

Dear All,

Apologies I haven't had time this week to send the normal Study Service email but we are meeting by Zoom as usual at 7pm and here is the information I sent to Greyfriars about the Study Service for their weekly Community News.

Best wishes - Bob

GREYFRIARS STUDY SERVICE COMMUNITY NEWS 28/2/21

The Study Service on Sunday will take the form of a Bible Study on one of the most intriguing and important biblical passages, Isaiah 52.13 - 53.12. There are 4 so called servant songs in Isaiah, 42.1-7, 49.1-6, 50.4-10 and the last, 52.13 - 53.12, known as "the suffering servant".

The great prophets of the Old Testament came to the stage when they were given to understand that the covenant promise of God, **"I will be your God and you shall be my people"** could only be fulfilled in a radical renewing of the covenant or by a servant figure. In Jeremiah 31.31-34, it is a renewed covenant in which God would write his law in the hearts of his people and they would all know him. In Ezekiel 36.22-37, God would put a new heart and spirit into them instead of their heart of stone and pour out his Spirit on them, 37.1-14.

For Isaiah, it became clear that the logic of the covenant could only be fulfilled through a "suffering servant" taking on himself the sins of the whole people, suffering for them, making amends and bringing them to healing. This is a truly remarkable passage, with several surprising elements to it. Not least is the way in which Isaiah 53 narrates the story of someone who was despised, rejected, stricken for the sins of the people, and put to death unjustly, yet someone who in hindsight was seen to have died for the people's healing and restoration.

It becomes clear that it is in fact God who is behind the suffering servant and that the servant is fulfilling the will and purpose of God. Who is this suffering servant?

Jewish interpretation can point to it being the people of Israel who are the corporate servant of God. For Christians and the New Testament, it is Jesus. The two interpretations are not necessarily completely contradictory, for in the New Testament Jesus is seen as the one who gathers up the whole mission of Israel to the Gentiles and fulfils it, until the time when Israel itself is re-united with them to form one new humanity under Christ. See Romans 9-11.