

The Suffering Servant

A Study of the Servant Songs



“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” (Isaiah 53:5)

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Published by the Zion Church Of Christ, Zion, Illinois, USA

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Introduction

- I. Before partaking of the Lord's Supper, brethren will often read from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and contemplate the suffering our Lord endured on the cross (Isa 53:1-12).
 - A. This beloved chapter in Isaiah is often called the *Suffering Servant* passage.
 - B. It is the fourth of Isaiah's *Servant Songs*—a series of passages dealing with “the Servant of the Lord” (cf. Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).
- II. New Testament writers, and even Jesus Himself, repeatedly applied the words of the Servant Songs to the life and work of Jesus.
 - A. “The NT rests its doctrine of atonement on this prophetic concept of the suffering servant. Thirty-four times we find various NT writers referring to Isaiah's proclamation as fulfilled in Jesus (e.g., Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet 2:22-25).” (Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, “Atonement,” *Dictionary of Bible Imagery*, 55)
 - B. As Jesus healed the sick at Capernaum, Matthew says He “took our infirmities” as Isaiah prophesied (Matt 8:16-17; cf. Isa 53:4; 1 Pet 2:24).
 - C. When the Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus, Matthew, in his longest quotation from the Old Testament, showed how their rejection of Jesus was a part of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah (Matt 12:14-21; cf. Isa 42:1-4).
 - D. Mark reminds us that, “it is written” that the Son of Man “must suffer many things and be treated with contempt” (Mark 9:12; cf. Isa 53:1-12).
 - E. John tells us that the people who rejected the signs Jesus performed fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy (John 12:37-38; cf. Isa 53:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9).
 1. The Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah was foretold by Scripture and served to confirm (rather than thwart) God's eternal plan.
 2. “The Fourth Evangelist cites Isa. 53:1 as evidence for his contention that the Jewish rejection of Jesus is supported by, and in fact fulfills, Scripture rather than being in conflict with it. The hermeneutical axiom underlying John's appropriation of this passage is the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, who in turn is identified with the Servant of the Lord, featured in the Isaianic Servant Songs. The typology extends not only to the linkage between Isaiah and his message, on the one hand, and Jesus and his message, on the other, but also to the rejection of Isaiah's message by his contemporaries and the rejection of Jesus' message and signs (“arm of the Lord”) by the same trajectory of people. According to the Fourth Evangelist, Jewish rejection of God's words is nothing new: just as Isaiah's mission and message had been rejected, so also were Jesus and his ministry...” (Köstenberger, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 478-479)
 - F. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus told how He would be arrested as a criminal, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Luke 22:34-37; cf. Isa 53:12).
 - G. Peter reminds us that Christ's sinless example was the subject of Isaiah's ancient prophecy (1 Pet 2:21-25; cf. Isa 53:9).

