



The Gospel according to God: Rediscovering the Most Remarkable Chapter in the Old Testament

John F. MacArthur Jr.

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Written to help readers better understand Jesus's life, death, and ultimate mission, this new book by well-known preacher John MacArthur looks at an important—yet often misunderstood—section of the Bible: Isaiah 53. Often hailed as one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, this passage foretells the crucifixion of Jesus, a critical event in God's ultimate plan for salvation. Explaining the prophetic words of Isaiah 53 verse by verse, MacArthur highlights important connections to the history of Israel and to the New Testament—ultimately showing us how these prophetic words to ancient Israel illuminate essential truths for our lives today.

The Gospel according to God: Rediscovering the Most Remarkable Chapter in the Old Testament Details

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David Steele says

C.H. Spurgeon calls the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah “a Bible in miniature … the condensed essence of the gospel.” John MacArthur agrees refers to Isaiah 53 as “the most remarkable chapter in the Old Testament.” This is the grand theme of Dr. MacArthur’s most recent book, *The Gospel According to God*.

Part One: The Suffering Servant

The first part of the book, which also comprises the majority of the book includes the key doctrinal distinctives of Isaiah chapter 53. The author explores the identity of the suffering servant, his humiliation, his suffering, and his exaltation. The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is presented, both biblically and polemically. MacArthur rightly notes, “Isaiah is describing a purposeful act of penal substitution carried out by the sovereign will of his Father.”

Part Two: The Life and Times of Isaiah the Prophet

The remainder of the book focusses on the prophet, Isaiah. The historical setting is set forth in vivid detail, including the demise of Judah. Readers are warned to steer clear from apostasy and serve Christ with unfettered devotion.

Summary

The Gospel According to God is a faithful exposition of a crucial section of Scripture that informs and inspires followers of Jesus Christ. The combination of rich doctrine and practical application make this book an important piece of a growing believer’s theological library. The gospel-centered truths that MacArthur presents are important reminders to remain faithful in a day marked by unbelief and apostasy.

I received this book free from the publisher. I was not required to write a positive review.

gail thompson says

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah foretold of the coming of the suffering servant, the future Messiah. In an easy to read, 224 page book, *The Gospel According to God*, by John MacArthur unpacks one of the most beautiful, but most misunderstood chapters in Old Testament Scripture, Isaiah 53. Arguably one of the most scrutinized chapters by textual critics as to its authenticity as prophesy, MacArthur’s exposition of verses 52:13 through 53:12 accomplishes exactly what the title suggests: it reveals the full gospel of Christ as prophesied by Isaiah and lived out by Christ and recorded in the New Testament.

Complete in sound doctrine, this book will enhance your love for the book of Isaiah, expand your understanding of this particular passage, and increase your future hope as you see the reality of Isaiah 53 lived out in the life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ultimate victory of Christ.

Becky says

First sentence: This is one of the chapters that lie at the very heart of the Scriptures. It is the very Holy of holies of Divine Writ. Let us, therefore, put off our shoes from our feet, for the place whereon we stand is specially holy ground. This fifty-third of Isaiah is a Bible in miniature. It is the condensed essence of the gospel. Charles Spurgeon

I love that MacArthur begins the book--begins most chapters of his book--with a quote by Charles Spurgeon.

The Gospel According to God is a study of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The book is divided into two sections. The first section--the majority of the book--walks readers verse by verse through this chapter. The second chapter--just two chapters--is about the life and times of the prophet Isaiah.

MacArthur writes, "The book of Isaiah is sometimes called the "fifth Gospel." It's really more than that. It contains in microcosm the whole range of redemptive truth. It is like a miniature compendium of the Bible. In fact, there are some interesting parallels between how the book of Isaiah is laid out and the arrangement of the Bible as a whole." He continues, "No text in the entire Old Testament is more momentous than Isaiah 52:13–53:12. It is a prophecy that begins and ends with the voice of Yahweh himself."

