

THE PROPHECY OF  
**ISAIAH**

An Introduction & Commentary

J. Alec Motyer

# To Beryl, with love

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# Contents

Author's preface	9
Select bibliography	11
Chief abbreviations	12
Introduction	
1. The Isaianic literature	13
2. Isaiah as author	25
3. The book of Isaiah	30
4. The text of Isaiah	33
<b>The book of the King (Isaiah 1–37)</b>	35
A. <i>The preface. Judah: diagnosis and prognosis (1:1–5:30)</i>	40
1. The title (1:1)	41
2. Sin and experience (1:2–31)	42
a. The national situation (1:2–9)	42
b. The religious situation (1:10–20)	45
c. The social situation (1:21–26)	48
d. Explanation: tensions between threat and hope resolved (1:27–31)	50
3. Sin and election (2:1–4:6)	52
a. Superscription (2:1)	52
b. The ideal Jerusalem (2:2–4)	53
c. The actual Jerusalem (2:5–4:1)	54
d. The new Jerusalem (4:2–6)	64
4. Sin and grace (5:1–30)	67
a. The vineyard: a total work, a total loss (5:1–7)	68
b. The 'stink-fruit': the crop produced, the harvest to come (5:8–30)	70
B. <i>The triumph of grace (6:1–12:6)</i>	74
1. The prologue: reconciliation and commission (6:1–13)	75
a. Isaiah's call (6:1–8)	75
b. The future revealed in principle (6:9–13)	78
2. The King and his people (7:1–11:16)	80
a. The word to Judah (7:1–9:7<6>)	80
b. The word to Israel (9:8<7>–11:16)	105
3. The epilogue: individual and community, salvation, joy and proclamation (12:1–6)	127
C. <i>The universal kingdom (13:1–27:13)</i>	131
1. The first cycle of oracles. The reality of the Lord's promises (13:1–20:6)	134
a. Babylon: appearance and reality in world history (13:1–14:27)	135
b. Philistia: the Davidic dynasty and the Davidic promises (14:28–32)	147
c. Moab: pride before a fall and the conditions of Gentile hope (15:1–16:14)	149
d. Damascus and Ephraim: destruction and preservation, the work of	

humankind and the work of God (17:1 – 18:7)	155
e. Egypt: one God, one world, one people (19:1 – 20:6)	163
2. The second cycle of oracles. The world in the shadows (21:1 – 23:18)	171
a. The Desert by the Sea (Babylon): the fall of the gods (21:1–10)	172
b. Silence (Edom): the prolongation of time (21:11–12)	176
c. Desert evening (Arabian tribes): needs but no solutions (21:13–17)	177
d. The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem): the unforgivable sin (22:1–25)	179
e. Tyre: pride and holiness (23:1–18)	189
3. The third cycle. Two cities in contrast: endurance through to glory (24:1 – 27:13)	194
a. The city of meaninglessness: world history planned around the people of God (24:1–20)	196
b. The end of waiting: the King shall reign (24:21–23)	205
c. The world rejoicing in salvation: the blessings of Mount Zion (25:1–12)	207
d. The strong city: waiting in hope (26:1–21)	211
e. The final gathering: the universal Israel (27:1–13)	220
D. <i>The Lord of history</i> (28:1 – 37:38)	227
1. The one foundation (28:1–29)	228
a. Ephraim: an end and a beginning (28:1–6)	229
b. No trust, no security (28:7–22)	230
c. True discrimination in sowing and reaping (28:23–29)	235
2. A problem solved, a problem stated (29:1–14)	236
a. Chastisement and deliverance (29:1–8)	237
b. Crisis: blindness and illumination (29:9–14)	238
3. Spiritual transformation (29:15–24)	240
a. The first transformation: the subverting of reason (29:15–16)	241
b. The second transformation: coming world renewal (29:17–21)	242
c. The third transformation: the changed fortune of Jacob (29:22–24)	243
4. Human faithlessness and the faithfulness of God (30:1–33)	244
a. Contemporary events: Egypt no help (30:1–7)	245
b. Coming events: the refusal of the word, the way of death (30:8–17)	247
c. Coming events: the waiting God, the sure glory (30:18–26)	249
d. Contemporary events: Assyria no threat (30:27–33)	251
5. Deliverance and renewal (31:1 – 32:20)	253
a. Prologue: disaster and deliverance (31:1–5)	254
b. The work of transformation (31:6 – 32:18)	255
c. Epilogue: humiliation and blessedness (32:19–20)	261
6. Victory, proclamation and pilgrimage (33:1 – 35:10)	262
a. Ultimate realities: salvation and wrath (33:1–12)	262
b. The first universal proclamation: the new Zion, its people and its king (33:13–24)	265
c. The second universal proclamation: the final overthrow (34:1–17)	268
d. Coming home to Zion (35:1–10)	272
7. The rock of history (36:1 – 37:38)	276
a. The first Assyrian embassy (36:1 – 37:7)	276
b. The second Assyrian embassy (37:8–35)	280
c. The finale: Assyrian overthrow (37:36–38)	284
<b>The book of the Servant (Isaiah 38 – 55)</b>	287
A. <i>Historical prologue: Hezekiah's fatal choice</i> (38:1 – 39:8)	290
a. Hezekiah's illness (38:1–8)	291