- H. As the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah 53, he was confused about the identity of the Suffering Servant (Acts 8:29–35; cf. Isa 53:7–8).
1. “His confusion was understandable, since contemporary Jewish thought was divided on the interpretation of this passage. Some held that the slaughtered sheep represented the nation, others that Isaiah spoke of himself, still others that he referred to the Messiah. There was no doubt in Philip’s mind, however, of whom Isaiah wrote.” (MacArthur, *Acts 1–12*, MNTC, 257)
 2. “Of all the passages in the Old Testament that the Ethiopian could have been reading, there is no single chapter more appropriate for explaining the work of Christ than Isaiah 53. Although many Jews thought of their own experience as fulfilling much of the suffering and martyrdom themes of the passage, Philip declares that the passage finds its decisive fulfillment in one person—Jesus.” (Arnold, *ZIBBCNT-5*, 2.287)
 3. Prior to the story about the Ethiopian, the book of Acts had already referred to Jesus four times as the *Servant* of God (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30).
- III. In the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah, we are given a dramatic view of our Lord’s life in the days of His flesh, we see His compassion, humility, power, and the salvation He would bring to all the world (John 3:16).
- A. “Few items in the study of the Old Testament have generated as much interest as the so-called servant songs. Already in 1948 C. R. North could list over 250 works devoted to these passages; the rate of publication has continued unabated since.” (Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 277)
 - B. “Another important NT passage utilizing Isa. 53 is 1 Pet. 2:22–25, which, in midrashic form, alludes to Isa. 53:4, 5, 6, 7, 9 (see also Rom. 4:25; 5:19; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Phil. 2:7–9; Heb. 9:28). Isaiah 53 also played a significant role in the Jewish-Christian debate in the patristic period (1 Clem. 16, citing Isa. 53:1–12; Justin Martyr, Dial. 13, citing Isa. 52:10–54:6; 1 Apol. 50–51, citing Isa. 52:13–53:12).” (Köstenberger, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 479)
- IV. The prophet Isaiah began his ministry about 740 BC and ended in 680 BC.
- A. God, through Isaiah, gives us a clear picture of what was to happen, not only in the immediate future for Israel but how God would bring the Messiah, His Suffering Servant, into the world.
 1. About 150 years before it happened, Isaiah predicted that the Jews in the southern kingdom would be taken into Babylonian captivity (Isa 6:11–12; 11:12).
 - a) Micah also foretold of the Babylonian captivity (Mic 4:10).
 - b) Jeremiah proclaimed that the captivity of the Jews would last for seventy years (Jer 25:1, 11–12).
 2. Isaiah’s topic in chapters 40–66 of his book was the Babylonian captivity, the reasons for it, and ultimately the deliverance from it.
 - a) The first deportation of the Jews from Judah to Babylon took place c. 597 BC (2 Kgs 24:12–16; Jer 52:28).
 - b) The destruction of Solomon’s Temple and a second deportation of the Jews took place c. 586 BC (2 Kgs 25:8–21; Jer 39:8–10; 40:7; 52:12–34).
 - c) A third deportation took place c. 582 BC (Jer 52:28–30).

3. The God of Israel would use Cyrus, the king of Persia, to deliver His people from Babylonian captivity and the means by which the Jews would be able to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4; 5:13-17).
 4. God referred to Cyrus as “My shepherd” and His “anointed” (Isa 44:28; 45:1).
 5. “Cyrus entered Babylon on October 29, 539 B.C., and presented himself in the role of the liberator of the people. He allowed the images of the gods to be transported back to their original cities and instituted a kindly policy of repatriation for captive peoples. His policies of moderation naturally extended to the Hebrews, whom he encouraged to return to Judea to rebuild their temple (2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-6).” (Gates, “Cyrus,” *NIBD*)
 6. “In his decree to the Jews (Ezra 1), Cyrus referred to ‘Jehovah, the God of heaven’ as the one who had given him ‘All the kingdoms of the earth,’ and who had charged him ‘to build him a house in Jerusalem’ (Ezra 1:2 ASV). How did Cyrus know this? Probably not through dreams or visions, but rather through confrontation with the prophecies of Isaiah written 150 years before. It seems highly probable that Daniel who lived at least until the third year of Cyrus (Dan 10:1), and who was greatly concerned about the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy of the return of Israel to her land after seventy years (Dan 9:2; cf. Jer 25:11, 12), was the one who presented a scroll of Isaiah’s prophecies to the Persian monarch. Josephus, who had access to many historical records long since lost, states that ‘when Cyrus read this, and admired the Divine power, an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written’ (*Antiq.* XI, i, 2).” (Whitcomb, “Cyrus,” *ZPEB*)
- B. However, in the Servant Songs, Isaiah tells of a *greater deliverance* than that from Babylon and of a *greater deliverer* than Cyrus.
1. “In the Suffering Servant the Messiah is seen making vicarious atonement through his passion and death, which has a positive purpose in the plan of God for the salvation of sinful men. The Messiah as the Suffering Servant sums up the entire prophetic movement and constitutes a climax in OT prophecy. The progress of prophetic revelation in history leads up to the idea of the innocent Suffering Servant of God, who in the redemptive purpose of his death reconciles men to God. In the Messiah’s sacrifice of himself as an expiation for sin his priestly office is revealed and combined with his work as prophet and king.” (Schultz, “Messiah,” *NIBD*)
 2. The Suffering Servant is introduced long before the beloved fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and is mentioned in four separate sections of the book.

