

# OpenTheo

## December 10th: Isaiah 53 & Luke 13:10-35

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The suffering Servant. Parables of Leaven and Mustard Seed and lament over Jerusalem.

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## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 53. Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 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.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 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.

All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 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.

By oppression and judgment 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? 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. 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, he shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, 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. The fourth of the so-called Servant Songs of Isaiah and the most well known, begins in chapter 52 verse 13. However the bulk of it is in chapter 53.

The importance of this passage in New Testament and subsequent Christian thought is immense. It is referenced or cited on several occasions in the New Testament, sometimes in quite surprising ways. It was this passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading in Acts chapter 8, and from which Philip directed him to Christ.

The apostle Peter develops an extended series of allusions to this passage in 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 19-25. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. After his allusions to Isaiah chapter 50, Paul likely alludes to this passage in Romans chapter 8 when he speaks of Christ interceding for us at God's right hand, and of Christians being regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. He then directly cites it in chapter 10 verses 14-17.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. In Luke chapter 22 verse

37, Jesus reveals that he sees the word of Isaiah concerning his being numbered with the transgressors as being fulfilled in his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

In John chapter 12 verses 37-41, the gospel writer connects the unbelief of the people in response to the many signs of Jesus and his teaching to verse 1 of the chapter. In chapter 8 verses 16-17 of his gospel, Matthew says that Jesus' healings and exorcisms were in fulfillment of the servants' prophesied taking of our illnesses and bearing of our diseases. Likewise, fulfillments of Isaiah chapter 53 are clearly alluded to in Christ's silence in his trials and his burial in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea.

While most Christian readings of Isaiah chapter 53 focus narrowly upon the crucifixion of Christ, the New Testament authors see far broader fulfillment of its words in both Christ and his church. In its original context in the book of Isaiah, we have already had intimations of the fact that the servant is one who will suffer and be rejected before he would be vindicated. Chapter 49 verse 4, But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity, yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God.

Chapter 50 verses 6-7, 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 flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. It is in chapter 53 however that the suffering of the servant and the great reversal that will occur when the Lord vindicates him finally come into a crisper and clearer focus.

The chapters that follow will build further upon this. The two servant songs preceding this, albeit not the first in chapter 42 verses 1-4, were words of the servant himself, spoken in the first person. Here however we have third person speech concerning the servant.

Earlier on Israel was spoken of as the servant, but as a blind servant who had failed to perform his task. In chapter 49 the servant called by the Lord, in a manner similar to the prophets, was described as the one by whom the Lord would restore Israel to himself. When the Ethiopian eunuch pondered the meaning of this chapter he questioned whether the servant described within it was the prophet himself.

There are certainly similarities that we might see between the figure of the servant as described in this chapter and prophetic figures. For instance Jeremiah's account of his experience in Jeremiah 11 verses 19-20 recalls Isaiah's words here. But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.

I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more. But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind,

let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. Jeremiah, a faithful prophet, is also a great sufferer, he is the weeping prophet.

Like Joseph he is cast into a waterless pit by hostile brethren led by a vicious descendant of Judah. He is then brought down into Egypt against his will. In all of this the destiny of his entire people is particularly concentrated upon him.

The story of the assassination of Gedaliah and its aftermath has numerous allusions back to the story of the sale of Joseph. Recognising the manner in which the servant is connected to Israel and to the prophet is important even when we relate it primarily to Jesus. Jesus sums up Israel in himself, takes its burden upon himself and as prophets like Jeremiah and others who preceded him, he bears the righteous judgement of the Lord upon a rebellious people as the innocent sufferer, albeit in a far more complete and perfect manner.

In addition to being a prophet-like figure, the servant also has royal features, being like a king who will be vindicated and exalted after suffering. We might for instance think of the experience of King David during and after the coup of Absalom. Much of the importance of this passage in subsequent thought comes from the way that it has inspired thought concerning the nature and the logic of the atonement.

