

## Isaiah's Gospel Theology (Paul R House)

### Gospel

The Hebrew word means “news,” with the context determining its goodness or badness (e.g. 1 Sam. 4:19). This “news” declares a narrative, a story, a history, and resulting obligations. Some summaries are longer (see Romans 1:8-15:13) and others shorter (see 1 Cor. 15:1-8), but they contain and assume certain elements.

Isaiah uses the word translated “gospel” five times (40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6; and 61:1), and the NT writers pick up his meaning. In Isaiah and in the Bible (see Romans 1:8-15:13), “gospel” denotes the following actions:

*God the creator taking creation **from** its original flawless state **through** its current sin-marred (though still lovely) state **to** its final glorious state*

*By means of*

*His **personal** (Father-Son-Holy Spirit) **comprehensive** (people, places, creatures, and things) **redemptive** (from sin and decay) work that he shares with his servants, his people.*

### Isaiah's Gospel Theology: Literary-Structural Framework

Isaiah has traditionally been divided into two basic parts: 1-39 and 40-66. This division does not fully recognize the book's shape. The book moves from sin to redemption to Zion several times. The story always ends in Zion.

- From a sin-charred city to a shade-protected home (1:1-4:6)
- From a sin-ruined vineyard to a home with wells of salvation (5:1-12:6)
- From the bane of war to the gift of resurrection (13:1-27:13)
- From marching kings to marching lame (28:1-35:10)
- From arrogant gentile kings to humble gentiles in Zion's temple (36:1-56:8)
- From the darkness of persecution to Zion's glorious light (56:9-62:12)
- From helplessness before foes to vindication in Zion (63:1-66:24)

### Isaiah's Gospel Theology: Literary-Narrative Framework

Isaiah reflects the biblical narrative and its plot: Yahweh created the heavens, earth, humans, and other beings. The whole world has sinned and marred his creation (e.g. 13:1-23:18). Thus, he made redemptive covenants with Noah (54:9), Abraham and Sarah (51:1-2), Israel (1:2-31), and David (11:1-16; 42:1-13; 55:3-5).

He has chosen Abraham's descendants to be a kingdom of priests to gather the nations to be priests for Yahweh (Exod. 19:5-6; 19:16-25; 66:18-21). He has redeemed them from slavery and given them his torah of freedom (Exod. 1-24).

At their best, the Israelites do his work. But at their worst they sin against God and others. Eventually they split into two parts, Israel and Judah, in 930 B.C.

Continued sin by both means loss of land through a series of exiles: 732, 722, 720, 713-711, 701, 670, 605, 597, 587, and 582 B.C. (7:1-37:36; Jer. 21-52). Yahweh had warned this could occur (see Lev. 26; Deut. 27-28). Yet Yahweh's covenants cannot fail, for he has made them. He had also promised a fresh start after exile (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 30:1-10). There is no failure paradigm in covenant theology.

Thus, in absolute continuity with and fidelity to those covenants, he will make a subsequent everlasting covenant of peace with his people for the purpose spreading his salvation to the ends of the earth (55:3-5; 56:1-8; 59:20-21). He will comfort and bring Israel (40:27-48:22) and Judah (49:14-56:8) back to the land (see Jer. 30:1-31:30), unite them under David's heir in an everlasting covenant (55:3-5) through the servant's death and resurrection (52:13-53:12), make them Spirit-empowered (59:20-21; 63:7-14) witnesses to gentiles (56:1-8; 66:18-21), and bring his international people home to Zion (19:16-25; 66:1-24).

The redemptive covenants do not end. They roll on together like an ever flowing river of grace. By the first-century Yahweh had repopulated the land with his people, and faithful persons from Israel and Judah waited for the Davidic heir, the messiah (see Luke 1-2). Jesus ministered to Israel and Judah, gathered his people, entered into a new covenant with them (Luke 22:20), died for them and was raised from the dead by God the Father, regathered and commissioned them to go to the nations (Matt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:1-8), ascended to heaven, baptized them in the Holy Spirit for ministry, and waits the father's signal to come again and bring all his people to Zion, as he promised.

