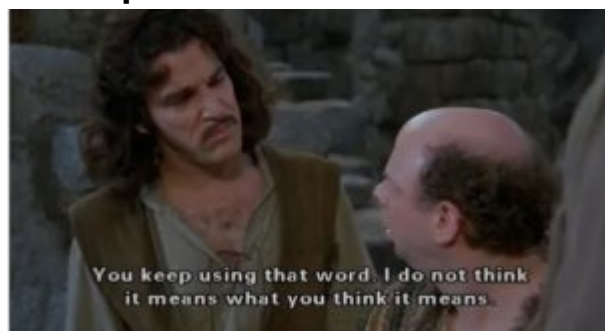# How To Do a Word Study of a Greek or Hebrew Word in the Bible

## Description



Iâ€™ve been looking more deeply into Penal Substitutionary

Atonement lately.  As part of that, Iâ€™m doing a deep dive into Isaiah 53 and it occurred to me that this was a great opportunity to teach how to do a word study, so thatâ€™s what weâ€™ll do in this article.  Because this is part of my Isaiah 53 research, weâ€™ll also touch on the meaning of the verse in question.
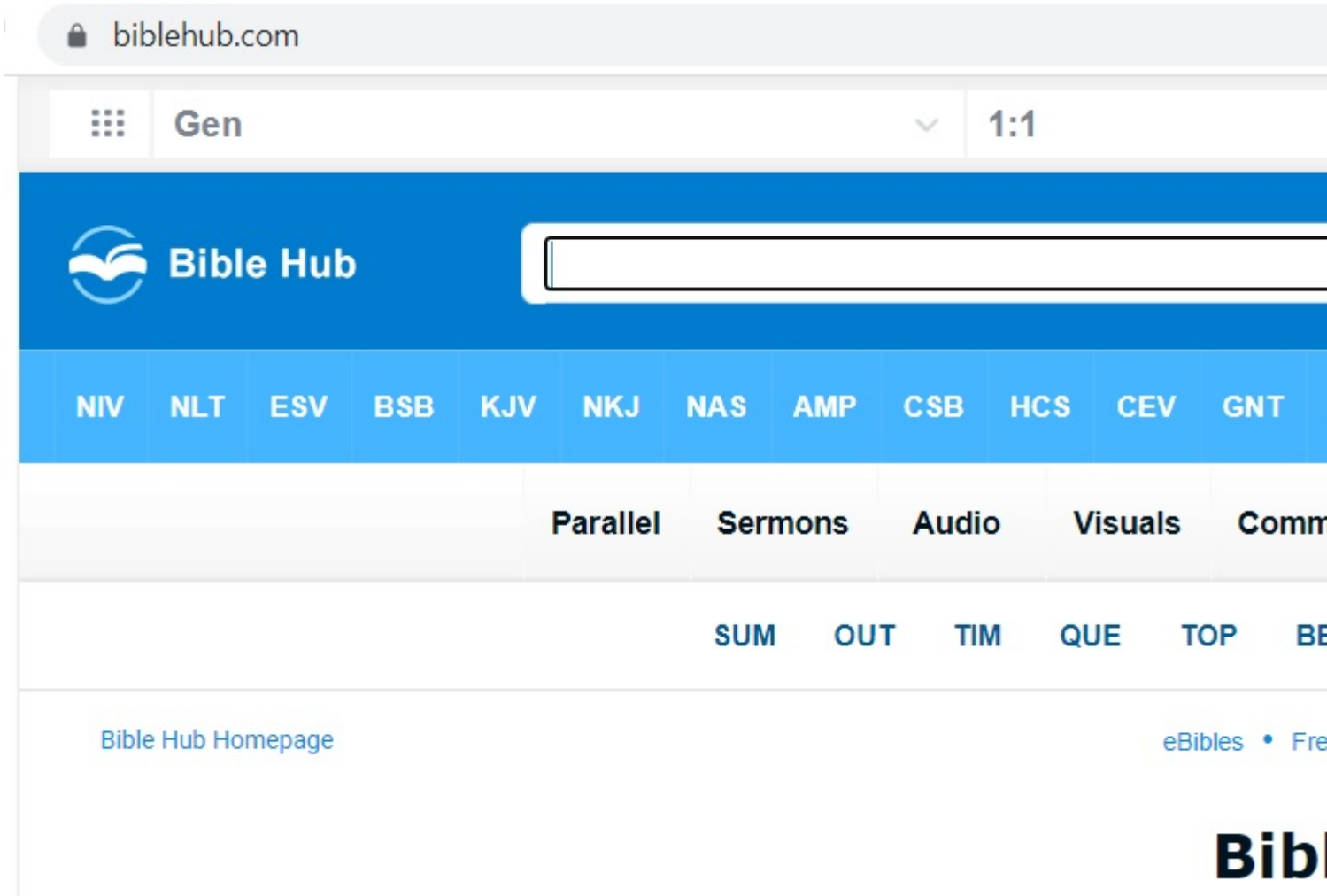
## The verse and word

The verse in question is Isaiah 53:6, and itâ€™s below in the NASB 95.

> **Isaiah 53:6** All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Now, in order to start our word study, we need to know what Hebrew word was used.  The easiest place to do this is the interlinear Bible at Biblehub.com.  Weâ€™ll do almost all of this word study on that website, which makes things easy. ðŸ™‚

You can click the link above, or go to Biblehub.com and click the circled link:

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On mobile, itâ€™s abbreviated â€œINTâ€.

Go ahead and search for the verse that contains the word, Isaiah 53:6 in this case.  Now, something you should know before we look at it: Hebrew reads right-to-left, not left-to-right like English and Greek do.  So when you see the verse below, realize that you read the rightmost word first, which is again the opposite of English and Greek.

