

One of the things that scholars used to say about the text we will look into this morning was that it was fake. It sounded so much like Jesus on the Cross that they decided that it must have been written after Jesus.

Moreover, it was absent from many modern Jewish texts of Isaiah.

But, in 1947 a miracle happened. A shepherd boy names Mohammad climbed inside a cave near the Dead Sea.

In that cave he discovered the greatest archeological find of the twentieth century: the Dead Sea Scrolls

The longest of them was the Isaiah scroll, containing the entire book of Isaiah, including chapter 53.

Modern dating techniques and other evidence showed that it must have been written before 230 BC.

And what does Isaiah 53 tell us?

The Servant Messiah suffered and died in our place.

Written more than 200 years before He was born... actually, 700 years before His birth.

Today we will be looking at the fourth of four Servant Songs in Isaiah.

Since Isaiah 40 we have been in the Book of the Servant.

God is presenting His absolute sovereignty over all creation and the nations.

He is promising to save Israel, bring them back to the promised land, and to restore Jerusalem.

He is promising to send His Servant Messiah to save His people for Himself forever.

This is one of the most important and most challenging parts of the entire Old Testament.

In fact, the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day did not know what to make of it. They still don't.

A friend of mine who pastors the EFC church in Chamberlain, SD told me his experience with this passage.

Leigh Warmbrand is Jewish. Did you know that a person can be Jewish and a Christian, both?

Leigh grew up Jewish. In preparation for his bar mitzvah, he had Hebrew classes.

The Bible that they used contained Isaiah, of course, but it went from chapter 52 to 54.

There was no chapter 53. He wondered about that.

Isaiah 53 does not appear in Jewish Synagogue calendar readings.

It is considered by many Jews an obscure text, not because they think Isaiah didn't write it, but because they do not understand it.

It was only after he'd become a believer in Jesus Christ that he found out why.

They didn't want to talk about Isaiah 53.

Why? It sounds too much like what Jesus did on the Cross.

This is among the most amazing prophetic descriptions in all of history.

The Jews for Jesus ministry uses this passage in one of their most effective evangelistic methods.

They ask, "Who is the subject of Isaiah 53? You decide."

And now I quote from the Jews for Jesus website:

- *Isaiah predicted that the Servant of the Lord would be disfigured by suffering and rejected by many. 700 years later, Yeshua (Jesus) was struck, spat on, mocked, and blasphemed (Mark 15:17-19, Matthew 27:39-44).*
- *Isaiah said this person would come from humble beginnings. Yeshua grew up in a city with a poor reputation, Nazareth (Luke 2:39-40,51).*
- *Isaiah said that the Servant would bear our sins and suffer in our place. 700 years later, Jesus "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" (1 Peter 2:24).*
- *Isaiah predicted that the Servant would heal many. Jesus made the lame walk, the blind see, and the sick healthy all throughout his earthly ministry (Matthew 8:16-17).*
- *Isaiah said that he would voluntarily take our punishment upon himself. Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).*
- *Jesus did not defend himself before Herod, Pontius Pilate, or the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:62-64; 27:11-14; Luke 23:9). Just as Isaiah foretold, he remained silent during his suffering.*

- *Isaiah predicted that the Servant would die, be buried with a rich man, but would not remain dead. Jesus did all of this when he died on a cross (Mark 15:37; John 19:33-34), was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60), and when he rose three days after his death.*
- *In 1922, the late David Baron, a British Jewish believer in Yeshua who was well-versed in rabbinics, wrote:
It is beyond even the wildest credulity to believe that the resemblance in every feature and minutest detail between this prophetic portraiture [Isaiah 53] drawn centuries before his [Jesus'] advent and the story of his life, and death, and glorious resurrection as narrated in the gospels, can be mere accident or fortuitous coincidence.*
- *Can it be true? Ask yourself—if you have the courage to believe it.*

In the chapter before us Isaiah speaks of this Servant 700 years before He arrives.

Thus, Isaiah is speaking in the future.

But we will be looking at these verses in the past tense because they have already happened.

We now know that these verses are speaking about what Jesus Christ did on the Cross.

This song begins with the final three verses of Isaiah 52. It has five parts.

The first section gives us an overview of the whole. The Servant will be exalted after He suffers.

I. He redeemed the nations.

Isaiah 52:13-15

The first thing that we read is that the Servant of the Lord will be exalted.

The second thing that we read is that this Servant will be appalling, marred, damaged, hurt, humbled.

Right away we are invited to ask the question, “How? How can both of these things be?”

In verse 15 we are told His purposes for doing all of this, to, “sprinkle many nations.”

What can that mean?

After all, in the context of the Old Testament, which is important, that sounds like atonement.

That is Leviticus language.

That is the priest, by the perfect sacrifice, making God’s people righteous before God.

How can all this exaltation and humiliation accomplish this?

And if we are wondering, the next line lets us know that we are not alone.

“Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him.” They will be stunned, surprised.

They will see what they have not heard and what they have not heard they will understand.

You are not going to understand this prophesy. You cannot understand it. It is beyond your comprehension.

But, when you see it, then you will understand.

Which is exactly what happened on the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Even His disciples, whom He told about it, did not understand it...

Until He rose from the dead, opened their eyes to see, and gave them the Holy Spirit.

II. He was despised and forsaken.

Isaiah 53:1-3

In this sense we can understand the challenge of many Jewish people when coming to this chapter.

It is an enigma in the midst of a puzzle that is hard to understand and harder still to accept.

And the chapter even says as much about itself. It begins that way.

After the puzzlement of Isaiah 52:15 we have Isaiah 53:1.

And the reader cannot miss the implicit answer to the two parallel questions, “No one.”

