

Isaiah 53:4-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/isa/isa-53/isaiah-534-6/>

Isaiah prophesies that the Messiah will bear our griefs and sorrows. People will wrongly think that God is punishing Him for His wickedness, but in reality He will be punished for our sins. And we will be healed by His punishment.

This Messianic prophecy is commonly known as the Suffering Servant prophecy.

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 is commonly referred to as “The Suffering Servant” prophecy. This description is derived from the suffering the passage foretells will fall upon the Messiah, who is described by the LORD as “My Servant” (Isaiah 52:13; 53:11).

It is an unbelievable and deeply ironic prophecy concerning the Messiah and *His* people. The reasons this prophecy is so unbelievable and ironic are because it defies the people’s deeply held expectations of the Messiah and themselves. Instead of predicting the Messiah’s final victory, omnipotent reign, and eternal glory, it predicts *His* humiliating defeat, surrender to death, and the scorn of men. Moreover, it predicts that the very people who prayerfully await *His* coming and victory will be same people who will despise, forsake, and kill *Him*. It is unbelievable because it is hard to reconcile the reality of these vastly different scenarios. Nevertheless, both are true.

Isaiah prophesies this by using a tense called “the prophetic past,” which speaks of future events as though they have already occurred.

In the previous sections (Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:1-3) the prophet foretold eleven things about the Messiah. He prophesied how the Messiah *was*:

1. Exalted and Lifted Up (Isaiah 52:13)
2. Would Sprinkle the Nations—Atone the Gentiles (Isaiah 52:15a)
3. Be Accepted by the Gentiles—despite never being told about Him (Isaiah 52:15b)
4. Physically Unattractive—*He* would not have an appearance that would draw people to *Himself* (Isaiah 52:14; 53:2b)
5. Not Believed—No one would believe *His* message (Isaiah 53:1a)
6. Unrecognized—No one would know who *He* was (Isaiah 53:1b)
7. Unremarkable—*He* would hold no titles nor have any majesty (Isaiah 53:2a)
8. Despised—*He* would be strongly disliked by the people *He* came to rescue (Isaiah 53:3).
9. Forsaken of men—*He* would be abandoned and avoided; people would be embarrassed to be affiliated with *Him* (Isaiah 53:3a)
10. Full of Sorrows and Grief—*He* would suffer hardships, physical pain, and emotional anguish (Isaiah 53:3b)
11. Misunderstood—People would fail to see *His* worthiness and perceive *Him* as worthless (Isaiah 53:3b).

In this passage, Isaiah pivots to describing things that this much doubted, unrecognized, unremarkable, unattractive, despised, forsaken, sorrowful, grief-stricken, and misunderstood Messiah will do for us,

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried.*

The first thing the Messiah will do for us is to *bear our griefs*.

The word that is used for *griefs* in this verse is the same word that was used in the previous verse when speaking of the Messiah's *griefs*: כְּחֹלִי—pronounced “khol-ee” (H2470). The English word, “melancholy” derives from “khol-ee.” It means to be sick with sadness and emotional anguish.

Not only will the Messiah be familiar with *griefs* of *His* own (Isaiah 53:3), *He* will also bear *our griefs*. Because *He* takes on other people's *griefs*, *He* is very well “acquainted with griefs” (Isaiah 53:3).

To bear something in this context means to take it upon oneself as a pack or load. The image is of packing something upon a servant's back for him to carry. The servant will bear the weight of it. In this case, Israel's *griefs* will be packed upon the shoulders of the Messiah to bear.

Israel's *griefs* include her sin and the grievous consequences of her disobedience. These griefs that Jesus will bear include being forsaken *of God*, and spiritual death (Matthew 27:46; Romans 6:23a). The Messiah will bear these terrible *griefs* for Israel. Because Jesus bears these griefs, all who believe in Him can lay these griefs upon Him (1 Peter 5:7).

The Messiah will also carry *our sorrows*. The Hebrew word that is translated as *sorrows* is the same word that was used when Isaiah described the Messiah as a “man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) It is a form of the word, מְכָאֵב—pronounced “mak-obe” (H3510). It refers to difficulties, and pain—both physical and mental. He will receive the brutality of man's wrath and the full fury of God's wrath upon sin. The Messiah will suffer the pain we deserve. Jesus will suffer and die in our place.