Anyway, hereâ€™s the verse:

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◀ **Isaiah 53:6** ▶

**Isaiah 53 - Click for Chapter**

| 6293 [e] | 3068 [e] | 6437 [e] | 1870 [e] | 376 [e] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| hip̄·gî·a' | Yah·weh | pā·nî·nū; | lə·ḏar·kōw | 'îš |
| הִפְגִּיעַ | וַיהוָה֙ | פָּנִ֑ינוּ | לְדַרְכּ֔וֹ | אִ֥ישׁ |
| has laid | and Yahweh | we have turned | to his own way | every one |
| V-Hifil-Perf-3ms | Conj-w \| N-proper-ms | V-Qal-Perf-1cp | Prep-l \| N-csc \| 3ms | N-ms |

Now, notice that I've circled the number above the appropriate word, not the word itself.  Here's why:

- If you click the number, it'll take you to a page with definitions.
- If you click the "[e]" next to the number, it'll take you to a page that has every use of the word in the Bible.  (*Well, unless there are too many to fit on the page. It seems like anything beyond about 300 gets cut off.*)

Now, normally I give the context first so when we look at the verse or word, you'll understand it immediately.  However, because this is a "how to" article, I'm *not* going to give the context up front, so it might be a little confusing for a while.  Sometimes, research is confusing for a while and I don't want to rob you of understanding the process.

**Word Forms**

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If youâ€™ve read my article: A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek (with Examples in English), youâ€™ll know a lot about the abbreviations at the bottom of the Biblehub interlinear. Now, since weâ€™re looking at a Hebrew word, not a Greek word, that article wonâ€™t help you with these abbreviations. However, Biblehubâ€™s interlinear is very helpful in providing the word form below that word:

6293 [e]

hip̄·gî·a'

הִפְגִּיעַ

has laid

V-Hifil-Perf-3ms
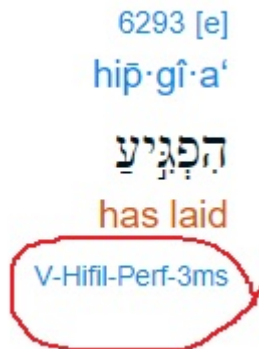
Now, if you look at Biblehubâ€™s Hebrew parsing guide, youâ€™ll see that the word in question is a verb (*the â€œV-â€œ*), with the â€œhifilâ€ stem, in the perfect aspect, and that itâ€™s 3rd person masculine singular. Now, the Hebrew perfect aspect indicates a completed action, but it doesnâ€™t tell you if it happened in the past, present, or future. The â€œhifilâ€ part (*also sometimes spelled â€œhiphilâ€ or â€œhiphâ€™ilâ€*) bears a closer look:

> The Hiphil form is a verbal stem formation in Biblical Hebrew, usually indicated by a ×"Ö´ prefix before the 1st radical and a hireq-yod (or sometimes tsere) vowel under the 2nd radical of the verb. (This ×" changes in the participle and Imperfect forms.) The Hiphil stem is generally used to express causative action in active voice. In many cases the noun derived from the same root is the object or result of the hiphil verb associated with that root. For example, the Hiphil verb ×"Ö´×žÖ°×˜Ö´×™×¨ means â€œto cause to rain downâ€; the noun ×žÖ¸×˜Ö¸×¨ means â€œrainâ€.
>
> â€¦
>
> Causative action means that the subject of the verb is causing the object of the verb either to perform the verbal action (for dynamic verb) or to be in the state described by the verb (for stative verbs).
>
> Source.

For example, itâ€™s the difference between â€œHe rained down fireâ€ (*simple action, for example with the â€œQalâ€ stem*) and â€œHe caused her to rain down fireâ€ (*hifil action*). Thatâ€™s oversimplifying things and losing all kinds of nuance, but sufficient for this article. You can see this properly translated in the NASB 95, and Iâ€™ve included another translation for comparison

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> **NASB 95:** All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD <span style="color:red">has caused</span> the iniquity of us all <span style="color:red">To fall on</span> Him.
>
> **ESV:** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turnedâ€"every oneâ€"to his own way; and the LORD <span style="color:red">has laid</span> on him the iniquity of us all.

The NASB uses â€œhas causedâ€ to indicate the hifil aspect of the verb.  The ESV (*Extremely Substandard Version*) doesnâ€™t.  Even the NKJV â€" which is usually a good translation â€" translates substantially similarly to the ESV here, which is rarely a good thing.  (*To see why the ESV is such a terrible translation, please see [my article on Bible translations](.)*)

With that in mind, letâ€™s look at the definition.

**Making Sense of Definitions**

The word in question is â€œ×¤Ö¸×'Ö·×¢â€ (*paga, pronounced â€œpaw-gahâ€*), and you can see the definition page [here](.).

So, the Strongâ€™s definitions are at the top and can *sometimes* be useful for a quick glance, but â€" and I canâ€™t stress this enough â€"<span style="color:red">Strongâ€™s is not a lexicon</span>.  I devote a whole section of my article [The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible](.) to this, so Iâ€™ll only touch on it here.  Strongâ€™s definitions are often so short and lacking in context that they can be misleading, sometimes entirely so.  Itâ€™s better to look at a real lexicon; see the link above for details.

Anyway, hereâ€™s Strongâ€™s:

> **Phonetic Spelling:** (paw-gahâ€™)
> **Definition:** to meet, encounter, reach

Hmm, I donâ€™t see anything that could mean â€œfall onâ€ as the NASB 95 translates it, or â€œlaid uponâ€ as the interlinear above translates it.  But again, <span style="color:red">this is Strongâ€™s so it doesnâ€™t really matter because Strongâ€™s is *not* a lexicon.</span>

Now, the NAS Exhaustive Concordance is much like Strongâ€™s in that its definitions are so truncated that they can be misleading.  However, Iâ€™ll copy/paste that here for completeness:

> **Word Origin**
> a prim. root
>
> **Definition**
> to meet, encounter, reach
>
> **NASB Translation**
> approach (1), attack (2), attacked (1), came (1), cut him down (1), entreat (2), <span style="color:red">fall (7), fell (4),</span>

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happen (1), intercede (2), interceded (1), kill (1), make supplication (1), meet (3), meets (3), met (2), pleaded (1), reached (6), spare (1), strike the mark (1), touched (1), touched and reached (1), urge (1).

Notice that the definition is exactly the same as Strongâ€™s.  Now, <span style="color:red">the NAS Exhaustive Concordance does have something that a lot of people _think_ is useful, but isnâ€™t as useful as most people think it is</span>.  Thatâ€™s the list of words or phrases that itâ€™s translated as.  Under the â€œNASB Translationâ€• section, it simply records how the word is translated when itâ€™s used.