The apostles did God's work, and we do God's work today.

### **Isaiah's Gospel Theology: Historical Framework**

Isaiah's life (c. 765-679 B.C.; see 1:1) unfolds in the era of Assyrian world dominance (c. 745-612 B.C.). The book reflects Assyria's practice of demanding obedience, threatening judgment, sending ambassadors, and setting up kings. In

effect, Isaiah asks Israel and Judah, “Do you want Yahweh to be your king or the Assyrians to be your kings?” Note these interwoven events.

- Assyrian conquests of Babylon: 729 (13:1); 709 (21:9); 703-702 (39:1-8; 36:1); 689 (46:1-47:13), their chief rival and potential savior of Judah
- Assyrian invasions of Palestine: 743 (1:2-31); 732 (7:1-9:6); 722 and 720 (17:1-14; 15:1-19:25); 713-711 (20:1-6; 21:1-23:18); 701 (28:1-33:24; 36:1; 39:1-8; 40:1-56:8); 688 (?) (37:9-35; 56:9-62:12); 670 (7:8); see also 52:4
- Assyrian kings’ deaths: Tiglath-Pileser III’s death (13:1-14:23); Sennacherib’s death: 681 (37:36-38; 63:1-66:24)

Isaiah reflects the following kings of Judah: Uzziah-Jotham (1:2-6:1), Jotham-Ahaz (6:1-14:28); Hezekiah-Manasseh (14:28-66:24). All these kings were forced to pay tribute to Assyria, and all but Ahaz tried to get out of the Assyrian orbit. They looked to Egypt and/or Babylon to help them get free of Assyria.

### **Isaiah’s Gospel Theology: Messianic Redemptive-Theological Framework**

Yahweh redeems through David’s anointed descendant, the messiah in several of the gospel cycles. The virgin-born king, who must be born after 722, 720, or more likely 670 B.C. (7:1-27).

- The “mighty God” king (9:1-7).
- The perfected-earth king (11:1-9).
- The righteous king (32:1-8)
- The humble servant-king (42:1-13; compare 11:1-9).
- The servant who brings servant Israel back to God (49:1-13).
- The suffering prophet (50:4-11).
- The suffering servant who dies for the people’s sins and lives again (52:13-53:12).
- The anointed preacher of good news (61:1-8).

### **Isaiah’s Gospel Theology: Gospel Herald Framework**

In Isaiah 36-37 Assyria’s king sends his ambassador. In the following passages Yahweh sends his ambassador with his news, his gospel.

- Isaiah 40:9: “Behold your God” in light of the Assyrian invasion of 701 (36:1; 39:1-8).

- Isaiah 41:27: Recall past gospel speakers in light of Assyria's past and current threats (7:1; 36:1-37:8).
- Isaiah 52:7: "Your God reigns" despite Assyrian theology (36:1-37:8).
- Isaiah 60:6: Praise God for his light in the dark days of the next Assyrian threat (37:9-35).
- Isaiah 61:1-8: Receive healing and strength from the anointed one as you wait for his coming.

### **Isaiah's Gospel Theology: Trinitarian Framework**

Isaiah presents God in the following ways, thus verifying NT doctrine.

