

# STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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“The Book of Isaiah, one of the most important and best-loved books in the Bible, is sometimes called the Gospel of Isaiah because of the good news that characterizes its message. Indeed, no other Old Testament book contains as many references to the Messiah as does the Book of Isaiah. Its sixty-six chapters contain crucial passages that allude to Christ’s incarnation, earthly ministry, and atoning death, as well as to His second coming and glorious world-wide rule. So important is Isaiah’s prophecy that the New Testament alludes to it frequently and quotes directly from it no fewer than sixty-two times.... Isaiah has also been called the Romans of the Old Testament because, like the Book of Romans, it sets forth God’s case against sinners, unveils the wretchedness of the human heart, and reveals the way of salvation for Israel and the world. Under the hammer blows of Isaiah’s message, God calls sinners to repentance and graciously promises forgiveness. It is no accident that in Romans Paul quoted Isaiah seventeen times—more than any other New Testament author.”

—Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 11

## OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

### Isaiah

#### I. Introduction

##### A. *Importance*

1. Isaiah stands out as the richest and most influential of the Latter Prophets. The NT writers quote more from Isaiah than from any other prophet, and it’s 2,186 different Hebrew terms give it the richest, most diverse vocabulary of any prophet.
2. “Of all the prophets of Israel, Isaiah stands out as incomparably the greatest. Writing with majestic grandeur, this gifted eight-century B.C. author exalts the grace of God in salvation. For this, if for no other reason, he has well been called “the evangelistic prophet.”<sup>1</sup>
3. “Isaiah is at once familiar and neglected. Chapters like 6, 35, 40, and 53 are among the best-known parts of the OT; and there are briefer, well-known sections in chapters like 7, 9, and 61. There are however vast stretches of the book, especially in chapters 13-34, that are virtually unknown to most Christians. Ignorance of any part of Scrip-

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<sup>1</sup> G. L. Robinson and R. K. Harrison, “Isaiah,” in *ISBE*, rev. ed., ed. 4 vols., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:885.

ture is to be deplored, but this is particularly so with a book that gives such a manifold presentation of Christ.”

4. Isaiah is also the most challenging of the prophets to interpret. His messages frequently shift in their historical settings between near and far off events and timeframes.

B. **Title:** ישעיהו, “Yahweh is Salvation/Yahweh will Save,” a name that providentially foreshadows the main theological thrust of the book (see Purpose).

C. **Focus**

1. Judah and Jerusalem are the primary focus of Isaiah through his prophecies, with the former referenced 29x while the latter is referenced directly nearly 100x (“Jerusalem” 48x; “Zion” 46x) and indirectly referenced another 24x.
2. These foci flow out of the Abrahamic and Davidic overtones of the book. Judah is an echo of the Abrahamic Covenant, representative of Yahweh’s intention of universal blessing to all the nations.
3. Jerusalem is an echo of the Davidic Covenant, the royal city where the Davidic king reigns, and the prophet’s message pertains not only to the city of his day but to the city that God will make it at the end of days.
4. The process by which Judah accomplishes her Abrahamic Covenant purposes and Jerusalem accomplishes her Davidic Covenant purposes is a long and difficult process realized through purifying judgment.