b. Hezekiah's psalm: a meditation on death and life (38:9–20)	292
c. Hezekiah's healing (38:21–22)	295
d. The moment of decision (39:1–8)	295
B. <i>The consolation of the world</i> (40:1 – 42:17)	298
1. The consolation of Zion (40:1 – 41:20)	298
a. Three voices of consolation (40:1–11)	299
b. The incomparable God of Israel: the Creator (40:12–31)	302
c. The incomparable God of Israel: the world ruler (41:1–7)	308
d. Three pictures of consolation (41:8–20)	311
2. The consolation of the Gentiles (41:21 – 42:17)	314
a. A court scene: the idol-gods are exposed and the plight of the world becomes apparent (41:21–29)	315
b. Remedy: the servant as the Lords answer to the world's plight (42:1–9)	318
c. The new song: the worlds joy in the Lords victory (42:10–17)	323
C. <i>The redemption of Israel</i> (42:18 – 44:23)	326
1. Release from bondage (42:18 – 43:21)	326
a. Israel, the blind servant (42:18–25)	326
b. Disaster reversed: Israel redeemed (43:1–7)	330
c. The certainty of what the Lord has promised (43:8–13)	333
d. Redemption from Babylon: a new exodus (43:14–21)	335
2. Forgiveness of sins (43:22 – 44:23)	338
a. Sin exposed (43:22–24)	338
b. The past forgotten, the future blessed (43:25 – 44:5)	340
c. The certainty of the Lords promise (44:6–20)	343
d. The blessedness of Israel in the redeeming Lord (44:21–23)	349
D. <i>The great deliverance</i> (44:24 – 48:22)	352
1. The task of Cyrus (44:24 – 45:8)	353
a. Cyrus, the Lords shepherd: Zion rebuilt (44:24–28)	353
b. Cyrus, the Lords anointed: interlocking purposes (45:1–8)	356
2. Impermissible questions: the sovereign Lord (45:9–13)	360
a. The potter and the parent (45:9–11)	361
b. Divine acts beyond question (45:12–13)	362
3. A world plan, a central people (45:14–25)	362
a. Gentile submission, Israel's glory (45:14–17)	363
b. Gentile salvation, Israel's glory (45:18–25)	364
4. Rebellious people: the inflexible Lord (46:1–13)	367
5. The triumph of Cyrus (47:1 – 48:22)	371
a. Pride before a fall: the doom of Babylon (47:1–15)	371
b. A problem solved, a problem raised (48:1–22)	375
E. <i>The greater deliverance</i> (49:1 – 55:13)	383
1. The Servant's double task: Israel and the world (49:1–6)	383
2. Divine confirmation: the Servant's success (49:7–13)	389
3. The many and the one: unresponsiveness and response (49:14 – 50:11)	392
4. Salvation in prospect and reality (51:1 – 52:12)	402
a. Commands to listen, promises of salvation (51:1–8)	403
b. Appeal and reassurance (51:9–16)	407
c. Commands to respond: the experience of salvation (51:17 – 52:12)	413
5. The arm of the Lord: the triumph of the Servant (52:13 – 55:13)	422
a. Witnesses, divine and human, to the sin-bearing, dying, living and victorious Servant (52:13 – 53:12)	423
b. Good news for the whole world: universal proclamation and	

