

**The
ATONEMENT
of the Servant of the Lord
Isaiah 53:4-6**

CHAPTER THREE

Truly, he himself has borne away our calamity, and as for our sorrows, he carried them. Yet we ourselves did estimate him to be stricken, smitten of God and belabored.

And he was pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our punishments; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his welt, healing is for us.

All of us as a flock have gone astray; we have turned each one to his own way, and Jehovah has caused to strike upon him the punishment due all of us.

One day in August, many years ago--1930 to be exact--one of my boyhood dreams came true. Every morning of my life I had stepped out of the house and looked westward at the majestic eastern slope of the Cascade Mountains of central Washington. The snowy white of winter, the green of spring, the brown overhung by evergreen and topped by the towering peaks of 12,000-foot Mount Adams and 14,408-foot Mount Ranier, had always intrigued and invited me. Father, Grandfather, and Great-grandfather had ridden those ridges and canyons for three generations--hunting, fishing, vacationing, herding sheep and punching cattle--almost back to the close of the Indian wars. Oh, I had been along the main roads on many camping and fishing trips, but never "away back" in the shadows of the crags and beside the glaciers and the Goat Peaks.

Then on this day my father took us for a week's horseback trip. There were always at least two saddle horses at our place and a farm horse that would do for a pack horse. Our Indian neighbor furnished another buckskin cayuse and off we went--Papa, my 11-year-old sister, Julia; seven-year-old brother, Gail; and 14-year old I. I started ahead of the rest with the string of horses at 4:00 in the morning. By 11:00 I had ridden 27 miles to where the road ended, and there I waited till the others came in the car. After a brief lunch Mama and the baby sisters went home in the car, and we started to climb. Even 25 years have not dimmed my indescribable exhilaration and ecstasy as we mounted those dreamy pine-covered ridges. The pine soon gave way to fir and spruce and aspen at higher levels. Then up ahead, my father rode "Ole Buck" out on a slight outcropping of rock and drew up to a stop. I saw him look into a circle of trees ten yards to his right and below, then dismount, and with grave face go to the spot toward which he was looking. When he arrived, he turned to me and said, "Come here, Bob!" I came and looked, and in that spot I saw the skulls of about 20 horses laid nose-to-nose in a five-foot circle. Many winters before, my father said, an early snow had trapped them all there, and they had died of starvation.

Then I learned that as beautiful and majestic as the mountains are, they are deadly too. Human bones are hid at the foot of many a cliff and

glacier. Death and misery are there. It almost spoiled my trip for the rest of the day thinking about it.

To apply the picture, we are in a wonderful country here in this chapter. All the glory of the wondrous cross of Jesus shines through, and up ahead towers the coming city of God. But there is sorrow here; there's tragedy; there's the blackest thing in all the universe--sin, together with the starkest tragedy the world has ever seen, the death of the Lord of life.

Neither the word *sin* nor any of its synonyms has been mentioned in the two sections treated in our first two chapters, but now sin studs the landscape in every direction in all its manifold aspects. It is in verse 12, "he bore the sin of many." This word describes sin in its negative aspect. A form of it is translated "miss" in Judges 20:16. It means to come short of the glory of God. Sin is in verse 8: "for the transgression of my people was he stricken." Transgression is sin in its positive aspect. It is open rebellion and revolution against law and authority, and is so translated many times (cf. 2 Kings 3:5,7; 8:20). But the most dreadful of all its aspects is in the section before the reader now. "He was bruised for our iniquities"¹ (verse 5). I have rendered it "punishments." It has special reference to the wholeness of sin, resulting in guilt and punishment. It is the word Cain used when he said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13).

Rebellion, falling short, punishment--sin in both positive and negative aspects together with its awful result is here.

