



***“Wounded for
Our Transgressions”
Rethinking
Isaiah 53***

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Jesus’ Death in New Testament Thought

VOLUME 1: BACKGROUND

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This selection from the beginning of Chapter 4 of *Jesus’ Death in New Testament Thought* offers a rereading of Isaiah 53 as an alternative to traditional interpretations of the passage. It argues that Jews in the Second Temple period would have looked to ideas regarding the suffering and death of prophetic figures rather than the idea of penal substitution to interpret Isaiah 53.

VICARIOUS SUFFERING AND DEATH IN ANCIENT JEWISH THOUGHT

Virtually all New Testament scholars would agree that, when Jesus' first followers began to ascribe redemptive significance to Jesus' death, they did so on the basis of beliefs regarding vicarious suffering and death that are found in ancient sources, including not only the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Jewish literature, but Greek and Roman writings as well.¹ While several passages of the Hebrew Scriptures imply that the death of certain persons could benefit others or the people as a whole, the passage that is considered to have exerted the greatest influence on the earliest interpretations of Jesus' death is Isaiah 53, which speaks of the suffering and death of God's chosen servant. A number of passages from other Jewish writings of antiquity, including the rabbinic literature, are also said to affirm the idea that the death of a righteous individual could atone for the sins of others. Because these sources are thought to provide the ideas and background necessary to understand the interpretations given to Jesus' death in the New Testament and in some cases to have influenced Jesus or his first followers directly, it is important that we examine them here.

In what follows, I will not enter into discussions regarding the dating of the sources examined or consider whether the various passages analyzed may have influenced the way Jesus or his first followers interpreted his death. Besides the fact that we can have no certainty regarding these questions, I do not consider them relevant for my purposes here. Instead, my goal is to explore the logic underlying these passages and demonstrate that in reality they provide no support for the idea that, in ancient Hebrew and Jewish thought, the suffering and death of a righteous person could atone for the sins of others or appease God's wrath on their behalf.

ISAIAH 53

The New Testament provides ample evidence of the widespread use of Isa. 52:13—53:12 (hereafter simply Isaiah 53) in the first century to interpret the significance of Jesus' ministry, passion, death, and resurrection. However, since the 1959 publication of Morna Hooker's book *Jesus and the Servant*, scholars

1. The term "vicarious," as used here, simply refers to something that benefits others and is not to be confused with the idea of substitution. While suffering or dying in the place of others is no doubt vicarious, not all forms of vicarious suffering and death involve substitution.

have debated how soon after Jesus' death Isaiah 53 came to be regarded as a prophecy of those events. Hooker argued not only that it is unlikely that Jesus identified with the figure of Isaiah 53, but also that there is "little evidence that the identification of Jesus with the Servant played any great part in the thinking of St Paul, St John, or the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and no *proof* that it was known to them at all."² While many scholars have agreed with Hooker's arguments, others have questioned her claims.³ Most of the allusions to Isaiah 53 in the New Testament writings view it as foretelling Jesus' ministry and sufferings, yet make no explicit reference to the verses that speak of the servant's death being "for sins." This makes it difficult to determine what role Isaiah 53 played in the development of the belief that in his death Jesus had redeemed others from their sins.⁴

For centuries, it has been common to regard Isaiah 53 as the passage that, more than any other, led Jesus' first followers to interpret his death in terms of penal substitution. This presupposes that the idea of penal substitution is present in the passage. Although some scholars have questioned this supposition, it still remains so thoroughly entrenched in New Testament scholarship that for many it is unthinkable that the passage might be interpreted in some other way.⁵ In fact, I would argue that it is precisely that presupposition that has led Hooker and others who find the idea of penal substitution problematic to argue that Isaiah 53 had little influence on the way in which Jesus' first followers interpreted his death. Ultimately, what these scholars wish to reject is not so much that Isaiah 53 played a role in the earliest interpretations of Jesus' death, but that almost from the start Jesus' followers interpreted his death on the basis of the notion of penal substitution. I intend to show here, however, that it is highly unlikely that those who read Isaiah 53 in the second-temple period would have interpreted it on the basis of the notion of penal substitution.

As I have already mentioned with regard to other passages from the Hebrew Scriptures used in the New Testament writings, for my purposes here

2. Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 127, 154-55. Hooker has since changed her position somewhat. In 1998, she wrote that she was "far more ready than I was forty years ago" to suggest that the use of Isaiah 53 to interpret the significance of Jesus' death may have begun with Paul ("Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*; ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998, 103; see 101-3).

3. Martin Hengel, for example, claims that "it should no longer be doubted that *Isa. 53* had an influence on the origin and shaping of the earliest *kerygma*" (*The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981, 59-60). See also Otto Betz, "Jesus and Isaiah 53," in *Jesus*, ed. Bellinger and Farmer, 71-82.

4. A related question is the importance of Isaiah 53 in pre-Christian Jewish thought. Hengel, for example, argues that the influence of Isaiah 53 can be found in numerous writings from the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Judaism ("The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey; ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 75-146). I would question, however, many of Hengel's claims and conclusions.

5. Stephen Finlan's observations regarding the passage, for example, are typical of many biblical scholars. He claims that the notion of penal substitution is clearly present in vv. 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 of Isaiah 53, and possibly vv. 8-9 as well (*The Background and Content of Paul's Cultic Atonement Metaphors*; AcBib 19; Atlanta: SBL, 2004, 176).

there is no sense in attempting to reconstruct the “original meaning” of Isaiah 53 (as if this were even possible), exploring its original historical context or its significance in the context of Deutero-Isaiah. All of this is irrelevant to this study, since my interest lies in examining how Isaiah 53 might have been read by Jesus’ first followers and other Jews with whom they were in dialogue in order to address the question of the significance of Jesus’ sufferings and death. Jews in antiquity knew nothing of any “Deutero-Isaiah.” In addition, a number of scholars have pointed out that interpreters of Isaiah in antiquity would not have viewed Isaiah 53 as one of several “servant songs” in the book, as if these passages formed together a unity.⁶ Therefore, in analyzing Isaiah 53, there is no reason to look at the other passages often considered as “servant songs” in Deutero-Isaiah.

