

# The Suffering Servant

Isaiah 53:4-11

SS Lesson for 04/04/2021

**Devotional Scripture:** Heb 10:5-18

## OUTLINE

### LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

*Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

*Key Verse: Isaiah 53:5*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

#### SERVANT'S SUFFERING (ISA 53:4-9)

*Suffering through grief, sorrow and affliction (4-6)*

Affliction of diseases (Matt 8:16-17)

Afflictions that are healed through Jesus' bearing them (1 Peter 2:24)

Though God allows grief, He will show compassion (Lam 3:32-33)

Even in grief, God's presence brings eternal joy (John 16:22)

God promises that His children who mourn will be comforted (Matt 5:4)

God promises that those who weep for His sake will one day laugh (Luke 6:21)

*Suffering to the point of death (7-9)*

God gave Jesus the power to swallow up death (Isa 25:8)

Jesus took the victory away from death (1 Cor 15:54-57)

Jesus destroyed death and brought immortality (2 Tim 1:10)

Jesus cannot die again and has mastery over death (Rom 6:9)

God put the last enemy, death, under Jesus' feet (1 Cor 15:25-26)

#### SERVANT'S REWARDS (ISA 53:10-11)

*Reward of being in God's Will (10)*

A reward of being in God's will is answered prayer (Isa 58:6-9)

A reward of being in God's will is delighting God (1 Sam 15:22)

A reward of being in God's will is forgiveness and healing (2 Chron 7:14)

A reward of being in God's will is the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24)

A reward of being in God's will is being Jesus' brother or sister (Mark 3:35)

A reward of being in God's will is the intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:27)

*Reward of God's satisfaction (11)*

God's satisfaction through seeking His will for our life (Eph 5:8-10)

God's satisfaction through obedience (Colossians 3:20)

God's satisfaction through praying for others (1 Tim 2:1-3)

God's satisfaction through living in righteousness (1 John 3:22)

God's satisfaction through the meditation of our mind and the words of our mouth (Ps 19:14)

God's satisfaction through serving God in righteousness, peace and joy (Rom 14:16-18)

God's satisfaction through taking care of my family (1 Tim 5:4)

### CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

#### COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

II. "Who has believed"—The suffering is offensive. (Isaiah 53:1-3)

A. They did not believe the report (1).

B. The suffering is observed (2, 3).

III. "Surely our griefs"—The suffering is vicarious. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

A. The Servant's suffering is punishment (4).

B. The punishment of the Servant was redemptive (5, 6).

IV. "Oppressed He humbled Himself"—The suffering is accepted. (Isaiah 53:7-9)

A. The suffering Servant is silent (7).

B. The suffering Servant is innocent (8, 9).

V. "The LORD was pleased"—The suffering was efficacious. (Isaiah 53:10-12)

A. The suffering was God's will (10).

B. The suffering was for our justification (10b, 11).

C. The suffering will lead to exaltation (11, 12).

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

## Lesson Background and Key Verse

### Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Kyle Yates, an Old Testament scholar who taught seminary for many years, once referred to Isaiah 53 as the “Mount Everest” of Old Testament prophecy. That analogy brings to mind the reality that mountain summits are not reached without first doing a lot of hiking up difficult terrain. Sometimes during our “hike” through the Bible, we may question the value or relevance of what we are reading. And so we struggle through the laws and regulations in Leviticus and rush quickly through the genealogies that fill the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles. As we do, we may wonder why we even began the climb in the first place! But reaching a summit-passage like Isaiah 53 makes us realize that the climb is worthwhile. This is all the more so when we consider that the existence of the New Testament ensures that Old Testament summit-passages are clearer to us than they were even to the original readers. Specialized “guides” such as Acts 8:32-34 and Romans 10:16 assist us in our journey to understand Isaiah 53 specifically while the general guides of Romans 15:4 and 2 Timothy 3:16 establish the importance of doing so for the Old Testament as a whole.