It is with God's means of forgiving this sin that we are now concerned. There is a sense in which it may be said that sin is never forgiven, though sinners are. Sin is always punished--if not in the sinner then in his substitute. Now our Lord reveals to us in the three verses before us (Isaiah 53:4-6) how our sin came to be punished and we came to be forgiven. It is the story of "The Atonement of the Servant of Jehovah." He reveals the human occasion, verse four; the divine act, verse five; and the great confession concerning it, verse 6.

Consider first,

HUMAN OCCASION FOR ATONEMENT OF THE SERVANT (verse 4)

"Truly, he himself has borne away our calamity, and as for our sorrow, he carried them. Yet we ourselves did estimate him to be stricken, smitten of God and belabored."

The very first word introduces the section as an explanation of what has gone before. That is the significance of the word "surely" or "truly."²

1 Precisely how God has treated each of these aspects of sin is set forth in Psalm 32:1,2. I suggest the following translation: "Oh, the blessedness of him whose *rebellion* is lifted up, whose *failure* is covered over. Oh, the blessedness of the man unto whom Jehovah imputes not *punishment*." Every word speaks of our Lord's atoning death.

2 This word, **וַיִּשְׁׁרָ** is of strong asseverative force, emphasizing sharp contrast with what has preceded and indicating that an explanation is about to follow (cf. same in Genesis 28:16; 1 Samuel 15:32). The movement of thought may be paraphrased: Converted Israel says (vv.1-3), When Christ came the first time it was to suffer and die in rejection, *but the*

Why was He rejected? The reasons are these:

1. OCCASION IN THE PUNISHMENT DUE MEN

First, there were the punishments due men which He bore. They are called "calamity" and "sorrow."

"He himself has borne away our calamity." The word "calamity" is punishment objectively considered--a dreadful thing, unpleasant experience both physical and mental, sickness and insanity. All the distress to body, soul, and spirit that hell will be is wrapped up in this word, as well as all the present effects of sin. We do not bear it forever because He bore it. The word "borne" calls for attention. It is the word Cain used when he said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). It is used in the story of the scapegoat, where it is said the goat "bore" the sins of Israel into the desert (Leviticus 16:22). It is the word "forgiven" in Psalm 32:1: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." Our punishment could not be remitted; it had to be borne. We could not bear it, so Jesus did.

"And as for our sorrows, he carried them."³ Sorrow is the subjective emotional side of calamity, calamity (punishment) the dread result of sin. Jesus truly suffered. They were real sorrows. Our Lord's experience was something more than an official and judicial thing. It was real and personal too. If God in heaven held it as lightly as we often quote John 3:16, it would not amount to much. Emphasize the right part too--he took *our* sorrows and *our* calamity. What would have been personally mine, He made personally His.

Oh, what a vale of tears we live in! Hundreds of people die every hour. The doors of our hospitals are open every minute. The graves fill by the hour many times over. I've seen the tortured frames of those injured in automobile accidents. I've watched them fight to live and finally die. I've held their hands and the hands of their parents as the shadows drew nigh. My shoulder has been the pillow for the tears of wicked girls and boys. I've seen the stark and awful heartbreak of a breaking home. I've seen a little of the sadness of goodbye. One of these days you and I shall enter a door beyond which "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall

explanation is (נָסָא) as follows (vv.4-6), etc.

3 The meaning of these two parallel clauses ("he himself has borne away our calamity, and as for our sorrows, he carried them") is that He not only outwardly and objectively bore objective sentences and punishments, but also inwardly and subjectively bore the subjective results in grief and torment which naturally result. The citation of this portion in Matthew 8:17, wherein it is used as a prediction of the healing ministry of our Lord, is to be regarded as fully proper but not an exhaustive explanation of its meaning. Matthew frequently quotes the Old Testament in this way (cf. 2:15,23). Indeed, inasmuch as His healing ministry was a partial remission of the full effects of sin, it was a pledge of the full remission at Calvary later. Healing for the body was provided in the atonement, for physical death is one of the results of sin in Adam which must be remitted for full redemption. However, full benefit will be received at the resurrection and glorification of the saints--and not until then. Frequently, when it suits His purpose, God gives us some of those benefits in healing now. There is absolutely no sound Scriptural basis for the belief that healing of the body is the will of God for all saints, and that sickness is evidence of either lack of faith or special personal sin. The procedure for asking God for healing of the bodies of believers is given in James 5:13-16, but it is significant that in the same passage the benefit and grace of God in permitting sickness to be patiently endured is pointed out.

there be any more pain." Heaven will be free of tears! And why? Because Jesus wrung them out at Calvary. No wonder Peter spoke of the "precious blood."