invitation, 'Come, for all things are now ready' (54:1 – 55:13)	443
<b>The book of the Anointed Conqueror (Isaiah 56– 66)</b>	459
A. <i>The ideal and the actual: the needs and sins of the Lord's people (56:1 – 59:13)</i>	463
a. World people, Sabbath people, praying people (56:1–8)	463
b. Two parties: problem and solution (56:9 – 57:21)	467
c. Sin exposed and confessed (58:1 – 59:13)	478
B. <i>The coming of the Anointed Conqueror (59:14 – 63:6)</i>	489
a. Situation and reaction: divine commitment to salvation and vengeance (59:14–20)	490
b. The covenant mediator (59:21)	492
c. The coming glory: the Lords city, the universal city and the consummation of the Abrahamic blessing (60:1–22)	493
d. Transforming power, present and future (61:1–9)	499
e. The commitment of the Anointed One and the oath of the Lord (61:10 – 62:12)	504
f. The day of vengeance and the victory of the Anointed Conqueror (63:1–6)	509
C. <i>Prayer and response: steps to the new heaven and new earth (63:7 – 66:24)</i>	512
1. The prayer of a <b>remembrancer</b> (63:7 – 64:12)	512
a. The foundation of intercession: the mind of God regarding his people (63:7–14)	512
b. Confession and intercession (63:15 – 64:12)	515
2. Sure promises: the final reckoning and the new Jerusalem (65:1 – 66:24)	522

## Author's preface

The sheer length of a book like Isaiah, not to mention the vast literature which has accumulated around it, compels any commentator to decide what sort of commentary to write. With the absurd unrealism of the very young, I planned (long ago) to include everything! I was then, and for many subsequent years, privileged to lecture on the Hebrew text of Isaiah to classes in Clifton Theological College, Tyndale Hall and Dalton House – subsequently, to the praise of God, Trinity College, Bristol. All the material – linguistic, exegetical, expository, introductory – appropriate to a lecture course and all the evaluative comments on specialist work and debate was to find a place in my commentary. But, of course, the world is not big enough to contain such a book, no publisher foolish enough to undertake it, nor am I competent to write it.

There are three main thrusts in commentating: explanation (what the text means), encyclopaedia (the course of specialist debate) and exposition (the continuing reality of the text as God's word today). Of these, I decided to major on the first while by no means forgetting the last, for I would count it the highest privilege under God to assist every reader of Isaiah into fuller understanding and to be of some assistance to preachers. But, of course, it is impossible to ignore the wealth and course of the study of the book of Isaiah.' It will be evident throughout my commentary that I gratefully stand on the shoulders of many a predecessor; and while both space and competence have

