

**SERVANT SONG #4:  
THE SONG OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT**

**ISAIAH 52:13-53:12**

Servant Song #1: The creator God delights in His servant upon whom He has put His Spirit, that He might bring forth justice and light to the Gentiles.

Servant Song #2: The servant will restore Israel, be a light to the Gentiles, provide worldwide salvation.

Servant Song #3: The Servant was abused, but as teacher and learner He determines to do the will of God.

Servant Song #4: The Servant gives Himself as a substitute for sinners but is ultimately to be glorified.

## Servant Song # 4: Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

The majority of rabbinic interpretations today make Isaiah 52:13– 53:12 a reference to the nation of Israel suffering in a Gentile world. However, the context shows that this cannot be so. It shows that the Servant has to be an individual personality.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum lists nine points that refute that interpretation.

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**ARIEL'S  
BIBLE COMMENTARY**

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH



*Exposition from a  
Messianic Jewish Perspective*

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**1. Rabbinic tradition.** Up until about A.D. 1050 all rabbis took the position that Isa. 53 was talking about an individual, and the vast majority said that it was a reference to Messiah.

The most famous rabbi was known as Rashi (1040-1105) is the first known Jewish teacher to take the position that Isa. 53 was about the suffering of Israel. At first his teaching was rejected because they said that he was going contrary to 10 or 11 centuries of rabbinic teaching. But his teaching spread throughout Europe and today almost all Jewish scholars accept his teaching as being correct.

**2. The distinctive use of pronouns.** There is a ... contrast between plural and singular pronouns: *we, us, our* compared with *he, him, and his*.

If the singular pronouns refer to Israel, the plural pronouns must refer to Gentile nations. But Isaiah is the one speaking, and he is a Jew. He was speaking to his own people who were Jews. He was not addressing Gentiles. When he says “we” and “us” and “our” he is talking about Jews. Therefore, the singular pronouns (*he, him, his*) refer to someone distinct from Isaiah and Israel – an individual, who must be Messiah.

3. Isaiah 53:8b: says *“he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people.”*

The speaker in this verse is Isaiah. He declared that the Suffering Servant was dying for **my people**. Isaiah’s people were the Jewish people, Israel. The Suffering Servant cannot be Israel because Israel happens to be “my people.”

#### **4. Nations cannot go through the experiences described of the Suffering Servant.**

A whole nation cannot be put on trial in a court of law. A whole nation cannot be put into a prison. A whole nation cannot be put to death. Only individuals go through such processes. Hence, the experiences described in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 portray the Suffering Servant as an individual personality.

## **5. The Servant is portrayed as a voluntary, willing, and silent sufferer.**

There is no doubt about the fact that Israel has suffered tremendously over the course of her existence. However, Israel has never suffered voluntarily, and she has never suffered silently.

6. Isaiah describes the Servant as being innocent [and] sinless ... whose suffering is vicarious. He is suffering by way of substitution, on behalf of others.

While Israel has indeed suffered, Scripture makes it clear that she has suffered because of her own sins. She has never suffered for or on behalf of the sins of the Gentiles.

The Suffering Servant, on the other hand, is sinless and suffers as a substitute for others.

7. The result of the suffering of the Servant of YHWH: **Isaiah 53:10–11 shows that His suffering results in justification.**

Israel's long history of suffering has not provided substitutionary atonement. No Jewish person nor any Gentile has ever been justified or become righteous by means of Israel's sufferings. Thus, the nation does not fulfill the role of the Suffering Servant.

## **8. Isaiah 53:8–12 is a description of the death of the Suffering Servant.**

While innumerable individual Jews have died, Israel as a people has always survived. Israel is indestructible, and in spite of the numerous attempts to annihilate the Jewish people, there is still an Israel. The Servant, on the other hand, dies.

9. Isaiah 53:10b: “*he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*” **This verse describes the resurrection of the Servant. After He dies, He is brought back to life.**

The people of Israel have ... never died. Therefore, there has been no resurrection of Israel.

