

Literary Structure and Meaning in Isaiah 52:13-53:12

- A** (13) Behold, my **Servant** will act wisely, he will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. (14) Just as **many** were appalled at him (so disfigured was his appearance more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), (15) so will he sprinkle **many** nations, kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.
- B**
- a** (53:1) Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? (2) For he sprang up like a young shoot before him, and like a root out of parched ground, he has no form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should desire him. (3) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we did not esteem him.
- b** (4) Surely he bore our griefs, and our sorrows he carried; but we, we reckoned him struck down, **put to death** by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our sins; the punishment that brought us peace fell upon him, and by his scourging we were healed. (6) All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord placed on him the iniquity of us all.
- a'** (7) He was treated harshly and he was afflicted, but he did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, he did not open his mouth. (8) By oppression and judgement he was taken away, and who would talk of his generation? For he was **cut off out of the land of the living**, for the transgression of my people he was struck down. (9) His **grave** was assigned to be with evildoers, and with a rich man in **his death**, although he had done no wrong, nor was there any deceit in his mouth.
- A'** (10) But the Lord was pleased to crush him and afflict him with grief. If he would **give his life as a ransom offering**, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hand. (11) Because of the anguish of his soul, he will see **the light of life**. He will be satisfied with his knowledge. My **Servant**, the righteous one, will make the **many** righteous, for he will bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore I will appoint the **many** as his portion, and the multitudes he will divide as spoil. For he poured out himself **to death**, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sins of the **many**, and interceded for the transgressors.

*The final and climactic Servant Song has an *envelope* structure, in which depictions of the Servant's exaltation in **A** (52:13-15) and **A'** (53:10-12) frame the description of the Servant's suffering in **B** (53:1-9). Note that the *center* of the poem is thus **B** (53:1-9). The focus of the Song is thus on the unparalleled *sufferings* of the Servant.

*The Servant is portrayed as suffering, judicially executed, buried, and then, amazingly, as raised to see the light of life (53:7-12).

*The center portion itself (**B**) has an internal envelope structure, revealing 53:4-6 as the *epicenter* of the entire Song. The very center of the poem thus focuses on the reason for the Servant's sufferings: 'he was pierced for our transgressions' (*substitutionary atonement*).