

# **Who is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53?**

## **Jesus or Israel?**

### **Kerry Duke**

Do you recall the story of Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8? The Bible says the eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship. As he returned home in his chariot, he read from the Old Testament. Do you remember which book and which chapter he was reading? His Bible didn't have chapter divisions, but ours do. It was Isaiah 53. That's the beloved passage about the One who would be led as a sheep to the slaughter. Like a lamb before its shearer, this One was silent.

Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading? (v. 30). The eunuch replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (v. 31). Then he asked a pointed question about what he was studying: "Of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or some other man?" (v. 34). So, the eunuch believed this passage was about an individual, a person, but he didn't know *whom*. Was Isaiah saying this would happen to him, or, was he talking about someone else? That's when Philip began at this same Scripture, and "preached Jesus to him" (v. 35).

That section of Scripture —Isaiah 53— is one of the most vivid prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament. It's the passage that says He would have a humble beginning and would grow up to be "despised and rejected by men" (vv. 2-3). It says He was "wounded for our transgressions" and that God "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (vv. 5-6). It says what the eunuch read: He was silent before His accusers (v. 7). He died with the wicked and was with the rich in His death (v. 9). He was numbered with the transgressors and made intercession for sinners (v. 12).

We have already looked at this amazing prophecy in Isaiah 53. And remember that there are many other predictions of Jesus in the Old Testament. This is just one; but it is surely one of the strongest.

One of the great mysteries to Christians is how anyone could read the words of Isaiah 53 and not see Jesus. How can an atheist or a skeptic reject it as a prophecy of Christ? And what about Jews who don't believe Jesus is the Messiah? After all, the book of Isaiah was delivered to the Jewish people first. They read it for over 700 years before Jesus was born. They of all people should have been able to identify Him as the Messiah who fulfilled this prophecy. And yet many of them, especially among the more educated Jews in Jesus' day, were blind to the Scriptures they claimed to know so well. When Paul preached at the synagogue at Antioch, he said that the Jews "did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every sabbath" and had "fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts 13:27).

Since that time, Jewish theology has become even more blind to Old Testament prophecies of Jesus. Many Jews today believe a Messiah will come someday to vindicate the nation of Israel. But they don't believe that Messiah will be Jesus or anyone claiming to be what Christians believe about Him. They reject the idea that the Messiah will be deity. They expect a national leader, a political savior. Jewish rabbis sometimes utter such nonsensical sayings about the Messiah, if and when he does arrive, as: "He who says does not know, and he who knows does not say."

So, Jews today do not believe Isaiah or any of the other prophets prophesied of Jesus as the Messiah. This brings us to the question of this discussion: what *do* Jews say about Isaiah 53? How do they interpret it? If this is not a prophecy of Jesus, what does it mean and who is it about?

We're not looking at this question because we're curious. We're not discussing it solely because we want to convert Jews (although that's true). We're also examining this subject because Jewish interpretation influences Christian thinking. This has been happening for many years and a lot of people don't realize it. I'll explain this more in a future lesson. I mention it now to encourage you to study this material carefully because *Christian colleges have been affected*.

For almost 1,000 years after Christ most Jewish interpreters said that Isaiah 53 refers to an individual Messiah. But Rabbi Rashi, i.e., Solomon Isaak, who lived from 1040 to 1105 A.D., proposed another view of Isaiah 53. His interpretation is now a common Jewish belief. That interpretation is that Isaiah 53 is about *the nation of Israel*. The Jewish nation was led as a lamb to the slaughter. The people of Israel were despised and rejected of men. The Israelite nation was like sheep that had gone astray. This interpretation has become the standard view in Jewish circles; and, it's their typical response to Christian arguments based on Isaiah 53 being a prophecy of Jesus.

Most of the time Christians point out that Isaiah 53 can't be about the Jewish nation because it uses singular pronouns, not plural. Isaiah says, "*He*" is despised and rejected (v. 3); "*He*" has borne our griefs (v. 4); "*He*" was wounded for our transgressions (v. 5) and so forth. And, preachers argue, "Isaiah 53 says 'he,' not 'they.' If Isaiah was talking about the Israelite nation (preachers say) he would have used *plural* pronouns like 'they' and 'them.'" And so (preachers argue) since Isaiah used the *singular pronouns* in Isaiah 53, he must have meant an individual, a person, not a nation of people.

