

## **Isaiah 53 and its use in the New Testament and classical Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa**

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### **Abstract**

In Pentecostal parlance one regularly hears that divine healing is founded on Christ's work on the cross, with reference to Isaiah 53:5, "by his bruises we are healed," and its use in the New Testament (Matt 8:17; 1 Pet 2:22-25). In this research, Isaiah 53 is placed against its historical context in terms of current scholarship before Pentecostal literature is investigated for its reference to this concept. Then current readings of the Bible in empirical research are used to correlate with the usage in early Pentecostalism before some conclusions are made about Bible reading practices and hermeneutics in the particular church that was investigated, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM of SA).

**Keywords:** Isaiah, pentecostal hermeneutics, Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, pentecostalism, healing

### **Introduction**

The Servant Song in Isaiah 53 and specifically the reference to healing in verse 5, "by his bruises we are healed," has been influencing Pentecostal thinking to a significant extent, as demonstrated by references to varied use of the text in Pentecostal preaching, Bible studies, the practice of prayer, and literature. In this article, the Servant Song and specifically Isaiah 53:4-6 is discussed in terms of its use in the New Testament with the purpose to compare it then to its utilization in the praxis of classical Pentecostal churches. Pentecostals connect their teaching about healing directly to the atonement on the cross, primarily based on their interpretation of this Servant Song. Pentecostal preaching and practice is described in terms of published material as well as an empirical study among three Bible study groups representing (three of the four) racial divisions of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM of SA); although the church was unified in 1996, it still mostly exists in terms of racially divided assemblies. The AFM is the biggest classical Pentecostal denomination in South Africa with 1.4 million members, the result of the missionary work of John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch.

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### Isaiah 52:13-53:12, and its use in the New Testament

Since the work of J. C. Döderlein (1775), J. G. Eichhorn (1778–83), and Duhm's Isaiah commentary of 1892, most scholars accept that Isaiah 40–55 (Deutero-Isaiah) should be distinguished from chapters 1–30 (Isaiah) and chapters 56–66 (Trito-Isaiah), and that Deutero-Isaiah exists as an essential (but not authorial) unity characterized by a group of passages designated as "Servant Songs" (42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). These songs play a significant role in the narrative of Deutero-Isaiah although the issue of the Servant Songs still remains a hotly debated problem without a wide consensus for its resolution.<sup>2</sup>

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 has been called the most contested chapter in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 53 has been described as providing a continuation of a lengthy prophetic "narrative" extending from chapters 40 to 55 and that climaxes in the sequence that follows, illustrating that God intervenes to end the exile and to usher in God's eschatological reign. It is clear that the author writes with awareness of the servant motif in Isaiah 40–55 and of the long history of suffering among the prophets of YHWH.<sup>4</sup> Several suggestions for the genres found here were made but recently a consensus is growing that although traditional psalmic conventions (especially Pss 30, 54) lie in the background, this passage is unique. It can be designated as prophetic liturgy, in which words of God frame words of mourning, thanksgiving, and penance.<sup>5</sup> The consensus is supported by the irregular meter found throughout the section, although the denseness and allusiveness, the key role played by simile (vv. 2, 6, 7) and sacramental and political/military metaphors, thirteen pairs of parallelism, and word order betray that it is in fact poetry.<sup>6</sup>

A hermeneutical principle that became axiomatic for most theologians is that a biblical book could only be properly understood when interpreted in the light of its original historical setting, leading to an increase in historical speculation in the search for an exact historical referent for this Song. The historical context of Deutero-Isaiah's book reflects an exilic period after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the ensuing deportation of the Judaeans to Babylon. Isaiah ends with the reference to the Babylonian envoys visiting the Judean king Hezekiah (Is 39:1–8). In Hezekiah's day Babylon was part of the Assyrian empire as a vassal state. Their interest in Judea was motivated by their intention to rebel against their rulers and they invited various peoples to join in rebellion against the shared overlord. The Assyrians were not successful in conquering Jerusalem and taking its people into exile, as was the case with Samaria and the Northern kingdom. At the time when Deutero-Isaiah was penned, a century later, Babylon had realized its ambitions of subjecting Assyria and

<sup>2</sup> Childs, Brevard S. *Isaiah* (Louisville, KE: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 290.

<sup>3</sup> Is 52:13 has been widely regarded as marking a significant transition in the chapters although the use of *hinnēh* ('there') never marks a wholly new beginning but a new section that links with what precedes (Goldingay, John and David Payne. *Isaiah 40-55* (Vol 2, London: T&T Clark, 2006), 273).

<sup>4</sup> Hanson, Paul D. *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 154.

<sup>5</sup> A term (prophetic liturgy) that was already used by Elliger, Karl. *Deuterocesaja in seinem Verhältnis zu Tritocesaja* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40-55*, 276.

finished the job that Assyria started, to subject the Jewish people that become infamous for their frequent rebellion against their oppressors. Now Babylon had become the new superpower intending to subject Egypt and Judah served as their vassal. In 597 and again in 587 BCE, the Babylonians attacked and captured Jerusalem and exiled all priests, prophets, and members of the administration such as the kings and their families. Judah would languish in Babylon for fifty years.<sup>7</sup> The Servant Songs address the interests of the Judahite people divided among the poor class who stayed in their country and the elite living under the direct oppression of their conquerors in Babylon. It was a people caught up in hopelessness, after their existence as a nation and the continuation of their religion were threatened with the desecration of the Jerusalem temple and the eradication of the monarchy. Chances were that Judah would lose its identity in exile, as was the case with Israel.