D. **Date & Authorship**

1. Date of Isaiah
  - a. The book contains very clear temporal markers that place its events and writing during the reigns of four different kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1).
    - 1) **Uzziah:** identified as a good king in Judah, though he failed to clear the nation of high places. He reigned for an extended time (52 years) and provided a degree of prosperity and stability not seen since Solomon.<sup>2</sup> His death marked the year of Isaiah’s call to ministry, cir. 739 B.C. Isaiah would have grown up under Uzziah’s leadership, and his vision of Yahweh on his throne (Isa 6), ruling Judah in the temple would have been decidedly comforting to the prophet during a time when the nation had just lost their human ruler and its future was in question.
    - 2) **Jotham:** also identified as a good king, though he too failed to remove the high places from throughout Judah. For this reason, his reign had little effect on the people, who drifted more and more into Baalism. It was during Jotham’s reign that Assyria began its new ascendancy in its desire for conquest and dominion under Tiglath-pileser III.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2:886.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- 3) **Ahaz:** evaluated in Kings as an evil king who “walked in the way of the kings of Israel and even made his son pass through the fire” (2 Kgs 16:3). Under his leadership, idolatry became state-sponsored, and he even contracted the construction of a pagan altar which he placed in the temple alongside the bronze altar, which he set aside for personal divination.
  - 4) **Hezekiah:** identified as a good king, he was one of the few kings that promoted real spiritual reform in Jerusalem. He removed the high places and placed his trust in Yahweh. In fact, it is during his tenure that Isaiah introduces the theme of “trust” in the book. It is also during his reign that Isaiah prophecies of the coming Babylonian exile.
  - b. Additionally, Isaiah mentions the assassination of Sennacherib of Assyria which occurred in 681 B.C., thus tying in the book’s events with its ANE historical timeline (Isa 37:38).
  - c. With this information, an accurate chronology of the book can be constructed, placing its events and writing between 739 B.C. and 681 B.C.
2. Authorship of Isaiah
- a. For 25 centuries, there was a unified affirmation on the part of Christian and Jewish scholars that the book was the product of one man who lived during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., identified in the book as Isaiah, son of Amoz (Isa 1:1).
  - b. However, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the critical approaches that had been applied toward the Pentateuch were also applied to Isaiah. Scholars submitted that a host of differences in “vocabulary, style, and thought” between chapters 1-39 and 40-66 led to the conclusion that they were the work of two or three separate authors—Isaiah (chs. 1-39), “Deutero-Isaiah” (chs. 40-55), and “Trito-Isaiah” (chs. 56-66).
  - c. As the process of critical scholarship progressed, the affirmed list of genuine “Isaiah” texts dwindled so that only a “small collection of Isaiah’s prophecies formed a nucleus that received a number of successive expansions over the centuries.”<sup>4</sup>
  - d. Today, the older model of three-fold authorship has largely been abandoned as the overall unity of the book as a literary unit has been more clearly demonstrated. Nevertheless, the majority of scholars still reject the idea of the book as a product of a single author in favor of seeing the book as a redaction of various sources into a cohesive literary whole.<sup>5</sup>
  - e. The evidence “supporting” these views has proven quite persuasive and, taken by themselves, represent genuine textual observations. As John Oswalt writes, “A novice Bible student with some skills in observation can feel the change in tone

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Oswalt, “Theology of Isaiah,” in *NIDOTTE*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:725-26.

and focus at ch. 40, and it takes only slightly more perspicuity to detect a similar change at ch. 56.”<sup>6</sup> So, even conservative scholars have observed and interacted with all the supposed distinctions in vocabulary, style, and thought in Isaiah. Yet they have maintained their support in the unity and Isaianic authorship of the book.

- f. Thus, all these arguments betray an underlying assumption. But what is it? What is the driving motivator to devise alternative explanations for authorship of Isaiah when the “evidence” is not as conclusive as critical scholars suggest? The answer: rationalistic presupposition.<sup>7</sup> There is an *a priori* assumption dissuading critical scholars from accepting the supernatural.
- g. Put simply, the underlying motivation of critical scholarship is to explain in a *rationalistic* way how a text attributed to an 8<sup>th</sup> century author could include specific an accurate foresight of events which transpired in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. To do so, they find convincing ways to attribute these portions of Isaiah to someone else, effectively eliminating predictive prophecy as an option and categorizing these passages as nothing more than *vaticinia ex eventu*—prophecy *after* an event.

“He who rejects a given passage of Isaiah, because it contains definite predictions of a future too remote from the times in which he lived, to be the object of ordinary human foresight, will of course be led to justify this condemnation by specific proofs drawn from the diction, style, or idiom of the passage. On the discovery and presentation of such proofs, the previous assumption, which they are intended to sustain, cannot fail to have a warping influence.”

—Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), 24

- h. In other words, their non-negotiable rejection of predictive prophecy have a decidedly “warping influence” on their observations, causing them to make assumptions about authorship based on style, vocabulary, etc.
- i. As one proponent of Deuter-Isaiah has written, “The most striking feature of Second Isaiah is the two occurrences of the name of Cyrus (xliv 28, xlv 1). That Isaiah of Jerusalem (First Isaiah) could use the name of a king, in a language unknown to him, who ruled in a kingdom which did not exist in the eight century B.C., taxes probability too far.... If the prophecy is to be attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem, then these passages must be regarded as later expansions.”<sup>8</sup>
- j. In summary, the critical views of the book are not at all based on variations in style, vocabulary, and themes. They are based on the assumption that Isaiah could not have predicted the future. “Once one grants that Isaiah of Jerusalem *could*

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<sup>6</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 366.