So much for one side of the human occasion of the atonement.

2. OCCASION IN MISUNDERSTANDING OF HIS SINLESS CHARACTER

The other side is the human misunderstanding of the character of Jesus as the sinless "holy one of God." They simply didn't see that He had no sins of His own for which to die. The verse says, "Yet we ourselves did esteem⁴ him to be stricken, smitten of God and belabored." They made an estimate of Jesus, all right, but they decided that God was punishing Him for His own sins. This statement, so often used as the right interpretation of Jesus' death, is really the wrong one. "Stricken" is the customary word for a divine judgment of some kind. When God caused King Uzziah to become a leper⁵ it is said "the Lord had smitten him." The other words in the clause have the same general meaning. So, here is the reason they committed Him unto death--they thought that for His own sins He ought to be "stricken, smitten of God, and belabored."

The Gospel records bear this out. Pilate could find no fault in Him, but the Jews could. They crucified Him in the name of God for two capital offenses--sabbath breaking and blasphemy. John 5:18 reports, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."

What then were the human occasions of the atonement of Christ? They were, first, the guilt of mankind, which made substitutionary atonement the only possible method of salvation; and second, the misunderstanding of sinful men concerning Christ's holy character, which resulted in their nailing Him to a cross where He died in their stead.

"Why hast thou forsaken me?" On two counts we are the answer to the cry--the first our guilt, the second man's blind misunderstanding of the Saviour's character and mission.

Do not blame the Jews for the crime any more than ourselves. It was our sin that nailed Him to the tree. Each lie of ours is a cry to "crucify him"; each hateful word a nail in His hand; each selfish thought a thorn in His brow; each blaspheming oath a spike through His feet; each unbelieving day a thrust through His side.

Now let us look at

DIVINE ACT IN THE ATONEMENT OF THE SERVANT (verse 5)

4 The word is *chashabh*, the same translated "imputed" in Genesis 15:6. This is a good illustration of what imputation is.

5 In the Babylonian Talmud 98b, we read: "The Messiah--what is his name?...The Rabbis say, The leprous one of the house of Rabbi is His name, as it is said surely He hath borne our griefs...yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." The basis of this is in the word "stricken," (נִגְנַע), the root of which is several times in the Old Testament used of being stricken with leprosy.

"And he was pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our punishments;⁶ the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his welt, healing is for us."

WHO KILLED JESUS?

It is now not uncommon for some more liberal-minded Jewish rabbis to admit that the Jews may have been wickedly responsible for Jesus' death and to say they are now sorry. Some of them are even rather proud to own Him as another good but misunderstood Jewish prophet. In other generations the Jews have vehemently denied any charge of guilt for crucifying the Saviour, and attempts are still made to exonerate themselves.⁷

Be that as it may, there was a greater act than man's, a greater power than man's involved when Jesus died. Men killed Him, but God planned it so. Both the wickedness of man and the plan of God were at work. Therefore Acts 2:23, addressed by Peter to the Jews who killed Him, says, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." There is something about this mystery that must be accepted by faith, something that mere human understanding cannot sound.

In this verse, the divine act whereby God actually inflicted His wrath for sin upon Christ is indicated by the passive voice of all the verbs--"was pierced...was crushed." God is emphatically the actor.

1. THE NATURE OF THE PUNISHMENT HE BORE

Four expressions tell us what God did to Jesus when He punished Him for our sin.

HE WAS PIERCED.

