I. INTRODUCTION

A. Composition:

1. Since Duhm’s day (1895) Isaiah has been divided into three major sections (1-39, 40-55, and 56-66)

2. This view prevailed through most of 20th century.

3. Child’s canonical approach (1979) brought the position and “opened the door for a large number of . . . studies on the compositional unity of the present book of Isaiah” (Oswalt, 2:4).

4. From Brueggemann (JSOT 29 [1984]: 96) to Rendtorff (VT 34 [1984]: 320), the old idea of “several independent books” is falling out because the “three books” are more and more perceived as interdependent.

5. “Thus, although contemporary scholars are more and more compelled by the evidence to admit the ideological and theological unity of the book, their conception of the nature of prophecy still prevents them from taking the step that the book itself clearly asks its readers to take: accept these writings as the result of the encounter of a single human being with the self-revealing Lord of the cosmos” (Oswalt, 2:5)

B. Content:

1. Israel in chs. 1-39 had been confronted with the idea of “servanthood.”

2. Servanthood of Israel to God was something Israel had trouble with:

   a. It was exhibited in the question, “Whom shall we trust, Assyria, the Nations, or Yhwh?

   b. Hezekiah demonstrated the ability to trust God on the one hand, “But at the same time Judah’s fundamental inability to exercise that trust is exhibited in Hezekiah’s failure to declare God’s glory to the Babylonians (39:1-8).

   c. Such failure as this ultimately sent them into exile.

3. 40-66 explore the significance of the idea that God, who had delivered
Judah from Assyria, would not deliver her from Babylon.

a. Would not that make God untrustworthy?

b. Would he still be God, Lord of the nations, who controlled history?

4. Thus precisely what is taught in chapters 1-39 is what is required in chapters 40-66

5. The dual questions of can and would God restore are addressed, whether in high and lofty poetic subjects (40-55), or the mundane (56-66).

6. Chapters 40-48: “Isaiah’s answers to the questions that the exile would pose about the character of God are as stirring as his poetry. In ringing assertions Isaiah declares that just as Assyria was a tool (10:5, 15) in the hand of God, so will Babylon be (47:5-9)”; further, God wants to deliver (Oswalt, 2:8-9).

7. Chapters 49-55: The means by which this is accomplished is the substitutionary self-sacrifice of the Servant.

8. Chapters 56-66: These chapters were written “to show how the theology of chs. 40-55 fits into that of chs. 1-29”; i.e., “‘servant’ involves more than merely being a passive evidence of God’s ability to deliver from bondage. Without the corresponding witness of a holy life, deliverance means little. In this way chs. 56-66 are to chs. 40-55 as James is to Galatians” (Oswalt, 2:11)

C. Major Themes:

1. Judah has been punished via the captivity

2. Such punishment has motivated a remnant to repent–servanthood

3. Yhwh is Lord of history and will overthrow the Babylonians through Cyrus

D. Structure:

1. “Ever since the work of Duhm, scholars have widely accepted that chs. 40-66 contain two freestanding books: chs. 40-55 and chs. 56-66” (Oswalt,
2. Though 56-66 are less agreed upon, 40-55 are seen more “as a unity in matters of style, theme, organization,” etc. (Oswalt, 2:12).

3. Muilenburg (IDB), Westermann (OTL), Lack, Melugin, and many others have tended toward arguing for some form of unity.

E. This “Book Two” might be called “The Vocation of Servanthood.”

II. A MOTIVE FOR SERVANTHOOD, 40:1-48:22

A. Announcement of the Return, 40:1-11:

1. Seeks to assure the people that the Lord will intervene and restore them to their homeland.

2. Four speakers cry out to make proclamation:


   b. *The Second* charges the hearers to prepare a highway for Yhwh to lead the people, 3-5.

   c. *The Third* emphasizes that this promise is sure, for God’s word will stand forever, while man is transient, 6-8

   d. *The Fourth*, the prophet proclaims that the Lord is coming to lead his people as a shepherd leads the sheep, 9-11