'The course of Isaiah studies since Duhm is well catalogued in B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (SCM, 1979) and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Tyndale Press, 1970). From Wellhausen (1869) onwards study concentrated on penetrating behind the text as received to the foundations of Israel's faith and the original setting of prophetic oracles. In Isaiah this process was given major impetus by the work of B. Duhm (1892) whose concern was mainly with underlying situations and the processes of redaction, the final form being of less importance; cf. R. E. Clements, 'Beyond tradition-history', *JSOT*, 31 (1985). The deserved fame of the ICC perpetuated the same emphasis, with considerable concern for emendation. It was assumed that the prophetic books were anthological, and the task of dividing obliterated any vision of the whole. Gunkel and the form critics helped to focus attention on individual pericopae; cf. S. Mowinckel, *Die Komposition des Jesaja-buches* (Acta Orientalia, 1933). More recently, the commentaries of Clements, Whybray, Kaiser and Westermann, though individually full of insight, bring little sense of a wholeness, and the same is true of the great work of Wilderberger. In 1969 J. Muilenberg coined the phrase 'rhetorical criticism' ('Form criticism and beyond', *JBL*, 88/1[1969]) and introduced a welcome emphasis on the use of individual components analysed out of a text to display the artistry of the whole. The advent of 'canonical criticism' (Childs, *Introduction*) and the increasing interest in 'integrative reading' (cf. Johnson on Is. 24 – 27) promise a concentration on holism (concern for the complete text as inherited), which is already producing fruit beyond what has arisen from a century of historical criticism and tradition criticism. See P. R. House, *Zephaniah: A Prophetic Drama*, *JSOTS*, 69 (1988) and *The Unity of the Twelve*, *JSOTS*, 97 (1990); B. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, *JSOTS*, 46 (1987); L. R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, *JSOTS*, 68 (1988); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (NY Basic Books, 1981). As House remarks, 'What is sought in literary analysis is the results of how that inspired Book is shaped as literature . . . There is still room for explorations of the anatomy of whole books.' See also R. J. Coggins, 'History and story in Old Testament study', *JSOT*, 11 (1979); J. F. A. Sawyer, *From Moses to Patmos* (SPCK, 1977); R. F. Melugin, 'The formation of Isaiah 40 – 55', *BZAW*, 141 (1976).

forbidden any prolonged engagement with the views of others, I have tried neither to be ignorant of what has been and is being said nor foolishly to fly in the face of those who are so very far my superiors. D. L. Peterson has put perfectly what I wish to say:

No commentary can hope to be truly exhaustive and at the same time coherent. This volume includes text-critical and philological notes when these appear necessary ... I have introduced notes which represent the dialogue between my own work and that of my predecessors. However, my primary goal has been ... interpretation ...<sup>1</sup>

For the same reasons I have not allocated space to an extensive specialist bibliography when such is readily available elsewhere to those who need it, and in general I have limited quotation to accessible English works which will in turn indicate wider areas of reading.

It is over thirty years since I was presumptuous enough to accept an invitation to contribute a commentary on Isaiah to the Tyndale series. The passing years have amassed material beyond what that useful series can accommodate, and it says much for the patience and tolerance of those in charge of the Inter-Varsity Press that they have waited so long and are now willing to accept so much. I remember with much gratitude the constant goading I received in years past from Ronald Inchley and rejoice that he is still with us on earth to learn that his gentle peremptoriness was not in vain. With affection and gratitude I acknowledge superb help from Frank Entwistle, the present Director of IVP and from David Kingdon, Theological Books Editor of the Press. I would like to mention also Sue Rebis who prepared my manuscript for publication. Her skill in turning many an incomprehensible comment into reasonable sense, her patience with me and with a very long text and her ever kind encouragement have meant more than can readily be expressed. To the people who checked the Hebrew and the Bible references I also extend warm gratitude. It would be impossible for an author to be more cared for and assisted than we who are privileged to achieve publication under the IVP imprint.

It has become conventional for authors to thank their wives for help and support, and in no case is this less a formality or more a reality than mine. My gratitude extends from the days long ago when, reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe's raven (though neither in looks nor in voice), Beryl stung my conscience by repeated exhortations to 'Remember Ronald Inchley' right through to her readiness to see the early years of our retirement devoted to the cause of Isaiah. To dedicate my book to her is no more than love would wish and far less than debt requires.

As I look back now, and particularly over the intensive activity of the last three years, there rises unbidden the picture of a very small mouse nibbling heroically at a very large cheese. Indeed it is no picture but a reality, and now that all is at last done, like Reepicheep of Narnia (though, please God, without his endearing bumptiousness), I too lay my sword at the feet of him who alone is worthy of all praise, the Servant of the Lord, the reigning King and the coming Anointed Conqueror, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bishopsteignton

Alec Motyer

<sup>1</sup>D. L. Peterson, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (SCM, 1984), p. 7.