The importance of the book of Isaiah is seen in the fact that it is quoted over five dozen times in the New Testament. Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem during dismal times for God’s people. His prophetic call came “in the year that King Uzziah died” (Isaiah 6:1), which would have been 740 BC. The latest historical event recorded (not prophesied) by the prophet is the death of the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib (37:37-38), which occurred in 681 BC. That makes for a lengthy period of ministry, so it is not out of the question to assume that Isaiah’s call came when he was a teenager or a bit older. The span of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry included the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah was in danger of going the same route in 701 BC. However, the presence and the prayers of a godly king, Hezekiah (Isaiah 37:14-20), resulted in an outcome far different from what the north experienced. Isaiah assured the king that the capital city of Jerusalem would be spared (37:33-35), and it was—in a miraculous act of deliverance (37:36). With Spirit-empowered insight, Isaiah spoke of a future day when Jerusalem would not be delivered; it would come under the control of the Babylonians (Isaiah 39:5-7). But Isaiah also promised that the Lord was not finished with Jerusalem or with his people. The Lord would rebuild the city through the efforts of a ruler whom Isaiah named: Cyrus (44:24-45:1). But Isaiah looked beyond even this restoration to someone far greater than Cyrus.

The Lord’s “servant” is one of the most striking figures in the book of Isaiah. The term servant is sometimes a reference to the entire nation of Israel, describing the special relationship the covenant people have with the Lord (example: Isaiah 41:8). In other places, servant appears to describe a remnant of God’s people, referring specifically to those who remained following captivity in Babylon (example: 48:20). There are still other passages where the word servant points to one individual who was assigned a very special role to fulfill. Four passages in Isaiah—often called Servant Songs—function in this way to point to the Messiah: Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12. (Isaiah 61:1-4 can also be included since Jesus applied it to himself [Luke 4:16-21].) This servant would carry out his tasks in a way that neither the nation of Israel nor the remnant could ever do. The servant passage studied today is the fourth in the list, beginning, “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” (Isaiah 52:13). The passage then describes the astonishment and rejection that many would experience at the servant’s lowly and repulsive appearance (52:14-53:3). It seems so inappropriate for someone “lifted up and highly exalted” not to also have a striking physical presence! But nothing in the servant’s background speaks of greatness at first glance. Our text begins with an explanation of the servant’s sorrows and griefs that are introduced in Isaiah 53:3. Christians have long and rightly interpreted the prophetic Servant Songs as fulfilled in Jesus alone. For instance, Isaiah 53:7-8 makes up the passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip approached his chariot. The Ethiopian asked whether the prophet was speaking of himself or someone else. And Philip “began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). No other figure appears in Scripture who claims to be the servant, and only Christ fulfills all that was written about that servant in these passages. The importance of today’s text is seen in the fact that the New Testament quotes from the song in which it occurs seven times.

## Key Verse: Isaiah 53:5

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Isaiah wrote that Israel will confess that she did not value the Servant. She would reject Him because He was considered an ordinary person.

**53:1.** The Jewish remnant will lament the fact that so few people will believe their **message** about the Servant, and that so few will acknowledge their message as coming from God and His strength (**arm**; see 40:10).

**53:2.** Though lamenting the fact that few people will believe (v. 1), the remnant will realize that **nothing** about the Servant's **appearance** would automatically attract a large following (cf. v. 3). He **grew... before** God as **a tender shoot** (i.e., coming from David's line; cf. 11:1), and as **a root out of dry ground**, that is, from an arid area (spiritually speaking) where one would not expect a large plant to grow. In His appearance He did not look like a royal person (in **beauty** and **majesty**). The remnant was not excusing people for rejecting the Servant; it was merely explaining why the nation rejected Him.

**53:3.** The nation Israel **despised and rejected** the Servant who experienced **sorrows** (*mak'ōb*, "anguish or grief," also used in v. 4) **and... suffering** (*hōl*). He was the kind of individual people do not normally want to look at; they were repulsed by Him. For these reasons the nation did **not** esteem **Him**; they did not think He was important. Yet He was and is the most important Person in the world, for He is the Servant of the Lord.

