

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 53:4, THE SUFFERING SERVANT, PART 6

Isaiah 53:4 <sup>4</sup>Surely [אֲכִן] our griefs [הָלִי] He Himself bore [נִשָּׂא], And our sorrows [מִכְאוֹב] He carried [סָבַל]; Yet we ourselves esteemed [הִשְׁבַּח] Him stricken [נִגַּע], Smitten [נָכַה] of God, and afflicted [עָנָה].

There is no way that any serious Bible student or theologian can read these verses and deny the substitutionary, vicarious nature of His sacrifice on the cross. As this verse eventually proves, national Israel is going to realize and admit that the Messiah did, in fact, die for their sins on the cross. "Now they acknowledge that He did not suffer for His own sins, but that He carried upon His shoulders the burden of their sins and the pain of their transgressions. His suffering was expiatory and vicarious in nature" [Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A Commentary*, 417]. What they will also realize at that point is that the Messiah is Jesus just as Christians have maintained from the time of the birth of the Church at Pentecost.

The subject, griefs, precedes the verb in this verse which is an indication of emphasis. The NASB inserted the pronoun "Himself" into the English text; it is not there in the Hebrew text. The only other English translation that does that is the Christian Standard Bible. What is in the text is "He, He bore." The second "He" is part of the verb form. When that happens, English translators generally drop the translation of the second personal pronoun, and that is the case with all the other translations I routinely compare. It does, however, indicate another form of emphasis because the independent personal pronoun did not have to be in the text; the personal pronoun is already present in the verb. The NASB and the CSB are trying to show us the emphasis on Him that is in the text that we would not ordinarily notice in our English translations, but a Hebrew reader would certainly notice it. It did not have to be translated in the reflexive form, "Himself." It could have been "He, He bore" with a comma between the two pronouns and that would have been not only more faithful to the Hebrew text, it would have been perfectly understandable and grammatically correct in English. Neither one of the pronouns in the Hebrew text are reflexive. Between the emphasis of the word order and the emphasis of the doubled up personal pronouns, this clause is very emphatic. I think the NASB and the CSB are correct in pointing out this use of the pronouns in their translations; it just was not necessary to use the reflexive pronoun "Himself" to do it. The personal pronoun "He" was sufficient to make the point.

Surely, אֲכִן, means surely, truly, or indeed and it is used as a marker of emphasis. This verse begins with a word that commands the attention of the one reading about the Suffering Servant, and it places emphasis on what is being revealed. Here, the word emphasizes the occurrence of the unexpected [cf. J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 334].

Griefs, הָלִי, means, illness, wound, affliction, or calamity. All of these elements in the meaning of the word are part of the fate of the Israelites and of mankind living in this sinful, broken, fallen world that is, at this time, operated according to the rulership of Satan to

the extent God allows. We are beset by illness, by wounds that result from physical violence of various kinds, and by afflictions or troubles that characterize life lived under the auspices of the world system as it exists at this time. Israel, due to the desire of Satan to defeat God by eliminating Israel and the Israelites from the face of the earth, has been especially hard hit with all these troubling things, but eventually the work done on their behalf on the cross will be recognized by the nation and all Israel will be saved as a result (Rom. 11:26). Furthermore, Israel has suffered these things to a great extent due to the temporal discipline imposed on the nation by God for disobedience and rebellion (Lv. 26; Dt. 28). In a sense, much of what the nation has suffered has been the result of self-inflicted wounds as a result of their rebellion against God. That will end only when they return to Yahweh their God (Dt. 30:2).

Sorrows, מְאֵיב, means pain, anguish, suffering, sorrow referring to not only bodily physical pain, but primarily to the anguish, grief, and suffering that are the mental and emotional damages caused by the various circumstances of life.

Griefs refers primarily, but not exclusively, to the physical aspects of the pain that characterizes the world at this time, and sorrows primarily, but not exclusively, refers to the emotional distress that accompanies the travails of life in an exceedingly sinful world that is in rebellion against God. The cross work of the Messiah is the remedy—the only remedy—for this situation.

