

September 28, 2025

“The Servant’s Suffering”
Lesson 4

Isaiah 53:1-7

Intro

Today’s study is one of four passages in Isaiah usually called the “servant songs”: 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. They are all written in the style of Hebrew poetry. Isaiah 53:1-7, today’s lesson, is found within what is perhaps the most powerful of the servant passages noted earlier. The passage of 52:13-53:12 is quoted seven times in the NT, and referred to in more than two dozen other places. Isaiah’s style here is usually described as the “prophetic past tense.” This means that even though Isaiah was looking centuries into the future in what he was prophesying, he spoke as though they had already happened. This is a way of highlighting the certainty of the prediction.

Read Isaiah 53:1-7

1. vs. 1: The chapter opens with two questions

Who has believed our report?

To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Both of these show that the message is unusual, and likely not to be believed

The phrase “the arm of the Lord” indicates His power, might, and eternity

This is quoted twice in the NT (John 12:37-38, Rom. 10:16)

In both places, it’s used to show that people didn’t believe the message given

In John, people don’t believe despite seeing the many miracles Jesus did

In Romans, Paul is disappointed the Jews don’t believe the gospel message

2. vs. 2: The first half of the verse shows the Servant coming from humble beginnings

“A tender shoot” shows something fragile and delicate

“A root out of dry ground” indicates it is in danger of dying if not properly nourished

Both of these show the perceived weakness of the servant and his questionable origin

Nathanael says “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” about Jesus

The Pharisees are skeptical of Jesus’ origin as well (John 7:41-52)

The second half of the verse deals with the Servant’s appearance

He has “no beauty or majesty”—his looks aren’t the thing that will draw others to Him

The second phrase means the same

Hebrew poetry often repeats an idea a second time using different words

3. vs. 3: Despite an unassuming appearance, the Servant draws attention to Himself

He is to be “despised and rejected”

Jesus faced rejection from the world and from His own people—his nation and his family

John 1:10-11 describes Jesus as “the world did not recognize Him”

Crowds gathered to hear Him teach and saw Him do miracles

Yet many turned away from Him, both before and because of the crucifixion

The servant knows suffering, is familiar with pain, both physical and emotional

4. vs. 4: Here we see the reason why the Servant is familiar with pain and suffering
It is the pain and weight of our griefs and sorrows He bears
In OT times, people considered sufferings and poverty to be punishments from God
The second phrase here says “We considered Him punished by God”
Because the servant suffers, some with consider that He deserved it
This is not the case; He suffered for our sins, not anything that He did
Jesus was “stricken by (God) and afflicted”
This was God’s plan for our salvation
5. vs. 5: Now Isaiah turns to the physical punishment the Servant will endure
Again, he uses the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry
Pierced and crushed are similar, as are our transgressions and iniquities
The skeptics were right in seeing God’s punishment at work on the cross
They didn’t see that the Servant took that punishment for humanity’s sins, not His own
He finishes the verse with the result of the Servant bearing this punishment
We get to have peace and healing from our sins
This transfer is the doctrine of “substitutionary atonement”
Christ acted as a substitute on our behalf, so that we could be spiritually healed
Only the sinless Son of God could pay such a price
6. vs. 6: People here are compared to sheep, a common comparison throughout the Bible
Sheep tend to go astray; so do people
We are similar; we both prefer to go our own way instead of that of the Leader
Despite that truth, God placed our iniquities on the Servant, Jesus
The word “all” appears twice in the verse
All of us are wayward sheep, and God placed *all* our iniquities on Jesus
There is no sin, and no sinner, excluded from the grace of God through Christ
7. vs. 7: The focus of this final verse is again the suffering of the Servant
The poetry parallels are here again also
He is like a lamb and a sheep, and twice he “did not open His mouth”
Jesus is compared to a sacrificial lamb in the OT offerings
He is also silent, not crying out in anger or vowing revenge on his enemies
Jesus spoke frequently during His ministry, but here the purpose is different
He is going to the sacrifice willingly; he is not trying to stop it

Application: This lesson marks the end of this month’s lessons on Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple. Isaiah was a prophet who proclaimed God’s message to His people at the time, and foretold other events which told God’s plans for the future. The most significant and impactful of these plans was that of the suffering Servant, who would bear the sins of all. Isaiah saw God’s glory in lesson 1 (chapter 6). He foretells of Jesus’ actions which bring Him glory because of the cross. The cross was an object of disgust in Jesus’ day. God used it to bring glory from something that was formerly shameful. This is what He does for us and in us daily.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the words of Isaiah 53. Saying “thank You” for what Jesus did on the cross seems inadequate. Help us to offer ourselves in gratitude to serve You, to be representatives of Jesus wherever we are, and whenever You choose to call us or use us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.