The Servant Song of Isaiah 42 identifies the servant with Jacob-Israel and introduces him with the mission to bring “justice” (*mišpāṭ*) to the nations. This changes in Isaiah 49 when the office of the servant is transferred from the nation to the individual prophetic figure (whether Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel, or the Messiah).<sup>8</sup> In Isaiah 50 the reception of his call as God’s servant is related as he is tortured and humiliated by his oppressors, who are not from outside, but from within the nation of Israel itself. Isaiah 52:13 starts significantly enough not with the servant’s humiliation, but with his exaltation, a theme climaxed in 53:11-12.<sup>9</sup> The full force falls on the astonishment and shock of the nations when they see the servant, whose kings shut their mouths in confused silence.<sup>10</sup>

Paul Hanson makes the provocative statement that the Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the theological contribution of Deutero-Isaiah to the discussion of how the tragic pattern of sin and punishment could be broken in Israel’s history and be replaced by the wholeness of God’s compassion and righteousness.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the Song is concerned with one theme, described with concepts like “transgressions,” “iniquities,” “punishment,” “gone astray,” and “offering for sin,” “make many righteous,” “bear their iniquities,” and “made intercessors for the transgressors” (translation of NSRV) found in verses 5-6, 8, 10-12 that determine the theme of the song and the work of the servant. The song presents an alternative to the pattern of sin and commensurate punishment of the guilty party, an alternative so radical and new that nobody has probably ever heard or thought of it before, carrying the sense of anticipation to new heights (52:15). God’s new saving initiative is in the form of a servant who submits to affliction as a bold choice to participate with God in an

<sup>7</sup> Goldingay, John. *Isaiah for Everyone*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 142–143.

<sup>8</sup> It should be stated that although the Servant Songs are abundantly rich and theologically suggestive, the identity and essence of the servant is undeniably inaccessible and without clear meaning, as Walter Brueggemann (*Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, KE: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 141) emphasizes.

<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann (*Isaiah 40-66*, 142) asserts that the decisive theme of the entire poem is epitomized by the relation between the *marred* figure of Is 62:14 and the *awesome* figure of 52:15. Only the powerful resolve of YHWH can transpose the figure with an inexplicable firmness.

<sup>10</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 412.

<sup>11</sup> Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 156.

act aimed at breaking the stranglehold that sin had maintained for countless ages over the human family.<sup>12</sup>

Healing forms a subtheme—the servant is “acquainted with suffering,” “borne our infirmities and carried our diseases,” “by his bruises we are healed,” and was crushed “with pain” (vv. 4-5, 10)—that should be read in the light of the main theme. It is submitted that the reason why Pentecostals used verses 4-5 to identify healing as a further benefit of the atonement of Christ was that they read the text on its own, without considering the larger textual context and the importance of explicating a text not on its own but in relation to what is said by the author in the larger textual unit, the book, and the rest of Scriptures. Verses 4-5 and its reference to healing serves to further the argument that the servant comes to bring relief and salvation from the debt of sin of other people. As applied by Christians, the text explains that some are healed of their sinful guilt by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.<sup>13</sup> This is also confirmed by 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” It directly connects forgiveness and healing as one act. The reference to healing serves the purpose of further illuminating the way the servant deals with the guilt of sin.

It is also important to remember that moral guilt due to sin was seen as the product and result of sin, and an offering was necessary to expiate the guilt and effect forgiveness. These concepts are not applicable on sickness or healing. There is no indication in the text that illness is connected to sin in a causative manner. It is viewed as a given, part of the created world. Illness therefore cannot be forgiven because it is not connected to moral guilt (except in some exceptional cases). Therefore, it is invalid to read the Servant Song in terms of healing without discounting the context of forgiveness of sins.

Like Israel in exile, the servant will be humiliated before being exalted for the salvation of the nations (52:13-15; see Rom 15:21; Phil 2:6-11). His humiliation is necessary because God does not play to appearances while those who look on will not immediately approve of the servant (53:1-2). As a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (53:3), the servant is not only suffering for righteousness, but also for the sins of others (53:4-6).<sup>14</sup> Although innocent, he is put to death (53:7-9), referring to the requirements of the regulations of the guilt offering in Leviticus 5:15 (53:10a). His sacrifice will bring peace and justify many people (53:5, 11-12). For his sacrificial service, God will reward him by prolonging his days (53:10b; see also 38:1-20, the prolonging of Hezekiah’s life).

<sup>12</sup> Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 159-160.

<sup>13</sup> Mbugua, “Misunderstanding the Bible,” in *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel*, ed. Michael O. Mbugua et al. (Nairobi: Africa Christian Textbooks Registered Trustees, 2015), 19.

<sup>14</sup> The grammatical particle opening Is 53:4 is an adversative of surprise and should rather be translated with “Nevertheless,” implying that this little one of no account becomes the object of active verbs (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 145). The lively debate among scholars about whether the servant’s suffering can be interpreted as vicarious (Childs, *Isaiah*, 415) cannot be discussed here due to the constraints of space. For the sake of the argument, the common view is accepted that the suffering is vicarious in one sense or another.

The reference to sheep in verses 6 and 7 serves to contrast the servant with the receivers of his grace. The receivers have gone astray like sheep while the servant is being led away to be slaughtered in their stead like a lamb, while he does not protest his treatment like a sheep that is silent before its shearers. A similar idea occurs in Jeremiah 11, when the prophet describes his own position with, "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (v. 19). His enemies, the people of Anathoth, wanted to silence him because his prophetic message was discouraging to the Judahites; they threatened to kill the prophet. "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" Jeremiah responds by calling on the Lord to judge between him and his enemies, and the Lord responds in verses 21-23 that the enemies will be taken care of properly.

Victor Matthews, Mark Chavalas, and John Walton write that Isaiah 53:4-10 might have reminded the first readers of a similar custom, the rite of the substitute king, that was used in Assyria when evil omens (especially an eclipse) suggested that the life of the king was in danger. It happened during the reign of Esarhaddon in the early seventh century BCE but by then it had been practiced for over a thousand years, that evil was transferred from the king to a substitute on whom the evil fate could fall. The person serving as substitute was someone considered of no significance and was perhaps even mentally or physically impaired. He was then exalted to high status and office for as long as one hundred days, and during this time the real king was kept in relative isolation and participated in numerous purification rituals. Meanwhile the substitute was sitting on the throne and although he was the shepherd of the people, actually he was nothing else than one of the sheep intended to be slaughtered. At the end of the period, the substitute was killed to appease the gods because the omens had suggested that it was the will of the gods to crush him. He died to save the king and the crown prince and was given a state funeral to cancel the omens in the hope that the king would live a long life.<sup>15</sup> It is not clear whether early readers knew about this custom in the country of exile of their brothers and sisters of the Northern kingdom; however, when the song is read in terms of the custom it shows several interesting interfaces with the Assyrian custom.

