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ISAIAH: BOOK OF

Isaiah was a prophet who ministered in Judah in the last third of the eighth century bc (approximately 735–700 bc). The book records his sayings from that period but also includes a lot of material that relates to later times. Some believe that the same prophet was responsible for authorship of the whole book, but most scholars think that it was written by several authors over a long period of time. Recent work has emphasized, however, that this does not prevent study of the book as a whole and discussion of its teaching as a unity of some sort. In the NT, Isaiah is the most frequently cited of all the Prophetic Books, and a number of passages, whether messianic or not, have featured prominently in Christian liturgy and teaching, as well as in wider cultural works of art, literature and music.

1. Structure and Content

The book of Isaiah is long and, at first sight, bewildering in its variety. The following is a somewhat rough and abbreviated outline that may help with initial orientation.

1.1. Introduction. Isaiah 1 serves as an introduction to the book, not in the sense that it includes a summary of the whole (note, e.g., that there is nothing here about kingship), but rather that it mirrors the shape of the book and so invites a responsive reading. The nation is criticized for its defection from following the Lord and threatened with even worse punishment; the survival of even a remnant is already a mark of God's grace (Is 1:2–9; cf. Is 2–39). Despite severe disjuncture between religious practice and ethics, there is an offer of full *Forgiveness still open to those who are willing to respond (Is 1:10–20; cf. Is 40–55). This response is anticipated at the individual level rather than at the full national level, and those who reject it will be judged severely (Is 1:21–31; cf. Is 56–66).

1.2. Programmatic Statement. Isaiah 2–12 seems to contain a wide variety of different types of material, but it encapsulates many of the major themes that will recur. Following another introductory heading (Is 2:1), it puts forward a *vision of how things will be one day, with Zion exalted and all the *nations streaming in and out in order to learn of God's ways, the outcome of which will be world *peace (Is 2:2–4). However, "the house of Jacob" falls far short of the ideal required for the fulfilment of this vision (Is 2:5–6), and much of the remainder of the book is devoted to addressing this problem. Most of Isaiah 2–5 amplifies and condemns the nature of the people's sin and failure,

though Isaiah 4:2–6 keeps the vision alive with a glimpse of what *Zion could and will be.

Isaiah 6 marks something of a fresh start with Isaiah's vision of the exaltation of the Lord as king and warrior, his highly ambiguous, though threatening, commission of Isaiah as his spokesperson, and a solemn warning of the judgment that will come before there is any hope of restoration. In a mixture of third- and first-person material, Isaiah 7–8 then shows the outworking of this commission in the specific context of the Syro-Ephraimite crisis (*see* Israelite History), while Isaiah 9:1–7 issues a reminder that God can reverse his punitive acts of judgment and use a Davidic descendant to initiate his rule of *justice, righteousness and peace. Isaiah 9:8–10:34 generally renews the threats of judgment on both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah at the hands of the Assyrians, whereas Isaiah 11 again affirms the ideal of righteousness and peace that God will bring through his appointed king. Isaiah 12 rounds off this section with an anticipatory hymn of praise—a structural feature of Isaiah 40–55 as well, the language of Isaiah 12 being also familiar from there.

1.3. Oracles Concerning the Nations. Isaiah 13:1 has a heading that consciously balances that of Isaiah 2:1. Bearing the introductory vision in mind, Isaiah 13–23 is largely concerned with foreign nations, both those that were active in the region of Judah during Isaiah's own lifetime and others that became prominent only later. There are two exceptions: one concerns Jerusalem (apparently) at the end of Isaiah's ministry (Is 22), and the other is a short prose account of his actions during the revolt of Ashdod that helps to bind the two previous chapters (Cush and Egypt) together. While this material keeps the international dimension of the prophecy in mind in relation to Isaiah's own time, Isaiah 24–27 (often called the "Isaiah Apocalypse") transposes these concerns on to a more timeless and universal scale (see Sweeney 1988). As with the original vision, the shape of the book thus encourages reflection on the truths propounded beyond the narrow historical context of Isaiah's own lifetime.

1.4. Headlong to Disaster. About twenty years after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (see Is 28:1–6), most of Isaiah 28–39 charts the course of Judah's history through to an almost equally serious catastrophe in the outcome of the revolt of King Hezekiah against the Assyrians and Sennacherib's punitive invasion in 701 bc. Scathing condemnations of Judah's policies at this time are included, though there are also smaller passages interspersed that remind the reader that this is not God's last word. Isaiah 36–39 then recounts the course of Sennacherib's invasion in a manner closely parallel with 2 Kings 18–20. Although the outcome is a miraculous deliverance for Jerusalem, the last word is not hopeful, in that the story of the Babylonian envoys points forward to eventual *exile there (Is 39:6–7), so setting the scene for the following major section of the book. Before these narratives, Isaiah 34 again universalizes the word of judgment (it is not confined to Judah, therefore), while Isaiah 35 contrasts sharply by sketching the joy and praise that will be offered when God restores his people; the talk of the ransomed of the Lord returning and coming to Zion again strongly anticipates the next major section of the book, so that the chapter functions in a manner similar to Isaiah 12.

1.5. "Comfort My People!". Isaiah 40–55 breathes a significantly different atmosphere from the bulk of what has preceded. Although, as we have seen, there are some small anticipations, now the message is this: forget the former things, and look to

the new thing that God is doing. Cyrus, the coming Persian king who is named as God's messiah (Is 44:28; 45:1), is coming to take over oppressive Babylon (Is 41:2–4; 43:14–15; 45:1–7; 46–47) and to set in motion the ingathering of the dispersed people of Israel from there as well as from all four corners of the earth. The prophet's message throughout Isaiah 40–48, therefore, is meant to encourage the people to respond in faith in place of their current despair (e.g., Is 40:27). They may believe God's promise because of his power shown as creator, his superiority to the idols of the peoples (as seen in a series of courtroom-like trials), and because he controls the destiny of the nations.