We must be cautious not to lay too much weight upon this passage for determining questions of the mechanics of atonement or for deciding upon a particular theory of the atonement. As in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, what we are given is a narrative of what will happen to the servant, not a theory of how it all works, something about which the scripture has surprisingly little directly to say. John Goldingay helpfully unpacks some of the terminology that has been used by commentators and theologians in order to understand what is going on here, terminology like substitution, representation, participation, identification, persecution, martyrdom, embodiment and vicariousness.

He writes, Representation, instead of, might be illustrated by Moses' suggestion that Yahweh should blot him rather than Israel as a whole out of Yahweh's book. He would take their place. Representation, on behalf of, is illustrated by the position the people ask Moses to occupy at Sinai when they ask that he should speak with Yahweh on their behalf.

He then takes their place in another sense, in acting as their representative. Participation or identification, with, is illustrated by the strand of thinking in the Torah that sees Moses as sharing in the consequences of the Exodus generation's failure and is thus also unable to enter the land. It is more fully illustrated by a prophet such as Ezekiel sharing in the experience of deportation to Babylon, as if sharing in the people's unfaithfulness and as the price of fulfilling a ministry to them.

Persecution, at the hands of, is illustrated by the stories of the people's attacks on Moses and later by stories about Jeremiah and by 2nd Isaiah's own testimony. Embodiment, before, is illustrated by Ezekiel's living out before people's eyes, the grim implications of the fall of Jerusalem. Vicariousness, for, is illustrated by Job.

He is not his friend's representative but his suffering embodies for them and for readers truths about a relationship with God and possibilities about coping with suffering that can lead them on in a relationship with God and in coping with suffering. Goldengay rightly observes that Christian understandings of what is going on in Isaiah chapter 53 are often hampered by the narrowing of our theological frameworks that has occurred through the elevation of legal models for understanding salvation to the exclusion of others. Legal models are clearly appropriate but they are not the only ones.

There are many facets to the salvation that Christ accomplishes and we will need several models of the atonement interacting with each other to do any sort of justice to the reality. One of the challenges that we face in reading Isaiah chapter 53 is the identification of the various characters and speakers. As Peter Lightheart notes, there are at least three characters.

There is the one who speaks of the central figure as my servant, which, given the way my servant is elsewhere used, is evidently the voice of the Lord. Then there is the servant himself, generally spoken of using third person singular pronouns. Finally there is the more mysterious we.

At first glance the we of verse 1 might seem to be a collective reference to the witness bearing prophets. However, closer examination unsettles this interpretation. The we in the verses that follow hide their faces from the figure of the servant and don't esteem him.

Most likely the voice here is that of Israel, the prophet being among them, bearing witness to the figure of the servant who has acted on their behalf while being rejected by them. The fact that the voice is Israel's own evidences the final success of the servant's mission. The expression the arm of the Lord was earlier used in chapter 51 verse 9 where the people called for the Lord's arm to awake and put on strength, acting in order to accomplish their deliverance.

Verse 10 of the preceding chapter spoke of the Lord bearing his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations. Here we see the form that the Lord's answer to his people's cry and his saving work takes. The arm of the Lord is revealed in the work of his suffering servant.

The origins of the servant are inauspicious. In the earlier chapters of Isaiah there are several references to the chopping down of forests and great trees as just a stump will be left of the former mite of Judah and of the house of David. Indeed we might see the

servant as a new shoot coming forth from scorched earth, a new ruler arising from a house that seemed dead, as in chapter 11 verse 1. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

While people might expect a new ruler to be marked out by peculiar charm, a handsome appearance or elevated stature, the servant has none of these. His appearance is unprepossessing, and there is no manifest majesty to him, nothing about him that would single him out from anyone else for the beholder. He would be considered worthless and unworthy of any sort of particular attention.