On the surface, this reasoning sounds valid. But the problem is that this point is not a conclusive argument against the Jewish view of Isaiah 53. In fact, an informed Jew has a quick response. He will correctly tell you that Isaiah refers to the nation of Israel in the *singular* several times in this book. That's usually because he refers to the *nation* of Israel by using the name of the *head* of that nation, Jacob or Israel. Sometimes God speaks to Israel in this book and refers to them in the plural; for instance, in Isaiah 41:1 God said, "Fear not, you worm Jacob, you *men* of Israel!" Also, in Isaiah 48:20-21 God said, "the Lord has redeemed His *servant Jacob*. And *they* did not thirst when he led *them* through the deserts."

But, at other times God used the name of the father of the nation, Jacob, or Israel, to represent the people of that nation; and he spoke as if he were talking to an individual. That's why these singular pronouns *can* refer to a whole nation of people. The head and sometimes the king of a nation stands by metonymy for the people in that nation. For example, in Isaiah 43:22, God said, "You (singular, 2.p.) have not called upon me, O Jacob." Also, in Isaiah 40:27, notice how He describes the whole nation in the singular: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My (not our) way is hidden from the Lord?'"

Again, this is not unusual in Isaiah — whether he refers to the nation of Israel, or, another nation, such as the Assyrian nation in chapter ten. Notice in Isaiah 10:5-7 that God calls the *nation* of Assyria "him" ("I will send *him* against an ungodly nation"--v.5) and "he" in v.7 ("yet *he* does not mean so..."). Other prophets refer to nations with singular pronouns as well.

So, the use of singular pronouns in Isaiah 53 by *itself* does not disprove the Jewish view of this chapter.

This brings us to the main argument of Jews about Isaiah 53. They point out that when God talks about "My servant" in this part of Isaiah (that is, chapters 40-66) it means the *nation* of Israel, not an individual. There are several verses where God speaks of His servant Israel;

therefore, how could that servant be Israel in all those other cases and yet be an individual Messiah, a single person in chapter 53?

Before we respond, let's listen to someone in the Jewish community (Youtube, Isaiah 53: Who is the Suffering Servant?).

What would you say in response to this argument? The first thing we should do is roll up our sleeves and do some homework. Let's look at the verses where God talks about His "servant" to see if this argument has merit. If you can open your own Bible, that will be great. If not, you can follow with me on the screen.

We won't go into the Hebrew word for servant, because that won't help the Jewish case or the case we are making. The Hebrew word for servant in these verses is *ebed*. It just means servant. In the OT, who that servant is and what kind of servant he is depends on how the word is used. It could be a household servant of his master. It could be the servant of a king. It can mean the servant of God in a spiritual sense. There's nothing unique about the word *ebed* that tells you it's this or that kind of servant. It's a matter of context. That's the key to interpretation. This means we will need to look at the verses in Isaiah where God talks about His servant to see how the word is used.

- Isaiah 41:8-9: "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away.'" God calls Israel His servant twice in these verses. There is no doubt about that, so let's go to the next example.
- Isaiah 42:1-4: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law."

This section in Isaiah is quoted in Matthew 12:15-21. Matthew says these words in Isaiah 42 were fulfilled in Jesus. The Lord worked quietly as the Messiah. He didn't make a lot of noise and call attention to Himself like other kings. He didn't force His will on others and compel them to do what He said. This description fits perfectly with the life of Jesus.

Also, He brought justice to the Gentiles; His death brought *justification* to the Gentiles. The reception of the Jews and Gentiles as equals and as brothers in one united spiritual kingdom is the great Old Testament mystery which was unveiled in the New Testament. Unbelieving Jews in New Testament times resented this idea, and they continue to reject it today.

The words of Isaiah 42:1-4 correspond perfectly to the character and mission of Jesus. So, we would not agree that the "servant" of the Lord in this passage is the Jewish people.

