



ISAIAH 53

THE SIN-BEARER SERVANT ~ THE SURRENDERED SERVANT ~ THE SERVANT’S REWARD

This chapter is a continuation of the last two verses of Is 52, describing in detail the "suffering servant." He grows up in front of God like a tender plant. People ignore him because he doesn't look particularly majestic. They all reject him and despise him, and he spends his whole life suffering.

But he pays off everyone's sins with all this horrible suffering. No one realizes it, but it works. Ironically, his suffering would produce our healing. The people return to God like sheep to their shepherd. Meanwhile, the servant goes like a sheep to the slaughter, bearing the people's punishment silently. He is taken away by a "perversion of justice (v. 8),” and is buried with the wicked and then with the rich.

There are many things that stand out in this beloved chapter of Isaiah. When it comes to commentaries, few can compete with the volumes of observations, opinions and impressions generated by these 12 verses of scripture. This is some beautiful bible!

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.</p>	<p>a 53:1 God’s arm is a metaphor for his triumphant power. It is said that almost every verse in this chapter is alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Jesus. b 53:2 Or “before him.” c 53:2 Jesus is the Root of David and the Sprouting of the Lord (Isa. 11:1). The parched soil can represent both the barrenness of humanity before God and the barren season of Israel’s history when Jesus appeared. A root cannot live in dry ground, yet we see a hint here that the Messiah would be miraculously born. A root in dry ground is an allusion to the virgin birth of Jesus, who was conceived without a human father. d 53:3 Yet Jesus was the most emotionally whole and healed man to ever walk the earth. He did not absorb the insults and rejections of even his own neighbors (Luke 4:14–30).</p>	<p>Isaiah 53:1 Who has truly believed our revelation? To whom will Yahweh reveal his mighty arm? a 2 He sprouted up like a tender plant before the Lord, b like a root c in parched soil. He possessed no distinguishing beauty or outward splendor to catch our attention—nothing special in his appearance to make us desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of deep sorrows who was no stranger to suffering and grief. d We hid our faces from him in disgust and considered him a nobody, not worthy of respect.</p>

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<p>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 pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds 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.</p> <p>⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.</p>	<p>e 53:4 This was fulfilled in two ways. First, when the Lamb of God carried away diseases as he walked the earth (Matt. 8:16–17). And second, by paying the sin price of all humanity on the cross with his sacred blood.</p> <p>f 53:4 Or “stricken,” a word used for one who is struck with leprosy. Because of this, the Jewish Talmud gives many opinions about this verse, then offers an authoritative ruling of the sages. “The rabbis say: ‘His name is The Leper ... as it is said [in Isaiah 53:4], “Surely our sicknesses he himself bore and our sorrows he carried, yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”’” (b. Sanhedrin 98b). Their conclusion was that the Messiah will be called “the Leper of the House of Rabbi.” They understood that he would not be an actual “leper” but that he would carry the “spiritual leprosy” of the people, as a leper carries his affliction.</p> <p>g 53:5 See Zech. 12:10; John 19:31–37; Rev. 1:7.</p> <p>h 53:5 This is the Hebrew word shalom, meaning “peace, prosperity, wholeness, success, well-being.” All of these have come to us through Christ’s sufferings.</p> <p>i 53:5 The Hebrew word could be translated “among his wounds (bruises)” or “in his wounds (bruises).” See the split-open rock of Song. 2:14.</p> <p>j 53:5 The Hebrew word for wounding (“scourging”) is chaburah and means “blueness of the wounds.” But chaburah is taken from the root word chabar, which means “to join together, to unite, to have fellowship, to become a couple.” A nuanced translation of Isaiah 53:5 could be “In the fellowship of being one with him is our healing.”</p> <p>k 53:6 The Hebrew verb wander has an implication of self-deception. See 1 Peter 2:25.</p> <p>l 53:6 The Hebrew verb laid can also mean “to make intercession.” This would mean that the Lord interceded within himself (the Godhead) to orchestrate our salvation.</p> <p>m 53:6 This entire chapter provides such detail of the last hours of Jesus Christ that one would almost imagine Isaiah was standing at the foot of the cross writing this chapter. Isaiah’s prophecy, written more than seven hundred years before the cross, is all stated in the past tense, as though it had already happened. There is no other person in human history who could possibly fulfill all of Isaiah’s prophecy. It is believed that Isaiah 53 is referred to eighty-five times in the New Testament. A few of these “references include Matt. 8:17; 27:11–13, 26–31, 41–43, 57–60; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–35; Rom. 5:6–9, 18–19; 10:16; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Peter 2:21–24.</p> <p>n 53:7 See Gen. 22:7–8; John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18–19; Rev. 5:12.</p> <p>o 53:7 This was the silence of submission to his Father’s will. See Matt. 26:63; Luke 23:9; 1 Peter 2:23.</p>	<p>The Sin-Bearer Servant</p> <p>⁴ Yet he was the one who carried our sicknesses e and endured the torment of our sufferings. We viewed him as one who was being punished f for something he himself had done, as one who was struck down by God and brought low. ⁵ But it was because of our rebellious deeds that he was pierced g and because of our sins that he was crushed. He endured the punishment that made us completely whole, h and in i his wounding j we found our healing. ⁶ Like wayward sheep, we have all wandered k astray. Each of us has turned from God’s paths and chosen our own way; even so, Yahweh laid l the guilt of our every sin upon him. m</p> <p>The Surrendered Servant</p> <p>⁷ He was oppressed and harshly mistreated; “still he humbly submitted, refusing to defend himself. He was brought like a gentle lamb n to be slaughtered. Like a silent sheep before his shearers, he didn’t even open his mouth. o</p>

