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The Reminder

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Understanding the Bible - 9

Isaiah 53 and The Sacrifice of Christ

By Maurice Barnett

(Because of the importance of this subject and the length of the article, the Newsletter this week will be enlarged to several pages).

These familiar passages in Isaiah 53 are important to our belief in the promises of God and in our understanding of His scheme of redemption. Yet, like the rest of the Bible, attempts are made to establish doctrines on these verses that are contrary to truth. One major theological philosophy is that of the imputation of sins to Christ. The word "impute" means to credit something to another, lay the blame on or place the responsibility of something upon another, to charge them with the act or guilt. Here are a couple of explanations, especially as they relate to Isaiah 53—

"The passage from 2 Corinthians quoted above, together with the verses from Isaiah, indicate that it was God the Father who put our sins on Christ. How could that be? In the same way in which Adam's sins were imputed to us, so God imputed our sins to Christ; that is, he thought of them as belonging to Christ, and, since God is the ultimate judge and definer of what really is in the universe, when God thought of our sins as belonging to Christ then in fact they actually did belong to Christ." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 574.

"II. Imputation of the Sin of Man to Christ. In contrast to the imputation of Adam's sin to the race, often considered a real imputation, the imputation of the sin of man to Christ is considered judicial, and related to the death of Christ on the cross. Christ 'hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . But he was wounded for our transgressions . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:4-6). Though the word impute is not actually used to express this idea in the NT, the idea is clearly stated in other words." *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, page 282.

The doctrine is that the responsibility for our sins was literally transferred to Jesus. He also assumed our guilt for

the sins committed by us. Further, the punishment that rightly belongs to us because of our sins was laid upon Him as well. That was done 2000 years ago and consequently we can only conclude from this that we really do not have any sins or guilt, never did have any and we will never be punished, because all of that was transferred, imputed, to Jesus. He stood in our place, taking our responsibility away from us and "bore" them all Himself while on the cross.

But, this Calvinist *doctrine of imputation* is just another way of stating the *doctrine of the vicarious, substitutionary death of Christ*. It is also known as the *doctrine of penal satisfaction*. Thus, the concepts of substitution and the vicarious death of Christ developed as an integral part of the the imputation of sins popularized by Calvinism. The *doctrine and the vocabulary* came out of Calvinism. Wiley and Culbertson, in their book *Introduction To Christian Theology*, page 228, say: "This is the theory generally held by the Reformed Churches, and is frequently known as the Calvinistic theory."

Now, what those terms mean is that all of the sins of the elect were removed 2000 years ago, literally. Even brethren, who deny the consequences of the doctrine, still use Calvinist vocabulary in explaining what they believe, interpreting Isaiah 53 right down Calvinist lines. *If you wont accept the consequences, then don't use the vocabulary.*

But, even Calvinists must admit the unscriptural nature, of at least their language, as stated above. Thomas Crawford was a convicted Calvinist and an avid believer in the imputation/substitution theory. Yet, among some other like things, he says the following in his book *The Doctrine of The Atonement*—

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Sunday - 9:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
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Ladies Class - Monday 9:30 am (September)

"One of these conclusions is, That our sins were imputed to Jesus Christ. It is true there is no passage to be found in Holy Scripture in which this doctrine is expressly affirmed; but there are many passages in which it seems to be necessarily implied. For, when we read of Christ as 'bearing our sins,' as 'made sin for us,' and 'made a curse for us,' we can hardly fail to recognize in these expressions the substance of what is really intended by all intelligent advocates of the doctrine that 'our sins were imputed to Jesus Christ.' page 188

Note that it "seems to be necessarily implied." Is that very convincing that the doctrine is true? With this in mind, lets take a closer look at Isaiah 53:4-12 as a foundation for the vicarious, substitutionary, death of Christ.

Verse 4 - "Surely he hath borne (*nasa*) our griefs, and carried (*sabal*) our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."