Another way to look at the text is through John Goldingay's analysis of the text as a ring composition:

13-15 My servant will triumph despite his suffering

1 Who could have recognized YHWH's arm?

2-3 The servant is treated with contempt

4-6 The reason is that he is suffering for us

7-9 He does not deserve this treatment

10-11a By his hand YHWH's purpose will succeed

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<sup>15</sup> Matthews, Victor H., Mark W. Chavalas and John H. Walton. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), Is 53:4–10.

## 11b-12 My servant will triumph despite his suffering<sup>16</sup>

Verses 4-6 illustrate then the most significant statement that forms the theme of the Song, that the servant suffers for the sins of others, supporting the thesis that verses 4-5 should also be read in terms of that theme, as suggested by the analysis.

This section has had a more colourful afterlife than most of the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup> The disciples of Christ saw in the passage many similarities with the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (“prolong his life;” 53:10), seeing it as a prophecy fulfilled in their time (Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 3:26; Rom 15:21; 1 Pet 2:22-25).<sup>18</sup> It is debatable whether Jesus had already seen himself as the suffering servant; it is clear, however, that later Christian interpretation came to treat the whole passage as a prediction of his ministry and death.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to remember, especially for Pentecostals whose hermeneutic teaches them to read the Old Testament exclusively in the light of Christ’s revelation, that prophecies in the Old Testament found their first and intended “fulfilment” within the world of the first readers and listeners. If the prophecy had no message of relevance for their own day, it would have been senseless to bring them the message in the first place. Some of the prophecies also find further fulfilments (or were interpreted as further fulfilments by participants in later history), also in events in the New Testament, as demonstrated by the way the epistles of Paul, synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel, and Luke’s historiography of the early church explicate the texts.

A last remark that Edouard Nsiku makes is that the explanation of this section would lead to the salvation of one of the first African converts to Christianity (Acts 8:26-39), the Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; reading Isaiah 53:7-8.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Goldingay, John. *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 469.

<sup>17</sup> In the words of Goldingay and Payne. *Isaiah 40-55*, 284.

<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the Pharisees who were gaining ascendancy as leaders of the majority of Jews in Jesus’ time were developing another dimension of the servant image, identifying the faithful Jewish community as the servant, an interpretation favored by later Jewish interpretation in reaction to the Christians’ Christological use of the fourth Servant Song (Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 163). Authentic Christian reading of the passage may never be monopolistic; as the poem propels and frees Christian reading of life through faith, others should also be allowed to feeding of their lives in faith though the text (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 149). The nearest to a concerted exposition of the passage within the New Testament appears in 1 Peter 2:22-25.

<sup>19</sup> The debate among liberal scholars that denies that Is 53 influenced the synoptic Gospels significantly due to the lack and vagueness of quotations and argues that the Christological application of the fourth Servant Song was late within Hellenistic Christianity and in no way related to the historical Jesus’ own self-understanding (Childs, *Isaiah*, 420), is not relevant for the argument in the article.

<sup>20</sup> Nsiku, Edouard K. “Isaiah,” in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 845. The remark that Philip the evangelist does not simply say that ‘the passage is about Jesus’ but ‘starting with this scripture, proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus’ (Acts 8:35) suggests some hermeneutical sophistication, as if Philip knew he was providing a readerly response to the text rather than the product of historical-critical exegesis (Goldingay and Payne. *Isaiah 40-55*, 286). At the same time, the poem surely intends, in its endless generativity, to be reread, reheard and

### Isaiah 53 in Pentecostal literature, and in the New Testament

By connecting forgiveness of sins and healing as equal and equivalent parts and benefits of the work of atonement on the cross, Pentecostals imply that forgiveness and healing is to be expected in equal terms. Forgiveness is unconditional, with God granting it graciously to everyone who believes, as Pentecostals also teach. The question is, do they view divine healing in the same terms, as unconditional and always conferred on those who put their trust in Christ's atonement?

Isaiah 53, quoted in the New Testament in Matthew 8:16-17 and 1 Peter 2:24, plays an important role in the literature of the AFM. In all references that were found it was clear that only a few verses in the Servant Song were utilized and that these verses were read christologically, without any consideration for the historical context in which Deutero-Isaiah functioned. The references connect salvation and healing to the cross without considering that the linkage to Jesus often made in the interpretation of the text is not intrinsic to the poem itself. It is rather made among those who imaginatively read the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus into what is said to be enacted by the servant.<sup>21</sup> When applied to Jesus, it implies, "He heals as He saves – out of boundless, fetterless, fathomless love."<sup>22</sup>

The implication when forgiveness of sin and healing are connected is that forgiveness as well as healing is granted to the believer in answer to faith in equivalent terms. Forgiveness of sin is unconditional, granted by God to anyone who believes. It can and should be accepted in faith. Is the same true of healing? Believers may accept in faith that their sins are forgiven; the confession need not (but can) be accompanied by any emotion or experience. Should believers accept they are healed after offering a prayer for healing in faith, even if the symptoms of the illness do not leave? And should they leave all medication aside as a sign of relentless faith in God's power to heal, as some early Pentecostals did, at times with tragic results?

Adrio König, a well-known retired Reformed systematic theologian at the University of South Africa, argues that the use of Isaiah in the New Testament indicates that early Christians utilized the text in terms of Christ's power to heal and not only of his death on the cross to earn forgiveness of sins for believers.<sup>23</sup> Early publications in the AFM unanimously share this viewpoint. For instance, C.S. Price asserts that if divine healing was not locked up in the atonement of Christ, Christians would not have had any right to claim healing from God as their inheritance. Then healing could not have been proclaimed as an "essential part of the cross." Because our pains and illnesses were carried by the Man of the cross, healing is a part of the salvation he brought by his death, in exactly the same sense as salvation. And like salvation, believers need to take it in possession by way of their faith. It is there for the

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reembraced, always with a concrete particularity, but at the same time with a transformative inscrutability that changes everything, in Brueggemann's (*Isaiah 40-66*, 149) words.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Editor. "Healing Helps," *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 10, no. 11, November/December 1918, 15.

