

Isaiah 53:8b-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-53/isaiah-538b-9/>

Isaiah predicts that no one will complain when the Messiah is killed. He also predicts that even though the Messiah is innocent, He will be regarded as a wicked man. But even though He will be perceived as a criminal, the Messiah will be buried as if He were a rich man.

This Messianic prophecy is commonly known as the Suffering Servant prophecy.

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 is commonly referred to as “The Suffering Servant” prophecy. This description is derived from the Messiah’s suffering which the passage foretells; the Messiah is also described by the LORD as “My Servant” (Isaiah 52:13; 53:11).

Isaiah prophesies these things in a prophetic-past tense, which speaks of future events as though they have already occurred, indicating the certainty with which they will come to pass.

Thus far in this song, Isaiah has prophesied that the Messiah will be:

1. Exalted and Lifted Up (Isaiah 52:13)
2. Will Sprinkle the Nations [Atonement for the Gentiles] (Isaiah 52:15a)
3. Accepted by the Gentiles—despite never being told about Him (Isaiah 52:15b)
4. Physically Unattractive (Isaiah 52:14; 53:2b)
5. Not Believed (Isaiah 53:1a)
6. Unrecognized (Isaiah 53:1b)
7. Unremarkable (Isaiah 53:2a)
8. Despised (Isaiah 53:3).
9. Forsaken of men (Isaiah 53:3a)
10. Full of Sorrows and Grief (Isaiah 53:3b)
11. Misunderstood (Isaiah 53:3b)
12. Misjudged as Stricken and Smitten of God (Isaiah 53:4)
13. Afflicted (Isaiah 53:4)

14. Pierced Through (Isaiah 53:5)
15. Chastened (Isaiah 53:5)
16. Scourged (Isaiah 53:5)
17. Oppressed (Isaiah 53:7)
18. Docile as a Lamb (Isaiah 53:7)
19. Falsely Condemned in a Trial of Judgment (Isaiah 53:8)

And Isaiah prophesied that the reason the Messiah would suffer such things was because *He* was receiving the penalty of all our iniquities upon Himself (Isaiah 53:6b) and that through this transaction we could somehow be healed (Isaiah 53:5).

In the previous portion of this Messianic prophecy, Isaiah has hinted that the Messiah would be put to *death* through the image of being “like a sheep that is led to slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). But in this portion of scripture the prophet affirms that the Messiah will die.

While pretty much everything in this chapter would have been difficult for an Israelite to contemplate, the thought of Him dying would have been particularly hard for an Israelite to fathom, much less accept. The Messiah was to be their national hero, empowered by God to defeat all their enemies and establish *His* benevolent reign that would endure forever (Psalm 110). How could the Messiah also be humiliated and die?

The Messiah was to be:

- A Prophet like Moses who would speak God’s words directly to the people (Deuteronomy 18:18)
- A King like David who would sit on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Ezekiel 34:23-24).
- A Priest in the order of Melchizedek whose service would be without end (Psalm 110:4)

Because the Messiah was to be all these things, it would have been hardly thinkable to the men and women of Israel that *He* would be killed. Moreover, it would have been no less unthinkable for them to imagine that they would be the ones who murdered Him and approved of *His* death.

And yet this is exactly what Isaiah prophesied would happen to the Messiah. These lines are perhaps the most shocking portion of Isaiah’s prophecy to the Israelites.

Isaiah begins this section raising a rhetorical question:

*And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?*

To better hear the question, it may be helpful to know that the Hebrew word that is translated as *considered* is רָאָה (pronounced “see'-akh”—H2255), which can also mean to “complain” or “speak out against”.

Isaiah is prophetically asking “*Who, among His generation* complained or protested when the Messiah was put to *death*?” The expected answer to Isaiah’s rhetorical question is that “No one protested.” This implies that the people of the Messiah’s *generation* will approve of *His death*.

The expression, *His generation*, refers to the community of Israel during the Messiah’s lifetime. The phrase describing how *He was cut off out of the land of the living* refers to the Messiah’s *death*—*He* is among *the living* no more.

