

# God Justifies

The one true God is forgiving; He justifies believers by taking their sin on Himself.

## ISAIAH 53:1-12



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...by the off  
...all men t  
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...made sinners, so by the  
...many be made righteo  
...and entails either that Adam was  
...ace and acted on behalf of us all, o  
...riminal head of the race and we were s  
5:13-14 These verses support the second  
for verse 12 (see note there). Sin "reigi  
manity before the giving of the law ev  
sinned in the way Adam sinned. Adam's  
deliberate act that plunged the huma  
and spiritual death. All humans, inc  
fants and young children who are incap  
and wrong and thus are not deliberate  
death's domain. All people now are b  
(Eph. 2:1-3). Adam's sin had this broa  
was a type (Gk *typos*) or prefiguration of  
was to come, and represented all of hu  
would do on the cross.  
5:15-16 The works of Adam and Jesus  
but drastically different effect. One o  
manity into ruin, but God gave the gift t  
cation in spite of our many sins. What

**How do you celebrate the sacrifice others have made for you?  
How does their sacrifice impact you today?**

We honor parents who work multiple jobs to provide a brighter future for their children. We place the names of public servants who died while on duty on bridges and buildings. We commemorate the sacrifice paid by soldiers who fought and died in battle. Most of us willfully celebrate the sacrifices made by a person for the benefit of others. Isaiah told of a Servant who would come for the purpose of paying for our sin so that we could have peace with God. Through faith in the sacrificing Servant, we find forgiveness and restoration.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Isaiah delivered a message of hope and encouragement that focused on God's deliverance of His people. He began with an exhortation for the faithful to remember how God used Abraham and his barren wife Sarah to do what appeared impossible and bring forth the nation of Israel in fulfillment of His promise to them. In the same way, God promised the people in Isaiah's day that He would restore the ruins of Jerusalem and fill it once again with joy, thanksgiving, and melodious song. God's salvation would also extend to the nations (Isa. 51:1–52:12).

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 contains the last of the four Servant Songs in Isaiah. This song elaborates on the themes of the Servant's suffering and vindication, providing a detailed description of the Messiah's suffering. Isaiah begins with a promise of His ultimate triumph, as He will cleanse many people. In spite of this, the song reveals the people of God would reject the Servant because of His humble beginnings

and unimpressive appearance. When the Servant suffered, the people would think God was inflicting judgment on Him because of His own sins. In truth, He would be suffering for their benefit as their substitute, bearing God's judgment for their sins and paying the price for their sins. Nevertheless, the Servant of the Lord would rise again to see the reward of His sacrifice.

Because of the Servant, Jerusalem had a bright future. God would protect it and bless it with beauty, peace, and righteousness (54:1–15). The Lord desired an eternal covenant with the nation like the one He made with David. If the people would seek the Lord and turn from their wicked ways, He would compassionately forgive their sins. On the contrary, judgment awaited those who opposed God and persecuted His people. Only those who repent and turn to God, whether Israelite or foreigner, would be part of this future community of faith (55:1–57:21).

# ISAIAH 53:1-12

**1** Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been **revealed** **A**? **2** He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was **despised and rejected** **B** by men, a man of suffering who **knew what sickness was** **C**. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him. **4** Yet he himself **bore our sicknesses** **D**, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, **struck down** **E** by God, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are **healed by his wounds** **F**. **6** We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. **8** He was taken away because of oppression and judgment; and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion. **9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully. **10** Yet the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his **seed** **G**, he will **prolong his days** **H**, and by his hand, the LORD's pleasure will be accomplished. **11** After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities. **12** Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and he will receive the mighty as spoil, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

## Passage Outline

- Despised (Isa. 53:1-3)
- Substitute (Isa. 53:4-6)
- Willing (Isa. 53:7-9)
- Sacrificed (Isa. 53:10-12)

