The “Servant Songs”

of the prophet Isaiah

*A series of Lent meditations*

**Introduction**

The prophet Isaiah - sometimes referred to as the greatest prophet who has ever lived - after Moses. Whether true or not, his writings deserve far more consideration in Christian reading than is currently given – after all, for over 2000 years, the Church has regarded herself as being in the “End Times”, to which Isaiah’s writings ultimately point!

However, there are many verses and passages in the book of Isaiah that refer directly to Our Lord Jesus Christ, prophetically; some to his birthplace, some to his birth; others to his resurrected, ascended Heavenly status. **Four passages, though, speak specifically of Jesus’ earthly ministry and do so with such precise language that no-one else could be identified, or intended to be so described.** **These four passages are known as the “servant songs”,** because they are all poetic in style and structure and, most significantly, because they all contain the phrase **“my servant” and/or “his servant”**. It is these four passages that these meditations/studies focus upon.

The studies are arranged in four sections, each focussing upon a particular “servant song” in chronological order. The aim is for the reader to read, then biblically meditate upon, prayerfully, what the Lord God was revealing to Isaiah about His “servant”.

The purpose of these studies is three-fold: firstly, to explore the scriptures much more deeply than in normal “daily readings” during Lent; secondly, to rediscover the art (mostly lost in the busyness of 21st century “western” life) of the practise of Biblical meditation –taking a passage of the Bible and thinking upon it, musing on it and so, slowly and deliberately, allowing the passage to draw you into contemplative worship of the Lord - God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And finally, to bring you into a fresh wonder and marvel at the awesome uniqueness of the Holy Scriptures and their incomparable integrity!

**Acknowledgements**

All Scripture quotations are taken from:

 The English Standard Bible (Anglicised Edition), HarperCollins ©2001 Crossway Bibles – unless otherwise stated.

The New International Version (Anglicised), [marked NIV], Biblica Inc.™ ©1973-2011.

Quotations from other publications are as referenced in the text.

The author wishes to thank Rev. Dr. Nick McQuaker, Elder of Christ Church, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, UK, also Director of Sussex Gospel Partnership and Senior Lecturer of Sussex Ministry Training Course (run by SGP) for much of the information contained in these notes; these were gleaned during the pre-course Bible-reading and prayer times during the summer term of SMTC in 2019. Your insight and teaching, Nick, was – and remains – invaluable and I am grateful, far beyond words, to you.

D.I. N-W February 2020.

Copyright ©2020 All Saints’ Church, Wick, Littlehampton, West Sussex, UK.

**The first “Servant song” - Isaiah Chapter 42, verses 1-9**

**Day 1 Reading: Is. 42:1 (first 3 lines)**

**“Behold my servant, whom I uphold,**

**My chosen, in whom my soul delights;**

**I have put my Spirit upon him;**

The very first word of this verse is intentionally powerful; it grabs the reader’s attention. **“Behold” …** LOOK! OBSERVE! TAKE NOTE!! Why? What are we to notice? **“Behold my servant…”** Anyone important or rich enough to have servants (slaves, actually, in Isaiah’s lifetime) would send a *very* trusted servant to carry a message to another rich friend, leader or dignitary, or to collect goods on their master’s behalf; such a servant commanded the same respect and deference that would be shown to their master. They would carry their master’s identity symbol (e.g. signet-ring) to validate their authority and authenticity. Any disrespect shown to them would therefore be considered disrespect, if not contempt, for their master!

If this was so for a servant of Isaiah, who lived in the King of Judah’s Court, consider how much more deserving of reverence The Lord God’s Servant is! *Now look at the end of the first line* **“whom I uphold”** – who exactly is backing, giving status and authority to “the servant”?

Not only is this servant trusted and highly regarded by his master; look and ponder on the second line: **“My chosen, in whom my soul delights;”** This servant is specially selected – one picked from amongst many – and not only that, he is very highly esteemed indeed – his master finds great joy and derives immense pleasure and satisfaction from this servant. The Master loves this particular servant deeply. To emphasise this, consider the final line for today: **“I have put my Spirit upon him;”**

This servant was not only chosen – he bore his master’s Spirit! When Jesus was baptised in the river Jordan by John, what happened?

Look at John’s Gospel, Ch.1:26-34.

Now ponder - what does v.34 above mean?

**Day 2 Reading: Is. 42:1(last line) – 3**

**“He will bring forth justice to the nations”**

Now the focus of Isaiah changes. Having established the servant’s importance to God, he starts to speak about what the servant will do. The servant’s task is immense! Strong’s concordance translates from the Hebrew word “mishpat”, which is a particular term, meaning an authoritative statement or verdict that is utterly final and complete, establishing precedent and, supremely, is The Lord’s overruling!

Ponder on this line - “He will...” - not a matter of ‘if’, but a definite certainty… and not to just His “chosen” people, as Isaiah’s contemporaries might think – but “to the nations”; different translations of The Bible use the words “coastlands”’ “isles”, or “Gentiles”. It is clear that this is going to be extensive, and international – even global!

Today, think “how might this affect not just us, our community, but our nation? What about our neighbouring nations? How might “international” affairs be influenced and affected? And is Jesus working His justice out in my life and our lives as a church? How? Where? In what ways?

**Day 3: Reading: Is. 42:2-3**

**“He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,**

**or make it heard in the street;**

**a bruised reed he will not break,**

**and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;**

**he will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

Now Isaiah considers how the servant will accomplish the task: According to Matthew Henry’s Commentary[[1]](#endnote-1), “He shall carry it on without noise. He shall have no trumpet sounded before him, nor any noisy retinue to follow him.” *(p.887.)*

The term “**cry aloud**”, in the original Hebrew, means “*to shriek*” or “*to proclaim*” - so, he will not be ostentatious, nor in any way seek to draw attention to himself; consider how Jesus taught and served, compared to then-contemporary rabbis and other ”religious” people *(Matt.6:1-8)*.

But… what is this, about bruised reeds and faintly smoking wicks? In ancient times, reeds were used for strengthening and thickening the filling materials for walls and roofs in buildings; damaged reeds were of no use. Even in making writing-media (papyrus, etc.), bruised reeds were considered poor-quality, and discarded.

Albert Barnes’ commentary again points out that “The word *’reed’* may be applied to people who are conscious of feebleness and sin...moved and broken by calamity; that feel as if they “have no strength to bear up against the ills of life.”; ‘*bruised’* means ‘broken or crushed, but not entirely broken off’ ...It may (suggest) those who...have been crushed or broken down by a sense of sin, by calamity, or by affliction. We speak...of “crushing” or “breaking down” by trials; the phrase here is intensive and emphatic, (implying) those who are...like a reed - feeble and fragile; and who...have been broken and oppressed by a sense of their sins, or by calamity.” *(parentheses mine.)*

**If this is you, my friend, please, take heart – Jesus is tender towards you and will not condemn; *I know.* I have, myself, faced times of extreme calamity, and felt despairing of hope and life – but Jesus did not cast me aside, and will not do so to you either!**

“...**and a faintly burning wick**”…? Again, Barnes says ‘The word used here denotes flax, and... a wick...made of it.’ The word ‘*smoking’* means that which is weak...feeble; ...which is just ready to go out, or to be extinguished; It may denote here the condition of one who is feeble and disheartened, and whose love to God seems almost ready to expire. **And the promise that he will not extinguish or quench that, means that he would cherish, feed, and cultivate it; he would supply it with grace,** as with oil to cherish the dying flame, and cause it to be enkindled, and to rise with a high and steady brilliancy. **The whole passage is descriptive of the Redeemer, who nourishes the most feeble piety in the hearts of his people.** *(Emphasis mine.)*

Today’s passage ends with a line of triumph:

**“he will faithfully bring forth justice.”**

An echo, perhaps, of the last line of v.1, but with an added emphasis – **faithfully!** The servant ***will*** complete his master’s allotted task and fulfil his intended purpose – complete, final, redeeming justice!

1. It is worth contemplating – religious “attention-seeking” is, in Jesus’ view, tantamount to hypocrisy!
2. Compare and contrast this to Our Lord Jesus Christ, “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb.4:15.)

**Day 4: Reading: Is. 42:4**

**“He will not grow faint or be discouraged**

**till he has established justice in the earth;**

**and the coastlands wait for his law.”**

The servant, we are assured, will not weaken - either in spirit (that is, zeal), soul (that is mind, will) or body…the two terms here “faint”, “discouraged” can equally mean “lack strength, be overcome” for the former, and “broken, despair in spirit” for the latter – until he has accomplished his pre-ordained task: to establish complete, final, eternal, redeeming justice throughout the earth. There is, of course, a two-fold meaning here; firstly, the accomplishing of the justice that The Father declared, immediately after The Fall of Adam and Eve, that He would accomplish (Gen.3:14-15); and secondly, the consummation of all justice, at the end of All Things, when the devil and his followers, together with all humanity, will know True justice (Rev. 20:4-6, 10-15).

