

ISAIAH lii. 13—liii. 12 : AN ANALYSIS.

ISAIAH is not uncommonly, and not without good reason, called The Evangelical Prophet. The date of his prophecies is given us in Is. i. 1, but, in the bulk, they would seem to have been spoken in the reigns of Ahaz and of Hezekiah, kings of Judah. This circumstance in respect of date may be taken as underlying the common division of the prophecies of Isaiah into two parts. Part I, I (following Douglas) regard as inclusive of chapters i.-xxxv., and Part II, as inclusive of chapters xxxvi.-lxvi. It is hard to say which part is more thoroughly charged with the Messianic idea, with the thought of the Coming Messiah. If Part I contains the great and illustrious prophecy concerning Immanuel (vii.-viii.), Part II contains the equally remarkable prophecy concerning the Suffering Servant of Jehovah (lii. 13—liii. 12).

Is. lii. 13—liii. 12 is our theme at the moment. It surely is one of the most marvellous instances of prediction known to literature, and the bare analysis of it will make its appeal to one. Such an analysis, in fact, with an occasional elucidatory remark, is all that is here attempted.

It has to be said, at the outset, that practically all the New Testament writers identify the Suffering Servant of Isaiah lii. 13—liii. 12 with our Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings and triumph. Thus, one may compare Matt. xii. 18 and Is. lii. 13 (in the light of Is. xlii. 1); Matt. viii. 16, 17 and Is. liii. 4; Mark xv. 28 and Is. liii. 12; Luke xxii. 37 and Is. liii. 12; John xii. 38 and Is. liii. 1; Acts viii. 32, 33, and Is. liii. 7; 2 Cor. v. 21 and Is. liii. 10; 1 Pet. ii. 22 and Is. liii. 9. These correspondences, in their number and exactness, are of a striking character, and yet, although they may be among the most obvious instances, they are by no means exhaustive of the proof of the pervasiveness of acknowledged Isaianic predictions concerning Jesus Christ, particularly as found in lii. 13—liii. 13, throughout the entire New Testament. But enough is here submitted to make the identification we here speak of a certainty for the genuine theologian. In the nomenclature made use of in the following analysis it is assumed that it is not open to question that, in the mind of the Spirit of God, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah and our Lord Jesus Christ are one.

Sometimes Is. liii. is taken as a distinct and complete prediction of itself. But it is better to regard lii. 13-15 as an essential part of this particularly striking prediction.

The whole section then consists of fifteen verses, and are analyseable into five sub-sections of three verses each. The theme is but one throughout the entire fifteen verses, to wit, Jesus Christ in His sufferings and triumph, but it is Jesus Christ and His sufferings and triumph looked at from different angles, and under various aspects. Let me explain :

(1) In the first three verses (lii. 13-15) of our section, it is Jesus Christ as He appeared to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the latter's sufferings and triumph that is set out before our gaze. None but the Father could speak of the Messiah, or of Jesus Christ, as "My servant." Thus we have from the point of view of the Father :

(a) Jesus beheld in His self-renunciation. *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently.* The prudence here intended is the prudence of the farmer, who casts away the precious grain and harrows it into the ground in the springtime, with the wise purpose of having it returned to him with an increase in the time of harvest.

(b) Then this increase is given us in the form of an antithetical parallel. Jesus is beheld of the Father in His glory : *He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.*

Again, this parallelism of suffering and triumph is repeated, thus :

(c) Suffering : *As many were astonished at thee : his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.*

(d) And, after Suffering, Triumph : *So shall he sprinkle many nations ; the kings shall shut their mouths at him : for that which had not been told them shall they see ; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.*

(2) God and the Father's vision of Jesus Christ is, of course, incapable of change or modification, because it is the vision of one who sees the end from the beginning, the vision of omniscience, and one that is absolutely correct. Not so is the vision of finite and sinful men and women, when the subject is profound, and, indeed, hard to interpret. Thus, when we come to the second of our five sub-sections (liii. 1-3), the scene seems quite changed. But the reason is that here Jesus, in His humiliation, is set before us as He appeared (and, indeed, still

appears) to men spiritually blind: *Who* (that is, no one in his natural state) *hath believed our report?* *And to whom* (that is, to no one, if left to himself) *is the arm of the Lord revealed?* *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

(3) The view that is given us in our second sub-section may be subsumed under the rubric of our Lord's sufferings. On the other hand, the light in which He appears in our third sub-section (Is. liii. 4-6), may be regarded as belonging to His triumph. For now is He viewed by those whose eyes are opened; by such as Paul himself, who found the Cross of Christ, at one time, a stumbling block, and afterwards, when he interpreted correctly the true inwardness of the Cross, gloried in it. This, in a word, is the right aspect under which to regard Jesus in His humiliation, and as crucified. The success of His engagement is not out of sight:

Surely he hath borne OUR griefs, and carried OUR sorrows; yet (or possibly, although) we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for OUR transgressions, he was bruised for OUR iniquities: the chastisement of OUR peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way: and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. That is a soul-saving view of a crucified and now exalted Messiah.

(4) In the fourth sub-section (Is. liii. 7-9), Jesus is presented to us as He appeared to the searcher of hearts in His inward dispositions, His patience under misunderstandings and persecution, His gentleness and meekness, in a word, His sinlessness: *He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Verse 8: *He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*

This eighth verse is probably, particularly in its last three clauses, the most difficult verse to interpret in the whole section which we are analysing. Sometimes the word "generation" is

taken in the sense of the Son's eternal generation. But that does not appear to be its meaning. Rather, is the word to be understood in the sense of the contemporaries of Jesus Christ. And the general sense, I take it, is that few among His contemporaries understood that the sufferings of Jesus were vicarious, and because they did not understand they persecuted. Yet His exit from sufferings is honourable :

And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

(5) In this last of the five sub-sections (liii. 10-12) into which we distribute this great section of Isaiah, we are introduced into those truths that are the most mysterious of all in connection with our Lord's sufferings. For we are taught that, in the last resort, our Lord's sufferings are to be regarded as the revelation of the judicial anger of God Himself against sin, even when that sin is borne by His own Son ; it is the Father Himself that has appointed Jesus as a trespass offering ; it is the Father Himself that has caused the penalty of our sins to fall upon Him. As Paul puts it : God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin (or a trespass-offering for us) ; or, as it is put elsewhere by Paul, Christ was made a curse for us. But the issue is brilliant. That also is Isaiah's thought : *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him, he hath put him to grief : when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed* [Jesus Himself will see the fruit of His sacrificial death] *he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many : for he shall bear their iniquities.*

This whole matter, in respect of both sufferings, and of Jesus' seeing of the fruit of His sufferings, is finally set before us as bearing essentially the character of a covenant engagement. This Covenant belongs to the very Being of God, for it is manifestly a covenant to which distinct Persons of the Godhead are parties ; a covenant with conditions which are here regarded as certain of fulfilment on the part of Jesus, and promises stipulated on the part of God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when those conditions shall have been actually fulfilled. We may, for purposes of interpretation, inverse the order in which the conditions and promises of this covenant of redemption are given us in the text, thus : (a) *Because he hath poured out his soul unto*

death : and he was numbered with the transgressors ; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors ; (b) Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.

Jesus is a many-sided subject. But those surely are five very affecting views of One Who is fairer than the children of men that are given us through the instrumentality of Isaiah. The same Holy Spirit who revealed to Paul so many of the deep things of God, revealed to Isaiah the Coming Messiah from those different angles, and under those different aspects.

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