The Fourth Servant Song clearly portrays an individual, a servant of YHWH, who suffers as a substitute for His people. The death of this suffering servant is not due to anything unjust or wrong in His life because He is without sin.

His suffering was actually what was deserved by Israel. And on the basis of His death, His substitutionary work, many will be justified (Isa. 53:11).

## Isaiah 52:13–53:12

There are five main divisions to this song. Each division contains three verses:

1. His humiliation and exaltation (52:13-15)
2. His experience of rejection (53:1-3)
3. His vicarious suffering (53:4-6)
4. His sacrificial death (53:7-9)
5. His reconciling work and resurrection (53:10-12).

## **First division (52:13-15) – humiliation and exaltation**

Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men;

Isa. 52:15, “So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.”

## **First division (52:13–15) – humiliation and exaltation**

**Isa 52:13**, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;  
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”

**Behold — Here! Look! —** to emphasize an idea,  
call attention to a detail; a marker of attention

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

**Here!, Look!** – used to emphasize an idea, call attention to a detail; a marker of attention

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

**Bond servant, i.e., one who is owned by another for service (as Israel in slavery in Egypt). But it was often used for one who was trusted to carry out responsibilities, or to indicate one who is chosen for a specific task.**

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

**have insight, get wisdom, gain understanding, be prudent, be skilled, i.e., have a capacity for understanding, implying this state is a result of proper teaching.**

**Succeed, prosper, i.e., accomplish an activity thoroughly and with success**

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

לְאַהֲסֵת נְאֻשְׁרֵי יְהוָה יִסְיָאֵם נִעְתָּאֵלִים נֹאֲתָם מֵעַם נֹ.  
“רַב־פֶּסֶד־רַע” שֵׁשֶׁסֶס The implication is that he would act with such intelligence as to succeed in his objectives. The focus here is on the results of acting wisely, which is success.

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

The words for exaltation are piled upon one another to convey the idea that He would be lifted up extremely high, above all other men, to the height of God Himself.

The words for “exalted” and “extolled” are the same as those used in Isa. 6:1 of Jehovah enthroned—“high and lifted up” and Isa. 57:15 “the high and lofty One.”

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

To be raised, be uplifted, be exalted; “to bring to a position of honor.”

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

be lifted up, raised, lofty respect, honor, i.e., show high regard for another (e.g., 2 Kings 3:14); be honored, ranked, prominent, elevated

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

utterly, i.e., pertaining to a high point on a scale of extent

**Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”**

exalt, i.e., to assign or give high status to an object

Isa. 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be **exalted** and **extolled** and be very **high.**”

All 3 of these words indicate something that has been raised up. Some commentators have interpreted these to be a reference to the Lord’s resurrection, ascension, and session.

**Isa. 52:13**, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”

In summary, verse 13 presents a concise overview of the Servant’s earthly ministry, including His fulfillment of the Father’s plan for the incarnation, as well as His resurrection, ascension, and present session in Heaven.

**Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were astonished at you,  
So His visage was marred more than any man, And  
His form more than the sons of men.”**

Verse 14 speaks of the humiliation of the Servant that will come before His exaltation.

The Servant will be terribly mistreated. He will be so disfigured that He will no longer resemble a man. This is the result of being beaten, being scourged with a Roman whip, having the beard ripped off from His face. See Isaiah 50:6

Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men.

Isa. 52:15, “So shall He sprinkle **many** nations”

Isa. 53:11, “By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify **many**,

Isa. 53:12, “He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of **many**, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were **astonished** at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men.”

To be desolate or appalled; to be horrified

Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were astonished **at you**,  
So His visage was marred more than any man, And  
His form more than the sons of men.” ~NKJV

Isa. 52:14, “Just as many were astonished at you, *My  
people*, So His appearance was marred more than any  
man And His form more than the sons of men. ~NASB

Isa. 52:14, “Just as there were many who were  
appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured  
beyond that of any human being and his form marred  
beyond human likeness.” ~NIV