Although the audience in Isaiah 49–55 seems to be largely the same, the tone of the writing is significantly different. The style is more intimate, with the people addressed now more as Zion, though the reassuring note and the expectation of joy remain.

This transition in style is mirrored in the transition in the role of the famous servant figure (for a messianic reading, see 5 below). In Isaiah 42:1–4 the servant was clearly Israel in some shape or form (see, e.g., the close similarities with Is 41:8–10), presented in royal guise as the one through whom God would bring justice to the nations. In Isaiah 49:1–6 this remains the final goal (see Is 49:1, 6), but the path to its realization has become more complex. The servant remains Israel (Is 49:3), but he now has first to restore the tribes of Jacob as a prior step in his mission. And what that will cost is spelled out in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, where the suffering is undertaken on behalf of "my people" (Is 53:8) but will astound and lead to a complete change of heart on the part of nations and kings (Is 52:13–15; 53:12; note how this may pick up on the witness of Is 40:5 and elsewhere).

1.6. The Reordering of a Godly Society. In many ways the last eleven chapters of the book (Is 56–66) are the most confusing. It may help to observe that Isaiah 60–62 is closest in thought to Isaiah 40–55, but now the standpoint seems to have switched back to the Jerusalem community. Prior to that there are passages apparently explaining why the promised deliverance has not turned out to be so glorious as had been hoped, and following it there is a long prayer of lament (Is 63:7–64:12) that complains again at the delay, to which the bulk of Isaiah 65–66 may be seen as the divine response. As part of these moves there is the start of a shift to a more individualized rhetoric. The community is divided between the righteous and the wicked, dependent upon repentance, so that the distinction between Israel and the nations begins to be transformed into a distinction between those of Israel and the nations who respond to God's call vis-à-vis those of either group who do not. Thus, at the start of the section (Is 56:1–8) and at the end (Is 66:18–24) we find introductory and concluding passages that show a remarkable universality about the potential of God's salvation, even though not all, by any means, avail themselves of it. In this way, the book concludes on a similar note to the end of the first, introductory chapter.

2. Survey of Scholarship on Composition

The preceding outline of the book has revealed a remarkable diversity of topics discussed and of historical situations presupposed by the author or authors of the various parts. Conservative scholars believe that all of this can be accommodated under the banner of predictive prophecy; probably late in his life, when Isaiah realized that

judgment was inevitable for the present dispensation, he was guided by God to foresee the eventual deliverance and restoration, including, for instance, the name of the Persian monarch Cyrus. It is often claimed that the NT references, which, it is thought, associate Isaiah with passages cited from the second half of the book, are conclusive in this argument. The majority of scholars, including many evangelicals, however, think that the evidence is better explained by the hypothesis that the book had more than one author. The hypotheses that have been advanced over the years differ considerably from one another, however, as the following highly selective and compressed survey will demonstrate.

2.1. Before 1892. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, earlier adumbrations by the medieval Jewish commentator Ibn Ezra (see Simon) were picked up by J. B. Koppe, J. C. Döderlein and, especially influentially, J. G. Eichhorn (see the survey in Vincent) to the effect that the second half of the book (from Is 40 on) was not written by Isaiah of Jerusalem in the eighth century bc but rather by an unknown prophet of the sixth century bc who directed his oracles toward the Judean exiles in Babylon. This view spread rapidly in the nineteenth century, so that although during those decades the most important work on Isaiah related to textual criticism and philology, the division of the book between two authors became something of a consensus position, attracting even the eventual agreement of the otherwise conservative F. Delitzsch in the fourth and final edition of his commentary.

2.2. Bernhard Duhm. In 1892 Duhm published the first edition of his commentary, which rapidly established itself as a classic. This is generally best known for two significant hypotheses, though a third is also of importance. First, Duhm argued for a third division of the book, following Isaiah 55, so that it now became common to speak of Proto-, Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah (Is 1–39; 40–55; 56–66). He demonstrated that just as Isaiah 40–55 presupposed a setting in the Babylonian exile, so Isaiah 56–66 presupposed a later situation back in the partially restored Jerusalem. Although Duhm himself did not hold this further opinion, it came to be widely believed that Deutero-Isaiah should be located in Babylon during the exile and Trito-Isaiah in Jerusalem at some time following the return from exile early in the Persian period.

Second, Duhm was the first to isolate as a separate composition the four so-called Servant Songs (*see* Servant of Yahweh) in the second half of the book (Is 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). He maintained that the presentation of this servant was so at variance with the faithless servant of the surrounding chapters that they could not have been held together in the mind of a single author. He thought that they had a quite separate origin, and that they were copied into conveniently blank spaces or margins in the manuscript of the larger book. Their present context therefore was not significant. This proposal has had a major bearing on many interpretations of these cardinal passages ever since, for it was considered even by conservative evangelicals somehow to give warrant to expounding them in isolation from their present literary setting.

Third, Duhm did not accept that all of Isaiah 1–39 should be attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem. Rather, he sought to press the evidence for different sections within these chapters as indicative of material of diverse origin, some of which (such as Is 24–27) certainly was very much later than Isaiah (and, indeed, later than some parts in the second half of the book as well). Because this third aspect of Duhm's commentary was not so startlingly original as the first two, it has not attracted the attention that they have.

Nevertheless, it contributed strongly to the growing tide of opinion that the first half of the book was written by several authors, stretching over several hundreds of years.