The reason *His generation* will approve of *His death* is because they will not regard Him as the Messiah (Isaiah 53:2-3). They will regard Him as *wicked*. The Messiah’s *grave* will be *assigned with wicked men*. And the Messiah’s *generation* will perceive *His death* as *due* punishment for *His transgression* (Isaiah 53:4-5).

The Messiah’s *generation* will celebrate *His death*, in an ironic twisting of the proverb “when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting” (Proverbs 11:10). Those of the Messiah’s *generation* will be joyful because someone they considered wicked has perished, when in actuality One who is perfect and righteous has been killed unjustly.

It is possible that the “Plank-eye effect” taught by Jesus the Messiah on the Sermon on the Mount is part of the reason that the Messiah will be so hated. It is easier to see sin in other people, than it is to see sin in ourselves. We are quick to see the speck of sin in *our* brother’s eye and hate his sin, while we miss seeing the log of sin within our own eye (Matthew 7:3).

But in an astonishing twist, the men of Israel will see in Him, the sinless and perfectly innocent Messiah, all of their own *wicked* sins. But they won’t recognize their *transgression* as their own. They will blame and accuse Him of being guilty of the *wicked* sins they themselves committed. And they will wrongly despise and hate *Him* as being *wicked*, even as they wrongly perceive themselves to be guiltless.

And as the Messiah is going through severe chastening and scourging and being afflicted and stricken, and pierced, and crushed for our sins, we will deem Him punished by God. We will see Him as the embodiment of sin—but the sin won’t be *His*. It will be *our transgression*.

God’s *people* (Israel) were the ones who committed the *transgression* and *to whom the stroke of death was due*, but because the Messiah died, and the LORD “caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6), they are given an opportunity to live:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 6:23)

There are a couple of layers of irony here. The first layer is that the Messiah is innocent and righteous. *His death* should be mourned, not rejoiced. The second layer is that those who deserved *death*, are allowed to live because of the Messiah who died.

Isaiah accurately predicts how Jesus the Messiah’s *generation* reacted to *His death* without complaint.

When Pilate offered *His generation* the choice for either Jesus (the Messiah) or Barabbas to be set free, they shouted for Barabbas (Matthew 27:21). Then when Pilate asked His generation what they wanted him to do to Jesus the Messiah, “They all said, ‘Crucify Him!’ (Matthew 27:22). And as Pilate tried to reason with His generation about this, they continued to shout “Crucify Him” all the more (Matthew 27:23).

Finally, when Pilate caved to their demands and tried to absolve himself of Jesus’s blood, “all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’” (Matthew 27:24-25).

And thus was Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled. No one of *His generation considered* (see'-akh) or complained when Jesus the Messiah was killed.

Isaiah then goes on to prophesy about the Messiah’s *death* and burial with two puzzling lines. The reason the lines are puzzling is because they seem to contradict one another:

*His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,*

The first line, *His grave was assigned with wicked men*, suggests that the Messiah will somehow be regarded as a *wicked* man or criminal when *He* dies. The second line, *Yet He was with a rich man in His death*, suggests that the Messiah will be regarded as a *rich* and respected *man*.

Before these things came to pass it would have been perplexing to imagine how both of these prophetic lines regarding the Messiah’s *death* from Isaiah 53:9 could both be true. But after the fact, we see that this is precisely what happened, just as Isaiah predicted seven hundred years prior.

Jesus, the Messiah, was executed between two *wicked* criminals (Mark 15:27). The Hebrew word translated as *grave* (קֶבֶר—H6912, pronounced “keh’-ber”) can also mean “grave-marker.” And while the Bible makes no mention that Jesus’s body was given a *grave* marker, Pilate had Jesus’s “crime” inscribed and put on His cross (John 19:19). This inscription served as *His grave*-marker. Therefore, Jesus the Messiah’s *grave* was literally *assigned with wicked men*.