Indeed, as one marked by suffering and sorrow, people would distance themselves from him. If you are looking for a leader or a figure to redeem the nation, you would look to the powerful, the attractive, the popular, the charming, the confident and the successful. The servant seems to have none of these qualities and is dismissed for this reason.

Yet Israel's impressions of the servant are greatly mistaken, as we see in verses 4-6. The man of sorrows carries the sorrows of the people themselves. Like Job's friends, the people, looking at the servant, consider that the Lord has singled him out for judgment.

His condemnation is evident from his suffering. However, the affliction with which he was struck was not an account of any sin on his part, but an account of theirs. John Oswald remarks upon the sacrificial overtones of terms such as bearing and carrying in verse 4, recalling the animals within the sacrificial system of Israel upon whom sins could be laid.

Imagery drawn from the sacrificial system will be strengthened in what follows. The servant suffers cruelly, pierced, crushed, chastised and wounded. In the disfigured face of the afflicted servant, the nation should recognize itself, as they were described in chapter 1 verses 4-6.

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds. They are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. The people, like a wayward flock, had all gone astray, rejecting the path of the Lord and bringing judgment upon themselves.

However, through his redemptive action in the servant, the bearing of his holy arm, the Lord had placed the iniquities of his rebellious nation upon his faithful servant. The servant who bears the iniquities of the people is himself innocent of any wrong. He submits to the oppression and humiliation without protest or resistance, like a sheep meekly going to its slaughter.

He was a willing victim, not one merely taken by violence, nor, in contrast to the lamb with which he is compared, was he unwitting of what awaited him. In the Gospels we see this in Jesus' silence before his accusers and those who would condemn him to his death, in addition to the way that he purposefully walked the path to Jerusalem, knowing the fate that awaited him there. He also bore his cross on the path to Calvary and stayed on the cross, even when he could have summoned legions of angels to deliver him.

The proper translation and sense of the first clause of verse 8 is unclear. Was the servant taken away by oppression and judgment? Was he taken away from oppression and judgment? Or was he taken away having been deprived of judgment? The context, as Oswald argues, most supports the first option, that the servant was, unlike Israel, cut off through injustice. He was cut off out of the land of the living.

This, as Goldengate recognises, could merely be a poetic way to refer to death, but even if it denotes death, it also connotes exile and indeed could potentially refer to being expelled from human society. The death of Jesus, of course, was a sort of expulsion from human society. He was disgorged from the body politic, held up for rejection and ridicule, disowned and handed over by his people, forsaken by most of his disciples and betrayed by one of those closest to him, even before he went down into the grave.

The servant seemed like one utterly removed and extinguished. To the eyes of others, he had no children to bear his name, and with his death his memory would also seem to have died. This was a terrible fate for one's name to be completely blotted out.

Yet all of this was on account of the transgression of the people. The innocence of the servant, the fact that he is without moral blemish, is seen in verse 9. Despite his innocence, those who killed him gave him a wicked man's death and set him apart for a wicked man's burial. The connotations of the term rich, used in relation to those with whom the servant was buried, are difficult to determine.

Is the term used more or less synonymously with the wicked, connecting the rich with the oppressors? Or does it have a less negative sense? Of course, in the gospels we read that Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man and a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea. Ironically, in his burial he was placed in the tomb of one of the men of the ruling body that sought his death. The final verses of the chapter sum up the larger message of the passage, declaring the outcome of it all and the Lord's purpose within it.

Judging by the appearance, the servant seemed to be condemned by the Lord, marked out for judgment. However, the Lord's will was being realized through the dreadful crushing of his servant. The Lord did not merely permit the suffering of his servant, but actively willed it.

This, of course, is an important claim concerning Jesus in the apostolic teaching. In Acts 2, verses 22-24, in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, Men of Israel, hear these

words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God, with mighty works and wonders and signs, that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Also in Acts 4, verses 27-28, For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

The purpose of the servant's suffering is to serve as a trespass offering. Although the servant seems to be utterly cut off, the successful offering of his sacrifice will mark a turning point. The servant will have a generation, an offspring, and his name will not be blotted out.