#### ***Nature of God***

- Holy one of Israel: Covenant maker and pure one (1:1-6:13)
- Yahweh of Hosts/Armies: Judge (2:6-22; 13:1ff; etc.)
- Creator (see summary above)
- Redeemer (see 11:1-12:6; 52:13-53:12; etc.)
- Provider for Creation and His People (4:2-6; 40: 1-31; 65:17-25)
- One Who resurrects His People (25:6-8; 26:19) and His Servant (53:10-12)
- One Who Provides a Permanent Home for His People (4:2-6; 12:1-6; 25:1-18; 65:17-25)

#### ***Nature of Christ/Messiah/Shoot of Jesse/Son of David***

- Virgin born (7:14)
- Divine (9:6-7)
- Spirit-filled and Righteous (11:1-19; 61:1-4)
- Savior for the Nations (11:10-16; 49:1-7)
- Healing and Suffering Servant (42:1-4; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-4)

#### ***Nature of the Spirit***

- Holy and Able to be Grieved (63:10)
- Gave victory to Moses and Israel (63:7-14)
- Fills the Messiah for Mission and Ministry (11:1-9; 61:1-2)
- Fills the prophet and people for ministry (59:20-21)

## **Isaiah's Gospel Theology: Servants Sharing Yahweh's Work**

It is quite an honor to be called God's servant, for only a few people receive this title in the Bible: Abraham (Gen. 18:3); Jacob (Ezek. 37:25); Moses (Deut. 34:5); David (2 Sam. 7:8); Eliakim (Isa. 22:15-25); Job (Job 42:8); Mary (Luke 1:38); and Paul (Rom. 1:1) receive or choose this title for themselves. Of course, Jesus is God's suffering servant, who dies for sinners, rises, sends, and rules. Thus, it is a high honor and high calling to be Yahweh's servants, and such we are!

### **The Isaiah Model for Self-Sacrificing Service (6:1-13; 7:1-9:7; 36:1-39:8)**

- God rules his world and work (6:1-4). His kingship is our motive for sharing his work.
- God humbles (6:5-7) and instructs (6:8-13; 7:1-8; 8:11-22). He provides the means and methods for our work.
- God reveals and rewards (6:8-13; 11:1-12:6). He provides the ends for our work.

### **The Servant Model for Service (42:1-13; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12)**

- The humble servant-king (see 11:1-9) draws attention to God, not himself (42:1-13).
- The missionary servant reconciles God's people to God and brings light to the nations (49:1-13). See Acts 13:44-47.
- The persevering, suffering, and persecuted prophet-servant keeps teaching God's word (50:4-11).
- The suffering, dying, atoning, rising, and justifying king leads us to a cross bearing ministry (52:13-53:12).

### **The Servants Model for Service (54:17; 56:6-8; 65:1-66:24)**

- Their heritage (54:16-17)
- Their family (56:6-8)
- Their perseverance in persecution (65:1-16)
- Their home (65:17-25)
- Their international ministry (66:18-21)

We desperately need servants who embrace God's motive, use his means, and accept his rewards. We have enough branders, movers, and shakers. We need servants.

## **Isaiah's Gospel Theology: God's Power over Death**

Jesus and the Pharisees disagreed about many things, but they agreed that the scriptures teach resurrection of the body. Isaiah 25:1-26:19 offers rich insight into this most essential doctrine (see 1 Cor. 15).

### **God's Coronation Gifts for His People (25:1-12)**

- God will gather his people to a great banquet, such as kings did when taking the throne (25:6; see Luke 22:14-23; Rev. 19:6-10).
- God will “swallow up” (judge) death (Lam. 2:2; 25:7), the veil over all nations.
- God will remove sin and sorrow (25:8; 65:17-25; Rev. 21:1-8).
- God will receive praise (25:9a) for his great deeds.
- God will destroy his enemies (25:9b-12; 66:24).

### **God's Shelter in Judgment (26:1-19)**

- God answers prayers for deliverance (26:16-18).
- God raises the dead (26:19; 53:10-12).
- God hides his people from condemnation (26:20-21).

### **God's Eternal Home (27:1-13; 65:17-25)**

- A healed vineyard (27:1-1; see 5:1-30).
- A gathered people (27:12-13).
- A home free from death and Satan (65:17-25).

Isaiah envisions new heavens, new earth, and new bodies (11:1-9; 25:6-12; 65:17-25). The one who comes in the flesh as Immanuel, Mighty God, and Servant paves the way for those who believe.