Isaiah: Responses to Questions

# Isaiah 1—12

*How did the messages get to Isaiah? How did Isaiah deliver them? Who is Isaiah writing to?*

\*\*I presume that Isaiah from time to time had a sense that he had a word from God coming, and he opened his mouth and out it came. At other times he actually heard words in his head and he then repeated them. At other times he saw a picture and described it for people. At other times maybe he had an idea and he developed it—it would still be wholly God’s word, but the process was different.

The phrase “Judah and Jerusalem” (1:1) usually denotes the Second Temple community (after the exile). This suggests that the intended readership of the book (as opposed to the individual oracles) is that later community.

*How was he received?*

\*\*If Ahaz provides an example, not very enthusiastically. But then, people usually rejected prophets, as Jesus pointed out. But evidently there were enough people who heard God’s word here to hold onto his words and preserve them.

*How do I make this relevant to me? It seems like a code I don’t understand.*

\*\*I’m not sure how to respond to this one. E.g.,

1:10-20 says that our enthusiastic, heart-felt worship makes God throw up if it is not accompanied by a right life in the community. That looks frighteningly relevant to me.

2:2-5 promise that God will draw the nations and teach them. That looks very encouraging to me.

7:1-14 raises the question of trust in God over against trust in being practical. That looks a very relevant issue to me.

*Why try to save the nation from Assyria when they were almost beyond redemption?*

\*\*Because God is committed to them as the people he chose, I guess. God’s faithfulness isn’t dependent on finding something worthwhile in them.

*How can God be just and merciful, and still fair?*

\*\*With difficulty. That’s why there is an ongoing tension between judgment and mercy, here and in the rest of scripture. It’s true for God as it’s true for lots of human relationships. Sometimes it falls out one way, sometimes the other. It’s part of the point of the cross, where God is taking both needs seriously. But that doesn’t mean that henceforth there is no problem, because people then turn their backs on Christ, and God has to decide whether to judge or to forgive.

*Yahweh seems so vengeful*

\*\*I would say that Yahweh is both vengeful and merciful. He is vengeful because morally he cannot simply let wrongdoing go on. He is merciful because that is even more his nature.

*Why does God use violence when the object is peace?*

\*\*Maybe God is in the same position as human beings. If you are a policeman or soldier or president you are involved in violence as a means of trying to keep violence under control. It doesn’t work very well, but neither does not using violence to keep violence under control. But the Book of Isaiah also recognizes that God’s ultimate achievements are not going to come that way (see ch. 53).

*How do you reconcile the wrathful God of the OT with the forgiving God of the NT?*

\*\*How do you reconcile the forgiving God of the OT (Ps 103:3) with the unforgiving God of the NT (Mt 6:15)?

*How did God choose the remnant to be preserved?*

\*\*As far as one can tell, the choosing was random (like it’s random that you know Christ and the person next door does not). Certainly lots of faithful people died (as is usually the pattern) and lots of unbelievers did not (as is usually the pattern). God’s concern wasn’t the preserving of deserving individuals (that would be our concern). It was preserving enough of the body of the people to ensure that the purpose of redemption kept going—and that required Israel to stay in existence. As the fact that you know Christ has as its aim that the person next door should also do so.

*How does the remnant theology play out in the NT?*

\*\*Romans 9—11 is the most systematic exposition.

*Isn’t the understanding of sin simplistic? It’s all about rebellion rather than brokenness. What if God had not been particularly present to the people? Weren’t they searching for more satisfying alternatives—would God punish them for that?*

\*\*I don’t think Isaiah is any different from the rest of the Bible, is it? What we might call looking for more satisfying alternatives is what it calls turning your back on the real God. I suppose we have to think about whether we think it is right.

*Why does sacrifice only work when you live according to God’s will? Where does it say that in the Bible?*

\*\*I guess because it’s part of a relationship. If you give a bunch of flowers to your wife but before that you have been being a bastard, your wife may throw them in your face. The point is suggested in the Torah by its combining moral demands with worship demands, and often mixing them up. There are a number of places in the prophets that say that Yahweh hates worship that isn’t accompanied by a life of justice (Amos 5:21-24 is another; see also Ps 50).

*Why is the Bible so puzzling?*

\*\*Because God took the risk of speaking to people in a context, which can make it hard to understand in another context?

Because the things it talks about are very mysterious?

Because our assumptions are so different from its?

Because people learn more if they have to work at it?

*1:18: in light of this exhortation, can we tell people they can “Come as they are?” (cf. Mt 5:23-24)?*

\*\*Maybe the key question is whether they stay as they are….

*1:29-30: What’s the nature of the worship involving oak trees etc?*

\*\*I guess it’s the Canaanite version of regular nature religion/traditional religion. Its concern is with making sure that nature “works”, and it thus involves rites in gardens and under thriving trees.

*When is “that day”? (2:2; 3:18; 4:2)?*

\*\*As it doesn’t say, maybe it wasn’t fixed?! I take such visions as a promise of the fulfillment of God’s ultimate purpose in the areas they describe. In none of the cases have the visions been fully fulfilled, but in all of them they have been partly fulfilled and confirmed in Jesus, in whom all God’s promises get their confirmation. So we can be looking and praying for their fulfillment in our churches and communities.

*4:1: Why seven women to one man?*

\*\*Because most of the men will have been killed in battle, I presume (see 3:25).

*4:4: Why are the daughters of Jerusalem picture as filthy?*

\*\*Because of the results of the trouble that is coming, I guess (see 3:18—4:1)

*5:1-7 seems to imply that God did not foreknow what would happen.*

\*\*Yes. The OT implies that God can foresee things and sometimes does, but not always.

*6:2: What are seraphs?*

\*\*Elsewhere they are snakes (e.g., 14:29; 30:6). The verb *seraph* means “burn” So maybe they are fiery flying snakes….

*6:6: Why is a hot coal applied to Isaiah’s mouth?*

\*\*Fiery heat sears and cleanses.

*6:9-10: Why would God not want them to repent?*

\*Two possible answers—both might be true. One is that it’s an act of judgment. The other is that Isaiah telling people this is designed to drive them to repent.

*Is Jesus a disciple of Isaiah? He quotes him a lot.*

\*\*What a great observation! How interesting that 6:9-10 is an example (Mk 4:11-12).

*How much of the prophecy of destruction came true?*

\*\*Syria and Ephraim got destroyed by Assyria. Next century Assyria fell. Judah was devastated by Sennacherib but Jerusalem was miraculously preserved, but then fell in 587.

*7: What’s going on with Ahaz?* Why did Ahaz say, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test”?

Ahaz is under pressure. The Assyrians are threatening Syria and Ephraim, and Syria and Ephraim are threatening Ahaz trying to get him to take their side. So he is trying to take responsible action to defend the city against attack from one side or the other. And he doesn’t want God to give him a sign to make him obliged to trust God! So he can appeal to the fact that you aren’t supposed to test God.