MacArthur's book is an exposition of Isaiah 53--verse by verse. It is also a reminder of what the gospel is and what the gospel isn't. Do we as individuals get to determine what the gospel is and isn't? Or is the Bible emphatic and clear?! Do we get to change and modify the gospel to suit our needs? Or is the Bible calling us to change and be changed by the gospel, through the gospel?!

MacArthur's book challenged me to think of Isaiah 53 in a new way. I had always thought of it in a simplistic way: Look, Isaiah is prophesying about Jesus! Jesus came and fulfilled this prophecy! The end. MacArthur writes,

"Don't miss this fact: the prophet is describing the sacrifice of the suffering servant from a vantage point that looks back from a time still in the future even now. He is seeing the cross from a prophetic perspective near the end of human history. He is prophesying the collective response of the Jewish people when they finally see, understand, and believe that the one they rejected truly is the promised Messiah. Isaiah is standing prophetically on that very day, near the end of human history, literally thousands of years after Jesus was crucified. He therefore speaks of Christ's death on the cross as a past event. That explains why all the verbs in chapter 53 from verse 1 through the first part of verse 10 are in the past tense. In other words, we need to understand this passage not merely as a description of the crucifixion per se; it is literally the lament of repentant Israel at a future time when the Jewish people will look back on the Messiah whom they had for so long rejected, and they will finally embrace him as their Lord and King. Isaiah 53 gives voice prophetically to the dramatic confession of faith that the believing remnant of Israel will make at that time."

He continues, "It is a significant moment in the yet-future final act of the story of redemption. The only worldwide ethnic community that will ever turn to Christ in multitudes together as a group will be Israel. And when they do so, the words of Isaiah 53 will be their confession."

I definitely enjoyed reading this one.

NinaB says

I received a free advanced copy of this book through NetGalley.

The Gospel According to God is classic John MacArthur. It is a biblically saturated, clear exposition of Isaiah 53 (beginning from 52:13), “the complete gospel in prophetic form, a surprisingly explicit foretelling of what the Messiah would do to put away the sins of his people forever. It is the gospel according to God, set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures.”

I have listened to several testimonies of Messianic Jews who never heard of Isaiah 53 being read in their synagogues. John MacArthur asserts the same fact and explains why practicing Jews avoid this chapter. The first part of the book covers the in-depth study of the passage. Using the Scriptures as the basis of his points, MacArthur skillfully and convincingly proves that the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in none other than Jesus Christ. Because of this, it is a good apologetics book to share with your Jewish friends.

The second part of this book talks about the historical context of the book of Isaiah - what was happening during the time of its writing. Understanding this part gives a deeper insight into the importance of the book.

Finally, I am pleased that MacArthur included Charles Spurgeon’s sermon on the Man of Sorrows in the Appendix. It is a fitting conclusion to his exposition of the passage. It is where the masterfully detailed study in prior chapters becomes devotional.

We will never understand completely the severity of the cross, at least in this life. “Yahweh ordained that something horrific, inexplicable, and incomprehensible would happen to his servant. The servant’s death was God’s doing, according to God’s plan...It was ultimately the Lord God who pierced him for our transgressions, chastised him to bring us peace, wounded him to heal us, and laid our iniquities on him. But even more shocking is that God, who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11), took pleasure in the death of his servant, the righteous one.”

“Jesus took on himself his people’s sin, guilt, grief, sorrow—and every other sinister expression of our fallenness. He voluntarily endured God’s punishment for those evils. And he thereby purchased peace and blessing from God for us. The death of the physician made the patient well.”

Get his book. Read it. Study it. Be changed by it. Share it with others. Marvel at the worthiness of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, the Man of sorrows. Be humbled that His undeserved sufferings result in our undeserved salvation.

