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THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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The question of the literary and theological unity of the book of Isaiah has consumed the interest of nineteenth- an twentieth-century researchers. Since the epoch-making commentary of B. Duhm (1892) the division of the book into three segments (1-39, 40-55, 56-66), each with its own historical or thematic interest, has been a widely accepted conclusion of biblical scholarship. Indeed since 1892 fragmentation of the book has proceeded apace. The problem with such approaches is the fact that the book of Isaiah was received into the Canon as a unity. This suggests that the sixty-six chapters have a literary cohesiveness which may be related to a major aspect of the purpose of the book. To postulate a 'school of disciples' (*cf.* Is 8:16) as responsible for the whole book, continuing the tradition begun by an Isaiah of Jerusalem, is really to beg the essential question and to explain one unknown by another.

Recent discussion has tended to look more for the inner theological connections which may be reasonably asserted to bind the book together. Factors such as divine kingship, the notion of holiness, the Davidic and Zionistic emphasis of much of the book (Davidic only in Isaiah 1-39, however), as well as the very high ethical tone of the whole have been pointed to as general tendencies giving a common theological direction.[1] At the same time B. S. Childs has suggested that Isaiah 40-55 functions as prophetic interpretation and elaboration of the traditions of Isaiah 1-39 (the 'former things' of 'the former and latter things', being on his view references to the prophecies of 1-39), while Childs and others

1. We may refer to the recent contributions of R. E. Clements, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah', *Int* 36 (1982) 1171-129; J. J. M. Roberts, 'Isaiah in Old Testament Theology', *Int* 36 (1982) 130-143; and W. Brueggemann, 'Unity and Dynamic in the Isaiah Tradition', *JSOT* 29 (1984) 89-107.

have seen Isaiah 56-66 as an elaboration and application of the message of Isaiah 40-55.[2]

Approaches of this character (particularly endeavours to interrelate the materials of the book as initial prophecy, 1-39, upon which successive sections build) have been helpful, but are not sufficiently precise. If the book is read as a unit there is an *overmastering* theme which may be said effectively to unite the whole. This is the theme of Yahweh's interest in and devotion to the city of Jerusalem. Of course, other sub-themes abound in a book of this length and character, and they have rightly been identified (notion of holiness, divine kingship, for example). But when we are considering the major contribution to the Canon which the book of Isaiah makes, the interest in the fate of the historical Jerusalem and the eschatological hopes bound up with the notion of Jerusalem which the book of Isaiah develops can be seen to be the factor which provides the theological cohesion of this work and gives it its unitary stamp.

Thus, Isaiah 1 presents us with the picture of a decadent Jerusalem whose sacrifices cannot any longer be accepted and whose prayers must be turned aside. Isaiah 1 functions as an introduction not only to Isaiah 1-12 but to the whole book.[3] Appropriately, therefore, the prophecy concludes (Is. 66:20-24) with the emergence of a new Jerusalem as God's holy mountain to which the world will go up in a pilgrimage of worship. From the final chapters of the prophecy it becomes clear that the notion of the New Jerusalem is intimately linked with the prophecy of a New Creation (Is. 65:17-18). This New Jerusalem in fact functions as a symbol of the new age and is presented in the conclusion in obvious contrast to the city with which the book has begun.

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2. B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 328-334. R. Rendtorff ('Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja', *VT* 34 [1984] 318) also regards Isaiah 40-55 as forming the kernel of the book around which the other elements were redacted. He notes major themes such as Yahweh's כבוד ('glory') and Yahweh as the 'Holy One' of Israel but sees the Zion theme as the significant factor which binds the three sections together.
3. G. Fohrer, 'Jesaja 1 als Zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesajas' *ZAW* 74 (1962) 251-268.

We should note that it is not merely this emphasis at the beginning and the end of the book which may be pointed to. The first half of Isaiah ends in chapter 39 with a threatened exile pronounced upon king Hezekiah and his city, Jerusalem. With chapter 40 the second half of the book begins with the announcement of a prospective return from exile in general terms (Is. 40:1). But immediately he prophet translates this 'comfort' to be extended to 'my people' (v. 1) into the Jerusalem who is to be spoken to 'comfortably' (v. 2). Indeed the entire focus of Isaiah 40:1-11, the introduction to Isaiah 40-55, is upon Jerusalem, as our later analysis will indicate. In the overall development of chapters 40-55, once the general nature of the return has been discussed in chapters 40-48, Jerusalem/Zion becomes the point of direct focus in 49-55. We shall also note how the Zion theme is extended in 56-66, beginning and ending this final section.