The first is "pierced"--"He was pierced for our transgressions." It seems to me it can refer to nothing directly except the driving of the nails into His hands and feet and the thrust of the spear into His side.

HE WAS CRUSHED

The second is "crushed"--meaning to be utterly and fully broken and bruised. He was crushed *physically*. The treatment He received, beginning with the slap on the face and concluding with the thrust of the spear, was crushing, though only in a limited degree. More than that, He was crushed *emotionally*. He loved these folk who were killing Him. He had wept over

6 Some Hebraists may recoil from "punishment" as translation of עוֹן . Yet it does have precedent in the standard versions and lays emphasis on the wholeness of the wrong in sin, including the penalty for it. The author would welcome the suggestion of a more comprehensive and useful word.

7 An article by Samuel Rosenblatt ("The Crucifixion of Jesus from the Standpoint of Pharisaic Law," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Dec. 1956) attempts to prove that the Pharisees, at least, had nothing to do with it, that the Romans apparently were responsible, and that the New Testament record has an anti-Jewish cast in regard to the crucifixion of Jesus. This cast, it is contended, was imported to the story after Christianity became predominantly Gentile.

their city and had spent the last week of His life preaching to them. This was worse than being "voted out." The rejection of love and care is the supreme indignity.

HE TOOK CHASTISEMENT

The third is "reproof" or "chastisement." In this case it is penal punishment, such as dealt to law-breakers (not corrective like our chastisement as Christians). In Ohio it would be the gallows, in Indiana the electric chair, in Utah the gas chamber, in France the guillotine, in the army the firing squad, but in the Roman Empire it was what has been called the most cruel kind of public execution ever devised--crucifixion.

HE RECEIVED WELTS

The fourth is "welt" or "stripe." The word refers to the mark left by a club or whip. It reminds us that "Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him," and that the soldiers "took the reed and smote him on the head."

But specific as all these terms seem to be, detailed as the fulfillment seems to have been, it appears to me that all these things only symbolize the worst part of the suffering, something no Old Testament prophet could see. I refer to the severance of the fellowship that took place when the Father turned away and the Son cried out in the bitterness of abandonment, "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" That pierced Him more deeply than the spikes and spear did. That crushed Him more than the weight of the cross He carried up the hill. That was sterner reproof than anything Roman or Jew had devised for criminals; and *that made a welt in His heart where the whip could not reach.*"

2. THE VICARIOUS VALUE OF HIS EXPERIENCE

The vicarious, substitutionary value of the suffering and death of Jesus is indicated by two expressions: "for our transgressions...for our punishments."

In consideration of this fact, in the opinions of men, we meet the problem of what has come to be called "double talk." A noted preacher is perfectly willing to say he believes that all suffering is vicarious and add in the same breath that the doctrine of the blood atonement is "a perversion of the Christian Gospel." What does he mean? Probably merely that those who cause suffering eventually suffer more than those who endure their wrongdoings, or that the sight of suffering serves to chasten men. What this man surely means to say is that our salvation has no relation to what Christ did *for us*. As we intend it to be understood, vicarious means substitutionary. When I say the death of Christ was vicarious, I mean that He died *in my place*.

"He was pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our guilt." One of the most discerning and well-informed students of the Hebrew Old Testament, if not most original, was Dr. Albert Barnes. He said concerning these words, that if it is possible for human speech to describe substitutionary atonement, these words do so. Franz Delitzsch--than whom few more learned

and discerning Old Testament scholars ever lived--said that such is the only possible construction to be placed on these words. Our transgressions and sins actually caused His death. One may deny substitutionary atonement, but he cannot do it and believe the Bible!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood.
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Verse four tells us that Israel once thought God was punishing Jesus at Calvary for His own sins. In verse five a convicted and repentant Israel, who have learned that the wounds in His hands were made there for their sins, confess that God was punishing Him in their stead. The first is the wrong view; the second is the right.