*7:14: Does the word mean “virgin”?*

\*\*I think it probably means “unmarried girl,” which would charitably imply virgin (but she won’t be an unmarried girl/virgin by the time she has her baby).

*Are there foreshadowings of Christ in chapters 7, 9, and 11?*

\*\*I’m not sure what is meant by foreshadowings. If it means would Isaiah and his hearers see the prophecies as referring to the Messiah, then I think the answer is “no” to ch. 7, “possibly” to ch. 9, and “yes” to ch. 11.

*Are there any real prophecies of the Messiah in the OT?*

\*\*Yes, Isaiah 11 would be one—though such passages don’t use the word Messiah.

*7; 9; 11: did they really give the kids crazy names?*

\*\*Cultures sometimes do. I read about some Zimbabwean personal names: Godknows, Lovemore, Tellmore, Trymore, Oblivious, Funeral, Anywhere, Enough (he was number 13), Hatred (because there was trouble in the family), Question (because the mother was not married), Nevertrustawoman (because the father didn’t think the child was his). In Isaiah, at least, I don’t imagine these were the names whereby they were known every day.

*What would have happened if Israel had repented? What if Pekah broke ties with Rezin and turned to Yhwh? What if the rich began to love the poor? How might history be different?*

\*\*For what would have happened if Pekah had repented, see Jonah 3.

*8:3: Who is the prophetess?*

\*\*Presumably Ms Isaiah

*8:8 Is “O Immanuel” sarcastic?*

\*\*I think it’s a weird translation, though it also appears in the NIV. The Jewish Publication Society translation makes more sense. It translates the word, “God is with us”, rather than just transliterating it, and makes it the introduction to the next verse. You will see that the same expression then comes at the end of v. 9 (NRSV and NIV do translate it in that way there). So this statement forms a bracket round vv. 8-9, giving the reason why Judah can have confidence.

*9:6: In what sense is the child “Mighty God”?*

\*\*The name isn’t a description of the child (just as “A remnant shall return” isn’t a description of the child). It’s something that the birth of the child points to or is designed to remind people of—in this case, some truths about God.

*9:16-17: Why did God have no mercy on orphans and widows, when the people were supposed to?*

*Can he hold them responsible if they were misled?*

\*\*Part of the answer (I guess) is that God would have to intervene in a special way to preserve orphans and widows. In creating a world and putting us in charge of it, God had decided to hold off from intervening every moment. Another part is that leadership and teaching really makes a difference. People don’t have to follow leaders. You have to take responsibility for following misleading teaching.

*9:19-21: How would Isaiah understand the interaction between God’s sovereignty and human agency? Here, God’s wrath scorches the land, and at the same time Manasseh and Ephraim devour each other; both God and people seem to be simultaneously responsible for destruction.*

\*\*Yes, that’s typical in the OT—while God can act “miraculously” and people can act without God being involved, quite often people act and God acts through them, or things work out by “natural” cause and effect and God acts through this process.

*10:12-19: Is it fair to punish Assyria after using them?*

\*\*I guess it would be less fair to take no notice of the wrong that 10:12-19 describes.

*10:25: Why must God’s anger be assuaged or used up?*

\*\*Because it’s the proper response to wickedness. It’s being used up means that wickedness has been properly punished.

*10:19-23: What does the idea of a remnant mean?*

\*\*It’s used in three ways:

1. The disaster will be so great that only a remnant is left
2. At least a remnant is left, so maybe there could be a future
3. The remnant that is left is challenged to become a faithful remnant (note that it is not the case that the remnant is people who survive because they are faithful—they are people who didn’t deserve to survive any more than anyone else did, so they are now challenged to be faithful).

You have to work out which meaning from the context.

*Is 11:1-9 literal or symbolic? Is there to be such a kingdom of peace on earth?Is this the same branch as 4:2?*

\*\*11:1-9 isa statement of what the “real David” will eventually achieve. Jesus hasn’t yet done it, so he will need to do so. Presumably it will be on earth, because that’s why God created the earth in the first place, and God likes the earth. In 4:2 the branch metaphor is used in a different connection—it describes the people as a whole. In both cases the image comes from the idea of a tree that has been cut down, but it’s two different trees.

*11:10-16: What’s the historical time frame?*

\*\*Taking for granted that both Ephraim and Judah are eventually going into exile, it promises that this will not be the last word. There will be a restoration. That began in 539 and is still going on.

*12: how much do we need to know about God to praise him? When is it true worship?*

\*\*I guess we need to know one thing, then we can worship God for that! Then every extra thing we learn and every new thing God does gives us more reason for worship. True worship isn’t a matter of the number of facts we have. It is a matter of whether we are responding to the facts we do have—responding with our words and our lives (see 1:10-20).

*12:2-3: What does Isaiah mean by “salvation”?*

\*\*It’s the kind of salvation referred to in Matt 8:25; 14:30—being rescued from disaster or death.

# Isaiah 13—27

*What’s the history behind the prophecies and their use and significance? Were some parts inserted later? How does this affect our interpretation? How much integrity is there about chapters 24—27?*

\*\*I presume most of the prophecies in chapters 13—23 were delivered to Judahites in a setting such as the temple courtyards or the royal court, (e.g.) to encourage people not to trust in or worry about these other peoples or to think that God will never act against superpowers that oppress people. I expect some parts are from later than Isaiah’s day, but it’s a matter of speculation so it doesn’t get us very far in trying to interpret them. I assume chapters 24—27 is a collection of prophecies from various backgrounds that would have been delivered in the same way but have been arranged to give us a series of pictures of world punishment and restoration, interspersed with appropriate reactions (e.g., praise). It’s not (very) linear. The dating of chapters 24—27 is uncertain because it doesn’t give us much concrete information—but as it is concerned to portray the destruction and restoration of the world in general, maybe this doesn’t matter so much.

*13—23: Why did the prophets prophesy to foreign nations who never heard the prophecy? When prophets speak “to the person on stage and to the house,” does the message place expectations on the other nation(s), or is it mostly to inform Israel about what God is doing? If both, does one receive more weight than the other? Were the prophecies fulfilled?*

\*\*I assume that as the other nations didn’t usually know about these prophecies, the main point was to inform Israel so as to shape Israel’s attitudes. We now that some were fulfilled—e.g., Babylon fell, Assyria fell, other smaller peoples were conquered by Assyria. Tyre wasn’t destroyed: Ezekiel 29:18-20 is an interesting comment on the way God’s will interacts with human wills in such a context.

*13—23: What does God expect of the nations?*

\*\*Not to make themselves into god; not to oppress their people or other peoples.