3. *NT Usage:* Isa 40:3-5; Lk 3:4-6; Matt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Jn 1:23

   a. **NRS Isaiah 40:3** A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

   b. **NRS Luke 3:4** as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet
Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

c. **NRS Matthew 3:3** This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

d. **NRS Mark 1:3** The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

e. **NRS John 1:23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

4. **NT Usage:** Isa 40:6-8; 1 Pet 1:24-25; Isa 40:13; Rom 11:34; 1 Cor 2:16

a. **NRS Isaiah 40:6** A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

b. **NRS 1 Peter 1:24** For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever." That word is the good news that was announced to you.

c. **NRS Isaiah 40:13** Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?

d. **NRS Romans 11:34** "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

e. **NRS 1 Corinthians 2:16** "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.
B. Assurance of God’s Deliverance, 40:12-31:

1. These verses are interlaced by a series of questions "a correct understanding of the functions of the questions provides the key to the structure of the pericope, and perhaps also to its composition. It is important to distinguish between those which are truly rhetorical (i.e., those to which the answer is obvious) and those which, on the surface at least, appear to reflect a genuine dispute."¹

2. These questions, whether or not they are all considered rhetorical, seem to divide the passage into four sections: 12-17, 18-24, 25-26, and 27-31.
   a. The 1st 3 sections discuss God’s immeasurability and incomparability (Naidoff, p. 72).
   b. As such they contain elements of hymns of praise and are preparatory for the 4th section, which the only real disputation.²

3. These questions should not be forced into either the category of a disputation or a hym since it exhibits characteristics of both genres.

4. They heighten the qualities of praise and producing an interaction between the speaker and the audience, expressing God’s power and ability while challenging anyone to compare Yahweh with any god, anything, or anybody.
   a. Such challenges and praises were needed if the Exiles would be properly convinced that Yahweh had not forgotten or abandoned them, or that he was able to deliver them (v. 27), and in fact, would save them (v. 31).


b. It was not enough for God to promise the Exiles that he would rescue them and return them to Israel (1-11).

c. The Exiles needed "proofs" that God could accomplish this.

5. **The Incomparability of God in Creation, 12-17**

a. **V. 12:** נֵבָא is the beginning of a series of rhetorical questions, which occur in 13, 14, 18, 25, 26.

1. The answer to these questions is "nobody," or "nobody but God."

2. "The questions are not 'Who is able to measure this and weigh that?'—scientists today can do that with some accuracy—but 'Who measured this in his palm and weighed that in scales?'—this when he created the world. The answer, 'Yahweh' (God, ver. 18) is implied in ver. 13.³

3. The Isaiah Scroll has יִוָמָי (waters of the sea) causing (BH3 and BHS) to emmend to יִוָמָי (seas); either way, the idea is the cosmic waters of creation.

4. *with a span,* גִּבּוֹרָה was a standard measurement = to .5 cubic; the span was the distance from the thumb to the little finger with the fingers spread; the image is that God has measured the heavens by spreading his hand across them. The Isaiah Scroll and the Syro Hexapla render this idea somewhat better with the reading גִּבּוֹרָה "with his hand."ifl (with his span).

5. The thought is "that since no one but God can do these things then God as creator is unique."

b. **V. 13:** asks two questions

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(1) Who understands God’s mind, power, etc.

(2) Who has ever given him advice?

(3) The answers, of course, are, "no one."

(4) **NT Usage:** Isa 40:13; Rom 11:34; 1 Cor 2:16

c. **V. 14: "enlightenment, justice, knowledge, understanding":** Rhetorical questions basically stating, "no one has taught God any of these things.

d. **V. 15: "nations":** shifts from creation to history, which implies that outwardly it appears impossible, God can save his people.

e. **V. 16: "Lebanon..."** is somewhat disjointed, while 15 and 17 flow very nicely together.

f. **V. 17: "All the nations are nothing"** removes the skepticism of the Exiles and shows "that as Creator, God is lord of history," as well as revealing to the nations their insignificance when they come face-to-face with God.

6. **The incomparability of Go to Idols, Princes, and Rulers, 18-24**

a. **V. 18: מָצָא הָאָרֶץ דְּבַרְתֹתָו** *To whom . . . liken . . . compare God* is probably the continuation of the rhetorical questions begun in 12, 13, 14, creating a different slant.

