



*The* HOLY ONE *of* ISRAEL

Studies in the Book of Isaiah

JOHN N. OSWALT



# The Holy One of Israel

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*Studies in the Book of Isaiah*

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# Abbreviations

AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CB	Cambridge Bible
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
IB	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal of the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal of the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LQ	<i>Literary Quarterly</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NIV	New International Version

NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> . 14 vols. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970–1994
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplement to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

# Preface

IN THE FALL OF 1973 I received a telephone call that changed the course of my life. The call was from Professor R. K. Harrison, editor of the *New International Critical Commentary on the Old Testament*. He was calling to invite me to write two volumes on the Book of Isaiah for the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. I was happy to be able to accept the invitation and did so with alacrity, little understanding all that would be involved in completing the project. The second volume finally appeared in 1998, after Professor Harrison had died. Then I had the opportunity to write the Isaiah volume in the *New International Version Application Commentary*, which appeared in 2003. Between these two projects I have spent some 30 years of my life with the great, bottomless well of truth, beauty, and inspiration that is this book of the Bible. Looking back, I can hardly believe that I have had this privilege, nor can I think of a more rewarding way to have spent the better part of my professional life. Thanks be to God.

Along the way, I have had the opportunity to write a number of articles in journals and chapters in books on the book of Isaiah as a whole, or some aspect of it. These materials have necessarily been scattered in various places, and I have often wished that they could be collected in some single volume. So when I proposed such a volume to Wipf and Stock Publishers, and they responded positively, I was very pleased. That is the volume you now have in hand.

The chapters in the book are arranged in something of a descending order, that is from more general treatments of the book as a whole and how I see the parts contributing to the whole, to studies of themes, such as holiness, righteousness, the nations, etc., and finally to treatments of specific segments. Some of the articles are more popular and some are more scholarly. Because each of the chapters first appeared separately, there is some overlapping. I apologize for this in advance, but hope that the repetition will at least serve to fully elucidate how I understand the book to be structured.

In all cases, you will see repeatedly that I understand the book to be a theological unity, a conviction that is happily more acceptable today than it would have been 50 years ago.

It is a pleasant duty for me to thank all who have had a part in bringing this work to completion, including original editors who either invited submissions or accepted them, colleagues who read drafts and made helpful comments, and assistants who typed and re-typed manuscripts. Particularly for the present book, I want to thank Sarah McQueen who has put into electronic form several of the articles and chapters which were not originally in that form. Her duties at the Francis Asbury Society have not specifically included such work, but she has undertaken it with generosity and a warm spirit, and I am very grateful. I also wish to extend thanks to the editorial staff at Wipf and Stock who have been unfailingly helpful. Finally, as with everything I write, I thank Karen, “the wife of my youth” who has given herself to me, making all this work possible, and worthwhile.

# 1

## The Kerygmatic Structure of the Book of Isaiah<sup>1</sup>

IN HIS BOOK *THE Formation of Isaiah 40–55*, Roy Melugin concludes that, while Isaiah 40–55 is composed of originally independent discourses, they have not been arranged in a chance or haphazard manner. Rather, they have been put in this order because of the specific message that the author or editor wished to communicate.<sup>2</sup> Melugin uses the New Testament Greek term *kerygma* ‘message’ to define this organizing principle.

It is my conviction that this conclusion applies to the book as a whole, not merely to the portion often labeled Deutero-Isaiah. Whatever we may conclude about the date and authorship of the various parts of the book, it is not now in its present form because of chance or because of such mechanical matters as word similarities. Rather, the various components are in their present shape and organization because of the theological points that the author(s) and/or editor(s) were trying to communicate.

Fortunately, the older position that chapters 40–55 and 56–66 were composed as independent books without any necessary dependence on Isaianic writings preceding them has mostly faded away.<sup>3</sup> I say “fortunately”

1. This is a revised form of a chapter which first appeared in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, eds. J. Coleson and V. H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996) 143–157, and appears here by permission

2. Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55*, BZAW 141 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976) 175.