**Again, this is sometimes useful for a â€œquick glanceâ€, but not for serious or deep study.**

Now weâ€™ll look at whatâ€™s actually useful: the lexicon.  Iâ€™ll copy/paste the short definitions of â€œpagaâ€, leaving the longer/fuller definitions for you to inspect your leisure, which again you can find [here](#).  Notice that itâ€™s divided into the Hiphil (_alternate spelling of hifil from above_) and Qal sections.  (_Qal is effectively a simple action._)

Qal

1 meet, light upon, with accusative of person

2 meet, with kindness, with accusative of person

3 encounter with hostility, fall upon with ×' person

4 encounter with request, entreat, with ×' person

5 strike, touch, of boundary, with ×' location

Hiphâ€™il

1. <span style="color:red">cause to light upon</span>, Perfect3masculine singular ×"Ö´×¤Ö°×'Ö´Ö¼×™×¢Ö· with accusative of thing + ×' person Isaiah 53:6.

2 cause one (accusative) to entreat

3 make entreaty, 3 plural ×"Ö´×¤Ö°×'Ö´Ö¼×¢×•Ö¼ Jeremiah 36:25 with ×' person; more Generally interpose,

4 make attack, only Participle

Now, If you look at the longer/fuller definitions on the lexicon page, youâ€™ll notice that most of them have several places where the word is used with that definition.  However, the meaning of â€œcause to light uponâ€• only has one instance where itâ€™s supposed to have the meaning.

**Thatâ€™s a red flag.**

<span style="color:red">The single-use definition is in a theologically significant passage, which makes it a rather large red flag.</span>

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I've been looking up words in controversial passages for a long time now and when I see something like this, usually something odd is going on.  If the word is used consistently with its normal 3-4 definitions everywhere, and then in one verse it all of a sudden means something completely different…  Yeah, that's a red flag.  Often, there's theological bias at work, though not always.

That means we go one level deeper: word usage.

**Checking word usage**

If you look at the definition of the word and it makes perfect sense with the usage — which happens the overwhelming vast majority of the time — you don't need to go further.  However, if the definition seems "off", then it's time to look at how the word is used.  You can do this by clicking the "[e]" next to the word, as shown in the screencap above.  For "paga", that takes you to [this page](#):

Usually I'll scan down the list, double-checking any usages that stand out to me.  Then once I have a general sense of how it's used, I'll go back through the list more methodically.

**We'll do that now.**

Buckle up, because there's a lot of them.

<span style="color:red">Sadly, there really is no other way to get the work done than to simply do the work.</span>  (*And by the way, this is part of why writing articles can take such a long time.*)

<span style="color:red">Now, I'm going to do a lot of the heavy lifting here by sorting the uses of "paga" by dictionary definition/usage.</span>  When you do this yourself, you won't need to copy/paste since you can just read it.  However, you will need to sort them by their meanings in your head if you don't take notes, so pick your poison.

Regardless, I would scan down the list first before taking notes so you're familiar with how it's used, then go through it more methodically later because it's useful to get a general overview before diving into specifics.

**Spoiler: from what I can tell, there are 3 primary uses:**

1. To "meet" or "reach", with "reach" being in the sense of one person/thing meeting another person/thing
2. To "meet with a request" (*or plea*)
3. To "meet with hostile intent", i.e. to strike/hurt/attack/kill.

Again, I've sorted all the uses of the word into three categories, except for Isaiah 53:6, which we'll look at last.  As you read, please keep Isaiah 53:6 in the back of your mind because we'll look at it when we're done looking at all the other uses.

<span style="color:red">The verses below are all in the NASB 95.</span>

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Here we go.

**To meet/reach**

(*Note: the Joshua verses are talking about the borders of the various tribes' land in Israel, i.e. one border meeting or reaching another border.*)

- **Genesis 23:8** And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish for me to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me,
- **Genesis 28:11** He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.
- **Genesis 32:1** Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.
- **Exodus 5:20** When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them.
- **Exodus 23:4** "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.
- **Numbers 35:19** 'The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him.
- **Numbers 35:21** or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and as a result he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.
- **Joshua 16:7** It went down from Janoah to Ataroth and to Naarah, then reached Jericho and came out at the Jordan.
- **Joshua 17:10** The south side belonged to Ephraim and the north side to Manasseh, and the sea was their border; and they reached to Asher on the north and to Issachar on the east.
- **Joshua 19:11** Then their border went up to the west and to Maralah, it then touched Dabbesheth and reached to the brook that is before Jokneam.
- **Joshua 19:22** The border reached to Tabor and Shahazumah and Beth-shemesh, and their border ended at the Jordan; sixteen cities with their villages.
- **Joshua 19:26** and Allammelech and Amad and Mishal; and it reached to Carmel on the west and to Shihor-libnath.
- **Joshua 19:27** It turned toward the east to Beth-dagon and reached to Zebulun, and to the valley of Iphtahel northward to Beth-emek and Neiel; then it proceeded on north to Cabul,
- **Joshua 19:34** Then the border turned westward to Aznoth-tabor and proceeded from there to Hukkok; and it reached to Zebulun on the south and touched Asher on the west, and to Judah at the Jordan toward the east.
- **1 Samuel 10:5** "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying.
- **Isaiah 64:5** You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved?

**To meet with a request or plea**

- **Ruth 1:16** But Ruth said, â€œDo not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.
- **Job 21:15** â€˜Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, And what would we gain if we entreat Him?â€™
- **Isaiah 53:12** Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.
- **Isaiah 59:16** And He saw that there was no man, And was astonished that there was no one to intercede; Then His own arm brought salvation to Him, And His righteousness upheld Him.
- **Jeremiah 7:16** â€œAs for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.
- **Jeremiah 15:11** The LORD said, â€œSurely I will set you free for purposes of good; Surely I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you In a time of disaster and a time of distress.
- **Jeremiah 27:18** â€œBut if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them now entreat the LORD of hosts that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon.
- **Jeremiah 36:25** Even though Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.