*13—23: This text seems rife with opportunities for Marxist, anti-statist, postcolonial, and anarchist readings. Are these fair readings of the text or too anachronistic?*

\*\*I don’t know about three of those expressions, but postcolonial insights are really helpful for much of the Prophets (and the OT elsewhere) because Israel, Ephraim, and Judah are usually in the position of colonial underlings of superpowers.

*13—23: Why is God so schizophrenic all the time? Is the talk of total destruction hyperbolic? God speaks of compassion and restoration for the same people. He speaks so unequivocally, but then gives in to compassion. So is there to be no Hell?*

\*\*God has to handle two obligations coming from inside himself: the need to act against wrongdoing and the need to be merciful. I wouldn’t like to assume there is no Hell because that would seem to abandon the necessary tension between the two obligations.

*13—23: What counts as a superpower, how were they so, and do they get treated differently from ordinary nations?*

\*\*The superpowers mentioned in Isaiah are Assyria, Babylon, and Persia (later there was Greece). A superpower is an entity that dominates the known world, maybe without having a rival. So these peoples dominated Israel’s world—the Middle Eastern world. They only get to be superpowers by being selfish and ruthless, and their success makes them think they are god, so there is reason for God treating them differently from other nations.

*13—23: Does God only punish nations, not individuals? Did people have no awareness of being individuals?*

\*\*It’s more that prophets’ ministry concerns nations not individuals (compare Jer 1:5). God’s relationship with individuals comes more in Psalms, Proverbs, Job….

*13—23: If God feels pretty much the same about the nations, why is Israel his chosen people?*

\*\*There’s no logic about love! See Deuteronomy 7. But God chose Israel in order to reach the nations whom he loved just as much.

*13—23: I would like to hear more about the political ramifications of the prophets giving messages about other nations. Though I understand that nations do not need a covenant with Yahweh to understand that certain actions are wrong, I am confused about the extent to which the prophets expect people outside the covenant to live according to the expectations of their covenant with God.*

\*\*I don’t think there is any indication that God expected other nations to live by the expectations of Israel’s special revelation. The problem is the opposite—when Israel ignores its special covenant expectations (e.g., not to make images of God) and lives in the way that the nations can be excused for. In that sense, the political ramifications are for Israel. But the exhortation to do the right thing and trust that things will work out would be an interesting one to press on an ordinary nation.

*13—14: Why is God so hard on Babylon? Why doesn’t get to join in worship, like Assyria in 19:16-27?*

\*\*In principle he’s hard on Babylon, because it’s the superpower, and you know how superpowers are…. I doubt if we should assume it’s excluded from the possibility of ever benefiting from the vision in 19:16-27 (after all, the comments about Assyria here in 13:24-27 don’t refer to its having that chance). That’s a different topic from looked at from a different angle.

*13:6, 9, 13: Is the Day of Yahweh our future judgment, the tribulation, or the rapture? What is the time frame? Which words are imminent, which for the far future? How do we find out which prophecies were for then and which for now?*

\*\*I doubt if the text can tell you this—as you cannot usually tell from the NT that the coming of Christ is thousands of years away. Partly this is because even if the complete fulfillment is thousands of years away, some fulfillment is to come soon—that will be a foretaste of the whole. The Day of Yahweh is a day that happens in people’s experience when God brings in a moment of his rule, which is thus a little experience of God’s complete rule. The final Day of Yahweh will be when all that happens. So the prophecies were for then, and they are also for now. The way God is relating to nations then gives examples of how God relates to nations now.

*13—23: What is God’s motivation—to punish or restore? Why does God wait till cities are so badly corrupt before acting against them to make things right? Why isn’t he proactive? He seems to work in waves. How can God sit back and let the world and the people he loves be destroyed?*

*Yahweh seems terrible—wrathful, causing suffering and war. Are these the natural consequences of wrongdoing, or is God bloodthirsty? See esp. 13:16. Many people can’t believe in that kind of God. How does God choose whom to be compassionate to? “I have no wrath” (27:4)—not the way it seems!*

\*\*I’ve combined some questions there, so here are several answers.

He surely doesn’t sit back—he actively destroys it, doesn’t he? And apparently with anger and grief—which is the usual way that people destroy things that they love, isn’t it? God does everything with passion—including warn of punishment and actually punish, I guess. At least in Isaiah he doesn’t send people to Hell—God waited till the NT to do that! But what he really wants is for people to turn to him, then he needn’t go in for destruction.

What makes you say he has waited so long before acting? What would being proactive look like? What he has done is create them, give them knowledge of himself and of his expectations, and then wait a very long time for them to respond (cf. Romans 1—2). Warning of destruction is then another way of seeking to reach them. (Remember that these prophecies are talk, not action. Insofar as they are designed for the nations to hear, they are designed to produce change, so that what they talk about doesn’t happen. And remember that God’s bark is worse than his bite.) Maybe being too interventionist would frustrate the whole idea of giving humanity responsibility for the world. It’s like treating adults as children. Of course this didn’t work, so eventually he sent his Son to die for them. But maybe it was no use doing that too soon—things had to be shown to be really desperate. And maybe that hasn’t worked very well either, to judge from the state of the world as we see it.

One of the pieces of background is a realism about how things are in the world. War involves events like those in 13:16, and the OT would rather assume that God is involved in the world than imply that he is not.

God chooses to be compassionate to the people he is already committed to. That’s the meaning of that word translated “righteousness” or “deliverance”—it implies doing the right thing by people you are committed to. Thus times when God is full of wrath with his people cannot last forever (27:4)—cf. 28:21. But the aim of being compassionate to them is to extend compassion to others. I don’t know how God chooses when to be compassionate to other peoples. Maybe it is a judgment call on whether there has to be some punishment or whether there can be some more compassion.

*13—23: What’s the relationship between God crushing the nations and the nations crumbling under their own mismanagement?*

\*\*One can regularly interpret history in the latter way—there was nothing miraculous about the fall of these nations. So the prophecies’ implication for us is that we mustn’t just see them as natural events, in that way, which we are tempted to do because we don’t like the idea of judgment and we want to get God off the hook.

*13—23: When people say 9/11 was God’s judgment, are they acting like Isaiah?*

\*\*Isaiah talked about things before they happened. Talking about an event after it happens isn’t so impressive.

*14:1-2: What is the relationship between God’s concern for the nations and God’s for concern for Israel?*

*Is 14:1-2 a reference to a mission to being a blessing—cf. Genesis 12?*

\*\*I don’t know that Isaiah itself makes the relationship absolutely explicit—or maybe it suggests several different answers, not incompatible. But the two basic ones are

(1) God’s concern for the nations is to use them to restore Israel.

(2) God’s concern for Israel is to model or embody something to the world.