<sup>23</sup> König, Adrio. "Healing as an Integral Part of Salvation," in *Healing in the Name of God*, ed. Pieter G.R. de Villiers (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1986), 93.

taking. Faith is further qualified in these terms: it should be active and appropriating, taking into possession what God promised to the believer.<sup>24</sup> The sick person should approach God in the following way: because Christ bore our sins and illnesses in his body, we pray and trust God for forgiveness and healing through Christ's wounds.<sup>25</sup> In his incarnation Christ had become the righteousness of God. In God's righteousness no illness, malady, corruption, imperfection, or perdition can exist.<sup>26</sup> The believer in Christ enjoys liberty from all the brokenness that the Fall in the garden of Eden caused humanity to suffer from, with the resultant curse it incurred.<sup>27</sup>

In 1918 the Executive Council of the AFM discussed the "heretical teaching" of a certain brother M.A. Botha that illness came from the hand of the Lord. When confronted he confessed that it was due to "thoughtlessness" from his side. At the next Annual Conference of the church on 16 July 1918, Scott Moffatt in response to the incident preached on Romans 5:12 and stated that the origin of sickness was the Fall and the instigator of the Fall was Satan, while the remedy for sickness was in the atonement of Christ on the cross. He emphasized that healing was guaranteed because the cross was a historical fact, and healing was grounded in Jesus's death.<sup>28</sup> J.A. Jamieson confirms this viewpoint in 1933: "Where is the remedy for sickness found? In the atonement. If we go to Christ for the forgiveness of sin, why not go to Him also for healing, for both are found in the atonement? Jesus bore in His body on the cross the sickness that now afflicts you."<sup>29</sup> This is confirmed by an article about the essence of the AFM, that states that divine healing is a cardinal characteristic of the church, with reference to Isaiah 53 and Matthew 8:17: "Healing is locked up in the atonement for each believer through faith in the Lord Jesus. On the ill you will lay your hands and they will be healed because He bore your illnesses in His body."<sup>30</sup>

If one text sounds like a refrain in the literature of the AFM (implying that it probably received the same attention in the church's preaching), it is Matthew 8:16-17, called by J.N. Hoover the "inspired and therefore a correct interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy." He continues, "To the rational mind this is final proof that provision was made in the divine atonement for every infirmity and sickness of man."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Standard Bearer. 'Healed by the Lamb.' *Comforter and Messenger of Faith* 12, no. 143, April 1943, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Price, C.S. 'The Lord's Broken Body and Shed Blood: A Powerful Sermon'. *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 12, no. 113, April 1943, 16.

<sup>26</sup> De Vries, H. Abraham. 'Die Apostoliese Geloof Sending van Suid-Afrika' ('The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa'). *Comforter and Messenger of Faith* 7, no. 3, March 1938, 20.

<sup>27</sup> De Vries, H. Abraham. 'Apostoliese Geloof Sending,' 21.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the Executive Council of the AFM of SA, 18 October 1919; 24 March 1921; see Burger, Isak V.D.M. *Die Geskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloof Sending van Suid-Afrika (1908-1958)* ('The History of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa 1908-1958'). Published DD dissertation, University of Pretoria (Braamfontein: Gospel, 1987), 409.

<sup>29</sup> Jamieson, J.A. 'Divine Healing.' *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 2, no. 1, January 1933, 23. The monthly magazine of the AFM was called the *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* and it played an important role in communicating testimonies and doctrine to members of the church, contributing to establishing an identity for early AFM Pentecostals.

<sup>30</sup> Editor. 'Wie en wat Wat Wij Zijn' ('Who and What We Are'). *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 10, no. 9, September 1918, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Hoover, J.N. "Divine Healing." *Comforter and Messenger of Faith* 17, no. 196, March 1948, 9.



However, in Matthew 8:16-17, in the context of Jesus's healing of Peter's mother-in-law and of many who were possessed with demons and other who were sick, the author notes that this was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." The reference is to Isaiah 53:4, speaking of the servant (52:13), that although he was a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity (54:3), he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases. Matthew 8 does not apply the reference in Isaiah 53 to Jesus's suffering or crucifixion but directly to his ministry of healing (Matt 8:1-13 is also concerned with healing narratives, of a leper and the centurion's servant). It seems as if the author argues that Jesus carried the illnesses on him by healing it. It seemingly has nothing to do with the fact that he would die on the cross.

Early Pentecostals emphasized the importance of comprehending the will of God in terms of illness and healing. Sin was the state in which people lived in separation from God, under the threefold curse of sin, sickness and death. Because Christ bought believers free on the cross, he destroyed the power of the devil over their lives. Why did illness then continue on earth? Because believers did not take possession of their healing in Christ, in the same way that many people did not take possession of salvation because of their unbelief.<sup>32</sup> Believers who did not understand that healing was God's will for them in Christ, could not trust him to heal them because in their hearts "they believe He might want them to remain sick for some mysterious good, which satan (sic) always puts into their imagination to thoroughly deceive them."<sup>33</sup>

In discussing Matthew 8:16-17, well-known faith teacher James van Zijl disagrees with Matthew's emphasis, that Jesus carries the illnesses on him by healing it.<sup>34</sup> Van Zijl brings the reference in connection with Jesus's suffering; it is clear for him that Jesus's body was broken during his hearing before the Jewish Council and the Roman procurator and on the cross with whip lashes and fists, nails, and the sword stabbed in his side. For that reason, it is not necessary for believers to accept any illnesses in their bodies. Believers' bodies need not be broken by illness because Jesus's body was broken for them; he paid the price for their healing on the cross. However, it is clear that Van Zijl reads more into the text than what is stated.

Sin originated in the garden of Eden and its sprouts, illness and death, spread from that time to include all humanity. Human beings lost the treasure of health through sin.<sup>35</sup> Adam and Eve were created with perfect health, and their obedience to God's laws would have preserved their health and longevity. Their disobedience led to illness as the precursor of

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<sup>32</sup> Stuart, Eva D. "Gods Wil in Genezing" ("God's Will in Healing"). *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 1, no. 12, February 1922, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Osterhus, C.S. "Have They Real Faith?" *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 1, no. 5, September 1932, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Van Zijl, James. *God se Wil oor Siekte: Die Finale Bybelse Uitspraak* ('God's Will for Illness: The Final Biblical Statement') (Stanger: Geloof in die Woord-Bediening, 1982), 12-13.