<sup>8</sup> McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, xvi.

have written such material, the arguments from style, vocabulary, themes, etc. become very nebulous.”<sup>9</sup>

## II. Major Themes

- A. John Oswalt submits that “without doubt the book of Isaiah is the most holistic of the biblical books. In its present form it encompasses the sweep of biblical theology better than any other single book of the canon.”<sup>10</sup>
- B. This statement accurately captures the vastness of Isaiah’s theological message, which touches on virtually every major doctrine of the Christian faith. In it, the theology of God, man, sin, redemption, atonement, and last things all converge on an epic scale and in a style unparalleled in biblical literature.
- C. The themes of Isaiah relate integrally with the purpose of Isaiah. The reader must bear in mind that Isaiah’s message is directed to a future generation of Israel who find themselves exiled in Babylon.

### D. *Yahweh*

#### a. *The Holy One of Israel*

- 1) Isaiah’s vision was without doubt a defining event in his life. As such, Isaiah 6 forms a clear launching point to understand the person and character of Yahweh throughout the book.
- 2) That passage identifies Yahweh as the thrice-holy God—the God who is exceedingly holy, perfectly holy, and therefore infinitely holy.
- 3) That idea forms the backdrop of one of the most prevalent designations for Yahweh in the book: “the Holy One of Israel” (25x in Isaiah). There is no record of this phrase being used before Isaiah, and it appears only 5x in the rest of the Bible. It is a phrase reserved exclusively to describe Yahweh.
- 4) The phrase speaks to the transcendence of God—his *otherness*. As the Holy One, Yahweh is absolutely incomparable to all the other “gods.” He is not merely the greatest of the gods. He is the *only* God.

#### b. *The Sovereign Lord of Creation and History*

- 1) Yahweh’s holiness indicates that he is utterly distinct from creation. He is not dependent on it, nor is he intricately part of it, and nothing in the system of creation places any conditions upon him.
- 2) Isaiah demonstrates God’s holiness in creation and history by making it clear that Judah’s crises and circumstances does not indicate a weakness or failure on the part of God. Assyria’s military successes do not indicate God’s inabilities.

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<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

- 3) Quite the opposite, “The great empires are not coming in spite of him, but because of him. He is the Lord of all nations, not merely of Israel. And all nations, including Israel, are subject to his judgment. Thus, Israel’s defeat at the hands of Assyria is not a defeat for God or a victory for Assyria’s gods. It is an act of divine judgment on Israel, for which Assyria can take no credit.”<sup>11</sup>
- 4) Thus enters the centrality of prophetic prediction. It is through this that God demonstrates his sovereign supremacy over his creation and history. While the pagan gods are incapable of foretelling the future and thus cannot be trusted for salvation, Yahweh has and does foretell the future in a way that clearly reveals his faithfulness and holiness.

c. *The Redeemer of Israel*

- 1) The phrase “The Holy One of Israel” is reserved almost exclusively in Isaiah 1-39 to discuss the stupidity of disobedience on the part of Israel.
- 2) However, throughout Isaiah 40-55, the phrase predominantly occurs with reference to Yahweh’s power to deliver. In other words, as his message progresses, God’s holiness becomes a means of exciting faith in Judah rather than uncovering their sin.
- 3) “How foolish to disobey the One who made the earth and stands over it, and how wise to believe in the One who can take the brokenness of earth and make it right again. This is holiness: not merely the austere, white light of uncreated perfection, but the infinitely creative love that can take the tainted and defiled and make it over again.”<sup>12</sup>

E. *Trust*

1. Trust is perhaps *the* central theme in the book of Isaiah. This theme naturally flows out of the rich and majestic portrait of Yahweh he paints throughout his messages.
2. Since God is utterly transcendent (i.e., holy), is sovereign over creation and history, and has the power to judge as well as deliver, it is both reasonable and imperative that a person place their full and complete trust in Yahweh alone.
3. According to Isaiah’s theology, trust is the fundamental feature of the divine-human relationship, and this grows especially paramount in a world system filled with alternative objects of trust.
4. The socio-political circumstances of Isaiah’s day provided a constant source of temptation to place their national security in forming key political relationships with the surrounding nations.
5. Likewise, the pagan backdrop of the ANE provided yet another set of potential problems. Though Isaiah sets out to demonstrate their lack of dependability, Judah was

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<sup>11</sup> Oswalt, “Theology of Isaiah,” 4:728.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 4:729.

frequently tempted to hope and trust in the pagan deities to ensure favorable conditions for the nation.