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## Chief abbreviations

- BDB** F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (OUP, 1929).  
**BH** R. Kittel (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica*, 3rd edn. (Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1927, 1937).  
**BHS** R. Elliger (ed.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1968).  
**BZAW** *Beiheft Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*.  
**DOTT** D. W. Thomas (ed.), *Documents of Old Testament Times* (Nelson, 1958).  
**EQ** *Evangelical Quarterly*.  
**GF** G. Fohrer, *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (SCM, 1973).  
**GKC** W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* (OUP, 1910).  
**KB** L. Köhler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Brill, 1958).  
**ICC** *International Critical Commentary*.  
**IBD** *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (IVP, 1980).  
**IDB** G. A. Buttrick et al. (eds.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 volumes (1962).  
**JBL** *Journal of Biblical Literature*.  
**JETS** *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.  
**JSOT** *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*.  
**JSOTS** *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplementary volume.  
**LXX** Septuagint (Greek version of OT).  
**MT** Massoretic Text (Hebrew Bible).  
**NBC** *New Bible Commentary* (IVP, 1970).  
**NCB** *New Century Bible*.  
**NIC** *New International Commentary*.  
**Q** *The St Mark's Isaiah Scroll from Qumran*.  
**VT** *Vetus Testamentum*.  
**VTS** *Vetus Testamentum*, Supplementary volume.

Readers should appreciate that because the basis of my exposition is the Hebrew text of Isaiah, I have frequently offered a more literal translation than the NIV. In order to avoid a tiresome repetition of 'lit.', I have simply inserted an oblique ( / ) between the NIV and my own translation. I have used the convention of a square root sign ( √ ) to indicate Hebrew verbal roots. Bible references cited throughout the commentary often relate to points of Hebrew grammar or vocabulary and their relevance may not be immediately obvious from the NIV translation.

# Introduction

## 1. The Zsaianic literature

While specialist study cannot agree about the place to be given to Isaiah of Jerusalem in the book that has always borne his name, it is now more acceptable than at any time in the last one hundred years to speak of a single literature. Throughout Old Testament study it is being recognized that, whatever view be taken of the prehistory of a text, it is the task of scholarship to pursue a holistic study. This means wrestling with the text as received, being unwilling to assume that ancient editors ordered their work with scant understanding of what they were doing, and searching out the message that emerges from the totality considered as a unit of Holy Scripture. The following commentary attempts this task in detail, but an initial overview will set the scene by tracing five unificatory lines which bind the Isaianic literature: the Messianic hope, the motif of the city, the Holy One of Israel, history and faith and literary and structural features.

### a. The Messianic hope

As the commentary shows in detail, the Isaianic literature is built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1–37), the Servant (chapters 38–55) and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56–66).<sup>1</sup> It also shows how each of these portraits is integral to the ‘book’ in which it is set. Standing back from the portraits, however, we discover the same features in each, indicative of the fact that they are meant as facets of the one Messianic person. Thus,

1. In each portrait the Messiah is revealed as endowed with Spirit and word.<sup>3</sup>
2. The concept of ‘righteousness’ recurs throughout, characteristic of throne and King (9:7) and the nature of his rule (11:4). Likewise, righteousness lies at the heart of the work of the Servant (53:11; 54:17), the character of the Anointed Conqueror (61:10; 63:1) and the outcome of his activity (61:3, 11).
3. While it is naturally emphasized that the King is of Davidic descent (9:6–7) – is indeed ‘David’ (11:1) – it is also true that the covenanting work of the Servant<sup>4</sup> is the realization of ‘the sure mercies of David’ (55:3). Furthermore, in the case of the Anointed Conqueror the climax of his victory is presented under the Davidic motif of the conquest of Edom (63:1; see on 34:1–17).
4. Each of the Messianic representations embraces equally Israel and the Gentile world. In each case the movement is from a central work outwards: the restoration of Zion (1:26–27) merges into the inflooding of the nations (2:2–4); the royal ‘David’ of 11:1 rules over a new world (11:6–9) and his harmonized people (11:13–14) become the ‘troops’ which ‘assault’ Philistia (11:14) and bring

<sup>1</sup>The main Messianic passages are: 7:10–15; 9:1–7; 8:23–9:6; 11:1–16; 14:28–32; 24:21–23; 32:1–8; 33:17–24 (on the King); 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12 (on the Servant); and 59:21; 61:1–3; 61:10–62:7; 63:1–6 (on the Anointed Conqueror).