**“and the coastlands wait for his law.”**

“The coastlands” is a many-faceted term; it is often translated “the isles” or “the Gentiles”; either way, it should give us great encouragement – the meaning is clearly the *entirety of humankind*, wherever we, and they, are upon the earth! It is a wonderful matter; The Lord is not slow in keeping His word – He desires and waits for as many as will answer Him to respond to His mercy and loving-kindness. “Law” here can also be translated as “teaching, instruction, or confident hope, assurance…”

What are you confidently hoping for?

**Day 5: Reading: Is. 42:5-6 (line 2)**

**“Thus says God, the LORD,**

**who created the heavens and stretched them out,**

**who spread out the earth and what comes from it,**

**who gives breath to the people on it**

**and spirit to those who walk in it:**

**“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;**

**I will take you by the hand and keep you;”**

Again, God addresses the servant, in Isaiah’s presence, calling him to consider His creation – firstly in the heavens above; How often have you gazed up in wonder and amazement at the “Milky Way” on a dark night in the countryside? Maybe it is time to do so again and ponder on His Glory…

Next, He calls the servant to consider His creation – “the earth and what comes from it” – the flora, the fauna, from which we get our food and shelter, the minerals and metals - it is ALL His!

Finally, The LORD reasserts to His servant that everyone, everywhere, is dependent upon Him and His loving-kindness: their very breath, and the spirit that sustains them. (In Hebrew, the words “spirit” and “breath” are synonymous, implying God-given means of life.) To this he adds His commissioning:

**“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;**

**I will take you by the hand and keep you;**

This last statement is revealing; it starts “**I am**” – the unspoken Name of THE LORD GOD, which He told to Moses, at the burning bush (Ex. 3 13-15). Next, The Lord emphasises His own standard and quality of commission that He is giving to His servant: “*in righteousness*”, as well as affirmation that he, the servant, is called both in, and because of, righteousness – as testified to by Jesus centuries later (Jn.10:30). Finally, The Father God gives that most reassuring of affirmations – his presence and sustaining…

Now read John 10:2-11, 14-16; In God’s calling and Jesus’ keeping, how safe are you? Meditate on this…

**Day 6: Reading: Is. 42:6-7**

**“I will give you as a covenant for the people,**

**a light for the nations,**

**to open the eyes that are blind,**

**to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,**

**from the prison those who sit in darkness.”**

The Father God continues speaking to his esteemed servant, in Isaiah’s presence, declaring the reason for the servant’s mission: he is not only to accomplish the Father’s purpose, but more – he is to be an active participant in an unbreakable agreement, a covenant! He, the servant, is being given in order to redeem other people. This was no surprise to Isaiah, nor to the servant – but may well have come as a rude, deeply disturbing shock to the people around; after all, they were the “chosen” nation, weren’t they? But here is their God – promising something unheard-of: giving His choice servant as a covenant – a guarantee – for the (unredeemable) people… a ‘light’ to the (rejected, Gentile) nations!

There is more; the beloved, esteemed servant of the Lord is going to achieve the seemingly impossible: restoring sight to blind people, releasing people taken as prisoners-of-war and bringing freedom – liberty – to those people condemned to death, sitting in the depths of the dungeons, where no light reached – but why?

Sometimes, personal and national events take unexpected turns that surprise and shock – even dismay us; what was your reaction the last time this happened?

Now read the passage again, slowly - comparing it to Jesus’ reading in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19); would it surprise you to discover that he was fulfilling Isaiah’s later prophecy in ch.61:1-2?

**Day 7: Reading: Is. 42:8-9**

**“I am the Lord; that is my name;**

**my glory I give to no other,**

**nor my praise to carved idols.**

**Behold, the former things have come to pass,**

**and new things I now declare;**

**before they spring forth I tell you of them.”**

Finally, at the end of His proclamation to his esteemed, beloved servant, the LORD God declares His name – but why? Isaiah lived in a time when even the Royal Courtiers, amongst whom he lived, were careless about their language – it seemed that profanity was everywhere (Is. 6:5). The LORD God is *jealous,* and he *will not give his glory to another,* whoever it is that stands in competition with him, especially not to *graven images.* *(Matthew Henry’s Commentary, ibid.)* Moreover, when The LORD made a covenant previously, with Abram, He swore that covenant by His own name - because there was (***and still is***) no greater name to swear by; He does not change. He further tells his servant – and Isaiah – that he has fulfilled past prophecies (former things), has yet more to reveal and will announce them prophetically, well in advance!

The times we live in, like those of Isaiah, seem full of bad language, self-glorification and idolatry – TV shows, “personalities”, world- and national-leaders, etc.

* How can we use passages such as this to refocus our minds, hearts, attitudes and lives on The Lord?
* Isn’t it time for us to re-attune our hearts in the next weeks to Him, in readiness for what He desires to reveal to us?

**The second “Servant song” – Isaiah Chapter 49, verses 1-7**

**Day 8: Reading: Is. 49:1**

**“Listen to me, O coastlands,**

**and give attention, you peoples from afar.**

**The Lord called me from the womb,**

**from the body of my mother he named my name.”**

Here, we read Isaiah prophesying specifically of the servant himself, who is calling out to ***all*** humankind - primarily gentiles - both declaring, uniquely, his calling from God and also ***God identifying him*** ***by name*** before his birth.

Outside of Judaism and Christianity, *no other faith* can honestly *claim and substantiate* their Leader having such a pedigree. Following Isaiah’s life, some ante-Christian commentators suggested that this person could have been Cyrus of Medo-Persia, who lived during the later times of the prophet Daniel, as well as both Nehemiah and Ezra. However, no evidence has been found among the extensive archaeological excavations of the 20th Century, of Cyrus making such claims.

So there can be no doubt – the “servant” that Isaiah prophesied about could only be one person – the Messiah, Jesus; but how can we be sure? Well, there is a very good test – proven over time immemorial and evidenced in the Bible itself: “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (2 Cor. 13:1 NIV). This itself is drawn from Deut. 13:19, and Jesus uses this in his defence against the Pharisees in John’s Gospel (ch.8:12-18).

How long is it since you last read the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews? Maybe, during this time of Lent, it is worth just musing a while on some of the passages in that letter about Jesus’ calling…

How long was it since you accepted the Lord’s call: “Follow me”? Isn’t it wonderful how His calling never loses its power and love?

**Day 9: Reading: Is. 49:2-3**

**“He made my mouth like a sharp sword;**

**in the shadow of his hand he hid me;**

**he made me a polished arrow;**

**in his quiver he hid me away.**

**And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel,**

**in whom I will be glorified.”**

Now, Isaiah speaks prophetically of the servant, describing The Lord’s preparing of him for the service he is to perform; the servant is described in the 1st person singular, so there can be no mistake about whether or not Isaiah was referring to the nation of Israel – he was not! (Even though he, Isaiah, lived in Judah!)

What is also particularly noticeable here is the terminology that the prophet uses – it is weaponry. The servant’s mouth is likened to a sharp sword – so his words were meant to cut and to wound, to penetrate and to separate, but not to maim or kill. The servant is also likened to a polished arrow – capable of piercing quickly, deeply and cleanly.

In both instances, the language used is meant to indicate *wounding with a distinct purpose:* to lance and cleanse, to allow healing. A blunt weapon will not only fail to penetrate - making only a shallow cut or puncture wound – it will also cause unnecessary damage to the surrounding tissues, leaving ragged edges to both skin and flesh, which will take far longer to heal and more long-lasting scar-tissue and possibly leaving weapon-debris in the wound.