Discussion of Isaiah 53 is complicated by the problems associated with the text. There are significant differences between the Masoretic text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX), and each of these presents its own textual variants. The Isaiah scroll found at Qumran also reflects differences with both the MT and the LXX. In addition, certain Hebrew phrases allow for different translations, while at times the Greek is rather awkward. All of this makes it difficult to determine precisely not only how Jesus’ first followers would have read Isaiah 53 but what text they would have used. The various New Testament writings seem to show evidence of the use of both the LXX and Hebrew versions of Isaiah 53.⁷ For this reason, we will take both texts into account here.⁸

In order to facilitate analysis of the passage, I will cite the NRSV translation from the Hebrew text and subsequently present a comparison between the MT and the LXX on the basis of a more literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek. This comparison includes only the verses that speak of the servant’s suffering and death as redemptive or “for our sins,” since the discussion below will focus primarily on these verses.

52:13 See, my servant shall prosper;
 he shall be exalted and lifted up,
 and shall be very high.

6. This argument is particularly attributed to Joachim Jeremias, “Παῖς Θεοῦ,” *TDNT* 5: 682–83. On both of these points, see Lidija Novakovic, “Matthew’s Atomistic Use of Scripture: Messianic Interpretation of Isaiah 53:4 in Matthew 8:17,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels*, Vol. 2: *The Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Thomas R. Hatina; London: T & T Clark, 2008), 147–54; Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 125, 128.

7. As Hans-Ruedi Weber notes, there is evidence of the use of both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament (*The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation of the Crucifixion of Jesus in the World of the New Testament*, trans. Elke Jessett; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 53–54).

8. On the primary differences between the MT and the Qumran text, as well as a comparison of both texts to the LXX version of Isaiah 53, see David A. Sapp, “The LXX, 1QIsa, and MT versions of Isaiah 53 and the Christian Doctrine of Atonement,” in *Jesus*, ed. Bellinger and Farmer, 170–92. For the most part, the textual variants between the MT and the Qumran text are not significant for the phrases that will be discussed here. On the different emphases found in the MT and the LXX, see Jesper Tang Nielsen, “The Lamb of God: The Cognitive Structure of a Johannine Metaphor,” in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (ed. Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann; WUNT 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 228–33.

- 14 Just as there were many who were astonished at him—
 so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,
 and his form beyond that of mortals—
- 15 so he shall startle many nations;
 kings shall shut their mouths because of him;
 for that which had not been told them they shall see
 and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.
- 53:1 Who has believed what we have heard?
 And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
 and like a root out of dry ground;
 he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
 nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by others;
 a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
 and as one from whom others hide their faces
 he was despised, and we held him of no account.
- 4 Surely he has borne our infirmities
 and carried our diseases;
 yet we accounted him stricken,
 struck down by God, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
 crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
 and by his bruises we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have all turned to our own way,
 and the Lord has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
 yet he did not open his mouth;
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
 so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
 Who could have imagined his future?
 For he was cut off from the land of the living,
 stricken for the transgression of my people.
- 9 They made his grave with the wicked
 and his tomb with the rich,
 although he had done no violence,
 and there was no deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
 When you make his life an offering for sin,
 he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
 through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
- 11 Out of his anguish he shall see light;
 he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
 The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
 and he shall bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
 and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;

because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

HEBREW MT

4 Surely he has carried our diseases and has borne our blows/wounds. And we considered him stricken, smitten/beaten by God and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced/wounded because of our transgressions (*mippesha'enu*); he was crushed/bruised because of our iniquities (*me'eonothenu*); the chastisement (*musar*) of/for our peace was upon him and by means of his blow/bruises we are healed (*nirpa'*).

6 All of us like sheep have wandered off; we turned each one to his/her own way, but the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

8 By oppression and by judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off from the land of the living? For the transgression (*mippesha'*) of my people the affliction/stroke [was] upon him.

10 And YHWH desired to bruise/crush him, making him suffer. If his soul makes a guilt offering (*'asham*)/If you make a guilt-offering of his soul, he will see offspring; and he will prolong [his] days. And the good pleasure of YHWH will prosper in his hand.

11 As the result of the suffering of his soul, he will see it [light]; he will be satisfied through his knowledge. [OR: Through his knowledge...] [T]he righteous one my servant will justify the many; he will bear their sins.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. And he bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

LXX

4 This one bears our sins and suffers for us (*peri hēmōn*), and we considered him to be in pain/distress (*en ponō*) and under a blow [of misfortune] and in affliction/oppression.

5 And he was wounded because of our lawless deeds (*dia tas anomias hēmōn*) and he was made to suffer/became sick because of our sins (*dia tas hamartias hēmōn*); the instruction/discipline (*paideia*) of our peace [was] upon him; with his bruises/wounds we were healed (*hiathēmen*).

6 We have all gone astray like sheep; each one has gone astray to his/her way, and the Lord has delivered him up/handed him over (*paredōken auton*) for our sins (*taiś hamartiais hēmōn*).

8 In [his] humiliation his judgment/trial was taken away. Who will tell of his generation? For his life is taken from the earth; because of the lawless deeds (*apo tōn anomion*) of my people he was led to death.

10 And the Lord desires to purge him from his blow [of misfortune]. If you present [an offering] for sin (*peri hamartias*), your soul will see long-lived offspring.

And the Lord desires to take away from the trouble of his soul, to show to him light and to form him with understanding, to justify the righteous one who serves the many well, and he will bear their sins.

12 On account of this he will inherit many and he will divide the spoils of the mighty, because his soul was delivered over to death, and he was reckoned among the lawless; and he bore [the] sins of many and was delivered up on account of their sins.

The Difficulties of Interpreting Isaiah 53

Although Christians have of course regarded Isaiah 53 as a prophecy regarding Jesus since the early days of the church, it is not clear whether prior to this time those who read or heard the passage would have understood it as speaking of a particular figure such as a prophet, the people of Israel or Judah collectively, or some particular group within Israel, such as the prophets of YHWH. Because the passage as it stands allows for multiple interpretations, we cannot rule out the possibility that it was read in any of these ways in antiquity.

