EBS7 Isa 53

**Lesson 7: Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

**The Suffering Servant**

**Objectives:**

1. The student will understand how the passage about the suffering servant fits within the context of Isa 40-55.
2. The student will understand the teaching of the passage about the suffering servant.
3. The student will understand how the New Testament uses Isa 52:13-53:12.

**Preparation:**

1. Review the two major divisions of Isaiah 40-55:
   1. In Isa 40-47 the prophet seeks to remove the idols of Babylon from Israelite thinking and theology.
   2. Since many resist, Isa 48 represents a turning point from a focus on all the Israelites in exile to the group called Zion that is willing to return.
   3. In Isa 49-55 the prophet centers on leading Israel out of Babylon. The servant leader plays an increasingly important role.
2. Review the structure of Isa 49-55. In Isa 49-55 Isaiah tends to alternate between addressing the servant and talking with Zion:
   1. 49:1-13—servant
   2. 49:14-50:3—Zion
   3. 50:4-9—servant
   4. 50:10-52:12—Zion
   5. 52:13-53:12—servant
   6. 54-55—Zion

**Theme: The God of hope and history sends a servant.**

**Background:**

1. This section includes one of the four traditionally identified servant songs.
   1. The four are:
      1. Isa 42:1-9
      2. Isa 49:1-12
      3. Isa 50:4-9
      4. Isa 52:13-53:12
   2. The word servant appears in these passages: Isa 41:8f; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1f, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 5ff; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; 63:11.
   3. Key texts about the servant include:
      1. Isa 41:8 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; 9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"
      2. Isa 42:1 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. 5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:
      3. Isa 42:19 Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD?
      4. Isa 43:10 You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.
      5. Isa 44:1 But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! 2 Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun [poetic name for Israel] whom I have chosen.
      6. Isa 44:21 Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
      7. Isa 44:26 who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins."
      8. Isa 45:4 For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me.
      9. Isa 48:20 Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!"
      10. Isa 49:1-6 Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. 2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. 3 And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." 4 But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God.” 5 And now the LORD says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength -- 6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
      11. Isa 50:4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6 I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7 The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; 8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9 It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. [“servant” not used]
   4. The word servant is used in different ways.
      1. God called Israel as a nation to be his servant in a generic sense.
      2. God called Israel to a particular task as his servant which they generally rejected.
      3. God used an individual Israelite, perhaps an ideal Israelite, to play a critical role in leading his people to Jerusalem.
      4. Jesus used the servant image in his preaching as a model for himself and a calling for his followers.
      5. Jesus by being a servant that suffered and died ideally fulfilled all that Isaiah writes about the servant.
2. Outline of Isa 52:13-53:12 with speakers and general context:
   1. **God Speaks—Announcement of the Exaltatio**n: 52:13 See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. 14 Just as there were many who were astonished at him-- so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals-- 15 so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.
   2. **People Speak—Report on Suffering and Exaltation**: 53:1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. 4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. 9 They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. 11a Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
   3. **God Speaks—Divine oracle about the servant:** 53:11b The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.
3. Appearance of the word servant in Isa 52:13-53:12.
   1. Opens and closes with reference to “my servant.”
   2. 52:13 See, my servant shall prosper….
   3. 53:11b The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous….
4. Form
   1. This passage is similar to the lament material found in the book of Psalms. It is often associated with an individual psalm of thanksgiving or lament except that it is offered by a bystander not the sufferer himself.
   2. Others argue that this is a unique form found nowhere else in the Bible
5. Roles in Isa 52:13-53:12