(1) 12, 13, and 14 deal with God’s power, wisdom, etc., and carry the answer “no one.”

(2) Here, the answer is “no one or nothing can be *compared* to

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5Westermann, 52.

6North, 85.
(3) It issues a challenge saying, “Find someone or something you can compare to God.”

b. **VV. 19-20:** are especially difficult to translate; several of these difficulties include

1. Belong to a later interpreter.  
2. Interrupt the chain of thought  
3. Misunderstand the point of verse 18

(4) However they are understood, they point to the impossibility of making an image of God.

(5) If נֵס is taken as generic (any idol) it the disruption is eliminated.

(6) Beginning with 18b the text would read "and to what likeness will you compare him? An idol? A craftsman. . . ."

(7) קֶס is usually translated as "the poor", while הקרונ is translated "offer" or "offering"; some translations (cf. NRSV) delete the term altogether.

(8) Taken together these verses emphatically state, "God cannot be compared to creation, history, even idols."

c. **V. 21, Have you known?** Continues the questions begun in v. 18

1. It also parallels verse 28

2. **V. 18: Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it
not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

(3) V. 28: Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

(4) Taken together these verses indicate looking to what God has done in the past, one sees what can be expected in the future.

d. V. 22, sits above the circle of the earth, expresses the idea of "entronement." So God "stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in," which become the place where he displays his kingship.

(1) The basic idea is "From creation God has lived in the heavenly tent he made for himself."

(2) So "The one who sits in his heavenly tent is the one who created the world."

(3) Here is portrayed the idea of a universal God, not a God of a peculiar locality, country, etc., but an all encompassing God who created, rules, and dwells over the entire earth; such a God would be superior in every way to any of the gods of Babylon.

e. V. 23 carries the thought further. Just as the inhabitants of the earth (v. 22) are as grasshoppers in God’s sight as he sits on his throne above the earth, so the rulers of the earth are as nothing. Such a pointed parallel was designed to encourage Israel and silence any of her doubters.

f. V. 24 explains why the princes and judges of the earth are nothing and empty.

(1) The wind can destroy plants which have not yet become firmly rooted in the soil.
(2) God can do essentially the same with the princes of the earth

(a) Before they get very deeply rooted in their projects and goals, God can blow them away as the wind blows away chaff.

(b) Therefore the God who is Creator and Lord of the world (12-17) is also absolute Lord of nations and rulers (18-24). This is the lesson Israel is to learn.

7. The Incomparability of God to Heavenly Hosts, 25-26

a. V. 25 returns to the rhetorical questions along the lines of 12, 13, 14, and 18.

(1) It also parallels verse 18, with the 1 difference that v. 18 is spoken by the prophet, whereas v. 25 are spoken by God himself.

(2) Here then is the continual demanding of God for someone to attempt to compare him to any thing

b. V. 26 shifts back to the prophet once again.

(1) refers to the creation of cosmic powers.

(a) does not mean creation out of nothing, "but it is never used except with God as the subject."

(b) In Isaiah 40-66 the term takes on the idea of "election.

(c) Therefore the entire human race is a creation of God

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10 Whybray, 57.

11 North, 88.

12 K. Bernhardt, \( \text{\textit{TDOT}} \) 2 (1977): 247.
(45:1?), but Israel alone, out of the nations that have arisen in history, was created by God (43:1,7,15).

(d) Therefore "the change of fortune for the exiles is interpreted as a new creative act of Yahweh." 13: attahnibhre’u vein’ meaz ‘they are created now, not long ago’ (48:7).” (Ibid., Cf. Harner, p. 305).

8. **God is the one who Gives Renewed Strength, 27-31.**

a. As stated above, 12-26 are preparatory for 27-31.

(1) 12-26 show that God, as creator, is far superior to idols and therefore able to help Israel in her situation. This superiority which presents God as creator of the world, and therefore controller of history, nations and rulers, is set up against the despondency and doubts of Israel.

(2) While 12-26 deal with the question of God’s ability to help Israel, 27-31 deal with the question (charge) of God’s willingness to help.

