

Unit I: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

How Do You Spell “Relief”?

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 12:14-21
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Isaiah 52:13–53:12
PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 53:1-7

KEY VERSE

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6, KJV)

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We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Investigate the role of prophetic suffering in God’s redemption.
- Mourn the ways in which Christians have “gone astray.”
- Consider how Christians are called to endure prophetic suffering today.

*Key Terms

Beauty (verse 2)—Hebrew: *toar* (to'-ar): form, appearance, shape; aesthetic qualities.

Bruised (verse 5)—Hebrew: *daka* (daw-kaw'): broke; contrite; “crushed” (NIV).

Grief (verse 3)—Hebrew: *choli* (khol-ee'): affliction; sickness; “suffering” (NIV).

Sorrows (verse 3)—Hebrew: *makob* (mak-obe'): sufferings; anguish; “pain” (NIV).

Stricken (verse 4)—Hebrew: *naga* (naw-gah'): touched; having been reached; struck; afflicted.

Stripes (verse 5)—Hebrew: *chabburah* (khab-boo-law'): blows; welts; bruises; “wounds” (NIV).

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

Introduction

In the journey through trials and triumphs, Isaiah’s portrait of the Suffering Servant speaks powerfully to the lived experience of African Americans who understand unjust suffering,



The Biblical Context

Isaiah 53 is part of what scholars call the “Servant Songs” in Isaiah (see chapters 42–53), which contain four major prophetic passages describing God’s special Servant. The passage sits within the larger context of Isaiah’s messages of both judgment and hope. Chapters 1–39 primarily contain messages of judgment, while chapters 40–66 focus more on comfort and restoration. This specific passage appears in “Second Isaiah” (see chapters 40–55), written during the Babylonian Exile period. This context helps explain why the message was so radical: it presented a Messiah who would save through suffering rather than through military or political power, contradicting widespread expectations of both Jews and Gentiles in the ancient world. The prophecy starkly contrasted with the ancient Near Eastern ideal of a powerful, majestic ruler, instead presenting a figure whose victory would come through apparent defeat.

rejection, and being widely misunderstood by society. Yet, like these sacred texts in which the ancestors found profound hope and strength, Isaiah’s prophecy reveals how God can work through suffering to accomplish His divine purposes. When the forebears sang spirituals and gathered in prayer houses, they genuinely connected with this image of a Savior who was “despised and rejected,” finding in His story both validation of their pain and hope for redemption. Amid present challenges in families, workplaces, and society, Isaiah’s words remind the hurting that the God who sees every struggle is intimately familiar with the weight of oppression and the sting of injustice. Isaiah 53 shows that God wrapped Christ’s suffering in redemptive purposes. Likewise, God gives meaning to the trials of life by transforming them into tools of testimony and transformation. These verses give hope to everyday people seeking to triumph through trials and find an intimacy with God that adversity cannot destroy.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Servant’s Identity and Appearance (*Isaiah 53:1-2*)

KJV

WHO HATH believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

NIV

WHO HAS believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

The opening verse includes two important questions highlighting the special nature of what comes next (verse 1). The prophet recognized that many people may doubt this divine message. The phrase “the arm of the LORD” is significant in Hebrew Scripture, representing God’s power and involvement in history. However, this power appears unexpectedly—through weakness and suffering rather than traditional strength. This introduction challenges us to rethink our assumptions about how God works. These questions also hint at the widespread rejection the Messiah would face, as recorded in the Gospels.

In verse 2, we encounter powerful metaphors that illustrate the Servant’s humble beginnings and ordinary appearance. The “tender plant” symbolizes vulnerability, while the “root out of a dry ground” suggests growth in unlikely circumstances. This portrayal contradicts the expectation of a glorious, warrior-like Messiah. The absence of beauty or majesty serves several important purposes: it highlights the Servant’s spiritual mission, encourages us not to judge based on appearances, and foreshadows Christ’s humble nature. This imagery connects to other prophetic references about the “Branch” from Jesse’s root.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does the Servant’s experience of rejection challenge your understanding of God’s presence in difficult circumstances?

The Depth of the Servant’s Suffering (*Isaiah 53:3-5*)

KJV

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

NIV

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Verse 3 focuses on the emotional and social aspects of the Servant’s suffering. The Hebrew text uses strong language to emphasize the intensity of rejection He faced. The term “man of

sorrows” conveys a life filled with heartache. The imagery of people hiding their faces reflects the social rejection He would endure—especially significant in a culture where honor is vital. This contrast reveals the difference between the Servant’s true worth and how humanity perceives Him.