In the case of 14:1-2, the emphasis is on the blessing this will be to Judah. It isn’t a mission—they don’t have to do anything. God does it.

*What is the meaning of God’s “plan”? See e.g., 14:24; 19:17.*

\*\*“Intention” might be a better way to translate it. In these contexts the “plan” or “purpose” or “counsel” relates to specific intentions, regarding e.g., Assyria (see 14:25-27), Egypt (19:12, 16-17), Tyre (23:8-9). It contrasts with the intentions/plans/counsel of earthly peoples such as Aram (7:5), Egypt itself (19:3, 11)—and Judah (30:1). God is “wonderful in counsel/planning” (28:29) and is the “Wonderful Counselor” because he is capable of deciding on a plan and implementing it.

*13:14-16: Why the violent language? Is this to prevent procreation? Why is rape involved?*

\*\*Violent language helps to convey the horrifying nature of what will happen. It will be a violent reality. The fall of empires is like that. The reference to children will link with the fact that children are the future of a people. But the reference to rape also points to the fact that Isaiah is simply describing what happens in war. Women commonly get raped.

*13:20-22: What about the fact that this didn’t happen?*

\*\*It shows we shouldn’t be literalistic in interpreting prophecies. They use imagery. Babylon cataclysmically fell, by surrendering to Cyrus.

*13:21: What is a goat-demon?*

\*\*It seems that frightening wild creatures of the desert were seen as embodiments of frightening supernatural powers. Cf Leviathan (27:1)—a sea-monster equivalent.

*13—14: How does all this relate to the fall of Babylon in Rev 13? Did Isaiah influence Revelation?*

\*\*In Rev 13 Babylon stands for Rome, but both become images for every superpower, which will be cut down by God in history and finally at the End. Yes, Isaiah certainly influenced Revelation, as did Ezekiel, Daniel, and others. Revelation got most of its imagery and language from the Prophets. It was inspired by the Prophets.

*14:12-15: I have been told this is the fall of Satan, but it’s obviously the fall of the King of Babylon. Why was it interpreted that way?*

\*\*Too right! Oddly, it utilizes a Canaanite and Babylonian myth that is about the fall of a god who tried to make himself top god, but as you say, here it is used to portray the king’s fall. I wonder if the reason for the interpretation is that Christians were very keen to have an answer to the question about Satan’s fall, so had to invent one.

*15—16: This is pretty unintelligible! In 15:5 is God weeping, or Isaiah?*

\*\*The bulk of the two chapters expresses grief over the suffering Moab is going to experience; I don’t think it makes much difference who is weeping, God or God’s representative. Both of them intend it to happen, yet are grieved by the implications. The middle (16:1-5) then allows for the disaster making Moab seek Yahweh.

*17:10: What are slips of an alien god?*

\*\*“Slips” are plant cuttings. So this refers to people looking to other gods for the answers to their prayers for a good harvest.

*18: Why the tough treatment of Ethiopia:*

\*\*It’s not Ethiopia as such; the government of Egypt was Ethiopian at the time (more accurately, Sudanese—that is, from the south of Egypt).

*19:16-25: Why are just Assyria and Egypt promised restoration? Was the vision ever realized? If God is making a covenant through Abraham and Israel and that is how God deals with people, how does God fit the Egyptians in? Is he using the same system or a different one? Are there any other OT references to God’s love for Assyria and Egypt?*

\*\*I presume that one reason these two are there because they are two big northern and southern powers in OT times—so in a sense they stand for all the nations, and specifically all the big regional powers and superpowers. If Assyria and Egypt are in, everyone must be! Egypt did become a center of Jewish and Christian commitment after the exile and in early Christian times. Chapter19 is another way of making the promise in Genesis 12—that is, Abraham/Israel becomes a means of blessing the nations. I can’t think of other OT references to God’s love for both Assyria and Egypt in particular, but of course Jonah is about God’s love for Assyria—because Nineveh is the Assyrian capital. And (e.g.) Genesis 1—11 is about God’s love for the whole world (Assyria and Egypt are mentioned among the other peoples there), while the Psalms often refer to Yahweh’s intention to have all the nations come to recognize him.

*21:11-13: What’s the point about Dumah? What is the sentinel’s message?*

\*\*“OK, night is over, so we are safe for another day. But there’ll be another night coming, and we have to go through it all again.” Dumah is an oasis near Babylon. I wonder if one of the points of the mention is that it’s totally irrelevant to Judah, so the mention affirms Yahweh’s sovereignty and activity in such other parts of the world.

*22:1: What is Vision Valley?*

\*\*That’s what the hearers would have asked. It eventually becomes clear that it refers to the ravines around Jerusalem.

*22: Why is Jerusalem’s punishment talked about in the midst of that of the nations? Is destruction of cities literal or figurative? Will God’s people be immune?*

\*\*There’s no indication that it’s symbolic, is there? The implication of chapter 22 is that God’s people will not be immune. Jerusalem is subject to the same rules as others.

*23:15-18: What is going on? And why is Tyre promised it will give everything to God? Is this judgment or restoration?*

\*\*Trade is like prostitution and after Tyre’s long desolation it seems like an aged whore still trying to ply her trade. But now her “profits” will be holy to Yahweh and will go to Yahweh’s worshipers, as in the days of Solomon and Hiram. So there is hope even for her trade. Yahweh is as free to reverse Deuteronomy 23:18 here as to reverse Deuteronomy 24 in Hosea 1—3. It is also a neat reversal of verse 9. It’s all a metaphor, remember! I guess that giving everything to God is this judgment or restoration according to what attitude they take to it.

*24—27: The chapters seem as puzzling as Revelation.*

\*\*That bad?! Is part of the problem that it appeals to the imagination? It’s like entering into a fantasy story.

*24—27: Why are judgment and renewal interwoven? Why are praise and joy interspersed with devastation?*

\*\*Because there are two things God needs to do—judge and renew; and because the judgment is good news, since it would be terrible if the wickedness of the nations was allowed simply to continue.

*24:1: What would they mean by the whole world?*

\*\*They wouldn’t know about the Americas, and maybe not about China. Maybe “the world” was not so different from “the nations,” which means the empire in whose context they lived. But they would know there were nations beyond nations they knew he names of, so maybe they would mean the world as whole, whatever was its nature, on the assumption that it behaved the same way as the nations they did know.

*24:1: Why is God going to punish the earth for the wrong done by human beings?*

\*\*It seems that the destiny of the two is tied together. Maybe the idea is that the earth is corrupted by human sin. It would fit with the idea that humanity’s vocation was to subdue the earth (Gen 1), to bring it under God, and humanity has failed to do so.