**To meet with hostile intent**

- **Exodus 5:3** Then they said, â€œThe God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three daysâ€™ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.â€
- **Joshua 2:16** She said to them, â€œGo to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.â€
- **Judges 8:21** Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, â€œRise up yourself, and fall on us; for as the man, so is his strength.â€ So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments which were on their camelsâ€™ necks.
- **Judges 15:12** They said to him, â€œWe have come down to bind you so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.â€ And Samson said to them, â€œSwear to me that you will not kill me.â€
- **Judges 18:25** The sons of Dan said to him, â€œDo not let your voice be heard among us, or else fierce men will fall upon you and you will lose your life, with the lives of your household.â€
- **Ruth 2:22** Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, â€œIt is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field.â€
- **1 Samuel 22:17** And the king said to the guards who were attending him, â€œTurn around and put the priests of the LORD to death, because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not reveal it to me.â€ But the servants of the king were not willing to put forth their hands to attack the priests of the LORD.

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- **1 Samuel 22:18** Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and <span style="color:red">attack</span> the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and <span style="color:red">attacked</span> the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod.
- **2 Samuel 1:15** And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, <span style="color:red">cut him down</span>." So he struck him and he died.
- **1 Kings 2:25** So King Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he <span style="color:red">fell upon</span> him so that he died.
- **1 Kings 2:29** It was told King Solomon that Joab had fled to the tent of the LORD, and behold, he is beside the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, <span style="color:red">fall upon</span> him."
- **1 Kings 2:31** The king said to him, "Do as he has spoken and <span style="color:red">fall upon</span> him and bury him, that you may remove from me and from my father's house the blood which Joab shed without cause.
- **1 Kings 2:32** "The LORD will return his blood on his own head, because he <span style="color:red">fell upon</span> two men more righteous and better than he and killed them with the sword, while my father David did not know it: Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah.
- **1 Kings 2:34** Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and <span style="color:red">fell upon</span> him and put him to death, and he was buried at his own house in the wilderness.
- **1 Kings 2:46** So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he went out and <span style="color:red">fell upon</span> him so that he died. Thus the kingdom was established in the hands of Solomon.
- **Job 36:32** "He covers His hands with the lightning, And commands it to <span style="color:red">strike</span> the mark.
- **Isaiah 47:3** "Your nakedness will be uncovered, Your shame also will be exposed; I will take vengeance and will not <span style="color:red">spare</span> a man."
- **Amos 5:19** As when a man flees from a lion And a bear <span style="color:red">meets</span> him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him.

**Recap before moving on**

Those are all the uses except for Isaiah 53:6. <span style="color:red">As you think about the uses, which fits the context of Isaiah 53:6 best?</span> Asking questions is one of the best things you can do when studying the Bible because it'll make you look for good answers. Here are a few such questions:

1. Does one of the uses above fit in Isaiah 53:6?
2. If not, does this word have some special definition in this verse?
    1. What would make this have a special definition here?
    2. What would make it clear that "paga" means something other than what it usually means? (*If it does have a special meaning here*)

I'm sure you can think of other questions, but those seem the obvious ones to ask.

**Here's another question, and possibly the most important one:** <span style="color:red">does the typical translation of this verse convey the word's meaning?</span>

There are two common ways that it's translated:

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**Poor translations (*NIV, NLT, ESV, etc*):**  the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**Better translations (*NASB 95, LSB*):**  the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

The poor translations make it sound like God put a burden on His back, but that's not what the word means.  Or at least, it's never used that way anywhere else.  That would require picking a special meaning for this word in this context, which again seems suspicious.

**Poor translations effectively say:** *"I know this word never means this anywhere else, but in this one place, it means something that's completely different from every other usage."*

That understandably makes me skeptical.

Very skeptical.

Now, the better translations are — no surprise — better. The NASB consistently translates the word as "fall upon" when it's used in the sense of "meet with hostile intent"/"attack". Thus, translating it that way here makes some sense.

**However…**

Reading it in context, the NASB's "fall upon" really doesn't sound much different than "laid on" in Isaiah 53:6.  It sounds like it's a burden or responsibility was transferred to Him, rather than Him being "met with hostile intent"; i.e. attacked.  That's fine if you want to argue that the word has a special meaning in this verse.  However, I'm always ***highly*** skeptical of introducing a completely new, special, and unique meaning to a word that only affects one passage, especially when the passage is at the center of theological debate.

Thus, while NASB 95 is definitely better, I'm not sure I would call its translation here "good" here because it's liable to misinterpretation because it's not clear.  It doesn't *technically* fall into the "special definition" category, but it comes extremely close because "fall upon" in this context sounds a lot like "laid on" instead of "attack".  However, that's only true in English, not Hebrew.

**So what does it mean?**

Again, normally, I would set up all the context ahead of time, but since this is a "how to" article, I'm inviting you into my process.  Part of that process involves a lot of confusion until we've gathered enough data to make sense of everything.  I've sometimes labored in the fog of confusion for months before I finally had a good answer, a few things took years, and some things I'm still trying to figure out.

Anyway, please keep those questions and the three major uses in your mind while we go looking for more information to make sense of what we've learned.

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## Commentaries

One source of additional information on the meaning of a word is biblical commentaries. However, the Isaiah 53:6 commentaries on biblehub.com arenâ€™t very helpful when it comes to this verse . Commentaries usually arenâ€™t helpful for defining words, but sometimes you can find some real gems of information so itâ€™s worth looking at them whenever you do a deeper word study. You usually wonâ€™t find anything, but the times you do make it worth looking in my experience. Itâ€™s a â€œfeast or famineâ€ kind of thing, but the gems you sometimes find make up for the majority of the time when you donâ€™t find anything.

That said, commentaries are fallible so donâ€™t take them as gospel truth. â€œTrust, but verify.â€

## Other Translations

Right up front, this is *usually* a waste of time. If the NASB 95, NKJV, and the LSB generally agree on a translation, itâ€™s probably correct. Poor translations like the NIV, NLT, and ESV rarely have anything useful to add. (*Again, for the reasons why they are poor translations, please see* [my article on Bible translations](#).)

However, this time was an exception. The NET Bible (*New English Translation*) translates it this way:

> All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the LORD caused the sin of all of us to **attack** him.