6. All these factors play into how the theme of trust is featured throughout the book:
  - a. In chapters 1-39, the thrust of Isaiah's message is an urgent plea for Judah and her king to place their trust in Yahweh as the source of protection and national security rather than establishing political alliances with nations that would ultimately fail. Whether it's trusting in the might of Assyria for protection from Israel and Aram, or trusting in Egypt to protect against a now-hostile Assyria, Isaiah argues that ultimately every human relationship is liable to be broken. Yahweh is the only one who can be trusted to protect the nation from danger. This point is demonstrated through the contrast between Ahaz's foolish misplaced trust and its outcome and Hezekiah's wise trust in Yahweh and its outcome.
  - b. In chapters 40-55, the tone shifts as Isaiah shifts his focus from the present crises to the future exiles who have lost all hope for a national future. Now gone from the land, the most tempting source of trust comes from the pagan gods who offer at least a modest level of hope for a dejected nation. But Isaiah encourages Judah to look to the loyal and faithful Yahweh, who "against all odds...can deliver them from the grip of the mightiest power in the world."<sup>13</sup>
  - c. In chapters 56-66, Isaiah's focus shifts once again to yet another future generation, this time returned to the land by God. Buoyed by their change in circumstances, the temptation now comes to begin to trust in their status as Yahweh's chosen nation as their ultimate source of security. This, of course, leads to moral decline as national election supersedes the need for righteousness. In response, Isaiah warns that Yahweh still expects Judah to live righteously, but that righteousness comes through trust in him and not in their national status as the covenant people of God.

#### F. *Rebellion*

1. Isaiah uses several terms to describe the sin of Judah and the nations throughout the book, but the key term that characterizes their sin is **פָּשַׁע**, "to rebel" (used 20x). It is a term that brackets the entire book, introducing Judah as rebels at the book's start (1:2) and emphasizing God's judgment of rebels at the book's close (66:24).
2. There is an important relationship between this term and the theme of covenant in Isaiah, and although the relationship is only occasionally referenced explicitly, it is "everywhere assumed."<sup>14</sup> Judah related to Yahweh through covenant, a relationship they entered through blood and oath at Sinai, and which demanded both loyalty and obedience. Judah was offering neither.
3. Rebellion is expressed in several ways throughout the book:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 4:731.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

- a. *Idolatry*: Rather than keeping Yahweh as the sole object of worship and trust, Judah rebelled against God by recognizing the viability of pagan deities and elevating them in worship alongside or even in place of Yahweh (17:7-9).
- b. *Pride*: Throughout the book, pride surfaces as a key expression of humanity's rebellion against God. Whether it's Judah's propensity to fear and lionize the current political power (Isa 2:12-17), Assyria's insistence in autonomy and refusal to admit that "it is merely a tool in the hand of the Almighty (10:12-16)," <sup>15</sup> Babylon's lack of recognition of any other political power in the region (47:10-11), the arrogant self-elevation of Babylon's king (14:13-14), the self-adulation of Jerusalem's higher classes (3:16-23), or the self-righteous ridicule of the Judah's religious elites towards lower social and religious classes (65:1-5), rebellion against God is at the heart of it all.
- c. *Ritualism*: In both the beginning and the end of the book, Isaiah addresses the tendency of the people to associate religious performance and duty with real righteousness (1:10-15; 66:1-6). Pride remains the core issue. "Isaiah says, with the other prophets, that God does not want religious behavior, he wants godly behavior. But godly behavior is a matter of every day and a matter of laying aside one's prerogatives for the good of others. Religious behavior is much more satisfying and much more uplifting to the proud." <sup>16</sup>

#### G. *Salvation*

1. Salvation is, of course, a central theme of Isaiah's prophecies, but there is a surprising relationship that salvation has to God's judgment. At first blush, the two concepts seem to be contradictory. Yet this is the genius of Isaiah's message: the two actually work together, the one revealing the significance of the other, and vice versa.
2. Isaiah contains a "complete and thorough investigation of the relationship between judgment and salvation.... No other book explores in such depth the ways in which the tragedy of the dissolution of the two kingdoms and the ensuing Exile could be understood as serving God's larger plans rather than as destroying those plans. From a simplistic point of view, God must either keep his covenant with his people by delivering them from their enemies, or he must repudiate that covenant and deliver them up to their enemies. But Isaiah shows that the issue is not a matter of judgment or salvation, but of judgment as a means of salvation, or salvation made possible through judgment." <sup>17</sup>
3. Throughout Isaiah, salvation is linked to a key term: "righteousness." Not only does this word speak about God's requirements of his covenant people, but it also speaks of God's righteousness in delivering his people who have fallen under judgment for

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 4:725.

their *lack* of righteousness. Even further, it is also God's righteousness that enables his people to live righteously as the law requires.