*24:5: On what basis are gentile peoples judged? Is accountability tied to knowledge of God’s word or are all peoples similarly accountable? What are the laws and statutes of 24:5?*

\*\*Scripture as a whole assumes that all human beings know that God is there, know the basics about God, and know the basics of our responsibility—e.g. to worship God, to care for one another, etc. It’s built into being human. We don’t need an extra revelation on top of being made in God’s image in order to know it. See e.g., Amos 1—2; Romans 1—2; and the Noah covenant. So the gentile world is assessed on the basis of that in-built awareness. Of course on that basis people don’t know (e.g.) that Jesus dies for them, so we who do know this would expect to be treated more severely if we know it but don’t live by it.

*24:14-16: Where is the praise coming from? Does 24:16b relate to the second coming or does it relate to Isaiah’s context? Why is this here, in a section of praise?*

\*\*It doesn’t say where the praise is coming from, so I presume that isn’t the point. The point is that it is coming. There isn’t anything to suggest the second coming rather than Isaiah’s context, is there? I see vv. 14-16a and 16b as alternative reactions to the vision in vv. 1-13.

*24:21: Who are the host of heaven, and why are they punished?*

\*\*They are heavenly powers (gods, if you like) that have rebelled against God and are working against God’s purpose.

*25:7-8: What is the shroud? How will God swallow death? Is this Christ conquering death?*

\*\*The promise is that there will be an end to the time when the life of the world and of Israel in particular is dominated by war and destruction and loss and grief—it’s a promise like that of 2:2-4. A great party will succeed death and destruction and grief and loss. Christ hasn’t yet done this, but we know that he will and so we pray for the promise to be fulfilled. The image of swallowing comes from the fact that people often talk about death swallowing us (and particularly of Sheol swallowing people—perhaps because we go down into the earth at death, and the earth thus swallows us). Now God will swallow it.

*25:10-12: Why special attention to Moab?*

\*\*Maybe it’s the temptation offered by the place name Madmenah. There are places with a name of this kind in Judah and in Moab, but it’s also the Hebrew word for a cesspit. It thus gives the prophet the chance to indulge in a scatological image for Moab’s fate. Any people will be wise to substitute its name for Moab and to make sure it qualifies as a people that is looking to Yahweh rather than one that ends up with the fate described here.

*In 26:19, what is the meaning of “Your dead shall live, your corpses shall rise”?*

\*\*In the context this looks like a promise that the nation will be brought back to life—cf. the vision in Ezekiel 37.

*27:1: What is Leviathan?*

\*\*A kind of embodiment of destructive power asserted against God. The image is taken from Middle Eastern myths. It is a sort of animalic equivalent to Satan, if you like.

*27:12-13: Is this just Israelites?*

\*\*I guess so, as 26:20—27:13 seems to be all about God’s own people.

# Isaiah 28—39

*What is the relation between the OT and the NT? Can I preach on the OT without referring to the NT?*

\*\*As far as I can see, Christian experience of God is not so different from the experience of God that the Psalms testify to or that you see in OT believers such as Ruth or Hannah. E.g., we don’t seem closer to God than they seem to have been. Although they lived before Christ, they enjoyed the benefits of who God is and of the fact that because of who God is, he is going to give his Son to die for them. Whatever passage I preach on, I don’t tend to refer to other passages—partly because it is confusing. I don’t usually refer to the NT when preaching on the OT. Of course I could never preach on the NT without referring to the OT….

*What will happen to the Jews at the Second Coming?*

\*\*See Romans 11:25-27.

*There seems to be a continual tension between the concepts of a unilateral covenant (where God acts because he has promised to do so, regardless of his people’s behavior) and a bi-lateral covenant (where God’s actions depend on human behavior). Is there a way of discerning for which things God awaits our participation? When is it conditional, when unconditional?*

\*\*You’re right, there is that tension, and if you get out of it, you are in trouble—like if you decide that Jesus is divine or human. For all things God looks for our participation, but for all things we can rely on God. I don’t think “conditional-unconditional” is a helpful way to try to think about the question. God’s commitment is unconditional, but it always demands our commitment.

*It is interesting that Isaiah relates God to politics and international affairs, whereas we don’t seek God’s view of that—religion and politics are very separate.*

\*\*I assume God is involved in international events now as then. It would be odd if God had withdrawn! (Of course God might withdraw from particular situations as an act of punishment—but that is itself a form of involvement.)

*Why does God deal so differently in the world now from then? He seemed consistently to answer prayers when people turned to him.*

\*\*I’m not sure God answered prayers any more then—lots of the psalms are prayed by people whose prayers don’t seem to have been answered.

*What is God’s judgment? Is it the bad things that people bring on themselves? Or does God intervene?*

\*\*The OT seems to portray God acting by lots of means, and I presume the same is still true. God works through human decisions, and through “coincidences”, and by “intervening”… It’s not an either/or.

*How do these prophecies link with actual history?*

\*\*We know from Assyrian records about the Assyrian invasion of Judah and about alliances between people such as Judah and Egypt. But we don’t know about the death of an army, and it was twenty years before the Assyrian king died.

*Is the Holy One of Israel God, or Christ, or the Spirit, or the Father God of Abraham and Moses?*

\*\*He is certainly the God of Abraham and of Moses. I guess he is the God whom people later knew was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but God did not reveal himself in this way before Christ because that revelation issued from Jesus’ coming and the Spirit’s being given.

*28—39: Any indication that this is a later situation and later prophet than 1—27?*

The references to Hezekiah indicate its two or three decades later, and the political situation presupposed by 28—32 implies Hezekiah’s time. There‘s no reason to think it’s not basically Isaiah, as 1—27 is basically Isaiah.

*28—39: It’s very repetitive—why?*

\*\*For the same reason that the rest of the Bible is very repetitive—people don’t listen the first time, or the second time, or the third, so God/Jesus keep having another try, putting it in a slightly different way.

*What did the Assyrian invasion accomplish? Not very much, it seems. Hezekiah turned to Yahweh, but what about the rest of the people? Were the Assyrians a serious warning rather than full-fledged judgment? If the people had turned to Yahweh, would there have been no exile?*

\*\*No, God’s judgments never achieve much, do they? Certainly I assume that if the people had turned to Yahweh, there would have been no exile. Repentance can always avert judgment.

*When people keep faithful in the midst of the destructive things God brings on them, what keeps them faithful? Glimpses of his faithfulness?*

\*\*I guess so. Also knowledge of who God is, and an awareness of the logic of what God is doing? And an awareness that it is fulfilling God’s word?

*In chapters 28—33, why do these all begin “Woe”? Are they really all woes? Why is there so much focus on reliance on Egypt?*

\*\*Actually they begin “Hey!”—“Woe” is an interpretation based on the way they all begin with bad news. But they go on to good news later. The reason for the focus on reliance on Egypt is that this was the key issue in the relationship between God’s people and God. It’s all about trust.