**53:4.** Though not realizing it at the time, the nation *will* realize that the Servant bore the consequences of their sin. His taking **our infirmities and . . . sorrows** (*mak'ōb*, v. 3) speaks of the consequences of sin. The verb **took up**, rendered "bore" in verse 12, translates *nāšā*, "to carry." His bearing "infirmities" (*hōl*, lit., "sickness," the same word trans. "suffering" in v. 3) refers to illnesses of the soul. His healing many people's physical illnesses (though not all of them) in His earthly ministry anticipated His greater work on the Cross. Though He does heal physical ailments today (though not all of them) His greater work is healing souls, giving salvation from sin. That this is the subject of Isaiah 53 is clear from the words "transgressions" (v. 5), "iniquities" (vv. 5, 11), "iniquity" (v. 6), "transgressions" (v. 8), "wicked" (v. 9), "transgressors" (v. 12 [twice]), and "sin" (v. 12). The Servant vicariously took on Himself all the sins (and spiritual anguish caused by sin) of the nation (and the whole world) and **carried** (*sābal*, "to carry as a burden"; cf. 46:4, 7) them on Himself (cf. 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). When Jesus was crucified, Israel thought His hardships (being **stricken... smitten**, and **afflicted**; cf. Isa. 53:7) were deserved for His supposedly having blasphemed God. Actually He was bearing the judgment that *their* sin required.

**53:5.** **Pierced... crushed... punishment... wounds** are words that describe what the remnant will note about the Servant's condition on their behalf and because of their **transgressions** (*peša*, "rebellion"; cf. v. 8; 1:2) and **iniquities**. As a result those who believe in Him have inner **peace** rather than inner anguish or grief (see 53:4) and **are healed** spiritually. Ironically His wounds, inflicted by the soldiers' scourging and which were followed by His death, are the means of healing believers' spiritual wounds in salvation. Jesus' physical agony in the Crucifixion was great and intense. But His obedience to the Father was what counted (cf. Phil. 2:8). His death satisfied the wrath of God against sin and allows Him to "overlook" the sins of the nation (and of others who believe) because they have been paid for by the Servant's substitutionary death.

**53:6.** The redeemed remnant (and others) will acknowledge that they were guilty and that the Lord made the Servant the object of His wrath in order to take away their guilt. **Sheep** tend to travel together, so if the leading sheep turns aside from the path for grass or some other purpose, usually all the sheep do so. They tend to follow the lead sheep which is often dangerous. Similarly all Israel had turned aside (cf. 1 Peter 2:25) from following the Lord, from keeping His commandments. The essence of sin is going one's **own way**, rather than God's way. That **iniquity** had to be punished, so **the LORD... laid** the punishment for that iniquity (cf. Isa. 53:11) not on the "sheep" (Israel and other sinners) that deserved it, but on the Servant who died in their place. The Servant died willingly (v. 7) and for others' transgressions (v. 8), even though He is righteous (v. 9).

**53:7.** As noted, the tendency of sheep is to follow others (v. 6), even to their destruction. In verse 7 the quiet, gentle nature of sheep is stressed. Seeing many **sheep** sheared for their wool or killed as sacrifices, Israelites were well aware of the submissive nature of sheep. Jesus, as the **Lamb** of God (John 1:29),

quietly submitted to His death. He did not try to stop those who opposed Him; He remained **silent** rather than defend Himself (Matt. 26:63a; 27:14; 1 Peter 2:23). He was willingly **led** to death because He knew it would benefit those who would believe.