No one believes this. It has been revealed to no one.

The next two verses prophesy that when this Servant shows up, His people will not see Him for who He is.

This is **John 1:10-11** in **Isaiah 53:2-3** language.

Jesus did not come from a royal family that anyone recognized.

Jesus was unremarkable and undesirable to most in the world.

It is astonishing that not one word is written in the New Testament about Jesus' appearance.

Jesus was despised, forsaken, familiar with sorrow, a friend of grief.

Jesus was a man that people turned away from. He embarrassed people. They hated Him.

This is not the way that you and I, nor anyone, would imagine a Savior of the world.

I recall when I was 14 years old and had rejected all of this Christianity and Jesus stuff. I didn't like it.

Jesus seemed to me like an odd fairy tale, a sick just-so story to explain suffering in God's world.

I didn't like the poverty of Jesus, His homelessness, His suffering, His death.

I didn't like all the talk of blood and sin and sacrifice. I didn't understand it. It made me feel bad.

If I would have made up a Savior of the world, he would be much cleaner and more powerful.

Like... well... like a Jedi Knight. I liked that! That seemed cool. Jesus didn't seem cool.

But that is the point. God's ways are not my ways. I don't get to make this up. No one makes it up.

What God does shows me my need for humility and submission to His will and His ways.

What God does shows me my sin and lack of understanding. **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

III. He bore our sins and sorrows.

Isaiah 53:4-6

The best non-Messianic Jewish explanation of these verses is that the Suffering Servant is Israel.

Israel suffered sorrowfully, was pierced and crushed.

But this simply will not do. These three verses are saying something far more than just that.

This is not only about a servant of God suffering. This is about a Suffering Servant who carried our sins.

Israel does not carry our sins for us. The priesthood does not bear our sins.

Only the sacrifice on the altar bears our sins, and how can a Suffering Servant be the sacrifice on the altar?

There are six great assertions of substitutionary atonement in these three verses, each is important.

vs. 4 He bore our griefs and sorrows when we thought Him stricken by God.

Even when the disciples thought that Jesus was tragically dying, He was bearing their sorrows and sins.

Everyone thought that Jesus was done when He had just accomplished His greatest work.

vs. 5a He was pierced for our transgressions (rebellion).

The piercing of the Messiah shows up in Psalm 22:16 and Zechariah 12:10.

How can the Messiah die being pierced AND being lifted up above the earth? Jesus did.

vs. 5b He was crushed for our iniquities (guilty conduct).

We deserved the death He died because of our behavior. The entire Old Testament teaches this.

Jesus died in our place, paying the death penalty for sin that we could not pay.

vs. 5c He took the chastisement for our shalom.

The Servant Messiah died so that you and I could have peace with God.

Romans 5:1 "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

vs. 5d He was whipped for us to be healed.

1 Peter 2:21-25 It is like Peter was reading Isaiah 53 as he wrote.

Are we talking about physical healing? Possibly. But we are certainly talking about spiritual healing.

vs. 6 When we were like sheep wandering away, the Lord laid our sins upon Him.

It was not like we were longing to be saved and Jesus responded.

Ephesians 2:1-7 Before you ever thought about Him, He took your sins upon Himself.

IV. He suffered and died unjustly. Isaiah 53:7-9

This next section makes it clear that the Suffering Servant was completely innocent. He committed no sin!

This simply cannot be Israel. Israel whined and cried and lied and did all kinds of violence.

Jesus silently went to His slaughter, not saying a word.

He was “cut off from the land of the living” by His own intent. He knew what He was doing.

Over and over in the Gospels we read that Jesus predicted His own death.

He explained to His disciples that this was why He came... to die, the righteous for the unrighteous.

The Gospels each portray a man, lied about, falsely accused, unjustly beaten, and murdered.

Because Jesus had to be sinless in order to pay our sin price. **Hebrews 7:26-27, 9:11-14**

In verse 9, lest we wonder if we are reading about a real person, now He is buried in a grave.

This is the grave of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, who we read about in each of the gospels.

Another fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah 53.

And every step of the way Jesus could have quit. He could have said “no more.”

He could have rained fire down on His murderers. He could have called 10,000 angels.

But He didn't. He didn't because He came to die, on purpose, for you and me.

And why?

Because He was doing something that could only be done this one way... that no one else understood.

V. He was crushed so we could be justified. Isaiah 53:10-12

This final section of the song takes us through a similar pattern as did the beginning (Isaiah 52:13-15)

The Servant is crushed to justify the many and thereafter be exalted.

But the focus here is on His serving as sin-bearing substitute as He goes through all this.

In verse 10 we read that He gives Himself as a guilt offering. Again, this is Leviticus language.

The Suffering Servant is acting as both priest and sacrifice in order to pay the sin price for His people.

“He puts Himself to grief, His soul making a guilt offering.”

Why?

So that He could see His “seed” = offspring... His children. He is doing this to rescue His people.

And the Lord God will make Him prosper.

vs. 11 The Righteous One, the Suffering Servant will justify the many by bearing their sins.

vs. 12 Because of all this the Suffering Servant will be glorified.

“Because He poured out Himself to death.” **Philippians 2:3-11**

He poured Himself out for you.

He bore our sins and now He prays for us before the Father... if you trust in Him.

Charles Simeon, the great Bible expositor of the Church of England at the beginning of the 19th century, wrote, *In Passion week as I was reading "Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper," I met with an expression to this effect, that — The Jews knew what they did when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering. The thought rushed into my mind, What I may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me that I may lay all my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.*

Have you come to Jesus and laid your sins upon His head? Have you become His follower?

Do it today. Confirm it today. Be at peace with God forever.