

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 13

Authenticity Arguments, Major Themes

Review of Deutero-Isaiah Arguments & Response

A week ago we were discussing the question of authenticity and authorship of the second part of Isaiah, Isaiah 40 through 66. A pretty standard critical view is that those chapters do not come from Isaiah himself, but from a writer in late exilic times, and we were looking at some of the kinds of arguments that are given to substantiate that view-point. To back up for a minute, by way of review, the arguments can be reduced basically to three.

The first one was the concepts and ideas differ in that second section of the book, from concepts and ideas in the uncontested parts of the first section of the book. The second line of argument is that there is a difference in language and style in the second part, and that that points to different authorship. We looked at both of those lines of reasoning fairly closely, and I gave you some responses to them.

We were then discussing the last argument, which is the argument from historical backgrounds. The historical background of the second part of the book is clearly different from that of the first part. It assumes the exile has taken place. Cyrus is mentioned by name as the one who is about to deliver Israel from exile. The message, instead of one of warning and coming judgment, has turned into a message of conciliation and hope in view of the eminent release from exile. Really, that historical background issue, it seems to me, is the crucial argument. It boils down to the issue of whether or not you are willing to accept the possibility of genuine prediction, and divine revelation, in connection with that. If you're not willing to accept that, you're almost forced to the conclusion of the critics that someone could not possibly have written that material unless he was living in the time of the Babylonian exile. That's why the critics argue that the person who wrote this must have been living in the time which he describes. It has been impossible for many to explain, by any human means, how Isaiah could have written these things.

Relevance of Isaiah 40-66 for Isaiah's Contemporary Audience [Judgment/exile→ Comfort]

But then in connection with that argument, the question often arises about the relevance of Isaiah 40 to 66 for Isaiah's contemporary audience, and that's where we were at the end of the hour. The critical argument is that the prophets always speak with relevance to their contemporaries. Isaiah 40-66 is of no relevance for someone in Isaiah's own time. I'm not so sure that is such a strong point either with respect to the content of the second part of the book.

Right at the end of the hour I was mentioning that during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, during which most of Isaiah's ministry took place, in Isaiah 1:1, it says that Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah. It doesn't mention Manasseh. But if you remember when we discussed the introduction of the book, the book does report about Sennacherib and we know the date of the death of Sennacherib. So it's clear that Isaiah did prophesy on into the time of Manasseh, even though he's not mentioned in the preface to the book. Many feel that what Isaiah did during the time of Manasseh was turn from a wide, public ministry to a private ministry to those who were godly in the land, those who did respond to his message and were concerned about Israel's condition of sin. When you get to the rule of the next king, that is, Manasseh, after Hezekiah, the nation fell into terrible apostasy. 2 Kings 21 describes the evil of the time under Manasseh as the most wicked king of the Southern Kingdom.

According to Jewish tradition, Isaiah was martyred during the time of Manasseh. Tradition is that Manasseh's men were pursuing him. So he hid in a tree, and the tree was cut in two—I think I mentioned that earlier, Isaiah was cut in two. Some see an illusion to that in Hebrews 11:37, where it says heroes of the faith that some were sawn asunder. It must have become clear to Isaiah, after the death of the good King Hezekiah, that the nation was not going to repent, that exile was inevitable. That would also have been obvious to the true people of God. Those listened to Isaiah's message under those circumstances. If Isaiah turned to minister to those people, there was no need to bring the

message of rebuke and condemnation any longer. That had already been done. It was clear exile was coming. The great need at that point was to bring words of comfort and hope to the true people of God who were following Isaiah in the midst of a time of terrible apostasy and persecution. No doubt those people saw the judgment of the exile as inevitable. They may have been tempted to despair and wonder if that was going to be the end of the nation. They would be deported. Would that be the end? So I think the frame of mind of the godly people of Isaiah's own time could have been very similar to the frame of mind of the people who actually experienced those conditions of the exile. People had already gone into exile. They could wonder too—is there any future for the nation? They could be tempted to despair. So the message of Isaiah, that God would deliver his people, would bring true comfort to the true people of God, and that would also be true for the people who actually experienced the exile. There would be comfort in knowing that the exile would be temporary; it would not be forever. It would also be of comfort to the true people of God in Isaiah's own time, where they saw the apostasy increasing as they realized that exile was inevitable.

