

# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 20

TOTC

ISAIAH

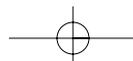
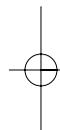
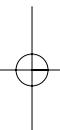


To

Ronald Inchley  
Frank Entwistle  
Donald Wiseman  
G. T. Manley (*in memoriam*)

and to Derek Kidner

With affection, respect  
and gratitude



# TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 20

GENERAL EDITOR: DONALD J. WISEMAN

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## ISAIAH

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

J. ALEC MOTYER



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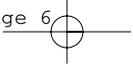
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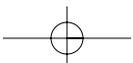
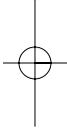
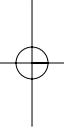
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## GENERAL PREFACE

With this publication of *Isaiah*, the series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries draws to its conclusion. The aim throughout has been to provide the serious Bible reader with handy, up-to-date commentaries with the primary emphasis on the exegesis and meaning of the text. At the same time the series has sought to face major problems raised by critics of each book. Each author has been left to make his or her own contribution to the evangelical understanding and faith.

In 1993 Inter-Varsity Press published a major commentary, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, by Dr Motyer. It was hailed as a major contribution, and the author's earlier invitation to contribute to the Tyndale series was renewed. The series rightly waited for this version. While it contains the essence of his earlier work and retains the earlier's structure and textual divisions, much is new and original in this concluding volume.

Isaiah is a book of soaring spiritual insight and stirring declaration of the promises of God. Indeed, it is sometimes known as 'the fifth gospel'. So perhaps it is appropriate that, despite his undoubted scholarship, it is Alec Motyer's preacher's heart that is most obviously at work in this commentary, bringing relevant application of the book to today's Christian church and reader.

In the Old Testament in particular no single English translation is adequate to reflect the original text. The version on which this commentary is based is the New International Version, but other translations are referred to as well, and on occasion the author

supplies his own. Where necessary, words are transliterated in order to help the reader who is unfamiliar with Hebrew to identify the precise word under discussion. It is assumed throughout that the reader will have ready access to at least one reliable rendering of the Bible in English.

Interest in the meaning and message of the Old Testament continues undiminished, and it is hoped that this series will thus further the systematic study of the revelation of God and his will and ways as seen in these records. It is the prayer of the editor and publisher, as of the authors, that these books will help many to understand, and to respond to, the Word of God today.

D. J. Wiseman

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I have set out to provide a 'reader's commentary' on Isaiah – a companion to daily Bible reading – and I believe that those who use it this way will reap the largest rewards from it. This is not to say that it cannot be used to look up 'spot' verses or passages, for I have done my best not to evade difficulties and, in every such place, to ask what a reader, Bible in hand, would find most useful to know.

In 1993 IVP were kind enough to publish my larger commentary, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, and it is only fair to say how this present work compares with that. First, I have felt comfortable in using again the structured outline of Isaiah which I worked out for the earlier book. Some reviewers criticized this or that aspect of my analysis, but, while I promise them that I have pondered what they wrote, they have not persuaded me to change my mind. Isaiah does not always stop to put down markers for us, and we come to his precious text to do the best we can. I do not see, for example, that I have opted for anything outrageous in dividing the book after chapter 37 rather than 39. R. E. Clements, whose approach to Isaiah is very far from mine, notes that 'a redactor has quite consciously sought to use these narratives [i.e. chs. 36 – 39] to form a bridge between the "Assyrian" background of chs. 1 – 35 and the "Babylonian" background of chs. 40 – 66, with ch. 39 forming a key transition unit' (*Isaiah 1 – 39*, New Century Bible [Eerdmans/Marshalls, 1980], p. 277). I have simply made the 'bridge' into a 'border-crossing'.

Secondly, the majority of the explanatory and expository work in this commentary is certainly new in expression and quite

considerably new in content. This is as it should be when we are dealing with the inexhaustible treasure of God's Word. I have only very occasionally consciously quoted from *The Prophecy of Isaiah*.

As ever, I owe a huge debt to Inter-Varsity Press and its ceaselessly kind director and editors. Even I cannot remember quite when it was that George Manley invited me to contribute an Isaiah commentary to the Tyndale series, so long ago is it! I was both surprised and delighted when, having presented them with the larger commentary (for which they had not asked!), and thinking that surely my chance with the Tyndale series (sadly, like much else in life) had been frittered away, Frank Entwistle renewed the invitation. He, like Ronald Inchley before him, has been a gracious and more than patient friend. It is in order to enhance my book that I dedicate it to these three, and to the present editor of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, men to whom we owe so much.

Originally, the plan was for a two-volume commentary and, to my delight, Derek Kidner had responded positively to my desire to dedicate volume two to him. I am certainly not going to allow the absorption of volume two (Isa. 38 – 66) into volume one to deprive me of the pleasure and the honour of having his name associated with my book – even at the expense of overloading the now single dedicatory page! I count it a great privilege to forge this small link with one who is both a great friend and a far greater and more sensitive contributor than I to the art of Old Testament commentary.

The completion of the Old Testament Tyndale series, begun with Derek Kidner's delightful commentary on *Proverbs* in 1964, has been a long time coming and the fault is considerably mine. Just as God has been pleased to use individual volumes to his own glory in helping many readers to a fuller and deeper knowledge of his precious Word, may he now be pleased even more to use the completed series to that same supreme end!

Alec Motyer  
Bishopsteignton, 1998

## CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

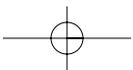
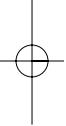
AV	Authorized Version.
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (OUP, 1929).
BHS	R. Elliger (ed.), <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (Wurtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1968).
GKC	E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley (eds.), <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> (OUP, 1910).
KB	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros</i> (Brill, 1958).
LXX	Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament).
MT	Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible).
NASB	New American Standard Bible.
NBC	D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer and G. J. Wenham (eds.), <i>New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition</i> (IVP, 1994).
NBCR	D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs and D. J. Wiseman (eds.), <i>New Bible Commentary Revised</i> (IVP, 1970).
NBD	I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman (eds.), <i>New Bible Dictionary</i> , 3rd edn (IVP, 1996).
NIV	New International Version.
NKJV	New King James Version.
Q <sup>a</sup>	The St Mark's Isaiah Scroll, Qumran.



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ISAIAH

RSV Revised Standard Version.  
RV Revised Version.



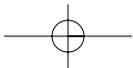
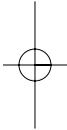
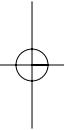
## NOTES

**Bible references** throughout are to the 1984 edition of the New International Version, unless indicated otherwise. The lower-case letters a, b, c, etc., refer to the lines within the verse in question.

**The Divine Name.** In the Hebrew Old Testament, the personal name for the God of Israel was denoted by four Hebrew consonants, usually understood as expressing the form *Yahweh*. A strange scruple has, for the most part, prevented translators of the English Bible from using the Divine Name, adopting the convention of four upper-case letters, LORD, instead. The form 'Lord' represents a Hebrew noun (*'ādōnāy*) meaning exactly that.