2.3. The Decades Following Duhm. As the influence of Duhm's major conclusions spread, it became common during much of the twentieth century to treat the various parts of the book in more or less complete isolation from one another. Books of introduction to the Bible had separate chapters on Isaiah of Jerusalem and Deutero-Isaiah, for instance, and these could be separated from each other if the treatment was chronological. Similarly, many commentary series assigned the different parts of the book to different commentators, and monographic studies focused their attention exclusively on one section or another. Scholarly trends in regard to each section differed starkly from one another.

2.3.1. Isaiah 1–39. Opinions regarding the composition of this part of the book have diverged more widely than any other, so that any summary is bound to be inadequate. Only a few significant trends can be mentioned.

The general tendency in the decades following Duhm was to find ever more divisions within these chapters. While it was relatively uncontroversial to ascribe the Isaiah Apocalypse (Is 24–27) to a late (and sometimes very late) period, this trend was quickly followed with regard to a number of the other oracles against the nations (e.g., the oracle against Babylon in Is 13–14 could not be earlier than the neo-Babylonian period, coinciding with the exile). In addition, Isaiah 35 obviously belonged closely with Isaiah 40–55 (note that Is 35:10 is more or less identical with Is 51:11), and Isaiah 34 went along with it. Isaiah 33 was also often seen as non-Isaianic, so that the end of the prophet Isaiah's own composition was found somewhere in the course of Isaiah 32.

A similar stripping off of material also characterized much of the opening chapters of the book. As we have already seen, parts of Isaiah 1 are close to the final chapters of the book and generally were thought to have been written at the same time. Isaiah 4:2–6 was more or less universally ascribed to an author in a late postexilic time, where several of its images find their closest parallels. Oracles of unconditional hope tended also to be denied to Isaiah of Jerusalem on the understanding that his ministry was primarily "negative" (see Is 6:9–10); this applied especially to the "messianic" passages in Isaiah 9:1–6; 11:1–9, but equally, the end of Isaiah 11 and especially Isaiah 12 were related closely with the work of Deutero-Isaiah. The same sort of conclusion was also drawn with regard to some of the more hopeful material in Isaiah 28–32. A standard English commentary such as that of G. Gray (covering Is 1–27 only) gives a fair and balanced discussion of these issues. What was noticeably missing, however, was serious exegetical attention to much of the material that was considered "later" or "secondary." There was an atmosphere in which early was considered best, or most important, so that little attention was given to how or why the larger work developed as it did. Moreover, virtually nobody writing during those decades considered how these chapters related to the second half of the book.

One significant and influential counter-theory, however, was that of K. Budde, who advanced the case that Isaiah 6:1–9:6 was entirely written by the prophet himself as what has come to be called the "Isaiah Memoir." While most of the theory and certainly the designation were more or less universally adopted, it is astonishing to find that within this Budde included material that in other respects certainly should have been considered "later," such as the last part of Isaiah 7, and equally that he lumped together

the third-person narrative in Isaiah 7:1–17 and the first-person accounts in Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 8. This had serious consequences for the understanding of Isaiah 7 in particular that only recently have begun to be unraveled.

2.3.2. Isaiah 40–55. By complete contrast with the treatment of Isaiah 1–39, scholars varied very little in their conviction that Isaiah 40–55 should be ascribed to the work of a great prophet in the Babylonian exile. Exceptions were made only for the Servant Songs and some of the anti-idol polemical passages (e.g., Is 40:19–20; 41:6–7; 44:9–20). Progress in research on these chapters was concentrated more on the increasingly sophisticated application of *Form Criticism, a method that detected comparable literary shapes between various passages that enabled them to be classified as trial speeches, oracles of salvation, disputations and so on. This had positive benefits: the otherwise rolling lyrical poetry could be divided into intelligible passages, and a meaningful social setting could be found for each type in a manner that led to a deeper appreciation of the rhetoric and encouraging argument of the prophet. This whole trend reached its climax in the commentary by C. Westermann, who both summarized and advanced research in this particular regard. It will have been in connection with the interpretation of the Servant Songs that opinions remained most widely divided.

2.3.3. Isaiah 56–66. Despite Duhm's breakthrough in connection with the last part of Isaiah, very few scholars after him found in these chapters the work of a single author. K. Elliger, as well as several Israeli scholars, with whom in this respect C. Torrey was in agreement, sought to uphold the authorial unity of the whole of Isaiah 40–66. The majority, however, considered that the diversity of material and viewpoint was indicative of the work of more than one writer working over an undefined period of time. If a majority viewpoint emerged, it will have been that again best represented in Westermann's commentary (see too Smith), in which Isaiah 60–62 is regarded as the earliest part, closely in succession to the views of Deutero-Isaiah. A sense of disillusion set in, however, when these promises appeared not to be being fulfilled in their entirety (see Is 58 for a clear example), and so the surrounding chapters came to be added in order to make clear what the conditions were that needed to be met as a first step. The decidedly universalist material at the start and close of the section might have been the final level of addition.

2.4. The Most Recent Trends. The last thirty years or so have witnessed several significant developments on many of these topics; although from one perspective they seem to be moving in opposite directions, there is an element of coherence that might permit the development of a new consensus. The key, it appears, is the increasingly sophisticated application of redaction criticism to the book in all its parts and as a whole (*see* Editorial/Redaction Criticism).

2.4.1. Isaiah 1–39. As far as the first part of the book is concerned, a significant development was initiated by H. Barth, who in 1977 argued in detail that many of the passages that had been regarded simply as random additions could be understood together as a single redaction in the reign of Josiah, the time that saw the sudden decline and eventual demise of the Assyrian Empire. Barth's proposal was adopted (with minor variations) by many leading commentators such as R. Clements, M. Sweeney and J. Vermeylen (who had reached many of the same conclusions independently). A similar, though less far-reaching, proposal was to find evidence for a redactional layer that related to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the exile of

many of the people (e.g., Clements 1980b). The significance of such proposals was to demonstrate that earlier work had overlooked historical levels of coherence within the book; that is, its literary growth was not random or haphazard, but rather at certain key points in the nation's history, leading religious thinkers returned to the valued work of their predecessors in order to find ways of continuing to apply their teaching to the changing circumstances.

