

animals to take away guilt is its most important feature. These sacrifices had no merit in themselves. They were symbols, or types, of the way God would make provision for removal of the guilt and power of sin. Forty years after these sacrifices had been fulfilled by the sufferings and death of the Messiah, they ceased to be offered. Ever since the first century of our era, large groups of pious Jews have paid great attention to fulfillment of other requirements of the biblical Law, but its most important feature - the obligation to perform the sacrifices for sin - has ceased to be observed.

The idea of vicarious sacrifice for sin is expressed four times in 53:5, and is repeated in verses 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12. There are few, if any, passages in the Bible where a single idea is repeated so many times. It is so pervasive that it cannot possibly be removed except by grossly distorting the meaning of each of these statements. All the sacrifices were fulfilled in the voluntary sacrifice of the Servant of the LORD as He gave Himself a ransom for many, so that all who put their trust in Him can find the salvation that is otherwise impossible.

The second matter that reaches a clear definition in this chapter is the identity of the Servant of the LORD. The fact that the work of the Servant of the LORD is to be performed by an individual rather than by the entire nation was suggested by the terminology of Isaiah 42 and still more strongly by that of Isaiah 49. The language of Isaiah 53 makes the individual character of the Servant absolutely clear, and this is particularly brought out in verse 8, where He is distinguished from Israel by the statement that He suffered "for the transgression of my people," thus plainly distinguishing Him from the people whose guilt He bore.

During the first ten centuries after the death of Christ, Jewish interpreters generally recognized the individual character of the Servant described in Isaiah 53. This is evident in the statements of early rabbis quoted in the Talmud or elsewhere. In the Targum (an early amplified translation into Aramaic), the passage begins with the words, "Behold my servant the Messiah" (52:13). Standard Jewish interpretation seems generally