<sup>35</sup> De Vries, H. Abraham. "Goddelike Genesing: 'n Blye Boodschap vir alle Krankes" ("Divine Healing: Good News for the Sick"). *Comforter* 24, no. 10, October 1955, 22.

death.<sup>36</sup> The second Adam restored what the first Adam had lost; Jesus died so that we may have life in abundance (John 10:10). “We therefore are entitled to healing on this ground.”<sup>37</sup>

However, it is not only Matthew that uses Isaiah 53 in the New Testament that does not link the text with the atonement. There is a second and different interpretation, demonstrating that early Christians did not interpret the text exclusively and in agreement, and that confirms that the text was not read in terms of the atonement. The context of the reference in 1 Peter 2:24 is the encouragement of slaves to accept the authority of their masters with all deference, even if they should act in harsh ways. There is credit for them if they endure pain while suffering unjustly because it shows that they enjoy God’s approval. Christians have been called to and they must expect to experience unjust suffering. Their example is Christ who suffered for them and left them an example. In following his steps, they should neither return abuse when they are abused nor threaten when they suffer (with reference to Is 53:9), but they should entrust themselves to the one who judges justly as Jesus did. Referring to Jesus, 1 Peter 2:24-25 uses Isaiah 53:4-6 in an eclectic way and adds content needed to apply it to the Christian church (italicized here). The passage states that Jesus “bore our sins in his body on the cross, *so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness.* By his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, *but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.*”

In discussing this passage, Jan Smit argues that the author is concerned with the suffering experienced by believers in the congregation and encourages them to suffer with happiness for Jesus’s sake because he carried our sins in his unjust suffering, making a new life possible for believers.<sup>38</sup> However, the context does not allow for such an interpretation. The author is intentionally addressing slaves, and the injunction cannot be shifted to the address of members of the congregation without further qualification. Slaves in the ancient world were regarded as part of the property of an owner who had the right to punish and even execute them without any interference, and it is likely that many Christian slaves were discriminated against by owners who did not share their religious intentions. Other references to the text by Pentecostal authors leave out the context of slaves and their unjust treatment and read the text exclusively in terms of Christ’s death on the cross and the benefits of the atonement, including healing.

By way of conclusion, the statement that the use by New Testament authors of Isaiah 53 allows the conclusion that healing is grounded in the cross, implying that Christ died for healing of illnesses in the same way that he died for forgiveness of sins, cannot be based on exegesis of the relevant passages in terms of the wider context of the Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and the way it is applied in two cases in the New Testament. The reference to healing should rather be interpreted in terms of the main theme, which is expiation of the debt caused by sin. The two references to the text in the New Testament are applied variously by the different authors, implying that the early church did not agree on the

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<sup>36</sup> HCM. “Divine Healing: What Saith the Scriptures?” *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 13, no. 157-158, November/December 1944, 23.

<sup>37</sup> HCM, “Divine Healing,” 23.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, Jan. “Wonderbare Genesings” (“Wonderful Healings”). *Comforter* 3, no. 8, 1982, 158-159.

interpretation of a text that was supposed to have played a significant role in early Christian thinking, to justify the way Pentecostals interpret the text and its references. In one case it was used in terms of Jesus's ministry of healing and in the other case to depict Jesus's unjust suffering as an example for slaves finding themselves in a similar situation.

When healing is connected to atonement in a rectilinear way, connecting forgiveness and healing in the same way to the effects of the crucifixion, it leads to pragmatic problems. Several articles in the AFM's monthly magazine refer to cases in the New Testament where believers were not healed immediately after prayer, for instance, 1 Timothy 5:23's statement that Timothy should no longer drink only water but take a little wine for the sake of his stomach and frequent ailments. Johannes Henning argues that Timothy had a weak constitution and because he was residing in an unhealthy region, he was advised not to use the unhealthy water that was harming his health.<sup>39</sup> The remark in 2 Timothy 4:20 that Paul left Trophimus ill in Miletus is explained by Henning in that Trophimus was living in iniquity that had separated him from God's grace and healing power.<sup>40</sup> The angel of 2 Corinthians 12:7 who tormented Paul is seen as a messenger of Satan who had become like a thorn in Paul's flesh, a bodily weakness (perhaps poor eyes) that God allowed (as in Job's case) to keep Paul from aggrandizement about his success in preaching the gospel. G.D. Morgan is adamant that it does not refer to a bodily illness.<sup>41</sup> The embarrassment of the authors with the fact that it seems as if some parts of the New Testament accept illness among Christians as a normal occurrence is clear in their rather far-fetched and imaginative ways to justify its occurrence.

The use of Isaiah 53 in the AFM among early members and pastors reveals an oversimplification of the relation between healing and salvation. Later in its literature a correction occurred among some contributors when they differentiated between forgiveness of sins as a completed work and healing as a part of the result of the work of atonement that was not realized in full. Healing is then compared to the promise of the glorified body (Phil 1:20). Christians have not taken possession of their glorified bodies because they will only receive it at the resurrection. However, they already share in the life of Christ who is the resurrection and life (John 11:25). The kingdom has come but its final realization will only be when the new earth is realized (proleptic anticipation). In the same way, believers receive divine healing as the precursor of their expectation of that wonderful time when God would be all in all.<sup>42</sup>

F.P. Möller,<sup>43</sup> a prominent leader and theologian in the White Division of the AFM, makes an important distinction in this regard. Genesis 3:14-19 describes it as a curse on the snake,

<sup>39</sup> Henning, Johannes G. "Vragen en Antwoorden" ("Questions and answers"). *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 3, no. 5, August/September 1923, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Henning, "Vragen en Antwoorden," 7.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, G.D. "Goddelijke Genesing" ("Divine Healing"). *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 2, no. 6, June 1933, 17.