**Inclusio.** Developments in our understanding of the structures of Hebrew poetry (see, e.g., E. R. Follis [ed.], *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* [Sheffield Academic Press, 1986]) have noted the feature called 'inclusio', meaning the 'bracketing' of a poem or stanza by identical words or matching thoughts.

**The 'square root' sign** ( $\sqrt{\quad}$ ) is used as a convenient way of expressing the root form of Hebrew verbs, e.g. on 4:1, p. 66.



## FURTHER READING

- P. Hacking, *Isaiah*, Crossway Bible Guides (Crossway, 1994) is good for group study.
- B. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today (IVP, 1996) is full of insight and application, excellent for personal study.
- D. Kidner, 'Isaiah', in *The New Bible Commentary, 21st Century Edition* (IVP, 1994). Brilliant for a 'first run through' of Isaiah. Full of perceptiveness.
- J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1 – 39* (Eerdmans, 1986) offers a very full treatment in the manner of a standard commentary, with discussion of contrasting opinions and patient unravelling of problems. Volume 2 is eagerly awaited.
- J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993) is a more demanding 'read' than either the present commentary or Oswalt. Delves into literary and poetic structure as a tool for displaying meaning and message. Take it slowly!
- David Stacey, *Isaiah 1 – 39* (Epworth, 1993). A gracious and helpful study, and a good introduction to the 'multiple-authorship' view of Isaiah.
- P. D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (JSOT Press, 1993) is like reading from 1:1 – 66:24 in the company of a marvellously well-informed friend who knows how to stop over key words and phrases and to explain how they 'work' in their differing contexts in Isaiah. A gold-mine!
- E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Eerdmans, 1965) is massively

conservative. Young's chief expertise was as a linguist, and especially in this area his commentary is of great value.

J. Skinner, *Isaiah*, 2 vols. (CUP, 1902, 1905) holds to 'three Isaiahs'.

He rarely fails to say something illuminating and helpful in his careful verse-by-verse writing.

J. D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah* (Epworth, 1967), and U. E. Simon, *A Theology of Salvation, Isaiah 40 – 55* (SPCK, 1953), adopt 'running commentary' styles with deep insights into the movement of the prophet's thought.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Isaiah's message**

It is a daunting task for a reader to face sixty-six chapters in page after page of unbroken print. I offer here in this Introduction a 'reader's review', an attempt to survey the wood before examining the trees. Please read this before you begin to tackle the text, looking up the (by no means exhaustive) references provided en route.

#### ***(a) Isaiah 1 – 5***

The account of Isaiah's call (6:1ff.) provides a convenient 'marker', suggesting that chapters 1 – 5 form an introductory unit. As the Commentary shows (pp. 47–75), this turns out to be a satisfactory observation. In these chapters Isaiah sketches the situation into which he was called. Their basic theme of disobedience (1:2–4, 15–16, 19–20; 2:5–9; 3:8–9; 5:7) is placed between the brackets of hope and no hope: on the one hand, the Lord has a future for his people (1:26–28; 2:2–4; 4:2–6), but on the other, sin must be judged (1:5–6, 24–25; 2:10–11; 3:11). This latter predominates: chapter 5 contains

no note of hope and ends with a vision of unrelieved darkness (5:29–30).

**(b) Isaiah 6 – 12**

Opening with the story of a single sinner cleansed (6:5, 7), this section ends with the song of a saved community (12:1–6). Within these brackets the section does something characteristic of the whole Isaianic literature: it takes as its major theme a sub-topic from the section preceding. In 1:26 the coming glory of Zion is anticipated in Davidic terms: David was the first to occupy Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6–9) and things will yet be as they were ‘at the beginning’, i.e. the days of David come back again. This Davidic theme is central to chapters 7 – 11. Against the background of the apostate King Ahaz (7:10–12), the light of the coming perfect King shines out (7:14; 9:1–7; 11:1–9).

**(c) Isaiah 13 – 27**

Within the vision of the coming perfect King, a minor theme is the universal empire over which he would rule (9:7; 11:4, 6–9, 14–16). Is this wishful hyperbole or a solidly grounded hope? The worldwide, indeed cosmic, panorama of chapters 13 – 27 is designed to provide the answer. Isaiah 13:9–13, along with 14:1, sets out the philosophy of history which animates these chapters: the Lord is the world ruler and when his ‘day’ comes he will exert his rule alike over heaven and earth, but at the centre of all his operations lies his compassion for his own people. Zion has this sure place in the Lord’s plans (14:32) and is a refuge for a troubled world (16:5); its ruler is sometimes David (16:5) and sometimes the Lord (24:23). The whole series comes to a dramatic climax in the contrast of two cities: the world’s city – the human attempt to organize the world without God – which falls (24:10), and the strong city of salvation (26:1) which stands.

**(d) Isaiah 28 – 37**

Within the world panorama of chapters 13 – 27, the Lord’s final purpose of ‘one world, one people, one God’ was set out in terms of the world map as Isaiah knew it: Israel sandwiched between the would-be superpower, Egypt, and the actual superpower, Assyria. At

the End, the Lord will make them a united, co-equal whole (19:23–25; 27:11–13). In Isaiah's time the people of the tiny puppet kingdom of Judah could well have questioned the realism of such a hope! In answer to this spoken or unspoken query, Isaiah moves on into chapters 28–37, dealing with an actual history in which Judah, Egypt and Assyria – the very nations which formed his eschatological trio – became entangled. In chapter 28, Jerusalem seems rightly doomed (verse 11), but the Lord's cornerstone is there (verse 16) and it remains to be seen how the divine farmer will deal with his field (verses 23–29). In fact his purpose is an eleventh-hour deliverance (29:1–8). The people of Judah have sinfully involved themselves with Egypt (30:12) and invited the wrath of their overlord Assyria, the unnamed adversary of 30:17. But the supposed strength of Egypt is meaningless (30:7), and a divine purpose long since framed has determined that the Assyrian march against Zion is his funeral procession ending in his funeral pyre (30:33). Chapters 36–37 record how all this actually happened (37:36–38).