- V. In this study, we are going to examine all four of Isaiah's *Servant Songs*, culminating with the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53.
- A. In the first Servant Song, Isaiah introduces the Servant of the Lord to us by His ultimate mission as One who would "bring forth justice to the Gentiles" (Isa 42:1).
 - B. The second Servant Song, we learn that the Messiah would feel human discouragement, "I have labored in vain," and natural fatigue, "I have spent My strength for nothing and in vain" (Isa 49:1-7).
 - C. Suffering becomes vital to the Servant's mission, for, in the third Servant Song He testifies, "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" (Isa 50:6).
 - D. In the first three Servant Songs, we learn that the Servant will suffer, but the *reason* for His suffering is unknown until we reach the fourth Servant Song (Isa 53:6).

Discussion

I. The Servant Has A Mission (Isa 42:1-4)

- A. "The servant's mission surprised Israel and it surprises us. His mission was not to deliver Israel from captivity and exile. The mission was for the nations. The servant gained power for his mission from the divine Spirit just as earlier rulers and prophets had." (Butler, *Isaiah*, 232)
- B. After Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, Matthew applied these verses to Christ and said that Jesus "fulfilled" this prophecy of Isaiah (Matt 12:15-21).
- C. The Servant was chosen by God (Isa 42:1).
 1. Not just anyone could perform this task.
 2. God would *delight* in this One.
 - a) The Father was pleased when Jesus was baptized (cf. Matt 3:17).
 - b) At the transfiguration, the Father was pleased with Jesus (cf. Matt 17:5).
 3. God the Father demonstrated His delight in His Servant by sending the Holy Spirit upon Him (John 1:29-34).
 4. Jesus applied the words of Isaiah, concerning the Holy Spirit, to Himself when He spoke at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21; cf. Isa 61:1-2).
- D. The Servant stands in vivid contrast to worldly conquerors (Isa 42:2).
 1. The Servant's conduct is different from that of ordinary men.
 2. "The real wonder of the Servant's mission, however, lies not so much in its breathtaking scope as in the manner in which it will be accomplished. He will not be a military conqueror like Cyrus. The source of his strength will be the Spirit of God (1). The instrument of his rule will be the word of God (4b). His manner will be gentle rather than overbearing (2, 3a), and there is more than a hint in the opening line of verse 4 that his mission will involve him in personal suffering." (Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 172)

3. “History is dominated by the building of one vicious kingdom after another, all erected for the glory of sinful men who used conquest to etch their names in bloody monuments to their ambition. They delighted in the weakness of their enemies and trampled them down like mud in the streets. But one day a gentle Jewish carpenter stood on trial before the most powerful empire on earth and proclaimed a different kind of kingdom than the world had ever seen. In effect, Jesus said to Pontius Pilate that day, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have fought, because that’s how worldly kingdoms are built. But my kingdom is of an entirely different nature, built by a quiet proclamation of truth’ (see John 18:36).” (Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, 243–244)
 4. Jesus did not enter into violent disputes with false teachers, but instead used the power of His words (John 7:46).
 5. He did not teach as the scribes did (Matt 7:28–29).
- E. The Servant would pity their low estate (Isa 42:3).
1. “These people would take a bowl of oil, put a piece of flax in it to act as a wick and it would be their lamp for light. When the oil burned low and the flax began to smoke and irritate those in the house, it was immediately snuffed out. The servant wouldn’t do that. He carefully replenished the oil and preserved the feeble flickering until a bright flame returned. This servant will not just talk good religion, he will speak in genuineness.” (McQuiggan, *The Book of Isaiah*, 212)
 2. He would not crush men nor quench their spirit.
 3. He had compassion on the multitudes (Matt 9:35–38).
 - a) Unlike the Pharisees, He would not bind heavy burdens on men (Matt 23:4; Acts 15:5, 10).
 - b) The Beatitudes are a wonderful expression of this (Matt 5:1–12).
 4. Think of our Lord’s kind and tender invitation (Matt 11:28–30).
- F. In this first of the Servant Songs, there is an *implied difficulty*, i.e., the possibility of the Servant growing weak or becoming discouraged (Isa 42:4).
1. His mission is to the *coastlands* or the *islands* (Isa 42:1, 4).
 2. Christ was a light to the Gentiles (Matt 12:21; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47).
 3. The kingdom of Cyrus was limited, and the Law of Moses was only for the nation of Israel—but the Servant has a universal mission and message!
 4. “As God’s Servant, Jesus did what Israel could never do. He perfectly carried out the will of the Father so that people everywhere may believe in the Holy One of Israel.” (Martin, *BKC*, 1.1095)
- G. In the second of the Servant songs, we learn that...