Verse Servant’s Role People’s Role or Quality

4 He has borne our infirmities

4 He carried our sorrows

5 He was wounded our transgressions

5 He was crushed our inequities

5 His punishment made us whole

5 His bruises we are healed

6 Laid on him iniquity of us all

**Learning Experiences:**

1. God speaks—Isa 52:13-15
   1. God speaks about the servant and describes him in ten ways. List them and note how they reference earlier material in Isaiah.
      1. My servant (repeats Isa 42:1).
      2. Will prosper (accomplish the goals set in Isa 42:1-4).
      3. Be exalted (God was exalted in Isa 6; 57:15; this exaltation will be echoed in the second speech of God at the end of the passage).
      4. Be lifted up.
      5. Be very high.
      6. Astonish many.
      7. Marred appearance (some suggest emotional disfigurement, others physical).
      8. Appearance beyond human semblance.
      9. Form beyond sons of men.
      10. Startled nations.
   2. God anticipates the response to his servant in several ways. List them.
      1. Many astonished at him (the “many” could refer to bystanders or the nations or kings of v 15).
      2. Startled by him.
      3. Kings silenced.
      4. Kings shall see what they have not been told.
      5. Kings shall understand what they have not heard.
2. The people speak—Isa 53:1-11a.
   1. Isa 53:1—Introduction.
      1. The reference to believers could refer to the Isa 40-48 division among the exiles who believed and those who did not believe. The believers are the Zion group of Isa 48-55 making their way back to Jerusalem. The Zion group are the ones to whom this has been revealed.
      2. The arm of the LORD almost always suggests strength (Isa. 17:5; 30:30, 32; 33:2; 40:10; 44:12; 48:14; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8; 63:5, 12) but here the arm of the LORD works through the suffering and weakness of the servant.
   2. Isa 53:2-9—The people report on the servant’s suffering. The suffering of the servant is described in many ways. List them.
      1. Isa 53:2-3—description of the servant.
         1. Lifelong (from young plant to his death as an adult) suffering.
         2. Root out of dry ground may indicate that this servant was not of royal descent but a common man.
         3. He was an unlikely prospect to play this role.
         4. He was not an attractive person physically.
         5. People did not pay him much attention.
         6. He was despised and rejected.
         7. He experienced grief and sorrow.
         8. He was isolated from the community and ignored.
      2. Isa 53:4-6—confession of the people about their involvement with the servant.
         1. He suffered the grief, sorrow, transgressions and iniquities of the people.
            1. He carried the sins of others.
            2. He suffered the punishment that should have been theirs.
         2. Just as the kings were astonished at his significance so are the people.
         3. The people believe that God caused his suffering.
         4. The servant gains three things for the people:
            1. Healing.
            2. Forgiveness.
            3. Removal of punishment.
         5. The passage is a clear description of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, i.e. that one person takes the place of the guilty party by bearing their sin and taking the punishment for that sin so that the guilty party is freed. The passage does not tell why it works, just that by God it does work.
         6. Other passages about those who suffer for others include Psa 22:67; 88:8; Jer 15:17; 20:7, 10.
      3. Isa 53:7-9—the people report on the servant’s suffering without regard to their involvement.
         1. Isa 49:2; 50:4 both speak of God preparing the mouth of the servant which is here closed.
         2. The verbs applied to the servant indicate violence: oppressed, afflicted, led to the slaughter, judgment, taken away.
         3. Two metaphors are used:
            1. He was silent at his trial.
            2. He was as helpless as a sheep or lamb to be slaughtered.
         4. “Taken away” is unclear but may indicate prison, exile or execution.
         5. “Cut off” may refer to isolation from the community or death.
         6. He was buried either by the wicked or with the wicked.
         7. The rich man could refer to those who exploited him or the wicked wealthy who shared in his death.
         8. He was guiltless.
   3. Isa 53:10-11a—The people report on the servant’s deliverance.
      1. God used the servant’s work to redeem Israel. The forgiveness offered in Isa 40:1-2 is paid for here.
      2. The suffering (“smitten by God” in v 4) of the servant is by the will of the LORD.
      3. List the ways in which God’s will is carried out with regard to the servant:
         1. Bruised him.
         2. Put to grief.
         3. Made an offering for sin.
         4. Made him see his offspring (the servant’s offspring will be mentioned in Isa 56-66).
         5. Prolonged his days.
         6. Prospered him.
      4. The work of the servant is also described. List his activities:
         1. Saw the fruit of his travail.
         2. Was satisfied.
      5. Summary: Isa 53:2-9 focus on the death of the servant, vv 10-11a focus on the deliverance brought by the servant.
3. God speaks—Isa 53:11b-12.
   1. God delivers an oracle about the servant.
   2. God speaks of how his will is carried out by the servant.
      1. Made many accounted righteous.
      2. Bore their iniquities.
      3. Gave him a portion with the great.
   3. The work of the servant is further described:
      1. Divided the spoil with the strong (the servant not only obtains forgiveness for the people, but spoil for himself).
      2. Poured out his soul to death.
      3. Numbered with the transgressors.
      4. Bore the sin of many.
      5. Made intercession for the transgressors.