Clearly, The Lord intended His servant to inflict wounds for the sole purpose of healing and restoring from serious, deep-rooted infection of our, humanity’s condition, namely – SIN (**S**elf-**I**nflicted **N**ecrosis…) But more, this weaponry had another purpose – a spiritual one; The servant was to go to war, as we have read earlier, to LIBERATE (ch.42:6-7) – and for that, he must therefore conquer whoever and whatever is holding these prisoners captive! It is to overcome The Devil, Satan, that he must go to war, and *total defeat will be necessary*. A two-edged sword, without doubt…

The servant was also to be concealed, not obvious – until The Lord intended him to start work; he was to be “*hidden in plain sight*” – just another man, nothing unusual or distinctive. This concealment was also for his protection – but what was the Lord’s “quiver”? According to Matthew Henry’s Commentary” *(p.899),* it was two-fold: firstly, within the Law of Moses – the Torah. Jesus was taught this – and so fully that he astounded the best of the Rabbis, in the Temple! (Luke 2:41-47) Secondly, it was closer – within the House of David – where particular shelter and blessing were afforded him, from people such as Herod the Great! *(p.899)*

But there is more. The Lord’s purpose was more than just victory over Satan and rescuing his beloved humankind; Look at v.3; His purpose is both to honour and exalt his servant, and to receive the worship adulation that is, rightfully, His and His alone!

Ponder how we should use our words – especially in prayer (Eph. Ch.6:17-18). Doesn’t this inspire you to worship Our Lord?!

**Day 10: Reading: Is. 49:4**

**“But I said, ‘I have laboured in vain;**

**I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity…’”**

Suddenly here, the prophet’s focus switches again. Now, he speaks from the servant’s perspective – and it is not encouraging; the first two stanzas point to weariness – exhaustion, even. There is a sense of despondency and despair. Those of us who have been in the Armed Forces and seen “active service” know exactly what is meant by the term “combat fatigue”; it can become dangerously all-consuming, if not noticed early and treated very quickly.

The Bible commentators agree here – the servant is clearly not complaining about the ultimate outcome of his service. Rather, he is viewing the immediate end-result, where the rewards don’t seem to justify the efforts he has expended; after all, he was a man – human in every way, yet without sin – even though he was fully God, he still experienced the full range of our physical senses, feelings, emotions – and quite likely, more! The suggestion here could be what, nowadays, might be called the very depths of “clinical depression”.

**My friend, if you battle with this, please be assured – you are never alone and will never battle alone! Jesus has been there, and moreover, knows the way through. Please, find the people in the fellowship who are involved in prayer ministry - and pray with them. If you cannot pray, they can - and will!**

**Day 11: Reading: Is.49:4 (last two lines)**

**“‘...yet surely my right is with the Lord,**

**and my recompense with my God.’”**

Isaiah continues his discourse on the servant, reaffirming the Lord’s calling from his human conception to the Great, two-fold Commission: firstly, to bring His Covenant people back to Him; and secondly, to make His loving rescue and mercy known to *all* humanity, globally.

It is worth remembering here - after The LORD led Israel out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them, and not merely in the contractual sense. They became His “treasured possession” – not an object, but, as Hosea (who prophesied at the same time as Isaiah) pointed out, like His Bride – His Beloved! Sadly though, Israel, before - and after - the reign of King David, behaved like a prostitute, chasing after other nations’ “gods”. That is why, here, as elsewhere in the prophets, God referred to Israel by the name ‘Jacob’ – implying wayward, wilful disobedience and heart-breaking unfaithfulness. However, God was not (*and still is not*) willing, even today, to give them up! Hence, Isaiah prophesied, “…that Israel might be gathered to him” – the loving desire is still there in God’s heart for His people, the Jews.

How do you cope with being praised and honoured? When you are asked to take on a challenging task, with the prospect of being recognised and esteemed, what is your inner reaction and how can we help each other to remain truly humble towards God?

**Day 13: Reading: Is. 49:6**

**“he says: ‘It is too light a thing**

**that you should be my servant**

**to raise up the tribes of Jacob**

**and to bring back the preserved of Israel;**

**I will make you as a light for the nations,**

**that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”**

Isaiah now tells of the servant’s high status, future honour, might and the enlarging of the servant’s mission. Here, the emphasis is that the remnant of Israel’s restoration is too menial a task; so his faithfulness is to be rewarded with a greater task with far more glory–the offer of salvation for all humankind, throughout time!

Have you been given a responsibility that seems too big for you to handle, lately?

If so, think on this: is it so great that God (who spoke the heavens and all the contents of the Earth into being) cannot enable you to achieve what is asked, and see you not only succeed, but do so exceptionally?

Or, have you felt that you have been given a demeaning task?

Jesus humbled himself to save us all; he left the gaze of angels and the majestic glory of heaven for a stable and an animal food-trough as his first cot!

Humility often precedes honour – prayerfully seize the opportunity and trust The Lord for the outcome!

**Day 14: Reading: Is. 49:7**

**“Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,**

**to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and arise;**

**princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;**

**because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel,**

**who has chosen you.’”**

Concluding his second “servant song”, Isaiah speaks clearly of the Father God in the first line of verse 7; the titles here are all His. The Lord is speaking through the prophet to His chosen One and what he has to say is deeply disturbing. Isaiah, being related to royalty, had access to both priests and high officials, and so had access to documents, including scripture scrolls. Being an educated man, he could read and understand these with considerable insight and discernment. He would have had intimate knowledge of the Torah, together with Psalms, so it is likely he would have been familiar with Ps.22, commonly known as the “crucifixion Psalm”.

Hearing and declaring The Lord’s word about the servant was very likely shocking, if not traumatic for Isaiah; he was, after all, a man with some sensitivity. The language he uses is graphic – the sort of language used to describe someone undergoing dreadful public humiliation. Historically, it would have been used about someone who had committed a “capital” crime, such as treason (for which Isaiah himself was later executed).

At the start of line two, the very first phrase, “***one deeply despised***” translates from Hebrew, according to the Pulpit Commentary, as one...“***who is despised of souls.***”[[2]](#endnote-2) It is hard to think of worse scorn directed towards someone, but he continues: “abhorred by the nation”, which could easily have been translated “***whom mankind abhors****”.* The term used is “***goi****”*, which points to the Gentiles rather than to the Jews. Mankind at large dislikes a "Holy One," since he is a perpetual reproach to it*”.[[3]](#endnote-3)* The expression is one of uncontained hatred. Then comes the verbal ‘twisting of the knife’: “***the servant of rulers****:*” Again, the Pulpit Commentary states “or, ***a slave of despots***”*;* treated as a slave i.e.by such irresponsible rulers as Herod (Lk. 23:11) and Pontius Pilate (Jn. 19:1, 16).” [References mine.]

The prophecy here brings into stark focus both the depth and duration of psychological, emotional and physical trauma that our Saviour endured, for our sakes.

Then suddenly and without any warning, Isaiah’s “tone” changes:

**“Kings shall see and arise;**

**princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;”**

Now, it seems, Isaiah is looking much, much farther into the prophetic future than Jesus’ earthly ministry; instead of demanding homage, earthly rulers are brought to their senses and realise whom they must – and indeed, desire to, honour; not only so, but they will fall on their faces in worship before him.

Finally, with a note of triumph, Isaiah proclaims why this will be: because the LORD God has demonstrated, through Jesus, his complete faithfulness!

Let’s spend some time pondering how much Jesus deserves our thankfulness, and what true worship of him is...

**The third “Servant song” - Isaiah Chapter 50, verses 4-11**

**Day 15: Reading: Is.50:4 (first two lines)**

**“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught,**

**that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.”**

**“Morning by morning he awakens;**

**he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.”**

Here, we see the prophet speaking from the servant’s perspective once more. Jesus, although both conceived and born perfect, and untainted by sin, even so had to learn obedience - but to whom, and why?

Firstly, He had to learn obedience to the Lord; it may not seem a big thing to us, from a western-perspective, but…

1. Learning obedience to The Lord meant, as a Jewish boy, becoming schooled in, and knowing the Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy) by heart; knowing how to interpret it and apply it – in every situation!
2. Having reached his 12th birthday, he would then have had his Bar Mitzvah – he became a man; he gave his childhood toys away (as did the Apostle Paul - 1 Cor. 13:11); he learned his father’s trade, and, in Jesus case, it is most likely that he trained as a Rabbi. We can deduce this by two things: firstly, in Luke’s Gospel, we read that, at the Feast of Passover, he went with his parents to the Temple in Jerusalem; afterwards, he remained there for three days, sitting listening and debating with the “Teachers of the Law” - Rabbis! (Lk.2:41-47). Secondly, there are several occasions in the four Gospels (you can look them up for yourself!) where Jesus was called “Teacher” or “Rabbi”; He could only have become a Rabbi by learning under another, older Rabbi, according to Jewish tradition and Mosaic Law.
3. Finally, having been baptised by John the Baptist, Jesus received the Holy Spirit, who remained on him; Jesus would have learned, presumably, to become sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading, guiding and promptings! And all this by the age of 30!!