*(e) Isaiah 38–55*

Chapters 28–37 are dominated by the topic of the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat and the proof this offers historically of divine sovereignty in ordering earthly history. But there is a distinct sub-theme: this great deliverance is totally contrary to what Jerusalem's rulers and people deserve. The same could be said of chapters 7–11 where the coming King is an unmerited promise but, while that earlier section acknowledged national sinfulness (e.g. 8:11–12, 19), its major concern was the sin of the leadership. There is no passage quite like 30:8–17. Equally, while the great Isaianic title, the Holy One of Israel, occurs at 10:20, in chapters 28–35 it occurs more often than in the rest of Isaiah 1–37 taken together (29:19, 23; 30:11–12, 15; 31:1; 37:23): there has been a specific national rejection of the Holy God (30:11). There is thus a deeper problem than how Judah may or may not fare in the power politics of the day. What about sin and rebellion, rejection of the word of the Lord (28:11–12) and of the Lord of the word (30:10–11)? This situation receives pointed illustration in the sin of Hezekiah, detailed in chapters 38 and 39. To choose security in an alliance with Merodach-Baladan (39:1–4) was to throw the divine promise of security and

deliverance (38:6) back in God's face and to abandon the way of faith. As a result the Lord of history would use the forces of history in the earthly chastisement of his people (39:5–7; 42:18–25). Nevertheless, mercy would triumph, and the comfort of God would come to his people as outlined in 40:1–2: the 'period of duress' (40:2a) would end; Cyrus the Restorer would send the exiles home and Jerusalem would rise again (44:28; 45:13; 48:20–22). But also, sin would be covered and cancelled (40:2b): the Lord's Servant, the Redeemer, would bring the people back to God (49:5–6) by bearing their sins (53:8, 12).

***(f) Isaiah 56 – 66***

Isaiah foresees that the people will be less than happy to have Cyrus as their restorer (45:9–11) and it is easy to see why they felt like this. They were exiled from Jerusalem as a subject people, dominated by the imperial power of Babylon. To return home by permission of Cyrus the Persian left their situation unchanged; they were still subject, still under an imperial power. David had not returned; there was now not even a puppet king in Zion; national sovereignty seemed more of a dream than ever! So when will the Lord's people really be a free people, free of worldly influence and oppression? It is to this topic that Isaiah turns in chapters 56 – 66. The opening is significant: the people are still awaiting the Lord's salvation (56:1). But the Lord has his Agent at the ready: one who will dry his people's tears (61:1–3), put an end to their oppressors (62:8) and by himself execute the great double work of redemption and vengeance (63:1–6). At last, Jerusalem will be the centre of the New Earth (65:17–25).

**Isaiah's thought**

It is not an overstatement to say that today the pendulum of specialist opinion is swinging rapidly away from the older emphasis on differences within the Isaianic literature and more towards the great unities which bind it all together. This is not to say that the specialist world is any nearer to asserting one single author, Isaiah of Jerusalem: far from it. But the rigidity of a first, second and third Isaiah separated by hundreds of years is giving way to the thought of an ongoing 'Isaiah school', prolonging, enlarging and re-applying

the teaching of the master-prophet.<sup>1</sup> For, after all, it will not do to impute silliness or carelessness to the ancient guardians of the written texts who in every other way give evidence of their extreme caution. We cannot, on the one hand, find them safeguarding the separate integrity of a fragment like Obadiah, or, as some would say, even inventing a name for the author of Malachi to guarantee its distinctness, and then, on the other hand, suppose that, querying what to do with the acme of Old Testament prophecy, Isaiah 40–55, they slotted it in with Isaiah 1–39 because they happened to have half a scroll, or whatever, to spare! It is a welcome thing to hail the scholarship which is steadily opening up the streams of unity in the Isaianic literature.

**(a) History and faith**

Isaiah is the Paul of the Old Testament in his teaching that faith in God's promises is the single most important reality for the Lord's people: this is the heart of chapters 1–37. He is the 'Hebrews' of the Old Testament in his proposal of faith as the sustaining strength of the Lord's people in life's dark days: this is the heart of chapters 38–55. He is also the James of the Old Testament in his insistence that 'faith works', proving itself in obedience: thus chapters 56–66. Behind all this lies the history through which he lived and future events as he envisaged them.

*i. God and history.* In 10:5–15 Isaiah teaches how history 'works'. He sees two fundamental principles. The first is that the course of history is in the hand of God in the most direct, managerial sense. The Lord is neither like a boy launching his model yacht on one side of the pond, confident that the wind will bring it safely to the other

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1. A useful review of recent study is provided in the Society for Biblical Literature's Seminar Papers (Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1991), esp. R. Rendtorff, *The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity*. See also B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (SCM, 1979), pp. 311ff.; W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1982), pp. 365ff.; and R. B. Dillard and T. Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Apollos, 1995), pp. 267ff.

side but uncertain what will happen in between, nor is he like a chess master patiently allowing the other player to make moves and then countering his opponent's intentions to secure his own victory. For Isaiah, even the superpowers of earth are but rods, axes and saws in the hands of a single divine Agent (10:5, 15). Secondly, within the divine programme, history is the outworking of moral purposes, the arena of choice and moral responsibility. Thus the Assyrian is held within the Lord's purpose to bring due punishment to Jerusalem (6, 12a): this is the moral government of the world which underlies the 'inanimate' models of rod, axe and saw. Yet the Assyrian is moved not by obedience to the perceived will of God but by the arrogance of his own imperialism (7-11, 13-14): he is out for self-advantage and the fulfilment of proud ambition, no matter at what expense to others. This makes him culpable before history's Ruler and he will be punished (12b). In this way Isaiah's view of history is consonant with the Bible's (especially the Old Testament's) fixed gaze beyond second causes to the First Cause, for preoccupation with second causes leads to living by our wits, working the system and making the right move, whereas concentration on the First Cause issues in a life of faith, trusting, 'cleaving to the Lord' (see Acts 11:23, AV), and living for his pleasure.

The nearest Isaiah comes to offering an illustration of this understanding of history is in his hint of the horse and the rider (37:29). All the violent strength lies in the horse; all the sovereign direction is the rider's. So it is in the show-jumping arena where the commentators move easily between congratulating the horse or the rider for a clear round – for there are two separate even though interlocking 'forces' at work. So it is in history. This is the 'theology of history' which made Isaiah the prophet of faith.

*ii. The three crises. Crisis one: The unbelieving king.* Isaiah ministered within the fifty-year period between the death of Uzziah (1:1; 6:1, probably 739 BC), and that of Hezekiah (1:1, 686 BC). This was also the great period of Assyrian imperialism initiated by Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul, 2 Kgs 15:19) in 745 BC. The Palestinian states almost immediately began to feel Assyrian pressure under which King Menahem accepted tributary status (2 Kgs 15:19). Pekah, however, who came to the throne by assassinating Menahem's son (2 Kgs 15:25), was not prepared to acquiesce in Assyrian overlordship without a struggle.

He joined with Rezin of Aram in a defensive alliance and, for an undeclared reason, the two moved against Judah. Was this to pressurize Ahaz of Judah into joining the alliance, making it the cohesive strategy of all the west Palestinian states, or was it a punitive measure because Ahaz, foreseeing that Assyria would act against Aram and Ephraim, was already himself negotiating with Assyria<sup>2</sup> to secure his immunity when the attack came?<sup>3</sup> Whatever the truth about this matter, Isaiah's concern was how Ahaz proposed to react to the northern threat.