Another way in which this same development was advanced concerned the prose narratives about Isaiah (Is 7:1–17; 20; 36–39). These are told in the third person and thus were unlikely to have been written by the prophet himself. Furthermore, they have a number of significant points of connection between them (see, e.g., Conrad, 38–40) indicating that they may have been derived from a single source; parts were also used, of course, in the composition of the books of Kings. While they include good historical memory, the question of the present positioning in the book is fertile ground for redaction criticism; for instance, Isaiah 7:1–17 applies the "hardening" saying of Isaiah 6:9–10 to the individual person of the king, whereas Isaiah 8 does so to the people as a whole; Isaiah 20 served to bind together the two previous chapters relating to Cush and Egypt, and Isaiah 36–39 draws out the consequences of all the preceding judgment oracles while at the same time pointing forward to the second part of the book. It remains a challenge to the interpreter, however, to hold together the generally positive presentation of Hezekiah in these chapters with the harsh criticism of what has to have been his own policies in some of the preceding chapters (Is 28–31).

2.4.2. Isaiah 40–55. In recent decades a strange division has opened up between German-speaking and English-speaking scholars with regard to the composition of these chapters. Whereas generally the latter have tended to continue to hold to the essential unity of authorship (although, following the lead of H. Barstad, there has been some debate about whether the author should be located in Babylon or Judah), the former have moved toward a much more complicated presentation. In many monographs, as well as now in some commentaries, the material is thought to have developed in multiple phases. An initial core may have gone through as many as five or six subsequent stages of expansion, the result being that it is not really meaningful to talk of Deutero-Isaiah any more, at least if by that a single author is implied. The theories inevitably differ somewhat one from another, so that in earlier years it was difficult to know how to evaluate them. More recently, however, they have been brought together into a fine synthesis by R. Albertz, so that one can now begin at least to see the forest from the trees in this regard.

Two points may be made about this particular development, which many people find puzzling when first encountered. First, there is certainly a division of some sort within Isaiah 40–55 following Isaiah 48. After Isaiah 48 there are no more trial scenes or anti-idol polemic; there is no more reference to the fall of Babylon; there is no further reference or allusion to Cyrus; Zion is addressed in a far more extended manner than previously; finally, Isaiah 48:22 obviously marks the end of a section, as a comparison with Isaiah 57:21 makes clear, and Isaiah 49:1–6 (the second Servant Song) is itself a passage that speaks of transition. To the extent that these new theories make us sensitive to the differences between the parts of Deutero-Isaiah, they should be welcomed, even if we do not accept all of their conclusions.

Second, as we will see shortly, some of this detection of redactional layering is due to the consequence of reading these chapters not in isolation, as had been the previous tendency, but rather within the context of the book of Isaiah as a whole; the detection of some connections with earlier or later passages obliged some scholars to seek a redactional explanation, not least because they still held to the likelihood that the core of these chapters began its life independently of the remainder of the book.

2.4.3. Isaiah 56–66. Work on these chapters has apparently been less dramatic because it effectively continues the kinds of development just described. That is to say, on the one hand, there is greater openness to finding more layers within the text than was previously entertained, and on the other hand, there is an increasing tendency to associate this with the development of the book as a whole. Regardless of opinions about the origins of Isaiah 40–55, most scholars are agreed that Isaiah 56–66 was not written in isolation from what precedes. Thus, one's understanding of the growth of the earlier parts of the book is likely to affect how one envisages the process in these closing chapters as well.

2.4.4. The Book of Isaiah as a Whole. This survey of recent developments in scholarship with regard to the various parts of the book must be put in subservience, as it were, to the most dramatic change of opinion in recent decades: the rediscovery of the book's essential unity. For most scholars, this is not what might be identified as a unity of authorship; instead, it is an acknowledgment that the various parts of the book developed not in isolation from one another but rather as part of a dynamic, and to some extent integrated, process of growth. In this, multiple examples of apparent literary dependence of one passage upon another and of the use of clauses and phrases (such as "the Holy One of Israel") that are rare or nonexistent elsewhere in the OT have been major contributory factors.

I have offered a detailed survey of the origins of this development elsewhere, crediting the work of numerous scholars (Williamson 1994, 1–18). There remains an important distinction, however, between those who conceive the unity as being seen only in the relatively late welding together of originally separate compositions (so prominently O. Steck with his pupils and followers) and those, such as myself, who believe that the later parts of the book were written in the first place only in order to carry forward the earlier parts that were at those authors' disposal. Thus, I sought to demonstrate that Isaiah 40–55 was directly influenced by an earlier form of Isaiah 1–39, that its author envisaged himself as proclaiming the deliverance that Isaiah had so long anticipated (see especially Is 8:16–18; 30:8 for evidence that this was specifically written down with an eye to the future), and that he edited the first part of the work specifically so that the two parts could be read together as a pair in relation to the end of the Babylonian exile (see, e.g., the role and position of Is 12, and the positioning of the oracle against Babylon as first among the oracles against the nations). Most recently, J. Stromberg has taken this suggestion forward to find a similar sort of process at work in relation to Isaiah 56–66 and the remainder of the book.