We may make he preliminary proposal that the purpose of the book of Isaiah was to provide information about and an explanation of the conditions which prevailed in Jerusalem in Isaiah 1 and the change which then gradually occurred and which takes us to the picture finally presented in Isaiah 65-66, but developed from chapter 40 onwards. Bearing in mind the broad movement of the entire prophecy, we now turn to the individual sections of the book and to the series of interconnections which serve to keep the Jerusalem theme before us.

A. *Isaiah 1-12*

As P. R. Ackroyd has pointed out, the content of Isaiah 1-12 moves alternately between the motifs of promise and threat.[4] In this way the outline of 1-39 as mainly threat and 40-66 as predominantly promise is introduced. Thus Isaiah 1 is plainly threat against Jerusalem, while Isaiah 2:1-4 outlines the prophetic hope for Zion (a prophetic notion obviously developed before Isaiah's time). This hope will be later greatly expanded by chapters 60-62. Isaiah 2:5-22 is a threat directed to a Jerusalem society given over to pride and idolatry. The threat continues in Isaiah 3 in which the Jerusalem

4. P. R. Ackroyd, 'Isaiah I-XII. Presentation of a Prophet' in *VT Supplements* 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 16-48.

leadership and the social upheavals occasioned by the reversal of roles in society is treated. This alternation of motifs continues with the promise of a return of the remnant to Zion in chapter 4 and the lament of the impending rejection of Judah and Jerusalem in 5:1-7. A series of seven woes against prevailing social conditions is formed by 5:8-10:4 (interrupted by 6:1-9:7) while the remainder of chapter 10 is interwoven with oracles concerning divine punishment to be visited upon Judah and Jerusalem and then divine judgement upon the arrogant Assyrian. The complementary message of hope pointing to an ideal community established under messianic leadership is presented in Isaiah 11:1-9, followed by a picture of the transformed new age established by a new Exodus (11:10-16). A salvation hymn (Is. 12) completes this first section and concludes on the note of praise to be uttered by the inhabitants of Zion in whose midst Yahweh will dwell.

Isaiah 1 is undoubtedly the key to the book. It is a thoroughgoing indictment of the failure of Israel to be the people of God and a rejection of Jerusalem, the political and cultic centre (vv. 2-3, covenant breach; vv. 4-9, Israel's refusal to be God's people; vv. 10-12, the problem of the perverted cult; vv. 21-23, the resumption of the indictment of vv. 2-3; vv. 24-26, threat of punishment; vv. 27-31, a verdict which reveals for the first time in the OT the emergence of two groups within the nation, the righteous remnant who will be redeemed [v. 27] and the wicked who will be punished [vv. 28-31]).[5]

What accounts for the intensity of this divine assault upon Jerusalem in Isaiah 1? Clearly the problem which Jerusalem presents as the book commences is being advanced, but what constitutes the problem? Here it may be helpful to turn to Isaiah 6:1-9:7, an intrusive element into the structure of threat and promise which we have seen prevailing in Isaiah 1-12. It is an intrusion of emphasis since Isaiah 6 contains the call of the prophet and directs us towards his vocation, towards the

5. On the structure of Isaiah 1 compare S. Niditsch, 'The Composition of Isaiah 1' *Bib* 61 (1981) 509-529 and A. V. Hunter, *A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortation in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah* (Baltimore: St Mary's Seminary and University 1980) 177-199.

difficulties which he will have to confront.[6] On the analogy of threat and promise which we have found in the surrounding chapters we may be inclined, however, to expect the same in 6:1-9:7. And find it we do. Isaiah 6:1-8:22 deals with judgement directed against the Davidic house in Jerusalem and the resulting desolation which is to come upon the city, while 9:1-7 returns us, as promise, to an idealized picture of Davidic leadership to be brought about by some divine intervention at a later period.

Isaiah 6 begins with an account of the prophet's call in the year of Uzziah's death. This long reign of fifty-two years had marked for the south a return to Davidic and Solomonic is greatness, but in the year of the death of this king Isaiah is encouraged to put politics into their proper perspective, by his vision of the Lord (6:1), the King (v. 5). As a result he comes to realise that what accounts for Judah's security and continuance is Yahweh's guidance within history, not the deft political kingship or conjunction of foreign alliances by which the southern kingdom had until then been held together. The scene which Isaiah beholds seems to be that of the heavenly council in session, Yahweh surrounded by his royal court, and the question under discussion, as the later context indicates, is the coming judgement upon Jerusalem (vv. 8-10), since ominously Isaiah sees Yahweh sitting upon his throne, a normal judgement posture (and the very marked similarity to the judgement vision of Micaiah at 1 Ki. 22:19 cannot be missed).