*28:10: What does “precept on precept” mean?*

\*\*That Isaiah keeps hammering home a simplistic message—just trust in God?

*29: What is Ariel?*

\*\*It’s a name for Jerusalem—we don’t quite know why. But it makes the prophet able to do some playing on words, because “Ariel” sounds the same as a word for the hearth round the temple altar where animals were burnt in sacrifice.

*29:13: What does it mean that their hearts were far from God?*

\*\*The heart in the OT commonly refers to the mind or attitude or intention. Compare the idea of people’s hearts being hard—i.e., they won’t change their mind or attitude. See 6:10; 10:9, 12; 32:6. (The heart can refer to the feelings—see 15:5; 24:7; but that fits less well here.)

*30:10: What does it mean to talk about prophesying illusions?*

\*\*In effect this was what people wanted—they wanted prophets to tell them things that were actually not true, and they half-knew that.

*30:16: What is the point about horses?*

\*\*They are key military resources.

*30:20: NRSV capitalizes Teacher—is this God or a prophet?*

\*\*I presume NRSV is right that the word refers to God—that makes better sense, doesn’t it?

*30:26: What do we make of Yahweh healing the wounds he himself inflicted?*

\*\*It’s better than the Lord not doing that, isn’t it? It’s another way of handling the need for Yhwh to be involved both in judgment and in mercy.

*32: Who is this king?*

\*\*The chapter is a promise that God will grant good government. It doesn’t indicate who the king is. There are lots of kings who have been a partial realization of the promise, aren’t there?

*32:9: Why are the women addressed specifically?*

\*\*Men and women are addressed at various points in the book, in accordance with their varying roles and sins.

*34—35: What would count as fulfillment of these visions?*

\*\*I assume these are concrete visions of ultimate punishment and blessing that receive various embodiments—e.g., when Babylon falls and Judah is restored, but also at the End as portrayed in Revelation.

*34: What does the host of heaven rotting like a scroll mean?*

\*\*The host of heaven are supernatural forces that oppose God. They are rolled up like a scroll (the way you might roll up the sky) and thrown away.

*34: Was this originally directed to Edom, then expanded to include the opening statement addressed to the nations? Or is mention of Edom intended to supply a detailed illustration of the terrible things that will happen to the nations on the day of Yahweh’s wrath?*

\*\*These aren’t mutually exclusive, are they? I.e., both could be true. Edom could seem the embodiment of wrongdoing in the Second Temple period, when it took over much of Judah;’s land.

*34:14: Who is Lilith?*

A female demon figure.

*36-37: Are the Assyrians telling the truth when they accuse Judah of relying on Egypt rather than on Yahweh?*

\*\*Yes—see chapters 30—31. It is ironic that the Assyrians tell the Judahites these home truths!

*Why did Hezekiah trust God when today’s politicians would not do so? What did Hezekiah know that we don’t?*

\*\*Well, occasionally in history there have been leaders who have trusted in God!

*37: Is there any non-biblical evidence of God’s slaughter of the Assyrians?*

\*\*No.

*37:22: Who is “she”?*

\*\*Ms Jerusalem—the sentence works backwards!

*37:26: How are we to understand God’s plans?*

\*\*See the material on God’s plan in the responses to questions on Isaiah 13—27.

*38:6: How does this reference to the king relate to the account of a king’s death in chapter 37?*

\*\*These stories aren’t in chronological order. Chapters 36—37 relate more to what precedes, chapters 38—39 to what follows.

*38:22: Why didn’t this come earlier? Dies God give signs?*

\*\*You aren’t supposed to ask for signs, so it’s a negative comment which is left until the end. But sometimes God gives one anyway….

*39: Why dies Isaiah rebuke Hezekiah? Was Hezekiah weary of battle and therefore willing to settle for peace at any price? Even after his healing and the prolonging of his life? Is Hezekiah a hypocrite? Why did he show them his stores? The chapter ends abruptly: has something got lost?*

\*\*He’s not a hypocrite, is he?—he is quite honest about his feelings! Showing them his stores was part of entering into a mutually supportive relationship with Babylon against Assyria, which is the reason for the rebuke—he’s trusting them instead of God. The story of Hezekiah does end abruptly, but it leads straight into chapter 40 where the people are in—Babylon.

# Isaiah 40—55

*I’m not completely clear on the history, but I understand that Cyrus the Persian is the instrument God used to end the Babylonian exile (though that was not necessarily a great thing for the Judahites who had grown accustomed to life in Babylon). Persia still ruled over them (and as I understand, later the Greeks, then Romans, etc.). So the “restoration” was really just going from being conquered and exiled to conquered and dominated by another power? How does that constitute as a restoration?*

\*\*Well, at least the exiles were able to go back home and rebuild the temple. See Ezra 1—6 for their enthusiasm – but Ezra 9 for recognition of your point, that they still needed a lot more.

*On the critical theory, Second Isaiah was prophesying only a handful of years before Cyrus conquered Babylon. How can we be sure that these texts were not written after his gaining control? There is not enough time separating when Second Isaiah may have been written and the events recorded elsewhere. What are church leaders to do about the notion that these “prophecies” about Cyrus may be descriptive of a previous event rather than a divine prediction of the future?*

\*\*I assume they were indeed given after he came to the Persian throne but before he conquered Babylon and thus took over the Babylonian empire. You couldn’t prove that they were not written after the fall of Babylon – the same as you could not prove that the whole OT is a fiction. But there’s no reason not to take them at face value, is there?

*What’s the relationship of Jacob-Israel and Zion-Jerusalem? Does Jerusalem matter to Christian faith today in connection with God’s purpose?*

\*\*Both stand for the people, but Jacob-Israel directly refers to it, whereas Zion-Jerusalem suggests the people’s capital (Zion is more the religious/theological term, Jerusalem more the political one, the place that would appear on GPS). Surely Jerusalem does matter—it’s still the place where Jesus died and rose and the place from which the gospel goes out.

*Can the servant refer to a different person in different passages?*

\*\*That makes sense. Early on it’s Israel, and 42 then describes Israel’s vocation but also shows that Israel can’t fulfill the role. In 49 and 50 the “I” strongly suggests it’s the prophet, who has the servant calling on an interim basis. In 50:10-11 the prophet then speaks of himself in the third person, and I think that continues in 53—it is a description of the prophet’s role as servant, which Jesus then takes up.

*Doesn’t 40—48 issue a challenge to open theism? Further, I’ve heard it said that “prophecy” primarily means “forthtelling” and not “foretelling,” but here there is an emphasis on the way one can distinguish the true God from the false ones is by their being able to predict the future? This is mentioned quite a few times throughout so is there something I’m missing?*

\*\*Yes, I think it probably does issue a challenge to open theism, so that it has the opposite effect to 5:1-7, which challenges classical theism! Here the prophecy assumes Yahweh can declare what is going to happen, though he’s not predicting it—he is declaring the intention to do it. Prophecy is both forthtelling and foretelling.

