

Lesson 26
Isaiah 52:13 – 54:17
The Gracious Son of God, a Suffering Servant (Part 2)

Memory verse: “Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3 NIV).

Isaiah Chapters 52:13 to 53:12 is the fourth and most famous Servant Song. “These five matchless stanzas of the fourth Servant poem are the Mount Everest of messianic prophecy.” So wrote Old Testament scholar Dr. Kyle M. Yates over fifty years ago, and his words still stand. This passage is at the heart of chapters 49—57 and its message is at the heart of the gospel. Like Mount Everest, Isaiah 53 stands out in beauty and grandeur, but only because it reveals Jesus Christ and takes us to Mount Calvary.

The messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was held by Jewish rabbis till the twelfth century. After that, Jewish scholars started interpreting the passage as a description of the sufferings of the nation of Israel. But how could Israel die for the sins of Israel (v. 8)? And who declared that Israel was innocent of sin and therefore had suffered unjustly (v. 9)? No, the prophet wrote about an innocent individual, not a guilty nation. He made it crystal clear that this individual died for the sins of the guilty so that the guilty might go free.

The Servant that Isaiah describes is the Messiah, and the New Testament affirms that this Servant-Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:27–40; 1 Peter 2:21–24). Isaiah 53 is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament more frequently than any other Old Testament chapter.

"The profoundest thoughts in the Old Testament revelation are to be found in this section. It is a vindication of the Servant, so clear and so true, and wrought out with such a pathos and potency, that it holds first place in Messianic prophecy." - Robinson

The reader of the promises that God would redeem His people with His mighty arm (cf. 50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10) could reasonably expect that redemption to come with a great display of overwhelming power. But the careful reader of the previous Servant Songs has picked up some hints that the Servant would not fit the mould of the traditional action hero. In this passage, Isaiah filled out the previously sketchy picture of the Servant with more detail concerning His work, character, and nature. God's greatest power is evident in His ability to return love and forgiveness for hatred and injustice, not in His ability to crush all opposition.

This Song consists of five stanzas of three verses each. The first and last stanzas record God's commendation of the Servant, and the middle three describe the Servant's commitment to God's will. The central one focuses on His substitute death. Two key contrasts mark the passage: the contrast between the Servant's humiliation and His exaltation, and the contrast between the reader's expectations of the Servant and reality.

Then in chapter 54 we have the image of Jehovah, the faithful husband, forgiving Israel, the unfaithful wife, and restoring her to the place of blessing. Isaiah has used the marriage image before (50:1–3) and will use it again (62:4). Jeremiah also used it (Jer. 3:8), and it is an important theme in both Hosea (chap. 2) and Ezekiel (chaps. 16 and 23). The nation was “married” to Jehovah at Mount Sinai, but she committed adultery by turning to other gods, and the Lord had to abandon her temporarily. However, the prophets promise that Israel will be restored when Messiah comes and establishes His kingdom

In these chapters you see God's love for His people and He can dispose of His righteous anger quickly, and He delights to bless His people. What a wonderful Saviour!

Scripture reading: Isaiah Chapter: Is.52:13-15; Is.53; Is.54:4-8

Things to learn: 1) The Servant Exalted 2) The Suffering Servant 3) The Restoring Servant

Discussion Questions:

Q1. The people did not admire or desire the Servant in Is. 52:2-3. Who is this Servant that the Lord exalted in Is. 52:13 to 15 and why were people appalled (NIV) or astonished (NKJV) with this person?

Q2. Isaiah 53 tells us about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Discuss in the following order, how much it can tell you about the Saviour of the world: Verse 1 to 3; 4 to 6; 7 to 9 and 10 to 12.

Q3. In Chapter 54, Isaiah expresses joy and confidence in the Servant on the restoration of Israel. Why is it so for the nation of Israel and will this be applicable to the church?