ISAIAH

A COVENANT TO BE KEPT FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHURCH

'Allan Harman's 'Isaiah' has made me wish wholeheartedly that I could start all over again. The detailed interpretative work is superb.'
Alec Motyer

ALLAN HARMAN

CHRISTIAN FOCUS

To the students
of the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne
1975-2001
with whom I studied the prophecy of Isaiah


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Abbreviations

ANE	*The Ancient Near East,* 2 vols., ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
AV	Authorised (King James) Version
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
CHAL	*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew,* ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-).
DOTT	*Documents from Old Testament Times,* ed. D. W. Thomas (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1958).
ESV	English Standard Version
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., Gesenius, Kautsch, Cowley, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).
1QIsa^{a}	A complete manuscript of the book of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.
1QIsa^{b}	An incomplete, and poorly preserved, manuscript of the book of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
LXX	The Septuagint, the oldest and most important Greek translation of the OT made in Egypt about 250 BC.
mg.	margin
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MT	Massoretic Text, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that became recognised as authoritative after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	*New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas (London: Inter-Varsity, 1962).
NEB	New English Bible
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
part.	participle
REB	Revised English Bible

RSV	Revised Standard Version
RTR	*Reformed Theological Review*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
TB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

Note: When referring to passages in the Old Testament in which the covenant name of God occurs (*yhwh*), the form 'LORD' is used. This is in accordance with the practice of English versions, the form 'Lord' being reserved for the translation of words other than *yhwh*.

Glossary

bulla	An impression stamped on a piece of soft clay (and then hardened) used to seal documents.
Dead Sea Scrolls	About 800 scrolls containing all or part of Old Testament books discovered at or near Qumran, on the north-western side of the Dead Sea.
fixed pair	The term 'fixed pair' refers to words that regularly occur in parallel expressions in Hebrew, e.g. head/skull, earth/dust, mouth/lip.
hapax legomenon	A word occurring only once. (pl. *hapax legomena*)
inclusio	A literary device by which a repeated theme both introduces and concludes a passage, so marking it as a separate section.
Qere	A Massoretic marginal note to the Hebrew text meaning 'that which is to be read' (in place of 'that which is written', the Ketiv).
stela	An upright stone monument bearing an inscription.
targum	An Aramaic translation or paraphrase of some part of the Old Testament. They were oral at first but were later written. The earliest examples (from Qumran) are from the second century BC.
theophany	A visible appearance of God.
trisagion	The threefold declaration of God's holiness ('holy, holy, holy').




Foreword

This is the third major Old Testament book on which I have been privileged to comment, all of which have been published by Christian Focus Publications (*Psalms* in 1998 and *Deuteronomy* in 2001). As with my previous books I acknowledge my indebtedness to many previous writers whom I have read over the years, and whose views have now become part of my own thinking and are indistinguishable from it.

As is the case with my other commentaries I have considered it my main aim as a commentator to set out the meaning of the Hebrew text for modern readers. I do not think a commentator's role is simply to give a distillation of the views of previous commentators. Hence, while I have had many commentaries near at hand as I have written, yet I have found it more beneficial at the early stages of writing to refer much more to Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries such as the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* and the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Hebrew grammars such as *Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley* and the magisterial *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by Waltke and O'Connor have been indispensable. At a later stage of writing I have referred to other secondary literature on Isaiah, both books and journal articles, and some of these are documented in footnotes.

Two other commentators on Old and New Testament books respectively have clearly taken a similar approach to my own. The late Dr. Allan MacRae, when writing on Isaiah 40:1–58:8, said this:

> Most commentaries tend to repeat one another's mistakes, and they often jump to conclusions based on the presuppositions of their writers. There is no great profit in playing one off against another. Some commentaries contain useful discussions of linguistic points; others present helpful devotional material. It is rare for one to attempt that comparative study of Scriptural passages that forms a vital part of the approach to this study.[1]

A similar approach has also been taken in regard to writing New Testament commentaries by Dr. Leon Morris. He has described his own method as follows:

When it comes to the actual writing of the commentary, I find it best to

[1] Allan A. MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah* (Moody Press, 1977), p. 188.

> work through either the whole book or a section of it writing furiously but without making any reference to other commentaries nor for that matter articles or general works. This gets onto paper what the book means for me and it means that the final shape of the book is my own, not a pale adaptation of some other writer who has impressed me. It may be that some other writers are more strong-minded than I, but I find that if in this first stage I refer to other writers I tend insensibly to be influenced by what they say. So at this stage I write out of my own head, with the comforting assurance that this draft is invariably headed for the waste paper basket anyway.[2]

I have chosen, therefore, to try and deal with the difficulties in the translation and interpretation of Isaiah. Progress in solving these problems depends upon the on-going work of commenting on the text. Too often modern commentaries have become a discussion between commentators, rather than an exposition of the text. It is also true that the task of explaining and expounding the Scriptures must be a constant commitment for the church. We have to wrestle with the texts before us (and many difficult passages occur in Isaiah), and depending upon the aid of the Holy Spirit, we have to attempt to set out our understanding of the passages with which we are dealing. A corollary of this is that exegesis is the task of the whole church, not just those who are professionally trained for biblical study.