*41: What are the idols, and why is there such a fuss about them, and doesn’t the prophet make people led sophisticated than they are in implying that people thought the images actually were gods?*

\*\*The chapters later refer to the big national images of Bel and also to the little images of such a god that someone might have in their house. The context may explain the former stress—the big images of Bel in Babylon would be impressive to the exiles. It’s right that sophisticated people wouldn’t identify image and deity, but it wouldn’t be surprising if ordinary people did, and anyway much of the polemic still applies—images cannot represent a deity who deserves to be taken seriously as one who speaks and acts.

*42: How does Judah receive the message of having a job in relation to the nations? How do they learn to turn the other cheek and minister to Babylonians whose relatives enslaved their people?*

\*\*I don’t think there’s reference to that kind of job. Their job is to tell the world about what Yahweh is doing and to embody what it’s like to have Yahweh bless them.

*42: What are the coastlands and islands?*

\*\*Maybe we should not try to identify them too specifically; but if we do, the lands across the sea from Canaan such as Turkey and Cyprus.

45: Why is Cyrus never called “my servant” but instead shepherd and “anointed one”.

\*\*The prophet seems to think in terms of two roles to be fulfilled. There is a political one for which “shepherd” and “anointed one” are natural descriptions (both commonly apply to kings. “Servant” could apply to a king (Jeremiah applies it thus) but this prophet keeps it for the role of restoring people’s relationship with God.

*45:7: Does this mean God is behind all natural disasters?*

\*\*That must be true in some sense, but there are some blessings and disasters that have a special place in God’s purpose, and others that don’t. Actually the context here shows that the prophet is talking about political events, but the same applies—there’s a special divine purposefulness behind some events (such as Cyrus’s rise) that doesn’t apply to all political events, though in a general sense God is behind them all.

*45:15: God hides?*

\*\*He’s been doing so in letting the Judahites go into exile.

*51:9: Rahab—why?*

\*\*Not the Rahab in Joshua (it’s spelled differently)—it’s a term for an entity like Leviathan, an embodiment of power asserted against God.

*52:1: The uncircumcised will not enter… But the Romans did…*

\*\*Perhaps we should say God had a change of mind, and that it’s an example of the way all God’s promises (and warnings) are part of a relationship. It’s implicitly “There’s no need for them to do that if you stick with me.” But sin makes a difference. Yet the Greeks did before the Romans (see Daniel and 1 Maccabees). Maybe sin was the explanation then, too. But also, it was only temporary—God delivered the city.

*52:8: “They will see in plain sight the Lord return*”: What would this mean to them?

\*\*Maybe an Ezekiel-type experience, but I think it’s more likely a metaphor. Lookouts literally see a general leading an army. People will see extraordinary events (Babylon falling, the possibility of going home) that mean Yahweh is returning.

*53: How does the suffering servant relate to the Messiah?*

\*\*Isaiah 40—66 doesn’t talk about a Davidic Messiah. The servant’s job is rather different from the Messiah’s. The servant’s job is to minister to the nations, but then to minister to Israel itself because it seems to need that first. At least as important is the question of the relation of Cyrus to the Messiah. Cyrus is called the messiah—Yahweh’s anointed. He is to do the Davidic king’s job in putting Babylon down and restoring the people.

*53: Wouldn’t that confuse the Judahites?*

\*\*I should think so—or perhaps rather, offend them (see 45:9-13).

*53: When did people come to see the servant as the Messiah?*

\*\*Only when Jesus turned out to be both?

*53: Why did they think that one person’s death could lead to reconciliation with God for others?*

\*\*Although this idea appears only here in the OT, it’s a leap you could make from other OT ideas. They knew that you could make an offering to make up for wrong you had done and there wasn’t exactly an equivalence, as if the offering had a monetary value (a person gave just a little bird (it’s a bit like us giving someone a bunch of flowers). So maybe one perfect life could compensate for many wayward ones.

*53: I can’t read it without projecting the messiah onto the message. I could not read it without thinking of Christ dying on the cross.  What was its significance for the people it was written for.*

\*\*That’s interesting, because there is so little reference to anything concrete about Jesus (e.g., a cross!). Here’s how I see it. It describes a servant of God (the prophet, I think), who is rejected by Judahites and Babylonians and persecuted for what he says. People then see his suffering as resulting from his sin as a false prophet. The odd thing is, he doesn’t behave like a false prophet. His silent response to his suffering forces them to rethink. Suddenly they make a jump. He is not suffering for his sin but for theirs. He suffers with them in their sin, though he doesn’t deserve it as they do (he is faithful to Yahweh). He suffers because of them—they make him suffer. He suffers on their behalf, in that he is prepared to make his acceptance of the persecution that comes as a result of his serving God into an offering he makes to God, which God might be prepared to accept as an offering that compensates for their unfaithfulness. God’s willingness to accept it means God will restore him.

*53: What do current Jewish scholars make of the language and theology of this passage?*

\*\*Over this question as over others, there isn’t a difference between Jewish and Gentile scholars. Most would say either thatit’s the prophet or that it’s Israel.

*53: How should we teach about the Suffering Servant in our churches? Can we say with any sort of confidence that Isaiah was referring to Jesus Christ in chapter 53 or not? Do you believe that any of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah refer to Jesus (even if they were also fulfilled in another way in their time)?*

\*\*There doesn’t seem to be any indication that the prophet had in mind someone who was going to be born in Bethlehem, crucified, and raised from the dead. I take the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 as someone who was alive at the time, in the 500s. In this sense “refer” doesn’t seem the right word. But Jesus is the spectacular embodiment of this description, and I guess God knew that would be so and intended that it would be so, and in this sense you could say God was “referring” to him. I would say the servant is a type of Christ (and also according to the NT a model for the church). My sermon on Isaiah 53 is elsewhere among these web resources.

*53: Can we say that through the vision of the servant in Isaiah, we see God’s desire for how his people/a prophet/a person would act and that at least some of these desires are realized in the person of Jesus, perhaps because they were failed to be realized before? I can’t help but to think that we see a window into God’s heart for how he desires to relate to us and our sin through the vision of the servant.*

\*\*I think that’s fine.

*Is it fair to say that God failed to get the people to do what he wanted (be fruitful and obedient) even after punishing them with exile and bringing them back?*

\*\*Yes to the first (punishing them) but he hasn’t brought them back yet, and there are some indications that they were more committed after that act of grace. The Torah was more written in their minds, as Jeremiah promised, because of this great act of mercy.