This may answer the “to whom”, but…why? The answer has to be: to prepare him to fulfil his ministry, as per Luke 4:14-30 and Mark 1:21-28,

“*…to proclaim good news to the poor…liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour*.”

Anyone who has had a chronic illness or health condition will know just how wearisome that can be, and Jesus came that he might deliver those who believe on Him. However, Matthew Henry also observed in his commentary: “Christ was anointed with the Spirit above his fellows. To make the man of God perfect, he has…*The tongue of the learned,* to know how to give instruction, *how to speak a word in season to him that is weary”* and “*the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season* for the comfort of those that are weary and heavily laden under the burden of sin…”(*p.902*). Likewise, Albert Barnes’ commentary observes “The Hebrew here is, ‘That I might know how to strengthen with a word the weary;’ that is, that he might sustain, comfort, and refresh them by his promises and his counsels. How eminently he was suited to alleviate those who were heavy laden with sin and to comfort those who were burdened with calamities and trials…”

Jesus also fulfilled the Torah – the sacrifice for sin and the scapegoat, so, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: “…when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting for that time until his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Heb. 10:11-14)

How much do we appreciate what Jesus had to learn, in order to fulfil the Law on our behalf before God”? When did you last read Leviticus and Deuteronomy? The Mosaic Law was extensive was demanding to keep and could be labourious too, yet Jesus kept it *all, to the smallest detail*. Isn’t that reason to be thankful?

**Day 16: Reading: Is.50:4 (last two lines)**

**“Morning by morning he awakens;**

**he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.”**

The meaning here is very much Hebrew idiom; it is that of a diligent student being awakened each morning, alert, focussed and *listening* *intently* to his teacher. The concept is still found in modern western teacher-training: no-one can be a teacher unless – and until they have *learned* to *listen* – and *apply* what they have received by instruction.

How busy are you? Are you constantly “on the go”, with barely a moment to pause and “collect your thoughts”? Sadly, it is an all-too-common symptom of modern life. Is it time to “hit the ‘pause’ button, find a place where you can be undisturbed and just…listen?

Ask Jesus what He wants you to learn of him; it may take a while!

**Day 17: Reading: Is.50:5-9**

**“The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious;**

**I turned not backward.**

**I gave my back to those who strike,**

**and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;**

**I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.**

**But the Lord GOD helps me;**

**therefore I have not been disgraced;**

**therefore I have set my face like a flint,**

**and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”**

Isaiah’s song continues from where we paused yesterday. It is just possible that Isaiah had, at this point, gone “head-to-head” with evil king Manasseh and been sentenced to death - we don’t know; these are the bold words of a man who knows he has been courageous in speaking the truth – and on his own head be it. Sometimes powerful people don’t like being confronted with the uncomfortable truth – even when it is for their own good!

What is most obvious, though, is the striking accuracy of the statements leading up to Jesus’ determination to finally head to Jerusalem, fulfil so much prophecy about himself, clear the Temple and accomplish that purpose which his Father had sent him to accomplish – His goal was indeed within reach and sight – and Isaiah, blessed with prophetic far-sightedness from the Lord God, had the “holy boldness” to write it down!

As we look in parts through the passage, there are some points to note:

**“The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious;**

**I turned not backward.”**

Jesus faced challenges to his authority many, many times – from religious leaders and political rulers. The Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes could not succeed against him though, because of:

* 1. His total trust in his Father,
	2. His (and God’s) unwavering commitment to righteousness and holy fulfilment of God’s word, and
	3. His listening and obeying the voice of his Teacher, the Holy Spirit.

He was resolute in fulfilling his calling – At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.’ Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.” (Lk 3:31)

***There is simply no substitute for total obedience to God’s word.*** The Bible is utterly reliable when it is believed for what it is and who ordained its writing!

**“I gave my back to those who strike,**

**and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;**

**I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.**

**But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;”**

We only have to consider the awful accounts of Jesus’ trial before the High Priest in the Gospels to understand the horrors that Jesus endured for our sakes; to be beaten about the back, face and head with sticks and to be spat upon was soul-breaking humiliation.

**“…therefore I have set my face like a flint,**

**and I know that I shall not be put to shame.”**

Jesus’ determination was total – we know that he “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk.9:51).

When you face opposition to God’s will in your life from other people, who are determined to have their way, how reassured are you that He will not let you be put to shame?

**Day 18: Reading: Is.50:8-9**

**“He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me?**

**Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary?**

**Let him come near to me.**

**Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?**

**Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;**

**the moth will eat them up.”**

None of the charges levelled against Jesus could stand up to scrutiny; neither the religious leaders, nor the political or military governors could contend with him. When we read through the Gospel accounts, we find the following, statements:

“Now the chief priests and the whole Council [that is, the Sanhedrin] were seeking ***false testimony*** against Jesus that they might put him to death, ***but they found none,*** though many false witnesses came forward. (Matt.26:59-60.) [Words in brackets, and ***emphases***, mine.]

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” **But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer.** Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ***But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed***. (Matt.27:11-14.)

And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ***?” For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.*** Besides, ***while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man,*** for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.” (Matt.27:16-19.)[ibid.]

And again, in verse 24 of the same chapter: “…So when ***Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing***, but rather that a riot was beginning, ***he took water and washed his hands*** before the crowd***, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood***…”[ibid.]

Even Herod gained no confession from Jesus: “…Then ***Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds,*** “***I find no guilt in this man***.” But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place. When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. **So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.** *The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.*” (Lk. 23:6-10.)[ibid.]

The Apostle John’s account is longer and has greater detail; there is insufficient space to explore it here. That is no reason not to do so yourself – approach this prayerfully and allow The Lord to reveal key details to you from scripture, by His Spirit.

**Day 19: Reading: Is.50:10-11**

**“Who among you fears the LORD**

**and obeys the voice of his servant?**

**Let him who walks in darkness and has no light**

**trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.**

**Behold, all you who kindle a fire,**

**who equip yourselves with burning torches!**

**Walk by the light of your fire,**

**and by the torches that you have kindled!**

**This you have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment.”**

Isaiah’s third song ends with an uncomfortably stern message; He knew that he was living amongst a very headstrong, rebellious nation, led by one of two kings:

* One who was a bit wavering (Hezekiah – good at the start of his reign; sadly disobedient towards his death),
* Or the other who was, frankly, atrocious (Manasseh – one of Judah’s most evil, idolatrous kings).

Once again, it has a double application. Firstly, Isaiah was fearless in his ministry towards Israel – his only fear was of the Lord (Is. 6:1-7). He had to tell both king and country what God told him to! He had to warn the nation of their ultimate fate: if they persisted in their wilful, self-reliant, worldly-wise rebellion, they would face the ultimate dreadful, agonising and appalling outcome.

Secondly, it has a rather more obscure fulfilment:

1. What happened at Jesus’ trial? It was at night, in the High Priest’s house. Jesus had to “*walk in darkness*”, without light – both spiritually and literally; He had to “*trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.*” His enemies kindled a fire and equipped themselves with burning torches…
2. At Jesus’ death and entombment? Again, it was night. His body was dead but he was alive spiritually - and had a final task to fulfil – he “*went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah…”(1 Pet.3:18-19)*. He had to “*walk in darkness”, without light*”, and “*trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.*”

At this point, I am aware that I may well be “going out on a limb” - I do hope not. **But I am pleading with you. If you are in a situation where you are spiritually “at a crossroads” or “a fork in your spiritual walk”, I beg you, please – please, DON’T trust your own self-reliance or judgement!** it is far, far better to wait. Seek out those whom you **know** you can trust to pray with you – and for you **– and above all, make no decision until you know you have heard from The Lord God and that there has been proper confirmation.**

My writing this is in the hope that it is not applicable to anyone reading – but if it is you***, I am desperately concerned that you do not proceed - as you risk sorrow, heartbreak and grief beyond words… I do not know your circumstances, but am writing this meditation with much prayer and a very heavy heart indeed…***

**The fourth “Servant song” – Isaiah Chapter 52, verse 13 to**

**Chapter 53 verse 7**

**Day 20: Reading: Is. 52:13**

**“Behold, my servant shall act wisely;**

**he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”**

Today, we start to look at the last, the longest and by far, the most intense of Isaiah’s “Servant songs”. At just fifteen verses, it describes, in sharp detail, every facet and justification of the servant – Jesus, the Anointed One’s - ministry, service, suffering and sacrifice.