To this day, many people believe that because Jesus healed people during His ministry and because He, it is claimed, bore our sicknesses on the cross, there should be no sickness today, at least among Christians. Most Pentecostals and Charismatics hold this position. In so doing, they fail to understand several issues.

One problem with that line of thought is that the purpose of signs, miracles, and wonders is for validating God's message and His messenger. Jesus' healing ministry was specifically for the purpose of validating His identity as Israel's Messiah, and the Lord affirmed this truth in His answer to John the Baptist when John questioned whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah (cf. Is. 35:5-6; Mt. 11:2-6).

Isaiah 35:5-6 <sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. <sup>6</sup>Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah.

Matthew 11:2-6 <sup>2</sup>Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>*the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, and *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. <sup>6</sup>"And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

Bearing the griefs and the sorrows of the Israelites was a pre-cross ministry of the Suffering Servant. The first two clauses of verse 4 are telling us that the Suffering Servant was verifying His credentials as the Messiah by means of His healing ministry. The last two clauses of

verse 4 are telling us that despite His healing miracles that verified His identity, He was rejected and put to death anyway.

Matthew 8:16–17 <sup>16</sup>When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.”

“The Holy Spirit carefully led Matthew to record only that part of Isaiah 53:4 which would really apply to His ministry of miracle-working ... [I]n His healing ministry before the Cross, Christ ‘fulfilled’ Isaiah 53:4a. Only after this does Isaiah 53:4b say ‘Yet we *did* esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.’ In spite of His fulfilling messianic prophecy concerning miracles, the Jews rejected Him and desired His crucifixion” [Thomas O. Figart, *The King of the Kingdom of Heaven: A Commentary of Matthew*, 171].

Another problem with this thinking that healing is part of the Suffering Servant’s cross-work is that this verse is not saying that He bore griefs and sorrows, that is, illness, on the cross. Those who think physical healing is part of the cross work of the Suffering Servant fail to understand that neither our physical health nor our spiritual health has been restored to what it was originally meant to be in the creation—but it will be. If nothing else, believers get sick and die. The only conclusion we can reach then is that illness was not removed based on the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant on the cross. The Messiah’s death has made that possible, because the sin problem was dealt with on the cross and illness is the result of sin, but the finality or fulfillment of it in total is still in the future. Everyone who believes in Him receives immediate forgiveness for personal sins, but the sin nature will not be eliminated in the believing person until after physical death and resurrection, or in the Rapture of the Church. Physical healing awaits the resurrection and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom where sickness will apparently still be present, but only minimally, and physical healing will then be standard operating procedure when illness or injury strikes. Remember, physical illness is present only as the result of sin and people in the Kingdom will still have a sin nature, but these things will certainly be minimized at that time. “This Old Testament prophecy looks forward to Christ’s work on the cross when He was to bear the sins of the world and thus make provision for removing the results of sin—sickness, death, and demon possession.... Christ’s work of taking away sin on the cross makes possible the removal of disease and deformity in the Kingdom and eternity. Thus the blessed conditions of the kingdom sovereignty were being displayed before the eyes of the Israelites as the healing ministry of the King previewed the results of the cross” [Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, 125].

“Verse 4 and its fulfillment in Matthew 8:16-17 shows that physical healing is *not* in the atonement, but rather that spiritual healing guarantees a future glorified body. Physical healing is a sovereign act of God, flowing from the cross of Christ, but it is *not* an integral part of the atonement” [Merrill F. Unger, “Isaiah” in *Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1297].

Griefs and sorrows are the plight of mankind in general, and the Israelites in particular in this context, but mere men cannot solve the situation on their own. These words are plural; mankind is beset by all kinds of griefs and sorrows that make life lived under the

auspices of the world system very difficult. The world and its people were not created to live in this condition. The source of the problem is sin; the griefs and sorrows, as devastating as they are in and of themselves, are the symptoms of the problem. "Christ died for our sins, not for our diseases, for physical disease in itself is not sin; it is merely one of the results of sin" [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1297]. The Suffering Servant must bear and carry these things on mankind's behalf in order for the sin problem to be rectified.