**53:8.** After His **oppression** (being arrested and bound, John 18:12, 24) **and judgment** (sentenced to die, John 19:16) Jesus was led to His death. He died not because of any sins of His own (for He, the Son of God, was sinless, 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5) but because of **(for) the sins (transgression, *peša* ‘; cf. Isa. 53:5) of others. To be **taken away** means to be **taken** to death. It is parallel to being **cut off from the land of the living**, an obvious reference to death, and **stricken**. The words **and who can speak of His descendants?** mean He was cut off in the prime of life and left no descendants. Those words, however, could also be translated, “and who of His generation considered” (cf. NIV marg.) meaning that few of those who lived then considered His death important. Some verbs in this verse (“was cut off, was stricken”), like those in verse 4 (“smitten, afflicted”) and verse 5 (“was crushed”), indicate by their passive voice that these actions were done to Him by God the Father (cf. v. 10; 2 Cor. 5:21, “God made Him... to be sin for us”).**

**53:9.** The soldiers who crucified Jesus apparently intended to bury Him **with the wicked** like the two criminals (John 19:31). However, He was buried **with the rich**, in the **grave** of a rich man named Joseph (Matt. 27:57-60).

**53:10.** The suffering and death of the Servant was clearly **the LORD’s will**. In that sense He was “slain from the Creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The statement, **the LORD** made the Servant’s **life a guilt offering**, does not mean that Jesus’ *life* satisfied the wrath of God but that His life which culminated in His *death* was the sacrifice for sins. As indicated in Isaiah 53:7-8 He had to die to satisfy the righteous demands of God. The word for “guilt offering” is *’āšām*, used in Leviticus 5:15; 6:5; 19:21 and elsewhere of an offering to atone for sin. His death and burial appeared to end His existence (He was “cut off,” Isa. 53:8), but in actuality because of His resurrection Jesus **will see His offspring** (those who by believing in Him become children of God, John 1:12) **and He will prolong His days** (live on forever as the Son of God). He will be blessed (**prosper**; cf. Isa. 53:12a) because of His obedience to **the will (plan) of the LORD**.

**53:11.** His **suffering**, which included His death, led to **life** (His resurrection). **Satisfied** that His substitutionary work was completed (“It is finished,” John 19:30), He now can **justify** (declare righteous those who believe; see comments on Rom. 1:17; and comments on 3:24) **many** (cf. Isa. 53:12). **By His knowledge** could be translated “by knowledge of Him” as in the NIV margin. **He** bore the punishment (cf. vv. 4, 6), for **their iniquities** (cf. v. 6), so that many people would not have to die. Because He died, they live.

**53:12.** Having willingly followed God’s plan, the Servant is exalted (cf. 52:13). To have **a portion and divide the spoils** pictures a general, after winning a battle, sharing goods taken from the enemy (cf. Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:7-8). Because He **was numbered with the transgressors**, that is, was considered a sinner (cf. Matt. 27:38) and **bore the sin** (cf. Isa. 53:6) **of many**, that is, everyone, He is exalted and allows believers to share in the benefits of that exaltation. And because He is alive (cf. v. 10), He now intercedes (prays; cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) **for... transgressors** (related to the word *peša* ‘, “transgression[s],” in Isa. 53:5, 8). This great passage gives a tremendously complete picture of what the death of Jesus Christ accomplished on behalf of Israel (John 11:49-51) and the whole world (1 John 2:2). His death satisfied God’s righteous demands for judgment against sin, thus opening the way for everyone to come to God in faith for salvation from sin.

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Servant's Suffering (Isa 53:4-9)**

4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked — But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

### **Suffering through grief, sorrow and affliction (4-6)**

*Affliction of diseases (Matt 8:16-17)*

16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

*Afflictions that are healed through Jesus' bearing them (1 Peter 2:24)*

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

*Though God allows grief, He will show compassion (Lam 3:32-33)*

32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. 33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

*Even in grief, God's presence brings eternal joy (John 16:22)*

22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

*God promises that His children who mourn will be comforted (Matt 5:4)*

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

*God promises that those who weep for His sake will one day laugh (Luke 6:21)*

21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

### **Suffering to the point of death (7-9)**

*God gave Jesus the power to swallow up death (Isa 25:8)*

8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

*Jesus took the victory away from death (1 Cor 15:54-57)*

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is

your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Jesus destroyed death and brought immortality (2 Tim 1:10)*

10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

*Jesus cannot die again and has mastery over death (Rom 6:9)*

9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

*God put the last enemy, death, under Jesus' feet (1 Cor 15:25-26)*

25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

### **Servant's Rewards (Isa 53:10-11)**

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You 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.