<sup>42</sup> De Vries, H. Abraham. "Goddelijke Genesing" ("Divine Healing"). *Comforter and Messenger of Hope* 7, no. 8, 15 July 1938, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Dr F.P. Möller was the first leader in the AFM with a through theological training (with three doctorates) and he served as president of the AFM for 30 years. His publications were influential in especially the White Division of the AFM (before the unification of the four racial Divisions of the church in 1996).

enmity between the snake and the woman as well as her offspring, pangs in childbearing, submission of the woman to the husband, a curse on the ground with accompanying thorns and thistles, and death. Through his death on the cross, Christ brought atonement between God and humankind. In him the reign of God was restored, but not fully. Möller makes a qualitative difference between the different parts of the fruit of the Fall. Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54) but it has not been destroyed yet. Humanity's relation with God has been restored but the curse on the earth is still valid. A qualitative difference also exists between illness and sin as a result of the Fall. Christ brought reconciliation for sin but as life on earth is still characterized by thorns, thistles, and death, so also illness will only be finally destroyed at the full revelation of the reign of God, realised in the second coming of Christ.<sup>44</sup>

Möller also suggests that the atonement should rather be understood in terms of Jesus's incarnation, teaching and preaching, ministry of healing and deliverance, death and resurrection, ascension and the outpouring of his Spirit on the church. Then atonement includes the whole life of the believer, implying total deliverance and salvation and including wholeness, holiness, healing and health.<sup>45</sup> The atonement on the cross encloses not only his death as payment for our moral guilt but also his eschatological resurrection victory over the evil powers of sin and death.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, his miracles demonstrate his eschatological victory over the powers of evil because he healed and freed people from the power of sin and death. This also explains why the synoptic evangelists gave so much attention to his healing of people from demonic possession.

However, although healing is part of the ministry of the Spirit in the church, specifically through the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*), Möller finds the basis for divine healing not in the gifts of the Spirit but in the atonement, which in my opinion is not warranted.<sup>47</sup> He agrees with Bruner that, "The case for healing is built paradigmatically upon the ministry of Jesus, and theologically is rooted not in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit but in the doctrine of the atonement."<sup>48</sup> Möller then argues that suffering, illness and death have received a new meaning through the atonement of Christ. It is not only mere measures of punishment any more but also made serviceable to grace. To be ill is an indication of humanity's participation in a broken world but it is also a sign of the grace where God promotes the good, by healing the illness or granting the grace for believers to live through the suffering to the glory of God.<sup>49</sup> However, the greatest miracle remains when a sinner gets saved. This is the real miracle in whose service all other miracles are.<sup>50</sup> Healing as the decision of the sovereign God can serve as a confirmation of the truth of the gospel, as a means used by

<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation with F.P. Möller, 1990-11-30.

<sup>45</sup> Möller, F.P. *Die Diskussie oor die Charismata soos wat dit in the Pinksterbeweging Geleer en Beoefen word* ("The Discussion of the Charismata as it is Taught and Practised in the Pentecostal Movement") (Braamfontein: Gospel, 1975), 219.

<sup>46</sup> König, "Healing as an Integral Part of Salvation," 93-94.

<sup>47</sup> Möller, *Diskussie*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> Bruner, Frederick D. *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 140-141.

<sup>49</sup> Möller, *Diskussie*, 235.

<sup>50</sup> Möller, "Rigting in the Vernuwning" ('Direction in the Renewal'). *Pentecostal Messenger* 9, no. 8, August 1984, 6.

God to get people's attention, and to fill them with astonishment and awe. "JESUS IS ALIVE! Is the trumpet voice of every miracle in our assemblies!"<sup>51</sup>

### Isaiah 53 in practice

Grounded theory, a form of qualitative research as a process of examining and interpreting data, was used to survey the responses of three groups, all of them associated with the AFM, that were given the opportunity to read through Isaiah 53:4-6 in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. The purpose was theory building based on data and the generation of concepts.<sup>52</sup> The Bible study leader in each case asked only two questions in an unstructured study: What do you think Isaiah 53:4-6 is all about? And is there anything in the text that jumps out of the page?<sup>53</sup> I attended in all three cases but I was relatively unknown to the participants. In the case of groups B and C, I at times preached at the two churches that their members attended. I did not participate in the discussion at all but left it to their study leader who in all cases were trusted leaders.

The data reveal varieties in how members described their interpretation of the relevant text. From these discussions, I formulated a sensitizing concept, in addition to the main research question. Some emerging categories became clear and I sought to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of these categories.

In all groups the enthusiasm with which participants participated in the discussion was remarkable. Among members of Group A, the young adults at first were hesitant to speak their minds until one young man took the lead, explained what he thought and then encouraged the other members also to speak their minds. Each group leader limited the discussion to twenty minutes; it was clear that the discussion would have continued for much longer if they were given the opportunity to do so. I also noticed that the leaders

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<sup>51</sup> Horton, Harold. *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Springfield: Gospel, [1934]1975), 101.

<sup>52</sup> Bryant, Antony and Kathy Charmaz. "Grounded Theory Research: Methods and Practices," in *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (London: SAGE, 2007), 1; for application, see Verweij, André C. *Positioning Jesus' Suffering: A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes* (Delft: Eburon, 2014), 30, 64.

<sup>53</sup> The research was done in two weeks during February 2019. I made an audio recording that was typed *verbatim* and used in the article. The three groups consisted of African youth using English although it is for most of them a second or third language (Group A), a mixed race group of older people using Afrikaans, their mother tongue, with one exception who speaks English (Group B), and a group of white adults consisting mostly of professional people (Group C). Group A meets in Promosa, Potchefstroom in the North-West Province at their church on Wednesday evenings, group B meets at their church in Parys, Free State on Wednesday mornings, and Group C meets at different homes of participants on Thursday evenings in Parys. Sociological data: Group A consisted of 7 girls and 11 boys aged between 12 and 17. They were all learners at the same secondary school. Group B consisted of 10 women and 4 men of whom 5 were married and 9 were widowers or widows. Four of them were in the age group 51-65 and 10 were older than 65 years. They were all pensioners. Thirteen completed secondary school as their highest qualification and one had a university degree. Group C consisted of 5 women and 6 men of whom 10 were married and one was divorced. Eight of them fell in the age group 36-50 and 3 in the age group 51-65. Seven were graduates while 11 attended secondary school as their highest qualification. Two were medical doctors, 3 were businessmen and one was a businesswoman.

ensured that each participant gave their opinion, in most cases in response to both questions.