2.5. Some Conclusions. The view is sometimes expressed that there is so much diversity of scholarly opinion that none of it can be of any solid worth. This is a mistake. On the one hand, biblical scholars do not disagree any more than do other people on other issues in all walks of life; what counts is not so much the answers that are proposed as the fact that all the scholars, in careful consideration of the material at

hand, come up with related questions. On the other hand, there is a developing agreement with regard to Isaiah that a pathway through the book's undoubted complexities is probably best sought in terms of literary history insofar as that can be traced by the observance of how one passage may be dependent in some way upon another. Where does this lead us, and what are its consequences for the ultimately more important task of interpretation?

First, I do not find the idea of unity of authorship to be either plausible or necessary. Despite frequent claims to the contrary by conservative scholars, this conclusion has nothing to do with belief or not in the power of predictive prophecy; after all, there is still predictive prophecy included in all parts of the book even on the most radical of critical positions. The issue turns rather on three considerations. (1) The setting presupposed by different parts of the book varies considerably. Much of Isaiah 40–55, for instance, takes its standpoint with those who have suffered judgment in the past and should now be anticipating deliverance; what sense would that make in the eighth century bc? If a concept of divine inspiration lies behind the view that all of this material was written at that earlier date, it would mean that God did not speak in a way that was intelligible to its audience at the time of delivery, so that this flies in the face of Christian understandings of the word of God, seen ultimately in incarnation. (2) The messages of the different parts of the book are so diverse that they cannot be understood as other than accompanying historical change. If all of them were delivered and considered together in the eighth century bc, they would be contradictory; it is only as they are related to different periods that the underlying unity becomes meaningful. Thus, to deny the probability that the book grew over a considerable period of time is to empty it of a major hermeneutical key. (3) The NT references do not alter this conclusion, since the use in those contexts of "Isaiah" may be perfectly well understood as a reference to the book, not the author. The only passage where the prophet himself is involved in action rather than as speaker or author in the argument is at John 12:41 ("Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him" [nrsv]), and there the citation from Isaiah 6 poses no difficulty.

Second, even though the results of redaction criticism as outlined above may differ between scholars, there are three major underlying gains for interpretation in the newer approaches adopted over the last twenty or thirty years. (1) It is unusual now to find material simply dismissed as "late" or "additional." Regardless of quite when or by whom a verse or passage was added, the first question nowadays is to ask after the rationale of this addition at just this point in the text. In other words, redaction criticism makes commentators and preachers more aware of the depth in the text and drives them to probe that creatively rather than to try to underplay its significance. (2) Redaction criticism has opened up in principle the legitimacy of interpreting one part of the book in the light of the whole. As will be illustrated below, many themes are treated in complementary ways in the different parts of the book, the variety being due to the differing historical circumstances. At any given time, expositors today may believe that it is necessary to stress one aspect or another—for instance, severe critique of hypocrisy, or the liberating message of sin forgiven and an open pathway into the future. However, the book will always bring balancing features into play that need also to be included—for instance, the changing impact of *repentance in humility in the first case, and the fact that there is no cheap *Forgiveness in the second. (3) Because redaction criticism

works primarily through the detection and evaluation of literary associations across many passages, it deflects the commentator's attention from too heavy a preoccupation with the precise historical dating of any saying (a quest that usually cannot be answered with any certainty because we lack so much of the necessary data) and focuses attention instead on an interpretation of the text that we have and with which we can deal more securely. After a brief look at the state of the text of Isaiah, we will move on to consider some of the major theological themes in the book in the light of these conclusions.

3. The Text of the Book of Isaiah

The position with regard to the Hebrew *text of the book of Isaiah is not as complicated as in the case of many others, such as Jeremiah. Most versions of the printed Hebrew Bible, on which English and other translations are based, are a copy of a manuscript dating from 1008 or 1009 and now housed in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg.

Uniquely, a more-or-less complete copy of Isaiah has been preserved among the *Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from the first pre-Christian century (i.e., over a millennium earlier than anything that was previously available). In addition, substantial parts remain in another manuscript, also found in Cave 1 when the scrolls were first discovered in the late 1940s. For an edition of both scrolls, see Ulrich and Flint. In addition, fragments (often very small) of some eighteen further manuscripts of Isaiah (or at least parts of it) were found in Cave 4, and they too have now been published (Ulrich et al.).

The Cave 4 fragments and 1QIsa^{b} are quite similar to the later traditional mt (although without the vocalization, of course). In the case of 1QIsa, however, there are many more variants. The overwhelming majority of these are of a linguistic nature (e.g., there is evidence of influence from Aramaic) or due to variations in spelling. In a major study, E. Kutscher concluded that the scroll was textually inferior to the mt, and although he may have pressed his case too far, generally he was correct. It therefore is clear that all the new evidence confirms that there is only a single textual tradition with regard to the book of Isaiah, so that each attested variant should be evaluated on its merits, not according to some other wider textual hypothesis. Nonetheless, there are a few passages where these recently discovered older manuscripts probably preserve more ancient readings, and these are usually adopted in modern translations; in the rsv there are just under twenty such readings adopted (though most readers remain unaware of the fact, which indicates that they are not of major import).

Among the ancient translations that predate the medieval manuscript, the same broadly conservative conclusion is also mostly justified. The Greek rendering (the lxx), however, raises particular questions of its own, and these are important because the translation was undertaken even earlier than the time of the DSS. It often seems to be a relatively free rendering, and this sometimes can make it difficult to know whether it is a rendering of the Hebrew text as we know it or whether it attests some variant reading. This translation is the subject of much debate in its own right, there being a sharp difference of opinion over whether, for all its freedom, its renderings are to be accounted for as an attempt to translate the text alone or whether the translator has also introduced significant theological or sociological interpretations of his own (for a survey

of opinions, see Troxel). Whichever of these two positions is correct, it is agreed that the lxx also generally attests the form of the Hebrew text as we know it, and that only occasionally may it be cited as evidence for superior readings.