So, what did Isaiah perceive? There is no hint, in this first “verse”, of any link to the previous part of the chapter, or its forthtelling of a future call to leave Babylon (or, before the scriptures were divided into “chapters” and “verses”, sometime during the 4th Century AD) - or any inkling in this “stanza”, of the enigmatic poetry that subsequently streams forth – or is there? The last word of the first line, in Hebrew, is Sa’kal (l;k,f)), which can be translated as “prudently”, “circumspectly”, “expertly”, “skilfully”, “prosper” or “successfully”! Most of the translations I have checked use “wisely”, or “prudently”; just four of them used “prosper” or “prospered”. However, I am assured that the closest transliterations would be “successfully” or “prosperously”.

Taken “at face value”, these two lines do imply that the servant will see both success due to diligence in his task and the subsequent reward by way of promotion. The terms “high”, “lifted up” and “exalted” have just those Hebrew meanings; no only so, but using the terms in such close conjunction indicates not just honour and promotion, but an ongoing, unceasing process of it...

Yet Isaiah, being Jewish, was likely to have been skilled in both irony and wit. Bearing in mind his earlier prophetic songs, it is not beyond possibility that he could perceive far ahead of his own time. He knew of the Psalms which spoke of an “Anointed One” to come, who would sit upon the throne of King David – but he also knew what The Spirit of The Lord had previously revealed, and was now revealing to him. This King would be like no previous one. He would be:

1. Eternal,
2. Full of The Lord’s Spirit,
3. Born from among peasantry, and
4. Willing to suffer greatly before receiving his honour.

Isaiah had earlier spoken of the suffering that the Lord’s servant would face – think back to Day 4 of this series and Is. 42:4. He knew “first-hand” what could happen to people who spoke wisdom to powerful, despotic rulers - who might not like being told what the Lord saw in their hearts and knew of their plans and intentions. So Isaiah may have spoken with an entirely different meaning; the Assyrians had demonstrated new, appalling forms of torture. He could have been warning others to “keep their own counsel”, yet with a “double-entendre” too, speaking of how the Lord’s servant would be punished...

I do not want to over-emphasise this, nor suggest you to “read too much into” the text. It clearly speaks of Jesus’ ministry. We know he acted with the greatest wisdom, gentleness, kindness and love. His reaching out to people who had been rejected, scorned and hurting was, in those times, far beyond extraordinary – why else would so many “commoners” follow and believe on him, to the intense irritation of the religious leaders?

Isn’t it time for us to seek to desire the same Holy Spirit of wisdom that so rested upon Jesus? The joy that he knew awaited him from fulfilling his Father’s will was more than sufficient to keep him from growing faint or becoming discouraged.

Let us come boldly before the Throne of Grace today, to learn of His wisdom and so better exalt the Lord Jesus in our praise and worship.

**Day 21: Reading: Is. 52:14**

**“As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred,**

**beyond human semblance,**

**and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—“**

Again, Isaiah changes direction, suddenly; from speaking about the servant being honoured for his diligence and wisdom, now we find him apparently contradicting! What is going on? It appears puzzling, if not bewildering – until we accept that the majority of this verse is between hyphens; it is an interlude, a “prelude” to matters later in the chapter. According to Matthew Henry’s commentary, “the ancient Jews understood it of the Messiah, though some will have understood it of Jeremiah” (*p.906.*) It speaks of something terribly disfiguring that has happened to the servant, so as to render him so unrecognisable that he would be considered not to be “human” in appearance or bodily shape. So, it can ***only*** speak of the beating and scourging that Jesus suffered at the hands of the High Priest’s followers and guards (Mk.14:65, Matt. 26:67) and the Roman soldiers (Mk. 15:15-20, Matt.27:26).

Rather than just leave matters here, although, it is worth meditating upon Jesus’ suffering, knowing that he suffered for us and for our sins; consider what the writer to the Hebrews has written: “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” (Heb.12:3,4.)

We all, each of us, struggle with issues that sometimes – maybe often – leave us feeling wearied, even to the point of wondering if we shall ever succeed in overcoming. Let us, please, remember to encourage one another – daily – we each need it, and no-one struggles in total isolation. Consider Jesus…

**Day 22: Reading: Is. 52:15 (first line)**

**“so shall he sprinkle many nations;**

Isaiah picks up here from the beginning of the first line of the previous verse; the word “sprinkle” here is commonly understood to mean that of sprinkling during one of the Levitical feasts (e.g. Passover, when the Priest would, at a set time, take a bowl of blood from a freshly-killed heifer, dip a sprig of hyssop into it and, using a flicking motion, scatter droplets over the assembled crowd). However, looking more carefully in its context and in-depth, it is more likely meant to suggest a sudden, unexpected act that would startle or surprise the assembled gathering. Certainly, regarding Jesus sacrificial death, much of His blood was sprinkled suddenly, without any special “preparation”, such as the ritual purifying of the High Priest before such a ceremony – indeed, with Jesus’ scourging and then his crucifixion, there was no preparation.

What was notable, though, was its timing. The crowd in Jerusalem at that time was from across the entire Roman Empire and, quite possibly, from beyond. There were Jews, Greeks, Romans, and others; so indeed, Jesus’ blood sprinkled many nations, without their prior expectation.

Sprinkling, whether by water or blood, was a much-used ritual in Hebrew worship and festivals. Sin, whether personal or corporate, had to be dealt with – and there was only one way. *Blood had to be shed.* We can see this throughout The Bible, from Genesis 3:21 onwards. Water was also used, significantly – to purify from the power of sin. Both were essential!

Jesus also shed “water” (what is nowadays known as “plasma”) when he was pierced with a spear following his crucifixion, before he was taken down from the cross (Jn.19:34).

Accordingly, our sin – and our sins – have to be paid for, in blood. Not only that, (if that were not enough!) but Jesus has also purified us from the very power of sin! As we head towards the most important day and festival of the Church year, can we grasp the enormity of what Jesus has done for us? Ponder on Heb. 9:11-12, 22 and 24-26...

**Day 23: Reading: Is. 52:15 (last three lines)**

**“kings shall shut their mouths because of him;**

**for that which has not been told them they see,**

**and that which they have not heard they understand.”**

There is a strong sense of finality here – there would be no more place or time for accusation, criticism or challenge. The servant would have fulfilled all that was required of him, completely. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom.8:1-4.)

Kings (Rulers, Governors Emperors, etc.) were normally the first to be informed of important news in, or on the borders of, their domains; *but the news of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection and ascension is news of an altogether different order.* There was no way that the “authorities” could possibly silence or prevent the spread of this news – it was out of their control! The sense here is that they were so taken by surprise, so astonished, that “words failed them”. They simply did not dare to open their mouths.

This could be seen in two contexts:

1. The sense of conviction that the highest rulers experience when they come under the power of the Gospel; true, total awe, leading to them repenting, and receiving the prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit, and
2. The final Judgement to come, when every person, both ennobled and commoners who know The Lord Jesus, will fall down and worship Him (Rev. Ch.’s 5 and 21:1-7).

**Day 24: Reading: Is. 53:1**

**“Who has believed what he has heard from us?**

**And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”**

There is much to ponder in these two short lines. Firstly, there is the Lord, speaking through Isaiah – in the ***plural***: “**us”**; in Hebrew, the word used for God is “Elohim” - and is ***always*** plural; there is no singular! The audience is a single person, though.

Next, can you see – there are two questions; there is a deliberate emphasis here. In Hebrew, if a question or statement was repeated like it is here, it was deliberately intended to attract attention, and such a question, prompt further enquiry.

The NKJV is more forthright: “**Who has believed our report?”** The word “report” can also be translated “proclamation” or “announcement”. So the questions are rhetorical; they are asked with a sense of wonder and amazement – as if to suggest “*why won’t he believe what he has been told?*”

So the message has gone out, more than once and by two (or more) messengers – so why is the person ignoring and disbelieving it?

We can ask who the recipient was; it could have been anyone. But it wasn’t – it was Jacob (disobedient Israel) that God was addressing. But how can we be sure? The clue is in the second question - “the arm of the Lord...” The “arm” here is not a limb, but a *person*! The “arm of The Lord was – *his servant* – whom he had sent to rescue Israel from Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night! His servant had also appeared several times to various people throughout previous times – we refer to them as “Christophanies” - The Lord Jesus appearing to one of his people, long before he was born, with his identity concealed! The Lord only revealed Himself (in his servant) to someone from Israel, so, by inference, we can be sure that Israel was who he was speaking to. What is more, the Lord was not only speaking – he was *revealing himself,* so the audience was not relying upon natural observations or senses – it had to be spiritual and, therefore, supernatural!