The primary difficulty with understanding Isaiah 53 as an allusion to an individual is that it seems to speak of the servant being exalted and prospering after his death (52:15; 53:10-12). Prior to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection, it seems unlikely that anyone would expect an individual such as a prophet actually to die and then rise from the dead in order to be exalted, prosper, and continue serving others. This could have led those who read or heard the passage to understand it as referring to something such as Israel's exile and return, which might be understood metaphorically as a death and resurrection. The idea would be similar to that which we find in Ezekiel 37, where the dry bones representing Israel are brought back to life. It is also possible that the "prosperous future" announced for the servant after his death would be understood in terms of his being "integrated again into the community from which he was separated by his illness and suffering," as Henning Graf Reventlow proposes, thus taking the allusions to the servant's death solely in a metaphorical sense.⁹

The problem with interpreting the servant as referring to Israel or Judah collectively is that it leaves unanswered the question of who the narrators ("we") are, since they are the ones who describe as observers what happened to the servant. If the narrators are identified with the people of Israel or Judah, then the servant must be taken as referring to someone else. Undoubtedly, at certain points of the passage it is YHWH himself who is speaking, yet in spite of this the narrators seem to be distinct from the servant. It is of course possible to see the narrators as Israel's neighbors from other nations in order to identify Israel or Judah with the servant, yet this raises other difficulties.¹⁰ In v. 8, for example, the servant is distinguished from "my people," which seems to be an allusion to Israel. Furthermore, when the people of Israel or Judah were punished, they were not thought to have been righteous or innocent as the servant is said to be.¹¹

9. Henning Graf Reventlow, "Basic Issues in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," in *Jesus*, ed. Bellinger and Farmer, 26.

10. The idea that the "we" passages would be understood as referring to "humanity as a whole," as George A. F. Knight claims, is extremely unlikely (*Deutero-Isaiah: A Theological Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*; New York: Abingdon, 1965, 234). This represents a later theologizing that, from my perspective, is foreign not only to Isaiah 53, but to the New Testament in general.

11. As James D. Smart observes, a collective interpretation is particularly problematic with regard to vv. 7-9 (*History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66*; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965,

One further possibility would be to associate the servant with some particular group within Israel, such as the prophets of YHWH.¹² This would require understanding the servant's being "exalted" and "prospering" in the future as referring metaphorically to this group. Such an interpretation, however, would raise the question of why the passage speaks of the servant as an individual, since one would instead expect the use of the plural "servants." Of course, it is possible to posit a change in the identity of the narrators at one or more points in the passage, as Jesper Tang Nielsen has suggested, yet this only seems to complicate things further.¹³

The basic ideas in the passage are relatively clear. It emphasizes the servant's unseemly appearance as a result of severe mistreatment by others, as well as perhaps some type of illness or infirmity sent by YHWH: he was "marred beyond human semblance" (52:14), "despised and rejected" (53:3), "stricken, struck down by YHWH, and afflicted" (53:4, 8), "wounded," "crushed," "bruised" (53:5, 10), "oppressed" (53:7), and "cut off from the land of the living." The last two verses of chapter 52, in which YHWH is the one speaking, mention nations and kings being astonished by the appearance of the servant (52:14-15). Those presented as narrators beginning at 53:1 also contemplate the servant. The passage mentions not only the servant's suffering but his death (53:9, 12), yet also speaks of him being exalted and prospering after mentioning his death (52:13; 53:10, 12).

The passage underscores the servant's innocence, since he does not suffer and die for any sins of his own but rather for the sins of the people. His suffering and death are also attributed not only to the actions of sinners but to an act of YHWH, who "afflicted" or "crushed" the servant and laid on him the iniquities of others. The allusion to YHWH chastising the servant raises the question of *how* he does so. The passage speaks of injustices committed against the servant; he was "led to the slaughter" and "taken away," evidently by others. The LXX affirms twice that YHWH "handed him over," presumably to those responsible for the servant's suffering and death. The images of physical bodily suffering involving bruises and wounds as a result of being beaten also point to some type of severe mistreatment at the hands of others. Yet once the servant's suffering is said to be inflicted by sinful human beings, it becomes problematic to see how that suffering can also be attributed to YHWH's activity. One possibility is to see those inflicting suffering on the servant as YHWH's instruments to chastise the servant. Undoubtedly, such an idea is common throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, where Israel's God

207). On the idea that the servant represents a "collective entity" that is "described in personal terms," see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 18.

12. Nickelsburg, for example, mentions: "According to one major line of early Jewish interpretation, the Servant figure is realized in the wise teachers of the Torah in the Hellenistic period" (*Ancient Judaism*, 18). Hengel notes that the servant might be identified with the remnant, though he insists: "Collective and individual interpretations need not be mutually exclusive. They are two aspects of the same thing" ("Effective History," 121).

13. Nielsen, "Lamb of God," 229-30.

uses foreign nations as instruments to chastise Israel for its sins. Paradoxically, often these other nations and their leaders are presented as sinful and spoken of as objects of divine wrath and punishment at the same time that they are said to serve as God's agents to inflict suffering on Israel.

The difference here in Isaiah 53, however, is that the servant is not considered sinful, as Israel was when it was chastised by God, but instead is viewed as righteous and innocent. This makes it somewhat more problematic to affirm that the people mistreating the servant are acting as YHWH's agents, though such an interpretation cannot be ruled out entirely. It is also possible to view at least some of the servant's sufferings as inflicted on him by YHWH himself if the sufferings of the servant involve illnesses or bodily afflictions that are not the direct result of mistreatment at the hands of others. Yet while some of the servant's sufferings might be attributed to YHWH's action alone, the passage seems clearly to attribute those sufferings to others who act unjustly toward the servant.