4. From this, it is quite clear that Isaiah's message of salvation was exceedingly monergistic—salvation was fully and completely from God. Man (i.e., Judah) failed to achieve God's righteousness, but God will deliver man because of his righteousness, and enable him to live righteously.
5. This dynamic brings out an interesting paradox relating salvation and rebellion. Although Isaiah paints a vivid picture of humanity as utterly sinful and motivated by pride, rebellion, and self-righteousness, he maintains a hope in man's significance in God's economy. God has purposed from the beginning to work *through* people to fulfill his plans. Man's unwillingness to exalt God and instead his desire to exalt himself leads to futility and death. But when man acknowledges his helpless condition and humbles himself before a holy God, he finds in turn is exalted to a role of significance and stature. Therein lies the paradox that is repeated throughout the whole of Scripture: whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.
6. In Isaiah, salvation is holistic. It not only deals with merely "spiritual" concerns, it deals with very tangible realities as well. It is something that God accomplishes in time and space. It constitutes the outward aspects of life—physical bondage and captivity—as well as inner aspects of life—spiritual bondage and captivity. It offers hope for physical realities (release from physical captivity) and spiritual realities that lie under those physical realities (atonement through substitution).

#### H. *Messiah*

1. The final theme requiring discussion concerns Isaiah's emphasis on Messiah—an emphasis that is unrivalled among the prophets. Indeed, no other prophet emphasizes the person and role of Messiah more than Isaiah.
2. Yet Messiah's role in Isaiah is dependent on understanding all the other themes that have just been discussed. Just as judgment must come upon Judah, so too Yahweh will bring salvation to the nation, and the people will turn to him in faith.
3. Isaiah describes the coming of salvation using specific words and imagery which all point to the role of Messiah:
  - a. *Light*: imagery of light appears repeatedly throughout the text of Isaiah, especially as it marks the reversal of darkness (9:2; 42:16; 49:6; 58:8-11; 60:1, 19-20). In this, the light serves as a vivid picture of the deliverance from peril, from anguish, from sin, and from destruction. But it will be accomplished through an agent—a child (9:6), a servant (49:3, 6), etc.
  - b. *Child*: it is interesting that deliverance is linked in numerous places to a particular child. It is the sign of a child being born that will signal to Judah and to the House of David that Yahweh has faithfully delivered them from their enemies (7:14). And it is through the ministry of a child-king who will bring light out of darkness and usher in a new era in Israel's history (9:6-7).

- c. *Shoot/Branch*: out of the stubble wrought by divine judgment, the imagery of a shoot and a small branch serves to illustrate Yahweh's continuing guidance of Israel toward his ultimate purposes for them. He will not obliterate Judah completely. Rather, he will leave a stump from which a future Davidic king will emerge to rule over them in due time (11:1; cf. 4:2; 53:2).
- d. *Stone*: The picture of the stone in Isaiah is multifaceted. It is a standard of righteousness and justice set by which to measure Judah (28:16-17). And it is a refuge representing the rule of a righteous and just king (32:1-2). For those who place their trust in him, he serves as a refuge and a sanctuary, but he will be a stumbling stone for those who refuse to trust God alone (8:14).
- e. *Servant*: Israel is referred to as Yahweh's servant, in that they were supposed to be Yahweh's servants to the nation (42:19). But Judah's failure to live up to their responsibility required the coming of an individual who would walk as Yahweh's True Servant—True Israel. As a servant, he would be faithful and obedient in a way that the nation was not, and he would humbly perform the task that Yahweh had assigned him, including offering himself as a sacrifice for his people (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).
- f. *Second Moses*: Yahweh's servant will function in many ways as a second Moses, just like Israel's return from captivity is characterized by Isaiah as a second exodus (11:11-16; 40:3-5; 31:17-20; 42:14-16; etc.).