Isaiah 36-39 Hezekiah & Merodach Baladan of Babylon

One other comment: it's interesting that the dividing section of historical material, chapters 36 to 39, that divides between Isaiah 1 to 35—the earlier prophecies—and then the later section of 40 to 66 ends with the prediction that the people of Judah will go into exile to Babylon. If you look at the end of chapter 39, it's a short chapter, you have the story of the visit of Merodach-Baladan who was the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, and he comes to Jerusalem during the time of Hezekiah. Hezekiah receives him, shows him all the treasures of the Judah. You read in chapter 39, verse 3, “Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, ‘What did those men say, and where did they come from?’ ‘From a distant land,’ Hezekiah replied. ‘They came to me from Babylon.’ The prophet asked, ‘What did they see in your palace?’ ‘They saw everything in my palace,’ Hezekiah said. ‘There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.’ Then

Isaiah said to Hezekiah, ‘Hear the word of the LORD Almighty: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ‘The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,’ Hezekiah replied. For he thought, ‘There will be peace and security in my lifetime.’” The interesting thing is, in the time of Hezekiah, Babylon was not a major power. Babylon was a city under Assyrian control; Assyria was the major power.

Now Babylon may have had its own ideas about trying to free itself from Assyrian domination, but at that point there wasn't much basis for that. But here is a specific prediction that God gives to Isaiah to pass on to the people: that captivity is going to come; and it's not just going to be to Assyria that was a major power, it's going to be to the city of Babylon.

Now, in the arrangement of material in chapters 36 to 39, which are incidents from the life of Hezekiah, that prediction about going into captivity of Babylon, is placed at the end of the section. In other words, it's placed immediately before chapter 40 and following, which talks about already being in Babylon and deliverance from exile. It's placed at the end of that historical section (chapters 36 to 39) even though chronologically it was probably earlier than some of the other events in Isaiah 36-39.

There's very complex problems with the chronology of Hezekiah's reign, but almost everybody's agreed that that visit by Merodach-Baladan did not occur at the end of his life; it occurred earlier. I won't get into the reasons for that, but it seems reasonable to assume that it was placed at the end for a logical reason, not a chronological reason. It's put at the end for a logical reason, to form an introduction to these words of consolation that follow. Isaiah assures the people that even though the exile is going to come, that's not the end. God will still be with his people; there's still a future ahead of them. So I think at that point you're back to what we said right at the beginning. If Isaiah

could predict an exile was coming, there's no reason why he can't predict that there's going to be a deliverance from the exile coming after that.

Micah's Prediction of a Babylonian Exile [not Assyria]

Not only does Isaiah speak about the coming of a Babylonian exile, not Assyrian, but Micah does too. Micah was Isaiah's contemporary. If you look at Micah 4:10; Micah says, "Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies." So, even Micah is speaking about going to Babylon.

So it seems to me that there is reason to say that this material does have significance for Isaiah's contemporaries, even though it involves events that are 100 or more years after his lifetime. I might just mention Manasseh reigned 686-642 B.C. We don't know exactly how far into that Isaiah's ministry went, although we go back there to the death of Sennacherib that was 681 B.C. The death of Sennacherib was 681, which is recorded in Isaiah chapter 37. So, certainly it went beyond 681. The dates of Cyrus are 539 to 530 B.C. It's about 150 years in the future. Now, it seems to me that these basic arguments of the critics are not adequate to prove multiplicity of authorship. There are good responses to all of them.

Arguments for Authenticity

Then you can go to the other side of the question. You have these arguments against authenticity, but there are also some strong reasons for maintaining Isaiah and his authorship, or the authenticity of this material—I want to mention two.