Jesus, the Messiah, *bore our griefs and carried our sorrow Himself*:

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf...”
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

“Christ [was] offered once to bear the sins of many.”
(Hebrews 9:28)

Matthew cites this prophecy from Isaiah as being fulfilled when Jesus began healing people of their diseases and exorcising their demons (Matthew 8:16-17).

But despite the Messiah bearing our griefs and sorrows for us Himself, Isaiah prophesies that *we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted*.

Stricken means to be hit suddenly by a powerful force. *Smitten* means to be severely punished or scourged. To be *smitten of God* means to be punished by *God Himself*. *Afflicted* means “to be punished harshly,” “humiliated,” or “brought low.” In the opinion of men, all three things will be true of the unrecognized Messiah.

There is a double irony in this prophecy.

The first irony is that even though the Messiah will be righteous according to *God's* perfect estimation, in *our* shoddy estimation *we* will esteem *Him* as unrighteous. When *we* see *Him* being *stricken, smitten, and afflicted*, *we*

will incorrectly think *God* is punishing *Him* deservedly for *His* wickedness; when in reality, *He* is entirely innocent and undeserving of these things. He is “the Righteous One” (Isaiah 53:11).

The second irony is silently embedded in our presupposition about ourselves. *We* wrongly assume that *we* are undeserving of being *stricken, smitten of God, or afflicted* for our sins. We incorrectly esteem ourselves as being righteous, when in reality we are full of transgressions and iniquities. *We* are the ones deserving of God’s wrath that was poured out upon the Messiah even as *we* judge the innocent Messiah as wicked.

Our estimation of the Messiah and of ourselves are wrong on both accounts:

- The Messiah is not unrighteous; *He* is righteous (1 Corinthians 1:30).
- *We* are not righteous; *We* are unrighteous (Romans 3:23).

The very reason the Messiah *was afflicted and smitten of God, was* because *He* took the penalty of sin that was upon us, upon *Himself* (Isaiah 53:11). This is the main way *He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows*. And again, *we* did not recognize that *He* was doing this remarkable thing for *us*. We jeered and hated *Him* and rejoiced in *His* suffering as though *He* was getting what *He* deserved.

God brought Jesus, the Messiah, very low, so low that *He* was emptied of all *His* glory. And *He* allowed *Him* to be publicly executed on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8). In the eyes of men nothing could be more humiliating. But because Christ was faithful to *His* Father while *He* was *stricken, smitten, and afflicted*, *God* will exalt *Him* above every other name (Philippians 2:9-11).

The final verse of this prophecy says because the Messiah endured these sufferings on behalf of the many, the LORD will “allot Him a portion with the great” (Isaiah 53:12). Amazingly, believers who are willing to serve as *He* served can share that *great* reward (Romans 8:17b).

But even as the Messiah was ridiculed as a sinner, smitten of God, He was in reality: pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

Here Isaiah explicitly prophesied that the Messiah would suffer *for our transgressions and iniquities*. The reason the Messiah would suffer was because of Israel’s sin. We now know that Jesus actually suffered for the sins not only of Israel, but on behalf of the entire world (John 3:16).

This line of prophesy, *He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities*; asserts that the *griefs*, sorrow, and burdens the Messiah will carry on our behalf has to do with *our transgressions*, meaning our sin against God. And it indicates that *He* will suffer the punishment that we deserve so that *we* won’t have to suffer them.

Peter says of Jesus, the Messiah: *He* “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

It is possible that the “Plank-eye effect” taught by Jesus, the Messiah, on the Sermon the Mount is part of the reason the Messiah will be so hated. It is easier to see sin in other people, than it is to see sin in ourselves. *We* are quick to see the speck of sin in *our* brother’s eye and hate his sin, and we miss seeing the log of sin within *our* own eye (Matthew 7:3).

Of course, Jesus was sinless (1 John 3:5).

But in an astonishing twist, the men of Israel will see in *Him*, the sinless and perfectly innocent Messiah, all of their own sins. And they will hate *Him* for it. They will hate the sin they see. But they won’t recognize their *transgressions* as their own. They will blame and accuse *Him* of being guilty of the sins they themselves committed.

As God made *Him* who knew no sin to become sin on *our* behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21), the men of Israel will wrongly despise and hate *Him* for it even as they wrongly perceive themselves to be guiltless.