Blake says

I love the gospel. Every day I preach it to myself. I hope you do to. I also have a deep appreciation and respect for John MacArthur and have read almost every book he has written, with the exceptions being his commentaries (although I’ve read several of them and often reference them in my studies). There is one particular series of books that John MacArthur has penned that I absolutely treasure. That series revolves

around the gospel. A couple of decades ago, I read the first installment of this series, titled, "The Gospel According to Jesus." It was such a great read and it helped me immensely to understand the essence of the gospel that Christ Himself presented. The book provoked a firestorm of arguments across the globe, some hating the book, others saying that it showed how MacArthur believed that one is saved by faith plus works (which couldn't be further from the truth), and others still finding the volume life changing. I took a counselee through the book and later he believed on Christ for salvation shortly before he had a heart attack and stepped into eternity. The Gospel According to Jesus was used to bring this man to true saving faith. But the book also provoked a lot of questions. The discussions that followed were awesome, and so, MacArthur published a follow up book titled, "The Gospel According to the Apostles." I love this book. It answered so many questions about the nature of true saving faith, the role of faith and repentance, about the gospel that the apostles presented and whether it was a different gospel than that presented by Christ. It was a treasure to those who longed to understand the purity of the gospel and the sufficiency of the Apostles message. More recently, MacArthur came out with, "The Gospel According to Paul," which narrowed the focus down to the specifics of what Paul, the apostle, taught, pertaining to the gospel.

2018 welcomed the fourth installment of this series, titled, "The Gospel According to God." It is a phenomenal book, focusing on the most remarkable chapter in the Old Testament. That chapter is Isaiah 53. MacArthur does what he does best, taking the content of Isaiah 53, establishing an understanding of the context of the chapter, then walking verse by verse through chapter 53, showing how each element of the prophesy of Isaiah 53 was fulfilled in Christ. The book is really a study in the Doctrine of Salvation. Recently I read Isaiah 53 out loud to a person I was counseling. When I was done reading it, he said, "That's incredible. That's about Jesus Christ, isn't it?" When I told him how this chapter in the Bible was written 700 years or so before Jesus Christ was born, lived, was crucified, buried and rose again, he was stunned. Isaiah 53 is really a presentation of the gospel and the author of this book does a marvelous job of explaining the content of Isaiah 53. I have nothing more to add to this other than to say that if someone wants to be encouraged and have an expanded view of the gospel, he should read MacArthur's newest book. It did not disappoint.

Becky says

Excellent book, and it includes Charles Spurgeon's sermon "A Man of Sorrows" in the appendix. Quite the bonus.

Ryan Hawkins says

The book is basically a long exposition of Isaiah 53. I knew this going into it, and I was excited about this. I like MacArthur's writing usually, as he is blazingly clear. But this book, although he was still clear, was disappointingly different than some of his others I've read.

The opening chapter—where he introduced Isaiah 53, the centrality of it, the gospel in it, and the centrality of Isaiah himself—was great. It hyped me up for the book. But then as it got going, it was basically a redundant commentary on the text. It was redundant in that he kept saying the same thing over and over and over again. In doing this, he would quote Isaiah 53 a lot, but also other parts of the Bible, but he just kept repeating and repeating—and much of it being about how it relates to Israel (then and now). And it was a commentary because much of it was just brute explanation of words and meanings.

Now don't get me wrong: I agree with almost everything MacArthur wrote in this book. He wrote rightly and correctly. It was just too redundant and commentary-like.

So the introduction introduced it all great, then the first 8 chapters was basically just an exposition of the text. But then the last two chapters were the most bizarre. Chapter 9 was basically the introduction to Isaiah—like an introduction to the book you'd read in a Study Bible. Then the last chapter was just a recounting off all the kings of Judah and how they led to Judah's final demise. These were accurate and biblical, but they seemed just thrown in. At the end of each chapter, he shows how this relates to Isaiah 53, but it is like a last second thing to make it fit into the book. It wasn't well done—even though the information was true and sometimes interesting.

