

Isaiah

Doing the Unthinkable

Lesson #10 for March 6, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 50:4-10; Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

1. In Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Isaiah recorded the vision of a suffering Servant which the Jews interpreted as being the suffering of their people and their nation but which Christians now know to be a prophecy of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, coming down from heaven and suffering the worst possible indignities, finally dying on the cross in a shameful humiliating display to make it possible for each one of us to be saved. There is at least a third way to view this section of Isaiah: By His life and death, Jesus answered and disproved all of Satan's claims and accusations against God.

Isaiah 50:4-6: ⁴ The Sovereign LORD has taught me what to say,
so that I can strengthen the weary.

**Every morning he makes me eager
to hear what he is going to teach me.**

⁵ The LORD has given me understanding,
and I have not rebelled or turned away from him.

⁶ **I bared my back to those who beat me.**

**I did not stop them when they insulted me,
when they pulled out the hairs of my beard**

and spat in my face.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Isaiah 50:4–6). New York: American Bible Society.[†]

2. So, we see that Isaiah presented a brief sketch of what the Messiah would experience.
3. Earlier, in Isaiah 49:7, we have already been told that the One who was hated and despised will one day see kings rise to respect Him and princes bow low before Him.
4. In ancient near-eastern cultures, the honor of a family or group was considered to be a life-and-death matter. If someone was dishonored or mistreated, one could expect the family or group supporting the victim to retaliate—sooner or later.
5. So, the question arises: Did Jesus really have to go through all that terrible treatment just to save us? No! **He had to go through all that He suffered to answer Satan's accusations and questions before the entire universe. That was necessary for God to convincingly bring the great controversy to a close in the minds of every living being in the universe.** Without that, God would not have won; the great controversy might have begun again. Unless God wins the great controversy, there would be no eternal home for us to be saved to.

When Christ came to our world, Satan was on the ground, and disputed every inch of advance in his path from the manger to Calvary. Satan had accused God of requiring self-denial of the angels, when he knew nothing of what it meant himself, and when he would not himself make any self-sacrifice for others. **This was the accusation that Satan made against God in heaven; and after the evil one was expelled from heaven, he continually charged the Lord with exacting service which he would not render himself. Christ came to the world to meet these false accusations, and to reveal the Father.** We cannot conceive of the humiliation he endured in taking our nature upon himself. Not that in itself it was a disgrace to belong to the human race, but he was the Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, and he humbled himself to become a babe and suffer the wants and woes of mortals. He humbled himself not to the highest position, to be a man of riches and power, but though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He took step after step in humiliation. He was driven from city to city; for men would not receive the Light of the world. [The Pharisees wanted to kill Him.]

They were perfectly satisfied with their position.—Ellen G. White, Morning talk at Battle Creek, Mich., January 29, 1890. *Review and Herald*,* February 18, 1890, par. 2.[†] Compare 1SM406.2 [which has only capitalization differences].[‡]

6. Read 2 Samuel 10:1-12. This is an example of what David did in response to being despised and disrespected by Hunan the new king of Ammon. The entire nation of Ammon was conquered and became subservient to David. Did Jesus do something similar? No!
7. So, would one of us be willing to be despised and mocked for standing up for what we believe? Do we trust in God at every step of our lives? Do we refuse to rebel against God no matter what happens? Or, who tempts us? Read this entire passage carefully.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12: ¹³ The LORD says,

“My servant will succeed in his task;
he will be highly honoured.

¹⁴ Many people were shocked when they saw him;

he was so disfigured that he hardly looked human.

¹⁵ But now many nations will marvel at him,
and kings will be speechless with amazement.

They will see and understand
something they had never known.”

^{53:1} The people reply,

“Who would have believed what we now report?
Who could have seen the LORD’s hand in this?

² It was the will of the LORD that his servant
should grow like a plant taking root in dry ground.

He had no dignity or beauty
to make us take notice of him.

There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him.

³ We despised him and rejected him;
he endured suffering and pain.

No one would even look at him—
we ignored him as if he were nothing.

⁴ “But he endured the suffering that should have been ours,
the pain that we should have borne.

**All the while we thought that his suffering
was punishment sent by God.** [Today, how many believe that?]

⁵ But because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.

We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.

⁶ All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.