II. The Servant Has Great Difficulties In His Mission (Isa 49:1-7)

- A. "Isaiah begins a new section where the Servant of the Lord is exalted. He will bring a greater deliverance than the deliverance from Egypt and from Babylon. He will actually bring a deliverance from sin. Nothing more is said of Babylon or Cyrus, or of the conflict with pagan gods and occult practices. The Servant-Messiah begins with another court scene that calls on all the peoples of the world to pay attention. What he is about to tell is of extreme importance to the Gentiles." (Horton, *Isaiah*, n.p.)
- B. The Suffering Servant is the speaker in these verses.
 1. He did not take this duty upon Himself (John 6:38-40).
 2. The Lord *called* Him into this service (cf. Heb 5:4, 9-10).
- C. Again, the *coastlands* (Gentiles) are invited to listen (Isa 49:1).
- D. The Servant was to "restore the preserved ones of Israel" and be a "light to the Gentiles" (Isa 49:6).
 1. "This is one of the greatest missionary chapters in the Bible, for it takes us into the secret counsels of the triune God for the extension of the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth. Here we are privy to an immeasurably deep conversation between the Father and the Son concerning Jesus's glorious mission on earth. Here God the Father tells the Son that it is insufficient glory for him to be merely the Savior of the Jews. God did not send his only begotten Son into the world to save Israel alone. But God has commanded Jesus Christ to be also the light for the Gentiles, that he may bring his salvation to the ends of the earth." (Davis, *Exalting Jesus in Isaiah*, 293)
 2. The apostle Paul was among this remnant of the "preserved ones of Israel" (Rom 9:1-8; 11:1-5).
 3. Christ is the "light to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46-48; Matt 4:12-16; Isa 9:1-2).
 - a) When the disciples were sent out on the Limited Commission, they were explicitly told not to go to the Gentiles (Matt 10:5-6).
 - b) However, in the Great Commission, the apostles were sent to "all the nations" (Matt 28:19).
 - c) The message of Christ would go "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt 24:14).
- E. God has chosen the Servant, but the nation of Israel would despise and abhor Him (Isa 49:7; John 1:11-12).
 1. However, in time, all men would bow before Him (Phil 2:10-11).
 2. He is indeed "the ruler over the king of the earth" (Rev 1:5; 21:24).
 3. He is "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16).
- F. In the third of the Servant songs, we learn that...

III. The Servant Will Suffer (Isa 50:4–9)

- A. “Once more the Servant speaks, letting us into some of the most deeply personal areas of his life: his communion with God, the physical and mental suffering which marks his way, and the assurance of final vindication that buoys him up. He speaks more to himself than to others (verses 4–9 have the form of a soliloquy) but there is more than a hint of who is meant to overhear him. It is the weary one of verse 4—the person who, like the Servant himself, is an object of ridicule and abuse, and whose strength to endure is almost exhausted.” (Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 198)
- B. One part of the Servant’s commission is to teach (Isa 50:4).
- C. The Servant would not flee from His divinely appointed task like the prophet Jonah did (Isa 50:5; Jonah 1:3).
- D. Isaiah speaks of the suffering of our Lord on His journey to the cross (Isa 50:6).
 - 1. Christ fulfilled this (Matt 26:67–68; 27:26–31; cf. Mark 15:16–20).
 - 2. Servants of God have always faced difficulties (cf. Matt 5:10–12).
- E. The Servant’s face was “like a flint” (Isa 50:7).
 - 1. He willingly chose the way of suffering and went forward with steadfast determination.
 - 2. He was confident in God’s help.
- F. In this section of Scripture, there is no *reason* given for His suffering—we are left to wonder *why* He had to suffer.
 - 1. While others may desert Him, the Father who vindicates Him is always near (cf. John 16:32; Matt 27:42–43).
 - 2. In spite of the taunts of His enemies, Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:3–4).