His life will be extended, and the purpose of the Lord, which would connect with the arm of the Lord mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, would prosper with him. While Christians rightly see the resurrection of Jesus in this verse, such a verse could also refer to an experience like that of Job, so we should beware of reading too much back into it. The servant, having passed through his bitter suffering, will be satisfied, having achieved his purpose on the other side.

We should probably read the words, by his knowledge, in relation to the servant's being satisfied, rather than in connection with the justification that he achieves. The servant, here also described as the Lord's righteous one, the exemplary Israelite, would make many righteous through his offering. In the final verse, we see the Lord's vindication of his faithful and righteous servant.

The servant is rewarded and exalted like a great victor. The one who was cut off from and by the people now stands at their head. This is on account of his willing suffering with, and most importantly, for, the transgressors.

Suffering as he did, he bore the transgressors' sins, and now he makes intercession for them. This is how the Lord will redeem his sinful people and achieve his great purpose, bringing Israel back into right relationship with him. A question to consider, how might the sacrificial system help us better to understand the work of the servant in this chapter? Luke chapter 13 verses 10 to 35.

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and behold there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your disability.

And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified



God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.

Then the Lord answered him, You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. He said therefore, What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches. And again he said, To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few? And he said to them, Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter, and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us, then he will answer you, I do not know where you come from.

Then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets. But he will say, I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

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.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. Behold, your house is forsaken, and I tell you, you will not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Our section of Luke chapter 13 begins with a healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus seems to make a point of healing upon the Sabbath. He brings in the true Sabbath rest of the kingdom to Israel. Most typically people have to come to Jesus to be healed, often even persisting for some time.

However, Jesus sees this woman, has compassion on her, calls her over, and heals her. Perhaps part of the point of this is intentionally and purposefully to heal on the Sabbath. Her situation doesn't seem to be urgent.

She has been that way for 18 years, note the earlier reference to the number 18 in verse 4, and the synagogue leader is appalled by this. He doesn't address Jesus but addresses the crowd, directly opposing Jesus' authority to them. The Sabbath healing here should probably be read alongside the Sabbath healing of chapter 14 verses 1 to 6. They have a lot in common.

In that other account we read, One Sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent.

Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on the Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out? And they could not reply to these things. In both of these cases there is a healing on the Sabbath, and in both cases Jesus uses an illustration of showing compassion to an ox or a donkey.

Why reference the ox or the donkey? Perhaps because the ox and the donkey are explicitly mentioned in the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy chapter 5 verses 12 to 15. Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Jesus' teaching stresses that the Sabbath is not just about refraining from work, but about giving rest to those in your care. Healing on the Sabbath is most fitting, and if the ox and the donkey are included in the Sabbath commandment, and you would untie your ox or donkey to give them water, why would you not untie or release a daughter of Abraham who's been held captive by Satan for 18 years? If you would give relief to your animals any day of the week, but are especially bound to do so on the Sabbath, how much more is it the

case for the woman that Jesus healed? Jesus gives now two twin parables.

The parable of the mustard seed is one in which Jesus is working with Old Testament background, most specifically the parable of Ezekiel in chapter 17. In verses 22 to 24 we see part of that that can parallel with this. What Jesus says about the mustard seed defies all botanical reality, and this is because it is not an illustration taken from nature.

Rather it's playing off against the image of the seeder. We are to recognize that what is happening with the mustard seed is not natural. The jarring contrast between reality and the parable is part of the point.

The image of the tree in which birds take refuge is found elsewhere in scripture, and is used of great kingdoms, empires, and their rulers. Daniel chapter 4 verses 10 to 12. The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these.

I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful, and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all.

The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. Against all appearances it is going to be the mustard seed of Israel, the small nation that outgrows the great trees of the nations. There is a similar image of surprising growth in Daniel chapter 2 verse 35.