- Isaiah 42:18-20: "Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see. Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear." Here the words "My servant" and "My messenger" do refer to the nation of Israel. The context is different. This time God is condemning His servant, not commending them. The Jews in Isaiah's day were blind and deaf, spiritually speaking.
- Isaiah 43:10: "'You are My witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.'" God's servant here is the nation of Israel. Isaiah is

contrasting other nations and their gods with Israel and the true God in the context. They were witnesses to the fact that what God said about the future had happened exactly as He said. Other nations couldn't say that about the gods they served. These witnesses certainly were not in any sense so called "Jehovah's Witnesses." In this verse God says there will be no God formed after Him. But Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus is "a god" in John 1:1 who was created. That is a direct contradiction of this verse.

- Isaiah 44:1-2: "Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen. Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.'" Two times here God identifies His servant as Jacob, so this must be the house of Israel.
- The same is true in Isaiah 44:21: "Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!" Then we find the same expression in Isaiah 44:26 that we saw earlier in chapter 42:18-20.
- Isaiah again refers to God's servant Israel in chapter 45:4: "For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me." This is in the context of the Jews' return to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile as a result by the decree of Cyrus King of Persia.
- The return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity is again mentioned in Isaiah 48:20: "Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth; say, 'The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!'"
- The nation of Israel is clearly meant also in Isaiah 49:3: "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"
- That brings us to the passage on the Suffering Servant. In Isaiah 52:13 God calls Him "My Servant." In Isaiah 53:11 God said "MY righteous servant shall justify many."

These are the verses in question. What are we to conclude? Is God's *Servant* in these verses the Messiah or the nation of Israel?

The context determines the meaning of a verse or a word in a verse. Jewish rabbis know this well and appeal to this maxim and even split hairs when it serves their purpose. When we interpret the word "servant" in Isaiah, we ought to let the context inform us in every individual case of its use. Each use should be examined on its own, and, in conjunction with the overall theme of the book and the backdrop of the Bible as a whole.

It is not a valid approach to say, "In 9 out of 10 cases, this word definitely has this meaning; therefore, it must have that same meaning here in this verse." Now, it can be helpful to see how the same word is used in other verses; but, just because a word is used one way in other verses doesn't prove that it must be understood the same way in every case. That's especially true when the context points to a different sense, which is exactly what we're about to see in Isaiah 53.

But consider another Old Testament book where God talked numerous times about His servant. That book is Jeremiah. God called the nation of Israel (or "Jacob") His servant 3 times (Jer. 30:10; 46:27-28). God also called David His servant 3 times (Jer. 33:21,22,26). He even called Nebuchadnezzar His servant 3 times as well (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). In each of these verses, the context indicates the meaning. Sometimes it refers to a group of people, at other times it refers to an individual. The book of Isaiah is no different.

The context of Isaiah 53 is not about the nation of Israel because there are phrases and expressions that cannot be harmonized with that interpretation.

To start with, notice that the servant in this chapter is *spoken to* and *spoken about*. Keep your eye on pronouns like “My,” “We,” “Our,” and “him.” Obviously, the section begins in Isaiah 52:13 with God speaking: “Behold, *My* servant shall deal prudently.”

Notice that God speaks *about* the servant — “He shall be exalted”--v.13. Look carefully at verse fourteen — “Just as many were astonished at you, so *His* visage was marred more than any man...” God continues to mention the Suffering servant in the third person; in v.15: “So shall *He* sprinkle many nations...”

We know that “He” is God’s servant, but who is the *you* in v.14? In the context, God is promising the Jews that He will bring them home from Babylon. (Isaiah 52:9-12; notice v.12 — “the Lord will go before *you*”--the Jewish captives!).

In verse 14, there is an analogy: Just as, in the same way, many were astonished at *you*, even so, likewise, *His* visage or appearance was marred more than any man. Now if “you” is the Jewish nation, then according to this interpretation, God is saying the appearance of the Jewish nation will be marred just like many were astonished at the Jewish nation!

I believe the NKJV translators were right when they put a capital “H” for “He” and “His” in these verses, but they put a lower case “y” for “you” in verse 14. They saw the analogy. They recognized the distinction. This is just one problem with standard Jewish thinking about this passage.

The Jewish view of Isaiah 53 must overcome another hurdle as the chapter begins. Verse One says, “Who has believed *our* report?” Who is speaking here? To whom does the word “our” refer? It can’t be the Jewish nation. That’s because whoever is speaking in v.1 is talking about “he” and “him” — which Jews say refers to the nation of Israel. This becomes even more of a problem in verse 4 and 5: “Surely *He* has borne *our* griefs” (v.4) and “*He* was wounded for *our* transgressions” (v.5).