But the LORD made
the punishment fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved.

⁷ “He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly;
he never said a word.

Like a lamb about to be slaughtered,
like a sheep about to be sheared,
he never said a word.

⁸ He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die,
and no one cared about his fate.

He was put to death for the sins of our people.

⁹ He was placed in a grave with the wicked,
he was buried with the rich, even though he had never committed a crime

or ever told a lie.”

¹⁰ The LORD says,

“It was my will that he should suffer;
his death was a sacrifice to bring forgiveness.
And so he will see his descendants;
he will live a long life,
and through him my purpose will succeed.

¹¹ After a life of suffering, he will again have joy;
he will know that he did not suffer in vain.
My devoted servant, with whom I am pleased,
will bear the punishment of many
and for his sake I will forgive them.

¹² And so I will give him
a place of honour, a place among the great and powerful.
He willingly gave his life
and shared the fate of evil men.
He took the place of many sinners
and prayed that they might be forgiven.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

This is not the “milk” of Isaiah’s word. He has prepared his audience by developing the Messianic theme from the early part of his book. In following the overall course of the Messiah’s life on earth, the prophet started with His conception and birth (*Isa. 7:14*), introduced His identity as a divine Davidic king (*Isa. 9:6, 7*), elaborated on His work of restoration for Israel (*Isa. 11:1-16*), and quiet ministry of liberation from injustice and suffering (*Isa. 42:1-7*). Then Isaiah revealed that the Messiah’s grand drama includes the contrast of tragedy before exaltation (*Isa. 49:1-12, Isa. 50:6-10*). Now the Suffering Servant Poem plumbs the depths of the tragedy.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Monday, March 1.[§]

8. And what will be the result of that new King from David’s line? “The land will be as full of knowledge of the LORD as the seas are full of water.” (Isaiah 11:9, *GNB*^{*}) The result will be that all the people of God will come back together and live in peace. When will that be?
9. This One who was coming had a very strange pedigree. He was the “Eternal Father” and yet, He was a descendant of David! How could that be? He would possess all the power of divinity; (Isaiah 9:6-7) yet, He would be born as a helpless baby to a poor family. He would be despised because of His supposedly illegitimate birth, (Isaiah 7:14) but have power to control the elements of nature and save all those who trust in Him, judging and ruling fairly even for widows and orphans. He will produce a world where there will be no death, no dangerous animals, and eternal peace for all inhabitants. He will be so misunderstood that people will say that because of His claims to be One with God, religious leaders and their followers will believe that “His suffering was punishment sent by God.”
10. Review Isaiah 52:13-53:12 once again. We see the “valley” shape of this experience of the One who came down from His place in heaven to suffer the worst kinds of insults, even dying on the cross as a traitor to the government and then rising again to eternal glory. We are reminded of Philippians 2:5-11. So, what are we to learn from these passages?

Ephesians 1:7-10: ⁷For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, ⁸which he gave to us in such large measure!

In all his wisdom and insight ⁹God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ.

¹⁰This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is **to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [That is the real “at-one-ment”!][‡]

Colossians 1:19-20:¹⁹For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God.²⁰**Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's blood [Jesus's sacrificial death] on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.—Good News Bible.*†**

11. The work of Jesus will not be finished until the entire universe is brought back together in peace.

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan [against God] refuted, the nature and results of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,* February 13, 1893, par. 12.†† Compare *The Signs of the Times*, December 22, 1914, par. 4; *The Messenger*, June 7, 1893, par. 5; *Bible Echoes*, July 15, 1893, par. 3; *That I May Know Him* 366.4. [Each reference listed for comparison has insignificant wording differences; some include the words *against God* as are in brackets above.]‡

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; **it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. **The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 68.2-69.0 (1890).† Compare *Reflecting Christ* 50.3-4 (1985) [which quotes the end of John 12:32 as: “will draw all men unto me” even though the *KJV* has the word *men* in italics indicating that *men* is not in the original.]‡**

By coming to dwell with us, **Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels....** Not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. **Our little world is the lesson book of the universe.** God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which “angels desire to look,” [1 Peter 1:12] and **it will be their study throughout endless ages.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 19.2 (1898).†† Compare *Reflecting Christ* 15.3-4 (1985). Also Compare *AG* 45.3; *LDE* 31.1; *OFC* 200.3.**

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, “It is finished,” had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished....

