

Isaiah 53 - The Forbidden Chapter

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Date: 29 March 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, in 1946, a Bedouin shepherd boy by the name of Muhammad Adib, a 15-year-old, was busy shepherding his sheep, as his father told him to, in what is now the West Bank in Palestine.

And as teenage boys who are given a chore by their parents do, he got bored pretty quickly and he decided to play a game of throwing stones, as boys of all ages like to do when they're bored.

And he saw a number of holes in the mountain, which are in a picture on the screen behind me, and he decided to try to throw the stones into those holes.

I mean, if you're a boy, you'll know the fascination with throwing stones at stuff and trying to hit your mark. And eventually he did. But as he did, and as his stone hit the bullseye in one of those holes, he heard, smash.

Now, as normally teenage boys do when they're throwing stones and they hear a smash, you would normally run the other way and make sure your parents don't find out, right? But he didn't. And what he did is he called some friends of his and they went up into the caves to see what was in there.

[1 : 24] And what they discovered was a number of old clay jars with very old-looking scrolls inside that they didn't know at the time were actually from the Bible.

They were scrolls of biblical text. They took these scrolls to their Bedouin camp and the elders of the camp didn't quite know what to do with them. So they hung them on the tent poles until they met an antiques dealer from Bethlehem and sold them to him.

And only later did he take them to some scholars who analyzed these scrolls and found out that they were over 2,000 years old.

They became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls and they are one of the most important archaeological discoveries of all time. Now, one of the scrolls, one of the most well-preserved, is called the Great Isaiah Scroll.

And it's the scroll that is the same word for word as the Isaiah we have in our Old Testament of the Bible. And you can go and you can actually see the scroll.

[2 : 39] It's currently on display in the Museum of Israel in Jerusalem. And you can actually go this close to a 2,000 year old scroll and look, even though you probably won't understand them because you don't know ancient Hebrew, you can look at words written by someone who lived before Jesus was even born.

It's an amazing experience to see these words that were written so long ago, before Jesus came. And yet, if you did know how to read ancient Hebrew and you went around those scrolls in the Museum of Israel, you could find a chapter in those scrolls that are there in Jerusalem now that describe in detail what was going to happen to Jesus on Good Friday, centuries before he was born.

Today we are going to read that chapter. It's Isaiah 53. And we're going to see not just how the events of Easter were foreseen centuries before they happened, but we're going to see how what happened on Easter, especially what happened on Good Friday.

And then Easter Sunday are central to God's plans for the whole world. Because that is what this prophecy of Isaiah is about. The scroll of Isaiah, it's a number, it's over 60 chapters long, and it's about God's plans for this world.

We're going to look at what the prophecy of Isaiah is about. And we won't read the whole thing. We don't have time, but I have read it. And I will tell you the summary.

[4 : 31] What it does, what the prophecy of Isaiah does, is that it reveals God's plans to bring people from all nations and tribes and countries back into a right relationship with Him, the God who made them.

And that is something that we all need. That is something that every human being, no matter where they're from, no matter what religion they were born into or believe, we all need right relationship with the God who made us.

Because ever since the fall, none of us are naturally in right relationship with God. But God, through Isaiah, in this prophecy, tells us what He is planning to do to change that.

And He is going to do that through someone called the Servant. That's all we hear about Him in Isaiah. He's just, He's got this name called the Servant. And even though He is from Israel, Isaiah tells us that His influence would stretch far beyond that land.

Let me read to you from Isaiah 49, verse 6. He, that is God, says, it is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel.

[5 : 55] I will also make you a light for the nations to be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Okay, now that sounds amazing, doesn't it?

Whoever you are, whether you believe this to be true or not, it really sounds good if it were true, right? That after thousands of years of humans doing their own thing and messing up this world, because that's the one thing we're good at, right?

Isaiah, in these scrolls, talks about someone who is able to bring us all back into right relationship with the God who made this world and made us.

And that is something that the world has always needed. The world has always needed to be in right relationship with its Creator. And whether you know it or not, it is your deepest need as well, as a human being, as a creature made by God.

It is your deepest need, whether you know it or not, to be in right relationship with the God who made you. And Isaiah gives this amazing prophecy of how that's going to happen.

[7 : 03] But how do we know Isaiah is not just making it up? I mean, people in history have made up a lot of stuff that sounds nice, but it's just not real.

Okay, we've got thousands of religions in the world that all have nice ideas about the future, nice ideas about what's going to solve our problems.

How do we know Isaiah is not just making it up? How do we know that God even exists and that this is His plan for the world? Anybody can write prophecies about the future, right?