IV. The Servant Suffers For Sin (Isa 52:13–53:12)

- A. “It is generally acknowledged by students of the prophets that in this the fourth of the Servant Songs is attained the loftiest height of prophecy. It was pointed out in the third song (50:4–11) that the Servant will suffer in obedience to the word of God, but the purpose of His suffering was not explained. This final song deals with both purpose and achievement. The Servant is to conquer as a sufferer, not as a warrior (cf. Rev 5:4–6). From His shameful suffering and inhumane treatment He is to emerge in triumph and glory. In this song the Servant neither appears in person nor speaks, but He is the central figure in the message of both Jehovah and the prophet. No time factor is found in the song. It deals with the past, present, and future; its theme embraces the whole of time. A question may be posed as to whether 52:13–15 is a conclusion to 52:1–12, which deals with the deliverance of Israel, a transition from 52:1–12 to chapter 53, or a part of chapter 53, serving as the introduction. Although the three verses build upon 52:1–12, they are best regarded as the introduction to the following chapter, the first of five stanzas in the final Servant Song (52:13–53:12).” (Young, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 434)

- B. The Servant will suffer in ways beyond human comprehension, but ultimately He will be “exalted and extolled and be very high” (Isa 52:13), which speaks of three stages of His exaltation.
1. His resurrection from the grave (Rom 1:3–4).
 2. His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:6–11).
 3. His being seated at the right hand of God (cf. Acts 2:33; Heb 1:3).
- C. “His visage was marred more than any man” (Isa 52:14).
1. “Those who would generations later witness Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross—not those who saw Jesus in some earlier context—would be ‘appalled’ by his appearance, for he would at that point be ‘disfigured,’ a term used of a ‘blemished animal,’ one unfit for offering to the Lord (Mal 1:14). This prophecy makes clear that Christ’s treatment at the time of his passion and crucifixion would be absolutely inhumane.” (Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*, comments on Isa 52:14)
 2. After condemning Jesus to die on a cross, Pilate ordered Him to be *scourged* (Matt 27:26).
 - a) A *scourge* was a “Roman implement for severe bodily punishment. Horace calls it *horrible flagellum*. It consisted of a handle, to which several cords or leather thongs were affixed, which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal, to make the blow more painful and effective. ... The victim was tied to a post (Acts 22:25) and the blows were applied to the back and loins, sometimes even, in the wanton cruelty of the executioner, to the face and the bowels. In the tense position of the body, the effect can easily be imagined. So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and not rarely died under it. ... It usually preceded capital punishment (Livy xxxiii.36).” (Dosker, “Scourge; Scourging,” *ISBE*)
 - b) The Romans called a scourging “halfway death.”
 3. Christ was stripped of all clothing, His hands were tied to a post, and then He was scourged with a *flagellum*.
 - a) A *flagellum* was a leather whip made up with thongs of leather, and each strap had a piece of bone or lead tied to the ends so it would cut deeper into the flesh.
 - b) Josephus speaks of a man named Ananus, who was “whipped until his bones were bare” (Josephus, *J.W.* 6.304).
 4. Isaiah would later tell us that “by His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5).
 - a) The soldiers hit Jesus and smote Him with a reed, which served as a mock scepter (Matt 27:27–31).
 - b) The terrible beating of His thorn-crowned brow caused His facial features to be hidden.
 5. The Servant will not remain in humiliation forever (Phil 2:9–11; Acts 3:13, 26).
- D. He would *sprinkle* many nations (Isa 52:15).
1. The word *sprinkle* was a technical word used of the cleansing by the priests under the Law of Moses (Lev 4:6; 8:11; 14:7).
 2. The purpose of sprinkling was to obtain ritual purity; consequently, the one who does the sprinkling had to be pure (John 1:29; Heb 12:22–24; 1 Pet 1:2).