The Jewish nation can’t be talking here. It wouldn’t make any sense for the nation of Israel to say, “*He* (the nation of Israel) was wounded for *our* (the nation of Israel’s) transgressions.”

How do Jewish scholars respond to this problem? They point back to Isaiah 52:15. There they tell us Isaiah mentions other nations with their kings and their reaction to the Jews’ return to Jerusalem from Babylon. So the Jewish answer to the question, “Who are the ones that are talking about the servant in Isaiah 53?” Is this: *Gentile Kings!*

According to this view, Gentile kings said the Israelite nation would grow up like a tender plant (v.2), that men would despise and reject the Jews (v. 3), that the Jewish nation bore the griefs of the Gentiles (v. 4) and so forth!

This *cannot* be what Isaiah 53 means. This interpretation flies in the face of the consistent teaching in the Old Testament about the justice of God in holding nations accountable for their own sins. Notice how this looks at verse 5: “But He (Israel) was wounded for our (the Gentiles’) transgressions.” Then in verse 6: “...the Lord has laid on Him (Israel) the iniquity of us all (all the Gentiles).”

This interpretation is a desperate attempt to get around the clear meaning of Isaiah’s words. God didn’t punish the Jews for the sins of the Gentiles! He punished the Israelite nation for *their own* sins!

This is what God warned their ancestors about before they entered the promised land. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses said if they obeyed God, they could keep the land and prosper. That’s Deuteronomy 28:1-14. But, hHe warned that if they disobeyed then God would punish them. The

Lord said in the rest of the chapter that He would scatter them from one end of the earth to the other.

But the Jews, for the most part, didn't listen. God sent the prophets to warn them — Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah who pleaded with the Jews for 40 years to repent. But they still wouldn't listen. That's why they suffered. The Assyrians invaded Northern Israel in 721 B.C. and took many captives. The Babylonians attacked Judah 3 times beginning in 605 B.C. God punished the Israelite people for *their sins*. He also punished the gentile nations — *for their sins*.

When you read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Habakkuk and other prophets, you'll notice that God holds each nation accountable for its own transgressions.

Not only do the other prophets teach this about the nation of Israel, but the book of Isaiah plainly shows that God's judgment would be poured out upon the nation of Israel for their *sins*! Who can read Isaiah chapters 1-6 and not see this? And, this is even stated in the opening of chapter 40! Isaiah 40-66 happens to be the section which Jews and liberal theologians say is only about the return from captivity.

But notice how this section begins in Isaiah 40:1-2: "Comfort, yes, comfort my people! Says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all *her sins*" — not for the sins of other nations!

Isaiah had already talked about God's judgment on Babylon in chapters 13-14, Moab in chapters 15-16, Damascus in chapter 17, Ethiopia and Egypt in chapters 18-20, and other Gentile countries in chapter 21. They paid for their own sins.

This contradiction should be abundantly clear. But Jewish scholars spilt hairs again. They tell us that Isaiah is saying the Jewish people suffered *because of* the sins of the Gentiles — in other words, the Jewish nation suffered *as a result of* Gentile evil — especially what the Gentiles did to them. Jewish interpreters remind us that God used Gentile nations like Assyria and Babylon to punish His people, and, in that sense God "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6).

But that abuses Isaiah 53 even worse. God did use the Gentiles to punish the nation of Israel; but, He did not put *all the sins* of the Gentiles on His people!! Besides that problem, verse 8 again teaches that the Servant of the Lord suffered for the sins of *the Israelite nation*! We'll look at that verse more in just a minute.

Here is another reason—a clear and strong reason—why the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is not and *cannot be national Israel*. I'm talking about the famous words in verse 7: "He was oppressed and 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."

The Jews weren't silent when the Babylonians were about to attack. They were defiant, rebellious, proud, and argumentative. The Jews in the book of Jeremiah were not like innocent, unsuspecting sheep who didn't make a sound when they were about to be slaughtered. The prophet had been trying to warn them but they wouldn't listen to what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 25:1-9. Does that sound like the image in Isaiah 53:7?