Another way to understand YHWH's "striking," "crushing," and "afflicting" the servant could be to affirm that YHWH sent the servant into a situation where sinful people would treat him badly and even kill him. In that case, YHWH also willed that the servant persevere in that situation even to the point of death. In this way, the servant's suffering could be attributed to YHWH in an *indirect* sense: YHWH struck, crushed, and afflicted the servant in the sense that he placed the servant in a context in which others would strike, crush, and afflict him, and then had him remain there. If the passage is interpreted in this sense, then it might be said that YHWH's primary will was not that the servant suffer, as if this were an end in itself, but that the servant accomplish some other task that required that he remain in a situation in which he was being abused by others and would eventually be killed by them. This interpretation could be combined with the idea that some of the servant's sufferings involved bodily afflictions or illnesses that were not inflicted on him directly by others but instead later followed upon the mistreatment he endured as a natural consequence. Obviously, when one is beaten and mistreated, one can become physically ill with other ailments. The servant might also be said to have come to suffer the same illnesses and afflictions that others were suffering in the context in which he became immersed if the illnesses and afflictions of others came to affect him as well.

What is not fully clear is how the relation between the servant's suffering and the sins of others is to be understood. Verses 4-6, 8, and 10-12 relate the servant's suffering to the sins of the people through the use of the same type of short, formulaic assertions that appear throughout the New Testament to speak of Jesus' suffering and death as redemptive. The servant "bears our sins and suffers for us" (v. 4 LXX) and was wounded and crushed because of "our" sins and iniquities (v. 5). The "chastisement of our peace" was on him, and "by means of his wounds we are healed" (v. 5). YHWH "laid upon him our iniquity" (v. 6 MT) or "handed him over for our sins" (v. 6 LXX). Because of the lawless

deeds of the people he was struck (v. 8 MT) or led to death (v. 8 LXX). Either the servant or the people must make a guilt offering in order to see offspring (v. 10). The servant justifies many (v. 11 MT) or is himself justified by the Lord (v. 11 LXX), and will bear the sins of others (v. 11). In v. 12, the past tense is used: he “bore the sin(s) of many” and either “interceded for the transgressors” (v. 12 MT) or “was delivered up on account of their sins” (v. 12 LXX).

All of these formulaic phrases use prepositions or constructions that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Clearly, the people’s sins were the cause of the servant’s suffering and in some sense the servant bore their sins, yet neither of these ideas is explained in detail. Furthermore, both the affirmation that the people were healed and obtained peace through the servant’s suffering (v. 5) and the statement that the servant justifies many (v. 11 MT) can be understood either in a forensic sense—the people are now forgiven—or in terms of a restoration to wholeness and well-being in a broader sense. The Hebrew verb *tsadaq* used in the hiphil (*yatsdiq*) in v. 11 of the MT can mean “to give someone justice,” “bring justice,” “acknowledge that someone is just and righteous,” “make someone just and righteous,” or “help someone gain her or his rights.” Because nothing in the passage or context suggests that any of these readings should be given preference over the others, in theory any of them are possible here.¹⁴

The phrase “the chastisement of our peace” in v. 5 is particularly terse and awkward. Both the Hebrew *musar* and the Greek *paideia*, usually translated as “chastisement,” actually mean “correction,” “discipline,” or “education,” as we noted in Chapter 2. Because the servant is regarded as righteous, the sufferings must be aimed at correcting or bringing about a change, not in the servant himself, but in the sinful people. Yet how this takes place is not specified. Nor is it specified how the people’s peace results from what happened to the servant or how the servant’s being struck and wounded leads to the people being healed.

Due to the enigmatic nature of all of these affirmations, it is possible to make sense of them only if they are viewed in the context of some larger narrative. For the most part, however, this narrative is not provided by the text and therefore must be provided by the readers. Here I would like to present two narratives that can provide the framework necessary for the passage to be understood in order to evaluate each one. The first is based on the notion of penal substitution. This represents the reading of the passage that has been predominant at least since the time of the Protestant Reformation. The second reading represents an alternative interpretation of the passage that excludes the notion of penal substitution.

14. Edward J. Young interprets this justification in a forensic sense (*The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 3:357-58). In contrast, Smart argues against such a rendering of the Hebrew: “The words ‘to be accounted’ in the RSV introduce a judicial idea that is alien to Second Isaiah and is nowhere present in the text. It may be translated ‘he made many righteous’ or ‘he turned many to righteousness’ or simply ‘he saved many’ but not ‘he made many to be accounted righteous’” (*History and Theology*, 213). On the various possible interpretations of the allusions to justification here, see especially Sapp, “The LXX,” 173-76.

A Penal Substitution Reading of Isaiah 53

Undoubtedly, because of the complexities associated with the idea of penal substitution, it would be a mistake to claim that all who read Isaiah 53 on the basis of that idea would interpret the passage in exactly the same way. Nevertheless, the basic elements of a penal substitution reading of Isaiah 53 would be the following:

- A) The people had sinned and God's justice demanded that they be punished by being made to suffer afflictions, hardships, and a painful death. In the words of Edward Young, "Because of our sins, so the thought may be paraphrased, God was not at peace with us. If he was to be at peace with us, there must be chastisement."¹⁵
- B) God wished to deliver the sinful people from this punishment, yet God's strict justice made it impossible for God to forgive them freely without inflicting that justly-deserved punishment on someone.¹⁶ John Oswalt, for example, affirms that the passage speaks of "a God who wants a whole relationship with his people, but is prevented from having it until incomplete [*sic*] justice is satisfied. In the Servant he has found a way to gratify his love and satisfy his justice."¹⁷
- C) God sent his servant to endure that punishment in the place of the guilty as their substitute. The servant was qualified to do so because he was sinless and thus was not liable to any type of punishment himself: he was righteous and had done no wrong (vv. 9, 11), and his suffering and death were a perversion of justice (v. 8).
- D) The punishment that the servant suffered in the place of the sinful people involved being smitten, afflicted, pierced, crushed, and stricken on account of the people's transgressions and iniquities (vv. 4-5, 8, 10).¹⁸ He was numbered with the transgressors (v. 12). In this case, it was his *suffering itself* which satisfied God's wrath. In the words of Martin Hengel, "The Servant's vicarious suffering cancels the guilt of sin...."¹⁹ Claus Westermann similarly explains:

two things are involved in what the Servant bears, what he has loaded upon him—the sins of the others and the punishment which results upon them.