11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

### **Reward of being in God's Will (10)**

*A reward of being in God's will is answered prayer (Isa 58:6-9)*

6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

*A reward of being in God's will is delighting God (1 Sam 15:22)*

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

*A reward of being in God's will is forgiveness and healing (2 Chron 7:14)*

14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

*A reward of being in God's will is the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24)*

24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

*A reward of being in God's will is being Jesus' brother or sister (Mark 3:35)*

35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

*A reward of being in God's will is the intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:27)*

27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

## Reward of God's satisfaction (11)

*God's satisfaction through seeking His will for our life (Eph 5:8-10)*

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

*God's satisfaction through obedience (Colossians 3:20)*

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

*God's satisfaction through praying for others (1 Tim 2:1-3)*

2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

*God's satisfaction through living in righteousness (1 John 3:22)*

22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

*God's satisfaction through the meditation of our mind and the words of our mouth (Ps 19:14)*

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

*God's satisfaction through serving God in righteousness, peace and joy (Rom 14:16-18)*

16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

*God's satisfaction through taking care of my family (1 Tim 5:4)*

4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh**

*II. "Who has believed"—The suffering is offensive. (Isaiah 53:1-3)*

The second stanza begins to trace the development of the theme of suffering, first showing that it raises disbelief and thoughtfulness in the people who observe it.

#### **A. They did not believe the report (1).**

If we paraphrase the first verse we would say something like, "No one ever imagined this." The verse is expressed in the form of questions. The penitent would reflect on the suffering Servant and eventually come to realize God was at work. But that realization would take belief and revelation. For ages Israel did not believe such suffering was at the heart of God's redemptive plan.

#### **B. The suffering is observed (2, 3).**

The response to the suffering Servant is so true to life. On the one hand his beginnings were thought to be insignificant, and on the other hand his sufferings were offensive.

Verse two describes his beginnings: like a tender plant in a parched ground. His beginnings were unlikely. Who would have thought that a "carpenter's son" out of Nazareth would figure prominently in the divine plan. There was nothing appealing or attractive in his appearance that would make Israel rally to him.

Verse three reports that he was despised, that is, looked down on, held in contempt, as well as rejected. His life was filled with grief and sorrows, so that men turned away their faces from him. In short, they did not "esteem him," they didn't think much of him, especially in his condition.

These words illustrate vividly a habit we all share, the habit of letting the eye cheat the conscience, of letting the sight of suffering blind us to the meaning. We dislike pain and suffering; we turn away from it, forgetting that it has a reason, a future, and a God. We look on things so superficially. We make snap judgments about suffering on the surface. Everyday we allow the dullness of poverty, the ugliness of disease, the futility of misfortune, the disappointment of failure, to prevent us from realizing that we share the responsibility for them. We allow suffering in others or ourselves to blind us to the fact of the reasons and purposes for sufferings. We consider the sufferer an unlucky person who is falling by the way. The truth is that suffering is part of God's plan to remind us of the human predicament we share, to bring us out of ourselves in sympathy and patience, and to eventually fit us for glory. So it is reasonable that the suffering Servant himself share the suffering of the world to redeem the world.

### *III. "Surely our griefs"—The suffering is vicarious. (Isaiah 53:4-6)*

If people at first make rash observations about the suffering of God's Servant, they are soon led in their conscience to realize its purpose. In this section they realize that the suffering is vicarious.