- E. The opening verses of Isaiah 53 tell us the Servant would live a life of rejection.
1. Men would see nothing spectacular in His appearance.
 2. He bore no outward evidence of royalty.
- F. The “arm of the Lord” (Isa 53:1) is a phrase Isaiah often uses to describe the power of God (cf. Isa 40:10; 51:9; 62:8).
1. The Jewish rejection of Jesus served to confirm, rather than thwart, God’s eternal plan for human redemption.
 2. John tells us that the people who rejected the signs Jesus performed fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (John 12:37–38; cf. Isa 53:1).
- G. Men would entirely misjudge the Servant (Isa 53:2).
1. Men would see nothing spectacular in His appearance.
 2. There was no physical beauty that drew others to Him.
 3. He bore no outward evidence of royalty.
 4. Men hid their face from Him—they regarded Him as nothing.
 5. One of the reasons Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss was to identify who Jesus was in the Garden—Jesus looked like an ordinary Jew (cf. Mark 14:43–44).
- H. Men of the world saw nothing extraordinary in Him (Isa 53:3).
1. “Jews and Gentiles alike treated him as no one special. The proof that he was just another dirty little Jew (to foreigners) was the way they mistreated him and mocked him. And the proof that he was just another Jew (to Jews) was that he suffered with ‘all the other sinners.’ And so, they esteemed him not.” (McQuiggan, *The Book of Isaiah*, 269)
 2. “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (Matt 13:55).
- I. “We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4).
1. Matthew 8:17 applies this passage to the healing ministry of Jesus, where He took pain and sickness away.
 2. “Isaiah 53:4 uses the verb *nagua*^c, which can refer to being stricken with a dread disease like leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 15:5). There is no doubt that this word indicates one afflicted by some dread disease, one that probably causes disfigurement and repulsive appearance, and leprosy best fits this sort of description. People were horrified, for this person was marred beyond human semblance. One must envision the usual human reaction here to seeing one who is badly disfigured. Who could believe that this sort of person could be exalted by God? The author is trying to make clear that we are dealing with a totally unique set of circumstances; indeed it appears he means to indicate this is an unrepeatable set of circumstances.” (Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New*, 243)
 3. At the foot of the cross, the Jewish leaders looked upon His sufferings as the punishment for His own sins (Matt 27:39–43).
 4. However, the real reason for His sufferings is *our* sins (Isa 53:6; 1 Pet 2:21–24)!
- J. The words *wounded* and *bruised* (Isa 53:5) are the strongest terms to describe a violent and agonizing death.
1. There is a stress on the word *our* in both statements.
 2. By His *stripes* (trans. *wounds* in the ESV) we are healed (1 Pet 2:24).

3. The procession of Christ and the two thieves was led by a Roman Centurion towards the place of the crucifixion.
 - a) A centurion compelled Simon to carry the cross part of the way from the Praetorium to “a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:17; Luke 23:26; Matt 27:32).
 - b) Even in the midst of such great agony, our Lord was concerned about those in Jerusalem (Luke 23:27–28).
 4. At Calvary (Luke 23:33), Jesus is thrown back onto the rough wood, and spikes are driven into His hands (Matt 27:33–37).
 5. “Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish, form of punishment. It was usually preceded by scourging, which, carried out thoroughly, left the body a mass of swollen and bloody flesh ... All who cared to witness the horrible spectacle were free to do so; the Romans, who thought it necessary to rule by terror, chose, for capital offenses by other than Roman citizens, what Cicero called ‘the most cruel and hideous of tortures.’ The offender’s hands and feet were bound (seldom nailed) to the wood; a projecting block supported the backbone or the feet; unless mercifully killed, the victim would linger there for two or three days, suffering the agony of immobility, unable to brush away the insects that fed upon his naked flesh, and slowly losing strength until the heart failed and brought an end. Even the Romans sometimes pitied the victim, and offered him a stupefying drink.” (Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 572)
- K. There is an emphasis on how helpless we all are (Isa 53:6).
1. “This verse is perhaps the most penetrating of all descriptions of sin and atonement, uncovering the fecklessness which is second nature to us and the self-will which isolates us from God and man alike; but also the divine initiative which transferred our punishment to the one substitute.” (Kidner, *Isaiah*, 662)
 2. “In the same way Israel’s priests laid their hands on the head of a scapegoat, symbolically transferring the people’s sins to it (see Lev 16:20–22), so our burden of sin was laid upon Christ (see 1Pe 2:24).” (Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*, n.p.)
 3. Matthew reminds us how, when Jesus saw the multitudes, “He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matt 9:36; cf. Ps 119:176).
- L. No one would “declare His generation” (Isa 53:8).
1. According to the *Mishnah*, once the accused was found guilty of a capital crime, they would take him out to the place of stoning “outside the camp” (*m. Sanh.* 6:1; cf. Lev 24:14).
 2. On the way to the place of stoning, a herald would go before the condemned.
 3. “And a herald goes before him, crying out, ‘Mr. So-and-so, son of Mr. So-and-so, is going out to be stoned because he committed such-and-such a transgression, and Mr. So-and-so and Mr. So-and-so are the witnesses against him. Now anyone who knows grounds for acquittal—let him come and speak in his behalf!’” (*m. Sanh.* 6:1)
 4. Apparently, at the death of Jesus, no one walked before Him to “declare His generation.”

