

# Isaiah

## *Thus Says Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel*

### **Introduction**

Oswalt begins his commentary on Isaiah with this description: “Of all the books in the OT, Isaiah is perhaps the richest. Its literary grandeur is unequaled. Its scope is unparalleled. The breadth of its view of God is unmatched. In so many ways it is a book of superlatives. Thus it is no wonder that Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the NT, and along with Psalms and Deuteronomy, one of the most frequently cited of all OT books. Study of it is an opportunity for unending inspiration and challenge.”<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah contains some of the most quoted and familiar passages by Christians throughout the ages, such as this text from Is. 40:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.

Is. 40:28-31 (ESV)

And yet, there are many other parts of this amazing book of Isaiah that are far less familiar or ignored altogether. While this class will not have the time to study the entire text in detail, the goal is to gain a much better appreciation for the entire message of the book to hear what the Holy One of Israel may be trying to say to us in our day as His people.

### **Background**

#### **Type of Book**

Prophets in the Old Testament were commissioned by God to act and speak on His behalf with His authority. Thus while God no longer spoke directly to the people as on Mt. Sinai when they first departed from Egypt, He did speak through His prophets. While Isaiah is not the first prophet in the Bible, this book attributed to him is the first of the “Prophet” books that conclude the Old Testament. These books use varying amounts of prose, poetry, and visions to communicate God’s message to His people. Isaiah uses some prose, but the majority of the book is presented in poetic form as he “interweaves the language of sight and speech”<sup>2</sup> – opening with the announcement of presenting a “vision” immediately followed with the command to “Hear ... for the LORD has spoken.”

Poetry is a language of images, metaphors and the careful arrangement of words. In some ways it can be considered to be “dense” in the amount of meaning it can convey in a small number of words.

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<sup>1</sup> Oswalt, John N. – *The Book of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986. Page 3

<sup>2</sup> Goldingay, John. – *Isaiah*. Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks a division of Baker Publishing Group. 2001. Page 2

It not only communicates an idea, but the communication itself is beautiful and rich. The arrangement of the words is very deliberate and full of meaning. In addition to imagery, Hebrew poetry uses a number of other literary devices in order to communicate its ideas. Thus some of the work of this class will be to delve into the rich and sometimes foreign imagery and literary devices used in order to unpack the deeper meaning of the text.

## Historical Context

As the book opens, it immediately identifies its first historical context: “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” Judah is facing threats from its immediate neighbors, but the far greater threat is that of invasion by Assyria. In chapters 40-55, the book’s context changes to address those in exile in Babylon. Then as the book concludes in chapters 56-66, the message is to those who have returned to Jerusalem from exile. Refer to the separate handout with additional details about the political state of that part of the world during the time encompassed by Isaiah.

## Authorship

There is general consensus among most scholars that there are multiple authors of Isaiah because of the span of time and topics it covers as well as the stylistic nature of different parts of the book. Oswalt still argues for a single author, but more than that stresses that the effort to determine the parts that belong to multiple authors ends up detracting from a study of the book as a whole. The effect becomes that of losing the beauty of a flower as a result of dissecting it into its parts. For the sake of deriving the most benefit from the text in the time we have, this class will not focus on details of authorship as we feel that will only detract from the most significant insights of the text.

## Structure

There are three main sections to Isaiah addressing the people of Israel through three chapters of their history:

- 1-40 – Addressing Israel before the exile facing threat from Assyria
  - 1-6 – Introduces the book
  - 7-12 – Trust Assyria or God?
  - 13-27 – Judgment and Redemption
  - 28-35 – The folly of trusting the nations
  - 36-39 – Sennacherib invades Judah, anticipating Babylon
- 40-55 – In exile in Babylon
  - 40-48 – Comfort and hope in exile, introduction of the LORD’s Servant
  - 49-55 – Salvation by the LORD’s Servant
- 56-66 – Return to Jerusalem
  - 56-59 – Human Inability
  - 60-66 – Glory in the Lord

## Themes

As Oswalt states: “In its present form it encompasses the sweep of biblical theology better than any other single book in the canon.”<sup>3</sup> This can be seen in the following major themes that flow throughout the book:

- Yahweh, the **Holy** One of Israel:
  - Glorious and majestic
  - Creator

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<sup>3</sup> Oswalt Page 52

- Redeemer
- Judge
- Faithful
- Despised
- Sovereign
- His People
  - They have turned away from their God
  - They do not turn to Him for help but instead rely on human solutions to their crises
  - Their pride, complacency, and offensive practices
    - Oppression and Injustice
    - Corruption
    - Greed
    - Idolatry – “Nowhere else in Scripture is the stupidity of idolatry subjected to such exquisite sarcasm as in the book of Isaiah”<sup>4</sup>
    - Empty religious practices
  - What does God want from His people?
- The World
  - Judah’s neighbors and enemies
  - Threats to God’s people
  - Nations Israel turns to as allies instead of God
  - God’s use of other nations to chastise
- Judgment
  - On His people
  - On the enemies of His people
  - On the world
- Comfort, Hope of Redemption and Promise of Sanctification
  - Comfort in crisis, in exile
  - Constantly, the book reiterates God’s mercy, redemption and restoration even in the face of judgment
  - God’s plan for the restoration of Israel and the sanctification of His people
  - God’s plan to call *all* nations to Himself

### **Goals for Class**

The following are what we hope will be the result of attending this class – whether it is a single class or a section or you are able to stay with us for the entire book:

- That you will be encouraged and motivated to follow God with a whole heart
- That you will become more knowledgeable of His Word so that it is better imprinted on your heart
- That you will have a better understanding of the heart of God and what He wants from His redeemed people so that you may serve Him more closely
- That as a result you will be transformed by the renewing of your minds as together we study the Word of God and His Spirit speaks to your heart

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 34