#### **A. The Servant's suffering is punishment (4).**

The earliest and most common moral judgment, which people pass on pain, is that which is implied in its name—that is penal. People suffer because God is angry with them. That is what Job's visitors concluded about his suffering. Here, Israel says, "We esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." That is, they saw the suffering Servant and thought God was striking him.

But now they knew they were wrong. The hand of God was indeed upon the Servant, and the reason was sin, yet the sin was not his, but theirs. Verse 4 makes this clear, and verses 5 and 6 amplify it.

#### **B. The punishment of the Servant was redemptive (5, 6).**

Note the parallelism of this fifth verse: "he was wounded for our transgressions" and "he was crushed for our iniquities." The contrast is between "he" and "our." All his suffering was because of our rebellions and sins.

The second set of expressions clarify the purpose of this *vicarious* or substitutionary suffering as *redemptive*: "The chastisement of our peace" and "by his stripes we are healed." All interpreters of this verse agree that the peace, the healing, is ours in consequence of the chastisement and scourging. The pain was his in consequence of the sin that was ours—that is, the suffering was *vicarious*. And the pain brought spiritual healing and peace—that is, the suffering was *redemptive*.

That the suffering is vicarious and redemptive is confessed by Israel in verse 6: "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The verse begins and ends with "all." Substitutionary suffering of this Servant touches all who have sinned—and we know that that is all of us.

In every family, in every nation, the innocent suffer for the guilty. Vicarious suffering is not arbitrary or accidental; it comes with our growth, it is of the very nature of life. It is that part of the service of humankind, to which we are all born, and of the reality of which we daily grow more aware.

Vicarious suffering is not a curse. It is service—service to God. It proves to be a power where every other moral force has failed. This is very intelligible, because it is based on love. Any parents who have suffered and sacrificed for their children can understand the impulse.

But people argue that vicarious suffering is unjust. They forget, however, that there are two reasons people endure suffering in this world—justice and love. We often suffer because we ourselves are not innocent. We share the cause of pain in the world. This is justice. But to suffer in service to God is a demonstration of love. The epitome of this is the suffering Servant. Not only is his suffering vicarious—it is voluntary. Human experience feels it has found its highest and holiest form of love when the innocent is willing to take the blame for others. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," and greater spiritual service can no one do for others, than to suffer with them and for them that they might be healed spiritually.

But, of course, the suffering of this Servant far outdistanced human vicarious suffering (and it is here the nature of the Servant begins to unfold): his suffering removes sin. We may observe a Moses interceding for the sinful people, asking God to take his life so that wrath could be averted from those worshiping the golden calf. That is noble; it's magnificent. But it cannot remove sin. God himself had to carry the sins of his people. What all vicarious suffering had failed to do in Israel's experience, the suffering of our Lord accomplished. Centuries after this oracle was written our divine Lord came and fulfilled to the letter the words of this prophecy. His vicarious suffering would strike the heart into penitence and lift it to peace with God.



*IV. “Oppressed He humbled Himself”—The suffering is accepted. (Isaiah 53:7-9)*

If the third stanza confessed that it was for the sins of the people the Servant suffered, the fourth stanza declares that he himself was sinless, and yet silently submitted to all which injustice laid on him.

**A. The suffering Servant is silent (7).**

What is so remarkable is that although he was afflicted and oppressed, he did not open his mouth. Such a thing is almost unheard of in the Old Testament. No one else could remain silent under pain. In the Old Testament sufferers broke out into one of two voices—the voice of guilt or the voice of doubt. The sufferer is either confessing his sin which the suffering has called to his attention or, when he feels no guilt, he is protesting his suffering, challenging God in argument. David, Jeremiah, Job, and countless others, including us we must confess, are not silent under pain. We confess that we deserve it, or complain that we do not.