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages 758.2-3 (1898).†**

12. Having been beaten and covered with bleeding wounds on His back, Jesus was crucified which caused bleeding, gaping wounds on His hands and feet. Having had all of His clothes removed, He was a revolting sight. That is exactly what the Roman authorities wanted to happen to anyone who was crucified because such a person was regarded as a traitor to the Roman government. Satan hoped Jesus would give up.

13. Having been thus treated, He would shock the world by rising from the dead and ascending to heaven to take His place on the throne of God. Why would God allow such a thing to happen to His Son?
14. Read Isaiah 53:2-3. God did not want anything of a worldly nature to attract us to Him. **God wanted some of us to be attracted to Him purely because of His divine nature and love.** However, because of His claims of divinity, most despised and rejected Him.
15. Read Isaiah 53:4. Back in the beginning, (Genesis 2:17) God had warned us of the consequences of sin. But, we disobeyed anyway! And Satan has been ultimately successful in leading every single human being except that One to sin and rebel against God's will. And because we could not fathom why all of this was happening to Him and following Satan's suggestions, **we assumed that God must be punishing Him!**
16. Read Isaiah 53:5-9. God knew something that we had refused to recognize. God knew that if we sin, we will die that death which is a direct result of sin, (Romans 6:23) and there would be no possibility for our salvation. **So, God Himself came to demonstrate what is meant by that death which is the ultimate and unavoidable consequence of sin. But, because He was divine, He could die and still rise in His own power and ascend back to heaven to take His place as the Ruler of the universe.**

When the voice of the mighty angel was heard at Christ's tomb, saying, Thy Father calls Thee, the Saviour came forth from the grave by the life that was in Himself. Now was proved the truth of His words, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Now was fulfilled the prophecy He had spoken to the priests and rulers, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John 10:17, 18; 2:19.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 785.2.†

17. The life and death of Jesus give us a choice. **God knew that there was no other way to demonstrate what needed to be shown. We can choose to live a life with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that is patterned after the life of Christ, or we will die the death that He died. It will be a death not of beating, blood loss, or crucifixion, but of being separated by our sins from God the Source of life.** (Isaiah 59:2; Acts 17:25; Matthew 27:46)
18. So, is it really possible to believe that someone could come down from the throne room of God, go through all those experiences, and then manage to return to retake His throne in heaven?
19. Was it possible for Jesus to take all that beating, scorning, torture, crowning with thorns, and crucifixion for our benefit? What did the universe looking on think of all that?
20. Think of the story of Job. What was accomplished through that tragedy? **Who was responsible for all of Job's troubles? (Job 1:9-12; 2:1-6)**
Job 1:8: "Did you notice my servant Job?" the LORD asked. **"There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is.** He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil."—*Good News Bible*.*†
Job 42:7-8: ⁷ After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you did not speak the truth about me, as my servant Job did. ⁸Now take seven bulls and seven rams to Job and offer them as a sacrifice for yourselves. Job will pray for you, and **I will answer his prayer and not disgrace you as you deserve. You did not speak the truth about me as he did.**"—*Good News Bible*.*†
21. Satan had made all sorts of accusations against God including the claim that God was not a correct and reliable Judge of character! Otherwise, He would not have cast Lucifer/Satan and his followers out of heaven! So, God allowed Job to go through that terrible experience to demonstrate that a particular human being that He, God, had declared to be upright and righteous would remain faithful to Him, and Job would do that no matter what Satan did to him! **Once again, Satan was proven to be wrong! God's foreknowledge was demonstrated!**