Each day as I began work on Isaiah I prayed for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is surprising how few books on hermeneutics have a section devoted to the ministry of the Spirit, but in coming to Holy Scripture we must recognise that we need spiritual enlightenment ourselves if we are to open up the Scriptures for others. After prayer, I read the appropriate passage in Hebrew, and also listened to it on tape. Often I heard things that my eye had missed when reading it. Aural reception of the text enables one to listen to features like alliteration and assonance and also to hear interconnections within the passage. Then I started to comment on the section, trying to ensure that I covered every verse. While I had hoped to spend more space on wider issues such as literary structure, I came to the conclusion that the greatest usefulness of this book would be if I could explore the Hebrew text and attempt to set out my understanding of its meaning.

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[2] This quotation is taken from Dr. Leon Morris' discussion, 'On Writing a Commentary', *The New Testament Student at Work*, vol. 2, John H. Skilton, ed., p. 179.

Two friends—Bernard Secombe and Gregory Goswell—have helped by reading the manuscript and it is the better for their queries and suggestions. Another friend, David Assender, has helped with the diagram and map.My wife Mairi has either read the whole manuscript or listened to me reading it as we worked through Isaiah in our evening devotions. Without her help and encouragement completion of the book would have taken much longer.

Allan M. Harman

Suggestions for Further Reading

G. W. Grogan, 'Isaiah' , *Expositors' Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1986), Vol. 6, pp. 1-354.

H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (Evangelical Press, 1977).

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August Pieper, *Isaiah II, An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979).

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

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Introduction

1. Isaiah and His Ministry

1.1 Isaiah the Prophet

The name Isaiah (Heb. *yᵉsha'yâhû*) means 'the LORD is salvation', and his name symbolises his message.[1] He was the son of *Amoz* (not to be confused with *Amos* the prophet, as the spelling of the two names differs). The medieval Jewish commentator Kimchi claimed that Amoz was the brother of Amaziah, the father of Uzziah. If this is true, then Isaiah was of the royal line, and this would fit in with the fact that he had access to the king. It is clear from his prophecy itself that he came from a family of some rank, as we can infer from his close relationship with the king (7:1-17) as well as his close intimacy with the priest (8:2).

Isaiah was married with at least two sons. The first one, Shear-yashub, had a name whose word order suggests that it meant '[only] a remnant shall return' (7:3), and the name of the other, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, means 'hasting to the spoil, hurrying to the prey' (8:2, 3). While the first son had a name that gave a glimmer of hope for the nation in mention of a remnant, yet it pointed to the coming disaster. The name of the second son referred to Assyria's lust for conquest. These names, as also his own, embodied Isaiah's message to Judah and Jerusalem.

The dates of his birth and death are unknown. He commenced his ministry in 740/739 BC, the year that king Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1). He was a spokesman for the LORD at the time of the Assyrian campaign in 701 BC, and notes Sennacherib's death in 681 BC (Isa. 37:38). Though Jewish tradition claims he was sawn asunder during Manasseh's reign (cf. Heb. 11:37), no reliable evidence is available to corroborate this. Manasseh became co-regent in 696 BC (and sole ruler in 686 BC). Apart from Isaiah's reference to Sennacherib's death, there is no mention in the biblical text of continuing ministry by Isaiah after 701 BC.

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[1]The first part of the name can hardly be regarded as meaning 'Yah saves', as the verbal form of this root does not occur in the Qal stem in Hebrew.

1.2 Isaiah and His Fellow Eighth Century BC Prophets

A cluster of prophets operated in Israel and Judah in the eighth century BC: Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah and Micah. There are several reasons why the eighth century was important for both kingdoms. The kingdom of Judah had very significant kings in that century, including Joash, Uzziah, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. In the north there was a succession of short reigns and the only major king was Jeroboam II. In both kingdoms there was great stability because of the long reigns of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC) and Uzziah (792–740 BC). Probably in the case of Uzziah there must have been regencies at each end of his reign, so that he was sole ruler for no more than seventeen years (767–750 BC).[2] The biblical text calls Uzziah both Azariah ('Yah has helped') and Uzziah ('Yah is my strength'). Possibly the former was his throne name and the latter his personal name.

Little information about the achievements of either Jeroboam II (Israel) or Uzziah (Judah) is given. Clearly there was a long period of peace between the two kingdoms, if not a formal treaty arrangement. Israel and Judah came to a peak of prosperity and influence during the reigns of these kings. Most of the territory held by Solomon was again under combined Israelite/Judahite control. 2 Kings 14:25 notes that Jeroboam II restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, as Jonah, son of Amittai, had prophesied. The book of 2 Kings gives little information regarding Uzziah, except for the statement that he rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah (2 Kings 14:22), which meant in effect control over Edom. However, 2 Chronicles 26:1-22 spells out in some detail the reign of Uzziah, including his attack on the Philistines and the building of new Jewish settlements in their territory (2 Chron. 26:6-7). He was a great farmer ('he loved the soil', 2 Chron. 26:10) and he pushed settlements down into the Negev area. The fact that Uzziah made the Ammonites subject to him (2 Chron. 26:8) has often been questioned. But we know from Assyrian sources that a leader of the coalition of Syrian-Palestinian states against Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria was led by an 'Az-ri-a-u' of 'Ia-u-d-a', who has often been identified with Azariah/Uzziah of Judah.[3] What this statement of 2 Chronicles 26:8 does tell us is not only of the growing

[2]This is according to the calculations of E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (The Paternoster Press, 1951), pp. 93-97.

