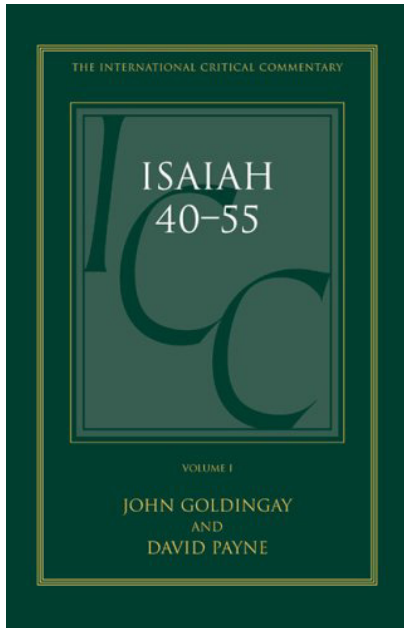


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**Goldingay, John, and David Payne**

***Isaiah 40–55: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary***

International Critical Commentary

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Chris Franke  
College of St Catherine  
St Paul, Minnesota

Until relatively recently, the majority of biblical commentary series had been completed with the exception of volumes on Isa 40–55/66. Times have changed. Second or Last Isaiah commentaries have been appearing on the bookshelves of libraries private and public. The Goldingay-Payne two-volume set is a welcome addition to the ICC series, finally filling out that empty space on the shelves. The new editors of this esteemed series, G. I. Davies, G. N. Stanton, J. A. Emerton, and C. E. B. Cranfield, have completed the project begun by the original editors, S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs, more than a century ago.

The two-volume work is composed of two major divisions: an introduction to Isa 40–55; and the section-by-section commentary. The introduction begins with sections on (1) the context of these chapters within the book of Isaiah and (2) the “discrete entity” of 40–55. While taking into account some of the results of redaction studies of Isa 40–55 in exegeses of particular sections, they take issue with assumptions of the method, especially the notion that repetitions and varying theological emphases point to different authors.

Goldingay and Payne take the text in its present form as the basis of their study. Section 3, on the text of Isaiah, provides a valuable up-to-date summary of text-critical questions as

well as a reflection on the question of what is meant by *the* text. In their commentary, the authors focus on the “hypothetical pre-Masoretic Hebrew text of the Greek or Roman period” (15).

In section 4, “The Arrangement of the Chapters,” the authors assert that the various sections of 40–55 were carefully shaped. They do not suggest, however, that the arrangement reflects the order in which individual units were composed. The structure of 40–55 is compared to that of a musical work in which there is movement having both linear and spiral characteristics. The spiral feature reiterates, develops, and elaborates a word, phrase, or motif. This insightful assessment of the overall structure acknowledges the multivalency of the poetry. It explains and allows the variety of scholarly understandings of the relationship between the units: the units are “not hermetically sealed” (19). The commentary proper develops in detail the spiral feature of the structure.

The traditional division between Isa 40–48 and 49–55 is observed. The authors see three major divisions in Isa 40–48. Chapter 40 functions as the introduction; 41:1–44:23 is entitled “YHWH’s vindication and Jacob-Israel’s deliverance” and 44:24–48:22 “YHWH’s work with Cyrus.” The two major divisions of Isa 49–55 are 49:1–55:13, “The servant and Jerusalem-Zion,” and 52:13–55:13, “YHWH’s act of restoration and transformation.” On both a macro- and micro-level, the authors observe a type of Janus relationship between or among many of the adjoining units.

Section 5 discusses in general the features of Hebrew poetry. Sections 6–8 treat the time, location, and identity of the audience(s) of the poems in 40–55. To arrive at their answers to these matters, the authors propose the following argument. Their hypothesis is that the book called Isaiah was applied to events in the Judean community during the Persian, Greek, and Hasmonean periods. They reason that, since there are no explicit references to events in the book called Isaiah during these periods, it was “preserved as a deposit of aspects of God’s dealings with the community over several centuries.” (27) The explicit references in Isa 40–55 point to a sixth-century context and address issues of the Judean community in the 540s; therefore, the poems are best understood as having been directed to an audience living during the late Babylonian period.