Lastly as for critiques, I think this title is his roughest yet. I like the other "The Gospel According to..." books. His title according "Jesus," "the Apostles," and "Paul" were apt. In this one, it should've been "According to the Father." This is essentially what it was (since it is God the Father prophesying through Isaiah). But giving it the title "According to God" makes it seems to supersede all the others—which is unfortunate, because if it was "According to the Father" it would've fit in his collection quite well.

So what were the good parts? As stated above, his introduction to Isaiah and especially chapter 53 in the Introduction was great. That alone pumped me up for the supremacy of this chapter in the whole OT. I agree with him there.

And besides that, reading the whole book did at least give me even more appreciation for the chapter. Although I think he could've been more organized and clear in places, I still appreciated reading 190 pages on the gospel, the cross, substitution, Jesus' resurrection, his exaltation—and seeing how this all was truly present in Isaiah 53. For that, I am thankful for this book.

But would I recommend it? Not really. I would recommend his 2017 book, "The Gospel According to Paul," because I did think that book was clear, robustly biblical, and not repetitive. But this one was too repetitive and less organized.

Julie D. says

This is one of the best books I've ever read! It was filled with so much information that made me understand who God and Jesus are and it truly made me love my Savior even more.

This book focused on the end of Isaiah 52 and all of Isaiah 53 which prophesies about the death and resurrection of Jesus, plus his glorious reappearing to come. You wouldn't think there would be a whole book of information on just these verses of Scripture, but it's just packed with amazing things about God.

John MacArthur is such a wonderful teacher. He is so Biblical and always makes sure everything is factual. One thing, however, you better have a dictionary at hand because he has one of the most amazing vocabulary of any author I've ever read, except C. S. Lewis. You will not only learn about the Lord but your vocabulary will be expanded as well!

I took note after note while reading this book! There was so much that I learned and so much I wanted to remember! I have read Isaiah many times, but John MacArthur opened my eyes and mind to so much more knowledge in this book. I really did learn so many things and I loved that he explained the important Hebrew

words and their meanings according to these Scriptures.

I definitely think this is a book everyone should read who wants to know the Lord more intimately. If you like learning about the Bible and you want true Biblical teaching, you really must read this book! I highly recommend it and give it 5 out of 5 stars.

*This ebook was provided to me for my honest review by Crossway

Bill Pence says

This is respected pastor and Bible teacher John MacArthur's fourth book in his The Gospel According to series. This book looks primarily at Isaiah 53, which he tells us includes the whole story of salvation in prophecy. He states that this is the most remarkable chapter in the Old Testament. Augustine called it the "Fifth Gospel", and Luther thought that every Christian should memorize Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.

The author tells us that Isaiah is the most quoted Old Testament prophet in the New Testament. His prophecies, written more than seven centuries before the birth of Jesus, were so accurate, that critics have claimed that multiple people had to have written the book.

There is a significant amount of doctrine included in Isaiah 53, including the penal, or substitutionary atonement of Jesus, the sovereign initiative of God and the justification of many. The author tells us that this is the doctrine of the Protestant Reformers, the Puritans and their heirs, but is challenged by some within the church today. For example, one writer has called the substitutionary atonement of Jesus as "child abuse".

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from this chapter when Philip came upon him in Acts 8: 26-39. The chapter is a magnetic description of Christ's sacrifice for sins. The author believes Isaiah 53 is the most important text in the Old Testament, but tells us that many Jews are not familiar with it, as the passage is never read in their worship.

The author provides a brief overview of the entire book of Isaiah, the life, times and politics (kings) of Isaiah the prophet, a mysterious figure, and a detailed exposition of Isaiah 53. The book explains the prophetic words of Isaiah 53 verse by verse, highlighting connections to the history of Israel and to the New Testament.