The revelation contained here is not figurative or metaphorical; it is real. The punishment for sin is death, and there is no forgiveness available in death without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). That death must be of a sinless One in place of the sinful one. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. "Bore" and "carried" are synonyms.

Bore, נָשָׂא, means to lift, to carry, and to take away. In this context, "the second semantic category [there are three] is to bear or to carry and is used especially in reference to the bearing of guilt or punishment of sin. This flows easily then into the concept of the representative or substitutionary bearing of one person's guilt by another" [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "נָשָׂא," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 755]. This is the same word used in Leviticus 16:22 to describe the mission of the scapegoat who carries and takes away the iniquities of the nation by removing them to the wilderness. "This servant of the Lord, says the prophet, is one who has shared, undeservedly and intensely, in the sins and hurts of others" [Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., s.v. "נָשָׂא," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 3:163].

Carried, נָשָׂא, means to incur, to bear a load, and to carry referring to initiating an action to unburden another of an unpleasant state or condition, with a focus that the subject will experience that state, implying care and sustenance. In this context, there may be an additional focus of becoming in a state of guilt. The stress is on the process of bearing or transporting a load. The sense is to bear or endure something unpleasant or difficult whether on one's own behalf or on behalf of someone else. The root of the word is also used in the context of dealing with punishments or penalties. "The most important context in which this root occurs is Isa. 53:4-11. Here the coming servant, Messiah, lifts up and takes upon himself man's sicknesses and bears the weight of his worrisome sorrows. Nothing could more graphically portray the vicarious sacrificial work of Christ who bore the penalty for man's sin so that many may receive God's righteousness and stand justified before him" [Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, s.v. "נָשָׂא," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 616].

At the time the Suffering Servant was being murdered on the cross, the people thought that He was being punished for His own sins, not for theirs. The majority of the world still believes that, if they even think about it at all, but one day, still in the future, people, especially the Israelites, will figure it all out, and they will realize that He was being punished for their sins which is a punishment that rightfully belonged to them and not to Him. It is true that He was being afflicted by God (cf. Is. 53:10), but it was not due to His sin; instead, it was due to the sin of the nation. The people esteemed Him to be stricken, smitten, and afflicted, all of which imply that His situation was His own fault and that He was justly suffering for His own sins. These words are all in the form of passive participles meaning that His suffering was imposed on Him by outside forces.

Esteemed, *קָשַׁב*, means to think, to account, to reckon, to regard, or to make a judgment. It relates to considering something pertaining to thought and thinking in a detailed, logical manner, considering various factors which has some focus on the formulation of an opinion. The basic idea of the word is the employment of the mind in thinking activity. In this context, the word is used in the sense of making a judgment, which relates to the nation and their thinking that the Suffering Servant was being punished for His own sins.

The nation thought it was immune from God's judgment because they were His people and they had the Temple. That thinking would be debunked by Babylon when they destroyed the nation, Jerusalem, and the Temple, yet they ignored the full significance of what happened to them at that time. They still had that attitude when the Messiah was making His offer to be the King of Israel. John the Baptist had to remind the leadership that they were not immune to judgment based on their Jewish heritage. Later, the Lord reminded some unbelievers of that truth as well (John 8:31-59).

Matthew 3:7 <sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

John 8:39–40 <sup>39</sup>They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. <sup>40</sup>"But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.

At some point in the future, after the cross, the nation is going to realize the mistake they made by thinking this way, and they will realize that He really died for them and their sins, not His own. "The speakers wrongly concluded that he was suffering afflictions that were justly sent by God for the sins he had committed. Their perspective was partially right and partially wrong, for God did smite him (cf. 53:10), but their understanding of why he was smitten was wrong (he was not being punished for his own sins)" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 450]. With the exception of the believing remnant, the nation will not finally figure this out until the Second Coming.

