



NAC-USA  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

The Book  
of Isaiah

The  
Suffering  
Servant

The  
Victorious  
Servant

**MIDWEEK  
SCRIPT**

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**2019**

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April

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## Session 1 – The Book of Isaiah

Welcome to our April midweek experience. This month, we will celebrate the holy days of Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter. During our midweek time together, we will explore how God foretold the work of the Messiah through the prophet Isaiah. We'll recognize how God has repeatedly drawn His people to Himself throughout the ages, teaching them to trust in Him. The purpose of this first session is to provide you with the context and historical background of the book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah is the first of the Prophets in the English canon, and is known, along with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as one of the "major" prophets due to the length and scope of their writings. This incredible Old Testament book is filled with poetic imagination, prophetic vision, and a complex structure. Written during a tumultuous time in the history of Israel, this book is a collection of prophetic sayings directed towards different groups over the course of several generations. First, Isaiah writes to his fellow Israelites who have become a rebellious people; then to the defeated Israelites in the 6<sup>th</sup> century who were in exile in Babylon; and finally, to believers of the generations to come who would be responsible for upholding God's covenant. The words he proclaimed were filled with warning, confrontation, and rebuke for God's people because of their unfaithfulness.

Isaiah writes in chapter 6 that he was called by God to serve God's people *in the year that King Uzziah died* (Isaiah 6:1), which was in the eighth century B.C. During that time, Israel had been split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The first portion of the book, chapters 1-39, describes this time and the coming judgment at the hands of the Assyrians. The prophet emphasizes sin, the call to repentance, and judgment. Isaiah provided guidance to two of the kings of Judah during his time, Ahaz and his son, Hezekiah. During Ahaz's time, the kingdom of Judah was threatened by Syria and Israel. Ahaz, not trusting in God, went against the advice of Isaiah and summoned the help of the Assyrians to combat the threat. This event led to the assimilation of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian empire around the year 721 B.C. Emboldened, Assyria then threatened the kingdom of Judah. King Hezekiah instead turned to and trusted in God for deliverance, and the Assyrian army was destroyed.

The next section of Isaiah's book, chapters 40-66, looks ahead more than a century to encourage the people of Judah who would be taken into exile in Babylon. The eventual downfall of Judah could be foreseen in Hezekiah's unguarded openness to Babylonian influence. Isaiah recognized that Hezekiah's enthusiasm for Babylon meant a future of captivity for God's people. While the first part of the book focuses on indictment and judgment, the latter portion focuses on God's forgiveness, deliverance, and the restoration of Israel. In spite of the nation's rebellion, Isaiah pictured a coming day when God would demonstrate the majesty of His mercy and grace.

Isaiah's purpose was to declare the good news that God will glorify Himself through the renewed and increased glory of His people, which would draw the attention of the nations. To fulfill that promise, Isaiah accused God's people of sin and rebellion against the One who made them and redeemed them. He instructed those sinners to reform their ways and act obediently, and announced God's judgment on the people because of their sin. Finally, he revealed God's future restoration of His people. As part of this restoration, Isaiah foretold both judgment on the nations and a future turning of the nations to God. Throughout his message, Isaiah employs the following themes: God, the Holy One of Israel; trust and confidence in God; and the Messiah, Servant, and Redeemer.

The book of Isaiah is a vision of hope for sinners through the coming Messiah, promising a new world for the redeemed people of God, where evil is defeated and sorrow will be forever forgotten. Just as Isaiah called the people of God to repentance, encouraged them during the time of exile, and set their vision towards a future Messiah and Redeemer who would be God's faithful servant for all time, His words serve to teach and encourage us today.

## Session 2 – The Suffering Servant

*The body and blood of Jesus given for you.* We hear this phrase in every divine service. How often do we stop to think about what it really means? What does it mean to *give* your body and blood?

In this week's session, we're going to engage with the prophecy of the Suffering Servant, laid out in the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah. Borrowing from Handel's method in the renowned *Messiah* oratorio, we'll explore each verse individually to find a deeper meaning. If you have a Bible, please follow along!

The first three verses of Isaiah 53 focus on how the suffering of the Servant was misunderstood by those that observed it. Let's read the first two verses: *Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no stately form or splendor; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

The *arm of the Lord*, or the help and power of God's presence, is spoken of several times in the book of Isaiah. In this verse, we can understand that Isaiah is speaking of a future time after the arm of the Lord has arrived, in the form of the Servant, to save His people. The questions that begin this chapter make it clear that those around Him did not realize it and the next verse tells us why: the Servant didn't seem to be anything special. He was a mere man and not an outstanding one based on His looks, so He was met with indifference. Verse 3 takes these misunderstandings a step further: *He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

The word "despised" is used twice in this verse, which emphasizes that the Servant was not only misunderstood, but was even detested and looked at with contempt. And in hiding their faces, far from following Him, they shunned Him. The word "esteem" in this verse is actually an accounting word, a reckoning of value. The last line of verse 3 drives home the point that when appraised by the people who saw Him, the Servant had no value in their eyes; therefore, His suffering was without worth.