Isaiah 7:1–17 reviews the crisis, focusing on Isaiah's call to faith and Ahaz' refusal of that call. Faith meant taking no action in relation to the northern threat (7:4), simply resting on the word of divine promise (7:7), but the alternative to faith was made clear (7:9): there is no other way of security or of continuance. Ahaz, however, refused the way of faith (7:10–17), choosing rather to buy Assyrian protection (2 Kgs 16:5–9) and thereby, in J. N. Oswalt's memorable phrase, acting like a mouse asking a cat to help it against another cat! Short-term benefit was purchased (as Isaiah foresaw) dearly. In every real sense the Davidic monarchy ended with Ahaz, for the remaining kings reigned only as puppets by courtesy of either Assyria or Babylon, and with the exile (586 BC) the monarchy disappeared and no king ever again reigned in Zion. When the Lord makes promises, faith is the make-or-break decision of his people.

*Crisis two: The faithful Lord.* By the time of Hezekiah Palestine was in the Assyrian grip: Damascus fell to Tiglath-Pileser in 732 BC. Shalmaneser succeeded in 727 BC, made his eastern empire secure by 724 BC and turned his attention westward. He began the siege of Samaria, but its fall in 721 BC is accredited to Sargon. As always in those ancient conglomerate empires, Sargon's accession was greeted by widespread rebellion of subject peoples and he spent his first seven

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2. See J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 6–7.
  3. There were two incursions from the north into Judah. In the first (2 Chr. 28:5–8; Isa. 7:1), in spite of successes, the invaders did not proceed against Jerusalem itself. The second wave of invasion (2 Chr. 28:17–18, 'again') included Edomite and Philistine incursions.

years quieting his eastern and northern dominions. This gave Hezekiah and the Jerusalem politicians a breathing-space in which to review their policy *vis-à-vis* Assyria. And Egypt was at hand making encouraging pledges of support should the Palestinian states revolt. Some of them did so in 715 BC, and it is an interesting comment on Egyptian promises that, when Sargon took Ashdod (714 BC) and its king fled to Egypt, the Egyptians promptly handed him back to Assyria!

Hezekiah seems not to have been involved in this insurgence, since he was not included in Assyrian reprisals, but, sadly, his day was to come. 2 Kings 18:7 simply says he rebelled against the king of Assyria, but behind that bald statement lies a strange infatuation with Egypt, reviewed by Isaiah in chapters 28 – 35. The unreliability of Egypt fully justified Isaiah's irony (30:3–7), and he was absolutely right in deriding the politicians, jubilant over their 'coup', because in their Egyptian alliance they had succeeded only in signing their own death warrant (28:14–15)! He saw that the issue (as in the days of Ahaz) was not one of political astuteness but of faith. He had faced them with the word of God in such a simple form that they mocked it as kid's stuff (28:9); he reminded them of the solid rock of the Lord's promises to David, the foundation stone laid in Zion (28:16), but they would not build on it; he called them to repentance, rest, quietness and trust as the way of salvation and (warrior) strength (30:15) but they chose the world's militarism (30:16). The message is the same as to Ahaz, and the situation not vastly different, except that Ahaz chose to seek security in a contemporary killer, Assyria, while Hezekiah trusted the ancestral specialist in ethnic cleansing (Exod. 1:22). Only the Lord is the life-giver, and faith alone is the way of life; every other remedy is the way of death.

Sennacherib acceded in 705 BC, and by 701 BC he had all Palestine at his mercy and Hezekiah belatedly conscious of his folly (37:1–3).<sup>4</sup> Hezekiah, however, discovered the truth that 'if we are faithless, he will remain faithful' (2 Tim. 2:13). Faith is a potent force, not because of any reflex effect it has within the human psyche but because it reaches out to a trustworthy Object. Isaiah had long since known

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4. For further details, see Commentary, pp. 206ff., 247–259.

that Assyria would (so to speak) meet its Waterloo in Judah (14:24–27); in the thick of the crisis he reiterated the same message (37:21–29); and in the event so it was (37:36). Judah was delivered just as Isaiah forecast, by an eleventh-hour intervention (29:1–8), and, in fact, with this the zenith of Assyrian power passed.

*Crisis three: The decisiveness of unbelief.* The great deliverance (37:36) must have been a bitter-sweet experience for Hezekiah. It would have been very strange if he had not found himself saying, ‘If only!’ For within the series of events leading up to the Egyptian Alliance and Sennacherib’s ferocious reaction, there had happened, within the secrecy of the palace, a personal crisis of faith for the king which was the hinge on which the national future turned. When we realize that before Sennacherib invaded – probably even before he came to the throne – Hezekiah had decisively turned from trusting the Lord to self-trust and worldly-trust, we appreciate how marvellous is the faithfulness of God who nevertheless intervened to shatter Assyria in the mountains of Judah (14:25) – not because the king trusted the promise, not because he merited deliverance, but simply because it is impossible for the Lord to pledge his word and then go back on it.

The tale of Hezekiah’s crisis is simply told. Merodach-Baladan of Babylon was a superb ‘freedom-fighter’, determined to end Assyrian rule. He achieved this for the first time, ruling as king of Babylon from 722 BC until he was ousted by Sargon in 710 BC. The death of Sargon in 706 BC, however, gave him a second chance and once more he made Babylon an independent kingdom. It must have been at some point in relation to this second insurgency that he sent his fateful embassy to Hezekiah (39:1). The ostensible reason was a gesture to the convalescent king; the actual reason, in the letter which accompanied the gift, can be deduced from Hezekiah’s reaction (39:2). Hezekiah may well have been already compromised by his negotiations with Egypt, and it was a small (but flattering) thing to be invited to a further alliance with the prince of freedom fighters! But in his illness Hezekiah had a specific promise from God: ‘I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria’ (38:6). From that point on it was surely simply a matter of trusting the promise and awaiting its fulfilment. To choose instead the way of alliances, armaments and resources (39:2) was as decisive a

rejection of the way of faith as Isaiah recognized it to be (39:3–7).

There is no need to find anything difficult or strange in Isaiah's prediction of Babylonian captivity. Babylon was plainly a world power; Merodach-Baladan had already once achieved a balance of power in Mesopotamia. The prediction of Babylon was a sharply relevant message to the king to whom it was addressed: he had chosen Babylon and, like it or not, all his proud possessions would go there! But, of course, Isaiah could not leave it at that. In fact, he must either tear up all his earlier prophecies of the glories of the coming king (9:1–7; 11:1–16; 32:1ff.; 33:17) or else he must seek light from the Lord on how, notwithstanding the end of monarchy and kingdom in captivity, they would yet be fulfilled. When we remember that, like Hezekiah, Isaiah lived to experience the astounding faithfulness of the Lord to his word about shattering Assyria, it is no wonder that he set alongside his prediction of Babylonian captivity (39:5–7) his message of comfort that the days of duress would some day be over (40:1, 2a) and, alongside the king's great sin in abandoning faith, his forecast that sin would be exactly and abundantly dealt with (40:2b). In this way 39:5 – 40:12 can be compared with 8:21 – 9:7. When the dark day comes, then, for those with believing minds, there is a bright light beyond the darkness, a faith to sustain them in the grim realities of life.