In verse 4, we encounter a key turning point that explains the meaning of the Servant’s suffering. The Hebrew text emphasizes certainty—He indeed bore the burdens of others. The mention of physical pain and sorrow points to spiritual and physical healing, suggesting that salvation is holistic. Tragically, many misinterpret His suffering as punishment, missing its purpose of redemption. This theme resonates with the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ healing ministry and His willingness to bear human pain.

Verse 5 clearly explains substitutionary atonement in the Old Testament. The vivid Hebrew words emphasize the depth of the Servant’s suffering. The text illustrates how our wrongdoings led to His piercing and our sins led to His crushing. *Peace* (Hebrew: *shalom*) means more than just the absence of conflict; it represents complete well-being and a restored relationship with God. The healing mentioned covers both spiritual and physical restoration. This verse serves as the heart of the passage and lends more clarity regarding Christ’s redeeming work.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what ways have you seen suffering and pain be a source of transformation or healing in your community?

The Universal Impact and Response (Isaiah 53:6-7)

KJV

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

NIV

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

The text addresses humanity’s universal condition through the sheep metaphor in verse 6. This imagery holds meaning for an agricultural society, illustrating the foolishness and

helplessness of human sin. The Hebrew structure emphasizes that each person makes his or her own choices, highlighting individual responsibility and recognizing that sin affects all people. The verse begins and ends with “all,” underscoring the total scope of human sin and the divine remedy. The mention of iniquity placed upon the Lord reflects God’s initiative in salvation.

Finally, verse 7 illustrates the Servant’s response to suffering. The Hebrew text contrasts His oppression with His choice to remain silent. The lamb metaphor connects this prophecy to the sacrificial system, particularly the Passover. The focus on silence is significant—defending oneself against false accusations is crucial for maintaining honor in Middle Eastern cultures. His silence represents tremendous self-control and submission to God’s purpose, demonstrating acceptance and a willingness to fulfill His plan.

The passage speaks to contemporary social-justice issues, personal suffering, and the search for meaning in pain. It challenges modern tendencies to judge by appearances and seek worldly power. The Servant’s example provides a model for dealing with opposition and misunderstanding in an increasingly hostile world. Most importantly, it provides hope by showing that God can work through apparent defeat to accomplish His purposes.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Regarding contemporary definitions of strength and power, how does the Servant’s example challenge them?

A Closing Thought

The prophecy of Isaiah 53:1-7 is not just an ancient text or a remarkable prediction—it is a mirror that reflects the very heart of God’s love. Our understanding that these words were written seven centuries before Jesus walked the earth enables us to have a firmer grasp of the magnificent scope of God’s redemptive plan. This passage reveals a profound divine purpose that challenges everything the world teaches about power, success, and significance.

Your Life

In moments of suffering, rejection, or misunderstanding, one can find comfort in knowing that the Savior intimately understands these experiences. More than that, He purposefully embraced them for the sake of saving souls. Reading this passage can stir more profound gratitude, assertive faith, and settling recognition that the God who orchestrated this plan of salvation continues to work purposefully for His people, even when—especially when—circumstances do not seem to make sense.

Your World!

In contrast to today’s emphasis on projecting strength and success, this passage presents power through apparent weakness. This empowers Christians to lead differently in their workplaces, families, and communities—choosing servanthood over dominance, humility over self-promotion, and sacrifice over self-preservation.

Closing Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, help us to embrace the comfort and challenge of Your redemption plan through Jesus, trusting in Your purposes during suffering and reflecting Your transformative love in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Please be prepared for next week's lesson. The lesson topic for Sunday, October 5, 2025, is "Who, Me?" The Devotional Reading is Jeremiah 1:11-19, the Background Scriptures are Jeremiah 1:1-10; 6:10-11; 8:18; 9:2; 26:1-24, and the Print Passages are Jeremiah 1:6-10; 26:8-9, 12-16.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, September 29	"Passion for God's Laws"	(2 Chronicles 34:1-7)
TUESDAY, September 30	"The Piercing Word of God"	(Hebrews 4:12-16)
WEDNESDAY, October 1	"Return to the Father"	(Jeremiah 3:12-19)
THURSDAY, October 2	"Cleanse Yourselves and Be Saved"	(Jeremiah 4:5-14)
FRIDAY, October 3	"God's Discipline Proves His Love"	(Hebrews 12:3-17)
SATURDAY, October 4	"God Is a Consuming Fire"	(Hebrews 12:18-29)
SUNDAY, October 5	"A Defiant Prophet"	(Jeremiah 1:6-10; 26:8-9, 12-15)

NOTES