[3]See D. J. Wiseman in *DOTT*, pp. 54-57.

power of Judah, but the serious weakening of Israel that was to lead to her demise in 722 BC. This is revealed by the fact that previously Ammon had been under the control of *Israel*, not Judah.

With control re-established over the trade routes, wealth began to accumulate, and this was reflected in the personal possession of the people and their luxurious homes (cf. for example passages such as Amos 6:1-7; Isa. 3:18-23). Clearly the narrative in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles does not fully detail the prosperity in the two kingdoms, nor on the other hand the basic discontent in society. The scope of the military expeditions suggests wealth for army supplies, but the main knowledge of the period comes from the prophets of the mid-eighth century – Hosea, Micah, Amos and Isaiah.

Economic class levels became very clearly marked in both countries. This is shown by the varied housing that has been unearthed at Tirzah (the capital of Israel before the building of Samaria by Omri) and the references in the prophets to economic, social and moral conditions. Isaiah's catalogue of female finery in Isaiah 3:18-26 points to a high level of income among the upper classes and also a very sophisticated society. Other passages in the early chapters of Isaiah also point in the same direction (see 1:23; 5:8; 10:1-3). While Isaiah was a city dweller, Micah lived in the country and he describes how the wealthier classes took advantage of the poorer classes and maltreated them (Mic. 3:1-3). The situation in the north was similar, as rich owners of vineyards had found ways of appropriating vineyards, like Naboth's, without breaking the law (see Amos 2:6-8).

Assyrian domination was signified by the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III. The impact of Assyria on Israel/Judah and all the other nations of the Near East was to be very great. Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with a message of judgment from the LORD. The temporary repentance of Assyria may have delayed Assyrian conquest of Israel until much later in the century when Samaria fell in 722 BC.

Israel/Judah faced severe external attacks during the eighth century. First, there was the Syro-Ephraimitic War of 734 BC. Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel attempted to force Judah into a coalition to oppose Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria. The aim was to depose Ahaz and to put Tabeel in his place (Isa. 7:6). Ahaz responded to the crisis by sending messengers to Tiglath-Pileser announcing that he was his servant and vassal (*'avd^{e}kâ ûvin^{e}kâ 'ânî*, 2 Kings 16:7), and showing this by taking the silver and gold from the Temple and from the treasuries in

the palace and sending them to Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 16:8). The result was that Tiglath-Pileser invaded Aram, capturing Damascus, deporting people, and killing Rezin (2 Kings 16:9). Likewise Assyria attacked Israel, taking Gilead and Galilee, and deporting many of the inhabitants (2 Kings 15:29).

The second major crisis was the siege and subsequent fall of Samaria in 722 BC. Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea in 732 BC (2 Kings 15:30), who, after the death of Tiglath-Pileser in 727 BC, withheld his tribute money and turned to Egypt for help. The new Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, attacked Israel and finally after a three-year siege Samaria fell to Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II, in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:3-5; 18:9-11). This was the final act in the history of the northern kingdom of Israel. People were imported and settled in the former Israelite territory, replacing those taken away into captivity (2 Kings 17:24).

The third military episode was the Assyrian Crisis of 701 BC. When Sennacherib succeeded his father in 705 BC, several subject peoples, including Judah, revolted. Sennacherib attacked Judah, and when he was at Lachish, Hezekiah sent him tribute money. He continued with his attack, but was repulsed by the direct intervention of God (for the two accounts of the crisis, see 2 Kings 18:13–19:37; Isa. 36–37).

The days of crisis for Israel and Judah brought the prophets to the fore with their messages from the LORD. The people had to listen to proclamation that challenged and rebuked. Many of the prophetic messages of judgment are couched in terms that echo the covenantal curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. While the prophets denounce the people for their sins, they also hold out the hope of blessing and restoration (cf. Amos 9:11-15; Isa. 9:2-7; Isa. 11:1-16).

Not only did the prophets speak God's word to the people, they wrote it, which is in marked contrast with the earlier prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, who themselves left no *written* records. Two main factors seem to be involved with this change to written messages. First, internationalism was becoming far more important. The Assyrian empire reached its peak in the period of Ashurbanipal (668–626 BC), but that was after a century of expansion of the Assyrian empire under his predecessors. This was also a significant period for the development of international relationships, especially through treaties. These treaties were written and the vassals included the general populace. When a treaty was broken, a royal messenger was sent to declare the impending

judgment or application of the covenant curses on the rebellious people.

In the biblical text there is one notable incident concerning a royal messenger and that is the account of the Rabshakeh (the name of an office, though treated as a personal name in the biblical accounts) who comes on Sennacherib's orders to bring a message to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17–19:19, and the parallel in Isaiah 36–37). When we look at the passage there are difficulties because of the change in persons speaking or being addressed (the second person addressee changes to plural in 2 Kings 18:22; Hezekiah is referred to in the third person while the Rabshakeh is referred to in the first person, verses 24, 25). The best explanation of the difficulties is that an official written decree lies behind the Rabshakeh's oral presentation. This may well have been the pattern: a written document which was then given fuller oral explanation. It is significant that the writing prophets emerge at this very period of Near Eastern history. There was a growing sense of international consciousness, with emphasis on contact between the Great King and subject kings and peoples by means of written and oral proclamation by messengers.