- M. Notice His voluntary endurance (Isa 53:7–9).
1. He would willingly lay down His own life (John 10:15–18).
 2. “They made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death” (Isa 53:9) refers to the intention of the government to give Him a state burial, but Joseph of Arimathea was granted His body (Matt 27:57–60).
 3. “It was intended that his grave be with the wicked, that is, with the condemned criminals who were crucified with Him. Yet, when He actually died, He was buried with honor by a rich man (see Matt. 27:57–60). This was God’s assurance that the accusations that He was a violent man and a deceiver were false (cf. 1 Pet. 2:22).” (Horton, *Isaiah*, n.p.)
- N. The God of heaven not only *saw* the Servant’s sufferings but was *pleased* by them—God chose His righteous Servant to suffer (Isa 53:10–12; cf. John 10:11; Heb 2:9).
1. “Why have these things happened to the Servant? The answer is given in this final stanza. They were not accidental; they were intended. Moreover, it was God’s intention. The opening lines of 53:10 are terrible. What good father could *wish* for his son to be crushed? It is only possible if there was some unquestionably greater good to be obtained. And what greater good could possibly justify the crushing of the Servant? The answer is given in the second half of the verse. It is when the ‘life’ of the Servant is offered as a sin offering that God’s purpose in bringing him to this place is realized (‘prosper’). Then will the injustice of being deprived of children and a long life be rectified. The Servant did not come to tell people what God wants; rather, he came to *be* what God wants *for us*.” (Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 573)
 2. “He shall see His seed” (Isa 53:10; cf. 2 Sam 7:12–16).
 3. This was fulfilled in Christ on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29–36).
 4. “Many, many facets of the Servant’s character are revealed in this Song. He is sage, priest, sacrifice, servant, sufferer, conqueror and intercessor. He is the channel of God’s grace to sinners. In him the holiness and mercy of God are perfectly reconciled. He is the key to all God’s plans for his people and for the world.” (Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 214)
 5. Jesus was not merely a martyr or a great ethical teacher—He bore the guilt and sin of all mankind on the cross so that we could be saved!

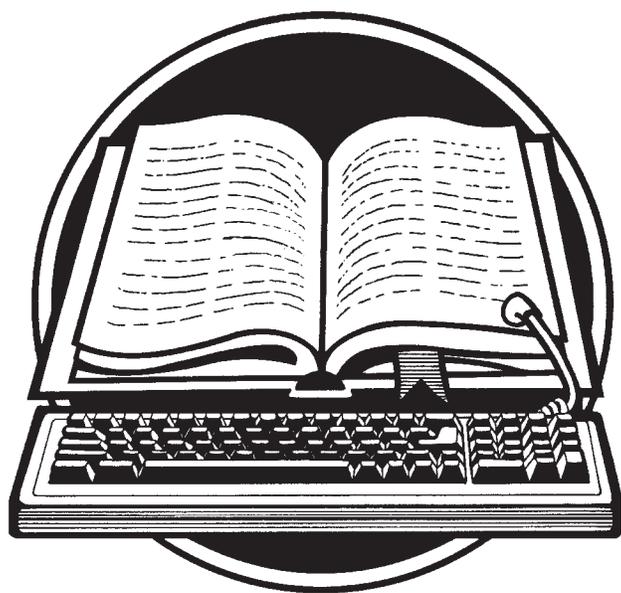
Conclusion

- I. Because of His suffering, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Heb 2:14–18).
- II. We are redeemed by “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19).
- III. At this very moment, Jesus is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16).
- IV. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9).

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