15. Young, *Isaiah*, 3:349.

16. See *ibid.*, 3:348.

17. John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 388.

18. Thus Smart claims that "the central theme of ch. 53 is forgiveness, God's forgiveness of the sins of men whereby he cleanses them and transforms them, delivering them from the death to which they were doomed by their sins and creating for them a new life and a new future" (*History and Theology*, 195). Janowski writes that *asham* in v. 10a refers to "a means of 'wiping out guilt,'" and stresses that the entire passage focuses on the question of how the people's guilt can justly be removed: "their own guilt has been wiped out by the Servant's suffering" ("He Bore our Sins," 67, 70). According to Oswalt, the servant "does not suffer merely as a result of the sins of the people, but in the place of the people. He suffers *for* them, and because of that, they do not need to experience the results of their sins" (*Isaiah*, 385).

19. Hengel, "Effective History," 124.

Thus, the healing gained for the others (v. 5) by his stripes includes as well the forgiveness of their sins and the removal of their punishment, that is to say, the suffering.... [W]ith his life, his suffering and his death, [the servant] took their place and underwent their punishment in their stead.²⁰

All of this was God's will in the sense that God laid upon the servant the iniquities of the people (v. 6); that is, he had the servant endure the punishment their iniquities deserved and willed to make the servant suffer (v. 10 MT). According to this reading, the affirmations that the servant bore the sins of others (vv. 4 LXX, 11, 12 MT) and offered up a guilt offering on their behalf (v. 11 MT) are also to be understood in the sense that the servant bore in the place of the guilty the punishment they deserved and offered up his life in substitution for theirs: "this Servant has actually suffered the condemnation of all the sins ever committed...."²¹ The idea that the servant made intercession for the transgressors (v. 12 MT) can also be interpreted in the sense that he asked God to accept his own sufferings and death in the place of those which the sinners deserved.²²

Several of these affirmations can also be understood as implying that the servant not only bore the *punishment* that the people's sins deserved, but also that those sins themselves were actually transferred to the servant in some sense. This would involve seeing sins as some type of substance or entity that can be taken from one person and placed upon another. Some interpreters compare this to the way in which sins were supposedly transferred to the scapegoat or a sacrificial victim, which was then put to death.²³ The allusion to a "guilt offering" in v. 11 would then be understood in this sense as well. It is also common to look to the idea of an exchange in order to understand these ideas: the people's sins are transferred to the servant, who bears those sins and their punishment, while the servant's innocence is in turn reckoned to the people so that they are now considered righteous by God. This latter affirmation does not appear explicitly in the text, yet it is possible to claim that it is present by implication.

Similarly, according to a penal substitution interpretation, the affirmation that the servant suffered "because of our transgressions" (vv. 5, 8) would be understood in the sense that "our" transgressions made it necessary for God to inflict punishment on someone for those transgressions.

20. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 263, 269. For other penal substitution readings of this passage, see Otfried Hofius, "The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters," in *The Suffering Servant*, ed. Janowski and Stuhlmacher, 166-68; Young, *Isaiah*, 3:348-50.

21. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 405.

22. Young, for example, affirms that the servant "pleads before God the merit and value of his atoning work as the only ground of acceptance of the transgressors for whom he dies. The basis of the intercession is the substitutionary expiation of the servant" (*Isaiah*, 3:359).

23. See, for example, Bernd Janowski, "He Bore Our Sins: Isaiah 53 and the Drama of Taking Another's Place," in *The Suffering Servant*, ed. Janowski and Stuhlmacher, 68.

This was because God's righteous nature does not allow God to leave sin unpunished. The same phrase can also be read as affirming that the servant suffered, not for any transgressions of his own, but due to the transgressions of others whose punishment he endured.²⁴

- E) The sinners are now saved in the sense that they are no longer under the punishment they deserved for their sins. The "peace" and "healing" mentioned in v. 5 should in this case be understood primarily in a forensic sense: the sinful people have "peace with God" and are "healed" in that that they now know themselves to be forgiven, although this peace and forgiveness also result in the people experiencing wholeness in a broader sense. The servant "justified" them (v. 11) in that God has declared them righteous by virtue of the fact that the servant took their sin and punishment upon himself so that they no longer stand guilty before God.²⁵

Analysis

While it is possible that first-century Jews and Jesus' first followers read Isaiah 53 on the basis of the ideas just mentioned, I would argue that, for several reasons, this is extremely unlikely. The most important of these reasons is that there is no clear evidence in ancient Jewish thought for the idea that YHWH's strict justice made it impossible for him to forgive sins without punishing them (point B). Such an idea is never affirmed or even suggested anywhere in the biblical and second-temple Jewish writings. In fact, those writings conceive of YHWH as a sovereign God who is free to act as he desires, forgiving when he wishes to forgive and chastising when he chooses to chastise: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exod. 33:19).

This observation is crucial. The penal substitution interpretation of Isaiah 53 depends in its entirety on the claim that it was impossible for God to forgive the people's sins without inflicting punishment for those sins on a sinless substitute. If God could have simply forgiven the people freely, there would have been no need to send the servant and have him suffer and die. Point B, therefore, constitutes the lynchpin of the penal substitution interpretation of Isaiah 53, since everything else depends on it.

In addition, according to this interpretation, the problem to which the passage responds is that of how God can save the people from punishment without compromising God's justice. This is simply not a concern in the Hebrew Scriptures nor in ancient Judaism as we know it. What is consistently seen as satisfying God's justice in ancient Jewish thought is not punishment or chastisement in itself but the return of the people to God in repentance

24. On this point, see Hermann Spieckermann, "The Conception and Prehistory of the Idea of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament," in *The Suffering Servant*, ed. Janowski and Stuhlmacher, 5-6.

25. On this idea, see Young, *Isaiah*, 3:348-50. Young also finds in Isaiah 53 the idea that the servant's righteousness is reckoned to the people, though nothing in the text explicitly affirms this (3:357-58).

and obedience. If this return does not take place, God's justice is *not* satisfied nor is God's anger appeased.

The use of the Hebrew *musar* and the Greek *paideia* in v. 5 makes it clear that the sufferings God allowed to be inflicted on the servant were aimed, not at appeasing God's own wrath or demand for justice, but bringing about the correction and repentance God wanted to see in the sinful people. The novel idea in this passage is that God brought about that correction and repentance by inflicting suffering, not on the sinful people themselves, but on the servant. The idea is that of chastising an innocent person for the wrongdoings of others, not as an end in itself, but in order to bring those others to repentance for what they have done.