Characteristic	Second Moses	First Moses
Endued with Yahweh's Spirit	42:1	Num 11:25
Will Establish Justice	42:1, 3, 4	Deut 4:8
Will be Called by Yahweh	49:1-2	Exod 3:1-4:12
Will Give a Covenant	42:6; 49:8	Exod 24:1-11
Will Be Rejected	49:7; 50:6; 53:3	Exod 2:14; Num 12
Will Be Humble	42:2-3; 53:2	Num 12:3

- 4. In Isaiah, Messiah represents the confluence of God's sovereign lordship over creation, history, and redemption. His coming is the time when history points to God as redeemer of humanity.
- 5. This individual operates in two realms: He is at once the Davidic King and the Suffering Servant.
  - a. *Davidic King*: as the Davidic King, Messiah is seen as the individual who will right all the failures of David's house. Ahaz is the epitome of Davidic apostasy, particularly as he refuses to exercise trust in Yahweh (7:13). And even Hezekiah, while contrasting Ahaz's faithlessness, nevertheless demonstrates his incomplete faith which ultimately ends in exile (39:1-4). But Messiah will be an individual who will rise up as a shoot from the stump of Jesse (i.e., second David) and will rule with righteousness, justice, and equity. His rule will cover not just Judah and

Israel, but the whole world (11:1-5), and he will accomplish this via a childlike-ness that contrasts with the harsh rule of previous rulers (11:9).

- b. *Suffering Servant*: as the Suffering Servant, Messiah is seen as the individual that will bring salvation and the knowledge of God to the world. He will serve the nations the way Israel should have, bringing light and salvation to them—something they never received through Israel. In his humility, he will provide atonement for his people and for the world as well.
6. These two poles, while very much distinct, nevertheless intersect in the person of Messiah. The Davidic king will rule in righteousness and justice and peace, yet the Suffering Servant will bring justice to the nations (42:1; 49:6). The Suffering Servant will serve in humility, even dying for his people, while the Davidic King rules in childlike humility.

### III. Purpose

- A. *A holy Yahweh will not permit unholiness in his people, so he will therefore deal with them in such a way as to chasten and purge them and make them fit to participate in his program of extending his rule over the Gentiles.*
- B. All the major themes collide in this summarizing statement. Yet the emphasis is entirely Abrahamic—God’s ultimate purpose of universal blessing through the seed of Abraham.
- C. God’s purpose in the judgment of Judah—and climaxed in their deportation to Babylon—was ultimately salvific in nature. Through judgment emerges the salvation of a nation who is restored and prepared for Yahweh’s original intent: participation in God’s program for the world.

### IV. Literary Structure

- A. Scholars have submitted various approaches to understanding how Isaiah organized his oracles into a literary unit. All of them are based on various relationships and similarities which stand out to the observer.
- B. Of course, the liberal approach divides the book up into three sections by three different authors. As discussed earlier, this approach provides an insufficient account of the overall unity apparent in the book.
- C. On the whole, despite whatever differences in vocabulary, style, and thought, the book evidences strong unity throughout, and this unity can be seen through a number of different structural arrangements:

### VERBAL CONNECTIONS IN ISAIAH

INTRODUCTION	CONDEMNATION	CONNECTION		COMFORT
Title	Oracles	Historical Interlude		Oracles
Vision	Rebels against Yahweh (1:2)	701 B.C.	702/1 B.C.	Rebels against Yahweh (66:24)
Prophet	New Moon/Sabbath (1:13)	Faith of Hezekiah	Folly of Hezekiah	New Moon/Sabbath (66:23)
Focus	City a Harlot (1:21)			Rejoicing in Jerusalem (65:18)
Time	None to Quench (1:31)	Assyria's Defeat	Exile in Babylon	Not be Quenched (66:24)
1:1	1:2 35:10	36:1 37:38	38:1 39:8	40:1 66:24
Assyrian Background			Babylonian Background	