3. THE ATONING EFFECTS OF HIS EXPERIENCE

The atoning value of that death is set forth in two expressions which present the results of His work: "Our peace...healing is for us."

PEACE

"Peace (**שָׁלוֹם**) is one of the most important words in the Old Testament. We think of peace as one of two things: cessation of activity (that is, rest) or as the termination of hostility--the end of warfare. The Hebrew word includes both and more besides. This will appear as one considers some of the translations of **שָׁלוֹם** in the Authorized Version: "It is *well*" (Genesis 29:6), "in *good health*" (Genesis 43:28), "Is Absalom *safe*?" (1 Samuel 18:29), I saw the *prosperity* of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3), "*wholly* carried away" (Jeremiah 13:19). An amazing use is in 2 Samuel 11:7 where David inquires of Uriah concerning the war Joab is waging. Hold in mind that Joab and the people were waging bitter warfare, and not the literal rendering: "David demanded of him concerning the peace of Joab, and concerning the peace of the people, and concerning the peace of the war." Our Authorized translation makes better sense to us, but the literal rendering helps in seeing the breadth and depth and height of this word "peace"--health, wholeness, safety, prosperity, soundness. It describes more fully than any other single word just what Christ procured for us at Calvary--deliverance "from wrath" and procurement of "all things that pertain to life and godliness." It was typified in the Peace-offering.⁸

HEALING

Along with this goes "healing"--"by his welt, healing is for us." This is both judicially true and practically true--official in the reckoning of God

8 The **שָׁלוֹם** or peace-offering in a remarkable way presented the benefits of salvation for all concerned. With this offering a joyful feast was always connected. The Lord had His portion, the inner parts of the slain animal, which were burned for Him on the brazen altar. The priests ate a thigh and a shoulder. The offerer and his friends could eat the remainder in the tabernacle precincts. Thus both God and His people could be seen to receive benefit. For the people it meant joy, health, happiness, peace, prosperity. In the New Testament we are told that Christ "is our peace."

and experiential in the life of the believer. Every spiritual disease was healed for us in Christ, and the physical ones too. Some are now in effect, some are going into effect, some will not reach actuality till Jesus comes again, but even now judicially it is all "ours." We own it all though we do not possess it all. That is the primary meaning of "healing is for us." But in another way "his welt" brings healing to us. I mean that the welts raised on our Redeemer are each a lesson to cause us to turn from our sins. No one who realizes that each one of his sins adds another burden to the weight of Calvary is likely to continue on a willful, sinful way. That is why it is good to contemplate the cross long and often, and why I say the healing has a practical realization now in holiness as well as primarily a judicial realization in righteousness.

Having now seen the human causes and the divine act, there next comes

CONFESSION CONCERNING ATONEMENT OF SERVANT (verse 6)

Israel now confesses three things: (1) that man is a sinner by nature, collectively in Adam ("All of us as a flock have gone astray"); (2) that man is a sinner by choice individually ("we have turned each one to his own way"); and (3) that the punishment for both, which is man's due, was all laid on Christ ("And Jehovah has caused to strike upon him the punishment due all of us").

1. MAN IS SINFUL BY NATURE--AS A RACE

Mankind are collectively sinners by nature; that is, born with guilt for Adamic sin, with an inborn inclination to sin. Man is not neutral with equal propensities for either good or for evil. His propensities, however good in a relative sense, all fall short of the true good, which is the glory of God who made him.

Such is the teaching of this first clause, "All of us as a flock have gone astray." "All of us" means all the confessors. Of course, primarily these are the restored Israel, but we have already shown how that all redeemed men do join the confession. There are no exceptions. Though some men may not be so wicked as others, all men do have an inherited sinful nature. The words "as sheep" are, as I have translated, properly "as a flock." Sheep do not behave as individuals in moving from one area to another. As anyone knows who has ever handled sheep, they follow a leader and move as a flock. Thus did all of us in Adam (whose name in Hebrew, by the way, means mankind). The words "gone astray" are also so translated in Psalm 58:3, which significantly says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born." Again, the Psalmist says, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep (119:176). Now it is obvious in all these cases that to "go astray" involved no act of reflective thought or movement of the will. Adamic nature and guilt are ours without any acts of our own. We got them at our conception before we could think. As David says, "In sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). He meant not that his mother was an immoral woman, nor that the act of parents which produces conception is wrong, but that from conception onward he, David, had a sinful nature.