The second significant factor was the growth of popular literacy. The emergence of written prophecy could only take place in the context of general literacy of the people to whom the prophecies were addressed. The Gezer calendar (ninth–tenth century BC) is probably a schoolboy's attempt, or else from someone whose writings skills were not well developed, as the script is awkward. Many seals have been found, and the significant thing is that by the seventh century they only contain the name of the owner, without any pictorial representation. That means that literacy was becoming widespread, and hence writing could be used both to record prophetic speeches and to distribute them among the general population. The fact that Isaiah was a scribe is noted by the Chronicler (2 Chron. 26:22), who also refers his readers to the work of Isaiah for additional information about the deeds of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:32).

2. Interpreting Isaiah as Poetry

In approaching the book of Isaiah we are confronted immediately with the fact that the majority of the book is prophecy, written in poetic form. The longest prose sections are the largely historical narratives in 6:1–9:7 and 36:1–39:8. This means that in addition to setting out hermeneutical rules for interpreting prophecy, account must be taken

of the poetry and its features that complicate interpretation.

The poetry in Isaiah shares the same marks that distinguish other poetic sections of the Old Testament from prose. These include non-predictable word order, figurative language, the use of parallelism, the presence of acrostics, unusual and older vocabulary, assonance and alliteration, and imagery in the form of metaphors and similes. Some of these features can also appear in prose, which means that the dividing line cannot be drawn sharply between prose and poetry. The distinction between them is one of degree.[4]

Some additional comment is called for in connection with the features of assonance and alliteration. Though there was growing literacy in Israel/Judah in the eighth century BC, yet for many people the reception of Isaiah's message must have been aural. This means that we have to take special note of the repeated use of assonance and alliteration in Isaiah's prophecies, for these must have been important factors in capturing the attention of hearers. Here are some transliterated examples taken from chapters 24–27:

24:3 *hibbôq tibbôq hâ'ârets v^{e}hibbôz tibbôz*
'the earth will be utterly laid waste and utterly plundered'.

24:16 *bog^{e}dîm bâgâdû ûveged bog^{e}dîm bâgâdû*
'The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!

24:17 *pachad vâpachat vâpâch 'âlekâ yôshêv hâ'ârets*
v^{e}hâyâh hannâs miqqôl happachad yippôl 'el happachat
v^{e}hâ'ôleh mittôk happachat yillâkêd bappâch
'fear, and the pit, and the snare are on you, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall be that the one who flees from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he who comes up from the midst of the pit shall be caught in the snare.'

25:6 *Mishtêh sh^{e}mânîm mishtêh sh^{e}mârîm sh^{e}mânîm*
m^{e}muchâyim sh^{e}mârîm m^{e}zuqqâqîm
'a feast of rich food, a feast of choice wine, choice food full of marrow, choice wine well refined.'

[4]See my commentary on *Psalms* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998), pp. 10-13, for a brief discussion on the nature of Hebrew poetry.

27:7 *hakk^{e}makkat makkêhû hikkâhû 'im k^{e}hereg h^{a}rugâv horâg*
'like the smiting of the one who smote him did he smite him?'

Another major factor that complicates interpretation of Old Testament poetry is the difficulty in distinguishing precise time changes.[5] Unlike most Western languages, which have a tense system built into the verbal structure, Hebrew verbs (and the same applies to other Semitic languages) are concerned rather with aspect. That is, in narrative Hebrew verbs express whether an action is regarded as complete or incomplete. If complete, then an English verb in the past tense may be appropriate, but at times a present or even a future tense will be required by the context. Similarly, if the action is incomplete, normally (but not invariably) an English future tense will be appropriate.

The situation is even more complex in Hebrew poetry for the two verbal conjugations (often designated by the forms *qatal* and *yiqtol*) are used almost interchangeably, and many aspects of use have still to be investigated thoroughly. In general, context must determine how we understand the tenses in a particular section of poetry, and the consequence is that interpretation must often be tentative in so far as time is concerned. One of the best discussions on this problem is that by Peter Craigie, who wrote:

> . . . it is evident that there can be no simple rule of thumb with respect to the appropriate English tense which may be indicated by the forms of the Hebrew verb. In practice, the context is the principal guide to determining the most appropriate translation, but difficulties arise precisely because context, in nonhistorical poetic texts . . . may leave room for considerable ambiguity and uncertainty.[6]

3. Interpreting Isaiah as Prophecy

In coming to the book of Isaiah we are approaching one of the major prophetical books of the Bible. A cursory reading of the text should alert us to the fact that its style is quite different from the historical books like Joshua or 2 Samuel, and some basic principles need to be

[5]On the wider questions of time dimensions in prophetic literature, see the discussion by John P. Milton, *Prophecy Interpreted : Essays in Old Testament Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1974), pp. 77-108.

[6]Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco: Word, 1983), p. 111.

kept in mind as the interpretative task is undertaken.[7]

Old Testament prophecy is something far different from history written beforehand. There is a complexity about it that puts it in a different category altogether. At times it contains what appears to be straight-forward messages, but intermingled are many that puzzle, and our interpretation has to be provisional. Exactly the same will apply to our interpretation of the book of Revelation. Prophecy was meant to speak first to the generation who originally received it. It was directed to a precise setting in biblical history that is often alluded to in the prophetic word. However, in reference to the future the descriptions often lack precision, as exemplified in the phrases 'in that day' or 'in those days'.