Stricken, *נָגַע*, means to touch, which is the basic meaning, and to reach, to strike. It can refer to inflicting a blow, possibly a fatal blow, and it may refer to being plagued and so being in a sick or a weak condition. "... [in this context, it has the sense of] being afflicted which is conceived of as being plagued" [s.v. "נָגַע," *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Logos electronic ed.]. "Plagued" is used in the YLT, LSV, and the TANAKH. This may be the best way to interpret this word because the other two words refer to the physical and the mental aspects of the Suffering Servant's mission. The people "regarded him as one punished by God with a loathsome and hateful disease.... it [נָגַע] does suggest the infliction of a hateful disease ... The precise character of the sickness is not mentioned, but we are probably on safe ground in saying that it was a loathsome, disgraceful disease, which resulted from the striking" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:347]. Examining these words that way, allows each word to shed some unique light on the Suffering Servant's condition and differentiates these somewhat

synonymous words from one another. Physical wounding and the infliction of death, mental suffering, and sickness resulting from a serious disease.

Isaiah 53:4 <sup>4</sup> ... And we—we have esteemed him plagued [נָגַעַ], Smitten of God, and afflicted (YLT).

Isaiah 53:4 <sup>4</sup> ... And we have esteemed Him [as] plagued [נָגַעַ], struck of God, and afflicted (LSV).

Because of the use of this word (נָגַעַ) in 2 Kings 15:5 where it is used to indicate that leprosy was imposed as punishment on a Davidic king, Azariah, AKA Uzziah, some Rabbis believe the Suffering Servant will be inflicted with leprosy. That reasoning is suspect. Just because a Davidic king in the past was struck with leprosy in judgment, does not mean striking the Suffering Servant with a plague in the future must be the same plague. That same kind of thinking is very prevalent among Pentecostals and Charismatics who believe that whatever God did in the past must be done in the future in the same way in the same type of circumstances. They base this largely on Hebrews 13:8 which says:

Hebrews 13:8 <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever.

2 Kings 15:5 <sup>5</sup>The LORD struck [נָגַעַ] the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death....

"It is impossible from this verse alone to tie these verbs down to any specific consequences experienced by the Servant.... It is inappropriate to connect the passive participle נָגַעַ 'stricken' to refer to the idea that God struck this servant with leprosy just because this term is used repeatedly in Lev 13-14 to describe those who are struck with leprosy. This verb can be used in other contexts, and there is nothing specific in this context that points directly toward leprosy" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 450, 450 n. 374].

However, at least one dispensational theologian apparently agrees with the idea that leprosy was the disease inflicted on the Suffering Servant. "Yet we did esteem (estimate) him (indicating the strongest emphasis and contrast) stricken (*nāgûa* 'smitten' with loathsome disease by God's judgment, particularly the 'plague' of leprosy; 2 Kings 15:5) ..." [Merrill F. Unger, "Isaiah" in *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1297]. I would not disagree that leprosy is certainly a possibility; after all, it was considered to be the most loathsome of diseases in that ancient time. That, however, does not mean, and is a far cry from mandating, that it must be leprosy based on the passage in 2 Kings 15:5.

God cannot be locked into that box; He can do in each and every circumstance whatever He decides to do regardless of what He has or has not done in the past. Whatever plague will strike the Suffering Servant will be inflicted on Him by God at the time according to His will whether it is leprosy or some other plague type of ailment. The only things God cannot do are those that violate His nature.

Smitten, נָגַעַ, means to smite, to strike, to wound referring to making physical contact with a blow. The sense of the word is to be struck which affects or afflicts suddenly and usually adversely. This verb form is causative passive meaning to be struck, to be beat, to be

wounded. These are forces acting on the Suffering Servant and inflicting these injuries on Him.

Afflicted, עָנָה, means to be afflicted, disturbed, oppressed which refers to being in a state of feeling anxiety and distress. The sense of the word refers to being caused to be afflicted by causing someone to experience great unhappiness. This verb form is intensive passive meaning the affliction is very intense and imposed on the Suffering Servant by external forces.