22. Let us be clear: Jesus suffered in unbelievable ways! From the time He appeared in that manger in Bethlehem, Satan and all his evil angels were absolutely determined to defeat Him. Almost immediately, through Herod the Great's effort to kill all the male babies, they hoped to destroy Him.
23. Satan had a three-step program by which he hoped to defeat Christ's mission. (1) He assured his evil associates that no one had yet lived as a human being on planet earth without sinning; and thus, he would get Jesus to sin. But he failed to do that. Then (2) If he could not get Jesus to sin, he would make life so difficult for Jesus that He would give up and go back to heaven, thus breaking up the plan of salvation. When that failed, and Jesus was dead in that tomb, (3) Satan and all his angels were determined to keep that Body dead. They claimed that every dead person belonged to them—that death was their realm. But, when an angel was sent from heaven arrayed with God's glory and came down to this earth, there was nothing that Satan and his evil angels could do but scatter. The angel rolled back the stone, and Jesus was called to come forth in His own power. (See *Desire of Ages* 780, 790.)
24. Read again Isaiah 53:4-6. **Why did people think that Jesus was being tortured by God?** God had provided all the answers that the entire universe needed. Those answers are what save us from being deceived by the Devil. God's salvation is now available to all who believe. (Acts 16:31) But, why was this really all necessary?
- The answer to the question "Why?" is Isaiah's testing truth: *Because of God's love, His Messiah would choose to suffer.* But why? Isaiah drives the "golden spike" in to complete the unthinkable truth: *He would choose to suffer in order to reach the unreachable, and the unreachable are us!*—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, March 3.[§] [Is that really why? Or, did the Devil and his evil forces cause that suffering?][‡]
25. **Satan's deceptions must be responded to in order for us to learn the truth about God and about Satan.** To answer Satan's claims and accusations required each step in the suffering of Christ. God would not have done it if it was not necessary. This whole sequence was an essential part of the great controversy saga.
26. Just as Job's friends were sure that Job must have committed some terrible sin and that was why those terrible things happened to him, the religious leaders in Jesus's day believed that He was a terrible sinner because of His claims about His relationship with His Father in heaven.
- What a price has been paid for us! Behold the cross, and the Victim uplifted upon it. Look at those hands, pierced with the cruel nails. Look at His feet, fastened with spikes to the tree. Christ bore our sins in His own body. That suffering, that agony, is the price of your redemption.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,** vol. 6, 479.2 (1901); *God's Amazing Grace** 172.4; *HP** 222.2.
27. **Let it be understood clearly that God did not cause all those evil things to happen. He simply allowed Satan to do his worst so the onlooking universe, as well as those of us who are paying attention, may come to understand what a universe controlled by the Devil would be like!**
28. The weight, the guilt, the punishment for the sins of the whole world—every sin, by every sinner—fell upon Christ at the cross as the only means to save us! What does it tell us about how bad sin is that such a "price" had to be "paid" in order to redeem us from it? What does it tell us about God's love that He would do this for us, even at such a great cost?
29. Jesus died to demonstrate the truth about sin and its results. (Romans 6:23) It is not really possible to transfer my sins which are being committed in 2021 to Jesus who died almost 2000 years ago. Sins cannot be moved around like a pile of trash.
- When we individually rest upon Christ, with full assurance of faith, trusting alone to the efficacy of his blood to cleanse from all sin, we shall have peace in believing that what God has promised he is able to perform. **As Christ**

represented the Father, so we are to represent Christ to the world. We cannot transfer our obligation to others.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* March 5, 1889, par. 6.†

By this ceremony the sin was, through the blood, transferred *in figure* to the sanctuary. In some cases the blood was not taken into the holy place; but the flesh was then to be eaten by the priest, as Moses directed the sons of Aaron, saying: “God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation.” Leviticus 10:17. Both ceremonies alike **symbolized** the transfer of the sin from the penitent to the sanctuary.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 418.1.† [Italic type is added for emphasis.]‡ Compare *PP* 354.2.

30. So, why would God allow His Son to go through that awful experience of being separated from the Father and dying on the cross? God hopes that we will realize the awfulness of sin and choose to follow Him instead of following sin and the Devil.

The law of God’s government was to be magnified by the death of God’s only-begotten Son. Christ bore the guilt of the sins of the world. Our sufficiency is found only in the incarnation and death of the Son of God. He could suffer, because [He was] sustained by divinity. He could endure, because He was without one taint of disloyalty or sin. Christ triumphed in man’s behalf in thus bearing the justice of punishment. He secured eternal life to men, while He exalted the law, and made it honorable.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,* Book 1, 302.1; *SD** 48.2.‡ Compare *The Youth’s Instructor*, August 4, 1898, par. 4; *7SDABC* 451.4.