### ***(b) Faith waiting***

The logic of his work as a prophet thus drove Isaiah to foresee a future for the Lord's people beyond Babylon. But, as we have seen above – and as chapters 56ff. elaborate – the return would be far from a fulfilment of the people's longings. They would come back still a subject people but now without even a semblance of a king (45:9–13). In fact neither they nor their circumstances would be vastly changed by the experience of exile, and chapters 56 – 66 include many evidences of malfunction – political (e.g. 56:9–12), religious (e.g. 57:3–8) and spiritual (e.g. 59:2–15). What then of the promises? Do the promises of the king in chapters 1 – 37 and of the Servant in chapters 38 – 55 still hold good? Yes, says the prophet, and you must exercise the patience of faith because my salvation is close at hand, and practise the obedience of faith as you 'maintain justice and do what is right' (56:1).

Isaiah was the prophet of faith, the faith that trusts the promises, perseveres through the darkness and obediently awaits the Lord's time.

*i. Hope.* The forward view, so prominent in the Isaianic literature, has two main foci: the city and the Messiah.

*The city.* Isaiah's vision (1:1) concerned Judah and Jerusalem, but to a major extent his preoccupation is the city, with the fate of the whole kingdom bound up with and settled by what happens in Jerusalem. Likewise the future is dominated by the prophet's expectations of restoration and renewal of the city. It is typical of the importance of this theme that references to the city, its transformation, international centrality and magnetism for pilgrims should provide the brackets around the whole literature: 1:21–26; 2:2–4; 4:2–6 with 65:17–25; 66:7–13; 66:18–24.<sup>5</sup> Like all visionaries Isaiah largely furnished the future from the present. But his development of the 'city' theme shows that he was consciously thinking beyond the geographical Zion/Jerusalem to the ideal it embodied. Thus, for example, in 11:6–9 the Lord's 'holy mountain' has become the whole redeemed creation; also in 65:17–18 the easy way the prophet moves from the 'new earth' to the newly created Jerusalem speaks to the same point. In the Bible the 'city' began (Gen. 11:4) as humankind's attempt to achieve its own salvation without reference to God, and when Isaiah looks forward to the End, he sees the fall of the 'city' humankind has built (24:1–10), Babel on a worldwide scale. As we noted above, the fall of the human city was matched by the stability of the city of salvation (26:1–2). In a word, Isaiah's vision is of the Mount Zion to which the redeemed have already come (Heb. 12:22) and which is also yet to be revealed from heaven (Rev. 21:2).

*The Messiah.* The three sections of the Isaianic literature are each dominated by a messianic figure: in the context of inadequate

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5. The city under judgment: 1:8; 3:1, 8, 16; 4:3–4; 10:12, 24–25, 32; 22:1–14; 64:10; 66:6. The city preserved: 1:8–9; 26:1; 29:1–8; 31:5–9; 36:15; 37:10, 32–35; 38:6. The city restored: 40:2, 9; 52:1; 57:13; 61:3; 66:8. Davidic restoration: 1:21, 26–27; 24:23; 33:20. Universal city: 2:2–4; 11:9; 27:13; 60:14; 62:12; 65:25. Redeemed city: 51:17; 52:1–2, 7–8; 59:20; 62:11. Cyrus and the city: 45:13. Divine dwelling: 4:3–5; 12:6.

Davidic kings – apostate Ahaz and gullible Hezekiah – Isaiah depicted the glorious King yet to come (chs. 1 – 37); in the aftermath of Hezekiah’s great sin of unbelief and the judgment of exile on a sinful people, Isaiah foresaw the Servant of the Lord, the sinbearer, effectually the Saviour of the world (chs. 38 – 55); and finally, envisaging the post-exile people still in subjection, Isaiah promised the coming Conqueror, exacting vengeance, bringing salvation (chs. 56 – 66). An initial appreciation of these three messianic figures can be gained by reviewing the four passages in which Isaiah portrays each figure: 9:1–7; 11:1–16; 32:1–8; 33:17–24; 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13 – 53:12; 59:20–21; 61:1–3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1–6. The whole literature is thus a messianic panorama on a grand scale, as the diagram opposite illustrates.

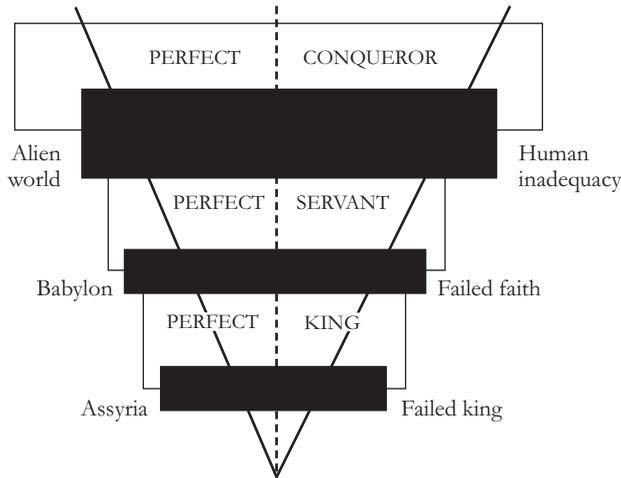
The point at the base of the diagram is ‘Isaiah’s eye’. All he sees, at first, is darkness with a surrounding brightness – for all three ‘black patches’ merge into one, as do all three patches of light. He is not looking down on the diagram as we are, but looking along the dotted middle line into the diagram. He identifies the brightness with the Perfect King, who will be the solution where Ahaz failed.

But then Isaiah lived on into the days of Hezekiah, in which the ‘dark’ problem was posed in a new way: the failure of king and people to trust the Lord’s promises and walk the way of faith, preferring rather the way of ‘works’, a rebellious alliance with Merodach-Baladan. The darkness of Babylonian captivity lay ahead – but now the brightness is that of a Perfect Servant, who will succeed where they failed, and in succeeding will make atonement for their sins.

Then, envisaging the people returning from Babylon, Isaiah sees the darkness of their inability to live for God in a threatening world and a hostile society. They need a deliverer, and the light ahead now reveals a coming Conqueror-Deliverer. As is always the case in the Bible, the truth is cumulative.

*ii. God, holiness, sin and salvation.* Isaiah is strictly traditional and orthodox in his theology, moving in a non-innovative way among the basic principles of Old Testament thought. His innovation resides in his application and outworking of established and familiar truth.