*What’s the significance of the talk of creation in 40—55?*

\*\*It’s that the fact that God is the creator means he can be creative now (in the sense of doing extraordinary new things, bringing order out of chaos).

*I’m still unclear as to why it couldn’t be that YHWH, being the only true God, couldn’t have shared predictive prophetic visions for people 150 years removed from Isaiah ben-Amoz. Why is this?*

\*\*Oh, God could have done. The question is, would he? Why?

# Isaiah 56—66

*What are we to do with Biblical texts that seem to contradict each other? Yahweh’s instructions to Moses and the people of Israel were clear: foreigners were not allowed to participate in festivals (Exod 12:43) and eunuchs were prohibited from being allowed into the Assembly of God’s people (Deut 23:1, 3, 7-8). Yet Third Isaiah does an about face on these earlier laws and now declares these as acceptable practices (Isa 56:1-8; 65:1). What are the reasons behind this sudden change for tolerance? Does not the rescinding of these laws diminish the credibility of the Torah? Was Third Isaiah writing these words partly because he knew the Judahites in post-exilic Jerusalem would not survive unless they had the aid from other nations… including foreign sympathizers and eunuchs?*

\*\*The Torah only bans foreigners who do not get properly “converted.” It welcomes Jethro (Exodus 18), and of course soon after that, the story talks about Rahab and Ruth, and later about others. It’s probably significant that Deuteronomy 23 doesn’t use the word eunuchs. Isaiah 56 is talking about a different issue – people who have been made eunuchs through being exile and being involved in imperial service. It certainly won’t be encouraging the community to include mere “sympathizers” in the people of God; they would need to be properly “converted.” But even if these texts don’t contradict each other, there are lots that do! It’s often the case that God needs to say different things in different social contexts. Jesus draws attention to one form of contradiction in Mark 10:1-9. Sometimes issues are complicated and it is a judgment call which principle has priority in which context.

*II am unconvinced that Isaiah 56—66 is to be understood as a distinct section from Second Isaiah. Are there scholars who would affirm this view (only two Isaiahs)? If so, who are they and what have they written?*

\*\*Yes, there are one or two, such as J. D. Smart in *History* *and Theology in Second Isaiah*.

*56:1-8: Why should eunuchs be excluded? How would the Judahites have responded to the extension of the covenant to foreigners?*

\*\*Maybe like white Christians in California when black people arrived and came into church—many would be offended, others would see it was in accordance with God’s purpose. There was nothing very new about what the prophet said—Israel had always been expected to welcome resident aliens into their worshiping company. Eunuchs might be excluded because they couldn’t contribute to the growth of the people.

*60—62: In light of this, what would be the prophet’s response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D?*

\*\*Maybe 2 Esdras tells us.

*61: Who speaks? When is the year of Yahweh’s favor?*

\*\*I assume the prophet speaks. The text doesn’t say when. Jesus says it comes with him! He re-embodies this role.

*63:1-6: While was Yahweh looking for help? As Yahweh was looking for someone else to establish justice, does that mean non-Christians who establish justice are fulfilling Yahweh’s vision?*

\*\*That seems plausible. Yahweh was looking for help because he regularly works through people—like previous superpowers Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.

*63:1-6: How can we reinterpret the violent language for the 21st century? What we do with the wrathful, vengeful Yahweh? How much is Israel involved in executing vengeance?*

\*\*Why would the 21st century need it reinterpreted? Oppressed peoples in the 21st century still need to know that God will put down their oppressors. And superpowers still need to have their pants scared off. So what we will be wise to do with the wrathful, vengeful Yahweh is repent, as the NT also implies. But Israel is not involved in executing vengeance at all. It’s God’s business.

*63:5: “My own wrath sustained me.” In what sense?*

One aspect of the value of wrath is that it gives you energy to act decisively against evil. 1 Sam 11 is a great example.

*63:7—64:11: Why does the prayer follow the description in 63:1-6? And how do we interpret the references to the Holy Spirit? And what do we learn about prayer hear?*

\*\*The order suggests that the prayer is saying “Okay then, when are you going to do what you said?” It’s claiming a promise. The phrase holy spirit comes only here and in Psalm 51. Lower case holy spirit is better so as not to set off these references to other OT refs to the spirit of God. The OT frequently assumes that God’s spirit (the holy spirit) indwelt Israel from the beginning. We learn that prayer involves remembering what God has done in the past, remembering how we have failed and the consequences of that failure, possibly saying outrageous things (63:17), and allowing for the possibility that God may answer back (65:1-3).

*65: Is the "new Heavens and a new earth" spoken of by the prophets poetic language for reconciliation between God and his people? How does it relate to Revelation's version of the same thing? Are we to see these statements as literal or figurative? Will heaven be on earth?!*

\*\*The new heavens and the new earth comes only in Isaiah 65 in the Prophets, and the context makes clear that it’s referring to a new Jerusalem, which seems to be quite earthy. I don’t know where this city life will happen. The point about the prophecy is that its vision of the future is very “earthly.” Compare the NT’s talks of the resurrection of the body. I don’t see any basis for saying that it is poetic language for reconciliation between God and his people (though the prophet also believes in that).

*Isaiah (and the OT) doesn’t seem to care about the afterlife, even after brutal warfare. How can this be? It seems to me that if God is so concerned with the world then the afterlife should constitute part of that concern. Maybe I am not taking the authors’ perspective enough into account but I really can’t wrap by head around this apathy concerning the ultimate destination of individuals. There is an eschatological focus that is great, but that is a different kind of focus then I am asking about here.*

\*\*You are right that Isaiah and the OT is not concerned about this question that is so important to us. So there is something there for us to learn from!

*66:1-3: Is the book rejecting temple and sacrifice?*

\*\*It would then be self-contradictory. 66:1-2 is seeking to get them to see the temple in a balanced way. Compare 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Kings 8 for the same tension. 66:3 is protesting at the way they can be offering proper worship but combining it with other forms of unacceptable worship.

*66:19: This looks like the Great Commission of the OT. What’s going on?*

\*\*That’s a great description! Except that it’s something God says he is going to initiate. It’s not a command to the people at the moment.

*66:23-24: The book ends abruptly. Was the ending lost?*

\*\*There’s no way of knowing, but it parallels the abrupt or odd ending to other books (Jonah, Mark), and the effect of its ending is to offer readers a choice—choose whether it is v. 23 or v. 24 that applies to you.

*Why didn’t God fulfill these promises at the time?*

\*\*For the same reason as Jesus hasn’t come back yet?

*If this is God’s last word through Isaiah—what now? How would these chapters have been received by their hearers?*

\*\*One can only guess, and guess on the basis of what the chapter say. And what they do is put before people a challenge to sort out their life and a promise that God will fulfill his purposes for them, without being specific about when or how. So the people are called to live in obedience and hope.