## Key Words

- A. "Who could have seen the Lord's hand in this?" (GNT)
- B. Despising the Lord means breaking covenant with Him (Ezek. 16:59).
- C. The Servant was "familiar with pain" (NIV) and "acquainted with deepest grief" (NLT).
- D. The scapegoat bore the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:22); the Lord takes away sin (Num. 14:18).
- E. "A punishment from God" (NLT). Moses was to strike the water so that it became blood (Ex. 7:17); David struck Goliath with a rock (1 Sam. 17:49).
- F. "Made whole by the blows he received" (GNT).
- G. Meaning Jesus' posterity—those who become children of God through Him
- H. This foreshadows Jesus' resurrection to unending life.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Isaiah was articulating the general unbelief in the world and in Israel in particular concerning the revelation of the Servant. This Servant of whom Isaiah spoke is Jesus. Isaiah spoke of the future in the past tense. The New Testament clearly teaches Jesus is the fulfillment of this song. In verse 3 Isaiah described how people viewed the Servant. They wanted nothing to do with Him and abandoned Him. Many considered Him contemptible and disgusting and consequently rejected Him.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to in 41 verses in the New Testament. New Testament writers identified the servant of Isaiah 53 as Jesus of Nazareth. (See, for example, Acts 8:30-35.)

Verses 4-6 are central to the song. They focus on how the Servant offered Himself as a substitute for others by taking the full penalty of God's judgment of their sin on Himself. The Servant did not become sinful like us but suffered the punishment we deserve.

**KEY DOCTRINE: God the Son**  
Jesus honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

**What single phrase stands out to you the most in verses 4-6? Explain.**

Even though He was mistreated with physical violence, Isaiah emphasized the Servant

quietly and willingly submitted Himself to His antagonists. He not only felt the excruciating physical pain of it all, but before and during what He experienced He fully understood and experienced the emotional and mental anguish of it.

**How does the willingness of the Servant demonstrate His love for people?**

**How does it demonstrate His love for the Father?**

Verse 10 reveals God Himself not only caused the Servant to suffer but was the One who inflicted the suffering on the Servant. What the Servant accomplished was exactly what needed to be done to make restitution to God for our sins. Isaiah revealed the Servant would live again and see the rewards of His accomplishment—many spiritual children and God's pleasure.

**How does the cost paid by Jesus to secure salvation for all who place faith in Him support the idea that there is no other way to the Father? How does what the Servant did for you strengthen your love and commitment to Him?**

This Servant Song concludes with God's declaration that He would honor and reward the Servant when He accomplished the work of salvation.

**What impact should knowing that the Servant intercedes for those He has saved have on believers?**

# APPLY THE TEXT

- The Servant faced rejection to secure our salvation.
- The Servant bore our sin, taking the judgment in our place.
- The Servant willingly paid the price for our sin.
- The Servant provides salvation to all who accept His sacrifice.

**Memorize Isaiah 53:5. Compare various translations to gain a deeper understanding of each phrase. How is this verse central to understanding the gospel?**

**Share about your spiritual pilgrimage. How did you come to know of your need for a Savior? What was your response to Jesus' offer of salvation? With whom can you share your story?**

**If you have not trusted Jesus, review the information on the inside front cover and visit with your Bible study leader.**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Jesus was sinless, but identified with sinners.

**Read Isaiah 53:1-3, considering what it means for Jesus to face rejection.**

In Hebrew, a *young plant* refers to a shoot that grew and was usually cut off from the roots of an established tree. It may be a reference to Isaiah 11:10 that speaks of the Messiah coming from the “root of Jesse” and was thus a descendant of David. In the context, it points to His unimpressive appearance. The description, *a root out of dry ground*, emphasizes His frail appearance, His poor family background, and His struggles. The Servant did not fit the stereotype of a savior for His people. Pain and suffering were distinctive characteristics of His life, and it was so bad that people did not want to look at Him. *Sickness* refers to the consequences of sin as made clear in verse 4. Therefore, the Servant knew what it is like to live in a fallen world. The gospels speak of these things. Jesus was sinless but pitched His tent among us (John 1:14). He identified with sinners. He knew what it was to live in a fallen world. His people rejected Him (John 1:11-13) and His family thought He was out of His mind (Mark 3:21). When soldiers arrested Jesus, His disciples deserted Him (Mark 14:50), and one of His inner circle publicly denied Him (John 18:15-18,25-27). On top of all these rejections was the ongoing hostility of the political and religious leaders of His day, along with the fickle crowds.