1. No Manuscript Evidence that the Book ever Existed in Anything but its Present, Unified Form

First one is: there's no manuscript evidence that the book ever existed in anything but its present, unified form. In other words, there is no manuscript of a second Isaiah as a self-contained unit. The interesting thing is we do have a Dead Sea Scroll manuscript of the entire book of Isaiah called the Isaiah Scroll. It has the whole book from the second century B.C. That's the prime exhibit in the Dead Sea Scroll museum in Jerusalem. If you look at the Septuagint, it's the same. Septuagint manuscripts do not divide up the book of Isaiah—it's the whole of the book of Isaiah. It goes back 250-200 B.C. So as far as manuscript evidence, it certainly supports the unity of the book.

2. The New Testament Witness is Clearly to Isaiahhanic Authorship

Second factor, and this certainly is of great significance if you have a high view of Scripture. The New Testament witness is clearly to Isaiahhanic authorship. Alexander in his commentary notes that Isaiah is quoted by name 21 times in the New Testament, which is quite a few times. Those quotations come from both sections of the book; that is, from 1 to 39 and from 40 to 66. Let me give you a few examples: John 12:38-40 says, "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: 'Lord, who has believed our message, to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' For this reason they could not believe because as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts.'" Now you have two quotes. The first one is from Isaiah 53:1 "Who has believed our message, to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed." The second one is from Isaiah 6:9. Both of them are cited from Isaiah, and one is from the first part of the book; the other is from the second part of the book. John 12:41 adds, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." So, it's quite clear that John understands both the first part and the second part of the book to have come from Isaiah himself.

If you look at Luke 4:17 it says: "The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him [Jesus]; unrolling it he found the place where it is written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.'" That's a quote from Isaiah 61, which is the second part of the book; it's the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Acts 8:30 is where the Ethiopian Eunuch is reading from Isaiah and you read: “Philip ran up to the chariot, heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I?’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me.’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The Eunuch was reading this passage of scripture: ‘He was led like sheep to the slaughter’”—that’s Isaiah 53. He is reading from Isaiah the prophet, the second part of the book. So I think the manuscript evidence in the New Testament witness is quite clear that we are to understand the entirety of the book as being from Isaiah.

Multiplication of Isaiahs

The same methodology that is used to divide Isaiah between first and second is carried further to produce a Third Isaiah. In some of these critical scholars we have a Fourth and Fifth Isaiah, and some of them have up to a dozen Isaiahs. That, again, points out the fallacy of that kind of method of separating language and style. Anywhere there is different vocabulary or style they say it’s by a different writer. You can almost say every chapter is written by somebody else. One probably wouldn’t go that far, but you can go a lot further than a Second Isaiah, and a lot of scholars have. But the predominant thing is a Deutero-Isaiah, but there are many who hold to a Trito-Isaiah. There’s a fair number of adherents to three Isaiahs, and there are examples of people going up to 12 and 13.

Josiah’s Reformation

Alright, you can back it up to that I guess, although you always have that Jeremiah passage. Where I’m thinking, of the passage, where the illustration is used for the potter and the clay. Jeremiah 18:8 says, “If that nation against whom I have pronounced judgement turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them.” So you do clearly have that statement of the exile at the end of chapter 39. But that can make you wonder about the possibility of Jeremiah 18:8 functioning in that context when you go from Manasseh then you have evil Amon. After Amon you have Josiah. In the time of

godly Josiah the law book was found, and there was that great reformation. So then you could wonder: is this reformation under Josiah going to be enough that the exile will be reversed; will they now experience blessing instead of judgment? But in Kings there are several explicit statements in the time of Josiah that make it clear that it was too little too late.

Look at chapter 23 in 2 Kings, and you have a record there of Josiah's reformation in the early part of the chapter. Then go down to verse 21: the "King commanded people saying, 'Keep the Passover,' and there was not held such a Passover from the days of the judges, that judged Israel, nor in all of the days in the kings of Israel." Verse 24 "Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols, and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did--with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses."

But look at 2 Kings 23:26. You see how there's great reformation in the time of Josiah. What implications is that going to have for this promised exile? Verse 26: "Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger." So, it seems to me that that issue also has to be considered and becomes very explicit because of what went on in the time of Manasseh. Judgment is not going to be lifted or revoked.