The words "borne" and "carried" are the key terms here. "Borne" is from the Hebrew, "*nasa*." Gesenius, pages 567-569, presents the range of meanings, while at the same time injecting the Calvinist position of imputation at one point, which will be addressed later. *Nasa* may have a *literal* meaning of lifting up something, such as the ark, Genesis 7:17, or the table of showbread, Exodus 25:27. It may also refer to being cheerful or merry, Job 10:15, or to a land able to support people, Genesis 13:6.

Nasa also has figurative meanings and so may be translated in some passages as "forgive" or "pardon," such as Exodus 32:32, 34:7, Numbers 14:18. In some places even though the words "bore" or "bear" are used, it may mean only "removal." The conclusion that *nasa*, "borne," refers to a transference of sins to the one who "bears" is a false conclusion. *There is no imputation of sins inherent in the word.*

Nasa is translated by the words "forgive" and "pardon" in Genesis 50:17, Exodus 10:17 and I Samuel 15:25. Must we conclude that the sins of the people involved were transferred to Joseph, Moses or Samuel? Were their sins imputed to these individuals? No, they were not.

"Carried," in verse 4, is from the Hebrew, "*sabal*." It is clearly a synonym of *nasa* in this passage. This will further be proven shortly. Gesenius, who was a Calvinist, inserts the idea of imputation into Isaiah 53:4 on page 578 of his Hebrew *Lexicon*. He says—

"TO BEAR, TO CARRY, a heavy burden... Isa. 46:4,7.

Used figuratively to bear griefs, sins, etc. i.e. to receive the penalties which another has deserved, Isa. 53:4,11; Lam. 5:7. [It must not be forgotten that when the vicarious sufferings of Christ are spoken of, every figure falls very far short of the full truth; he actually bare our sins.]"

Gesenius does accurately admit that *sabal* is used figuratively, just as *nasa* is used. The mistake that many make is to literalize the terms where they are not literal at all. Just what figurative meanings are to be attached to the terms? Gesenius claims that in Isaiah 53:4 that *sabal* (carried) refers to receiving the penalties which another has deserved. *This could not be further from the truth!* It is so outlandishly false that only one who is blinded by his theology could reach such a conclusion. It is a determined effort to insert Calvinism into the Bible.

We are not left to wonder what these terms refer to in Isaiah 53. For verse 4, especially, we have an *inspired explanation* of the way they are to be understood relative to Jesus and *they have nothing at all to do with His death on the Cross!* Matthew 8:16-17 says—

"And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases."

The context of these passages shows that Jesus healed them of their diseases. The Holy Spirit said specifically that what Jesus did was a *fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4*, a fulfillment of the phrases that include both *nasa* and *sabal*, *borne and carried*. Were their diseases transferred to Jesus in any sense whatever? No. Did He become a leper in their place when he "bore," "carried" their diseases and suffering? Did He become blind in healing their blindness? The answer is obvious. And, take note that this was all done at the time LONG BEFORE His death on the cross!

Further, the Greek verbs used in Matthew 8 mean only to remove or take away. Jesus removed their diseases. This is what, by divine inspiration, *nasa* and *sabal* mean in Isaiah 53. There is no "imputation" nor "transference" at all involved in these terms.

Verse 5 - "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."

The preposition "for" is found twice in this passage in English, "for our transgressions" and "for our iniquities," and in the Hebrew text the preposition, *minee*, means "on account of" or "because of." This is why the Septuagint, translated by Hebrew Scholars, uses the Greek preposition *dia* in both instances; they do not use either *huper* or *anti*. *Dia* means here, *because of*, in keeping with the Hebrew preposition. It was because of our transgressions and because of our iniquities He was wounded and bruised. There is no "imputation of our sins to Him," no "in the place of" nor "instead of" idea in this verse.

"Chastisement of our peace" may also be translated as "chastening He took in order to bring us peace," as also say Keil and Delitzsch on this statement.

His being wounded, bruised and chastised refers to His physical suffering before and during His time on the Cross. He was also emotionally stressed but there isn't even a hint in these terms that Jesus suffered bitter rejection because "God had withdrawn from Him" while on the cross. The so-called "desertion" of the Father is a fabrication. We will deal with that in a Newsletter article soon.