The actions of the seraphim are important for the understanding of what is being now conveyed to Isaiah. They pronounce, as R. Knierim has noted,[7] a doxology of Judgement (v. 3). What the seraphim have done in heaven causes Isaiah to reflect that he is a man of unclean lips and dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips (v. 5).

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6. It has sometimes been argued that Isaiah 6 finds its place within the developing ministry of Isaiah and as such does not report his call. But the major difficulty with such a view, as has been noted, is that the prophecies of chapters 1-5 would have been uttered with 'unclean lips'.

7. R. Knierim, 'The Vocation of Isaiah', *VT* 18 (1968) 55.

This is not merely the language of prophetic diffidence since v. 5 presupposes that what characterizes Isaiah characterizes Judah also. It is language which reflects the proper response to Yahweh's kingship heard from pure lips, the response in worship of the seraphim which was kingship at the centre of Israel's covenant life, the the acknowledgement of sovereignty. At once Isaiah realises that it was the failure of himself and Judah generally to reflect the sovereignty of God, Yahweh's cult, which would account for the tremendous movement from prosperity to desolation and cities despoiled (v. 12) which Isaiah 6 projects. We see clearly the reasons underlying the sweeping condemnation of worship and sanctuary in Isaiah 1:10-20.[8]

The eschatology of the book of Isaiah aims at reversing the situation described in Isaiah 1. That is perhaps the reason for what seems a new introduction at Isaiah 2:1. Certainly, such an aim seems the reason for the presentation of hope for Jerusalem which we find in Isaiah 2:2-4. The material of Isaiah 2:2-4 is contained also in Micah 4:1-5 and thus seems anterior to both. We have argued elsewhere that the Zion imagery in Isaiah 2:2-4 received its impetus from the choice of Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6. The peculiar form which the hope surrounding Jerusalem assumed was influenced by the contours of the Solomonic empire, particularly as acknowledged by the visit to Solomon's court of the Queen of Sheba (1 Ki. 10) as representative of her world.[9] Her 'hard questions' (1 Ki. 10:1) are responded to by Solomon's wisdom and in this we are not far from the picture developed in Isaiah 2:2-4 whereby the chosen city Jerusalem becomes the redemptive centre of the world and a towering world mountain, the place of divine revelation to which the world will resort. Nations who have previously assailed Jerusalem will come in pilgrimage for the divine will, while the use of 'flow' (נהר) of this world pilgrimage is suggestive of the reversal of the chaos combat myths which are part of the old Zion theology (*cf.* Ps. 46). The nations come to Yahweh as 'judge' (*i.e.*, world king), for תורה, 'law' (Is. 2:3). Since תורה is paralleled

8. I have argued this point in greater detail in 'Worship and Isaiah 6', *RTR* 43 (1984) 1-8.
9. I refer to my article 'Some Observations on the Political origins of Israel's Eschatology', *RTR* 36 (1977) 33-41.

by the general expression 'word of the Lord' (v. 3) we are not dealing with a prescriptive code but with divine instruction understood in the broadest terms, divine regulation of the affairs of the world in the new age. What is affirmed in this passage is international submission to divine kingship. Nothing is stated concerning the Davidic traditions, nor is it in the considerable expansion which this passage undergoes later in Chapters 60-62. This eschatology of 2:2-4 becomes basic in chapters 40-66. But throughout chapters 1-12 (indeed, 1-39) the vulnerability of Jerusalem is made plain (1:21; 10:28-32; *cf*. 24:10; 29:1-7; 32:13-14), while at the same time it is emphasized that the Zion ideal would survive (7:1-9; 10:28-34; *cf*. 17:12-14; 29:8; 30:27-33; 31:1-9).

In connection with this ambivalent attitude to Jerusalem it is important to note the development of the 'remnant' conception within Isaiah 1-12, particularly within chapters 7-9. In chapters 7-9 the house of David in the shape of the reigning Ahaz is rejected, while the future is tied to the motif of a faithful remnant who will emerge from the coming disaster. It is probable, as G. Hasel[10] has noted, that in the name of the prophet's son (Shear Yashub, 'a remnant shall return', Is. 7:3) who is taken with Isaiah when Ahaz is confronted with and refuses the prophetic offer of a sign (7:11), there is foreshadowed the community of faith who will turn in faith to Yahweh ('turn' is to be given its theological significance of 'repent'). This faith community provides the positive side of the double-edged sign of Immanuel ('God with us' - in judgement or salvation!) which is to confront the community (Is. 7:14; 8:8).