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. God sowed the mustard seed in his field, and it will become the greatest tree of all.

The parable of the leaven that follows, leaven hidden in three measures of flour, is one that corresponds to this in certain respects. Israel is hidden among the nations, causing the nations gradually to rise up. Perhaps we could connect the three measures of flour with the three sons of Noah, I don't know.

It's not a dramatic, but it's a gradual process, and it's not glorious. Indeed it uses something that might be seen as negative or unclean. Leaven often has negative symbolism attached to it.

The mustard seed and the leaven are twin parables. They can more readily be understood when related to each other. They're not identical twins.

They represent different aspects of Israel's ministry in relationship to the nations. Small in both cases, but making an outsized effect. And hiddenness is an important theme.

They have insignificant and inglorious origins, but a great purpose and destiny. One of the parables involves a man sowing seed, and its twin involves a woman hiding leaven. There's a sort of marriage here.

Both involve an intentional action towards a goal with significant results, but imperceptible processes. As Jesus gradually works his way towards Jerusalem, someone asks him the question whether those who are saved will be few. Jesus responds with the illustration of a narrow door.

This is similar to Matthew chapter 7 verses 13 to 14. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

However, there isn't the same contrastive framing of the point here. It's not the contrast between the wide gate and the narrow gate. And as we'll see, Jesus has a more subtle point to make here in his response to the question.

The door will only be open for a limited period of time, and many who will want to enter will not be able to do so. The verse that Jesus quotes about those being told to go away comes from Psalm 6 verse 8, depart from me all you workers of evil. Jesus' implication that only few will find the door need not be read as a timeless statement that in each and every age only a few people will be saved.

It's given into a specific context, and although it does have more general application, we really must remember the context into which it is first spoken. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are going to be in the kingdom at the messianic feast with Gentiles, while numerous sons of the kingdom find themselves outside. This imagery of an eschatological feast comes from the Old Testament itself.

In Isaiah chapter 25 verses 6 to 9, on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined, and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, behold this is our God, we have waited for him that he might save us.

This is the Lord, we have waited for him, let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Many are coming from the east and the west, the north and the south. There is going to be a great turning of tables, and this all presents an answer to the question that might have surprised the questioner.

The questioner was most likely thinking of the size of the remnant of Israel, but Jesus'

answer, while half suggesting that the remnant of Israel might indeed be few, speaks of many people coming from the four corners of the world to join Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets in the eschatological banquet. The numbers at the feast won't be small, but the identity of the honoured guests might be surprising. Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem, however he still seems to be in the territory of Herod Antipas.

There are three contrasting desires within this section, Herod's desire to kill Jesus, Jesus' desire to gather Jerusalem together, and Jerusalem's desire to resist this. Jesus is warned by some Pharisees, and again we should remember that the Pharisees are not always bad guys in the Gospels and Acts. They fear he is going to get caught in the trap and want him to travel away from the region so that he will not be destroyed by Herod.

Herod is a genuine threat, he has already killed John the Baptist and he's speculated that Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead. He's described like a fox by Jesus, he's a pest, he's a minor player. In Judges 15 verses 4 following, Samson seems to associate the Philistines with foxes.

Jesus is indeed going to leave Herod's region of Galilee, but not to save his life, rather in order to die in Jerusalem, being killed in the chief city which stands for the entire nation. In verses 32 to 33, Jesus describes his work in a three-day pattern, corresponding to patterns of death and resurrection. He will finish his course on the third day.

Jesus is a new Jeremiah, he declares judgment upon the house and then laments over Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the site where the prophet's blood must be gathered, the house, the temple, and by extension the whole nation is to be left desolate. Jesus wants to gather Israel under his wings, this is a biblical image of God's protection and the provision of refuge for his people.

The fact that Jesus compares himself to a hen immediately after speaking of Herod as a fox may not be a coincidence. A question to consider, how might Jesus' Sabbath practice inform our understanding of the purpose of the law more generally?