



The Cross of Jesus

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

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We believe Jesus Christ assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived many centuries before the time of Jesus. He wrote this passage as a foreshadowing of Jesus and the events of the cross. This study will unpack Isaiah's prophetic details about the life and death of Jesus -- and the significance for us today.

1. Read aloud [Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12](#), slowly and carefully. Consider how this passage offers us a portrait of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. What phrases and details seem to foretell the actual events surrounding the death of Jesus? What does it tell you about the cross and its meaning if this passage actually does interpret the event long before it happened?
2. The song contains five stanzas, each containing three verses. Give a title to each stanza that helps you recall what is said in those verses. How do these stanzas relate to one another? What does this tell you about the structure of the passage?
 - Isaiah 52:13-15
 - Isaiah 53:1-3
 - Isaiah 53:4-6
 - Isaiah 53:7-9
 - Isaiah 53:10-12
3. Look at the first stanza (vv. 52:13-15) and the last stanza (vv. 53:10-12) about the exaltation of the Servant. What do you learn about his exaltation from these verses? How does the final stanza answer an enigma raised in the first stanza?
4. The second stanza (vv. 53:1-3) and fourth stanza (vv. 53:7-9) both offer physical descriptions of the Servant. Focus especially on 53:7-9 and consider the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. What striking parallels can you identify?
5. How does the description of the Servant in vv. 53:1-3 compare to the common visual representations of Jesus you see today in movies or Bible story books? The New Testament doesn't offer any physical description of Jesus, yet Isaiah described the Servant (Jesus) who "had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." If this is so, what did attract men and women to the Lord Jesus?
6. The focus of the Song of the Suffering Servant is the central stanza (vv. 53:4-6).
 - What do you learn about the suffering and death of the Servant from these verses? Why does he suffer? For whom does he suffer?
 - How does this central stanza act as a hinge to hold together the whole Song of the Servant?

7. Compare this stanza to v. 53:10. What is the relationship of the LORD to the suffering of the Servant? Who ultimately brings this suffering upon the Servant?
 - What is a “sin offering?” (To understand this term, see [Leviticus 4](#) where the LORD ordained the “sin offering” for his people.)
8. Review the whole passage and note each place that mentions the Servant suffering and dying in the place of sinners. How many times is this foundational idea expressed? What does this tell you about the importance of “substitution” in understanding the cross of Jesus?
9. Take time together to offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus, God’s Servant, who suffered for your sins. Conclude by reading [Isaiah 53:4-6](#) in unison.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

- Think about these New Testament events in light of the Song of the Servant. How does this deepen your understanding and appreciation of Jesus’ death? How does this deepen your love and devotion to Jesus?
- Read Isaiah 53:4-6 again silently and substitute your name for “*our*.” (For example, “Surely he took up *Tom’s* pain and bore *Tom’s* suffering. . .” or “. . . and the LORD has laid on him *Tom’s* iniquity.”) Does such a reading express what you desire to be true for you?

GOING DEEPER

- The Song of the Servant gives an important perspective for understanding many of the events and sayings of Jesus. What experiences in the life of Jesus do you see foretold by Isaiah? Review these four events in particular:
 - Jesus predicts his death in [Matthew 20:17-28](#) and summarizes his mission in v. 28.
 - Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples at the Last Supper in [Matthew 26:26-30](#).
 - Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane about his suffering in [Matthew 26:36-45](#).
 - Jesus cries out from the cross in agony and abandonment in [Matthew 27:45-54](#).
- The Song of the Servant is also important background to the teaching of New Testament epistles about the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death. Consider how Isaiah’s writings illuminate and clarify these passages:
 - [Acts 8:26-40](#) (This passage clearly states that Isaiah 53 speaks of Jesus.)
 - [Romans 5:6-11](#)
 - [1 Peter 2:21-25](#)
 - [Revelation 5:1-14](#)

TOOLS FOR FURTHER GROWTH

John R. W. Stott, [*The Cross of Christ*](#) (InterVarsity Press, 2006). Perhaps the finest of John Stott's wide-ranging corpus, this work considers not only the foundational teaching about the cross as a work of atonement, but also its claim on our lives as disciples, as faithful members of the church, and as worshippers. This is a classic, which means, *"Sell your shirt to buy this book!"*

James I. Packer, [*"The Logic of Penal Substitution,"*](#) The Biblical Theology Tyndale Lecture, 1973. This thought-provoking article addresses the basic question, "What did the cross achieve?"

Alan Spence, [*The Promise of Peace: A Unified Theory of the Atonement*](#) (T&T Clark, 2006). Some argue that the traditional view that Jesus was crucified for our sins is repugnant, arrogant and manipulative. What is God's rationality for the atonement? Is it a mystery, or is there redemptive logic for his eternal purpose of reconciliation through the cross of Jesus?