While all these considerations mean that the text of Isaiah is a continuing subject of lively debate, their bearing on the general reader is strictly limited. We may be confident that the text of the book is relatively secure.

There remain a number of elements in the vocabulary of the book whose meaning is not precisely known (especially in the realms of technical botany, clothing and the like). Sometimes, discoveries of inscriptions or parallels in related languages shed light on these problems, but readers need to be aware of the tentative nature of many such proposals.

4. Two Major Theological Themes

Even in a relatively lengthy dictionary article such as the present one, it is impossible to present a full survey of all the teaching of the book in each of its parts. In the following I will outline two of the major distinctive elements that straddle the book as a whole—one on the nature of God, the other on human response—in order to illustrate the importance of the recent rediscovery of the book's unity for responsible exegesis. (Other important themes could equally well have been chosen, such as *Zion [on which, see Maier] or the development and reversal of the "hardening" saying of Is 6:9–10 [on which, see Uhlig].) At the end, I will add a separate section on the messianic passages, for which the book is especially well known.

4.1. God

4.1.1. God as "High and Lifted Up." Few would doubt that Isaiah's call or commissioning (it is not quite clear which it is) as recorded in Isaiah 6 was a foundational experience for the prophet, just as its recorded version in writing has become for the development of the book as a whole. Its vocabulary and themes are constantly cited or alluded to elsewhere, and of course its influence on later theology and liturgy is pervasive.

It starts with a vision of God in all his royal majesty (he is called "the king" in Is 6:5), and in Isaiah 6:1 the words "high and lifted up" appear. Grammatically, it is not quite clear whether these words apply directly here to God or whether they instead qualify the throne on which he is sitting. Either way, however, as we will see shortly, they came in the course of time to be understood as referring to God.

From this opening statement, a number of other characteristic phrases and words may be seen to take their natural place. The use of the "holiness" word group in relation to God is prominent (see further below). "Glory" is another favorite term in the book, and it takes its place alongside "holy" as early as Isaiah 6:3 in the praise of the seraphim in the Trisagion (the proclamation that begins "Holy, holy, holy"). From there the language ripples out in several different directions. Another characteristic title for God is "the Lord of hosts" (again, starting from Is 6:5), the "hosts" in this context almost certainly being the heavenly armies of the divine king. This too adds to the impression of all-powerful and completely dominating divine power.

Appreciation of this exalted majesty of God undoubtedly was a dominating consideration for Isaiah in his theological worldview. He has a strong sense of hierarchy

and a consequent appreciation that it is important for each part of the created order to know its place. At the simplest level, therefore, anything else that claims a "high and lifted up" position is doomed to destruction because it manifests hubris in the face of the only truly exalted one, God himself. Thus, the several occurrences of these words with relation to trees, mountains, towers and the like in Isaiah 2:12–17 are sufficient to explain without further justification why the Lord of hosts has a day against them, "against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high."

The same principle then explains Isaiah's theology in relation to Assyria, for instance. As long as Assyria acts in judgment even against Judah, it is regarded as God's minister, as "the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury! Against a godless nation I send him" (Is 10:5–6). But as soon as the Assyrians exceed their God-given brief and start to act in arrogant independence (Is 10:7–14), their own fate is sealed (Is 10:15–19), for this again is a clear example of hubris. This pattern we find repeated elsewhere.

This theology translates downwards, we may also note in passing, into Isaiah's understanding of the proper ordering of society. There are aspects of this that some today might well find inappropriate or distasteful, though it should be remembered in partial mitigation that Isaiah has an equally strong sense that those higher up the ladder have correspondingly larger responsibilities to care for those lower down. Nevertheless, it is helpful to appreciate the theology on which some of these more challenging passages, such as Isaiah 3, are based.

If this brief characterization of God in the first part of the book is correct, then it is of more than passing interest to see how it is handled later on, not least because of the ways, as we have noted, one part of the book often is balanced in important ways by another. The most striking way into this is the use of the same vocabulary in reference to God (and where, indeed, "high and lifted up" has actually become a divine title) in Isaiah 57:15: "For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (nrsv). The majesty of God as recapitulated from the first part of the book is here shown not to make him necessarily remote, as we might otherwise suppose. Rather, when God's majesty encounters people of a suitably contrasting disposition, he is said to dwell with them quite as much as in the high and holy place. The same sentiment exactly is echoed in Isaiah 66:1–2, which concludes, "But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word" (nrsv).

This balancing between the parts of the book could be developed further in this regard, of course, but it serves as a reminder once again of the need to consider each individual part of the book in the light of the whole. On this occasion, there is just one further dimension that should be added here, for this same language recurs at the start of the fourth of the Servant Songs, at Isaiah 52:13: "See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (nrsv). This is a remarkable statement of how the servant will share the status and designation that previously we had thought was reserved exclusively for God. It comes in the introduction to a passage of extended reflection on rejection and suffering and anticipates (as is not unusual in Hebrew narrative) the outcome of the sequence of events that is to follow (cf. Is 53:12, which brings us back to the same point as this opening). Of the many insights that this affords, let it suffice here to state the obvious: when God finds an attitude of acceptance

of his will in the service of others, no matter what the cost, he is prepared against all expectation to share the highest honors with his servants.

4.1.2. "The Holy One of Israel." A comparable, though slightly more complex, pattern may be traced with regard to the distinctive divine title "the Holy One of Israel." This occurs twenty-five times in Isaiah, and there are a few similar related expressions in addition. This sometimes has mistakenly been cited as evidence of unity of authorship; however, its usage is more interesting than that (for the following, see Williamson 2001).