The two verbs used in v. 5 to represent in positive terms the results of the servant's suffering and death point in the same direction: the people have "peace" and are "healed." A penal substitution requires understanding both of these terms in a forensic sense, as if they merely involved God forgiving the people. While such a reading is certainly possible, both verbs seem to imply something more than forgiveness alone.

As I have argued in the last chapter, in ancient Hebrew and Jewish thought, the presentation of offerings for sin (*asham*, v. 10 MT) had nothing to do with the idea of penal substitution. Rather, like other sacrifices, an offering for sin was considered a form of *intercession*. The idea of intercession appears explicitly in v. 12 MT, where the servant is said to have offered up a prayer on behalf of the guilty. As we have seen previously, according to the doctrine of penal substitution, there is no need for further intercession once a sacrifice for sin has been presented and accepted by God, since once God has accepted the sacrifice, forgiveness is ensured. To make forgiveness depend on the intercession as well means that the substitutionary sacrifice in itself does not obtain that forgiveness. If those presenting the guilt-offering in v. 10 are the people rather than the servant or YHWH himself, as the LXX affirms, this would also tell against a penal substitution interpretation of the passage. There would be no sense in the people themselves making an offering for sin if the servant's death has already obtained their forgiveness.

For all of these reasons, it is extremely problematic to claim that in antiquity Isaiah 53 was read on the basis of the notion of penal substitution. A penal substitution reading not only presents serious theological difficulties but runs against many of the most basic beliefs that Jews in antiquity held regarding Israel's God.

An Alternative Reading of Isaiah 53

A second narrative can also make sense of the affirmations regarding the servant's suffering and death independently of the notion of penal substitution:

- A) The people had fallen into sin and God wished to chastise them in order to correct them and bring them back to obedience. For this

purpose, God sent the servant. Although the text does not say explicitly how the servant's presence among the people would accomplish this, it hints at the idea that the servant would reveal God's will among them, making that will prosper among them (v. 10), and perhaps lead them to practice righteousness by giving knowledge to them (v. 11). The fact that he is called a servant also implies that in some way he was dedicated to serving them (v. 11 LXX). If the servant is understood as a prophet, perhaps his task would be that of calling others to repentance, although this is not stated in the text.

- B) The servant was beaten, mistreated, and abused, probably by a person or group from among the people themselves, though not all of the people may have been involved. The servant apparently also suffered other hardships that were not necessarily inflicted upon him by his abusers, such as some type of sickness, plague, or infirmity. As observers, the narrators initially thought that it was God who was inflicting this suffering on the servant, whether directly or indirectly through those who mistreated him. In accordance with the view of suffering commonly found in the Hebrew Scriptures, they thought that his suffering was sent from God in order to chastise the servant: "we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted" (v. 4).
- C) At some point, however, the people realized that the servant was innocent of any sin: "he did no wrong and no deceit was in his mouth" (v. 9). They then understood that the servant was suffering not on account of his own sins but on account of theirs, and that it was they rather than the servant who deserved to suffer the same kind of things that the servant was suffering. They also saw the servant's suffering as God's will, since God was allowing the servant to suffer as he did, and perhaps had even sent some type of illness or bodily deformity upon the servant. The passage also implies that God had sent the servant into the situation in which he was being afflicted and crushed, and willed that he remain there in spite of the sufferings this involved. Thus the narrators who observe the servant affirm that he was "smitten by God," "afflicted," "pierced because of our transgressions," and "crushed because of our iniquities" (vv. 4-5). God "laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6) and "delighted to bruise him, making him suffer" (v. 10). He was stricken "for the transgression of my people" (v. 8) and "bore their sins" (vv. 11-12).

According to this narrative, the affirmation that the servant bore the sins of others can be understood in three different senses, each of which complements the others rather than excluding them:

- 1) The servant bore the sins of the people in the sense that he took upon himself the task of turning the people away from their sins

and was willing to suffer whatever might be necessary in order for this to happen. He assumed responsibility for bringing the people back to God in order to reconcile them to God and also interceded to God on their behalf. It might also be said that the servant “bore the sins of the people on his heart” in the sense that, in the midst of his suffering on account of his efforts to turn the people away from their sins, he remained committed to bringing them to repentance, no matter what the personal cost to himself.

- 2) The servant also bore the sins of the people in that he bore the *effects* of their sinful acts. This can be understood in the sense that he entered into a situation in which the people were practicing injustice and violence toward one another and, as a consequence, he came to be affected by this injustice and violence as well. However, the servant himself can also be seen as the one against whom the aggression and violence of all or some of the people was directed.
- 3) In addition, the servant bore the sins of the people by enduring the suffering inflicted by God as chastisement for their sins. In ancient Hebrew and Jewish thought, God responded to sin by allowing sinners to endure the consequences of their sinful actions without intervening to save them, as well as by sending different types of hardships and afflictions on them, such as illnesses, misfortunes, violence, and oppression at the hands of enemies. However, instead of the sinful people suffering these things, it was the servant who endured them. Either the people did not suffer at all or else their suffering was not as severe or as visible as that of the servant.

In this case, however, God’s purpose in inflicting suffering on the righteous servant was to bring about a change in the conduct of the people rather than the servant. Perhaps God hoped that seeing the innocent servant suffer as he carried out the task given him would convict the people of their own sins and wrongdoing, particularly if all or some of the people were themselves responsible for inflicting suffering on the servant. By seeing how much the righteous servant was suffering because of the way in which they had treated him or as a result of his efforts to bring them back to God in repentance, they would be made aware of the depths into which they had fallen and the full extent of their sinfulness and injustice. Even though repentance is not mentioned explicitly in the passage, as Nielsen notes, it is implied in the people’s recognition that the suffering of the servant was due to their sins rather than his: “In the confession that the servant is slain for their sins they confess that they are sinners.”²⁶ The servant’s faithfulness to his task and his intercession

26. Nielsen, “Lamb of God,” 231.

on their behalf in spite of the afflictions he endured might also be seen as making a strong impression on the people and bringing them to change their ways.