Not so with the suffering Servant. He did not open his mouth, but was silent like a sheep led to the slaughter. Why was this Servant the unique sample of silence under suffering? Because he knew the truth. It had been said of him in 52:13: “My servant shall deal wisely.” He knew what he was about. He had no guilt of his own, and no doubts of God. He knew that it was not punishment he was enduring for himself, but that it was a service he was performing—a service laid on him by God, a service for man’s redemption, a service sure of results that were glorious. If anything will enable a person to accept silently his suffering it is this—the knowledge that the suffering was service to God.

**B. The suffering Servant is innocent (8, 9).**

The prophet reports that the Servant was innocent. He had done no violence; no guile was found in him. Yet he was taken to judgment by tyrannical powers. It was judicial murder. And when they considered that he was lawfully put to death, they consistently gave him a convict’s grave. On this note the stanza ends. He was innocent, but he willingly submitted to the oppression, an oppression that carried him to an ignominious burial. From all appearances, an innocent man’s life ended fruitlessly. But nothing could be further from the truth.

*V. “The LORD was pleased”—The suffering was efficacious. (Isaiah 53:10-12)*

It appeared to many that the death of this Servant was an awful tragedy. It was utterly a perversion of justice. Surely here passed into oblivion the fairest life that ever lived. People might see and say, God forsakes his own. On the contrary, the fifth stanza begins, God’s will and pleasure was in it.

**A. The suffering was God’s will (10).**

“It pleased the LORD to bruise him” begins the theological explanation of the suffering. The verb “pleased” does not mean enjoyment. It basically means that God willed the suffering. It is that kind of pleasure. This is the one message which can render any pain tolerable—God willed it—it is his pleasure. Thus, any that God calls to suffer for his service should make it their purpose to do his will, to please him. Therein is success with God.

**B. The suffering was for our justification (10b, 11).**

This suffering was efficacious, that is, it was powerful to effect its intended results: the justification of sinners. God made this Servant a sin (guilt) offering for many, so that by their knowledge of him they might be justified. In the Upper Room Jesus alluded to this passage by saying that the cup was His blood of the New Covenant “poured out for many.” That brought the remission of sins. So the effect of the suffering of our Lord is full atonement. Paul says that he made him to be sin (here, “sin offering”) for us that we might become righteous (here, “justify”) (2 Cor. 5). For those of us who have come to know him by faith this suffering will receive eternal praise. We, the guilty sinners, have been declared righteous before God.

**C. The suffering will lead to exaltation (11, 12).**

With this note the passage comes full circle. God was satisfied, yea, pleased with the obedient suffering of the Servant, whom we know to be our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Because he bore the sins of many, that is, because he made “intercession” for sinners in his self-sacrificing love, God appointed him to honor and glory. Using military terminology Isaiah declares that the Lord will divide the spoil.

And so it was at this point, according to the prophecy, that the Servant, though brought so low, was nearest his exaltation; though in death, yet nearest life, nearest the highest kind of life, the “seeing of a seed,” the finding himself in others; though despised, rejected, and forgotten of men, most certain of finding his place of exaltation with God. Before him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

*(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/19-triumph-suffering-servant-isaiah-5213-5312>)*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

As with many mountaintop experiences, it can be difficult to return to life below after leaving the magnificent scenery of Isaiah 53 behind. That is perhaps the most powerful of the Servant Songs in its prophetic depiction of the suffering experienced by Jesus at the cross as he died for the sins of others. Jesus' death was not an accident or random tragedy as we use those terms. Rather, his death was the fulfillment of a divine plan to rescue lost humanity. The study of a passage such as Isaiah 53 should not end with the lesson. We can return to it and scale its heights again and again, as often as we like—and we should. Prophets like Isaiah yearned to know more about how their prophecies would come to pass (1 Peter 1:10-12). But it was not granted to those men to live in the era of fulfillment (Hebrews 11:39-40). That is our privilege as Christians, who possess the sacred Scriptures of both Old and New Testament. It is we who are able to see from the mountain's summit what Isaiah could see only partially, from somewhere farther down. May we never take such a sacred privilege for granted.