3. For an example of the older position, see Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, tr. P. R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 304, 332–46.

because such a position stems more from the early enthusiasm for source criticism, which sought to find independent sources behind every document, than it does from an attempt to understand the present book.<sup>4</sup>

An interim attempt to explain the phenomenon of the present book was the school hypothesis. This theory saw the present unit as the result of a school of prophets who were committed to studying and transmitting the Isaian corpus. Eventually, new books were written by members of the school, which, while still independent of First Isaiah (and later, Second Isaiah), nonetheless show the influence of the great eighth-century prophet's thought and outlook. Ultimately, other members of the school combined their colleagues' work with that of the master.<sup>5</sup> However, as Clements and others have recently noted, the existence of such a school is both unprecedented and unattested.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence in support of the hypothesis except the present form of the book, which gave rise to the hypothesis in the first place and which can be better explained in other ways.

Recently, a number of studies showing the interdependence of the various sections of the book have appeared.<sup>7</sup> First Isaiah is not ignorant of Second Isaiah or even Third Isaiah. This observation is not new, but whereas it used to be said that these passages were insertions from the second or third Isaianic "sources," it is now argued that First Isaiah *in its present form* reflects a thoroughgoing impact of the ideas of the last twenty-seven chapters.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it is asserted that these last chapters were never meant to stand alone but were written in the full knowledge of the earlier work(s)

4. Eissfeldt dismisses the entire question of the origin of the present book in less than a page (*ibid.*, 345–46).

5. William L. Holladay, *Isaiah, Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (New York: Pilgrim, 1987) 18. This book is an excellent example of the atomistic tendencies in critical studies that have reduced the book of Isaiah, and others, to collections of often artificially and accidentally collected phrases and sentences.

6. R. E. Clements, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah," *Int* 36 (1982) 119.

7. P. R. Ackroyd, "Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38–39," *SJT* 27 (1974) 329–52; Walter Brueggemann, "Unity and Dynamic in the Isaian Tradition," *JSOT* 29 (1984) 89–107; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 216–25; R. E. Clements, "Unity," 117–29; Clements, "Beyond Tradition-History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes," *JSOT* 31 (1985) 95–113; Rolf Rendtorff, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja," *VT* 34 (1984) 295–320; Christopher Seitz, "Isaiah 1–66; Making Sense of the Whole," in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah*, ed. C. R. Seitz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 105–26.

8. Seitz, "Isaiah 1–66," 113–14. See also H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) in which the author maintains that the present chapters 1–55 are largely the work of "Deutero-Isaiah," who was moved by the work of "Proto-Isaiah" to edit and supplement the work of that earlier prophet in the light of the exile.

and with the intent of bringing the ideas found there to their full development.<sup>9</sup> The implications of these findings for date and composition have been profound. Many now argue that the present book is the product of a thoroughgoing revision that took place sometime during the fifth century B.C.E. At that time the materials was ordered and reordered in such a way as to give a theological unity to the whole.<sup>10</sup> However one may receive this last suggestion, the new recognition of the wholeness of the book can only be greeted with enthusiasm. The dissection and fragmentation of one of the great pieces of world literature, not to mention one of the great pieces of theological reflection, has been nothing less than scandalous.

Scholars have identified several indications of the literary unity of the present book. Some of these relate to terms and concepts, such as, for instance, the even distribution of the phrase “the Holy One of Israel” throughout the book (twelve occurrences in chapters 1–39; thirteen in chapters 40–55).<sup>11</sup> Clements has also noted the recurrence of the theme of “deaf and blind,” especially in relationship to Israel, in the various segments of the book (6:9–10; 35:5–6, 7; 42:18–20; 43:8; 50:4–5; 55:2–3; see also 63:17).<sup>12</sup> Rendtorff has pointed out the presence of “comfort,” a leading idea in chapters 40–52, at such key junctures as 12:1 and 61:2.<sup>13</sup> The importance of redeemed Zion is another concept that is found throughout (1:27; 4:5; 12:6; 28:16; 29:8; 30:19; 33:20; 34:8; 35:10; 40:9; 46:13; 51:3, 11, 16; 52:1–2, 8; 59:20; 60:14; 61:3; 62:11; 66:8).<sup>14</sup> It has also been observed that the hymnic portions of 40–48 closely resemble the preexilic psalms (as do the similar portions of chapters 1–39).<sup>15</sup> Two other concepts worth mentioning are “wait” (8:17; 25:9; 26:8; 33:2; 40:31; 42:4; 49:23; 51:5; 59:9, 11; 60:9; 64:4) and rebellion (1:2, 20, 23, 28; 24:20; 30:1, 9; 36:5; 43:27; 44:22; 50:1, 5; 53:5, 8, 12; 57:4; 58:1; 59:12–13, 20; 63:10; 65:2; 66:24).