In Jeremiah 36 the prophet had Baruch to write a scroll containing God's word and read it to the people. Jewish leaders seized him and Jehoiakim cut the scroll in pieces and threw it in the fireplace. Does that sound like the image of a silent, docile sheep?

The fact is, the Jews weren't silent before the Chaldeans attacked or afterward. They were stubborn and argumentative to the end. Even after the devastating siege in Jeremiah 39, the Jews that were left in Judah rebelled against the word of the prophet of God. The Chaldeans

destroyed their land, but here is what the Jewish men told Jeremiah when he warned them not to go to Egypt: “As to the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven...” (Jer. 44:16-17).

Does that sound like Isaiah’s words, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet He opened not His mouth”?

The fact is, the Jews wouldn’t shut their mouths when they were warned and even after they were punished!

We see the same obstinate attitude in Ezekiel. The prophet was in Babylon warning the Jewish captives there that the war was not over. The final fall of their beloved city Jerusalem was coming. But they didn’t want to hear that kind of message. Several times in Ezekiel chapters 2 and 3 God said these Jews were “a rebellious house.” God Himself sure didn’t think they were like sheep that yielded to tribulation without complaint.

The Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 gets even worse in verses 8-9. Notice the statement in verse 8: “For the transgression of My people He was stricken.” Many Jewish interpreters would agree that God is speaking now in this chapter, because it says “My people” — the Jewish people.

So, who is the “He” in this verse? The Jewish view says the “He” in this chapter is the Jewish nation. But how can that fit with the context. This “He” was struck “for the transgressions of My people.” If the Jewish view is right, the Jews were punished for their sins. But that’s not what they say about verses 5-6. Jews today tell us “He” (the Jewish nation) was wounded for “our” (the Gentiles’) transgressions; but verse 9 says “*He*” (the Jewish nation according to Jews) had *done no violence*. There is only one conclusion we can rightly draw: God’s people cannot be the “He” in verses 8- 9! Otherwise verse 9 would contradict verse 8!

Let’s go next to verses 10-11. Here again we see Jewish theology at odds with itself and with Isaiah 53. Verse 10 talks about God making His soul *an offering for sin*: “When You make His soul an offering for sin.”

We’ve already seen the problem with saying that the nation of Israel was “Wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities.” But now in verse 10 it gets worse because now the idea of a *sin offering* is mentioned. The JEWISH NATION *a sin offering*? For the GENTILES? Then look at verse 11: “My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall *bear their iniquities*.” He will justify many by bearing their sins!

A sin offering in the law of Moses was made by the person who sinned. A Jew made a sin offering for his trespass, not for the sin of another Jew and certainly not for a Gentile’s sin. Also, Jews adamantly deny the sacrifice of oneself as a vicarious offering for the sin of others. So, Jewish theology forbids what their view of Isaiah 53 requires in this verse.

Furthermore, verse 11 says He will bear their iniquities. But Jewish law says in Ezekiel 18:20, “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

The Jewish nation could not bear the iniquities of the Gentiles as a sin offering. Thus, Israel could not be the “He” of this passage. Only Jesus the Christ could bear our sins and give His life as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Now let’s look at verse 12. We’ve already noticed that there are statements in this verse that correspond perfectly with the life of Christ: the fact that He was numbered with transgressors, the fact that He “bore the sin of many” (which, by the way, does not mean He

merely “bore the brunt” of the sins of others); but, more especially in verse 12: He “made intercession for the transgressors.”

Intercession can be made in one of two ways. A person can make intercession *against* others. That’s what Paul said Elijah did in Romans 11:2-3. But the other, more common kind of intercession is interceding *on behalf* of others for their good. This is what Isaiah 53:12 is about; the context makes that clear.

If the “He” in this verse is Israel, when did Israel as a nation pray to God on behalf of the Gentiles for their good? Sometimes we see the Jews going along with Gentiles and following their sinful ways. Many times we see the anger of the Jews toward the Gentiles. But how often, if ever, do we read in the Old Testament of Jews praying that God might forgive the Gentiles — especially after the Gentiles had destroyed their land?

The words of Isaiah 53:12 fit perfectly with Luke 23:34 — “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” — but Isaiah’s words in no way describe the attitude of Jews toward Gentiles in the Old Testament.