And you can't disprove them because it's about the future. I could take a piece of paper and a pen and write down that in two years, it's going to start raining ice cream in Cape Town. And God has told me this.

Now, there's no way you could disprove that, but you're probably not going to believe it because it's just wishful thinking. I wish it would rain ice cream in Cape Town, but it's probably not going to happen. I just made it up, okay?

[8 : 01] Like most prophecies about the future, it's wishful thinking. People get these visions and they have these great feelings about what they'd love the future to be, so they write it down and they claim it's a prophecy about the future, but it's really just wishful thinking.

They're just making it up. How do we know Isaiah wasn't? How do we know Isaiah wasn't just making this stuff up? Well, here's the amazing thing.

And this is how we know that the Bible is different from any other book ever written. The reason we know Isaiah wasn't making this up is because what he wrote down in his scroll has already started to happen in our history and in a way that no one could have set it up.

Especially the things that are written in this chapter, Isaiah 53. It's an amazing chapter when you understand that it was written 700 years before Jesus came.

And we know that because of those scrolls that were discovered in 1946. Isaiah 53 is known by many as the forbidden chapter.

[9 : 20] And the reason is because rabbis used to read Isaiah 53 in ancient times in synagogues, in Jewish synagogues. It used to be part of the weekly synagogue readings. But after Jesus came, according to one Jewish historian, there were so many arguments and great confusion when this chapter came up that the rabbis eventually took it out of the weekly synagogue readings.

And the result is that most Jews today have never read it. So let's see why. Let's look at the words of this scroll translated into English and see what it actually says.

I'm starting from verse 1, Isaiah 53, verse 1 to 2. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him. No appearance that we should desire him.

And so the first thing this tells us about this servant to come is that he will look ordinary. You wouldn't be able to pick him out from a crowd. Few people will notice that he's come and that he is the one that Isaiah was talking about when he comes.

[10 : 39] In fact, not only would they not notice him, people for some bizarre reason wouldn't like him very much. As we read in the next verse. This is what Isaiah prophesies. He was despised and rejected by men.

A man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from. He was despised and we didn't value him.

So, you know, even though Isaiah's wrote in the past tense, that's what prophets do. He's talking about something that hadn't happened in his time. It was only going to happen hundreds of years later. And when Jesus came, 700 years after he wrote these words, that is exactly what happened.

These verses that he describes. The Jewish leaders did not believe in him. They did not see him as the Messiah they were expecting. He was too ordinary. And not only that, they disliked him.

And as you read the Gospels, you see that their hatred for him grew and grew. So much that they conspired to kill him. And eventually, even his own disciples ran away from him.

[11 : 50] Isaiah says he was like someone people turn away from. He was despised and we didn't value him. And then, unprecedented in history, the Jews and the Romans, who normally would have hated each other, united together.

Isaiah 53. And the crowd, all of them, to a man called for the death of Jesus. Even though he had done nothing wrong. Isaiah 53 goes on in verse 7.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers.

He did not open his mouth. He was taken away because of oppression and judgment. And who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living.

Jesus was condemned to death. And yet, when he was, he famously did not try to defend himself.

[12 : 55] Or prove his innocence. Even though it was so clearly unfair what was happening to him. I mean, when something unfair happens to you, what do you do? You don't stay silent?

Boys and girls, when your brother gets two pieces of cake and you only got one, are you just going to stay silent? I don't think so. At least not the children I know.

You're going to say, that's unfair. You're going to make sure people know that something unfair has happened. Well, the most unfair thing happened to Jesus. And he didn't say a thing.

He didn't say a thing. He didn't try to prove his innocence. He didn't defend himself. He just accepted what was happening to him.

Even though it was totally unjust. And he had every right to object. And yet he didn't. And because of that, he was then led out to die.

[13 : 57] As Isaiah says, he was cut off from the land of the living. But listen to what Isaiah prophesies next. Now, I want you to remember, this is written 700 years before any of this happens.

Okay? And we know that because of the evidence that we found. Isaiah writes something in chapter 53 verse 9, which nobody understood at the time he wrote.

It's a very strangely specific and just mysterious thing that is part of his prophecy. And for hundreds of years, Jews reading this didn't really know what it meant.

And it's this. He says in verse 9, He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death. So for hundreds of years, people had no clue what this was actually about.

But when Jesus came, and we read in the Gospels, written by eyewitnesses, he was charged as a criminal, even though he wasn't one.

[15 : 01] And he was crucified, we're told, along with two rebels, just as Isaiah 53 verse 12 says, he was counted among the rebels.

And he was also, did you know, intended by the Romans to be buried along with the criminals that he was crucified with.