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 37, 74, 131, 289, 326, 461, 493.

<sup>3</sup>11:1–2, 4; 42:1; 49:1–3; 50:4; 59:21; 61:1–3.

<sup>4</sup>42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3.

the Gentiles into subjection.' The panoramic spread of David's rule over the world (chapters 13-27) includes the coequal membership of erstwhile outcasts and aliens (19:23-25; 27:12-13). The Servant is introduced as the vehicle of divine revelation to the Gentiles (42:1-4), but the developing portrait shows that he performs this work by restoring Israel/Jacob (49:1-6) and thus himself becoming the Lord's salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6). When he accomplishes his saving work (52:13-53:12) the call to enter into the benefits extends to both Zion (chapter 54) and the whole world (chapter 55). The advent of the Anointed Conqueror as a Redeemer to Zion (59:20-21) brings the nations into the light Zion enjoys (chapter 60), and the salvation that comes to Zion becomes a universal message (62:11-12). The explication of the Conqueror's role, implicit in 63:7-66:24, includes a Gentile hope as glorious as anything in the rest of Scripture, and much more the result of missionary enterprise (66:19) than appears elsewhere in the Old Testament.

5. The 'Messianic enigma' evidenced in the Old Testament is especially prominent in these three portraits with their implication of a Messiah who is plainly man and truly God. The King is born in David's line (11:1) but he is also the root from which David springs (11:10) and the 'Mighty God' (9:6). The Servant possesses a human ancestry and appearance (53:2) and had the common human experience of rejection (53:3) and a trial of suffering beyond any other (50:6; 52:14). But he was also 'the arm of the LORD', the Lord himself visibly present in saving action (53:1; cf. 51:9; 52:10). The 'arm' of the Lord reappears at the beginning of the 'Anointed Conqueror' sequence (59:16) as the Lord himself dons the garments symbolic of his capacity for and commitment to the effectuating of his righteousness and the working of salvation. But in fact the garments are passed to the Anointed One (61:10) and it is his righteousness, vengeance and redemption which are finally accomplished (63:1,4). The sequence which began with the Lord's 'arm' ends with the 'arm' of the Anointed Conqueror (63:5).

The coinciding presentations of the portraits of the Servant<sup>3</sup> and the Anointed Conqueror merit further exploration. The broad comparisons can be displayed in a diagram.

'The subjection motif belongs within the 'kingly' metaphor: kings conquer, and one state comes to terms with another by submission. The intended reality in the use of the motif is that of submission to the truth and therefore submission, initially, to those who minister the truth. See on 11:14; 45:14-25.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt. 22:41. See I. A. Motyer, 'Messiah' (*IBD*); B. B. Warfield, 'The divine Messiah in the Old Testament', *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. S. G. Craig (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1952).

<sup>3</sup>On the interpretation of the Servant Songs see North, *Suffering Servant*; H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord* (Lutterworth, 1952), pp. 3-88; E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (Tyndale Press, 1954), pp. 103-141. The main trends of interpretation have been to see the Servant as personified or idealized Israel or a personification of the 'remnant' (collective views); as the prophet himself (autobiographical view); or as an individual, whether a known person within Israel's history or the foreseen Messiah (individual views). Collective views find difficulty over the perfection attributed to the Servant, as 'Israel', including the remnant, is always classed as sinful and needy before God. On the convolutions to which a collectivist is driven, see Wade's tabulation of the six contrasts between Israel and the Servant followed by his remarkable conclusion that they are, nevertheless, the same! (Wade, p. 267). The autobiographical view faces difficulty in chapter 53 where the Servant dies yet lives on and, of course, in 49:3 where the Servant is named 'Israel' (see Whybray). Attempts to identify the Servant with known (Jeremiah) or unknown (Duhm's 'leprous rabbi') individuals make a mockery of the whole exercise of interpretation for no such individual can sustain the comparison and we would have to conclude that the Servant came and went without being