Similarly, the affirmation that the servant suffered “because of our transgressions” can be understood according to any of the various senses just mentioned:

- 1) The people’s transgressions made it necessary for God to send the servant to call them back to repentance. This required that the servant enter into a context in which suffering was inevitable.
 - 2) The innocent servant suffered due to the sin being committed by some against others in that context, and also because of the sinful deeds directed against him by some or all of the sinful people. The servant endured this out of faithfulness to his task and God willed that he continue to carry out his task, in spite of the suffering it entailed.
 - 3) In order to bring the people to repentance, God had the servant suffer the same afflictions that he was imposing on the people to chastise them for their sins—though perhaps to a greater degree—, or else made the servant suffer afflictions that the people themselves did not suffer. Thus their transgressions led to the servant’s suffering the chastisement sent by God.
- D) After enduring great suffering as the result of his commitment to the task God had given him, the servant was put to death: “he was cut off from the land of the living” (v. 8); “he makes his grave with the wicked” (v. 9); “he poured himself out to death” (v. 12). Even though he was righteous (v. 11), and what was done to him was a “perversion of justice” (v. 8), he faced death willingly and passively and, instead of rebelling or lashing out against others, he offered up his life to God making intercession for the sinful people. If the “sacrifice for sin” or “guilt offering” (*asham*) mentioned in v. 10 MT is taken as referring to what the servant did, then his death might be seen as analogous to a sacrifice for sin in the sense that, as he faced death, he offered himself up to God seeking God’s forgiveness for the sins of others.²⁷
- E) The result of the servant’s suffering and death is that the people are restored to health and *shalom*: “the chastisement of our peace was upon

27. I would reject the argument of Janowski that the *asham* in v. 10 refers not to a guilt-offering but a reparation or compensation paid (“He Bore our Sins,” 67-70). This involves reading back into the text the Anselmian idea that the people owe some debt on account of their sin that must be paid; the servant supposedly does this by suffering in their place. Undoubtedly, according to the Mosaic law, when one had taken something unjustly from another or caused someone else some type of loss, restitution was necessary along with the sacrifice. However, there is no hint in Isaiah 53 that the servant is making restitution to someone for some loss or damage that the people’s sins have caused, either by suffering or by some other means.

him, and by his bruises we are healed” (v. 5). This can be understood in the sense that the people were led to repent by the servant’s faithfulness to the task God had given him in spite of the suffering it involved for him and also by observing what happened to the servant. Both of these things made their sin evident to them and led them to repent and change their ways so they might have peace and be healed. “His sufferings bring them back to their senses, for his sufferings convict them of their sins.”²⁸ This repentance also led to their being justified or accepted as righteous by God. In this sense, he “will justify the many” (v. 11 MT), having borne their sins.²⁹

Analysis

This interpretation of Isaiah 53 accounts for all of the affirmations found in both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the text and makes perfect sense of each of them. While in principle the same can be said of the penal substitution interpretation, there are good reasons for claiming that it is much more likely that those who read Isaiah 53 in Jesus’ day would have understood it in accordance with ideas such as those just outlined.

Above all, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, in both the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Jewish literature, the condition for being forgiven was always said to be repentance and a renewed commitment to obeying God’s will. What was thought to bring forgiveness was not divine chastisement in itself, but only the proper reaction to that chastisement on the part of the people.

A second factor is that, rather than focusing on the question of how YHWH can forgive sins without compromising his justice, the passage stresses the impact that the servant’s suffering had on the people. The first verses of the passage repeatedly speak of those who observe the servant: as they look at him, they are astonished and startled because they see something they had never seen or heard about before (52:13-15). They proclaim what they have heard and what has been revealed to them (53:1). They see nothing desirable in his appearance (53:2) and hide their faces from him, holding him of no account (53:2). As they look at his infirm, diseased figure they consider him to be rejected and afflicted by God (53:4). While the subsequent verses do not explicitly mention the people observing the servant, they use graphic imagery that suggests that the people were touched deeply by what they saw: the way the servant was crushed, wounded, oppressed, and afflicted, as well as the fact that he was silent as he was led away like a lamb led to slaughter, created quite an impact on them (53:7-8). The images and language running throughout

28. Sapp, “The LXX,” 186 (referring to the MT).

29. Terence E. Fretheim notes the parallels between Isaiah 53 and Ezek. 4:4-6, in which the prophet is said to bear the guilt or punishment of Israel while lying on his side (*The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*; OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, 163). Whether or not the idea is actually the same, in both passages it would be a question of God’s servant willingly enduring suffering in order to make the people aware of their sins rather than suffering in their place.

these verses therefore also focuses attention on the extraordinary and even shocking things that happened to the servant, as well as the admirable things God has done and will do through him in order to accomplish his objectives among the people.³⁰

All of this strongly supports the idea, therefore, that what leads to the people having peace and being healed and justified is *their reaction to what they observed and heard*. If the offering for sin mentioned in v. 10 is understood as something presented by the people, as the LXX affirms, this would support the same conclusion: having been convicted of their guilt by what the servant endured, they respond by presenting a sin-offering up to God, either in a literal or metaphorical sense.³¹

In addition, as noted above, the use of *musar* and *paideia* communicates the idea of the *chastisement* and the *correction* of the people rather than their punishment per se. Although it is the servant who suffers rather than the people, the effect is the same: the chastisement that the servant endures moves the people to repentance and obedience. In fact, if we understand the word “punishment” in these terms, there is even a sense in which we could speak of the servant’s enduring the punishment for the people’s sins in their place. However, while the language would be the same, the idea would be different from that which we saw above with regard to the penal substitution interpretation of Isaiah 53: the reason that the people are restored to peace, healed, and justified is *not that the servant endured the suffering that they deserved for their sins in their place*, but rather that *the servant’s suffering what they deserved for their sins, together with the ministry that led to that suffering, brought about a change in them*.