Prophecy is also difficult to interpret because much of its language cannot be understood by a word for word translation into another language. That is partly because it is given principally in poetic form (see the preceding discussion on 'Interpreting Isaiah as Poetry'), but also because it includes symbolism that needs identification before any sure conclusions can be drawn as to its meaning. The problem is highlighted by reference to passages such as Isaiah 7:18 where the LORD is pictured whistling to the flies and bees, or Isaiah 27:1 with reference to the judgment to come on Leviathan, 'the gliding serpent', or to the identification of the 'destroyer/traitor' in Isaiah 31:1. Biblical prophecy may puzzle us, but it also puzzled those who transmitted it, for they enquired and searched diligently regarding the nature and timing of the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

This also means that prophecy was intended by God to be a combination of what is plain intermingled with messages that are ambiguous or multifaceted. The children of God need encouragement regarding the future, but do not need to know with absolute precision everything that is going to take place. There is an important place for faith in the believer's life, with a forward view to future demonstrations of God's grace and power. The general pattern is clear; the precise

[7]For fuller discussion of principles of prophetic interpretation, readers should consult Douglas Stuart's concise contribution in Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *Reading the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 1993), pp. 172-86; Walter Kaiser Jr., 'What About the Future? The Meaning of Prophecy', in Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Zondervan, 1994), pp. 139-58.

outworking is not revealed.

The revelation of God in the Old Testament is progressive, prospective, and preparatory. That is, not all of God's message for mankind was revealed at first, but progressively over a long period of time. Moreover, at each stage of revelation indications are given that greater disclosures of God's will are to come. It also becomes clear with the prophets that all that has happened up to their day is preparatory for the fuller appearance of God's grace and power in new covenant days. This approach means, of course, that the Old and New Testaments are taken as parts of the unified revelation of God, and that the believing community is basically the same in both.[8]

4. The Structure and Unity of the Book of Isaiah[9]

While the book of Isaiah has often been regarded by critical scholarship as a composition of at least three major sections (chapters 1–39, 40–55, 56–66), the last thirty years has seen a major change in emphasis. This is partly because of the influence of Brevard Child's 'canonical criticism' that seeks to emphasise the final form in which a biblical book has come down to us. Thus R. E. Clements can claim that though editorial stages in the formation of the book of Isaiah can be discerned, yet 'all these considerations are sufficient to indicate that the overall structure of the book shows signs of editorial planning and that, at some stage in its growth, attempts were made to read and interpret the book as a whole'.[10] Similarly W. L. Holladay writes: 'Yet beyond all our awareness of the *contrasts* between what comes before chapter

[8]For discussion of this point, consult the comments of John L. Mackay in his revised and expanded volume on *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* in this same series (*Focus on the Bible*: Fearn, 2003), pp. 349-54.

[9]For much fuller discussions on the unity of Isaiah, recent introductions and commentaries should be consulted such as: W. S. LaSor, D. A. Hubbard, and F. W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 281-88; R. B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1994), pp. 268-83; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (NICOT: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 17-28. See also the recent survey on the subject by Gregory R. Goswell, *'My eyes have seen the King': Kingship, Human and Divine, in the Book of Isaiah with Special Reference to Isaiah Chapters 36-39*, Ph.D. thesis, The University of Sydney, 2001, pp. 1-32.

[10]R. E. Clements, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah', *Interpretation* 36 (1982), p. 121.

40 and what comes in and after it, contrasts of authorship and of life situation, there is also a curious *unity* which we can perceive'.[11]

This unity in the book of Isaiah extends to language and themes. It has often been pointed out that virtually all the major themes occur in summary form in the opening chapter, and are developed in greater detail as the book progresses. Phrases like 'the holy one of Israel' occur throughout, while themes such as divine kingship and the creator/redeemer recur with great frequency. Even when Isaiah has the exilic situation especially in view in chapters 40 onward, the standpoint from which he writes is still Palestine in the eighth century BC.[12] References to trees, for example, are those that are typical of Palestine, not Babylon.[13] Moreover, linguistic evidence points to a pre-exilic date for chapters 40–66, a section so often dated by critical scholarship as coming from the post-exilic period.[14] Isaiah is able to address the two basic questions that the exile will raise: 'Is Israel's God *truly* God (as compared with the Babylonian ones)?', and 'Will God forgive the sin of his people and resume fellowship with them?'

The opening and closing of the prophecy are also critical markers of a unified structure for the whole book. In chapter 1 sinful and rebellious Jerusalem is introduced. Her condition is described as a sickness that affects the whole body. While a call to repentance, with the assurance of acceptance with God, goes out, yet it is only much later in the book that the servant of the LORD is depicted as the one who can heal her condition (for discussion on the repetition of language in chapter 53 that first occurs in chap. 1, see the commentary on 53:4). The opening of the book has its counterbalance the concluding pictures of a New Creation (65:17-18) that results in a New Jerusalem (66:20-24). The message, then, of the book of Isaiah relates to the way in which God is going to purify his people through judgment and

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[11]W. L. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (Eerdmans, 1978), p. 40.

[12]J. Barton Payne discussed this in detail in 'Eighth Century Israelitish Background of Isaiah 40–66', *WTJ* 29 (1966-67), pp. 179-90; 30 (1967-68), pp. 50-58, 185-203.

[13]Robert L. Alden, 'Isaiah and Wood', in John H. Skilton ed., *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 377-87.