## The Servant

<b>42:1-4</b> Biography	<b>49:1-6</b> Autobiography	<b>50:4-9</b> Autobiography	<b>52:13-53:12</b> Biography
The Servant's task	The Servant's task	The Servant's commitment	The Servant's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He experiences despondency	He experiences suffering	He experiences suffering
Tailpiece (42:5-9)	Tailpiece (49:7-13)	Tailpiece (50:10-11)	Tailpiece (54:1-55:13)

## The Anointed Conqueror

<b>59:21</b> Biography	<b>61:1-3</b> Autobiography	<b>61:10-62:7</b> Autobiography	<b>63:1-6</b> Autobiography
The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's commitment	The Conqueror's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation
Tailpiece (60:1-22)	Tailpiece (61:4-9)	Tailpiece (62:12)	?Tailpiece (63:7-66:24)

The two presentations are:

1. *Continuous*, in that the 'seed' of the Servant appear for the first time in the final Servant Song (53:10) and reappear in the first Song of the Anointed Conqueror (59:21).

2. *Parallel*, as indicated above, but note also that in each series the first

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recognized or without having achieved the task allotted to him. Here also Duhm set Isaiah studies off on an unproductive track by isolating the Songs from their context and treating them as later intrusions. Not every commentator who has adopted a 'Messianic' view has rectified this fault or shown the integration of the whole sequence of chapters 40-55. Only when this is done is the Servant rightly seen in the sort of developmental light that Rowley sketched. See also M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (SPCK, 1959).

## INTRODUCTION

appearance of the Messianic personage is unheralded: he suddenly steps onto the stage. In each case the third Song is anonymous; only the context makes it clear who the speaker is.

3. *Contrasting*, in that in the Servant-series there is a mounting emphasis on self-submissiveness, reaching its climax in the last two Songs, whereas in the Conqueror-series there is a mounting emphasis on action, reaching its climax in the last two Songs.

The change from biography to autobiography in the fourth Songs must be seen as deliberately intended in order to bring out this same contrast between the one who 'opened not his mouth' in the final enacting of his task and the one who brings the work of vengeance and redemption to its spine-tingling conclusion. The most obvious explanation of the way the two figures are presented is that it is a conscious literary construction, deliberately devised. This suits the contexts, respectively chapters 40-55 and 56-66, which read like books with a plan and structure and the craft of the writer. By contrast, the diffused presentation of the King in chapters 1-37 has much more the feeling of a written deposit resulting from a spoken ministry.

These similarities and contrasts must be accounted for in any synthetic view of the Isaianic literature. King, Servant and Anointed Conqueror, however, make a single picture in which each needs the others. Both the King (9:1-5) and the Servant (53:12; cf. 49:24-26; 52:3-6) are victors, but without the Conqueror the victory is neither explained nor consummated. The King rules in righteousness over a righteous community (32:1-8), but how can he do so until the Servant provides righteousness for the Lord's servants (53:11; 54:17) and the Conqueror effectuates righteousness and overthrows their enemies (63:1-6)? The King rules over the whole world (see references above), but how can he do so until the Servant opens the way for all who will to come to feast and to enjoy the 'sure mercies of David' (55:1-5) and until the Conqueror creates a world free of opposition?

### b. The motif of the city

Jerusalem first came into the traditions of the people of God with the person of Melchizedek (Gn. 14:18) and the recognition of his royal priesthood by Abraham. Thereafter nothing significant happened until the capture and occupation of the city by David (2 Sa. 5:6-10) and his centralizing of the city politically and religiously in Israel (2 Sa. 6). David's understanding of the city as 'the place the Lord chose' is revealed in 2 Samuel 7:10-11. Joshua 10:1 provides a hint that the Melchizedek/Adonizedek tradition was maintained in Jerusalem, and if this is the case then David, on setting his throne there himself became the successor to Melchizedek. This provides background for the use of the Melchizedek tradition as a vehicle of Messianic hope in Psalm 110,<sup>1</sup> just as the Abrahamic tradition leads into Psalms 47, 87 *etc.* Thus, through David (and Nathan) and under God, the Davidic monarchy, the Melchizedek priesthood, the Abrahamic promises and the chosen city all came together. But it fell to Isaiah to become the chief propagandist of this city-based royal eschatology. The Isaianic literature could be accurately described as 'the book of the city'. To be sure, its scope is 'Judah and Jerusalem' (1:1), but in its vision the fate of Judah is sealed in the city, and the restoration of the city is the restoration not merely of the people but of the world. Four Isaianic strands are woven together

<sup>1</sup>See A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press, 1967).