*The Holy One of Israel.* In Isaiah, as throughout the Old Testament, the basic idea of ‘holiness’ is ‘otherness’ – not ‘otherness’ defined by contrast (other than what?), but ‘otherness’ as distinctiveness



(other because what?). In this sense all the gods were holy because they possessed their own distinctive nature, sphere and activity, and those who devoted their lives to the gods were 'holy' as belonging to that distinctive sphere – like the 'shrine-girl', literally 'holy woman' (*qēdēšā*) of Genesis 38:20. Isaiah inherited and furthered the Old Testament understanding that the distinctive of the Lord was his ethical, moral character: to this he gave definitive statement in the 'thrice-Holy' of 6:3 (see Commentary, p. 81), a super-superlative, all-embracing holiness that made the Lord the uttermost threat to all sinfulness. Indeed, Isaiah is the pre-eminent prophet of divine holiness. He uses, for example, the adjective 'holy' (*qādōš*) of the Lord more often than all the rest of the Old Testament taken together, and focuses it in a title which he could well have coined, characteristic of the Isaianic literature: The Holy One of Israel. The title is used throughout Isaiah twenty-five times as compared with seven in the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 6 stands as a microcosm of the whole book: the Holy One as King (6:1, 5) becomes the theme

6. 'The Holy One of Israel' occurs twelve times in 1 – 37, eleven times in 38 – 55 and twice in 56 – 66. This should be compared with the seven times elsewhere in the OT: 2 Kgs 19:22; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Jer. 50:29; 51:5; Ezek. 39:7.

specially of chapters 56–66; the Holy One as the ground of condemnation of moral condemnation (6:3, 5) is the theme of chapters 1–37; and the revelation of the Holy One as the Saviour (6:6–7) finds its fulfilment in the Servant in chapters 38–55.

*The Servant of the Lord.* Isaiah likewise breaks no new ground in his use of the vocabulary of sin and redemption but, once again, it is in vision and application that he becomes distinctive, referring to the Servant of the Lord in chapters 38–55. The search for an understanding of the Servant has produced a century and more of controversy.<sup>7</sup> There is ground within Isaiah for thinking of the Servant as the nation, Israel: for example, the nation is called ‘my servant’ in 41:8 and the Servant is named ‘Israel’ in 49:3. But as soon as details of any such corporate identification (whether with the nation as a whole or with some ‘remnant’ within the nation) are probed, the theory collapses. In what sense could either nation or group claim the obedience evidenced by the Servant in 50:4–9? Did the nation ever possess the sinlessness required in one who bears another’s sin (53:9; cf. Exod. 12:5)? In what sense could the nation bring the nation back to God (49:5–6)? Likewise, the autobiographical presentation of 49:1–6 and 50:4–9 gives substance to the question in Acts 8:34. But again the scope and demands of the Servant’s role run beyond the character and abilities of any known individual of the past, whether Isaiah or another – not to mention that such an identification would mean that the Servant came, lived and died in the past without leaving any record or ripple in history. As the Commentary shows, if we refuse the fragmentarist approach which began with Duhm and insist in understanding the Songs within an integrated development, the Servant is distinguished in turn from the errant and spiritually numb nation (42:18–25) and from the spiritually committed and expectant remnant (51:1–52:12), leaving a majestic Individual to occupy our gaze (52:13) as he dies bearing the sins of others (53:4–9) and lives to administer the salvation he has won for them (53:10–12).

In portraying the Servant’s death, Isaiah lays under tribute the

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7. H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord* (Lutterworth, 1952); C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (OUP, 1956).

established vocabulary of Levitical/Mosaic theology and practice: substitution and peace with God through punishment laid, by the will of God, on another (53:5–6, 8), a sinless sufferer (53:9) who provides righteousness for others (53:11) by bearing their sin (53:12). The towering genius of Isaiah was displayed in that he saw so clearly that in its truest sense substitution needs a person to take the place of people. Animal sacrifice can illustrate the principle, but only one who voluntarily accepts the role (53:7) and voluntarily pours out himself (53:12) – that is to say, provides a will to take the place of the sinful will (cf. Heb. 10:5–9) – can achieve by a true substitution the full, indeed final, salvation of those for whom he dies.

### Isaiah's book

#### (a) *Recovery of unity*

No apology is needed for calling the Isaianic literature 'Isaiah's book', for it has never been anything else. There is no manuscript evidence other than for the literature as it stands: indeed, in the oldest manuscript available, dating back to 100 BC, the first two lines of chapter 40 (which is where many scholars say the book should be divided) come without any break in the text at the bottom of the column on which chapter 39 ends.

Furthermore, the course of present-day study is preponderantly concerned with the unity of this great corpus: 'Today scholars are beginning to move from analysis to synthesis [in order to try to] understand the overall unity and the theological dynamic of the Isaiah tradition',<sup>8</sup> and, within this, few dispute that Isaiah of Jerusalem was the initiator of the tradition and the beating heart that kept it alive through (as they would hold) the centuries that it took to bring it into its present and final shape.<sup>9</sup> Many are following the

8. B. W. Anderson, 'The Apocalyptic Rendering of the Isaiah Tradition', in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism* (Fortress, 1988).

9. For contrasting approaches to the Isaianic literature see, e.g., the two vols. of the New Century Bible (Eerdmans/Marshall): R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (1980) and R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* (1975), as compared with J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah*, 2 vols. (Word, 1985).

lead of B. S. Childs,<sup>10</sup> who maintains that our concern must be with the ‘canonical’ form of Isaiah, not because of dogmatic views of ‘inspiration’ but on the ground that this is the form, as P. R. Ackroyd puts it, which is ‘stamped with the hallmark of experiential testing in the life of the community’.<sup>11</sup> Specialists differ in the extent to which they think it is important to isolate sections large and small and relate them to the different periods in history in which they are supposed to have originated. Some make this crucially significant,<sup>12</sup> but others take the literature as it now stands and mine the richness of its interrelations.<sup>13</sup>

***(b) Models of growth***

Within this general approach, some view the Isaianic literature as growing by addition with three authors strung along a time-line. Isaiah of Jerusalem (c. 700 BC) was broadly responsible for chapters 1 – 39; the author of chapters 40 – 55 is ‘Second (or Deutero-) Isaiah’, who lived in the Babylonian captivity (586–539 BC) and worked probably about 540 BC; and the ‘Third (or Trito-) Isaiah’ ministered to the returned community, 539 BC onwards.<sup>14</sup> Another model is that of accretion: i.e. the growth of the literature around an original core so that what we have is the final form of what has been, at all stages, a single ‘book’, constantly receiving editorial adjustments to meet new situations along with additions reflecting and extending the spirit of the original (Isaianic) core.<sup>15</sup>

10. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, pp. 311ff.

11. P. R. Ackroyd, *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (SCM, 1987), pp. 79ff.

12. B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (SCM, 1967).

13. P. D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (JSOT Press, 1993).

14. An easy (and helpful) commentary following this approach is J. Skinner, *Isaiah*, 2 vols. (CUP, 1902, 1905) or, on a massive and less accessible scale, H. Wilderberger, *Jesaja*, 3 vols. (Neukirchner Verlag, 1972, 1978, 1982).

15. See O. H. Steck, quoted in Rendtorff, *The Book of Isaiah*.

***(c) Arguments and evaluations***

This modern search for ways to express the unity of the Isaianic literature arises from the fragmentation which is the product of the last one hundred years of specialist study – whether three ‘authors’ working at separated intervals or an anthology collected by a supposed Isaianic ‘school’. Previously, the assumption of one single author had provided the ground for considering the work a unity, but at least since the mid-nineteenth century a number of factors were taken to make a single author an impossibility.