In connection with the eschatology bound up with the erection of this new community, if the latter half of Isaiah 7:15 may be translated as a purpose clause ('in order that he may now to refuse the evil and choose the good'), then the announced birth of a child to a virgin could have the distant reversal of Israel's fortunes in mind (*i.e*. it could look forward to a series of events far beyond the immediate Assyrian crisis).[11] Certainly

10. G. Hasel, *The Remnant* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, 1974) 270-287.
11. As J. Jensen argues in 'The Age of Immanuel' *CBQ* 41 (1979) 220-239.

the developed pictures of a God-given ruler in Isaiah 9:1-7 (and 11:1-9) cannot be references to contemporary leadership. As noted, the hymn of Isaiah 12 appropriately ends the first section of the prophecy by emphasizing that fulfilment of prophetic eschatology calls for the presence of the Holy One of Israel in the midst of the new community of Zion.

B. *Isaiah 13-23*

Chapters 13-23 are prophecies against foreign nations. The origin of this genre of prophecy is difficult to establish and in any case we should have to consider the manner in which the respective oracles are employed within the particular prophetic books, but there is much to be said in favour of the view of H. P. Müller[12] that the judgement oracles against foreign nations are offshoots of the Zion traditions. In Isaiah, as S. Erlandsson has pointed out, the link which joins chapters 13-23 together is that they concern nations who have encountered or will encounter Assyrian rule or, threats and who would take part in useless and profitless coalitions against Assyria.[13]

In these chapters there seems implied condemnation for Judaean attempts to establish contacts by diplomacy with Babylon (Is. 13-14); Philistia (14:29-32, where we note that the alliance policy is rejected out of hand, since Yahweh has founded Zion and he will protect it); Ethiopia (18:1-7, where it is noted that Yahweh himself will intervene before the final harvest, i.e., before complete destruction by Assyria, v. 5. On the other hand, perhaps vv. 6-7 refer to the fate of the Assyrians and their submission to Yahweh in Zion); and Egypt, whose undependability is the stress of Isaiah 19. Isaiah 15-16 are directed against Moab and may refer to the abortive stand by that state against Tiglath Pileser III in 734 BC. The oracle suggests that Moab would pay the price for the non-recognition that Yahweh's historical purposes were being accomplished through the Assyrian menace. The threat against Damascus (17:1-11) could fall into the same category

12. H. P. Muller, *Ursprünge und Strukturen alttestamentlicher Eschatologie* (BZAW 109) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969) 123.
13. S. Erlandsson, *The Burden of Babylon* (Con Bib OT series 4) (Lund: Gleerup, 1970) 102-105. Our general indebtedness to Erlandsson for material on Isaiah 13-23 is acknowledged.

time. Isaiah 21:1-10 links the names of Elam, Media and Babylon together and could thus point to a time of c.700 BC when the fortunes of those three nations converged and when they were dealt with by Assyria which appears to be the devastator of verse 2. The message of 21:1-10 is clear. No hope is to be reposed by nations in the doomed Babylon. Verses 11-17 appear to be related to Assyrian campaigns of the period against the Arab peoples. S. Erlandsson has suggested that Isaiah 22 refers to political measures taken when Jerusalem was threatened during the reign of Hzekiah and that the detail indicates an attack on Jerusalem society for its reliance upon defences and not upon Yahweh in its time of need.[14] Finally, Tyre and Sidon (ch. 23) were involved in the western coalition against Assyria c.734 BC and had strong commerical links with Judah.

The recurring theme of Isaiah 13-23 is that faith in Yahweh's purposes and not foreign policies will protect Jerusalem. Yahweh will crush Assyria and is the guarantor of Zion's security. In this connection the difficult 17:12-14 may refer to an attack upon Zion, with the attackers being described in the typical chaos imagery of 'many waters'.[15] This attack is thwarted by Yahweh at the last moment. Chapters 13-23 thus carry forward the dominant Jerusalem theme struck in 1-12.

3. *Isaiah 24-27*

Isaiah 24-27 do not interrupt the course of the prophecy but, as J. J. M. Roberts has pointed out, are held together by a strong Zionistic emphasis, even if it remains difficult to identify precisely the two cities involved.[16] They may be Babylon and Zion, or equally, and perhaps more likely, the wicked city of these chapters may be Jerusalem (*cf.* Is. 24:10, 25:2) in contrast to the Zion in which God will reign (24:23).