The agreement in the way all the groups responded to the first question was remarkable, and reflected the view found in early literature of the AFM. The text was consistently read by all participants, without any exception, as referring to Christ. Not once did anyone in any of the groups refer to a possible historical context of the prophet, his audience and their social circumstances that might define the meaning of the text. In all instances the first direct answer to the question what the passage refers to was, to Christ and the cross. What was clear was that every participant read the prophetic text in the Hebrew Bible from their perspective found in the New Testament without considering that it occurs in a part of the Bible separate from the New Testament. In their emphasis on immediacy, the readers ignored the hermeneutical distance between the reader and the text, resulting in their confusing of sixth-century BCE and present-day culture. Jacqueline Grey mentions a second shortcoming of particular concern within the study of Pentecostal hermeneutics, that their literalistic tendency suggested an application for their present-day circumstances at the cost of the uniqueness and immanence of God's message to the original audience.<sup>54</sup> It is not part of their frame of reference to consider the text in terms of its historical context, in an attempt to figure out what its first listeners heard.

In many of the answers the emphasis was put on grace, that God reached out to humankind in Christ without any merit from our side. Some referred to the availability of God's love for human beings, even in cases where they were not interested in God's offer.

One participant in group B, an older and experienced believer, summarised the text as that the Lamb of God suffered on the cross because God punished him. "God saw in Jesus our sins; God saw our face when God looked at the Son, and God punished the Son for these people's sins." That was only what people passing the crucifixion scene saw and concluded when Jesus died on the cross, not that he was offering his life as a sacrifice for their sins but that he was rejected and punished by God because they did not understand the ways of God. She concluded that many contemporary people still looked at the cross in the same way, without understanding its salvific value, that Christ washed us with his blood shed on the cross. Another person in group C held the view that people persecuted Jesus while he lived on earth and many are still persecuting him today. "They do not realise why he died as the people of his day also did not realise why he died. If they knew why he died they would become his children and share in his sacrifice." Another female in the same group responded by stating that while the prophecy in Isaiah is concerned with the fact that it seems as if Jesus was rejected and forsaken by God when he was hanging on the cross, that his crucifixion was a result of God's rejection and punishment. Faith allows one "to look deeper and understand the mystery of God's word in Christ's incarnation and death, and resurrection."

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<sup>54</sup> Grey, Jacqueline. *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 143-144.

The words, “by his wounds we are healed,” also led to animated discussion in two of the groups. The group of young people (Group A), living in a township marred by economic inequality as one of the results of the apartheid system and characterized by extreme poverty, did not refer to the theme at all.<sup>55</sup> It might be that their economic circumstances and youth blinded them to the specific reference. In several cases participants of the group of older people (Group B) emphasized that the passage reminds us that we are already healed because Christ’s death on the cross is a historical fact. “If you are sick as a Christian it is because you did not stand on the fact, and base your life on the fact that Jesus had already died for your illness on the cross,” stated a female in group B. “All we should do is to appropriate the healing in Jesus’s name, thank him for it and stand up and live for him.” A male in group C also expressed the opinion that Jesus took our sins and sicknesses on him; “it happened in history and nobody can contest the fact. What we now need is faith, that he had died for our sicknesses. As we need faith to accept that he died for our sins, we also need to accept in faith that he had already died for our illnesses. When we realize that, healing becomes a reality in our lives.” The impression was repeatedly created that the security of being saved by the cross would be duplicated in the belief that the cross consistently holds healing for all illnesses experienced by believers.

Another part of the text that received attention was that we were like sheep, each one of us going their own way. It was emphasized by several participants in group C that not one of us is exempt from having strayed. A few saw an allusion in the text to believers’s eternal destiny. “Because God prepares us for eternity, Jesus took our punishment on him,” said another member of the group, a medical doctor. It was also remarked that even if believers sin again after receiving forgiveness of their sins, Jesus remains faithful and saves us “because it is not for our sins or lack of sins that God rejects us or approves us but because of what Jesus did on the cross,” in the opinion of a young girl in group A. An older man in group B states that Jesus took our unrighteousness on him “so that even though we are not righteous, God sees us as righteous. He carries the burden for us so that we may stand before God, as perfect people even though we are sinners at the same time.” The principle of *simul justus et peccator* was widely held and understood.

An interesting response to the second question by a lady, whether there is anything in the text that jumps out, that enjoyed the approval of several other participants in group C was, “For me this text is nearly a summary of the whole New Testament in three verses. If you look at what these three verses teach, you will find that it summarizes what happened in the whole of the New Testament.” It explains the mind-set of the Christian believers when they read this text in the Old Testament from their Pentecostal tradition, that the text was exclusively meant for Christians.

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<sup>55</sup> Gerald West (*The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2016), 348) remarks that theologies north of the Limpopo in Africa traditionally had an emphasis on the religio-cultural dimensions of African life, and theologies south of the Limpopo (in South Africa) had an emphasis on the political-economic dimensions to African life. Poverty in South African townships have a political dimension as a result of the inequalities caused by years of rigid application of apartheid policies, benefiting white people and disadvantaging black people, and people living in townships cannot be expected to experience reality in terms otherwise than this political-economic perspective.

A female medical doctor in group C responded to the second question in tears with, "Jesus did it for us. This is the most poignant element of the passage for me." Another male, a businessman, responded that what was poignant is that Jesus's body was broken through and through on the cross for our sicknesses and our sins. "He was thinking of us – of you and me - while hanging on that cross." Somebody else said that what was poignant in the passage is God's grace, that "Jesus was crucified and died without God intervening to save him because God's grace is so great that he was willing to pay any price to save sinners like us." The emotional response in group C to the question was remarkable and did not occur in any of the other groups. "What Jesus went through he did not deserve; I deserved to die in that manner because of my sins," was the response of a female in group A. Another response in the same group was that she heard in this passage something about human beings, that they are corrupt and that there is no hope for them. But she also heard something about God, "that he is full of love for human beings and he is gracious enough to forgive us our sins, even though it cost him everything, namely his Son."

Somebody in group B, a retired pastor, said that he heard in the passage that Jesus was perfect and that is the reason why his sacrifice on the cross was accepted by God. He was the Lamb without spot or wrinkle (probably induced by the reference to sheep and lamb in verses 6-7), the perfect one, able to buy perfect reconciliation for us with God because he was without any sins. But he also heard that "we are now perfectly forgiven and free."

