

separate themselves from all that is wicked and to touch no unclean thing. They do not have to go forth in haste if God is leading them. They can go calmly and peacefully, because His power is so great that there is no need of hurried flight. In view of the phrase "ye that bear the vessels of the LORD" it is impossible to escape here an allusion to the return from the exile, when Cyrus allowed the people to take the vessels of the temple back to Jerusalem under his own personal patronage. He gave them permission to rebuild their temple and to reestablish God's worship in their homeland. However, this is the only touch in the verse which could suggest that it be restricted to this phase of God's redemption. Surely the greater phase is also in view. God's people are to depart from evil, and to do it with the assurance that His power and presence will be with them.

This leads very naturally to the beginning of chapter 53 -- the great climactic passage about the redemptive work of the Servant of God. It is the last time that the Servant is specifically mentioned in the book of Isaiah. The passage includes the last three verses of chapter 52, and it is extremely unfortunate that it is interrupted by a chapter division at this point. The section from 51:1 to 52:12 forms a fitting introduction to it, particularly the great chorus of joy in 52:7-12. This wonderful passage from 52:13 to 53:12 has been called the very "Holy of Holies" of the Bible.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

We now come to one of the grandest passages in the entire Bible. It is the climax of all the words of comfort that we have read between Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 52, and also of all the wonderful teaching about the mission of the Servant of the Lord. After this "servants of God" occurs but never "servant."

Previous to this point we have seen recurrent hints, and then a clear view in Isaiah 49, of the fact that the Servant of the Lord is distinct from Israel. He is Israel in a true sense because He is from Israel and represents Israel; yet He can be sharply distinguished from the nation as a whole. Israel is the servant of the Lord, called to perform a great work and to be a light to the Gentiles, but Israel has fallen into sin and