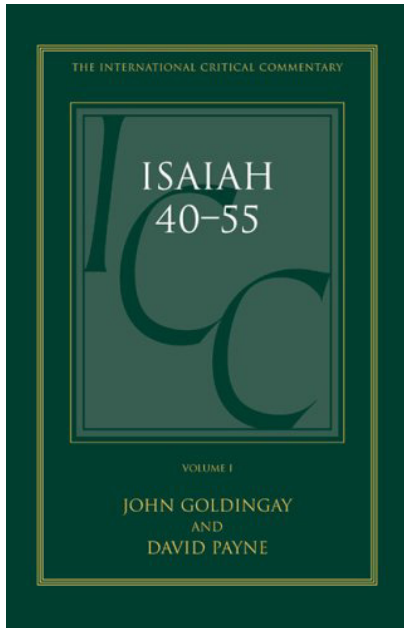


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Goldingay, John, and David Payne

Isaiah 40–55: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary

2 vols.

International Critical Commentary

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The present commentary on Isa 40–55 is divided into two volumes. The first volume contains an introduction to Isa 40–55, written by John Goldingay, an extensive general bibliography of critical works, as well as the commentary on Isa 40:1–44:23, while the second volume contains the commentary to Isa 44:24–55:13. This commentary is the joint work of David Payne and John Goldingay, created section by section. Payne first wrote the textual and philological notes to a section, before giving it to Goldingay, who incorporated these notes into his own textual, philological, literary, exegetical, and theological work. Goldingay next passed the material back to Payne, who produced further textual and philological notes for Goldingay to include in a final manuscript. The present two volumes give prominence to the textual, philological, and exegetical material, while Goldingay published the surplus literary-theological material in his own *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London, T&T Clark, 2005).

The introduction, written by Goldingay, interacts with substantial amounts of previous scholarly research and provides a wealth of information about the various aspects of Isa 40–55. It is divided into ten chapters.

In the first section, Goldingay discusses Isa 40–55 in the context of the book of Isaiah. He views Isa 40–55 as an integral part of the book of Isaiah. As Isa 40–55 came into being as part of a process that also brought into being Isa 1–39 and 56–66, at some point its different parts were designed to be read together. This final unity of the book of Isaiah is further supported by its pan-Isaianic theological themes. The need to read Isa 40–55 as part of a larger whole can thus be argued on both a synchronic and a diachronic basis.

At the same time, Goldingay, in the second section, regards Isa 40–55 as a unit with a distinct agenda, with Isa 40:1–11 and 55:6–13 forming an *inclusio*. Furthermore, he sees 56:1 as forming a new beginning, thus tentatively resisting common authorship of Isa 40–66. Goldingay also opposes the view of Berges, Hermison, Kratz, Merendino, Steck, van Oorschot, and Vermeulen. These scholars argue that a core section, consisting of texts primarily from Isa 40–48, stems from a “Second Isaiah” located in Babylon around 540 B.C.E., while Isa 40–55 came into being through a century-long process. Goldingay objects to the underlying assumptions of this kind of study, in particular to the conviction that repetitions, syntactical unevenness, and varying theological emphases suggest diversity of authorship, as well as the often arbitrary decisions about what a prophet may have said.

The third section contains a discussion of the text of Isa 40–55. Goldingay provides a succinct discussion of the scholarly research pertaining to the various forms of the book of Isaiah at Qumran and in late antiquity, and he gives an overview of the characteristics of the ancient versions. The present commentary rests upon the model that one pre-Masoretic text came into being in the Greek or Roman period but that the Jews of this period did not consider it important that every subsequent copy of the text was exactly the same. He further assumes that the MT, as represented by the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex, is the descendant of such texts. The work model is thus to ask whether the evidence from the versions provides a text that seems more likely to be the pre-Masoretic one than the one attested in the previously mentioned codices.

The fourth section addresses the arrangement of the chapters. Goldingay argues that on form-critical grounds, as well on the basis of their internal coherence, the longer sections of Isa 40–55 were composed as wholes rather than compiled from earlier shorter units. As a working model, Goldingay assumes that the people responsible for compiling chapters 40–55 had access to a variety of pieces that were then carefully arranged.