In these chapters sifting judgement has been pronounced upon the earth, with the centre of focus directed against some city (Is. 24:1-13, 17-23). The righteous who wait for this lift up their voices in an interlude

14. *Burden* 95-9 .
15. Willer, *Ursprünge* 88ff.
16. Roberts, 'Isaiah' 142.

of praise (vv. 14-16). Yahweh's victory (24:21-23) leads to a song of praise in 25:1-5, followed by a feast upon the (world) mountain (vv. 6-8). Chapter 25 closes with a hymn of praise (vv. 9-12). The reference to Moab in these final verses is difficult but may depict the victory in terms of a new entry into the promised land, as W. Millar suggests.[17] Zion (26:1-6) offers a song of trustful confidence, while verses 7-19 broadly deal with the life of the final age which Yahweh has now brought about. Yahweh's control over death (v. 19) is now revealed. In the oscillation of motifs which these chapters contain, a short lament (vv. 20-21) follows, concluding (27:1) with the assurance that Yahweh will slay the dragon, thus removing any threats to the new age. Isaiah 27:2-6 reverses the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7. In 27:7-11 we appear to return to the theme of the punishment to come upon Jerusalem, while verses 12-13 close the chapter with a picture of an eschatological return to the promised land by Israel's scattered people, all coming to worship on God's holy hill of Zion. Thus, while the obscurity of these chapters is tantalizing, their Jerusalem emphasis is undeniable.

4. *Isaiah 28-33*

Chapters 28-33 are difficult to date precisely owing to the absence at times of specific detail, and this difficulty is reflected in the wide range of interpretations among the commentators. However, there is nothing suggesting that these chapters may not contain material dealing with Assyrian activity directed against Judah and Jerusalem in the later period of the reign of Hezekiah (715-687 BC), apart from the reference to Samaria (28:1-4) which presupposes a time prior to the fall of that city in 722 BC. Editorially the chapters are unified by an introductory formula (הוי, 'woe'; *cf.* 28:1; 29:1; 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). The details of these chapters confirm their interest in Zion, notably in their call upon that city and her people to rely upon the cornerstone of Zion, the temple in Jerusalem. The message concerning the avoidance of foreign alliances and the certainty of the defence which Yahweh himself will provide for Jerusalem is characteristic of these chapters.

17. W. Millar, *Isaiah 24-27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (HSM 30) (Missoula: Scholars, 1976) 30.

Isaiah 28:1-4 speaks of judgement upon Samaria, verses 5-6 salvation for the remnant in Israel, verses 7-13 condemnation of Judaean indulgence, and verses 14-22 a rejection of Jerusalem leadership which trusted in political agreements. The cornerstone on which faith ought to have relied (v. 16), is, as W. H. Irwin has suggested, Zion herself.[18] The community of faith is thus called to take their stand upon the doctrine of God's purposes as bound up with Jerusalem, while Yahweh conducts his strange work of sifting and punishing. Verses 23-29 offer to the faithful an assurance of God's perfect timing in the unfolding of events.

In the Ariel paragraph (29:1-8), Yahweh first occasions the siege of Jerusalem and then relieves it. Verses 9-12 trace the spiritual lethargy of the people of Jerusalem, a lethargy which is the result of a basic religious insecurity (vv. 13-14) and which must draw punishment. Verses 15-24 threaten the perverse (vv. 15-16), but promise salvation to the meek (17-24). A golden age will then result. Isaiah 30:1-5 condemns trust in Egypt. Verses 6-7 seem to belong to the same period and strike the same note but the details are in doubt. Perhaps ambassadors are en route to Egypt (v. 6), but Egypt's help will be worthless (v. 7). Verses 8-18 call for the prophet to summarize his message (v. 8), then detail its rejection (vv. 9-11), the consequences, and the salvation which has been rejected (vv. 12-18). For the community of salvation, however, who dwell in Jerusalem (vv. 19-26), blessings await in the shape of the defeat of the oppressor and the full transformation (v. 26) of the cosmic order. The consequences for the oppressors of history, with Assyria particularly in view, are then graphically outlined (vv. 27-33).