[14]Mark F. Rooker, 'Dating Isaiah 40–66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?' *WTJ* 58 (1996), pp. 303-12.

restore them into a close covenant relationship with himself. Jerusalem's character will be so changed that she will be in the centre of God's kingdom that will embrace Jews and Gentiles in the one fold.

Various parts of the book of Isaiah are marked off by particular groupings of associated messages (such as the messages against the nations in chapters 13–23, or the historical interlude in chapters 36–39). All through the book there is the interplay of historical and eschatological themes, so that an outline of the book can be set out as follows:[15]

1–12	History and Eschatology
13–23	History
24–27	Eschatology
28–33	History
34–35	Eschatology
36–39	History
40–55	Eschatology
56–66	History and Eschatology

While the exile and beyond is the focus of chapters 40–66, yet the exile is also prominent in the earlier parts of the prophecy. Isaiah and his contemporaries were familiar with the idea of exile. Amos announced God's message: 'Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,' says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty' (Amos 5:27), while in Hosea God's plan for Israel is stated in these terms: 'Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her' (Hos. 2:14).

Isaiah's reference to ruined cities and the people being taken far away is important both in itself and for the fact that it comes in his inaugural vision (6:11-12). In the previous chapter he anticipates the exile as he proclaims a series of 'woe' oracles. The LORD's declaration is: 'Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding' (5:13). Redemption from exile is also a common theme in the first main section of the prophecy (chaps. 1–12), as it also is in the writings of Isaiah's contemporaries. In chapter 11 he mentions how God is to do something a second time (11:11), when Israel and Judah will be re-united (11:13) following the new exodus (11:16). Similar statements

[15]I am following the scheme set out by W. J. Dumbrell, 'The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah,' *TB* 36 (1985), p. 123.

were made by Isaiah's contemporary Amos (see especially 9:9-15). Another contemporary, Micah, also spoke of exile in Babylon and redemption from there: 'Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies' (Mic. 4:10, NIV).

When the exile is spoken about by Isaiah it is not only Assyria that is named but also Babylon. This is so particularly in chapter 39 in reference to the Babylonian envoys who come to visit Hezekiah (39:1-3). The question that Isaiah asks of the king is not, 'Where did they come from?', but, 'Where are they coming from (*yâvô'û'*)?' The way the question is phrased may suggest a succession of 'comings' from Babylon. Isaiah's response to Hezekiah's statement regarding the extent of the visit is to warn of the future event when not only the treasures of the king's palace but also the king's sons will be carried away to Babylon (39:5-7). Isaiah looks even beyond Assyria and Babylon to the Medo-Persian empire, for in 13:17 he refers to the Medes being stirred up against Babylon, while in 21:9 he looks further ahead still to the fall of Babylon.

Little evidence for the writing of a prophetic book such as Isaiah exists. Clearly literacy was widespread, as has already been pointed out, and on occasions in the book of Isaiah the prophet himself is instructed to write (8:1; 30:8). Moreover, from references in the historical books it is clear that Isaiah was one of those recording the history of Judah. He wrote of Uzziah's actions (2 Chron. 26:22) and also of Hezekiah's acts and good deeds (2 Chron. 32:32). No extant evidence tells of how the entire book we know as the prophecy of Isaiah was finally compiled. Sections of it may have existed separately, but in the final composition there is unity and purpose. Within individual sections there is evidence of careful planning and structure. For example, chapters 7–11 contain parallel messages to Judah and Israel, while chapter 6 forms a prologue to the section, and chapter 12 an epilogue. The pattern in this section is:[16]

[16]This is based on J. A. Motyer, 'Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14', *TB* 21 (1970), pp. 118-25.

1. Prologue 6:1-13

	Judah	Israel
2. The Moment of Decision	7:1-17	9:8–10:4
3. The Judgment	7:18–8:8	10:5-15
4. The Remnant	8:9-22	10:16-34
5. The Glorious Hope	9:1-7	11:1-16

6. The Epilogue 12:1-6

Another section is found in the last twenty-seven chapters consisting of three parts, each of which concentrates on a key figure, and each rounded off with a refrain. This division was noted long ago in E. W. Hengstenberg's *Christology* where he commented in this way:

> The fact . . . it is divided into *three sections or books*, is, in the first instance, indicated by circumstances that at the close of chap. xlviii. and chap. lvii., the same thought recurs in the same words: 'There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked;' and that same thought, viz., the exclusion of the wicked from the promised salvation, is found also a third time at the close of the whole, although there in another form.[17]

The three sections are as follows:

Chapters 40–48
Central Figure: Cyrus
Refrain: 'There is no peace', says the LORD, 'for the wicked' (48:22).

Chapters 49–57
Central Figure: The Servant of the Lord
Refrain: 'There is no peace', says my God, 'for the wicked' (57:21).

Chapters 58–66
Central Figure: The Spirit-Filled Messiah
Refrain: An announcement is made regarding the lack of peace: 'All mankind will come and bow down before me', says the LORD. 'And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind' (66:23-24).