Isaiah 53 verse 9, he was assigned a grave with the wicked. He literally was by the Romans. But instead, listen to what happened. I'm reading from Matthew 27.

He was an eyewitness. And he writes this from Matthew 27, 57. You don't have to turn there. Just listen to what happened. 700 years after Isaiah wrote these words, that he would be...

I'm just going to read it again. So you remember, he was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death. Very strange. What does it mean? Listen to Matthew. When it was evening, this is after the death of Jesus, Friday night.

[16 : 02] A rich man from Arimathea named Joseph came, who himself had become a disciple of Jesus. He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

This was very unorthodox. You don't do that with Romans. Then Pilate ordered that it be released. Very strange. So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in clean, fine linen, and placed it in his new tomb, his new tomb, which had been cut into the rock.

He left after rolling a great stone against the entrance of the tomb. 700 years before that happened. It was written that he was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man in his death.

Just as Isaiah said. All this was written seven centuries before it happened. And the Dead Sea Scrolls sitting in Jerusalem today prove that.

Carbon dated. They were written before Jesus came. And no matter who you are, you've got to deal with that fact. Whether you believe in him or not, you've got to deal with the fact that these things were written about him hundreds of years before he came.

[17 : 18] Because it tells us two things, at least. Firstly, it tells us that this is no ordinary book. See, that tells us that the words that we read here are inspired by God.

And therefore, we cannot ignore them. We should not ignore them. We ignore them to our peril. But secondly, we learn from that that it was God's plan.

It was God's plan that his servant was going to die in this way. In this terrible way. In fact, Isaiah 53 verse 10 says, Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely.

Why? Why? Was it always God's plan for centuries before it happened that his servant, his own son, it turns out, would die in this horrible way?

In this unjust way? Why? Well, Isaiah tells us. Isaiah, right in the middle, right in the center of Isaiah 53, this forbidden chapter, we find out why.

[18 : 36] And I'm going to read from verse 4 to verse 6. Yet he himself bore our sicknesses. And he carried our pains.

But we, in turn, regarded him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion. Crushed because of our iniquities.

Punishment for our peace was on him. And we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep.

We all have turned to our own way. And the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all. You can see why this is the forbidden chapter for Jews.

Because Jews totally disagree with this idea that one man can take on the sins of someone else. But if you think about it, that is the only way that sinners in this world can have any peace with God.

[19 : 50] Can be in any kind of right relationship with God. Not by keeping religious rules. It's not going to work. We've already sinned against God. No amount of religion is going to make up for that.

The only way is if our sins are justly punished according to God's perfect and unchangeable justice. And yet, if that happens to us, it would condemn us to hell and eternal death.

And that's why God always planned that the servant would come. The son of God who would come as one of us with one mission.

And that is to take our sins on himself. And he's the only one who ever could. The divine son of God, sinless. He's the only one qualified in the history of humanity to be able to take on the sins of other people on himself.

So that he could receive the just penalty and they could go free. And he knew he was the only one who could do that. And that is why he didn't try to stop the trial from happening.

[21 : 03] That's why he didn't open his mouth. That's why he accepted what was happening to him. But he was pierced because of our rebellion.

Crushed because of our iniquities. Punishment for our peace was on him. And we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep.

We all have turned to our own way. And the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all. You know, literally in the original language, there's a special word it uses for the Lord has punished him or laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

Literally, it says the Lord has gathered together our sins on him. Gathered together all of our sins on him.

It's like when you gather together rubbish in your house so you can throw it away. You know, you're cleaning up your house. Boys and girls, maybe your mom and dad tells you you've got to clean up your room.

[22 : 10] What do you do? You take all, you gather all the stuff. Well, you should. You often don't. But you should. But if you're trying to clean up our house, we gather all the rubbish, all the things that don't belong there from every corner.

And we look under the couch and we get stuff and we look behind the table. And we get all the rubbish, all the stuff that doesn't belong there. We gather it together. We put it in a big black bag. We tie it up, put it in the bin.

And it's taken away by the rubbish truck on Wednesday morning or whenever it comes. But do you know that that is what God does through Jesus for the sins of all who trust in him?

He gathers them together. Even those sins that are deeply hidden away in your life that you don't even realize, he gathers all of them. Every single one.

Every sin you've committed and every sin you're still going to commit. He gathers it all together. And he puts it on Jesus. And Isaiah knew that that would happen 700 years before it did.

[23 : 18] But Isaiah's prophecy is not finished. Isaiah 53 verse 11. After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied.

By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many and he will carry their iniquities. And so Isaiah foresees that not only would death not hold the servant, but literally the next line, literally it says, the righteous servant will make many righteous.