B. The Symphonic Structure of Isaiah 40-66 as Themes Move Back and Forth

Let's go onto B. in the outline. Under Isaiah 40-66, which is: "The symphonic structure." The idea that I want to discuss with you here I heard first proposed by Dr. MacRae in some lectures a number of years ago. What seems to me to be helpful is that Isaiah 40-66 is not arranged like a formal address or a historical treatise. It has a very

complex and difficult literary style to analyze, and what MacRae has proposed is that the literary style be compared with the symphonic musical composition. So what you find is when you read through Isaiah 40 and following is that the material is not in the form of a logical discussion; rather the structure of the material moves from one theme to another theme to another theme, and sometimes those movements are very abrupt. Sometimes there's no direct logical connection with the passage that immediately follows another passage. You just move back and forth through a variety of themes, and MacRae feels the structure is an appeal to emotional and psychological needs of people in misery and suffering in exile, and various themes are touched on in an interchangeable way. You'll have one theme introduced for a time and then a new one is introduced, and then a third one; and then you return to the first one, and maybe get a fourth one, and you'll come back to the third one, and it just seems to move like that. In the course I had with Dr. MacRae, which was just on Isaiah, in fact, on this section of Isaiah, he had us do an exercise that I found very helpful; I just don't have time to do it in this course. That is, go through Isaiah and chart the themes. Color code them, and then if you have half a dozen themes and half a dozen colors and you color code as you move through, you can identify the theme, and you can see, at a glance of the page, how the structure moves from one theme to the other theme.

Look at page 28, 29 of your citations. Whybray, 1983. The second two paragraphs under Whybray, which comes from pages 40 and 41 of his book, on the question: Are there any consistent arrangement of the themes that can be discerned? He's talking about Second Isaiah; it's the title of his guide book. "It is perhaps sufficient to say the lack of agreement between scholars in their attempt to find one, and the failure at any of these attempts to gain widespread support, suggests a negative answer."

Bullwinkle, admitting the impossibility of finding a logical principle of arrangement, proposed a mechanical one. He argued that the articles have been editorially arranged on the principle of the catch word; passages have been juxtaposed, not because of any intrinsic congruity or continuity of sense, but because of the fortuitous occurrence

in both of some purely verbal link. An example is found in the occurrence in 45:20-25 and 46:1-4 of the word “bow down.” Even if it is possible to find some subtle theological point in this, it is a point made by an editor, since the two passages are each complete in themselves. In other respects there’s no thematic connection. Some cases Bullwinkle’s kind of mechanical link between every pair of passages in the book is often very forced and it fails to carry conviction. But something’s going on, but a logical, thematic structure is equally hard to find. Segments, or pericopes, which are clearly connected thematically, for example, the four so-called servant psalms (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 53:1-12) are scattered throughout the book! Whybray says, “For no clear reason, in spite of attempts to show that they are related to their context, it would be rash for a modern reader to assert categorically that there is no consistent, logical order in the book. But it remains the case that no attempt to discover one has so far succeeded.”

No Logical Arrangement More Like a Musical Composition

What MacRae’s saying is, there is no logical arrangement. It’s more a psychological, emotional sort of interspersing of themes, much like you have in a musical composition that makes an impact, or impression, on people. You listen to a musical composition; you don’t analyze it technically; you can be carried along with the music, and you can be moved by the music. But unless you’re a trained musician, you don’t try to really analyze technically exactly what’s going on. You recognize things; you recognize recurrences of a theme—you go on to a note and then come back to the first one. That’s the sort of analogy MacRae uses.

Major Themes of Isaiah 40-66

Now, when we went through this with MacRae, we tried to identify various themes. It’s amazing how much material will fit under the categories of a few major themes. Let me give you some of them.

1. Comfort

The first one is comfort, and under that, deliverance in a general sense, and a more specific sense of deliverance from exile. But under the theme of comfort, people in misery are told to be comforted because deliverance has come. Sometimes it seems to be deliverance in a very broad, general sense. At other times it seems to be deliverance specifically from exile. But you have people who are in misery being told that deliverance is coming. So you have the theme of comfort.