Are there times when The Lord has spoken to you, either through Scripture, or prophetic gift (someone has given you a verse or a “word of knowledge”), or maybe you have had a dream or seen a vision? Did you believe what you were given? What did you do about it? These are special, personal matters of your testimony. How did you feel, that The Lord was speaking to *you, personally*?

**Day 25: Reading: Is. 53:2**

“**For he grew up before him like a young plant,**

**and like a root out of dry ground;**

**he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,**

**and no beauty that we should desire him.”**

Here we read of Isaiah describing the Lord’s early life – nothing noteworthy or spectacular, just someone...normal, “run-of-the-mill”, “everyday”. He was, according to human birth, the son of a carpenter – a common tradesman, not “educated” or with any claim (so the religious leaders thought) to status.

The servant, here, is likened to a young plant – the sort of thing that, if it happened to grow in the “wrong” place, would just be uprooted and tossed aside, without a second thought. But *he grew up before God, and that is the point here.* He did not need to “grow up before men” - in fact, He is also likened to a root, pushing up through the dry surface of the soil, possibly on a pathway or cart–track - a common occurrence before “metalled” or stone-surfaced Roman roads had even been invented.

Isaiah now moves to more stark, direct language - and it is not kind, nor polite:

**“he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,**

**and no beauty that we should desire him.”**

The servant, the Lord Jesus, did not look the slightest bit like royalty! No training on how to stand correctly, no “apparel” such as expensive robes! He was not what the Jewish people were expecting; after all, Moses was, apparently, beautiful as a child (Ex.2:2). They were, apparently, expecting their Messiah to be handsome, with attractive eyes (1Sam 16:12). But no, he was, to his own people, just an “ordinary” man…

Do you feel, or have you felt, overlooked because of your appearance, physique or apparent “plainness”? Believe me, it hurts deeply. Jesus knows too – he has experienced life with all its prejudices, being “looked down upon” and “thought nothing of”. But remember, “God ***chose you*** before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) ***and you are precious in His sight!*** Meditate on this today...

**Day 26: Reading: Is. 53:3 (first two lines)**

**“He was despised and rejected by men,**

**a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;”**

From speaking about the servant Messiah’s early life, Isaiah now prophesies about his adult life and ministry.

Jesus was hated and scorned by religious leaders – Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were two powerful, opposed, priestly groups that had arisen from Israel’s history, during 300 B.C. – Roman Era. Sadducees were ultra-pious and orthodox, brooking no dissent from their own strict interpretation of Moses’ Law “as written” (plus their own “additions”); coming from the Jewish aristocracy, they were, mostly, Temple Priests and controlled the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees were no less pious, but less orthodox and accepted Jewish “oral tradition” as of equal status to the Torah. They too were harshly critical of Jews who did not strictly keep the Law. Coming from wealthy “upper-middle-class” Jewry, they were mostly Rabbis and “Teachers of The Law”. Neither found any favour with Jesus and were denounced by him on numerous occasions. They questioned his authority and background: “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” (Mk. 11:27-28, Matt. 21:23)

But Jesus was rejected by more than just the religious leaders – he was also rejected by rulers (Herod the Great, Philip of Galilee, Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, etc.) and commoners – most of the Greek and Roman peoples, for example.

Jesus was ***“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”***; according to Albert Barnes’ Commentary: ‘in Hebrew, the first statement is rendered “*A man of chastisements*” … The word rendered “*grief*” means, usually, *sickness, disease* (see Deut.7:15 and 28:61; also Isa.1:5); but it also means *anxiety, affliction* (Eccl. 5:16) and then *any evil or calamity* (Eccl. 6:2).” Barnes continues: “The idea is, that he was (to be) familiar with sorrow and calamity. It does not mean … that he was to be himself sick and diseased; but that he was to be subject to various kinds of calamity, and that it was to be a characteristic of his life that he was familiar with it. He was intimate with it. He knew it personally; he knew it in others. He lived in the midst of scenes of sorrow, and be became intimately acquainted with its various forms, and with its evils … There is evidence in abundance that he was familiar with all kinds of sorrow, and that his own life was a life of grief.’ [emphases mine.]

How many times did Jesus encounter people who had “demons”? Or people who had physical disabilities? Or had recently been bereaved, for instance?

There is *not one* kind of human misery, illness or suffering that Jesus has not encountered and carried – endured – for us**. Not one**.

Today, spend some time musing about what Jesus experienced and endured during his time on earth amongst us; yet he met and dealt with each suffering person with extraordinary compassion. Such love…

**Day 27: Reading: Is. 53:3 (last two lines)**

**“and as one from whom men hide their faces**

**he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”**

Isaiah continues the verse – but what does he mean? This verse can only suggest one thing – the shock of those around the servant at his appearance; it implies that they were appalled that he could be so disfigured!

What we do know from Scripture is that the servant, Jesus the Messiah, had suffered so greatly at the hands of the Sanhedrin at his trial, when he had been beaten about the face, and then, later scourge-whipped by Roman soldiers, that he was so disfigured, so badly injured, that he could scarcely be recognised as a human, let alone be identified for who he was.

The Hebrew (translation) is literally, ‘And as the hiding of faces from him, or from it;’ (Albert Barnes’ commentary.)

Isaiah then repeats the first phrase of the passage again:

**“he was despised,”**

The emphasis is powerful – Our Lord and Saviour, prior to his crucifixion, was doubly scorned. The desire of the Pharisees and Sadducees for vengeance reached its awful, horrible climax. They were determined to vent their spite and hatred of him for his righteous condemnations of them and they vented with all the evil they could muster. If that were not enough, they whipped-up the crowd to a frenzy. We can only wonder at how Jesus endured such vile screaming and taunting.

Isaiah continues **“and we esteemed him not.”** This is actually, in Hebrew, an “accounting” term! Also, note therepetition, albeit in different words, of the end of the first line. The force of this was to “ram home” to the reader(s) – if they could grasp what he was alluding to – that ***no-one cared, in the least, about the servant.*** John Gill’s commentary describes it in this way: “**he was despised, and we esteemed him not**; which is repeated to show the great contempt cast upon him, and the dis-esteem he was had in by all sorts of persons; professors and profane, high and low, rich, poor, rulers and common people, priests, Scribes, and Pharisees; no set or order of men had any value for him; and all this disgrace and dishonour he was to undergo, to repair the loss of honour the Lord sustained by the sin of man, whose surety Christ became.”

The graphic damage of sin could not be clearer. But how much does this impact us today? We are bombarded by TV scenes of immense suffering currently (and have been for decades, it seems), of people fleeing war-ravaged towns and cities in terror, with little but the clothes they travel in. The world seems to want us to focus on such immense suffering, only to forget it when the next international calamity arises. Of course, it doesn’t – people take years to recover from such terrors, if they ever do. **But Jesus suffered more.**

Have you ever suffered humiliation and taunting from a crowd? Or have you had to endure ongoing scorn, hatred or rejection from former friends (or worse, family)? If so, it is very easy to feel sorry for yourself – but what about for someone else?

Ponder today on how much, and how deeply, Jesus endured for us…

**Day 28: Reading: Is. 53:4**

**“Surely he has borne our griefs**

**and carried our sorrows;**

**yet we esteemed him stricken,**

**smitten by God, and afflicted.”**

Isaiah’s words describe clearly how the servant suffered – ***for us*** – yet look at how he points out the transferring of responsibility and blame! The word “surely” at the beginning of the first line is, in the Hebrew, very strong indeed – it means “certainly”, and “without doubt”.

We must give due thought to the remainder of the line, too:

**“…he has borne our griefs**

**and carried our sorrows;**

“In all cases there is the idea of lifting, sustaining, taking up, and conveying away, as by carrying a burden”.” (Albert Barnes’ commentary.)

All humankind present at Jesus journey to Golgotha made the grave error of thinking him being punished by God. According to Matthew Henry, “he had scarcely in any part a whole skin … but from the crown of his head, which was crowned with thorns, to the soles of his feet, which were nailed to the cross, nothing appeared but wounds and bruises.”

The contrast between our guilt and Jesus’ pure innocence, could not be put more plainly. “We treated him as one whom we regarded as being under the divine malediction, and we therefore rejected him.” (Albert Barnes’ commentary.)

The burden of our fallen humanity is, beyond question, too great for any of us, individually, to bear. But today, reflect on how much Jesus took upon himself – ***for us.***

**Day 29: Reading: Is. 53:5**

**“But he was pierced for our transgressions;**

**he was crushed for our iniquities;**

**upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,**

**and with his wounds we are healed.”**

Now Isaiah prophesies of the servant’s physical injuries, and the reason for them. Jesus skin and flesh were pierced – by the nails spearing him to the crucifixion cross. His brow was pierced – by the crown of thorns thrust hard upon his head. His back, sides and, most likely, his frontal torso were also pierced – the scourge-whips contained metal and bone shards, together with pieces of sharp stone – such as flint, purposely to pierce, cut and rip away whatever they struck!