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

This week's text is an obvious prophecy of Christ's suffering and crucifixion, but its main focus may escape us at first glance. Yet it reveals one of the most essential and important (and, regrettably, controversial) foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, namely, that of Christ's vicarious or substitutionary, atonement. Our text is very plain. Christ's wounds were the wounds we deserved and Christ's bruises were the bruises we deserved. The whippings and scourings that He suffered were ones we deserved, and it was all for the sake of our undeserved peace, healing, and salvation, Christ's sufferings were by no means merely some addition to God's saving plan to show that He identifies with our human suffering, as some would wrongly have it. On the contrary, they were absolutely essential to the forgiveness of our sins and the assuaging of God's righteous wrath toward us as sinners. As the writer of Hebrews tells there is no forgiveness "without shedding of blood" (9:22). In John's first epistle, a very valuable aspect of the doctrine of vicarious atonement is expounded when the apostle uses the word "propitiation" (2:2) to describe Jesus' saving work. The Greek word for "propitiation" is the same word used in the historical Greek translation of the Old Testament (usually referred to as the Septuagint, or the LXX) to stand for the Hebrew word for mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The mercy seat was the place between the outstretched wings of the two golden cherubim perched at either end of the lid of the ark. It was considered to be the very throne of God on earth within the tabernacle. This mercy seat was the holiest place on earth, for it was the exact chosen dwelling place of God's presence in the tabernacle or the later temple building. Most significantly for the subject of vicarious atonement, the mercy seat was the place where the high priest placed the blood of the annual sin offering for the entire nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The purpose of this offering was to appease God's righteous wrath toward the sins of His people by demonstrating that the rightful penalty for Israel's sin had been paid for by the death of the sacrificial animal (cf. Lev. 16:15-16; Num. 18:5). All this teaches us that our God is holy. He will not for any reason tolerate sin. His holiness causes His wrath to burn unceasingly against all those who sin. The only way to appease God's wrath toward sin is to atone for it with blood—the perfect blood of the sinless Sacrifice. Only by such a holy sacrifice can the wrath of God's holiness be appeased. Only by appeasing God's holy wrath can forgiveness be granted to the sinner. In His great love for us, God chose from the foundation of the world to appease His own holy wrath toward our sin. He did so by giving His own sinless Son as the perfect Sacrifice to accomplish our forgiveness. Amen!

## ***Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary***

The Suffering Servant - The Old Testament prophet Isaiah vividly painted a picture of God's Suffering Servant dying for His people. The details fit Jesus' death on the Cross hundreds of years later as Jesus endured the pain and sorrow of carrying on His back the sins of every individual who ever walked this earth. Christians who understand this truth embrace Him as Savior and praise Him for what He's done. God orchestrated and ordained the Son's sacrifice on the Cross. Why? Each person should be paying for his or her own sin. But instead, the Father arranged for His Son to suffer and take everyone's place. Before His crucifixion, the Roman soldiers viciously whipped Christ, tearing the flesh from His back, and it is by these stripes that healing and restoration can happen.

The Shepherd for the Sheep - Isaiah said that all people rebel against God at some point and time, choosing their way instead of following the Lord's leading. He describes humans as sheep—ignorant, easily lead astray, and desperately in need of a shepherd's care to survive. Therefore, the Lord sent the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who despite the extreme torture, did not defend Himself, but was like a lamb being led to the slaughter. Christ voluntarily sacrificed Himself as our Shepherd to protect and save us.

The Plan of Salvation - The Father watched the death of Jesus and saw it as a significant victory, for through the sacrifice of Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection fulfilled the Father's plan for salvation for everyone who will believe. Believers stand clean and justified before God as a result of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross. Easter Sunday is filled with songs, sermons, poetry, and dramatic presentations highlighting the events surrounding the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant. However, we should every day turn our thoughts to the One whose redemptive work as the sacrificial Lamb of God made eternal life with Him possible.