Will make many righteous. Many who were previously sinners. He will actually not just take their sins, but he will give his righteousness to them so that they can be in a right relationship with God.

That they can be holy in God's sight. Not just in this life, but in the life to come. They will have Jesus' righteousness instead of their own. Saved for eternity from sins.

That is a salvation that is life changing for those who have received it. Life changing for those who have trusted in Jesus and found the salvation and know that their sins have been taken away and they have received the righteousness of Christ in the eyes of God.

[24 : 45] They cannot go on living the same way as before. When they know that they have come into right relationship with the God who made them and they experience real relationship with Him and they know that they will no longer be judged for their sins ever again.

It is life changing. And that has changed the lives of millions of people all over the world. People not born in Christian countries.

People not born into Christianity. People who have never heard about Christianity before have come to hear and believe in Jesus and receive the salvation.

People in persecuted countries who have given their lives because of what they believe and yet they didn't turn away because their lives had been changed. People from low positions.

People from high positions. People from all races and all cultures. And people in every position of society. Popers and kings have received the salvation.

[25 : 50] And it has changed their lives. And it's in that way that the servant is lifted up in all the nations just as Isaiah prophesied.

Isaiah 52. It's the beginning of this whole passage. It actually starts in 52.13. Listen to what he said. Listen to what Isaiah prophesied. See, my servant will be successful.

He will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted. Verse 15. So he will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For they will see what had not been told them. And they will understand what they had not heard. And all this was prophesied 700 years before it happened.

And it happened exactly as Isaiah prophesied it. And you can go and read those actual words that were written before Jesus came. And that is why we as Christians believe this.

[27 : 01] We don't believe this because we like how it sounds or because we would love to believe it to be true. We believe it because it's based on evidence that cannot be disproven. Prophecy fulfilled in time and space.

If you're not a Christian, if you don't follow Jesus, if you don't believe in Him, what are you going to do with this? What are you going to do with Isaiah chapter 53?

You have to do something with it. But not everyone believes. Not everyone believes. Why? Why does not everyone believe if it is so clear?

If it is so clear, you can read these words that were written before Jesus came and yet it's talking exactly and you fulfill them to the letter. And there's far more than Isaiah. There's a whole lot of other prophets that talk about where He was born.

Details about His life. And they were all perfectly fulfilled. No other religion has that, by the way. No other religion has prophecy that has been fulfilled in our history. You can look it up.

[28 : 06] Only the Bible. You have to do something with that. But why? Why does, if it's so clear, why do so many people still not believe? Maybe you don't believe because you're like, well, you know, a lot of people don't believe in Christianity so there must be good reason why.

Why? Why is it that so many people don't believe? Well, it turns out that's exactly another thing that Isaiah prophesied would happen. Not everyone would believe.

Look again at verse 1 of Isaiah 53. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord, the way God is going to work in the world, through whom He's going to work, the servant, to whom has He been revealed?

He has to be revealed. This is not something that everyone will believe. And then at the end of verse 3, He was like someone people turned away from. He was despised.

And we didn't value Him. Why would people not value Him when it's so clear that Jesus was sent by God to save us?

[29 : 15] Why would people not value that? Well, it turns out because people prefer living life their own way.

And they don't actually want God. That's why people rejected Him when He came. And that's why people still reject Him today.

Just as Isaiah prophesied. Did you know that you are in Isaiah's prophecy? You. You are in Isaiah 53.

You are written about in those ancient scrolls that are there in Jerusalem right now. Either you are one of those in verse 3 who will turn away and not value Him.

And you will leave this place and it's not going to make much difference to your life. Or you are one of those in verse 11 that says, Those who have trusted in Jesus, those who have been baptized into His name, and those whose sins have been taken away, and whose lives now belong to Jesus.

[30 : 42] I will give Him the many as a portion. That's what happens when you're saved. That you are given by God to Jesus as His possession.

Isaiah talks about you, but which one are you? Are you one of those who, as Isaiah said, would not value Jesus?

Or are you one of those whose sins will be taken away and who will be given to Jesus as a possession? There are only those two types of people in the world. Which one are you? Well, it's how you go out of this place and live from this day on, whether you live for yourself or you live for Jesus, that will show which one of the two you are.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, as we open Your powerful Word and we see that it is no ordinary book, but it contains ancient prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ on Easter.

We are overwhelmed that You make Yourself known in such a way. But Lord, we pray that You would help us not to ignore what we have heard.

[32 : 08] Lord, help us not to be those who do not value Jesus and who refuse to see the plain evidence of who He is.

Help us to be those, Lord, who trust Him, who follow Him and who live our lives for Him. In His name we pray. Amen.

Amen.