May I emphasize that this is the New Testament doctrine, and that the New

Testament emphatically declares that guilt and punishment are deserved, even for this inborn sin. I cite Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men (as a punishment for sin, obviously), for that all have sinned." This is why the heathen are lost, and why except for the atonement of Christ, which goes as far as depravity, every infant who dies would go to hell. Hard doctrine, you say? Yes, many hard things are also true.

2. MAN IS SINFUL BY CHOICE--AS A PERSON

Furthermore, men are individually sinners by choice--"We have turned each one to his own way." Every word in this clause speaks of personal, willful, deliberate action. Our sinful nature expresses itself in decisions of the whole man (i.e., the will) which agree with it. This is what the Psalmist is speaking of (Psalm 14:2,3): "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is no one who does good, no, not one." To be convinced that the New Testament teaches this same doctrine, one need only turn to the third chapter of Romans where the condemnation of the whole race is pronounced for inbred sin--and these very same words from this very same Psalm are quoted as proof-texts.

3. JESUS BORE THE RESULTS OF BOTH RACIAL AND PERSONAL SIN

Finally, to show that Jesus took the guilt and punishment for all mankind's sin and sins, whether racial or personal, whether inbred or willful, the text declares as our confession, "And Jehovah has caused to strike on him the punishment due all of us."

Almost the whole plan of salvation is in this brief statement. Jehovah God Himself is the actor. Salvation is all of God. In Him is justification, sanctification, and glorification. This is emphasized in 2 Corinthians 5:19--"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Man had nothing to do with it. God was the agent. Furthermore, salvation, or forgiveness of sins, is with respect to punishment--and that not by simple failure on God's part to inflict punishment. God always punishes sin. The word "iniquities" of our common version really includes everything about sin--disposition, act, sins of omission and commission, together with the guilt and punishment of the same. Punishment is only the result and final consummation. Hence, it has been translated in the Authorized Version "fault," "iniquity," "mischief," "punishment of iniquity." All of this, reads the Authorized Version, the LORD "laid on him." How tame a rendering! Let us read a few passages where the word translated "laid" is used. "And the children of Dan said...Let not your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows *run upon* you, and you lose your life" (Judges 18:25). "And king Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he *fell upon* him that he died" (1 Kings 2:25). "So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and *fell upon* and slew him" (1 King 2:34). Thus is the death of Joab described. If you want to know what it means to have "iniquity" laid upon one, ask Joab. It meant death to him, capital punishment for sin. So it was with Jesus. All the hell that the Lake of Fire will be for lost men, Jesus took in that dreadful afternoon on

Calvary.

Finally, observe that the verse closes as it began--"All of us...all of us." Praise God, though sin went deep and far, redemption goes farther still. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:17,18).

Yet one more thought. Many arguments have been angrily fought out and much blood has been shed over the question of who killed Jesus. The truth is that in one sense the Romans killed Him; a Roman soldier drove the nails into His hands and another thrust the spear into His dead body. In another sense the Jews killed Him, for it was a Jewish mob that yelled, "Crucify him!" In still another sense we all killed Him, for it was in our place and for our sins that He died. But in the most real and important sense--one almost shudders to say it, though it is true--God killed Him, "ran upon him that he died," for (and I return to our last verse) "Jehovah caused to strike on him the punishment due all of us."

The heart of the saint can only cry out, as he contemplates and believes all this:

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts;
praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet;
praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance;
praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Praise him upon the loud cymbals;
praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise ye the LORD.