That really caught my eye, partially because the NET Bible often has extensive footnotes on translation. Now, occasionally the footnotes are useful, sometimes they are absurd, and most often they are simply irrelevant. (*The NET Bible isnâ€™t a good translation overall; again, see* [my article on Bible translations](#) *for why*) Thankfully, their footnote was useful here and it reads:

> Elsewhere the Hiphil of ×¤Ö¸×’Ö·×¢ (pagaÊ¿) means â€œto intercede verballyâ€ (Jer 15:11; 36:25) or â€œto intervene militarilyâ€ (Isa 59:16), but neither nuance fits here. Apparently here the Hiphil is the causative of the normal Qal meaning, â€œencounter, meet, touch.â€ The Qal sometimes refers to a hostile encounter or attack; when used in this way the object is normally introduced by the preposition ×‘Ö¼Ö° (bet, see Josh 2:16; Judg 8:21; 15:12, etc.). Here the causative Hiphil has a double objectâ€"the Lord makes â€œsinâ€ attack â€œhimâ€ (note that the object attacked is introduced by the preposition ×‘Ö¼Ö°. In their sin the group was like sheep who had wandered from Godâ€™s path. They were vulnerable to attack; the guilt of their sin was ready to attack and destroy them. But then the servant stepped in and took the full force of the attack.

**Iâ€™m somewhat partial to the NET Bibleâ€™s translation of this verse because itâ€™s very in line with the most common usage of â€œmeet with hostile intentâ€.**

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The footnote's application seems suspect, but the translation makes more sense than "fall on", since "fall on" isn't very clear in its meaning. "Attack" is more clear, and it's the nuance that seems to be the focus.

## Other context

Sometimes simply looking at a word's definition isn't enough. Sometimes more historical context is needed, sometimes it's cultural context, but most often, looking at the definition of other words in the sentence is what's necessary to make sense of a confusing passage.

The (*poor*) translations like the NIV, NLT, and ESV, as well as the NET Bible's notes make this verse sound like Jesus was punished instead of us. (*That's called Penal Substitutionary Atonement {PSA} by the way*). However, the word's definition seems slightly at odds with that in this verse. Since this is part of a deep study into PSA, in addition to trying to understand what "paga" means, I also want to know for sure if this verse is teaching PSA.

And it's important to note that PSA doesn't stand or fall on this verse; there are other verses and I'm planning to examine them all in similar detail.

**Today, it's Isaiah 53:6's turn. We already looked at "paga", now we'll look at the word translated "iniquity".**

Here we go.

### The Hebrew word translated "iniquity"

Sometimes, when a verse isn't making sense after looking at one word, you need to start looking at other words. Not always, but sometimes. Such is the case here, though I'll skip the step-by-step on how I found this.

This is partially a rabbit trail, but lends some important context and sometimes, research leads you down rabbit trails.

Here's the verse again, and we'll take a moment to look at another word before we analyze what the verse means. The Hebrew word translated "iniquity" is "x¢Ö¸x•Ö¹xŸ" (*avon, pronounced "aw-vone'"*), and here's where it's used in the verse:

> **Isaiah 53:6**
>
> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

This is usually understood in the sense of punishment here, even though the word â€œpunishâ€ isnâ€™t used.  Thankfully, The Bible Project already did a much deeper word study on â€œavonâ€ than a simple lexical analysis allows:

> The Hebrew word avon is another word for sin, but with a different nuance. We also translate it as â€œiniquity,â€ which adds another dimension to our understanding.
>
> The biblical authors use avon to describe a twisted or crooked road (e.g., Lam. 3:9) or a malformed back thatâ€™s bent out of shape (e.g., Ps. 38:6). Isaiah uses avon to mean â€œdazed and confusedâ€ (Isa. 21:3). <span style="color:red">Avon is about distorting what was otherwise beautiful and good, and the authors use it to refer to behavior like murder or adultery. Other examples of this type of twisted behavior include deceitfulness, broken faith, violence, and other kinds of harm.</span>
>
> <span style="color:red">Avon also refers to the crooked results and consequencesâ€"the suffering people, shattered relationships, and cycles of retaliation that come from this behavior.</span> When we are abused and taken advantage of, we are experiencing avon, iniquityâ€"sin
>
> [Source](#).

In their video on â€œavonâ€ (*which is embedded in the article linked to above*), they say this in part:

> <span style="color:red">You find this idea in the biblical phrase â€œto punishâ€ which in biblical Hebrew is to visit someoneâ€™s â€œavonâ€ upon them. That is, **to let them sit in the consequences of their crooked choices**. This is what the Prophet Jeremiah said about the Babylonians who were destroying other nations. One day those nations would destroy them in return, and so Babylonâ€™s divine punishment would be having to live in a disfigured world of its own making.</span>
>
> <span style="color:red">This is actually the main way biblical authors talk about Godâ€™s response to human â€œavonâ€: letting people experience the crooked consequences of their choices. This is the meaning of the common biblical phrase to â€œbear your iniquityâ€ or, in Hebrew, to carry your â€œavonâ€.</span> **God gives people the dignity of carrying the consequences of their bad decision**
>
> [Source](#).

**Notice that the nuances of â€œpunishmentâ€ and â€œconsequencesâ€ are different.**  When I found this explanation fromthe Bible project, all the pieces of Isaiah 53:6 fell into place for me.

Now, if you did some lexical analysis as outlined above for â€œpagaâ€, a few things would probably stand out to you right away.  One of them would be the phrase â€œpunishment for iniquityâ€ in several lexicons, another might be the first use of â€œavonâ€ in Genesis 4.  Weâ€™ll look at the lexicons first.

The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon has:

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×¢Ö¸×• Öº×Ÿ noun masculine Isaiah 22:14 <span style="color:red">iniquity, guilt, or punishment of iniquity;</span>

But thatâ€™s not the whole story because further down it reads:

> 3 Consequence of, or punishment for, iniquity (<span style="color:red">SS include most of these under 2, and **do not recognize 3**</span>; <span style="color:red">**Buhl** thinks this meaning rare, giving only Genesis 4:13; Isaiah 5:18</span>)

> Note: â€œSSâ€ is C. Siegfried and B. Stade, in â€œHebrÃ¤isches WÃ¶rterbuchâ€ (Hebrew Dictionary, in German)

**This lexicon clearly states that another lexicon says the meaning of â€œpunishmentâ€ doesnâ€™t exist, and another source says that itâ€™s rare.**

<span style="color:red">That means that the lexicon is admitting that _itâ€™s in the minority_ in thinking that â€œavonâ€ can mean punishment.</span>

Thatâ€™s important.