This book is a wonderful, clear exposition of the prophecies of the suffering and glory of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, the Servant of God, who was slaughtered by God for us. A sermon of Charles Spurgeon "The Man of Sorrows" is included as an appendix.

The author has been a faithful expositor of God's Word for fifty years. I highly recommend this book for not only believers, but also skeptics and those of the Jewish faith. The audiobook version is well-read by Bob Souer.

Austin says

I received a copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley to read and review.

The Gospel According To God is John F. MacArthur's detailed study of Isaiah chapter 52, verse 13 through chapter 53, verse 12, also known as the song of the "Suffering Servant." It's the last of four such "Servant" songs in the book of Isaiah, a set of prophecies that foretell the coming of the Jewish Messiah, the divine individual who was promised to restore Israel and lead the world into salvation. MacArthur undertakes to

demonstrate that, in its details, its theology, and its prophetic meaning, this Song exactly predicts the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth - otherwise known as Jesus Christ - several hundred years before he lived. Further, MacArthur argues that this text is a proto-gospel (a predecessor and precursor to the four Christian Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and that as such, it contains everything one must know to arrive at a believing faith in that same predicted Messiah. In other words, according to MacArthur, Isaiah's 53rd chapter is a gospel ("good news") literally from the mouth of God.

The book is divided into two Parts. Part One provides an in-depth analysis of the Biblical text, giving readers a close look at a passage of prophetic verse that they may have read during Easter services, but not invested much more time into. At this, it succeeds quite well, deftly handling the minutiae of grammar, structure, and vocabulary, explaining why they matter without bogging the reader down too much. In the shorter Part Two, MacArthur summarizes the historical background of the prophet Isaiah, the Jewish kingdoms, the kings under whose reign he served, and what came to pass after his death. At this, also, the author proves quite adept - indeed, I enjoyed the historical scene-setting more than the analysis in Part One.

The book is, essentially, a deep Bible study, guided by an experienced theologian and preacher. It's a genre likely familiar to most readers of Christian study guides. And while it convincingly argues its thesis (that the Suffering Servant song is a prophetic proto-gospel), it also suffers something of an identity crisis.

It seems that the intended audience for this title is, predominantly, believing Christians who want to deepen their knowledge. But often, MacArthur seems to write as though he is attempting to convert. He occasionally switches out his professorial tenor for a rather more plaintive, personal address. He invokes the pronoun "you" quite often, calling upon the reader directly. He makes assertions about the text and invokes the audience to provide his proof for him (e.g. "...any fair-minded reader would see..."). Rather than building upon a reader's knowledge, these digressions over already-covered basics of Christian belief seem extraneous, and cause the reader to ask why the author is so defensive.

Beyond attempting to convert the (likely) already converted, he frequently seems to be arguing with believing Jews. As an example, he asserts that Isaiah 53 is a "forbidden" text, withheld from public readings in Jewish circles. But unlike nearly every other factual point in his book, this assertion is followed by no footnote or source. It may be that Isaiah 53 is not read publicly in Jewish synagogues, but MacArthur doesn't see fit to include proof of that assertion. He makes a leap from there to argue that Judaism ignores, or is made uncomfortable by, this text – which is, it must be pointed out, contained in their own Holy Scriptures – but again, he provides no source beyond a reference in-text to a Christian-created documentary. It may be that his assertions carry some truth in them, but his refusal to acknowledge a possible reply from his alleged opponents decreases his arguments' power. (And, again, provokes readers to question his defensive position – especially since it seems the intended audience for the title would not be Jewish readers).

There are further small points: digressions where MacArthur seems to want to work out hobby-horse arguments against fellow believers who disagree with his interpretations; an apparent refusal to cite sources more recent than 50 years ago (is there nothing to gain from work done in the past decade?); historical assertions that disparage ancient cultures without adequate explanation (e.g. the Assyrians are apparently uncivilized – intriguing, since at one point they were the governing civilization of most of their known world); and other similar problems.

