

Surveying the Text: Isaiah

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INTRODUCTION:

Isaiah is one of the great prophetic works of the Old Testament. Majestic in scope, lofty in vision, tenderhearted with regard to sinners, and powerful in application, the prophet Isaiah is frequently cited by New Testament authors. With the exception of the Psalter, no book had more influence on the New Testament than this one. In this book we feel the center of redemptive gravity, and a recapitulation of the message of the entire Bible. Perhaps Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 13th century, the man who established our chapter divisions, was having a little fun with this—Isaiah has 66 chapters, just like the Bible has 66 books. And the first 39 chapters of Isaiah roughly correspond to the Old Testament, while the last 27 chapters center on the arrival of the Messiah.

THE TEXT:

“Remember the former things of old: For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times the things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all my pleasure” (Is. 46:9–10).

BACKGROUND ON ISAIAH:

The ministry of Isaiah extended from around 740 to 687 B.C. He began his ministry during the reign of Uzziah, and conducted his prophetic ministry under Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jewish tradition holds that he was martyred under Manasseh by being sawn in two, and the reference to an execution like this in Heb. 11:37 indicates that this tradition had something to it. Jewish tradition also held that Isaiah was of noble blood. Those who divide up the book in order to parcel it out to different authors are being overly precise and pedantic, and do not know how the versatile minds of geniuses work. They could deconstruct a nursery rhyme into an amalgam of the Humptyist school of thought, resting of course in tension with the Dumptyists, who were the outsiders, disgruntled members of the school of the prophets.

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

In this text we begin by noting the glory of God. He has ultimate glory in the fact that He is the only true God. Other powers and principalities exist, but all of them are *creatures*. No one and nothing compares to Him. He declares the end from the beginning, meaning that all of history is laid out before Him. From ancient times, He declared what was not yet, which means that ancient times and the distant future are all one to Him. This is why He is able to taunt the false gods with their inability to tell the future. Show us the things that will come to pass hereafter, so that we might test your divinity (Is. 41:23). So the

first thing we see is that God is God, and there is no other God. This is why His counsel will stand, and this is why He will do all His pleasure.

But we are not done. We should consider the rest of Isaiah. What *is* His counsel? What *is* His pleasure? Not to keep you in suspense, let us look seven centuries later. “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things *after the counsel of his own will*: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:11–12). The majestic and almighty God, the one who stands alone, is the one whose *counsel* and *pleasure* is the salvation of your soul, predestining you to be like Jesus Christ. This is the whole point of hot Calvinism—to rejoice and be glad in a saving sovereignty. We are invited to take pleasure in the fact that it is God’s pleasure *to forgive us*.

SALVIFIC MAJESTY:

We need to understand the true nature of God’s majesty, high in one sense and low in another.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One That inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Is 57:15). God is the high and lofty one. He is the one who inhabits eternity. His name is holy. He dwells in a high and a holy place. And who is there with Him in that high and holy place? The man who is contrite and humble, the one who is *lowly*. God’s majesty is not simply a crushing weight, one that demolishes all creatures. God’s majesty has two everlasting arms, the arms which saved us and which also hold us up. God’s counsel and pleasure is *salvific*.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ISAIAH:

If we are to be saved, then God is the one who must do it (Is. 1:9; Rom. 9:29). Otherwise we would have been like Sodom. Apart from His grace, our hearts are entirely shuttered and closed (Is. 6:9-10; Acts 28:26-27; Matt. 13:14-15; John 12:39-40). But Isaiah promised that a virgin would conceive, and that her son would be Immanuel (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). Before His arrival, a messenger would come to prepare the way (Is. 40:3; Matt. 3:3; Jn. 1:23). This Son would become a stone in Israel—some would trust in Him (Is. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6; Rom. 9:33; 10:11), and others would stumble over Him (Is. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rom. 9:33). That Son would arise in Galilee of the Gentiles (Is. 9:1-2; Matt. 4:15-16). He would have the government of all nations placed upon His shoulders, and that government would never cease to grow (Is. 9:6-7). He would be the Root of Jesse, and all the nations would stream to Him (Is. 11:10; Rom. 15:12). All the heavenly lights would collapse on the old Israel (Is. 13:10; Matt. 24:29), and the new Israel would be established. At the culmination of His reign, this Messiah would swallow up death forever (Is. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:54).

This would all be done on the basis of the vicarious and substitutionary death of the Servant of God, the suffering Servant. He is the one who took up our infirmities and who carried our sorrows to the cross (Is. 53:4; Matt. 8:17). He is the one who was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is. 53:7-8; Acts 8:32-33). He had done no violence Himself (Is. 53:9; 1 Pet. 2:22), but was numbered with the transgressors regardless (Is. 53:12; Luke 22:37).

He was pierced for our transgressions (Is. 53:5). He was crushed for our iniquities (Is. 53:5). He was stricken by God, smitten and afflicted (Is. 53:4). By His stripes we are healed (Is. 53:5). This is not just the point of Isaiah, but the point of the entire Bible. It is the point of this entire series of messages.

WHO UNDERSTANDS THIS?:

The end result of all this is that God has now established the Christian church. The barren woman, the Jerusalem above, has now become the mother of us all (Is. 54:1; Gal. 4:27). She is the most fruitful of all women, and she will be the mother of all the living. This is the glory promise, these are the sure mercies of David (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34).

Who has known the mind of the Lord (Is. 40:13; Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). Who can best His Spirit in an argument? What are His counsels? What is His pleasure? The answer to *that* question is *your* salvation.



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