<div style="color:red" align="center">

**It seems like a red flag to support a doctrine on the translation of a passage where you now have two words â€" not one, but _two_ words â€" translated according to rare and/or unusual meanings.**

</div>

<div align="center">

**To be clear, that doesnâ€™t necessarily mean the doctrine is wrong, (_since there are other verses to consider_) or even that itâ€™s not taught here.**

</div>

However, it should raise a red flag and indicate that perhaps something is going on that should be investigated further.  So weâ€™ll do that.

(_Note: word studies often snowball for me, as is happening here.  I wonâ€™t do the full word study here like I did with the previous word since you should know how to do that yourself now._)

Now, there are a few verses where many people would say that â€œavonâ€ means â€œpunishmentâ€.  Letâ€™s look at a sampling:

> **Genesis 4:13**

> **9** Then the LORD said to Cain, â€œWhere is Abel your brother?â€ And he said, â€œI do not know. Am I my brotherâ€™s keeper?â€

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**10** He said, â€œWhat have you done? The voice of your brotherâ€™s blood is crying to Me from the ground.

**11** â€œNow you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brotherâ€™s blood from your hand.

**12** â€œWhen you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.â€

**13** Cain said to the LORD, â€œMy **punishment**(avon) is too great to bear!

This one certainly seems to contain the idea of punishment, but the idea of consequences fits equally well.  Arguably better, with the idea that since Cain spoiled the ground with his brotherâ€™s blood, the ground will no longer â€œyield its strengthâ€ to him.  However, thatâ€™s certainly open to debate and punishment certainly does make sense here.

Another verse is King Saulâ€™s promise to the witch of Endor, concerning his request to raise Samuel from the dead.

### 1 Samuel 28:9-10

**9** But the woman said to him, â€œBehold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?â€

**10** Saul vowed to her by the LORD, saying, â€œAs the LORD lives, no **punishment**(avon) shall come upon you for this thing.â€

Interestingly, while most modern translations have â€œpunishmentâ€ or something substantially similar here, not all do.  The NET Bible doesnâ€™t, and as weâ€™ll see soon, it also translates Isaiah 53 in a very different way as well. (*Itâ€™s more literal/accurate in certain key/important places in that passage, despite being a poor translation overall.*)

### 1 Samuel 28:10 â€“ NET Bible

But Saul swore an oath to her by the LORD, â€œAs surely as the LORD lives, you will not incur guilt in this matter!â€œ

That seems like a perfectly valid understanding that completely avoids the idea of punishment.  There are other verses as well, but all of them can be easily understood with a meaning that isnâ€™t â€œpunishmentâ€.

**Now, the next obvious question is: are there places where â€œavonâ€ *canâ€™t* mean â€œpunishmentâ€?**

The answer is actually â€œyesâ€.

The reason is that a Hebrew word for punishment is occasionally used alongside â€œavonâ€.  Again, thereâ€™s no substitute for doing the work because thatâ€™s how you find these things.

(*Yes it takes a lot of time, but there really isnâ€™t a shortcut that gets the same results, otherwise I would use it.  And again, this is part of the reason that I donâ€™t publish articles very often; research takes a lot of time.  I donâ€™t always do this much work on word definitions, but even a small word study can eat up a lot of time.*)

Here are some verses where â€œavonâ€ is used alongside a word that definitely means to punish.  For clarity, the word thatâ€™s **not** â€œavonâ€ which means to punish will be **bold underlined**.

> **Leviticus 18:25**  For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

This first one requires a little explanation since the NASB completely drops â€œavonâ€ for some reason.  (*Not sure why.*)  Fortunately, the NKJV captures it correctly:

> **Leviticus 18:25**  For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the **punishment (paqad)** of its iniquity (avon) upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

If â€œavonâ€ can mean â€œpunishment for iniquityâ€, then why is another word required here?  Keep that in your mind and weâ€™ll move on.

> **Isaiah 26:21**  For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place **To punish (paqad)** the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity(avon); And the earth will reveal her bloodshed And will no longer cover her slain.

And again:

> **Lamentations 4:22**  *The punishment* of your iniquity (avon) has been completed, O daughter of Zion; He will exile you no longer. *But* He will **punish (paqad)** your iniquity (avon), O daughter of Edom; He will expose your sins!

Please notice that the phrase â€œthe punishmentâ€ above in green is italicized, indicating a translator addition for clarity.  **That means the NASB translators donâ€™t think that â€œavonâ€includes the idea of punishment.**  The translators of arguably the most accurate modern translation didnâ€™t think that â€œavonâ€ means â€œpunishment of iniquityâ€.

Thatâ€™s pretty big.

These italics in this verse are a tacit admission that it doesnâ€™t mean â€œpunishment for iniquityâ€ in the translatorsâ€™ eyes.  (*Or perhaps some of the translators because translation teams are often split into sub-teams who handle a few books each.*)

Anyway, hereâ€™s the next verse

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> **Amos 3:2** â€œYou only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore, I will **punish (paqad)** you for all your iniquities(avon).â€•

**Thatâ€™s four clear places where avon clearly doesnâ€™t mean â€œpunishment of iniquityâ€ and we know that because another word that means â€œpunishâ€ is in the text.**

**Thus, â€œavonâ€ doesnâ€™t seem like it can mean â€œpunishment for iniquityâ€**

It can have the idea of intrinsic â€œcrookednessâ€/iniquity, and even refer to the consequences of wickedness, but not to the punishment for wickedness.  If you do the legwork and look at all the places itâ€™s used, every one of them seems to make perfect sense without the idea of punishment.  (*I wonâ€™t go through all 200+ occurrences for the sake of space though.*)

Additionally, the one lexicon that endorses such a definition admits that other lexicons either donâ€™t accept it at all, or only accept it in very rare circumstances. (*Most of which can be understood in other ways, including as â€œconsequencesâ€•*)

So, with all that said, hereâ€™s Isaiah 53:6 again:

> **Isaiah 53:6**
>
> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Now, whatever the verse means, it **_canâ€™t_** mean that the punishment for our sin â€œfell onâ€ Him because the word â€œavonâ€ simply doesnâ€™t have that connotation.