Isaiah’s prophecy literally describes Israel’s perception of Jesus the Messiah as being a wicked man when *He* was crucified for *our* sins (Matthew 27:43; Luke 11:15; John 19:7). The Gospel

writer Mark considered the fact that Jesus was crucified between two criminals a fulfillment of prophecies like this one in Isaiah, that He was considered *assigned with wicked men*.

Being *assigned with wicked men* is similar to being “numbered with transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). The phrase “numbered with transgressors” is quoted from Isaiah 53:12 in the New Testament, showing that the gospel writers considered Jesus’s death fulfilling Isaiah 53,

“They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And He was numbered with transgressors.’”
(Mark 15:27-28)

It is also worth noting that Jesus used this prophecy from Isaiah 53:12 after the Lord’s Supper to help explain to His disciples why it was necessary for Him to undergo the suffering He was about to face,

“For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘And He was numbered with transgressors’; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment.”
(Luke 22:37)

So Jesus was executed *with wicked* criminals (“numbered with transgressors”), then *His* body was placed in *a rich man’s grave*,

“There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock...”
(Matthew 27:57-60)

The *rich man* was Joseph of Arimathea, a city of the Jews. He was a member of the Jewish Council, and was described as a good and righteous man, “who was waiting for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:50-51).

This was how it came to be that Jesus, the Messiah *was both assigned a death with wicked men* and placed in the *grave of a rich man*.

It was remarkable that prophecies like this one about the Messiah at one time caused skeptics to dismiss Isaiah 53, along with the message of the Old Testament. Some skeptics argued that they were too precise to be true. They claimed that these predictions were added in after Jesus’s death and were forged proofs that should be ignored.

Because there were no Old Testament manuscripts that predated the life of Jesus until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, skeptics prior to that era could assert their position and wag their finger: “You can’t prove me wrong.” But once the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, they were proven completely wrong. The Dead Sea Scrolls date back to three centuries before Christ. In these discoveries were found all the prophecies of Isaiah 53 (and much of Daniel 7). They have thus been verified as authentic predictions and not post-Christ forgeries.

The uncanny accuracy of Isaiah's prophecies, including these in Isaiah 53, make skeptics of Christianity arguably require more faith to maintain their skepticism than is required by believers to believe the Bible is true. But one does not need to have the Dead Sea Scrolls to authenticate the scriptures in order to believe they are true, because God's word stands on its own and judges men (Isaiah 40:8). Its truth is not dependent upon men. It is only for men to accept God's word and profit (2 Timothy 3:16-17), or deny God's word to their folly (Hosea 4:6).

There is a second prophetic meaning to *rich man*. The Messiah was not *rich* in the estimation of *His people* or the world. But *He was rich* in God's estimation. And the reason the Messiah was *rich* in God's estimation is explained by Isaiah in the final lines of this verse:

*Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.*

The Messiah was regarded as *a rich man in death* by God *because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth*. Jesus lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus only loved and served, He never exploited. The ultimate expression of exploitation is *violence*. Jesus only spoke the truth, in love. There was no *deceit in His mouth*.

The Messiah would be meek and loving. *He* would be truthful. *He* would sin neither in action (no violence/exploitation); *nor* would *He* sin in His words (*nor any deceit in His mouth*). The Messiah would be morally perfect.

Because the Messiah was perfectly obedient to God, the LORD "will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong" (Isaiah 53:12).

These things were true of Jesus.

He was sinless. He did not come to condemn but to save (John 3:17; Luke 19:10).

He came to *His people* in "the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Matthew 23:37). *He* was gentle and loving even as *He* was powerful and spoke truth. *He* perfectly kept the commandments in word and deed (Hebrews 4:15). And after obeying His Father's will to the point of death, God rewarded Him for His faithful service and highly exalted Him above every other name (Philippians 2:8-11).

Peter uses Isaiah 53:9 specifically, and the basic message from Isaiah 53, to encourage believers during their fiery trials to emulate Jesus's patience and faith in God,

"Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth [Isaiah 53:9]; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to

Him who judges righteously.”
(1 Peter 2:21-23)

Biblical Text

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