Another female in the same group responded that she saw in the eye of faith the Son of man hanging on the cross, and "even though it is difficult to look at the one hanging on the cross because he seems hideous to us, he is the one chosen and sent by God to finish our salvation in his body. A deep love fills me when I look at him hanging there for me."

A young girl in group A said that what was poignant for her was that Jesus died for her sins and her rebellion. He did it for her. "Yes, for other people as well but also for me!" On the other hand, somebody else in the group then responded by saying that what was poignant for him was that Jesus died for all of us, not only some of us, as in the Old Testament, but for all people. "Nobody is excluded from his love and grace. None of us can think that we have been good enough - Jesus had to die even for people who thought they were good." It was remarkable that members in this group repeatedly appropriated Christ's atonement for themselves.

An elderly lady in group B stated that the passage explained for her that if God looked at us as sinners we would have been dead. "But because God sees Christ, and us standing behind him, he accepts us." She compared what was happening with the ark of Noah, with the people in the ark being saved because they were sealed by the Holy Spirit. The people not in the ark when it started raining died in the end. "In the same way, we have been sealed by the Spirit and Christ stands before us. God does not see us in the first place, he sees his Son and we are saved because of that."

A last thread in responses to the second question was concerned with healing. Somebody in group B of older people (who are probably more concerned with health and the effects of its absence) said that she heard in this 'prophecy' the invitation to her when she was sick, to



come to God for healing. But she also heard the invitation to all people, to come to Christ for salvation. "We are invited to bring all our yokes and put it on him. Like at the bath of Bethesda, we can get into the water and experience the healing power of God."<sup>56</sup> Another female then responded that the passage told her that when we said we would one day go to heaven because of what Jesus did for us and we would be free and healed in heaven, we were missing an important part of the gospel. God was also interested in our daily living, in our needs, challenges and troubles. "God is not only concerned with where we will be after death." Salvation is not only about eternity but also about today and tomorrow, and our daily struggles. It was also emphasised that when the prophet speaks about "healing by his stripes," the prophet is not only referring to our sins and spiritual healing. Jesus's ministry demonstrated that God was interested in physical healing. Jesus's wounds brought healing from our physical illnesses as well. "That is important to remember because many Christians do not think that God can still heal any and all illnesses in the world."

I observed in each group that two or three respondents took the lead in terms of various turns in the conversation and led the group in thinking of certain perspectives. In one case the group leader served the same role, taking the lead with a new idea when the group's responses floundered. Another remarkable fact was that group B was more interested in healing, spending more time on the theme than on salvation. It might be related to the average age of the group and the fact that the group had prayed for ill persons in their company before they started with the discussion at the hand of Isaiah 53:4-6.

## Conclusion

The short exegetical study of the Servant Song found in Isaiah 42:13-53:12 concluded that the theme of the song is a form of expiation in which the servant gives his life to save others. References to healing functioned within the context of the theme of salvation of all those who have gone astray by a servant who is innocent. The servant's "offering of sin" (v. 10) makes many righteous because he bears their iniquities (v. 11). He bears their infirmities and carries their diseases (v. 4) and by his bruises they are healed (v. 5) to prosper the will of the Lord (v. 10), bearing the sins of many, and making intercession for the transgressors (v. 12). The infirmities are the further elucidation of the effect of the moral guilt as the result of sin; the forgiveness of sin implies the healing of these infirmities.

The New Testament does not have a single voice in its interpretation of the Servant Song and it does not relate it to the atonement at all. Matthew interprets Jesus's healing ministry in terms of the servant's offering. The servant was a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity. For Matthew, Isaiah 53 is not concerned with Jesus's suffering or crucifixion but with his ministry of healing. Jesus carries the illnesses on him by healing it. In 1 Peter 2:24-25, on the other hand, the author refers to the context of slaves who experience unjust suffering at the hands of their masters, and they are encouraged to accept the authority of their masters with all deference, even if it involves unjust suffering, because Christ suffered

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<sup>56</sup> The respondent was clearly not thinking about the fact that only one person was healed by Jesus, leaving the others still sick (John 5:2-9).

for them and left an example not to return abuse when they are abused or threaten when they are threatened. The implication is that the New Testament does not apply Isaiah 53:4-6 exclusively in terms of one theme, and when it refers to healing it is not in terms or in the context of the atonement brought by Christ's crucifixion at all.

The use of Isaiah 53 in the AFM among early members and pastors, therefore, reveals an oversimplification of the relation between healing and salvation, when forgiveness of sin and healing of illnesses were viewed as benefits in equal terms of the atonement process of Christ's crucifixion. This view was later partly corrected when some contributors differentiated between forgiveness of sins as a completed work and healing as a part of the result of the work of atonement that was not realized in full.

In the empirical research it was shown how the Old Testament passage was interpreted in a non-reflected way from the angle of the atoning death of Christ without anyone of the respondents considering the text's historical and intratextual context. The widespread Pentecostal definition of "prophecy" as prediction leads to the application of Isaiah 53 to the Christian life and contemporary situation, without considering what the value of the message reflecting the intention of the author was for the first listeners. Pentecostals tend to read all passages in the Bible in a literalist and biblicist way as sacred Scripture, absorbing and dissolving the various biblical genres into one category, "holy Scripture."<sup>57</sup> Scripture is then equated with the "word of God," the revelation of God's will. The use of the specific text in the tradition of their Pentecostal church and their personal experience of salvation tricked them into reading the text as though it were written for people in the contemporary day, without considering that the prophet spoke to people in the sixth century BCE and encouraged them in a historical situation that differs from ours.

The Pentecostal movement as a whole suffers from hermeneutics that differ between the majority that use a biblicist-literalist way of reading the Bible related to fundamentalism, and a new Pentecostal hermeneutics developed since the 1970s in continuation with some trends in early Pentecostal Bible reading practices by several theologians (Nel 2018:108-108). The research of the article demonstrates that the movement will benefit from a more unified and intellectually sophisticated hermeneutics.

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<sup>57</sup> Grey, *Three's a Crowd*, 145.

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