Now that weâ€™re all good and confused, we can start putting the pieces together to get some clarityâ€¦

â€¦after a brief look at one more word.

(*Sorry; context needed.*)

## The conjunctive â€œwawâ€ (or â€œvavâ€)

A conjunction is a word that joins two or more elements of a sentence.  For example, in English, we have â€œandâ€, â€œyetâ€, â€œbutâ€, etc. as conjunctions.  Hebrew can be very confusing as those three conjunctions (*and many more*) are all expressed by a single Hebrew conjunction.  Yes, Hebrew can be confusing.

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This is called the â€œwawâ€ or â€œvavâ€ conjunction, depending upon the way you pronounce the letter â€“ e.g., when I took Hebrew, the ×• was called the â€œwaw,â€ but today in more recent, Hebrew grammars, it is called the â€œvav.â€ However, regardless of how you pronounce it, it functions as the Hebrew conjunction, and <span style="color:red">its primary translation is â€œ<u>and</u>,â€</span> but there are instances where it is translated asâ€¦

- <span style="color:red">â€œbutâ€</span> (e.g., â€œBut (×•) a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the groundâ€ â€“ Genesis 2:6);
- â€œnowâ€ (e.g., â€œNow (×•) the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,â€ â€“ Exodus 14:1);
- â€œthenâ€ (e.g., â€œThen (×•) the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,â€ â€“ Leviticus 5:14);
- â€œwhenâ€ (e.g., â€œWhen (×•) the woman saw that the tree was good for food,â€ â€“ Genesis 3:6);
- â€œsoâ€ (e.g., â€œBut the children struggled together within her; and she said, â€˜If it is so, why then am I this way?â€™ So (×•) she went to inquire of the LORDâ€ â€“ Genesis 25:22).

[Source](#).

Context determines its usage, so <span style="color:red">in the Old Testament, whenever you see the words â€œandâ€, â€œyetâ€, and â€œbutâ€, they are all the same Hebrew word.</span>

**No, Iâ€™m not kidding.**

Thus, if you see a verse with â€œandâ€ but you think that â€œbutâ€ captures the idea better, it would be hard to say youâ€™re wrong.  With that in mind, weâ€™ll look at Isaiah 53:6 again:

**Isaiah 53:6**

All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; <span style="color:red">But</span> the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

<span style="color:red">That â€œButâ€ is a conjunctive waw (*or vav depending on pronunciation*), and thus could also be translated â€œandâ€ and still be perfectly accurate to the original Hebrew.</span>

Please keep that in mind.

# Next step: Analysis and putting it all together

There are a few steps, starting with simply looking at our translation options.

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**Our legitimate translation options for "paga"**

Remember that unique definition that applied to only one verse?  That does indeed seem to be some kind of bias creeping into the lexicon.  It's rare, but it happens, especially with significant words in doctrinally significant passages. However, the uses of "paga" that everyone can agree on are these:

- To meet or reach, (*with "reach" being in the sense of one person/thing meeting another person/thing*)
- To meet with a request or plea
- To meet with hostile intent, i.e. to strike/hurt/attack/kill.

Now, given that and everything else we've learned, we end up with something like this:

> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; [but (or) and] the LORD has caused the [crookedness/wickedness (or) consequences of crookedness/wickedness] of us all [to "meet Him with hostile intent"/attack] Him.

Now, I think all of those potential variations can be distilled into two major understandings.

> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has caused the wickedness of us all to attack Him.

**OR**

> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the consequences of the wickedness of us all to attack Him.

**The idea of consequences attacking someone is… odd.  Perhaps not impossibly odd, but definitely odd.**  Now, some would say that "punishment" is in view here, but as we already saw, "avon" doesn't mean "punishment".  Even if it could mean that, it's still a very odd idea.  So if you want to stretch "avon" to mean punishment – which it really doesn't, but for the sake of argument we'll look at that anyway – you could end up with something like this;

> All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the punishment of the wickedness of us all to attack Him.

> (*And some might say that: "But the LORD has caused the punishment of us all to attack Him." is a better translation, but again, "avon" doesn't mean punishment.*)

However, you still end up with the incredibly strange phrasing of punishment attacking Him.  I can't think of a single other place where consequences (*or punishment*) are said to attack someone like that. This again starts to sound like assuming special meanings or uses here when those meanings/uses aren't found anywhere else.

It gets even more strange when you consider that the more literal meaning is "to meet with hostile intent".  So then you end up with something like:

*"But the LORD has caused the punishment of us all to meet Him with hostile intent."*

Not only is that not supported by the word's meaning, it's also not clear and ends up sounding like gibberish, or perhaps "gibberish adjacent".  So let's move on to context.

## Context

As always, context is important. We'll look at the context of the verse first, then the larger context of the passage.

### The Verse Context

We'll be generous to both sides and contrast the two major translation options.  Here's the first one

### Understanding #1:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has caused the wickedness of us all to attack Him.

In this one, the 3rd line would coordinate quite well with the first two lines.  The first two lines are about our wickedness — first going astray and then going our own way (*as opposed to God's way*) — and the third line says that God made our wickedness (*literally crookedness*) attack Him.  That certainly happened because it was the wickedness of the Pharisees and Romans that led to Jesus's death.  (*Okay, it was actually Jesus giving Himself up for the benefit of us all, but you know what I mean.*)

The above understanding is clean, simple, lines up with what happened, and requires no strange understanding of the verse or passage.

Versus:

### Understanding #2:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the consequences of the wickedness of us all to attack Him.

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Now, if you can ignore the strangeness of the idea of consequences (*and some say punishment*) attacking someone, this does (*sort of*) work.  The first two lines talk about our sin, and the last talks about God dealing with those consequences.  This is how the verse is typically understood from a modern perspective by those who hold to Penal Substitutionary Atonement.

Now, weâ€™ll look at the larger surrounding context of the passage.