*i. Prophecy.* O. T. Allis is correct in rooting the fragmentation of Isaiah in a nineteenth-century rationalism which denied predictive prophecy<sup>16</sup> – for if prediction is impossible, the movement of the Isaianic literature progressively into the future can be explained only by the supposition of new authors working in those later times. But today, when a modest element of prediction has been readmitted as a possibility, another problem arises: not whether Isaiah could predict the exile and return, but would he do so.<sup>17</sup> After all, what comfort is it to learn that in a century’s time all will be well! How could Isaiah’s contemporaries get their minds around the thought of a Babylonian captivity when their world was dominated by Assyria, not Babylon, and what would they make of the name of an unknown king from an as-yet-unknown kingdom? How, come to that, could Isaiah know, all those years ahead, the name of Cyrus (45:1)?

Putting ourselves back, however, into Isaiah’s situation, these difficulties begin to evaporate. First of all Isaiah says nothing about a gap of a hundred years between prediction and fulfilment. It is a caricature to claim he said, ‘Don’t worry! In a hundred years all will be well!’, he did not say so! G. E. Wright asserts that ‘a prophecy is earlier than what it predicts but contemporary with or later than what it presupposes’.<sup>18</sup> His intention is to root prophetic ministry in the prophet’s own situation, to insist that every message is meaningful

16. O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Tyndale, 1951).

17. J. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, Anchor Bible (Doubleday, 1968), p. xvi; see also the excellent introductions to Isaiah in LaSor et al., *Old Testament Survey*, and Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*.

18. G. E. Wright, *The Book of Isaiah* (John Knox, 1964).

to the prophet's contemporaries. This suits Isaiah perfectly – and in particular the Babylonian prophecy of 39:3–6. The name 'Babylon' was spoken to Isaiah by Hezekiah and thereby became a subject on which the prophet must comment: indeed, so contemporary and relevant was the message of captivity that Hezekiah had no right to assume that it would not happen in his days (39:8)! The advent of Merodach-Baladan's agents reminded him that the balance of power in Mesopotamia was a fragile thing and that Babylon was, even then, a candidate for empire.<sup>19</sup> Besides, how can we who have seen the sudden disappearance of the Communist empire say that quick change is impossible? Furthermore, as 14:24–27 and 29:1–8 indicate, Isaiah was aware that it would not be Assyria before whom Jerusalem would fall: 39:3–6 was a defining moment in which the dark power behind 6:11–12 was named publicly.

Regarding Cyrus (who is predicted by name in 44:28), 1 Kings 13:2 (cf. 2 Kgs 23:15–17) and Acts 9:12 show that name-prediction is not unknown in the Bible. The fact is that, if prediction is admitted at all, we cannot set limits to its exercise. Nothing of the 'mechanism' of revelation, inspiration or prediction is revealed to us, and the Lord of the prophets can sovereignly declare the exceptional just as much as the usual. In the case of Cyrus, we can, however, see that the name was germane to the message of comfort. We only have to picture ourselves as an ethnic minority under a dictatorship to imagine the sense of foreboding with which the news of an even mightier dictator would be greeted. In mercy, therefore, would not the Lord want to assure his people that the greater despot will be their deliverer? On the one hand, the naming of Cyrus is a relevant message of comfort to Isaiah's contemporaries, but, on the other hand, to refuse to allow that it was Isaiah who named Cyrus creates two problems: first, it is untrue to 41:25 ff. with its claim that the rise of Cyrus also was a matter of prediction and, secondly, it negates the force of 45:1–6 that Cyrus would be in a position to recognize the Lord as the author of all his success. A later prophet, speaking after Cyrus became news, would be no better than the priests of Marduk, who were only wise after the event when they claimed the conqueror's success in the name of their

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19. S. Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon* (CWK Gleerup, 1970).

god. Only a prophecy with a veritable claim to have anticipated the event could be presented as proof of the sole deity of Yahweh.

*ii. Literary style.* The difference in the style of chapters 40–55 was an early argument for separating them from chapters 1–39,<sup>20</sup> and it is still used<sup>21</sup> as a means of distinguishing authors, even though widely discredited.<sup>22</sup> It is and always has been a nonsense. *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, evidences a narrative style, a dialogue style and a poetic style. Must it have had three authors? Could not Milton have written in the jolly rhythms of *L'Allegro*, in the sonorous tones of *Paradise Lost* and also in the measured prose of *Areopagitica*? When Isaiah of Jerusalem is presumed to be the author, a scenario for the two main styles of the book is simplicity itself. Most of chapters 1–35 are a sort of rhythmic prose, Isaiah's 'record of preaching' style. The messages of the prophets as they stand could not have been preached: they are too brief, too quickly come and gone; they do not have the repetitions and elaborations essential to allow hearers to fix their minds on what is being said. Like all the prophets, Isaiah filed for the future carefully crafted encapsulations of his preaching. But the days of Hezekiah were followed by the 'police state' days of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1–18), and maybe in such a time the now elderly prophet would turn exclusively to writing: this is the real contrast between the two styles, the one primarily a record of sermons, the other a solely literary product.

*iii. Background.* It is plain to see that the envisaged background to

20. S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (T. & T. Clark, 1909), pp. 204ff.

21. Note how McKenzie, in *Second Isaiah*, includes chs. 34–35 in his commentary on 40–66. This is typical of ongoing stylistic judgments.

22. R. Margolioth, *The Indivisible Isaiah* (Yeshiva University, New York, 1964), presents the most thoroughly researched and searching enquiry into the vocabulary, idioms and phrasing of the Isaianic literature and demonstrates linguistic unity. But see the different results of Reinken's linguistic researches as reported by McKenzie (*Second Isaiah*, p. xvi). Radday (see Dillard and Longman, *Introduction to the Old Testament*) used computer technology to demonstrate diversity. None of these studies has escaped searching criticism.

the three sections of Isaiah is different: the earlier chapters are at home in eighth-century Jerusalem; chapters 40 – 55 envisage a Babylonian exile; and chapters 56 – 66 are once more in Palestine. On examination, however, a claim that 40 – 55 must have been written in Babylon tends to evaporate. Certainly they are Babylonian in orientation, but not so in setting. Apart from the four references to Babylon (43:14; 47:1; 48:14, 20), there is little that is exclusively or typically Babylonian about the chapters: ‘When we search for evidence of the prophet’s residence in Babylon, we are surprised how hard it is to find any that is convincing.’<sup>23</sup> Rather, Babylon receives broad-brush treatment; it is predicted rather than presupposed. The sort of detail which betrays an eyewitness is simply not there – what the city was like, its life, structures, the ‘feel and smell’ of the place – nor any indication of the organization of the society of the exiles. In the same way, when these chapters speak of the experience of being exiled (42:22; 51:14), they bear no relation to the homesick (Ps. 137:1–6) but generally pleasant (Jer. 29; Ezek. *passim*) conditions of life (from which, when the time came, so few were willing to detach themselves, Ezra 1 – 2). In his allusions to the ‘sufferings’ of exile, as, indeed, in his poetic, impressionistic depiction of the fall of Babylon (47:1–15), the prophet offers not reportage but poetic use of conventional stereotypes.