The contrast between the search for support (from Egypt) and the true source of Zion's protection continues in Isaiah 31:1-9. The hymn of chapter 32 appears to draw out the consequences of the new era of deliverance which is granted to Zion. Just government will prevail (vv. 1-2), sensitivity and understanding will be the property of all in the new age (vv. 3-5) and a contrast is drawn between the former and the latter leadership (vv. 6-8). The reference to the 701 BC siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib

18. W. H. Irwin, *Isaiah 28-33. Translation with Philological Notes* (Bib Or 30) (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1977) 30.

seems continued in the denunciation of the women of Jerusalem (32:9-14) whose reversal of social roles has been characteristic of the social conduct which has brought Jerusalem down (*cf.* 3:16-26). There follows in 32:15-20 a section which ushers in the ensuing age of salvation when all life will be regulated by the divine Spitit who is poured out. The emphasis on Zion seems clear in the closing hymn (Is. 33). The defeat of a powerful enemy risen up against Jerusalem and the ultimate glorification of Zion is the theme. The motif of Zion is prominent in chapter 33 which, though difficult to date, could also well be ascribed to the period of Yahweh's deliverance of Jerusalem from the hands of Sennacherib in 701 BC.

Thus, the argument in chapters 28-33, though difficult to unravel, makes it clear that Yahweh is the ultimate defender of Jerusalem, although that city must first pass through fires of judgement.

5. *Isaiah 34-35*

In the next section of Isaiah, a clear contrast is provided between the two chapters (Is. 34-35) by the Zion motif. Edom, Israel's old enemy, is ranged against Zion as enmity idealized (Is. 34; *cf.* Ezk. 35) but this will be destroyed, allowing the redeemed of the Lord to return through a transformed wilderness to Zion (Is. 35). These two eschatological chapters are often linked by commentators with the material of chapters 40-55. The very general character of their projections, however, make their presence in the first half of the prophecy perfectly congruent. Conveying a sense comprehensively of the future of the people of God, Zion functions in these chapters as the world centre.

6. *Isaiah 36-39*

The last four chapters of the first half of the prophecy, Isaiah 36-39, deal with the historical situation immediately preceding the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC. Isaiah 39 closes with a prophecy of exile, but primarily refers to the deportation of the Jerusalem leadership (vv. 5-8). Thus the first half of the book ends with a prophecy of the virtual destruction of Jerusalem and the cessation of the Davidic house (Is. 39:6-7). The unremitting prophecies directed against Jerusalem in Isaiah 1 are still in view, though at the same time throughout Isaiah 1-39 there has been an

emphasis maintained upon the role appointed for the eschatological Zion of Isaiah 2:2-4.

7. *Outline of the Book*

Since chapters 40-55 represent almost pure eschatology, and 56-66 offer a blend of history and eschatology, we thus have the following arrangement of the overall structure of the entire prophecy:

Isaiah	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

8. *Isaiah 40-66*

We are now in a position to discuss the material of Isaiah 40-66, having noted the consistent threat in chapters 1-39 of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, and the equally consistent eschatological note of God's protective role to be exercised on behalf of Zion and the remnant who will populate it. We now turn to trace how these twin themes are worked out in chapters 40-66. In these chapters the theology of a renewed city of God is taken up in earnest.

A. *Isaiah 40-55*

Following hard upon the promise of exile and the threat to Jerusalem with which chapters 1-39 had concluded, 49:1-11 begins with an emphatic word of comfort extended to Jerusalem. The structure of 40:1-11 which introduces 40-55 must be carefully noted. Material related to Jerusalem is found in 40:1-2 and 9-11 with both sets of verses bound internally by thematic considerations. Verse 2 contains three causal clauses (introduced by כי, 'that') which provide the ground for the statement of verse 1. There are two imperatives in verse 1 and two more in verse 2 and these would seem to unite the two verses since where a double imperative occurs in chapters 40-55 (as it does in 40:1) it is linked with a further imperative in the same context (*cf.* 51:9, 17; 57:14;

62:10).[19] Not only is Isaiah 40:9-11 linked by the Jerusalem theme to verses 1-2, but it should be observed that three 'behold' (הנה) clauses in verses 9-10 balance the three causal clauses of verse 2. Like verses 1-2, verses 9-11 begin with an imperative and continue with a double imperative (v. 9b). In turn both passages encase material relating to a new Exodus. Verses 3-5 refer to the preparation of a divine way through the wilderness; verses 6-8 make it clear that these events will happen as a result of the proclamation of the divine word. These three themes of verses 1-11 (viz. consolation for Jerusalem, the new Exodus from Babylon, the power of the divine word which accounts for all transformations) also account for the content of 40:12-55:13. The message of 40:1-2, 9-11 is developed by 49:1-52:12; 40:3-5, and the return to Jerusalem considered as a new Exodus is taken further in 40:12-48:22, while 40:6-8 which deals with the power of the divine word to effect final change finds further development in the material of 52:13-55:13.[20]

Sorrow has been removed from Jerusalem, her period of suffering is over and the covenant language of 40:1 ('my people/your God') foreshadows the re-inauguration of the Sinai covenant, language reinforced by the second Exodus terminology of the prophecy. Comfort for 'my people' (v. 1) will issue into the restoration of Jerusalem (v. 2), both people and place; that is, the substance of the Abrahamic promises have been united into this major symbol of restored Jerusalem. The message of comfort is basically a simple one, which the shepherd language, used of Yahweh in 40:9-11, explains. God is coming as King and will dwell in Zion (*cf.* 52:7)! By a new Exodus engineered by Israel's God the covenant will be re-established for the people of God who are to be gathered to the divine centre, Jerusalem.