It is probable (in view of Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:18) that this title was in infrequent use in the Jerusalem cult. Isaiah's experience of the thrice-holy God (Is 6:3) may have led him to make use of it, even though the title itself does not occur in that chapter. On normal critical grounds, some five occurrences may be ascribed to him, mostly from the later part of his ministry. In these cases, as Isaiah 6 might lead us to expect, God's holiness stands in contrast with Judah's faithlessness, so that the title is used in connection with coming judgment. In this, Isaiah will have been turning cultic expectations on their head: the God whom the psalms led the people to believe would fight on their behalf turns out, in his sovereignty, to be the one who is planning their judgment for sin.

In the second part of the book, however, the exact opposite situation obtains. The judgment now is pictured as past, and the prophet seeks to turn his people's attention forward to the creatively new work that God is about to do. As part of that, the familiar title, which has come to be seen as threatening, is turned again to announce that the free and sovereign Lord is able to work as vigorously and surprisingly in grace as he had in judgment; all thirteen examples of the usage there are uniform in this regard. This therefore opens the reader up to a new appreciation of the rich character of God, who is not bound by institution or routine but rather is free to respond to his people's situations in ways that constantly take them unawares and ultimately, so far as this book proclaims, in grace.

Finally, we should note that while some of these later positive uses are reflected in what most scholars regard as positive redactional passages in Isaiah 1–39, the title drops almost completely from use thereafter. There are only two occurrences in Isaiah 56–66, one of which (Is 60:9) is merely a citation of Isaiah 55:5, and the other of which (Is 60:14) may be an echo of Isaiah 12:6. It then does not occur at all in the later material such as Isaiah 24–27; 34–35. Careful attention to the literary contexts of the title's use thus opens up an illuminating theology in this particular regard.

4.2. Justice and Righteousness. In common with some other parts of the OT, as well as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, the first half of the book of Isaiah stresses the need for *"justice and righteousness" in various spheres of life. There are some dozen occurrences of this word pair. Such language is not in common use today, and thus it requires some explanation.

By observing uses in context, including topics with which these values are contrasted, we soon learn that this goes far beyond just the administration of the criminal legal system (though that is included). It speaks instead of the need for probity, including compassion, in all walks of social and political life; one scholar has even gone so far as to gloss it with the phrase *"Social Justice." This may have taken very different forms in antiquity than it does today, but the general area is one of obviously continuing need at various levels of local, national and international life.

According to Isaiah's presentation, these qualities used to be characteristic of Zion in what he portrays as the golden era of Davidic rule, even though things have declined seriously since (Is 1:21–23). He concludes his parable of the vineyard by asserting that God still looks for these qualities in the present time, but instead he finds only their opposite: bloodshed and the cry of oppression (Is 5:7, with the clever use of word play). However, he is confident that they will once again characterize the restored Zion of the future, as pictorially God as builder of the new city declares, "I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet" (Is 28:17 nrsv). Their importance is underlined still further by the fact that they should be the concern of the ideal king (Is 32:1) and indeed will be of the royal child whose birth is announced in Isaiah 9:6–7. Many other passages could be cited where these words either occur together or on their own to demonstrate how central a concern this was to Isaiah and how the perversion of justice and righteousness was a significant cause of the judgment that he anticipated.

When we turn to the next part of the book, however, we find a remarkable contrast. To be sure, there are some elements of continuity (e.g., in Is 42:1–4, though the words "justice" and "righteousness" do not appear in tandem at any point in Isaiah 40–55), but more commonly we find "righteousness" singled out and used in a very different way. It appears several times in parallel with the word for *"salvation," so that whereas in Isaiah 1–39 it was something that persons in positions of responsibility had to do or perform, now it becomes part of the gracious deliverance and provision by God. There are those, indeed, who understandably would translate it as "victory" or "deliverance" in these chapters; examples include Isaiah 41:10; 45:8; 46:13; 51:5, 6, 8.

Finally, and remarkably, we find that these two apparently contrasting uses are brought into relationship in the twofold use of the word at the very start of the third section of the book, Isaiah 56:1: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed" (rsv) (see Rendtorff). Here the parallel form familiar from Isaiah 1–39 reappears in the first line as an urgent imperative, whereas in the following lines "righteousness" (the rendering of the rsv, which I have cited, is "deliverance") is used in parallel with "salvation," as in Isaiah 40–55, as indicative of God's imminent deliverance and as motivation to obey the command of the first line. This theologically rich intertwining of the two preceding sections of the book is then taken up and developed in various ways in the concluding chapters.

The foregoing remarks are only the sketchiest outline of a topic of central importance to the book. The striking balance introduced in Isaiah 56:1 needs constantly to be kept in mind, however. In some situations it may be necessary to focus on the practice of justice and righteousness and so to concentrate on one or more of the relevant passages in the first half of the book. It would be a mistake, however, to leave the matter there, for there is also a rich source of encouragement from reflection on God's correspondingly salvific righteousness. Conversely, the need may be for the dispirited to be comforted by the good news of God's deliverance as joyfully proclaimed in so much of the second part of the book, but here too it would be unbalanced so to concentrate on that without any indication that God looks for a response in gratitude in the treatment of others. The recovery of the sense of the book's unity thus brings balance to our understanding of its teaching with regard to human response.

5. King and Messiah

Isaiah has several classical *messianic prophecies that feature regularly in most church lectionaries. They raise many exegetical problems, however, so that a few words of guidance here may be helpful. Included prominently among these passages (though there are a few others that are less well known) are Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7; 11:1–9; 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–4. (For the following, see more fully Williamson 1998.)

In terms of a traditional Christian reading of these passages, there are two main dangers. First, often they are applied so directly to Jesus that they are treated in willful disregard of their present immediate context in Isaiah. The bits that fit the NT tend to be pulled out with no attempt to relate them to other things that are equally prominent in the passage under consideration. Second, there is a tendency to stress so emphatically that Jesus has fulfilled these prophecies that they are emptied of any other content, including matters that should be prominent in our exegesis.