31. Think of all the ways that Isaiah 53:7-9 say that Jesus would be treated. Compare what we know of the story of His sufferings and His death as recorded in Matthew 26-27; Mark 14:53-15:46; Luke 22:54-23:53; and John 18:12-19:42.

32. So, how did the death of Christ magnify the law of God? What does that mean?

Now the guilt of Satan stood forth without excuse. **He had revealed his true character as a liar and a murderer. It was seen that the very same spirit with which he ruled the children of men, who were under his power, he would have manifested had he been permitted to control the inhabitants of heaven.** He had claimed that the transgression of God’s law would bring liberty and exaltation; but it was seen to result in bondage and degradation.

Satan’s lying charges against the divine character and government appeared in their true light. He had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, and had declared that, while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice. Now it was seen that for the salvation of a fallen and sinful race, the Ruler of the universe had made the greatest sacrifice which love could make; for “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. It was seen, also, that while Lucifer had opened the door for the entrance of sin by his desire for honor and supremacy, Christ had, in order to destroy sin, humbled Himself and become obedient unto death.

God had manifested His abhorrence of the principles of rebellion. All heaven saw His justice revealed, both in the condemnation of Satan and in the redemption of man. Lucifer had declared that if the law of God was changeless, and its penalty could not be remitted, every transgressor must be forever debarred from the Creator’s favor. He had claimed that the sinful race were placed beyond redemption and were therefore his rightful prey. But the death of Christ was an argument in man’s behalf that could not be overthrown. The penalty of the law fell upon Him who was equal with God, and man was free to accept the righteousness of Christ and by a life of penitence and humiliation to

triumph, as the Son of God had triumphed, over the power of Satan. Thus God is just and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus. [See Romans 3:25-26.]

But it was not merely to accomplish the redemption of man that Christ came to the earth to suffer and to die. He came to “magnify the law” and to “make it honorable.” Not alone that the inhabitants of this world might regard the law as it should be regarded; but it was to demonstrate to all the worlds of the universe that God’s law is unchangeable. Could its claims have been set aside, then the Son of God need not have yielded up His life to atone for its transgression. The death of Christ proves it immutable. And the sacrifice to which infinite love impelled the Father and the Son, that sinners might be redeemed, demonstrates to all the universe—that nothing less than this plan of atonement could have sufficed to do—that **justice and mercy are the foundation of the law and government of God.**

In the final execution of the judgment it will be seen that **no cause for sin exists.** When the Judge of all the earth shall demand of Satan, “Why hast thou rebelled against Me, and robbed Me of the subjects of My kingdom?” the originator of evil can render no excuse. Every mouth will be stopped, and all the hosts of rebellion will be speechless.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 502.1-503.2.^{†‡}

33. This song in Isaiah 52&53 of the suffering Servant has led to many vigorous discussions among scholars. Jewish scholars generally believe that the suffering servant is actually a metaphor for the nation of Israel. But, we as Christians believe that:

The book of Isaiah itself provides some insights to help us make a clear, positive identification of the Servant as the Messiah. The song first identifies the Messiah as the King (*Isa. 52:7, 8*); second, it identifies the Messiah as Rescuer and Redeemer (*Isa. 52:9-15*); and finally, it identifies the Messiah as the Suffering One (*Isaiah 53*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 132.[§]

As we suggested earlier, a third possibility is that Jesus suffered and died to answer questions in the great controversy over God’s character and government including: (1) What Satan really is like, (2) What a world ruled by Satan would be like, and (3) What God is really like.

34. There are two verses in our study for today which seemed to be in contradiction.

Isaiah 53:10: ¹⁰ The LORD says,

“It was my will that he should suffer;

his death was a sacrifice to bring forgiveness.

And so he will see his descendants;

he will live a long life,

and through him my purpose will succeed.”—*Good News Bible.*†*

And **Isaiah 53:4:** ⁴ “But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne.

All the while we thought that his suffering

was punishment sent by God.”—*Good News Bible.*†*

35. Was God punishing Jesus? Absolutely not! **God was allowing Satan to do his worst so that the universe looking on could see what it would be like if Satan were in control. God allowed it, yes. But, did He do it? No!**

36. What can we, as Christians living in 2021, learn from these passages written more than 2700 years ago that will help us on a day-by-day basis?

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