2. God's Power

Then you have the theme of God's power. Under God's power I put stress on his existence, his creative power, and his sovereignty in history. But I think with this theme it's brought in to assure God's people that his promises will be fulfilled. In other words, here are people suffering. They're told deliverance is coming. They're told to be comforted, and the question can arise: "How can this be? How are we going to be delivered?" Well, God is all powerful. He exists, number one; number two, he is the creator of the ends of the earth and, number three, he controls all of history. All nations, leaders, rulers are subject to his power. So the emphasis, I think, is to show that God is able. He created the universe, and he created all men. His power contrasts with the weakness of the Babylonian idols and heathen deities. That leads to another theme, which is a major theme in this section of Isaiah.

3. Futility of Idolatry

Number three: the futility of idolatry. There's a contrast drawn. Israelites are in captivity to a heathen power, Babylon. They see the Babylonian temples. They see the Babylonian idols. They see the religious processions. They see their own temple destroyed. They could be inclined to think the Babylonian gods are more powerful than Yahweh. The common concept in the ancient world was that the god who was victorious in a battle was the more powerful god. But this theme of futility of idolatry is

interspersed. Isaiah will hit it and then go back to the power of God, or to the comfort theme and he will come back to the futility of idols, and the themes keep interchanging. There is that kind of movement.

Look just for one illustration at 40:19 and 20. “As for an idol: a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple.” The foolishness of bowing down to a tree that’s been crafted by a workman! So you have stress on the futility of idolatry.

4. God’s Omniscience

A fourth theme that is also quite prominent is God's omniscience. The one who heard, or read, Isaiah's prophecies could ask for proof of God’s power. You say God is powerful—how do we know he's powerful? One particular line of proof is particularly stressed, and that line of proof is: I predicted you would go into captivity to Babylon, not to Assyria, and you went into captivity to Babylon. I predicted that Cyrus would deliver you, and now Cyrus is on the scene. To those who were living in the exilic period, he promised to deliver them. So you see the line of God’s omniscience in connection with his ability to predict the future is a strong theme in the book.

5. The Servant of the Lord

The fifth theme, that’s the last that I'll mention, is: “The servant of the Lord.” We're going to look at that theme in more detail, so I am not going to say much about it now. There's a whole series of passages. Whybray there said that the four so called “Servant Songs” are scattered throughout the book for no clear reason. There are a lot more than four. There are four major ones. But there are numerous other brief references to the work of the servant scattered throughout the book. So you don't get rid of the servant theme just by lifting those four passages out. Some critical scholars feel that they

were originally some kind of separate composition that's been set in the book. It's more complex than that. There are a lot of servant passages, and it's a major theme.

You're familiar with the climax of that servant progression in Isaiah 53. That's the fourth of those major passages on the servant found in Isaiah 53:1-12. The question arises: How does the servant theme integrate with this larger emphasis of deliverance from exile? What's the connection? I think as we work through this a bit, particularly with the servant theme, it becomes clear how those two relate. Exile is not the major problem or even the fundamental problem. The exile may not be very pleasant and certainly an experience that Israel would like to be delivered from; but more fundamental than the exile was the sin problem, because it was sin that led to exile. The servant comes to deal with that more basic problem, the sin problem, and it seems to me that that's the way that servant theme integrates into that context of deliverance from exile.

It becomes very clear as we move through that, you'll see how the basic problem was the sin problem, not the exile, even though the exile was something that was prominent among the people. So you get at least those five themes. You could probably identify a few others, but these are the major ones that were interspersed in an interchangeable way through Isaiah 40-66. It's not a logical sort of structure. But it seems to me that that analogy with the symphonic, musical composition is helpful on trying to understand how the text is organized.

Maybe we ought to take a break. I want to go to C., "The overture of chapter 40." But before getting into chapter 40, let's take a ten minute break. We'll start on chapter 40 when we come back.

Rough edited by Carly Geiman
Edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final edit by Dr. Perry Phillips
Re-narrated by Dr. Perry Phillips