**Continuities**

1. Why does Isaiah weave the descriptions of the servant into his appeal to the people in Babylonian captivity? How might the people have heard this material?
2. What is the most remarkable line in the passage at hand?
3. What puzzles you about this passage?
4. Why is this text so difficult to understand?
5. What part of this text is repulsive? Apparently those who first witnessed the suffering servant had similar responses. What repulsed them?
6. Why do you think Isaiah does not name the suffering servant?
7. What effect did the servant have on the general population? Does Jesus have the same effect today? Why or why not?

**Additional Study.**

1. Servant Songs in the NT—the Isaiah texts and the NT citation. The section below includes the sections of Isaiah’s servant song and their citations in the NT.
2. Isa 53:1
3. Isa 53:1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
4. John 12:38 This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”
5. Romans 10:16 But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"
6. Isa 53:4
7. Isa 53:4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
8. Matthew 8:17 This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."
9. Isa 53:7-8
10. Isa 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.
11. Acts 8:32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." 34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.
12. Isa 53:9
13. Isa 53:9 They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.
14. 1 Peter 2:22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."
15. Isa 53:12
16. Isa 53:12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.
17. Luke 22:37 For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled."
18. The NT regularly cites the Isa 53 passage as finding its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus and events surrounding him.
19. Who was the servant?
    1. Clearly, the New Testament identifies the servant as Jesus. There can be no doubt about this identification.
    2. Many of the lines in Isaiah have multiple fulfillments. Isa 6 is a clear example.
       1. Isa 6:8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." 9 And he said, "Go, and say to this people: `Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.'
       2. Throughout Isa 40-55 Isaiah himself cites the blindness and the deafness of the exiles. God told him he would encounter just such people in Isa 6 and the prediction comes true.
       3. However this passage has multiple applications or fulfillments according to the biblical writers:
          1. Ezek. 3:27--Thus says the LORD God: “He that will hear, let him hear; and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house”
          2. Mark 4:12—”…so that they may indeed see, but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.”
          3. John 12:40—”For Isaiah again said, ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should turn from me to heal them.’”
          4. Acts 28:25 So, as they disagreed among themselves, they departed, after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26 `Go to this people, and say, You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. 27 For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.' 28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."
    3. Those who study Isaiah have disagreed on whether Isa 53 has multiple fulfillments.
20. Some argue that there was only one servant who is Jesus. Yet even they agree that not every reference to servant in Isaiah refers to Jesus since Isaiah clearly says on occasion that the servant is Israel.
21. Others argue that there was a suffering servant in Isaiah’s day who is not identified and that in the accepted practice of double fulfillment, Jesus becomes the ultimate servant.
    1. Among those who argue for double fulfillment there are numerous suggestions as to the identity of the first suffering servant. The suggestions fall into two broad categories.
       1. The servant was a corporate group:
          1. The servant is Israel.
          2. The servant is the remnant.
          3. The servant is the Messiah.
       2. The servant is an historical person of the day. Suggestions have included: Hezekiah, Uzziah, Jeremiah, Cyrus, Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel, and an unidentified individual Israelite appointed to lead the return.
          1. Zerubbabel leads the return from exile and then suddenly disappears. See 1 Chr. 3:19; Ezr. 2:2; 3:2, 8; 4:2f; 5:2; Neh. 7:7; 12:1, 47; Hag. 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4, 21, 23; Zech. 4:6f, 9f.
          2. Some have suggested that he gave his life on behalf of the returning exiles, but there is no biblical evidence to verify this assertion.