

Lecture 3. Isaiah 40-55 (Second Isaiah) and 56-66 (Third Isaiah).

Second Isaiah is the work of a prophet during the Babylonian captivity (more than a century after Isaiah's death. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar's army conducted an unsuccessful thirteen-year siege of Tyre (587-574). In 582 they passed through Judah to take into exile a group that had survived Jerusalem's defeat and to overthrow the government of Gedaliah (see Jer 52:30). By 568 Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and secured it for Babylon. After his death in 562, his son Evil-Merodach was able to hold power for only two years (562-560) – just long enough to release King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison (see 2 Kgs 25:27-30). Neriglissar deposed Evil-Merodach and ruled from 560 to 556. At his death Nabonidus, an Aramean from Haran, seized the throne but was so hated by the Babylonians for his worship of the god Sin (rather than their god Marduk) that they made him move to Teima while Belshazzar, the crown prince, ran the government. Meanwhile, in 555 Cyrus of Persia launched a successful rebellion against Medes under King Astyages. After victory there he sent his armies west and had control of most of Asia Minor by 547. In 539 his army overwhelmed the forces of Nabonidus and took possession of Babylon, to the cheers of the Babylonians, who were glad to be free of Nabonidus. In 538 Cyrus decreed an end to the Exile and permitted the people of Judah to return to Palestine and rebuild. Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah, led the first wave of those returning. After Cyrus's death in 530, Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest arrived in Judah. Encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, they began the restoration of the Temple in 520 and dedicated the reconstructed Temple in 515.

I. The Voice of Divine Compassion and Hope for His suffering people – 40:1-31

40:1-11 – a proclamation of deliverance (in contrast with the denunciation of sin 1:2-31). Giving hope to those who are resigned to being forsaken. Divine forgiveness and the greater reliability of God's word to all human effort.

40: 12-31 – the LORD, Creator and Master of History. Note the rhetorical questions about the vastness of the universe and the short duration of human regimes.

II. The End of the Exile – 41:1–48:22 (presumably from some time after 550)

41:1–44:28 – the LORD is the Redeemer of Israel just as He was the world's Creator

41:1-7 – for Israel's liberation, the pagan Cyrus of Persia is to be the agent of the LORD who is "first" and "last" in the governance of all history (frequently used as a title). [Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw that the LORD used a foreign king (Nebuchadnezzar) for his judgment on Jerusalem.

41:8-20 – Israel as the servant of the LORD, "the Holy One of Israel" (also a frequently title)

41:21-29 – denunciation of false Gods and the making of idols

42:1-9 – first Suffering Servant song: the prophet's vocation to bring justice to the earth. [The NT cites the construction of a new road in reference to the spiritual path of discipleship in the mission of John the Baptist. Jesus's baptism as the commissioning of the Servant.]

42:10–44:8 – the LORD as the Redeemer (*go'el*) of Israel by a new Exodus: the sinfulness, ingratitude and stubbornness that led to the exile. In contrast to the nothingness of the false gods, the Lord alone can say "I am" – a linkage to the revelation to Moses at Sinai. For "redeemer" see Num 35:16-19, Dt 19:12, Lev 25:23-25. Note the use of images from the original Exodus: the desert, the sea, water in the wilderness, revelation of His glory/

44:9-20 – satire on the making of idols

44: 21-28 – The LORD, Creator and Liberator

45:1–48:22 – The LORD, the Nations, and Israel

45:1-8 – Cyrus of Persia, the LORD's Anointed for delivering His justice (*zedekah*). Note: like mercy, justice here refers to the unmerited gift of God to His people solely on the basis of His choice of them as His own.

45:9-25 – the only God, Master of the universe [cf. Nabonidus's preference for the god Sin over the

Babylonian Marduk] will give all peoples the chance to turn to Him for redemption.
46:1-13 – the fall of Babylon. 47:1-15 – lament over Babylon
48:1-26 – the LORD summons His people from exile

- III. The Return to Zion – 49:1–54:17: the promise of land, encouragement for the task at hand
(presumably from after 538 but before 525: no reference to Zerubbabel or Joshua)
49:1-51:8 – the LORD directs His people homeward
49:1-7 – second Suffering Servant song: renewal of the call to restore Israel to the Lord.
49:8–50:3 – the path to restoration: the LORD has not forgotten His people
50:4-11 – third Suffering Servant song: Not the view that affliction is God’s punishment for sin, but
that it purifies and leads to hearing God’s word more deeply. [Mk 14:65, 15:19, Mt 26:67, 27:30]
51:1-8 – the LORD reigns over Zion
51:9–53:12 – Salvation for Zion
51:9–52:6 – the consolation of Jerusalem
52:7-12 – the messenger of the news
52:13–53:12 – fourth Suffering Servant song, including a dialogue about the way in which the
people misunderstand the perfect Servant whom God will change from humiliation to exaltation.
The Servant does not go down to Sheol but up to God, having made a sin-offering of atoning
reparation according to the priestly code (Lev 5:14-26 and Numbers 5:5-8). [Only the passion
and death of Jesus for the redemption of sins fulfills this prophecy: Mk 8:31, 9:31, 10:34-35]
54:1-17 – Jerusalem as the LORD’s spouse

IV. Invitation to seek the LORD – 55:1-13 – note the messianic reference to the Davidic covenant

Who is “the servant”? Israel? the prophet? Cyrus? the Christ who is to come (42:1-12; 9:1-6, 11:1-9).
By genre, a likeness to the confessions of Jeremiah (11;18–12:6, 15:10-21; 17:14-18, 18: 18-23, 20:7-18).
Jesus identifies himself as the Suffering Servant (Mk 8:31, 10:45) and only he fulfills these prophecies.

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- I. Renewal through repentance – 56:1-59:21. [End of the monarchy, a focus on the Temple & priesthood]
56:1-8 – the new Temple: open to non-Jews who will be obedient [Jesus’s cleansing of the Temple:
Mark 11:15-17, Matthew 21:12-13, Luke 19:45-46 – see Is 56:7]
56:9–57:13 – oracles against corrupt leaders and idolatry
57:14-21 – God is exalted yet dwells with a humbled people
58:1-14 – genuine fasting: justice for the oppressed
59:1-21 – psalm of repentance

- II. The glory of the LORD in the New Jerusalem – 60:1–62:12
60:1-22 – the LORD’s glory in Jerusalem
61:1-11 – the LORD’s New Servant: the prophet’s mission [read by Jesus at the beginning of his
public ministry – Lule 4:18-19; His miracles fulfill what 3rd Isaiah foresaw, Lk 7:18-23]
62:1-13 – the New Jerusalem, spouse of the LORD

- III. Judgment and Promise – 63:1-66:24
63:1-6 – disciplining the nations
63:7–64:11 – Israel’s History – God’s faithful love
65:1-25 – new heavens and new earth: apocalyptic.
66:1-17 – judgment on Jerusalem, and a promise
66:18-24 – foreigners come to Jerusalem