Isaiah 40:12-42:4 form a continuous argument.[21] The crucial figure of the servant is presented in 42:1-4 in

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19. On the structure of Is. 40:1-11 note K. Kiesow, *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979) 23-66.
20. *Ibid*. 165.
21. W. A. M. Beuken (*'Mišpāt,* The First Servant Song in its Context', *VT* 22 (1972] 1-30) has demonstrated this.

both royal and prophetic terms. He is an idealised figure whose ministry will control Israel's future and that of the world. Though superficially unimpressive his suffering ministry will result in the pilgrimage of the Gentile world to the divine centre, Zion (*cf*. the mention of תורה, [v.4] for which the 'isles', *i.e*. the wider world, waits). Thus the eschatology of Isaiah 2:2-4 will be fulfilled. As W. A. M. Beuken has demonstrated, the important term in 42:1-4 and one which threads together the argument of 40:12-42:4 is משפט which in the total context seems to mean the present course of history which Israel regards as misdirected by Yahweh. Israel's complaints (40:12-31) and her present plight (in the grip of foreign powers, Is. 41) will be redressed by this ministry of the servant![22]

The remainder of the material to Isaiah 48 cannot be dealt with in detail here but the emphasis in these chapters is upon the impending return, the overthrow of idolatrous Babylon, and the role of Cyrus. Chapters 49-55 are narratives which are given over to the question of Zion's future. Thus this new phase of the prophecy begins with reference to the ministry of the servant (Is. 49:1-6) which has as its result the response of kings who stand up to watch the return of Israel in processional Exodus to the promised land (49:7-13; *cf*. Ex. 15:12-18). Yahweh has not forgotten Jerusalem (Is. 49:14-26), for the relationship whereby she is engraven on his palms is clearly unbreakable (v. 16). The nations who have oppressed Israel will return her.

It is indicated (Is. 50:1-3) that discipline and not divorce was intended by the exile. 50:4-9 offers a message to the servant to persevere and calls (vv. 10-11) to the exiles to respond to his message. 51:1-8 addresses a faithful Israel who will inherit the promises, while verses 9-11 spell out the return to Jerusalem in terms of a new creation. Verses 12-16 offer consolation to Jerusalem, for Yahweh stands behind her and the covenant is to be restored (v. 16). Jerusalem is then called upon to rouse herself (vv. 17-20) since her cup of wrath will be passed on to Babylon (vv. 21-23). She is to put on garments appropriate to the new age (*i.e*., queenly

22. *'Mišpāt'* 2-8.

robes, 52:1-6). 52:7-10 provides a climax to the expectation of 40:1-2, 9-11, and the return to Jerusalem (52:11-12) is seen to parallel the Exodus from Egypt.

What follows is a commentary explaining how this return has been achieved, namely through the ministry of the servant who has suffered so extremely, 52:13-53:12. The disfigured servant whose ministry was nonetheless so effective is presented in 52:13-15. Then in 53:1-9 we seem to be confronted by the confession of the Gentile kings of 52:15 who stand astonished at the new Exodus and restoration, followed by a prophetic (vv. 10-11) and a divine (v. 12) assessment of the servant's ministry.[23] What is clear is that it has been the servant's ministry which has made possible this great change involving the return of God's people to his city. The confession of the kings thus bears eloquent testimony to the eschatology of 2:2-4.

There is a bewildering array of covenant terms in Isaiah 54 which draws out the consequences for Israel and her world of this ministry of 'servant' Israel, once rejected, now exalted.[24] Abrahamic (vv. 1-3) , Sinaitic (vv. 4-8) and Noachian (vv. 9-10) language is employed before the colourful new covenant imagery depicting Zion's rebuilding and repopulation occurs (vv. 11-17). From the restored Jerusalem, eschatologically presented in a manner reminiscent of what we see in Ezekiel 47:1-12, waters of life flow (55:1-2), while all the people of Jerusalem are now sharers in the promises of the Davidic covenant and are therefore kings and priests (vv. 3-5).