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<p>⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?</p> <p>⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.</p> <p>¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.</p> <p>¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.</p>	<p>p 53:8 Or “who of his generation considered.”</p> <p>q 53:8 Or “He was cut off from the land of the living.” See Dan. 9:26.</p> <p>s 53:9 See Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32; John 19:18.</p> <p>t 53:9 See Matt. 27:57–60. The literal Hebrew is “and with the rich in his deaths (plural).” His death is our death too, for we have been co-crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). Jesus was born from a virgin womb and laid in a virgin tomb.</p> <p>u 53:10 Or “disease.”</p> <p>v 53:10 This points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to the place of highest honor (Phil. 2:5–10).</p> <p>x 53:10 Christ’s sacrifice results in the birth of spiritual offspring. He will see his spiritual offspring and enjoy living his life through them; thus, it could be said he prolonged his days. The life we live is no longer our own, and in a way, we prolong his days as we walk in close fellowship with Christ. A people in his image is the joy that was set before him (Heb. 12:1–2).</p> <p>y 53:10 Or “the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”</p> <p>z 53:11 This vision of light is the light of a new day, the resurrection morning light that flooded into the empty tomb.</p> <p>aa 53:11 Or “He will eat and drink his fill.” See Song. 5:1.</p> <p>ab 53:11 Or “by his knowledge” or “by his sweat.” The Hebrew word knowledge is taken from a homonymic root for “sweat.” Perhaps this is an allusion to his sweat trickling from the cross or of the sweat of blood in the garden of Gethsemane, as well as the knowledge of life that comes to us when we believe in him. See also Gen. 2:9 and 3:17–19, which also connect knowledge (of good and evil) with Adam’s sweat.</p> <p>ac 53:11 This is an intimate knowledge, or experience of him by faith, that imparts the righteousness of God to everyone who believes. To be declared righteous involves pardon and acceptance. We are fully pardoned and fully accepted in Christ. See Rom. 3:22–26, 8:1; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:5–6; 1 John 4:10.</p> <p>ad 53:11 Jesus accepted the responsibility for the consequences of our sins. See Ps. 38:4; John 1:29; 1 John 3:5.</p> <p>ae 53:12 Jesus shares the spoils of his victory on the cross and resurrection with us, his mighty ones. He purchased your victory, your salvation, your emotional wholeness, your healing, your deliverance, and your triumph over every foe.</p> <p>ah 53:12 The work of a priest was to offer sacrifice for sin and intercede for the sinner. Our High Priest, Jesus, has done this for us. He became our sacrifice and now is interceding for us. See Luke 23:33–34; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25, 27.</p>	<p>⁸ By coercion and with a perversion of justice he was taken away. And who could have imagined his future? p He was cut down in the prime of life; q for the rebellion of his r own people, he was struck down in their place. ⁹ They gave him a grave among criminals, s but he ended up instead in a rich man’s tomb, t although he had done no violence nor spoken deceitfully.</p> <p>The Servant’s Reward</p> <p>¹⁰ Even though it pleased Yahweh to crush him with grief, u he will be restored to favor. v After his soul becomes a guilt-offering, w he will gaze upon his many offspring and prolong his days. x And through him, Yahweh’s deepest desires will be fully accomplished. y ¹¹ After the great anguish of his soul, he will see light z and be fully satisfied.</p> <p>aa By knowing him, ab the righteous one, my servant will make many to be righteous, ac because he, their sin-bearer, carried away their sins ad. ¹² So I, Yahweh, will assign him a portion among a great multitude, and he will triumph and divide the spoils of victory with his mighty ones—ae all because he poured out his life-blood af to death. He was counted among the worst of sinners, yet he carried sin’s burden for many ag and intercedes for those who are rebels. ah</p>

Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- The report of the death of the Servant (53:1-12) This report on the death of the Servant will be given by enlightened Israel after they realize the significance of His death on their behalf. Like the nations, they badly miscalculated the Servant's importance to them.
- **Israel's Confession Regarding Her Rejection of the Servant** (53:1-3). 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 comments on 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 (bOaVkJAm, "anguish or grief," also used in v. 4) and ... suffering (yIIFj, see comments on "infirmities" in v. 4). 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.
- **Israel's Realization About the Servant's Substitutionary Death** (53:4-6).
 - **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 (see comments on v. 3) speaks of the consequences of sin. The verb took up, rendered "bore" in verse 12, translates aDcĭn, "to carry." His bearing "infirmities" (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 [Vol. 1, p. 1108] [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 ("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 ("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 comments on "infirmities" in 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.
- **Israel's Account About the Servant's Death** (53:7-9). 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 (transgressio; 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).
- **The Lord's Promise About the Blessing of the Servant** (53:10-12).
 - 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 [Vol. 1, p. 1109] 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 MDvDa, 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 oAvRÚp, "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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Verse 1 of this incredible chapter seems to "prophesy" the reality that the Jewish people would have a very hard time understanding the "suffering servant." Why is it so difficult for us to accept it when our "heroes" have to suffer? Can you think of a modern-day hero who experienced major suffering on behalf of others and that suffering was difficult for people to understand, accept and embrace?
2. What is the worst thing you have ever suffered on behalf of someone else? What was your attitude toward having to go through that time of suffering? How did you get through it?
3. The Great Tribulation ("Great Trouble," David Pawson) will be a time of intense suffering. Do you believe the church (you and I) will go through that time or escape it? Please explain how you, personally, arrived at that understanding and belief.
4. Take a look at this quote by biblical teacher, **Zane Pratt**...*"The comfortable experience of Christians in the West has actually been an anomaly in this regard. Because of the Christian heritage of Western civilization, combined with democratic freedoms and historic rule of law, Western Christians have largely been left alone for their faith. Even today, as Western nations become increasingly post-Christian (and even anti-Christian), the opposition experienced by most Christians goes little beyond mockery. However, there are signs that this protected status may be changing. If it continues to do so, it will simply put Western Christians in the same boat as their brothers and sisters all over the world."* How does this make you feel? What is your response to the whole idea that suffering is simply part of the Christian experience?