These injuries Jesus bore were on our behalf; “**our transgressions”, “our iniquities”** – *but what are these?* These old words have largely, nowadays, lost their meanings; but they are legal terms. “Transgressions” refers to corporate offences against the Jewish criminal code: revolt, idolatry, etc., where the wrongdoings were of a large-scale nature – even including “national” acts. “Iniquities” includes a range of behaviours, not necessarily criminal - from perversity (wilful stupidity), perversion, up to blasphemy, murder, theft, adultery, and so on. They were all punishable - three of them by death.

Both were offensive to God. Insulting a neighbour, or slander, was (and still is!) as bad, to Him, as physical wounding, or worse…

**“the chastisement that brought us peace”, and**

**“with his wounds we are healed.”**

We know that “chastisement” means “punishment” or “correction”; at its strongest, it denotes physical torture!

The word translated “peace” here is actually the Hebrew word “shelomeynu” (שלמינו); it is far more than “peace”! It is the end of warfare, the cessation of hostilities! It means that Jesus Christ has signed the eternal “peace-treaty” with God – on our behalf! Adam Clarke’s commentary puts it this way: “that by which we are brought into a state of peace and favor with God.” This commentary further explains that “Twenty-one MSS. (manuscripts – Jewish Torah scrolls) and six editions have the word fully and regularly expressed”. No wonder that Jesus cried out on the cross “It is finished!” (Tetalestai)[[4]](#endnote-4).

Depending on which translation of the Bible you read, the phrase “**“with his wounds we are healed”** varies; The version of the ESV I use reads “with his stripes we are healed”; the NASB reads “by His scourging we are healed”. Whichever version you read, the text of Isaiah here indicates a severe whipping. According to Albert Barnes’ commentary, “The word used here in Hebrew, “chabbûrâh” (חבורה) means properly stripe, weal, bruise, that is, the mark or print of blows on the skin.”

This is truly awesome and was horrific for Jesus. Consider this: “Christ is a wonderful physician; he heals by taking the sicknesses of his people upon himself, by bearing their sins, and being wounded and bruised for them, and by his enduring blows, and suffering death itself for them…

"when we obey his words, our sins will be forgiven us;''

but forgiveness is not through our obedience, but the blood of Christ.”(John Gill’s commentary.)

**Day 30: Reading: Is. 53:6 (first two lines)**

**“All we like sheep have gone astray;**

**we have turned—every one—to his own way;”**

Have you ever observed a flock of sheep? In each flock, there is a “top female” - a “matriarch”; wherever she goes, the flock will follow! Sheep are not intelligent animals and need a shepherd to keep them safe. If the shepherd is not diligent, or worse, is absent, the flock will wander – a long way from where they should be. Sadly, the sheep have little sense of their own vulnerability - until they are attacked.

We are, spiritually, not dissimilar; no matter how “wise” we may think we each are, we can all-too-easily be led astray. It only needs one cunning, persuasive person who can *act* like a true Christian (but is not one), to start persuading people down unspiritual paths. Jesus warned us about both false shepherds, who have no real concern for the congregation (flock) and “wolves in sheep’s clothing”.

The truth – the *painful* truth – is that we have all “gone our own way” more than once; we need to stay close to each other and close, spiritually, to Jesus.

How apt are you to “wander” spiritually? It is much easier than you might think...Today, read and ponder on Psalm 23...

**Day 31: Reading: Is. 53:6 (last line)**

**“and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

Isaiah was familiar with Jewish ritual animal sacrifice. It was a regular, frequent part of life. Not only did sins have to be paid for individually, but there were national ones that had to be dealt with. There were peace-offerings, guilt offerings, ritual-uncleanliness offerings – and more! (They are all explained in Leviticus.)

However, animal sacrifices were not, and could never be, sufficient. Why? Because since Adam and Eve’s “fall” - actually a wilful act of disobedience to God’s instruction – the whole of creation was tainted; nothing was “clean enough” to fully, permanently, pay for all humanity’s sin…

At the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, our sin – all of it, forever – was transferred to Him. Yes, all of it; past; present; future! We can only accept, with eternal thankfulness, as there is absolutely nothing else we can do. We are not required to “add” to what Jesus has done – it is sufficient, adequate. (See Col. 2:16-23.)

This is wonderful! Read and ponder upon Heb.10:10, 12, 14 and 18!

**Day 32: Reading: Is. 53:7**

**“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,**

**yet he opened not his mouth;**

**like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,**

**and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,**

**so he opened not his mouth.”**

**There is nothing more oppressive than sin – period.** This is what Jesus, God’s son and beloved servant, faced for and on behalf of us. We have already read of how he was cruelly tortured (afflicted); We only need to read the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ trials – before Sanhedrin, before Herod and before Pilate to know that he was “oppressed”. The literal fulfilment, by Jesus, of these prophetic lines, written some 700 years beforehand, was startling! The two words together, “oppressed” and “afflicted”, though, portray a double burden – psychological and physical. He bore lies, false testimonies and trumped-up accusations; he faced rank disbelief about himself and his ministry. Finally, he faced the awful, horror of the innocent being found guilty, with all the punishments that entailed. Then came the physical brutality – and his tormentors did not hold back or “pull their punches” in any way. Yet twice in these lines we find the words “ **he opened not his mouth”**. No protest, no objection, no appeal to anyone. He did not rail against His Father for what was happening – just willing acceptance of what he was to endure for our sakes. This repetition emphasises the true and perfect character that Our Saviour, Lord and High Priest has.

How easy it is, when faced with false accusations and the prospect of consequences, to protest our innocence! But meditate today upon this: Jesus has been where we have been – or might yet go. He knows what it is to face spiteful accusers. Now read and ponder upon Heb. 4:14-16...

**Day 33: Reading: Is. 53:8**

**“By oppression and judgement he was taken away;**

**and as for his generation,**

**who considered that he was cut off**

**out of the land of the living,**

**stricken for the transgression of my people?”**

Now Isaiah prophesies of events that he knew probably nothing about. There are two statements here:

**“By oppression and judgement he was taken away;”**

and

**and as for his generation,**

**who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living,**

**stricken for the transgression of my people?”**

These are definitive; the first is a statement, the second is a rhetorical question. Jesus was “taken away” from his disciples, and the women who lovingly followed and cared for him, by force – a mob! They seized him from prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; they held him prisoner between his appearances before his “judges”, and then, when they had finished condemning him, they “took him away” from everyone – his mother and family, his disciples and followers, and indeed, from all who believed on him. His oppressors “took him away” to death – the death of a “cursed” criminal, to be hung on a cross.

But why cursed? Well, in the Mosaic Law, anyone found guilty of “a sin worthy of death” - such as blasphemy – could be hung upon a tree; the cross was, figuratively, a tree.

Now we come to the second quotation. No-one of his “generation”, neither his contemporaries nor his siblings - not even the disciples - realised fully that he was being killed judicially – falsely – for the sake of the Jewish people and for all humankind down through the ages…

...Except maybe a very few; what about the centurion who stood near the foot of the cross? (Matt. 27:54, Mk. 15:39 and Lk. 23:47)

Today, please just meditate upon the passage at the beginning.

**Day 34: Reading: Is. 53:9**

**“And they made his grave with the wicked**

**and with a rich man in his death,**

**although he had done no violence,**

**and there was no deceit in his mouth.”**

Isaiah could not possibly have known, naturally, about what he was proclaiming. He could ***only*** have known this by the Holy Spirit’s revelation.

It was unacceptable in Isaiah’s day, particularly according to Mosaic Law, to bury or entomb Godly dead anywhere near the “cursed” or “ungodly dead” – including any Gentiles! No, criminals and especially those who had been hanged for murder, giving judicial false testimony, etc. had to be buried in a separate graveyard, to be forgotten…

Isaiah was also testifying – prophetically and marvellously – about Jesus’ innocence and his perfect, pure character; he had committed no violence nor had he spoken anything but the truth! (You may wonder here about the incident where Jesus drove out the merchants and money-changers from the Temple. But Jesus used a “whip of cords” - one that could not inflict any wound or harm.)

Jesus’ grave was certainly with a rich man; He was embalmed with a significant weight of myrrh and aloes (Jn. 19:38-39). He was attended to by two wealthy men – Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin. The tomb was new and unused – owned by someone with a high position in society and therefore someone with influence among the powerful people!