It is impossible to set out the process by which the varied prophetic messages that Isaiah delivered were finally integrated in inscripturated form as we now have them. Presumably his messages were remembered, but also committed to writing. Either Isaiah himself or some other person inspired by the Holy Spirit brought them together in the form they have come to us. Perhaps the recording in Holy Scripture of Jesus' words and deeds by the disciples parallels what happened in the formation of the book of Isaiah. The structure of the whole book can be set out in this way:

Part 1: The Book of Judgment (1:1–35:10)

A. Introduction: Judah Rebuked—The Covenant Broken (1:1-31)
1. Title (1:1)
2. Thoughtlessness (1:2-9)
3. Formalism (1:10-20)
4. Judgment and Salvation (1:21-31)

B. Future Glory for Judah and Jerusalem (2:1–4:6)
1. The Glory of the Eschatological Days (2:1-5)
2. Jerusalem's Future Exaltation (2:6–4:1)
3. Jerusalem's Eventual Purification (4:2-6)

C. Judah's National Sins (5:1-30)
1. The Parable of the Vineyard (5:1-7)
2. Six Woes (5:8-23)
3. The Assyrian Invaders (5:24-30)

D. The Book of Immanuel (6:1–12:6)
1. Isaiah's Vision (6:1-7)
2. Isaiah's Commission (6:8-13)
3. God's Word to Judah (7:1–9:7)
4. God's Word to Israel (9:10–11:16)
5. The Epilogue (12:1-6)

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[17]E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (McLean, Virginia: McDonald Publishing Company, reprint n.d.), vol. 1, p. 507. He attributes the observation to a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Rückert.

E. Burdens against the Gentile Nations (13:1–23:18)
1. Against Babylon (13:1–14:23)
2. Against Assyria (14:24-27)
3. Against Philistia (14:28-32)
4. Against Moab (15:1–16:14)
5. Against Syria and Israel (17:1-14)
6. Against Cush (18:1-7)
7. Against Egypt and Cush (19:1–20:6)
8. Against the Wilderness of the Sea [Babylon] (21:1-10)
9. Against Dumah [Edom] (21:11-12)
10. Against Arabia (21:13-17)
11. Against The Valley of Vision [Jerusalem] (22:1-25)
12. Against Tyre (23:1-18)

F. World Judgment and Israel's Redemption (24:1–27:13)

G. A Cycle of Prophetic Warnings (28:1–33:24)

H. Additional Promises of Judgment and Blessing (34:1–35:10)

Part 2: Historical Transition (36:1–39:8)

A. The Assyrian Siege of Jerusalem (36:1–37:38)
1. Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem (36:1–37:8)
2. God's Deliverance (37:9-38)

B. Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (38:1-22)

C. The Prediction of the Babylonian Exile (39:1-8)

Part 3: The Book of Comfort (40:1–66:24)

A. Israel's Restoration and Return (40:1–48:22)
1. The Coming of the LORD (40:1-26)
2. Strength for the Weary (40:27-31)
3. The LORD of Israel (41:1-29)
4. The First Servant Song and a Song of Praise (42:1-17)
5. Israel's Only Saviour (42:18–43:13)
6. Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Mercy (43:14–44:5)
7. The Folly of Idolatry (44:6-23)
8. The Only Saviour (44:24–45:25)
9. The Impotence of Babylon's Gods (46:1-13)
10. The Fall of Babylon (47:1-15)
11. The LORD's Rebuke to Israel (48:1-22)

B. The Messianic Salvation (49:1–57:21)

1. The Second Servant Song (49:1-7)
2. The Restoration of Israel (49:8–50:3)
3. The Third Servant Song (50:4-11)
4. The Joy of Restoration (51:1-16)
5. Jerusalem's Preparation for the Returned Exiles (51:17–52:12)
6. The Fourth Servant Song (52:13–53:12)
7. Glorious Zion (54:1-17)
8. The Gracious Invitation (55:1-13)
9. Incorporation of Others in God's Redemption (56:1-8)
10. Adulterous Israel (56:9–57:13)
11. Comfort for the Contrite (57:14-21)

C. The Ultimate Salvation (58:1–66:24)

1. The Marks of God's People (58:1-14)
2. Redemption for Penitent Israel (59:1-21)
3. The City of the LORD (60:1-22)
4. The Fifth Servant Song (61:1-9)
5. The Saviour Comes! (61:10–62:12)
6. The Day of Vengeance (63:1-6)
7. God the Father and Redeemer (63:7–64:12)
8. A Patient and Compassionate God (65:1-16)
9. The New Heaven and the New Earth (65:17-25)
10. Distinguishing True and False Worshippers (65:1-24)
11. Zion Triumphant (66:1-24)

5. The Significance of the Book of Isaiah

The prophecy of Isaiah marks a highpoint in prophetic ministry in the Old Testament. It is clear that the development of the prophetic office went hand in hand with the institution of kingship in Israel. The prophets were guardians of the theocracy,[18] and they maintained the principle that the LORD was the king, and Israel was committed to exclusive reliance on him. They were covenant enforcement messengers, as they proclaimed the blessings and curses set out in the law (cf. Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). Those ministering from the time of Samuel to the middle of the eighth century BC did so by oral communication, and their message to the nation was one of repentance and conversion.

[18]The English word 'theocracy' is borrowed from the Greek *theokratia*, 'government by God', a word probably coined by the Jewish historian Josephus (born around AD 37).