Goldingay examines the poetic forms of Isa 40–55 in his fifth section. He focuses on the interpretation of the various verb forms, arguing that that the descriptions of the future in these prophetic texts should always be understood as pictures in metaphor.

The sixth section discusses the dating of Isa 40–55. Goldingay begins backwards by assuming that the book of Isaiah as a whole reached its final form in Jerusalem in the later Persian or early Greek period and that Isa 40–55 reached its present form by the end of the Persian period. Nonetheless, rather than addressing the needs of the community in Judah at these times, Goldingay argues that a sixth-century context of Isa 40–55 makes most sense.

The seventh section asks about the whereabouts of this audience. It is refreshing to see that Goldingay takes neither a Babylonian nor a Judahite setting for granted. He argues, on the basis of the sentiments expressed by the texts, that either community would fit and that there are compelling arguments for both views. Although Goldingay finally decides in favor of a Babylonian-based prophet, he also sees the overt audience of Isa 40–55 as encompassing both communities and argues that the oracles address not only the needs of the Babylonian exiles but also the people who remained in Judah.

In the eighth section, Goldingay investigates the polemics of Isa 40–55. As in the preceding chapter, he is open to the possibility that Isa 40–55 serves the purposes of either the Babylonian exiles or the Judahites. Nonetheless, he argues for a certain Babylonian perspective and emphasizes the need to distinguish between what he calls the corporate personality embodied by the city from its physical population.

The ninth section addresses the issue of the identity of the author(s) of Isa 40–55. After looking at the evidence of Isa 40:6 (LXX); 48:16; 49:1–6; and 50:4–9, he concludes that the ministry of an individual lies behind Isa 40–55.

In the final and tenth section, Goldingay outlines the theological message of Isa 40–55, claiming that it focuses on five key issues. First, Isa 40–55 focuses on God, seeking to rehabilitate him in the eyes of Israel by describing him as a warrior and as a shepherd for Israel, the single creator and ruler of the universe. Second, the message makes clear that its audience is God's people Israel. They are to be his future servants after he has brought the scattered people back to their land. Third, God's people is identified with Jerusalem. Fourth, until the people can become God's servant, the prophet will fill this role. Finally, the message of Isa 40–55 concerns the world as a whole. Moreover, the foreign king Cyrus is identified as God's tool.

Overall, this is a very readable, succinct and informative introduction. What I find missing, however, is a more focused discussion of the Servant Songs: their place within Isa 40–55 and the identity of the servant. Goldingay mentions the issue in passing in his second and tenth sections, but, given the intense interest in these texts, both from a scholarly and from a faith-based perspective, a separate discussion would have been an

asset. Furthermore, I am unconvinced by Goldingay's flexible attitude toward the setting and the identity of the audience of Isa 40–55. While he is to be commended for highlighting the various, often conflicting, aspects of the text, I feel uncertain as to his perception of the interaction between the Jerusalemite and Babylonian communities as reflected in Isa 40–55. Along the same lines, I would have wished for more interaction with the theories concerning possible redactional layers within Isa 40–55, which are advocated by a significant number of scholars. In particular, the idea of a shift from a Babylonian setting of Isa 40–48 to a Judahite setting in 49–55 is, in my view, deserving of more discussion.

Turning now to the actual commentary, Payne and Goldingay interpret each textual section in great detail. They first outline the structure and the extent of each unit, discussing its general structure, the extent of its subunits, and how the various parts of the section hang together through form-critical and rhetoric devices. They further explore, through interaction with previous research, whether the textual unity is primary or the result of editorial efforts, tending to argue in favor of the former. Finally, when applicable, there is a discussion of the possible liturgical function of the section. A detailed discussion of each verse or even half-verse then follows, with focus on the linguistic and exegetical elements. This section is accompanied, when relevant, by a text-critical discussion, which discusses the ancient versions (a full discussion is only provided in conjunction with ch. 40), and/or the character of specific words, whether glosses, redactional insertions, scribal omissions, or the like. Finally, each subsection is followed by a detailed bibliography of articles pertaining to that section.

In conclusion, the present commentary is an indispensable new tool for research on Isa 40–55. It is a commentary to be consulted primarily for its form-critical, philological, and exegetical details. In order to benefit fully from the authors' profound insight into Isa 40–55, however, this commentary is best read alongside Goldingay's literary-theological commentary.