The first point to notice is that the emphasis falls more on the task that the figure is to perform than on the identity of the figure in question. In Isaiah 9:6–7, for instance, the whole drive of the prophecy is that the child has been given in order to establish and uphold the kingdom "with justice and with righteousness," so that this fits closely with the theme that we surveyed briefly in the preceding section. We can well imagine that such hopes would have attended the birth of any royal child in ancient Judah; surely, this new prospective king will improve the social circumstances of the kingdom over the present state of affairs. The focus in Isaiah 11 turns out, upon inspection, to be not so very different. It is also immediately in line with the proverbial saying of Isaiah 32:1: "A king should reign in the interests of righteousness, and princes rule for the furtherance of justice."

The case of the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 is different. So far as its immediate context is concerned, the child in question clearly is to be born in the immediate future, as the close link with the promise of deliverance from the threat of the invading Syro-Ephraimite coalition makes clear in the two following verses. Furthermore, there is no direct statement as to the identity of the child's mother. The three main views are (1) he is another child of the prophet, as with the children in Isaiah 7:8; 8:1–4 (see too Is 8:18); (2) he is in some way a member of the royal household, perhaps even a child of King Ahaz, as the several references to the Davidic house in Isaiah 7:1–17 might lead one to suppose; (3) he is no specific child, but generically just any children who are born to Judean mothers in the very near future. Even if we prefer the second option (which I regard as marginally the most probable), this does not make it a long-term messianic prophecy as usually understood. The messianic interpretation is familiar from the citation in Matthew 1:22, of course. The legitimacy of that is not a question of historical exegesis of the text as it stands in Isaiah (where equally the mother of the child is not specifically identified as a virgin, though the word in question does not rule out such an interpretation either); rather, it needs to be justified through the path of the history of interpretation and the manner of the citation of the OT in the NT (a topic that runs beyond the parameters of the present article).

When we turn to the second half of the book, we find that the political conditions have changed completely, and that the royal hopes of the first half of the book are turned now to the community of God's people in relation to the nations (see Is 55:3). The essential task remains, however: three times it is stressed in Isaiah 42:1–4 that this new "servant king," clearly identified in context as Israel/Jacob (see the similar language

used of Israel in Is 41:8–13 as of the unnamed servant in Is 42:1–4), will "bring forth justice to the nations." The relation of the servant and the nations is also the dominant topic in the second Servant Song (Is 49:1–6), while in the third (Is 52:13–53:12) it is also prominent, as the opening and closing verses indicate. As with the anticipated king in the first half of the book, therefore, the main point to grasp is that the figure portrayed whom we now read in messianic terms is defined by his or their role in relation to justice and peace brought to others (in Israel to start with and then internationally) (for sensible guidance on the controversial question of whether the prophet should be characterized as a nationalist or a universalist, see Van Winkle).

At Isaiah 54:17 we have the only reference in Isaiah 40–55 to the servants (plural) of the Lord, and again in this verse the familiar pair of "justice and righteousness" appears, albeit in a varied form: they are promised that they will be vindicated against any who rise up against them in judgment (the same word as "justice"), while equally their vindication ("righteousness") is guaranteed by the Lord. As others have noted (e.g., Jeppesen; Beuken 1990; Blenkinsopp 1997), this verse forms a bridge into the final section of the book, where, as we saw in our introductory survey, there is a more individualized portrayal of the community of God, and where correspondingly the servants of the Lord are always plural—a collection of faithful people rather than a community regarded as a single entity. Thus, in terms of a messianic reading, the focus moves once again under the pressure of changing national and social conditions away from the exilic community regarded in royal terms as the bearer of promise and hope for the nations toward a world in which individuals are responsible for their own condition before God and consequently as a witness to his concern for social well-being.

In these changed circumstances the people are beginning to wonder why all the great promises do not seem to have been realized in the spectacular fashion that they perhaps had hoped for. Nevertheless, the figure in Isaiah 61:1–3 recapitulates many of the characteristics of the earlier messianic passages and emphasizes again that he will come to proclaim deliverance for the oppressed, which was an integral element of justice as envisaged in this book. He seems to gather up into himself many of the tasks that had previously been identified separately, and in that way its use by Jesus at the start of his ministry (Lk 4:16–21) may be regarded as supremely appropriate.

This brief sketch suggests that these are passages that indicate God's purpose for a broken nation and a distressed world. That nation and that world move through all sorts of different circumstances, but the vision remains constant. When Jesus came, he lived in a situation that again was not directly envisaged in Isaiah: an artisan living under oppressive foreign occupation. Christians believe that in that very situation he demonstrated to perfection what it means to inaugurate justice under the constrained political circumstances within which he had to operate. His concern for the outcast, his care for the suffering, and his love for the unloved are part of that work, and supremely, of course, his journey to the cross and his death there fulfilled the work of reconciliation between humanity and God in a way that even surpasses what had previously been envisaged.

This does not, however, exhaust those prophecies. We should not understand their fulfilment in Christ in such a way that we do not realize that the tasks posed for the kings and servants of antiquity remain open and necessary still in the modern world. Justice, righteousness and peace at all levels, from international relations all the way

down to those at the bottom of the social heap in our own neighborhoods, have not yet been fully realized. To hear these passages read during Advent or in Holy Week is not to encourage a smug feeling that all that has been taken care of by Christ; rather, it is to remind us that as imitators of him, we are challenged to implement these same costly and tiring values in our own changed circumstances.

See also Isaiah: History of Interpretation; Prophets in the New Testament; Servant of Yahweh; Zion.

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