9. Rendtorff, “Komposition des Buches Jesaja,” 320.

10. For example, see John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah* 1–33, WBC 24 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985).

11. J. J. M. Roberts, “Isaiah in Old Testament Theology,” *Int* 36 (1982) 131–33; “The Holy One” with reference to God occurs a total of 35 times, 18 in 1–39 and 17 in 40–66. As noted above, 25 of these are “the Holy One of Israel,” one is “the Holy One of Jacob,” 3 times it occurs with a pronoun referring to Israel, and 6 times it stands alone (3 in 6:3).

12. Clements, “Unity of the Book of Isaiah,” 125.

13. Rendtorff, “Komposition des Buches Jesaja,” 298–99.

14. *Ibid.*, 305–9.

15. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah* 40–66, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 56, 59.

But beneath and around these hints of the unity of the book is a conceptual unity that gives shape and substance to what must otherwise remain somewhat ephemeral. By this I mean that, lacking a central theological concern and purpose, the presence of these repeated terms and concepts proves little. But if such a concern can be identified, then these elements become confirmatory evidence and take their places as component parts of a larger whole.

Melugin's phrase *kerygmatic structure* is a happy one for Isaiah, I believe. For without question, Isaiah is a kerygmatic book. It might be urged that all of the prophets are kerygmatic in their strong emphasis upon proclamation of both judgment and salvation. But Isaiah is more so. From the opening verse to the last, the book resounds with calls to hear, to attend, to deal with, to take action. The prophet is depicted as proclaiming a message that demands response. Moreover, it is a message of good news, not only, as is especially the case, in chapters 40–55, but long before that. The message to Ahaz, though not received as such, was intended to be good news: "God is with us; we need not fear Rezin and Pekah" (7:4–10). But even before that, the announcement of salvation is clearly an integral part of the introduction (chapters 1–5), not only in chapter 1 (vv. 16–19, 26–27), but also in 2:1–5 and 4:2–6. Moreover, that note of hope caps each succeeding segment (chapters 6–12 end with chapters 11–12; chapters 13–24 are followed by chapters 25–27; chapters 28–35 close with chapters 32–35, etc.). All this is brought to a climax in chapters 60–66, which, without denying the people's inability to save themselves (63:1–65:7), nevertheless insist upon the absolute triumph of the grace of God.<sup>16</sup> Thus, if the message of any book has a claim to the term "kerygmatic," Isaiah's does.

But what precisely is the message of Isaiah? When we look to the first five chapters of the book, which most scholars, regardless of their convictions on authorship, believe were written to introduce the present book, two aspects are likely to catch the reader's eye. The first is the dramatic interchange between light and dark, judgment and hope. The judgment passages are almost unremittingly dark, from the bitter injunction to turn away from useless, dying humanity in 2:22, to the call for the howling winds of battle to destroy a nation so far gone as to call evil good (5:20, 26–30). Against this backdrop, the hope passages are almost unbelievably bright. They speak of a nation clean and pure, sheltering beneath a benevolent God (4:2–6), to whom all the nations will come to hear how the Creator intended them to

16. As one more element in all of this, remember that the prophet's name is *yeša'yahû*—'Yahweh saves.'

live (2:1–5).<sup>17</sup> The sense of contrast between these emphases is heightened by the way in which they are alternated with each other. After chapter 1, which is largely judgmental, except for two brief rays of light (vv. 18–19, 26–27), comes hope in 2:1–5. But then we return to judgment in 2:6–4:1. This is followed by hope again (4:2–6), which gives way yet again to the judgment that closes the segment (5:1–30).