It was not beyond possibility, considering the restive times in and around Israel then, for someone to be both wicked and rich. How little things have changed, in two thousand years since!

Consider how powerful these events must have subsequently seemed to the early believers – seeing prophecy fulfilled, literally, before their own eyes! Have you been given any powerful, meaningful prophetic words that have come to fulfilment? How did you feel?

**Day 35: Reading: Is. 53:10 (first four lines)**

**“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;**

**he has put him to grief;**

**when his soul makes an offering for guilt,**

**he shall see his offspring;”**

Once again – and for the final time in these “servant songs”, Isaiah’s perspective changes. His “song” now takes on a more victorious tone. It is the culmination of the servant’s work and ministry – the ultimate fulfilment of his master’s purpose for sending him! Not only that, but it looks, prophetically, further than previously into the future – in fact, into Heaven’s eternity!

My notes indicate that this second portion of this chapter of Isaiah divides into two clear sections; verses 7 – 9 describe ***what*** was going to be done to Jesus, and verses 10 – 12 explain ***why***.

But this final section also sub-divides further. Each verse has two (or in verse 12, four) parts. These form a “cause-and-effect” pattern.

The first part of this verse – the first two lines – declare with clarity that the servant’s suffering was not purposeless; it was the master’s intention from the outset. Yes, the servant was to suffer greatly, both physically and psychologically (emotionally and mentally) – so that he would be the “guilt offering” fulfilling the Mosaic Law. Our guilt will be ***covered over – for ever!*** It is, however, important to note that the Master derived no pleasure from the servant’s suffering – only satisfaction from his outcome and victory.

But once this offering has been completed, the servant will see his reward - “offspring”. The Hebrew meaning of the word “offspring” (in the KJV and later versions, the word “seed” is used) is that of fruit or posterity. Jesus knew this because he said of himself that “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (Jn. 12:23-24.)

In 1Peter 3, we are urged to live holy, upright lives so as to honour Jesus; meditate on 1Pet. 3:8-17 and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what He will...

**Day 36: Reading: Is. 53:10 (last two lines)**

**“he shall prolong his days;**

**the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”**

Here, Isaiah perceives the first “effect” of the servant’s suffering; Albert Barnes’ commentary explains it thus: “The meaning here is, that the Messiah, though he should be put to death, would yet see great multitudes who should be his spiritual children. Though he should die, yet he would live again, and his days should be lengthened out. It is fulfilled in the reign of the Redeemer on earth and in his eternal existence and glory in heaven.”

This theme continues in the second line. Not only will the servant live eternally, he will also be given greater authority and dominion. Again, Barnes’ commentary describes this “The reward of all his sufferings in making an offering for sin would be, that multitudes would be converted and saved; that his reign would be permanent, and that the work which Yahweh designed and desired would prosper under his administration.”

Meditate on this: we are part of that great multitude! Doesn’t the Lord’s suffering cause you to wonder – and desire to not only worship Him, but seek His will more earnestly?

**Day 37: Reading: Is. 53:11 (first line)**

**“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;”**

Now we look at the second of Isaiah’s “cause-and-effect” stanzas; this is the first section. Isaiah’s turn of phrase here is peculiar; the word “anguish” in Hebrew translates as “exhausting, arduous labour”. It can be used of a woman in labour. The Lord, “labouring to death” both physically and psychologically may be difficult to comprehend - but anyone who has been working in a role that is long-term both mentally-taxing and physically-demanding will appreciate just how quickly exhaustion can develop. This term could also be used of modern Armed Service Personnel, who, faced with the rigours and horrors of the battle-zone, can become overwhelmed and start to suffer from PTSD.

But Isaiah again sees more - the reward for his labours will be ample! Some translations put “he shall see light” or “he shall see the light of life”; the words “and be satisfied” are possibly somewhat conservative – the immense pleasure and contentment of a work well done, with outcomes far better than anticipated. Ponder on this today…

Have you been labouring long and hard in The Lord’s calling lately? If so, bear in mind that He will reward you – in His time and His own, perfect manner – and His reward will certainly be worth all the effort and the waiting!

**Day 38: Reading: Is. 53:11**

**“by his knowledge shall the righteous one,**

**my servant, make many to be accounted righteous,**

**and he shall bear their iniquities.”**

Today, we consider the second part of the “cause-and-effect” pattern of the prophet’s poetry. Yesterday, we considered the demanding nature of the servant’s task; now, we see the reward – and what a reward it is!

Firstly, the servant is recognised by his knowledge; the Hebrew here can mean “insight”, “learning”, “instruction”, “perception” or “discernment”; it can also imply a close association with and awareness of someone. Next, the servant is identified specifically: ***the*** righteous one. Not just ***a*** righteous one, but one who is “in a class of his own”, without equal! Isaiah clearly perceives the pleasure of the Lord God here.

Then he continues, stating what this special servant’s “knowledge” will achieve. He will “cleanse”, “justify” “make right” a large number of people – this is what is indicated by “**make many to be accounted righteous**” (a “book-keeping” and legal term.) But how? Now we come to the focus of Isaiah’s verse: how will this servant achieve all this? “**he shall bear their iniquities.**” The Divine transaction! the Divine transfer and exchange – he will give his righteousness in exchange for their offences!

We are seeing, in hindsight, what Isaiah was being shown by Heavenly, revelatory foresight; and we have been given more – we have been given ***relationship*** with the Lord God, through Jesus Christ, His Son! And we have the immense privilege of sharing this with others…

**Day 39: Reading: Is. 53:12 (first two lines)**

**“Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,**

**and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,”**

Isaiah now moves on to the third “cause-and-effect” clause of the passage – the distribution of rewards. “The words here used are taken from the custom of distributing the spoils of victory after a battle, and the idea is, that as a conqueror takes valuable spoils, so the Messiah would go forth to the spiritual conquest of the world, and subdue it to himself.” (Albert Barnes’ commentary.)

There is also Hebrew metaphor here – that of the servant being elevated to a position of great status. The hint is in the two terms “**I will divide him a portion**” and “**he shall divide the spoil**”. This verse rightly links, though to the previous verse, so that the “effect” of the last part of verse 11 becomes the “cause” of the beginning of verse 12.

There can be no question or doubt – Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and sin-bearing for us was the greatest burden ever to be carried. It follows, then, that the Father’s reward would also be immense! Jesus is sat at God’s right hand, above all power, rule and authority; It is, therefore, his right (and his right alone) to share that reward accordingly with those he sees as deserving.

But what about the terms “the many” and “the strong”? Well, firstly the “many” may well be the great multitude mentioned in Revelation Ch. 7 vv.9 – 14; after all, we know that, Jesus, “having ascended on high, led captivity captive and gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8 – 9). Secondly, “the strong” may refer to those of former, earthly high position or power who came to faith in Jesus Christ, or it may mean that the strong powers that ranged against Christ and the Church will face being divided “as spoil” - that is, as that which is worthless!

The key matter here is that Jesus Christ has overcome sin and death, has fulfilled His Father’s purpose and now has the highest position and authority that can possibly be – and he will do what is right with his kingdom! Meditate on this: Phil. 2:5 – 11…

**Day 40: Reading: Is. 53:12 (remaining lines)**

**“because he poured out his soul to death**

**and was numbered with the transgressors;**

**yet he bore the sin of many,**

**and makes intercession for the transgressors.”**

Now we come to the final part of Isaiah’s fourth and final “servant song” -and what an ending it is! The sense of triumph is clear.

The servant achieved ***everything*** the master sent him to accomplish:

1. He sacrificed himself;
2. Was counted as a “Law-breaker”, when in fact,
3. He carried away their wrongdoings.

What is more, even now, for those who have not yet heard or responded to him, is advocating – representing them as a lawyer – before God the Father! It is worth noting that the first three stanzas are in the “past-tense” but the final one is in the “present-continuous-tense” – he makes (now) and will continue (making) intercession…

Finally, the passage neatly separates into two parts; the first two stanzas contrast with the second two:

1. “because he”… did” this, and “was” considered that,
2. “yet he” responded by doing this and is now continuing to plead!

So let us, as we approach that day when we remember Our Lord’s obedient self-sacrifice for us, meditate upon His victory over sin and death – for us – and then respond in wonder and worship – He deserves all we can give and all we can be!

1. i. Matthew Henry’s Commentary (Broad Oak edition), 1979

	1. https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/isaiah/49.htm
	2. *ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. i https://www.biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/isaiah/49.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. vi https://bible.org/ [↑](#endnote-ref-4)