With Isaiah and his contemporaries two changes took place. On the one hand, they not only spoke but their messages were committed to writing. On the other hand, the content of their messages changed too, for they said that God was not only going to act as he did previously, as at the Exodus, but that he was going to do something far greater. They knew that, 'not repair, but regeneration of the present lies in the womb of the future'.[19]

The doctrinal teaching is striking, doubly so because it is couched in such passionate language. Form and content are inextricably interconnected. Often, though, as is typical of the prophets in general, the argument is not always in strict logical order or sequence. Rather the argument centres around major themes that are looked at from different angles. Reference is made to the same basic truths time and time again. Isaiah's prophecies are unique in that they cover greater scope than any of the other Old Testament prophecies. His vision is the entire progress of God's kingdom that will culminate in a new heavens and a new earth in which a new humanity will dwell. Nature itself will be transfigured, when 'the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21, NIV).[20] All in all, 'Isaiah sums up biblical theology in a better way than does any other single book of the Bible.'[21]

History and eschatology are intermingled throughout the book but appear in paired format especially in the opening and closing sections (chapters 1–12 and 56–66). The Holy One of Israel will purify his people through judgment and bring them into a renewed experience of the covenant relationship. The glory of the LORD will fill the whole of creation, for 'the fulness of the earth is [nothing but] his glory' (Isa. 6:3). Even Israel/Judah in exile must know that their God is indeed the creator/redeemer and in him 'all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory' (Isa. 45:25). The closest parallels to Isaiah's prophecies

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[19]Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 189.

[20]For recent discussions on theology of Isaiah, see John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39*, pp. 31-44; John N. Oswalt, 'Isaiah, Theology of', *NIDOTTE*, 4, pp. 725-32; Thomas Constable, 'A Theology of Isaiah' in Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (Moody Press, 1991), pp. 305-40; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 272-98.

[21]John N. Oswalt, 'Isaiah, Theology of,' *NIDOTTE*, 4, p. 732.

in the Bible are undoubtedly parts of the Pauline epistles, and Romans in particular.

> In both there is the same deep impression of the infinite majesty and absolute sovereignty of Jehovah, the same intense conviction of the awfulness of the divine justice and the inexorable nature of its claims, the same overwhelming sense of the insignificance, the unworthiness, the helplessness of sinful man, the same insistence upon the exclusive activity of God in the work of salvation, the same prominence on the idea of faith, the same abounding trust in the marvelous, condescending grace of God, the same unlimited and illimitable faith in the world-embracing scope of the divine purpose.[22]

The number of quotations from and allusions to Isaiah that appear in the New Testament is striking.[23] Approximately one-third of the New Testament is made up of direct quotations or indirect allusions to the Old Testament,[24] and of the Old Testament books the Psalms and Isaiah are those drawn upon most often. About twenty times Isaiah is cited by name, and these quotations come from twelve different chapters spread throughout the book. In consecutive verses in John 12, Isaiah 6:10 and 53:1 are quoted with application to Jesus, for, as John comments, 'he saw his [Jesus'] glory and spoke about him' (John 12:41). Of Isaiah 53, all but one verse is quoted in the New Testament.

This use of the book of Isaiah draws attention to the continuity of biblical revelation between Old and New Testaments. Jesus' own public ministry began with a sermon on Isaiah 61 in which he made the

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[22]Geerhardus Vos, 'Some Doctrinal Features of the Early Prophecies of Isaiah', in Richard Gaffin, Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 287. Vos goes on to suggest that if the line of continuity is traced back from Calvin to Augustine, and from Augustine to Paul, then another step can be taken into the old dispensation and to recognise that the line commences with Isaiah. Walter Kaiser Jr., *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Zondervan, 1978), p. 212, similarly draws the parallel between Isaiah and Paul, saying that chapters 40–66 'are as close to being a systematic statement of OT theology as is the book of Romans in the NT'.

[23]Convenient listing of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, and allusions and verbal parallels, occurs in *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), pp. 887-901.

[24]For details, see Andrew E. Hill, *Baker's Handbook of Bible Lists* (Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 102-04.

declaration: 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21). Clearly he set the interpretative model for exegesis of the Old Testament by the teaching he gave to his disciples, as he instructed them about everything written concerning him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). This teaching was that given in his ministry prior to his death, and as the disciples were enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit to remember what was said (John 14:26), they preached and taught accordingly.

Not surprisingly a book like Isaiah features prominently in the apostolic writings of the New Testament Scriptures. It constitutes one of the 'building blocks' utilised by the apostles as they drew upon the Old Testament and integrated its teaching with the newer revelation given by Jesus. Nowhere is this more evident than in the book of Revelation. Out of 348 allusions in it to the Old Testament, the largest number from any book is 79 from Isaiah.[25] With heavy dependence on Isaiah, John depicts the two great cities, Babylon and Jerusalem. Babylon will fall, but the city of God, the New Jerusalem, stands, and in so doing marks out the consummation of history. What Isaiah had prophesied so long before will reach fulfilment. Those from all nations and tongues will come to the eternal city that God calls 'my holy mountain Jerusalem', and there they will see the Lord's glory (Isa. 66:18-20). Reading and using the prophecy of Isaiah should direct the vision of God's people to the one city that will remain. All others will vanish, for the heavenly Jerusalem is not to be created from any earthly city. Rather, it will be part of the 'new things' that God does, and this will be marked by the fact that 'the holy city, new Jerusalem' will come *down* from the new heavens (Rev. 21:2). The believing church must wait expectantly for that dwelling place, and sing:

> How lovely is that city,
> The home of God's elect!
> How beautiful the country,
> That eager hearts expect!
> Jesus, in mercy bring us
> to that eternal shore;
> Where Father, Son and Spirit
> are worshipped evermore.
>
> Bernard of Cluny, 12th century.