The Gospel According to God is worth reading for the textual analysis and the historical setting. When MacArthur sticks to the Biblical text, he provides insight and help to those who seek understanding. When he leaves the Biblical text for extraneous subjects, the book ceases being helpful or insightful.

Michelle says

‘The Gospel According to God’ is an Old Testament study by author John MacArthur. It is a study of the Bible book Isaiah chapter 53 which portrays our Messiah’s coming ministry, death, resurrection, and coronation. Isaiah’s prophecy was highly prized and well known in the first century. The meat of this book comes from Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12. This passage reveals precise details that could have been known only by God. Isaiah chapter 53 is a mini-Bible, the condensation of the gospel. There are footnotes so the reader can check the accuracy of this book. As well as lots of scripture to back up scripture references.

I appreciate that the author wrote this book for readers familiar with Christ and coherent enough for a new Christian. It’s written as if the reader were sitting across from John MacArthur as he explains this piece of scripture. I learned that Noah’s ark represents the true ark into which sinners enter and are kept safe through the waters of divine judgment.

This book would make a good study book for a student of the Word. Jesus prophesies the response of Jewish people when they finally see, understand, and believe the One they rejected truly is the Messiah. The author uses New Testament scripture to back up what was revealed in Old Testament scripture about Christ.

Because the author took the time to explain the meanings of certain words I understand more of the scriptures than I did before. Example: When the Bible states they were astonished at His teaching the Word astonished, in this case, means appalled, it comes from the Hebrew term Shamem and is never used to describe a positive reaction.

I recommend this book to seasoned Believers as well as those new to the faith.

Disclaimer: "I was provided a free copy of this ebook. All opinions are my own."

Dorothy says

It has been very interesting studying this passage, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, while also preparing for the Christmas choir program at church; it cannot help but put a different perspective on the birth of a baby that will end up as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

This book, well-researched and scripturally based, does not give a verse-by-verse study of the text, but rather examines various aspects of the prophecy of Jesus’s suffering, death, and ultimate glorification. There is also historical context and an explanation of why the Jews reject Jesus and the truth of this passage; the story of salvation is so clearly given.

I have been aware of John MacArthur’s ministry for a long time and therefore chose this book immediately when I saw it. I found so much more than I expected and have yet to absorb it all. I will definitely read it again.

I received a free copy of this book from Amazon Vine in exchange for my honest review.

Daniel Ligon says

An excellent commentary on Isaiah 53! John MacArthur does a fantastic job at explaining the importance and meaning of this pivotal Old Testament passage. He places the chapter in its context of the book of Isaiah as a whole and then deals with the individual verses in detail. MacArthur also has a section at the end where he gives a biographical sketch of Isaiah's life and ministry and places it in its historical context in the Kingdom of Judah. This book is a very helpful resource for anyone preaching through this passage or just interested in studying it in depth.

I received a digital copy of this book for free from the publisher and was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I express in this review are entirely my own.

Nay Denise says

Received an early copy for review.

This is a phenomenal book to own! This is a study of Isaiah 53 broken into two sections. The first section being the Suffering Servant and the second section being about the prophet Isaiah. I love how detailed this study is about the verses and it's meaning. It goes through how it's misunderstood and some of the doctrines within the chapter. It's a biblical sound book with a lot of biblical references.

I adore that this book contains tons of quote and includes a sermon by Charles Spurgeon. I love that I can use this for an in-depth study of the chapter. This is great for any Bible scholar and also perfect for all lovers of the Word.

I highly recommend this in physical and/or ebook copy! It's great for your arsenal.

David Steele says

C.H. Spurgeon calls the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah “a Bible in miniature … the condensed essence of the gospel.” John MacArthur agrees refers to Isaiah 53 as “the most remarkable chapter in the Old Testament.” This is the grand theme of Dr. MacArthur’s most recent book, *The Gospel According to God*.

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