And as the Messiah is going through severe *chastening* and *scourging* and being *afflicted* and *stricken*, and *pierced*, and *crushed for our sins*, we will deem *Him* punished by *God*. We will see *Him* as the embodiment of sin—but the sin won't be His. It will be *our transgressions*.

Isaiah adds:

*The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.*

Chastening means corrective discipline. *Chastening* has the purpose of instructing the offender that his actions were hurtful with the hope that he will learn from the pain and do better in the future. For modern societies of Western Civilization, *chastening* in the criminal justice system can mean restitution, a prison sentence or a fine. For the ancient world, corporal punishment, such as a *scourging*, was more typical.

What normally happens when a law breaker is arrested and found guilty is that they face some sort of *chastening*. The law breaker then has an opportunity to learn from his chastisement, and become a better person. A deterrent effect is also intended.

It is not normal, or just, for an innocent person to be chastised. And it is even stranger for an innocent person to be chastised in the place of the guilty while the guilty go free. One would expect such injustices to seed further wickedness and sow greater corruption. However, in the case of Jesus, He bore the sins of the world that all might be reconciled in Him (Colossians 1:19-20).

Scourging means whipping. It is a bloody and extremely painful form of corporal punishment. Scourging tears open a person's back. When we match this prophecy with that of Isaiah 50:6 and Isaiah 53:10, we see that the Messiah willingly allowed Himself to be scourged.

"I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."
(Isaiah 50:6)

"...He would render Himself as a guilt offering..."
(Isaiah 53:10)

Scourging creates *wounds*. It mutilates a healthy back into a bloody mess. Normally, *scourging* takes away health. It is not normal for a *scourging* to bring healing. And yet, Isaiah's prophecies go against the normal patterns and defy these expectations.

He prophesies how the Messiah will be punished for our sins, and we will be *healed* from His *scourging*. The punishment and chastisement that we richly deserved *fell upon* the Messiah instead of *us*. But despite not being chastised for our wrongdoing, we somehow do not lose the opportunity to morally improve and prosper. The Messiah's suffering becomes our good. Our mortal wounds (of sin) *are healed by His scourging*.

This prophecy hints how: the Messiah's death becomes our life (1 Peter 2:24); and His righteousness becomes our righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is remarkably merciful and gracious.

There are several specific fulfillments to this portion of Isaiah's prophecy in the life of Jesus.

The first specific fulfillment of Jesus being *pierced through for our transgressions* is that Jesus the Messiah's hands were *pierced* when *He* was nailed to the cross (John 20:25-26). Another is that *His* body was *pierced* by the Roman soldier overseeing *His* crucifixion after *He* died (John 19:34).

A second specific fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy is that by *His scourging we are healed*; Jesus the Messiah was, in fact, *scourged*. Jesus *was scourged* and flogged with a whip by the Romans (John 19:1).

The Apostle Peter cites this prophecy as having been fulfilled when he explains how Jesus's suffering and death brought us life and healing:

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

(1 Peter 2:24)

There is also an interesting connection between this Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53, the Last Supper, and the element of Unleavened Bread eaten at Passover.

As *He* celebrated *His* last Passover with *His* disciples, Jesus, the Messiah took the unleavened bread, broke it, and told them it represented *His* body which was broken for them (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

In Hebrew, unleavened bread is called "matzah." According to tradition, it must be made "pierced and striped" to prevent it from being puffed up with leaven. The way unleavened bread is traditionally made aligns with Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would be *pierced through for our transgressions and by His scourging* (literally "stripes") *we are healed*.

Moreover, Deuteronomy 16:1 refers to the unleavened bread as "the bread of affliction," further associating it with the Messiah and how *He* was *afflicted*.

Scourging typically causes bleeding, as do other actions such as being *pierced* or *crushed*, which Isaiah prophesies will happen to the Messiah. Earlier in this song, Isaiah prophesied, "Thus He will sprinkle many nations" (Isaiah 52:15). An important action within the sacrificial ceremonies for atonement involved sprinkling with blood (Leviticus 16:14-15, 19). The word "sprinkle" is also used in the priestly ceremony that pronounces someone clean and healed from leprosy (Leviticus 14:7). To sprinkle many nations [Gentiles] means to atone or pronounce many nations whole.

The Messiah will sprinkle us with *His* own blood. *He* will offer Himself as *His* own sacrifice on our behalf (Isaiah 53:10). *And by His scourging we* [Jews and Gentiles] *are healed*.

Biblical Text

**⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.**

**⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.**