## INTRODUCTION

in this use of the city motif in which Jerusalem, Zion, mount/mountain and city are broadly interchangeable terms: 'divine judgment,' 'preservation and restoration,' the security of Zion and security in Zion (14:32;28:16) and the centrality of the city in the divine thought and plan.<sup>3</sup>

The most striking use of the city motif is 'the tale of two cities'. The ongoing history of the world produces a global society structured without God, the humanly-made, humanly-centred city, created by human cleverness for human salvation. The small beginnings in Shinar (Gn. 11:1-4) are thus a microcosm of what the whole earth will be at the end. Contemporaneous with the inevitable divine overthrow of this city there is created the 'city of God, a new world order constructed by God on his plan, with himself at the centre and from where he reigns over a universe of righteousness and peace. The central outworking of this striking idea is in chapters 13-27, particularly chapters 24-26 (e.g. 24:10;25:2-3, 6-10; 26:1-6). It is interesting to note that while chapters 40-55 share the city motif and are certainly not lacking in world vision, the main links are between chapters 1-37 and 56-66.<sup>4</sup>

### c. The Holy One of Israel

The focal point of the call of Isaiah is the holiness of God. It is the only thing capable of 'filling all the earth' and the only quality in the whole Old Testament which has to be 'cubed in order adequately to express its worth and magnitude (6:3). Within the call-narrative (6:1-13) the notion of holiness is applied in three directions. First, holiness and transcendence. The vision is of the exalted Sovereign (Lord, *ʾdōnāy*, in verse 1; King in verse 5), and the nature of that sovereignty is defined in the ceaseless cry of the seraphim that the Lord is holy. Secondly, holiness and judgment. The clarity of the prophet's reactions in verse 5 makes up for any uncertainty in translating verse 4. It is a deadly thing for a sinner to be found in the presence of the Holy One. No sentence need be pronounced from the throne; conscience declares personal and national guilt and its consequence. Thirdly, holiness and salvation. The smoke of holiness (*cf.* Ex. 19:18) left the means of salvation (the altar) still in view (verse 6), and from the presence and by the will of the Holy One a seraph flew to be the minister of cleansing and atonement to the sinner. The whole of the Isaianic literature has a theology of holiness exactly as if it all depended on the truth enunciated in chapter 6.

As far as general statistics are concerned Isaiah is the prophet of holiness. In the Isaianic literature the adjective 'holy' (*qāḏōš*) is used of God more frequently than in all the rest of the Old Testament taken together.<sup>5</sup> Even when the adjectival use of the noun (only Is. 52:10) is taken into account the Isaianic literature still contains over one third of the total ascriptions of holiness to God

<sup>1</sup>1:8;3:1, 8, 16; 4:3-4;10:12, 24-25, 32; 22:1-14;64:10;66:6. This theme of judgment is reflected in the ruined city of 49:14-21;54:1, 11.

<sup>2</sup>The preservation of the city (1:8;26:1;29:1-8;31:5-9;36:15;37:10, 32-35;38:6); its restoration (40:2, 9;52:1;57:13;61:3;66:8); the Davidic restoration (1:21, 26-27;24:23;33:20); universal (2:2-4;11:9;27:13;60:14;62:12;65:25); redeemed (51:17;52:1-2, 7-8;59:20;62:11); Cyrus (45:13); sanctuary/divine dwelling (4:3-5;12:6;*cf.* 30:19).

<sup>3</sup>E.g. 1425; 41:27;46:13;60:14;62:1, 6;65:18-19;66:13.

<sup>4</sup>Note, however, the reappearance of 35:10 in 51:11 and of 11:6-9 in 65:25.

<sup>5</sup>Thirty-three times in Isaiah compared with twenty-six times in the rest of the Old Testament.