There’s another slightly different Jewish view of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Some say this servant is *the faithful remnant* of the Jewish nation, not the Jewish nation as a whole. It is true that a remnant of faithful Jews is mentioned several times in Isaiah.

In fact, the book starts off by mentioning this small group. In Isaiah 1:9, the prophet wrote, “Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.” It’s clear in Isaiah chapters 40-66 that there were some Jews who remained loyal to God.

But there are problems with saying that the Suffering Servant is the faithful few in the nation of Judah. First of all, even the faithful remnant were not innocent altogether. If anyone was true to God at the time of the Babylonian captivity, Daniel was. But even Daniel said he (as well as the other Jews) were suffering for *their sins*. Listen to Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:

“4 O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,

**5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.**

6 Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.

7 O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of **the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.** (Here he says “they.” Does this mean Daniel is using an editorial “we” in these verses? No. He specifically includes his own sins. We’ll see that in a moment.)

8 O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because **we have sinned against You.**

9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though **we have rebelled against Him.**

10 We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.

11 Yes, **all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.**



**12 And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.**

**13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.**

**14 Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.**

15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as it is this day--**we have sinned, we have done wickedly!**

16 "O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.

17 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.

18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

19 O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

20 Now while **I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel**, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God..."

Here Daniel specifically mentions his own sin. We don't know what his sin was. But Daniel was not innocent. He was not sinless. He was suffering the consequences of his sin and the sin of the people. It is not a prayer of intercession for the Gentiles; it is a prayer of confession on behalf of the Jews!

Does this sound anything at all like what Isaiah said about the Suffering Servant? No! Isaiah 53 says the Servant is innocent! Isaiah 53:5 says the Servant "was wounded for **our** transgressions" (not his). He was "bruised for **our** iniquities" (not his). Isaiah 53:9 says the Suffering Servant "had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." But Daniel, who was definitely part of the remnant, said he was guilty too! So, the Suffering Servant can't be the faithful few in Judah!

If we follow this interpretation, we run into more trouble. Isaiah 42:19 says who is "blind as the Lord's Servant?" If His servant refers to the remnant, then they were blind spiritually! Does that sound like the faithful few? In Isaiah 45:4 God said to His servant, "You have not known Me." Did the remnant not know God?

There's another problem with this interpretation. Isaiah 53:12 says the Servant "bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Yet, in his long prayer of intercession, Daniel made *intercession for himself* as well as for the people! But the Servant in Isaiah 53 doesn't intercede for Himself. He has no sin according to verse 9.

The "remnant" view of Isaiah 53 won't work. It's just another attempt of unbelievers to avoid the plain meaning and application of the text.

Now let's summarize the evidence against the Jewish interpretation of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:

1. The nation of Israel is called God's servant numerous times in Isaiah. But each use of this word must be weighed in its context.

2. The view of the servant being the nation of Israel does not harmonize with the context of Isaiah 53. The things Isaiah says about the suffering servant in chapter 53 cannot be about Israel as a nation.

3. It makes perfect sense to say that Isaiah called Israel God's servant and also called Jesus God's servant. Often the prophet mentions "Jacob, My servant" because Jacob was the origin, the source of that nation (Israel). In the same way, Jesus was the ultimate aim of that nation. The Jewish nation existed to bring the Messiah into the world, not to be a perpetual race of chosen people with permanent law. Its purpose was temporary as a means to an end.

4. The Messianic view of Isaiah 53 is consistent with other Old Testament prophecies—Psalm 22, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 11:12-13 and many other passages point to an individual, not a nation.

5. The view that Jesus is the suffering servant harmonizes with secular history of the Jewish and Roman cultures of the first century.

6. The Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 fits perfectly with the New Testament record where these prophecies are fulfilled in detail in the life and death of Jesus

The Ethiopian eunuch didn't know who was being talked about in Isaiah 53. But he had one thing right. He thought this section was about an individual, and he was right. Thank God Philip was there to help him connect the dots. The Bible says Philip began at this very Scripture—Isaiah 53—and preached to him Jesus! This convinced the eunuch that Jesus was the Messiah and the Savior. He stopped the chariot at a place of water, and Philip baptized him. The last we see of the eunuch, he is on his way rejoicing! All of this happened because he was reading about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53.