As to the location of the audience, the authors seem to favor the view that the anonymous poet worked in Babylon, especially given the details of a Babylonian setting. How do they then explain the implications in various parts of the poems of a Jerusalem audience? Suggestions include the possibility of reading an implied author addressing two audiences, Babylonian and Jerusalemite, or possibly the rhetorical form of address, sometimes to Zion, at other times to Babylonian Judeans. While Goldingay and Payne

lean toward a Babylonian location, they admit uncertainty about the location of audience and/or author. Some inconsistencies in their interpretations point to a lack of clarity regarding the question.

The audiences are identified as Jacob–Israel, Zion–Jerusalem, and, beginning in chapter 41, YHWH’s servant. The authors propose a variety of suggestions as to the identities lying behind these titles. Israel may be characterized in several ways, including the religious and political rulers from Jerusalem living in Babylon who were not in agreement about their religious views and their political future. Jerusalem or Zion is described as YHWH’s people but also as a ruined city. Conflict between those living in Jerusalem and those in Babylon may be inferred; on the other hand, the prophet may see a common destiny for all, emphasizing inclusiveness rather than exclusivity.

The terms as described above with religio/political divisions or unity in mind are understood as geographical entities. Another way of differentiating between the two is to see Jerusalem–Zion as an archetype or metaphor for YHWH’s wife and Jacob–Israel as a collective person: YHWH’s people. Goldingay and Payne cite several other scholars who have different ways of configuring these audiences. In the end, they identify the audience as those living in the late Babylonian period in Babylon. Their main concern in their commentary is to focus on the rhetorical strategies used to encourage this audience in Babylon. Those studying Isa 40–55 can identify with the description of the “allusiveness” in the text that may move toward greater clarity, while also allowing for the possibility that clarity may turn out to be a mystifying illusion.

The poet-prophet is described in section 9. The anonymous author of Isa 40–55 is called a prophet because this person speaks words from God to people and from people to God. The designation as poet identifies Second Isaiah as a person who uses poetic language to communicate and persuade. Why is the prophet anonymous? Perhaps the editor cooperated with the prophet, who did not want to overshadow the Isaiah who was the source of inspiration, or perhaps the editor was the prophet. Another suggestion is that Second Isaiah was a woman whose gender was hidden.

Section 10, on the message of Isa 40–55, describes the emergence of a “particularly articulate comprehensive theological perspective” (49). The focus is on God, Israel, Jerusalem, the prophet (as servant), and the world. The images of God as king and creator describe a God whose will is made known and who controls events of history. Israel is God’s chosen people. Even though they rebel against God and are punished, they remain in a special relationship to God. Jerusalem–Zion stands for the people abandoned but soon to be comforted. God’s restoration of Jerusalem is seen to have political implications. It will never again be invaded by the “uncircumcised and stained.” The

authors understand these two categories of invaders to be equated with “unbelieving foreigners and uncommitted Israelites” (256). The translation of נִדָּב as “stained” is problematic in the extreme and leads to an unfortunate interpretation of what group might be called נִדָּב (53–54).

The prophet as servant is a follower of YHWH and of the “original” Isaiah. His task is to bring Jacob–Israel back to YHWH. The servant may turn his suffering and death into an offering to God that could compensate for the people’s rebellious nature.

The final aspect of the theology of Isa 40–55 is the focus on the world. The servant’s ministry will benefit all nations and their rulers. The sovereignty of God as creator completely overshadows that of nations, who are at a loss to explain the rise of Cyrus on behalf of Israel. Babylon, the supposed superpower, will come to an ignominious end, committing suicide by drinking the cup of poison first given to Zion. The authors speak of a universalist perspective but also assert that Israel maintains a special position with YHWH.

This commentary touches on many important issues and difficulties in understanding the placement of chapters 40–55 within the book called Isaiah, the various theories of multiple authorship, and the attempts to locate these chapters in a specific time and place. One of the strengths of this volume is that the authors do not attempt to prove too much with respect to these issues. Their presentation of the structure of the chapters and the linear/spiral movement tying poems and themes together is a convincing explanation of what unifies the poems. Given the allusive nature of the poems and the linear spiral movement throughout, the assertion of an “articulate comprehensive theological perspective” is not convincing.

These volumes will be valuable resources for future generations of Isaiah scholars. One wish I had with respect to the printing of the books has to do with the appearance of the printed page. For a book that one expects to consult frequently, a cleaner and clearer type and more space between lines would have been welcome.