The second aspect that will impress the reader in these introductory chapters is the shocking abruptness with which these interchanges occur. There are no transitions whatsoever from judgment to hope, or back again—this in a book that is noted for such smooth transitions that scholars cannot agree in given cases whether the transitional statement is to be interpreted with the previous segment or with the following one.<sup>18</sup> Yet here there are no transitions, and we must ask why. Surely it will not do to posit a construction by mechanical means (e.g., similar words in two otherwise unrelated pieces) or by chance. This would be as if to say that one motif follows another in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony because both happen to have been written in the same key, or because the one happened to fall from a student's composition book at the moment the master was in need of another phrase. No, the abrupt juxtaposition of these kinds of ideas, whatever their ultimate source, not once, but twice, in these opening chapters, whether done by author or editor, must be seen as an indication of intent.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of the prophet's call only after these introductory chapters must be taken into account

What does the structure and content of these chapters say about the kerygmatic intent of the book, about the way in which the author or editor wishes us to read the book? Without question it speaks about the inescapability of divine retribution. This is clear both by the way chapter 1 concludes and by the way chapter 5 concludes the introduction, Whatever the distant future may hold, it is *through* judgment, not around it, Whatever

17. Calling the Mountain of the Lord the highest mountain of the world is a figurative way of calling him the Creator.

18. Some of the debated transitional passages are 1:9; 2:5; 6:1–13; 9:1[2]; 17:9; 30:18; 32:5; 44:6–8; 45:23, etc.

19. While I insist that this kind of structuring is indicative of intent, I am cautious regarding hypotheses that depend on identifying elaborate structures, such as chiasmic parallelism, extending over several chapters or even over the whole book. Too often these proposals seem to me to depend on misusing some of the data sooner or later. They also do not seem to take enough account of the way the motifs of the book appear and reappear. Thus, it is possible to create any number of these "structures," each one plausible and each one differing from the rest. An example in point is John Goldingay's "The Arrangement of Isaiah 41–45," *VT* 29 (1979) 289–99. On the other hand, see the proposal in chapter 13 below.

the ultimate destiny of Israel and Judah, their immediate destiny is one of destruction.

But against this bleak backdrop stands another certainty equally as real, one whose absolute nature is not mitigated in any sense by the certainty of destruction. This certainty is the realization of the Exodus promises: God's people will be holy, as he is, experiencing his continual guidance and protection (4:2–6; cf. Exod 19:3–6; Num 9:15–18). Whatever may come upon the nation in retribution for their rebellion (chapter 1), their pride (2:6–4:1), and their corruption of moral truth (5:1–30), God's promises will not fail.

But to what purpose are those promises? Was the covenant with Israel merely a fiat of divine love, one manifestation of that eternal Tao that reveals itself to other cultures in other ways? Hardly! The placement of 2:1–5 could not be more telling. The God of Israel is the *only* manifestation of the Tao, and his law was given to the Israelites so that it might be transmitted to the entire world. They cannot perform this function if they are filthy and blood-stained, but cleansing and holiness are not ends in themselves, either. Rather, they are necessary conditions if the ultimate end of the promises—worldwide acknowledgment of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is to be attained.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, this acknowledgment is expected to result in a rule of peace and equity (see also 9:5–6 [6–7]; 11:3–9; 25:6–9; 42:1–4).

Thus, the opening chapters of Isaiah tell us how we are intended to read the book. We are intended to see that as sure as destruction is apart from some radical and continuing change of moral direction (1:16–20), restoration is equally sure. But restoration is for a purpose, the purpose of revealing God to the world and drawing the world to him.

Investigation of the placement and distinctive content of chapter 6 confirms this judgment. The central focus of this chapter is the revelation of God in his moral perfection and in his world-filling glory. God must be known, both in his own essential character and in his relationship to the world. But this revelation can only be destructive to sinful humanity. Thus, Isaiah's response to the experience is not that he is limited, or finite, or even

20. Controversy continues to rage over whether Isaiah is “truly” universalistic. See Harry M. Orlinsky, *Studies in the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah*, VTSup 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 97–117. But unless conjectural emendation is resorted to and offending parts are excised, it seems to me beyond any qualification that the present book teaches that the God of Jerusalem is the sole God of the world and that the whole world must eventually come to him in submission, either voluntary or coerced. (Along with this passage, see 19:23–25; 25:6–8; 45:5–6; 66:18–19.) Whether this end is envisioned as resulting from Jewish “missionary” activity or simply as a result of God's activity on behalf of his people may be argued. But I do not think that the nature of the expected outcome can be disputed. See chapters 8 and 9 below.