"With his stripes we are healed," means that by His suffering and death we are spiritually healed and is quoted in I Peter 2:24—

"...who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."

What is the meaning of "bare" in Peter's statement here? It is from the Greek word, "*anaphero*" in this passage. *Anaphero* is found in the Septuagint of Isaiah 53:11 as a translation of *sabal*, "he shall bear (*sabal/anaphero*) their iniquities." As a synonym of *nasa* in 53:4 and its fulfillment

in Matthew 8, *sabal* means to remove or take away. *Anaphero* means to offer up. Now notice Hebrews 9:26 and 28—

"..else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away (*athetesin*) sin by the sacrifice of himself."

"..so Christ also, having been once offered to bear (*anaphero*) the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation."

These two passages are saying the same thing, parallel in thought. *Athetesin* means "removal," Bauer, page 21. "Put away" and "bear" mean the same as also does "sacrifice" and "offered." Jesus bore our sins in that He removed them by means of His offering. There was no imputation of sins, no transference of our sins to Him, no substitution here. But, notice another passage—

"..who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up (*anaphero*) sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up (*anaphero*) himself." Hebrews 7:27.

The sacrifice was offered on behalf of the people. The preposition "for" in both places in this verse is from *huper*, definitely meaning "on behalf of" the people, not a substitute for them. Well then, was the priest who made the offering a substitute for the people? No. Remember that the priest offered sacrifices as much for himself as for the people. Was the priest a substitute for himself? No. Substitution was not involved in *anaphero*—

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up (*anaphero*) Isaac his son upon the altar?" James 2:21

Isaac was "offered up" on the altar. For whom was Isaac a substitute? Certainly, the ram was killed on the altar in the place of Isaac because the text says so. But, the text says that Isaac actually WAS offered up, but offered up in whose place; for whom was Isaac a substitute? For whom was Abraham a substitute?

"..ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up (*anaphero*) spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

When Christians offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, can they use a substitute to do it in their place so that they don't really have to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God themselves? When Christians do make the offering for spiritual sacrifices, for whom are they substituting?

Isaiah 53:5 connected with I Peter 2:24 in no way teaches that Jesus was our substitute, that our sins, guilt and punishment were imputed to Him.

Verse 6 - "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

"Laid on" is from the Hebrew *paga*. Among its varied meanings, according to Strong, p. 93, is the figurative, "come (betwixt), cause to entreat, fall (upon), make intercession, intercessor, entreat, lay, light [upon], meet (together), pray, reach, run." So also says Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon. Note that in this same context of verse 6, verse 12 uses the same term, saying that He, "... made intercession (*paga*) for the transgressors."

The Septuagint records this in verse 6 as (English

translation in Bagsters), "and the Lord gave him up for our sins." The Greek verb, *paradidomi*, is in the *Septuagint* and means to deliver up or intercede, just as you find translated in Isaiah 53:12. Consider two NT passages that have *paradidomi*—

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up (*paradidomi*) for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32.

"...and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up (*paradidomi*) for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell." Ephesians 5:2.

Keep in mind that to *bear* sins is to *remove them*, not impute them to Himself. See also John 1:29, Hebrews 9:26, 28, I Peter 2:24.

Verse 7 - "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."

He was "oppressed" and "afflicted" only refers to His suffering brought on Him by His tormentors and then describes how He reacted to it. Also, where is there in these terms anything that even implies that He "suffered" because the Father withdrew His presence from Him while on the Cross?

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."

His being taken from prison and from judgment refers to His incarceration by the Jews and the judgment brought upon Him. Being cut off from the land of the living refers to His death. That He was stricken refers again to His suffering through incarceration, judgment and death.

"For the transgression of my people" means what? The meaning hinges on the preposition "for." Is it "in the place of our transgressions he was stricken?" The preposition "for" is again the Hebrew *minee*, as in verse 5, and means *on account of*. The Septuagint uses the Greek preposition *apo*, meaning *out of*. It might be translated as "out of the transgressions" that He was stricken. The transgressions were the reason for what He did. But, no substitution is involved.