Topological background is also important. While the Babylonian scene has not become clear, the Palestinian background has not grown faint. The idolater goes out into the woods to cut a tree for carving (46:14), not possible in Babylonia! The trees are those a Palestinian knows; the oils are those of West Asia (41:19; 55:13); the landscapes and climate are those of the west – mountains, forests, sea, snow and land refreshed by rain, not by irrigation.<sup>24</sup> The claim that

23. J. D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah* (Epworth, 1965), p. 20.

Smart’s research led him to place ‘Second Isaiah’ in Palestine ‘squarely in the midst of the international upheavals generated by the exploits of King Cyrus’ (p. 32).

24. See A. Lods, *The Prophets of Israel* (Kegan Paul, 1937), p. 238. Lods was unable to accept prediction, and therefore made the author of chs. 40 – 55 a West Palestinian working in the post-exile.

in chapters 40 – 55 we move into a Mesopotamian milieu is not borne out by the evidence.

*in. Theology.* Even as late as 1950, H. H. Rowley could record that in chapters 40 – 55 ‘the whole tenor of the message ... the ideas that lie behind it ... the thought of God ... are different’<sup>25</sup> from chapters 1 – 39, but this is simply not the case: expression and presentation vary but the theology is the same. First, the whole is bound together by the title ‘the Holy One of Israel’ (see above, p. 28–29), and when we consider the enhanced universalism of chapters 40 – 55 it is hard to see why any prophet other than Isaiah would use a title that so emphasized a particular, national God. Secondly, the six main theological foci of chapters 1 – 39 continue in 40 – 55: the Lord as Lord of history (10:5–15), his supremacy over idols (2:12–20), the remnant (8:11–20), God and sinner reconciled through atonement (6:7), Zion restored (1:26–27) and the Davidic Messiah (9:1–7). Chapters 40 – 48 are a set of variations on the first three of the above; 53:1–12 is the ‘fulfilment’ of 6:6–7; Jerusalem is as central throughout the rest of the book as in 1 – 37; and 55:3–4 anchors the revelation of the Servant in the Davidic covenant.

#### ***(d) An ‘Isaiah’ scenario***

Apart from the special exercise of forecasting the name of Cyrus, there is an easy simplicity in relating everything else to Isaiah of Jerusalem. The prophet of a glorious future (e.g. 1:26–27; 2:2–4; 4:4–6; 9:1–7; 11:1–16) is also the prophet of disaster and total loss (e.g. 5:24–30; 6:11–12; 7:17–25). Isaiah gathered what we would call a ‘home-group’ around him (8:16), and these disciples would have been uncommonly restrained if they did not press the prophet to say how these strands would intertwine, especially after he had said to the king that all was consigned to Babylon (39:6–7). Surely after the events of 39:3–7 Isaiah must either tear up his earlier promises, or he must now at last answer the insistent question: how does hope fit in?

Thus circumstances compelled him on – and, since chapters

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25. H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (Hutchinson, 1950), p. 95; cf. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.

40 – 55 so admirably fulfil the required role, we must at least start by assuming that in them Isaiah answered the question. As we have seen, he builds in no time factors and he says nothing about Babylon or the exiles that knowledge and common sense would not suggest. In terms of Wright's dictum (see p. 33), Isaiah is speaking wholly within the presuppositions of his time – and, of course, a prophet's own earlier predictions are part of the presuppositional frame within which he ministers.

The basic thrust of his message is going and coming back, the certainty that doom does not have the last word. But in his developing vision of the future it is the work of Cyrus, not that of the Servant, that brings them home to their land. Their redemption (48:20–21) is political, not spiritual, and thereby hangs Isaiah's understanding of the returned community. They return as the people who went, the 'wicked' without peace with God (48:22). For this reason Isaiah's portrayal of the returned community in chapters 56 – 66 is in pre-exilic terms: their sins, temptations, failings and apostasies are all those of the pre-exile, likewise the quality of leadership they endure and their political subjugation. Isaiah's pre-exilic messages suffice to be the word of God to his envisaged post-exilic community. Is there anything in all this unavailable to the eye and inspiration of Isaiah of Jerusalem?

## Text

The Hebrew Text (MT) of Isaiah has come to us in fine preservation without any real doubt what the text means or a serious necessity of emendation. The Targum of Isaiah (an early Aramaic paraphrase finalized in the fifth century AD)<sup>26</sup> witnesses to a text very close to if not identical with the MT. The Greek translation of Isaiah, says Ottley,<sup>27</sup> is 'by common consent one of the worst translated parts of the LXX'. Ottley, of course, assumed that the LXX translators were

26. See D. F. Payne, 'Targums', in *NBD*; J. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Clarendon, 1949).

27. R. L. Ottley, *Isaiah according to the Septuagint*, 2 vols. (CUP, 1906, 1909), pp. 8–9.

working from the MT as we know it (and it is true that their worst efforts coincide with places where the Hebrew is unusual in idiom or vocabulary), but it may be that LXX was in fact following a different Hebrew original<sup>28</sup> which we now have no chance of recovering. The Dead Sea Scrolls have yielded Isaiah material with the manuscript Q<sup>a</sup> being our oldest witness to Isaiah. It is at least a thousand years older than the Ben Asher text (MT) of AD 1009. The overwhelming identity between these two (notwithstanding the time gap) is an astonishing tribute to careful copying. Such differences as seem to be important are noted in the Commentary, but ‘our mandate’, says Oswalt, ‘is to interpret the text as it is before us unless there is manuscript evidence to correct that text. To do anything else would be to build our interpretations on air.’<sup>29</sup>

### Isaiah and the New Testament

The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than all the other prophets together, and does so in such a way as to leave no room for doubt that the New Testament writers, and the Lord Jesus, took Isaiah to be the author of the whole book that bears his name. It is true that in some references ‘Isaiah’ need mean no more than the book where the quotation is found. Mark 1:2, for example, seems to use ‘Isaiah’ (as Luke 24:44 uses ‘the psalms’) to name that section of the Old Testament Canon of which, respectively, they are the first books. But when John 12:41 notes ‘Isaiah’ as the one who ‘saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him’, referring to 6:1–10, or when Luke 3:4 quotes from ‘the book of the words of Isaiah’, there can be no doubt that the individual prophet is intended, and this is, of course, the natural and logical interpretation of the main bulk of the quotations. The New Testament quotations cover all sections of the Isaianic literature, ascribing all alike to the same prophet. The authority of the New Testament with, at its centre, the authority of Jesus, is decisive.

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28. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 30.

29. Oswalt, p. 31.