Crucifixion was one of the most horrifyingly imaginative and cruel ways to execute someone ever devised. I found an abstract of an article written for physicians entitled "The History and Pathology of Crucifixion" from an organization called *The National Library of Medicine*.

"In antiquity crucifixion was considered one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death. Probably originating with the Assyrians and Babylonians, it was used systematically by the Persians in the 6th century BC. Alexander the Great brought it from there to the eastern Mediterranean countries in the 4th century BC, and the Phoenicians introduced it to Rome in the 3rd century BC. It was virtually never used in pre-Hellenic Greece. The Romans perfected crucifixion [sic] for 500 years until it was abolished by Constantine I in the 4th century AD. Crucifixion in Roman times was applied mostly to slaves, disgraced soldiers, Christians and foreigners--only very rarely to Roman citizens. Death, usually after 6 hours--4 days, was due to multifactorial pathology: after-effects of compulsory scourging and maiming, haemorrhage [bleeding] and dehydration causing hypovolaemic shock [caused by reduced blood volume] and pain, but the most important factor was progressive asphyxia caused by impairment of respiratory movement. Resultant anoxaemia [deficiency in the amount of oxygen in the blood] exaggerated hypovolaemic shock. Death was probably commonly precipitated by cardiac arrest, caused by vasovagal reflexes [either one of the tenth pair of cranial nerves, consisting of motor fibers that innervate the muscles of the pharynx, larynx, heart, and thoracic and abdominal viscera, and of sensory fibers that conduct impulses from these structures to the brain], initiated inter alia by severe anoxaemia, severe pain, body blows and breaking of the large bones. The attending Roman guards could only leave the site after the victim had died, and were known to precipitate death by means of deliberate fracturing of the tibia and/or fibula, spear stab wounds into the heart, sharp blows to the front of the chest, or a smoking fire built at the foot of the cross to asphyxiate the victim" [F. P. Retief and L. Cilliers, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14750495/>, accessed 13 Nov. 2021].

One thing we have to remember about the entire process of the Lord's execution, is that He was beaten and scourged, certainly losing a lot of blood, all of which took Him to the brink of death before He ever got to the cross.

We think of the cross that the Messiah died on as a Latin cross, but it was more likely the Tau cross which was a cross shaped like our capital letter "T." It would have been far too much weight for a man who had just been scourged to carry the Latin cross. Even the crossbeam of the Tau cross was heavy, and the Lord needed it to be carried for Him (Mt. 27:32).

The prisoner was nailed to the cross with a nail in each wrist and one through the feet although there were probably times when the feet were nailed separately on each side of the cross. The hands may have been tied to the cross beam as well. Most people think the nails went through the palms of the condemned one, but the hands would have ripped apart on the nail with the full body weight bearing downward on it. There are nerves in both the wrists and the feet that would have sent excruciating pain signals to the brain.

In order to breath, the man would have to push himself up and down on the cross further aggravating the back that was already shredded from the scourging. Muscle cramps would have added an extremely painful element to the process. Eventually the pericardium fills with serum and compresses the heart which causes an immense amount of chest pain. The blood gets thick and the heart has difficulty pumping it throughout the body. The lungs cannot exhale until the body is pushed up which is another excruciating process. All of this is being done while under the terrifying feeling of being suffocated to death.

It was not uncommon for the Roman soldiers to break the legs of the condemned man so that he could not raise himself up to exhale and continue breathing. This was not an act of mercy; it was done for the convenience of the soldiers when they wanted to leave the area and be done with their assignment. The Suffering Servant did not require this act to be done because He was already dead (John 19:31-33). However, a soldier did pierce His side with a spear in order to ensure that His life had ended (John 19:34).

“Apparently, to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. The 34th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John reports: “And immediately there came out blood and water.” That is, there was an escape of water fluid from the sac surrounding the heart, giving postmortem evidence that Our Lord died not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure (a broken heart) due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium” [for a full explanation see Dr. C. Truman Davis, “A Physician’s View of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ,” <https://www1.cbn.com/medical-view-of-the-crucifixion-of-jesus-christ>, accessed 13 Nov. 2021].