Some have appealed to the American Standard Version that says - "for the transgressions of my people for whom the stroke (was due)?" This implies substitution but even the translators recognize that this is a doubtful rendering by putting "was due" in parentheses and adding a question mark. The NASV puts "was due" in italics with a question mark. This means it is the translators addition and is not in the Hebrew text. The New Living Translation is even more blatant in injecting Calvinist theology into the text by rendering this - "that he was suffering their punishment." The true expression of the text is given in *Bagsters Greek and English Septuagint* - "because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death." Imputation is not found in this passage.

Verse 9 - "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."

These are details of what happened at the Cross and afterward. He was absolutely innocent of all the charges brought against Him as He was also sinless.

Verse 10 - "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, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."

The suffering of Jesus is highlighted in the first part of the passage and the consequence of what He did in the latter part. He was bruised and brought to grief. The key phrase we are interested in at the moment is that *his soul was made an offering for sin*. The single Hebrew term, *asham*, translates into the phrase, "offering for sin." It means "trespass-offering." In the *Septuagint*, the preposition "for" is the Greek *peri*, meaning *concerning*. It was a trespass-offering concerning or relating to sin. There is no imputation nor substitution in this.

Verse 11 - "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."

The term "soul" is from *nephesh*. Among its many meanings is that of a *living being*. Here it refers to what other passages say about the piercing and the suffering He endured in this whole ordeal. Jesus was physically and emotionally stressed. See Psalm 69:19-22 for some insight into this.

The key phrase here is that "he shall bear their iniquities." The word "bear" is the *same word as in verse 4, sabal*. It means iniquities were removed, *not imputed* to Christ. In such passages as Leviticus 16:25, Numbers 5:26, *sabal* is translated as an "offering."

The Septuagint of this verse uses the word *anaphero* for *sabal*. *Anaphero* is found in such passages as Hebrews 7:27, James 2:21, I Peter 2:5 and translated as "offer up" sacrifices. See the comments on verse 5 in this article. There is no imputation or substitution in this passage, either.

Verse 12 - Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; 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."

He poured out His soul unto death - the word "soul" is *nephesh* in the Hebrew text and *psuche* in the Greek Septuagint and the preposition is correctly rendered as *eis*, unto. It refers to the time where it says of Jesus that "He gave up His spirit."

Bare the sin of many - "Bare" is from *nasa*. Again, see the comments on Verse 4. It means to *remove* or *forgive*, which is certainly what He did. Brown, Driver, Briggs say that among its meanings are "to take, take away, carry off, forgive."

Made intercession for the transgressors - Intercession is from *paga*. See the comments under verse 6 in this article. *Bagster's Septuagint Greek/English*, page 889, translates this "and was delivered because of their iniquities." The preposition is *dia*. There is no hint at all of imputation/substitution in this verse nor any of the verses in Isaiah 53:4-12.

The question after all this is: *At what point* did Jesus "offer up" Himself in order to remove our sins? Here's a taste of it—

"For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself." Hebrews 7:26-27.

"It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us: ²⁵nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own; ²⁶else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this *cometh* judgment; ²⁸so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation." Hebrews 9:23-28.

Jesus was not our high priest until he ascended into the holy of Holies, heaven. He portrayed first of all the animal that shed his blood in the Old Testament. But, just as the killing of the animal was not enough, so with the death, shedding of the blood of Jesus. Just as the High Priest had to take that blood into the Holy of Holies, so our High Priest had to do the same in heaven.

TODAY

PRAYERS

Jeremy Banks
Doug Seyk
Maurice Barnett

SONG LEADER

John Wilson

LORD'S TABLE

Bobby Banks
Brent Haugen
Alex Durazo
Skeet Franklin

SCRIPTURE READING

Michael Baker

SERMON

Tom Baker

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Maurice Barnett

WEDNESDAY

SINGING

NEXT WEEK

PRAYERS

Joe Davis
Doug Seyk
Bobby Banks

SONG LEADER

Steve Johnson

LORD'S TABLE

Doug Seyk
Matt Allen
Mike Franklin
Chuck McCowan

SCRIPTURE READING

Matt Allen

SERMON

Maurice Barnett

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bobby Banks