- D. **Introduction (1:1-5:30):** Additionally, the first 5 chapters function as an introduction to the whole. After the superscription (1:1), which provides some historical context for the book, 1:2-5:30 introduce the focus of the book as a whole: the contrast between Judah's current rebellious condition and its consequences and Judah's glorious future that awaits her following Yahweh's purifying judgment.
- E. **Transition (6:1-13):** Isaiah's famous vision and call to prophetic ministry (6:1-13) transitions the reader from the introduction to the first major section of the book. Isaiah's vision of Yahweh in his holiness, ruling on his throne in the temple, is the basis for Isaiah's depictions of God throughout the rest of the book. Additionally, his call to serve the Lord as a divine representative (6:8) becomes a paradigm of servanthood for the nation itself.
- F. **The Book of Judgment (7:1-35:10):** The first half of the book (chs. 7-35) focuses almost exclusively on the Assyrian threat and the need for Judah and its king to trust Yahweh for deliverance. At the forefront of this section—and serving as a representative for Judah as a whole—is Ahaz, who is placed in a dire circumstance where he must choose whether to place his trust in men or in God. His failure to trust God is a failure of the nation as a whole, and the remainder of the book outlines the supremacy of God over the nations and the imminent consequences of Judah's rebellion.
- G. **Historical Interlude (36:1-39:8):** In the center, there is an historical interlude—a narrative portion chronicling the definitive moment in Hezekiah's life. Here, he proves himself faithful by trusting Yahweh in the face of Assyrian siege. Yet he ultimately fails when he opens the temple's vaults to the Babylonian delegates. This interlude serves as the transition from Assyria to Babylon, from present to future, and from trust to servanthood.
- H. **The Book of Comfort (40:1-66:24):** The second half of the book (chs. 40-66) focuses on Babylon as the new threat—the new instrument that Yahweh will use to chasten Judah. Here, Isaiah's focus shifts from the present generation to those in the future who will experience the consequences of unbelief and rebellion. He encourages them to hope in Yahweh, who will faithfully redeem them physically from Babylon and spiritually through his servant, and ultimately restore them to a glorious future.

### SELECT MACRO OUTLINE APPROACHES TO ISAIAH

Chapters 1-33			Chapters 34-66		
Based on the 3 line gap in the 1QIsa <sup>a</sup> & the international focus of chaps 34-35.					
Chapters 1-39 Isaiah of Jerusalem			Chapters 40-55 Deutero-Isaiah		Chapters 56-66 Trito-Isaiah
A common division by critical scholars.					
Chapters 1-39			Chapters 40-66		
Simplest Division of the Book					
Chapters 1-35 The Book of Judgment			36-39 Historical Interlude		
Chapters 40-66 The Book of Consolation					
Contemporary Assyrian Context			Inverted Pivot		
			Futuristic Babylonian Context		
			Later Assyrian Crisis		
			Earlier Babylonian Compromise		
Separates the historical middle section to highlight its role as a hinge.					
Suggested Composite Outline					
Isaiah I: The Book of Judgment				Isaiah II: The Book of Comfort	
Chaps 1-6 Intro		Chaps 7-27 First Major Collection of Oracles		Chaps 28-39 Second Major Collection of Oracles	
Chaps 40-57 Oracles for those in Exile		Chaps 58-66 Oracles for those after the Exile			
Chaps 63-66, Future Judgment and Restoration		Chaps 60 - 62, The Future Glory of the Holy People and the Holy Land		Chaps 58-59, The Needs and Sins of the People of God	
Chaps 49-57, The Ministry of the Servant of the Lord		Chaps 40-48, Deliverance from Babylon		Chaps 38-39, Transition to Babylonian Crisis	
Chaps 36-37, Resolution of Assyrian Crisis		Chaps 34-35, Apocalyptic Conclusion to Woe Oracles		Chaps 28-33, Woe Oracles at Jerusalem's siege	
Chaps 24-27, Apocalyptic Conclusion to oracles against the nations		Chaps 13-23 Oracles against the nations		Chaps 7-12 Oracles growing out of the Syro-Ephraimite Conflict	
Chap 6, Commissioning		Chaps 1-5, Overture			
Adapted from Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, <i>A Survey of the OT</i> ; Herbert Wolf, <i>Interpreting Isaiah</i> ; Alec Motyer, <i>The Prophecy of Isaiah</i> ; <i>The ESV Study Bible</i>					

## V. Recommended Resources

Wolf, Herbert M. *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of Messiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985.

Oswalt, John N. *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

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———. *Isaiah*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Smith, Gary V. *Isaiah 1-39*. New American Commentary. Grand Rapids: B&H Publishing, 2007.

———. *Isaiah 40-66*. New American Commentary. Grand Rapids: B&H Publishing, 2009.