This constitutes the fundamental difference between the two readings. According to a penal substitution reading, it is the servant’s suffering divine chastisement for the people’s sins *in and of itself* that brings about their healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation to God and one another. According to this alternative reading, however, that healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are the result, *not of the servant’s suffering per se* but of *the manner in which the people react to the servant’s unjust suffering*. For this reason, even though the innocent servant endures in the people’s place a chastisement or discipline similar to that which they deserved for their sins, strictly speaking, the servant is not their *substitute*. God’s objective was not to satisfy his justice by punishing the servant rather than the people for the people’s sins, as if suffering itself satisfied God’s justice, but to bring about a change in the people by having the servant endure the kind of punishment or chastisement that their sins deserved as a result of his ministry among them.

30. As Ben Witherington III notes, the LXX stresses even more than the Hebrew the speaker’s having observed the distress and suffering of the servant (“Isaiah 53:1-12 [Septuagint],” in *The Historical Jesus in Context*; ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison Jr., and John Dominic Crossan; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, 402).

31. Hengel, for example, suggests that the “spiritual ‘sin-offering’” alluded to in v. 10 of the LXX should be understood as the people of Israel’s repentance, “acknowledging and confessing their sins” (“Effective History,” 129).

While it is entirely plausible that Isaiah 53 would have been read in this way in the first century CE, many other readings were of course possible. It is quite likely that the servant was at times understood as representing Israel in general, in which case the passage would probably be seen as referring to Israel's exile. Even if it was read in this way, however, the idea would be, not that the suffering that Israel endured at the hands of other nations was an end in itself and satisfied God's justice, but rather that other nations would become convicted of their own injustice by contemplating Israel's suffering.³² The same observation would hold true if the servant was understood as a particular group within Israel: in itself, the suffering that the members of this group endured as a result of their serving others who were guilty of grave sins did not lead to peace and healing for the people as a whole. Rather, what restored peace and resulted in healing was the way the people as a whole reacted to the unjust suffering of the group identified with the servant.

A number of biblical scholars have argued for a reading of Isaiah 53 based on the notion of participation or inclusive place-taking. The most notable of these is Otfried Hofius, who considers the idea of penal substitution, which he identifies with "exclusive place-taking," as "simply outrageous."³³ Hooker has claimed that in Isaiah 53, "we do not have someone who suffers *instead* of his guilty compatriots, but rather someone who *shares* in their sufferings, even though he himself, unlike them, is innocent."³⁴ She interprets vv. 4 and 12 against this idea: "if we remember that the Servant was not the only person to be suffering, these statements read rather differently from the way in which they are normally interpreted.... [T]he Servant suffers *as a result of the sins of others*."³⁵ She speaks of this as "representative suffering" or "inclusive place-taking" rather than "exclusive place-taking."³⁶

Clearly, behind such interpretations of Isaiah 53 is a desire to replace the notion of penal substitution with a participatory soteriology. Knight, for example, insists that Isa 53:7 is to be interpreted in the sense that the "vicarious suffering on the part of the volunteer is therefore participative; it is neither substitutionary, nor yet is it penal."³⁷ However, while the passage can certainly be interpreted in the sense that the servant suffers God's chastisement *together with* the people rather than doing so *in their place*, the latter idea can also be affirmed while still rejecting the idea of penal substitution. According to the proposal I have just outlined, the servant can be said not only to suffer

32. For this interpretation of Isaiah 53, see Kenneth Grayston, *Dying We Live: A New Enquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 192-93.

33. See Hofius, "Fourth Servant Song," 168. In this article (164-88), Hofius does not offer a detailed exegesis of Isaiah 53 on the basis of the idea of inclusive place-taking, but simply claims that it is present in the New Testament. A more complete discussion of this idea is found in the two articles by Daniel P. Bailey, "Concepts of *Stellvertretung* in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," and "The Suffering Servant: Recent Tübingen Scholarship on Isaiah 53," in *Jesus*, ed. Bellinger and Farmer, 223-50, 251-59.

34. Hooker, "Use of Isaiah 53," 97.

35. *Ibid.*, 97.

36. *Ibid.*, 98.

37. Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 237.

the same things that the people suffered for their sins, but also to endure sufferings that the people themselves did *not* endure, even though they deserved to suffer similar things for their sins. In this case, the servant can be said to have suffered in their stead. Yet, as I have argued above, this should not be taken in the sense that the punishment the servant endures in itself leads to the people's healing and forgiveness, as a penal substitution interpretation affirms. Rather, what leads to the people's healing and forgiveness is *the manner in which they react to the servant's sufferings*.

It should also be noted that most proponents of a penal substitution reading would also agree that, once the servant had endured the punishment deserved by the people for their sins, a change in the people's behavior would take place as a result.³⁸ In fact, advocates of penal substitution interpretations often claim that, once God has had the servant punished for the people's sins, the people know that God does not overlook sin but invariably punishes it. This leads them to avoid falling back into sin, since they now know that God does not leave sin unpunished.

Such a view, however, ultimately results in a denial of the claim that the people's forgiveness depends entirely on what the servant did. If God has already punished the people's sins by inflicting the suffering they deserved on the servant, then they are no longer subject to punishment, no matter what further sins they commit. Thus it does not matter whether or not they fall back into sin, since they will still be forgiven by virtue of what the servant suffered. However, if they now know that God does not leave sin unpunished and therefore must refrain from sinning in order to be spared punishment, then any further forgiveness ends up depending on their repentance and obedience rather than on what the servant did for them in the past.

In the end, then, there are strong reasons for affirming that, when people in Jesus' day read Isaiah 53, they would have understood the basic idea of the passage in terms of the sinful people being healed, justified, and restored to peace, not by the servant's suffering itself, but as a result of their contemplation of the servant's suffering, since what they saw led to a change in their manner of thinking and behaving. Although they may have understood in different ways the affirmations that the servant bore the people's sins, along with other ideas that are found in the passage, there is no basis either in the passage itself nor in ancient Hebrew and Jewish thought for the notion that God's justice was satisfied when the servant suffered what the people deserved for their sins. Rather, as the Hebrew Scriptures and second-temple Jewish writings consistently maintain, God's justice is satisfied only when the people return to God in repentance and obedience, committing themselves to living according to God's will. This is what the servant's suffering and death would have been understood as accomplishing.

38. See, for example, Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 263-64.