### The context of the passage

Iâ€™m going to do something that I almost never do: quote another translation alongside the NASB 95 and say the other translation got the sense of the passage more accurately.  Even though the NET bible overall has **major** problems (*itâ€™s not nearly literal enough in most places and makes some major changes*), it does get the sense of the passage more correct than the NASB 95.  (*Yes Iâ€™ve looked; you didnâ€™t think Iâ€™d only research the one word, did you?*)

I would recommend that you read one column and then the other, and then do a second read through going line-by-line.  Obviously thatâ€™s up to you, but I think itâ€™ll make things clearer.

As a disclaimer: **In this passage, the NASB is far more literal/accurate overall, but less literal/accurate in a few important ways.  The NET Bible is far less literal/accurate overall, but more literal/accurate in important places.**

Iâ€™ll skip the word study for the differences, other than a quick note about the difference between â€œbecause ofâ€ and â€œforâ€ (*Iâ€™ll highlight them in the quotes below so you can see where this applies.*)  Anyway, hereâ€™s the NET Bibleâ€™s note on the topic, and you can find the biblehub.com entry for the preposition [here](#).

> The preposition ×žÖ´×Ÿ (min) has a causal sense (translated â€œbecause ofâ€) here and in the following clause.

Anyway, hereâ€™s the passage side-by-side in two different translations.

[table id=11 /]
Now, youâ€™ll notice that those two different translations strike you rather differently.  Normally, I would be on the side of the NASB 95 since itâ€™s usually the most accurate and literal translation.  However, here, the NASB makes a bunch of translationâ€¦  well, I canâ€™t *quite* call them â€œmistakesâ€, but they do give a wrong impression.

For example, we already saw that â€œfall uponâ€ (*in the sense of â€œattackâ€*) is a normal way that the NASB translates the Hebrew word this article is about.  However, we also saw that itâ€™s a bit misleading in this context.  There are other examples throughout this passage as well.

(*For example: translating the Hebrew preposition â€œforâ€, when it actually means â€œbecause ofâ€.  Translating it â€œforâ€ almost compels you to think that substitution is in view.  It might be, but you canâ€™t get the idea of substitution from the Hebrew preposition translated â€œforâ€.  Thus,*

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"because of" is the correct translation. I'm actually rather irked that the NASB got that so wrong.)

**How should the verse be understood?**

Ultimately, we have four major variations, and I'll include a 5th because it's often (*erroneously*) translated that way. To be clear, the list below is just as much about translation as it is about interpretation. If a translation is literal but gives the wrong impression, then another literal translation that _doesn't_ give the wrong impression is superior.

1. **"the LORD has caused the wickedness of us all to attack Him."** This has the benefit of making perfect sense (*God used man's wickedness to ensure Jesus's death*) and uses standard/common/normal definitions for the words.
2. **"the LORD has caused the consequences of us all to attack Him."** This has the downside of not making very much sense. It uses normal definitions, but the idea of consequences attacking someone is strange and without precedent in scripture.
3. **"the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him."** This has the downside of "fall on" making it sound like a burden is being transferred instead of an attack. Other than that, it's similar to #1.
4. **"the LORD has caused the punishment of us all To fall on Him."** This has the double downside of both (1) stretching word definitions up to the breaking point, and (2) the phrase "fall on" gives a false impression of the meaning here, making it sound like a burden was transferred to Him instead of something attacking Him.
5. **"the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all"** This is a terrible translation (*It's the ESV though, so [that's not surprising](#)*). It not only ignores the hifil aspect of the verb, but "laid on" simply isn't what "paga" means. It means to meet, and can include the nuance of meeting to plead or attack depending on the context.

I think #1 has the fewest problems by far. I'm open to #2, but someone will first need to explain to me what it means. #3 is substantially identical to #1, but unfortunately gives a false impression that a burden is being transferred instead of an attack or a "hostile encounter". As for #4, it's far more problematic than the previous options because it goes against the normal/common word usage. I would even go so far as to say it flies in the face of the word definitions and usage.

**#5 is a complete bastardization of the text, and yet most common/popular Bible translations use this phrasing.**

I'm not shocked when bad translations like the NIV, NLT, and ESV mistranslate for doctrinal reasons (*please see [my article on Bible translations](#) for the evidence*). However, even the NKJV mistranslates this verse horribly.

That surprised me.

(*And by the way, the CSB and HCSB take the award for the worst mistranslation in this passage with: "the LORD has punished Him for the iniquity of us all". Yikes that's bad!*)

**<span style="color:red">Yet again, the NASB 95 stands head and shoulders above the rest in translation quality, once you understand that it regularly uses "fall on" to mean "attack".</span>**

**There's a reason it's my go-to translation.**

<span style="color:red">Thus, I conclude that "the LORD has caused the wickedness of us all to attack Him" is probably the best translation of this passage.  This agrees almost perfectly with the NASB 95 — arguably the most accurate translation — which is *almost* always a very good thing.   The meaning would be that God used man's own wickedness (*literally "crookedness"*) to make them "attack" Jesus; at first verbally and then later physically, culminating in His crucifixion.</span>

Conversely, the idea that this verse is saying that Jesus was punished for our sins seems to stretch the verse and words past the breaking point.  That might be taught in other places, but it's not taught here.

## Conclusion

This article's goal was to both teach you how to do a word study, and also to do some deep analysis of Isaiah 53:6.  To do the word study, first look at the definitions.  *IF* the definitions don't line up with the usage, it's time to see how the word is usually used.  It's also worth noting that sometimes, you need to look up other words in the passage to make sense of the passage.  Commentaries can be helpful, but often aren't and they aren't infallible.  Sometimes, additional study beyond the lexicon can be very useful, as was the case for "avon".

Additionally, if you are looking up a word in the New Testament, I highly recommend my article [A Complete, 100% English Introduction to Koine Greek (with Examples in English)](#) as a companion to this article.  It will help you understand the grammar of Greek words (*without having to know Greek*) so you can have a pretty thorough understanding of a word's meaning in context.

To the meaning of Isaiah 53:6, it seems like God was prophesying that He would make man's wickedness attack Jesus (*that is, God would use our wickedness to make us attack Jesus*), ultimately leading to Jesus's death.  It seems beyond the word definitions to use this verse to support Penal Substitutionary Atonement, though that doesn't mean PSA isn't taught elsewhere.