B. *Isaiah 56-66*

Isaiah 56-66 expands the material of Isaiah 40-55 with more reference to the divisions within the community whereby salvation is confined to the faithful (as also

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23. The speakers of Is. 53:1-9 are, of course, disputed. Gentile kings as speakers fit the context nicely. For an assessment of the passage, see D. J. Clines, *I, He, We and They - A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (JSOT Supplements I) (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1976) 29-30.
24. On the allusions to earlier biblical material which Isaiah 54 contains, compare W. A. M. Beuken, 'Isaiah LIV: The Multiple Identity of the Person Addressed'' *OTS* 19 (1974) 29-70.

in Is. 40-55) and is not for the nation as a whole. The covenantal, new creation emphasis of Isaih 40-55 is carried forward here, with special place being again accorded to Zion. An international pilgrimage to a sacred mountain, presumably Jerusalem (56:1-8), begins the sequence of these chapters, just as a similar pilgrimage ends it (66:18-24). While the detail of these chapters cannot be treated here mention must be made of the manner in which the promises of 2:2-4 are expanded in Isaiah 60-62.

Isaiah 60:1-9 resumes the themes of chapters 49-55 but with the expectation of the return to Zion presented as imminent. 60:10-22 describes the manner of the return. The wealth of nations and peoples, led by their rulers, will stream into the renewed Jerusalem and this will be in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises (vv. 21-22). In 61:1-3 a servant personage announces the victory. Verses 4-11 are concerned with the physical reconstruction of Zion which is to be populated by priest kings (v. 6) with world homage being offered the bride Zion (v. 10) with an attendant transformation of nature.

The particular election of Zion to privilege is the subject of Isaiah 62. She is vindicated and restored (vv. 1-2a), a new name is given to her (2b-3) and her future is adverted to in the covenant imagery of marriage (vv. 4-5). Zion's security is the theme of vv. 6-9, while a call to the people of God to enter Jerusalem as a sanctified people and to occupy that holy space completes the chapter (vv. 10-12).

P. D. Hanson has pointed to the dualism which pervades Isaiah 56-66.[25] Only a small group within the community will be the recipients of the promises of return. Thus in 65:10 we are dealing with the concept of 'my people' as opposed to those who 'forget my holy mountain' (v. 11). In verses 17-25 the elect people of God (the remnant of chapters 1-39) enjoy the blessings of the new age resulting from divine intervention. Yahweh revives the theme of the New Jerusalem as he roars from his heavenly temple (66:5-6). Judgement upon his enemies follows and the metaphor of Zion's miraculous delivery of many children

25. P. D. Hanson (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, 32-208) analyses the argument of Isaiah 56-66. Our dependence upon his analysis is acknowledged.

(vv. 7-9) points not only to Abrahamic covenant fulfilment, but also to the suddenness of the transition to the new age. Again, such a consolation is available only for those 'who rejoice in Jerusalem' (v. 10). Traditional imagery returns in the description of the new age (vv. 12-14) and Yahweh's judgement by means of the divine warrior motif (vv. 15-16). Beyond this judgement the end is heralded by the return of the chosen to Zion (vv. 18-24). The book concludes with a picture of uninterrupted temple worship, which is the consummation of history.

9. *Conclusion*

The book of Isaiah moves from the perverse worship offered by physical Jerusalem under judgement arising from the neglect of Yahweh's kingship, to the worship of Yahweh in the New Jerusalem. Gradually, in the course of this book, Jerusalem becomes a major biblical symbol uniting city and saved community, combining sacred space and sanctified people. Isaiah makes it clear that there can be no thought of a restored Israel without the prior restoration of Zion. For it is Yahweh's presence alone which makes Israel the people of God. Davidic king and temple have little space devoted to them in the latter half of the book, for Isaiah is talking about the ultimate end. His Zion is an ideal - the perfected community, the righteous people of God.

As a political concept, however, Isaiah's notion of Jerusalem reminds us that God's saving activity occurs within history. Out of the Babylons of this world, God will save his people. He will found for them a city which provides the image of a unified political community of which he is the maker and the builder. The Babel concept of Genesis 11 will have been reversed. Isaiah's conception of the New Jerusalem is thus the replacement for the ill-conceived humanistic dream of the tower builders of Babel.

It is the function of the book of Isaiah to put this theology of the centrality of the New Jerusalem before us. But the historical setting of this symbolism alerts us to the fact that eschatology builds on prior history and projects an historical fulfilment. It was the role of the book of Isaiah to take the salvation history bound up with the original choice of Jerusalem and to turn it into a magnificent concept of a populated city of God.