Verses 4 through 6 explain the previous verses; they tell us why the Servant suffered – for the sins of mankind. Let's start with verse 4: *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* Yes, the Servant was a *man of sorrows*, but they were not His own – they were ours. Another meaning for the word "smitten" is struck down, humiliated. This line exposes that those who saw His suffering assumed that it was from God and therefore rightfully deserved.

The next verse, however, reveals the truth: *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.* The Servant suffered for our sin – His sacrifice was a substitute for our punishment, and through His pain and wounds, our alienation from God was healed and restored. At some moment this week, read these verses again and take the time to see the rawness and pain that the author so poetically expresses. The words give a picture of real and horrible suffering that should not be lost to us.

Let's read verse 6: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* The image of the sheep emphasizes our human nature and inadequacy. Like one of our hymns reminds us, "prone to wander, Lord I feel it." The author also emphasizes the common guilt of humanity and our individual sinfulness by starting with the word "all" and then in the next line, using "every one, to his own way." We are all to blame for our sin. The word "iniquity," used repeatedly in these verses, is more than just another term for sin; at its root, it implies crookedness or bentness and reflects the distortion of humanity by sin.

*And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* This was a divine act. The Servant was the plan and provision of God for our sin. He was the satisfaction for our punishment, and His suffering fulfilled God's will. These last three verses stress that the Servant was alone in His suffering, and ultimately in His death.

Verses 7 through 9 describe the Servant's voluntary and undeserved death. Even though He did not deserve to die, He died willingly. Let's start with verses 7 and 8: *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He*

*opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.*

In silence, the Servant endured His sufferings and died. He is compared to a lamb being taken to slaughter, however, an animal does not know consciously what is happening; unlike the Servant, who is not ignorant and still goes willingly.

The idea of a substitutionary sacrifice was quite a departure from the rest of the Old Testament, where the people atoned for their sins with their continual animal sacrifices. This prophecy points to a need for a greater sacrifice, where animal substitution is insufficient and where sin is most serious – when it is willful, when we choose to sin. We know something is wrong, but we do it anyways. Only a consenting will can be a substitute for a rebellious will. So the Servant, without sin, acceptable to the Holy God, submitted to suffering and death, as the once brought, eternally valid sacrifice.

*And who will declare His generation?* The wording is a little difficult but we can understand this as questioning who, if any, of His contemporaries will proclaim that He died for the sins of the people. Again, a reminder that the Servant's suffering was misunderstood by those in His time.

Let's read our last verse: *And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.*

Read in the context of the Old Testament, this verse is perplexing. If He was condemned and died with the wicked, the criminals, then He should also be buried with them. This verse is really only comprehensible by its fulfillment in Jesus. And I think this really sums up our contemplation through these nine verses in Isaiah; when events in Jesus' life provide the explanation for this prophecy, we are certain that He is the Suffering Servant.

He was despised, rejected, crushed, struck down, and killed for our sin and for our reconciliation with God. As we approach Holy Communion this Sunday, and in every divine service, let's take the time to contemplate what it meant for Him to give His body and blood for our sake, and wonder at how He willingly suffered alone to be the Savior of all. Let this gift of grace carry you through Passiontide.

### **Session 3 – The Victorious Servant**

Welcome to our final midweek experience for this month. In today's session, we are going to focus on Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the victorious Servant.

We continue where our last session left off, at the end of Isaiah chapter 53, verses 10-12. Let's read verse 10: *Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.*

This verse summarizes verses 1-9, reiterating that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sin. God was pleased and satisfied with His offering, which reconciled us to Him through Christ. The verse speaks of *His seed*; the seed or offspring of Jesus are those who He has redeemed. Ephesians chapter 1 tells us: *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...* (Ephesians 1:11). We have an inheritance through Christ!

The last part of the verse states: *He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.* Jesus was dead, but now lives! And because Christ lives, we also live, because He gives us new life. God's plan and purposes have prospered and been completed through Christ, who now sits at His right hand with power and authority.

Let's continue reading with verse 11: *He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.* This Servant, Jesus Christ, knew what

had to be done in order to reconcile humanity with God. Because He was righteous, He willingly accomplished the task through His life, suffering, and death. Through His sacrifice, Jesus shares His righteousness with us! We have been justified through His victory over death, as we can recall in the Chief Apostle's message for the year 2016, when he quoted 1 Corinthians: *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Let's finish the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah with verse 12: *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercessions for the transgressors.* Christ was victorious through conquest. And who are the strong that He defeated? Sin and Satan, death and hell. What are the spoils of this battle? The faithful and redeemed who He died for – we are His!

We can turn back to Isaiah 52, verse 13 to sum up our study: *See, my servant will prosper; He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted* (NIV). Here we see the triumph of Jesus' sacrifice, so eloquently written with three simple phrases: Jesus will be **raised** in His resurrection from the dead, **lifted up** in His ascension to heaven, and **highly exalted** as He is seated at the right hand of God.

The message of our Easter service – *Jesus Christ lives!* – encouraged us to profess Christ's victory. As we reflect on the Eastertide season, let us never lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ was victorious for every soul because God desires all to be saved, and that our role as Christians is to be a witness to this good news, professing to all that salvation can be found in Christ.

As we end our study of Isaiah, we can carry this verse from chapter 25 with us through the rest of our Eastertide season: *This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation* (Isaiah 25:9).