**How does knowing the Servant faced being despised and rejected comfort you?**

## Day 2: Jesus suffered the punishment we deserve.

**Read Isaiah 53:4-6, noticing the great burden Jesus took on.**

The Servant was *pierced*, a verb used in the context of someone being killed. *Crushed* refers to oppression or a crushing that is fatal. *Punishment* refers to discipline or corrective reproof. *Wounds* refers to open bruises. Jesus incurred these from His beating (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1). The Servant endured all of these things because of our *rebellion* and *iniquities* against God. As our substitute, the Servant bore the punishment we deserve. The Servant suffered these things for *our peace* and healing. Because of our sins, God was not at peace with us. However, through His vicarious punishment, the Servant secured our peace with God. In addition to this, the Servant’s wounds healed us in that by His suffering, our relationship with God was restored and we are made whole. The phrase *we all have turned* points out the willfulness of our sin. There was nothing accidental about it. We chose to go our own way. Even so, the Lord *punished* His Servant *for the iniquity of us all*. The Servant did not become sinful like us but suffered the punishment we deserve.

**What single phrase stands out to you the most in verses 4-6? Explain.**

## Day 3: Jesus willingly submitted Himself.

**Read Isaiah 53:7-9, underlining verse 7.**

Even though He was mistreated with physical violence, like sheep going to *slaughter* or to the *shearers*, Isaiah emphasized the Servant quietly and willingly submitted Himself to His antagonists. Sheep do not realize what is about to happen to them, but the Servant knew and submitted to everything that was going to happen to Him. He not only felt the excruciating physical pain of it all, but before and during what He experienced He fully understood and experienced the emotional and mental anguish of it. *For he was cut off from the land of the living* means He died. The word *pierced* in verse 5 indicates His enemies killed Him. Why did the Servant submit to this death? Isaiah wanted everyone to understand the Servant died as a substitute for the transgressions of His people. Verse 9 speaks of the Servant's burial. His executioners dishonored and disgraced Him by treating Him like a criminal. Nevertheless, the Servant was given an honorable burial after His dishonorable death. Matthew is the only one to mention that Joseph of Arimathaea was *rich* (Matt. 27:57). Jesus' body would have most likely been buried along with the bodies of the two criminals who died alongside Him. However, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus ensured Jesus received an honorable burial (John 19:31-39).

**How does the willingness of the Servant demonstrate His love for people?**

**How does it demonstrate His love for the Father?**

## Day 4: Jesus was our substitution.

**Read Isaiah 53:10-11, understanding that it was God's plan for Jesus to die for our sins.**

The Servant was the only sacrifice acceptable to God, and the Servant's suffering and death provided the necessary sacrifice for salvation. A *guilt offering* was about restitution, paying what needed to be paid for an offense. What the Servant accomplished was exactly what needed to be done to make restitution to God for our sins. Isaiah revealed the Servant would live again and see the rewards of His accomplishment—many spiritual children and God's pleasure. The Servant would know exactly what He needed to do to *justify many*. He would bear their sins so they might stand righteous before God. Everything is dependent on the righteous Servant's substitutionary work and the faith of those who believe in Him.

**BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary to examine a term.** Review articles about substitutionary atonement in a Bible dictionary. Read the Bible passages included in the article. How do the passages examined give you deeper understanding into Isaiah 53? Write a summary statement of how you would explain Jesus' substitutionary atonement.

**How does what the Servant did for you strengthen your love and commitment to Him?**

## Day 5: Jesus intercedes for us.

**Read Isaiah 53:12, noting God's promise to Jesus.**

Having defeated sin and death, the Servant would enjoy the spoils of war because He *willingly submitted to death*. Jesus said, “This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own” (John 10:17-18a). Additionally, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of being *counted among the rebels* when He was crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27; Luke 22:37). God promised to exalt the Servant because of His willingness to bear *the sin of many*, and now as their mediator He intercedes for them to God (Rom. 8:34).

**As a believer, what impact should knowing that the Servant intercedes for those He has saved have on you?**



## TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Isaiah 53, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

**For what reasons or purpose did the Servant suffer?**

**How does the Servant model what willful service to God looks like?**

**What does it mean to be justified? Explain its significance to the Christian faith.**



For additional context, read “The Early Church’s Use of Isaiah 53,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Fall 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.