(3) v. 27 quotes the Exiles’ complaint is verbatim — My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God — which is an accusation that God (1) refused to see the fate of the exiles, or (2) that he concealed from the people his purpose.14

(4) v. 28, Have you not known? Have you not heard? draws to a conclusion the statements of God's power, might, and eternity made earlier

(5) v. 29, He gives power to the faint, reasserts God's unlimited power (v. 26)

(6) vv. 30-31, those who wait for the LORD shall renew their

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14Whybray, 58.
strength, contrasts between unaided human strength and those that wait on God.

(a) Therefore the exiles were to wait for God’s action.

(b) Though their situation seemed to be without hope, the all powerful creator of the world, and ruler of kings and nations (12-26) would, at the appropriate time begin to rescue them.

(c) Here is the answer to their charge raised in verse 27.

C. The Nations Summoned to Trial, 41:1-42:4

1. Deals with God’s raising up Cyrus to overthrow Babylon and restore the Exiles to their homeland.

2. “The literary pattern seems to be $a\ b\ a’\ b’$ (41:1-7; 41:8-20; 41:21-29; 42:1-4)” (Willis, 357).
   a. “Yahweh address the nations in $a$ and $a’$ and the exiled Jews in $b$ and $b’$. In $a$ he summons the nations and announces that it was he who sent Cyrus against them, putting fear into their hearts; then in $a’$ he challenges their gods to interpret the past or predict the future, proving thereby that they are truly gods” (Willis, 357).
   b. “In $b$ Yahweh promises the exiles he will be with them and enable them to defeat all their enemies; then in $b’$ he declares that the restored remnant, as his faithful servant, will carry his saving message of justice to the nations” (Willis, 357).

3. **NT Usage**: 42:1-4; Matt 12:18-21

D. Yhwh’s Plan for Israel, 42:5-25

1. In the previous section God was the spokesman, but here the prophet speaks.

2. He relates,
   a. Yhwh’s charge to Israel to be a light to the nations, 5-9
b. Calls on the nations to praise God for his concern, 10-13

c. Announces that Yhwh will intervene in history, 14-17

d. Chides the servant for being blind and deaf, 18-20

e. Declares that Yhwh sent Judah into exile as punishment for sins, 21-25

E. **Israel as Yhwh’s Witness to the Nations, 43-44**

1. Perhaps these chapters should be joined to the previous section.

2. The prophet is still the speaker who relates the Lord’s words in the first person, 43:1, 10, 12, 14, 16-17; 44:2, 6, 23-24.

3. The people who are addressed are the exiles in Babylon, 43:8, 14

4. The time is shortly before Cyrus’ commission for the people to return home and rebuild the temple, 44:28

5. The prophet declares:

   a. The people should not fear; Jerusalem is about to be restored, 43:1-7, 14-21

      (1) **NT Usage:** 43:20-21; 1 Pet 2:9

   b. The people are to carry out their mission of being a light to the nations, 8-13.

   c. Though sacrifices could not atone for their sins, God would forgive them for his own sake, 22-28.

   d. Because he alone is God, he will revive them, 44:1-8

   e. Those who bow down to idols made with their own hands are ridiculed, 44:9-20

   f. Reassurance that God has forgiven them; all creation should praise
God, 44:21-23

g. Cyrus will restore the people to their homeland and the cities of Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple will be rebuilt, 44:24-28

F. Yhwh Calls Cyrus, the Nations, and Israel, 45-46

1. The prophet continues his speech repeat the message of the, 45:1, 11, 13ff, 14a, 15-18e.

2. The message is directed to three audiences in logical sequence.

   a. Yhwh assures Cyrus that he is with him, and charges him to rebuild Jerusalem and set the exiles free, 45:2-13

   b. He challenges the nations to prove that their idols are true gods and charges them to turn to him, 45:18-46:2

      (1) NT Usage: 45:21, 23; Mark 12:32; Rom 14:11

   c. He challenges the exiled people to trust him, the only true God, since he is about to deliver them, 46:3-13

G. End of the Exile and Its Meaning, 47:1-48:16c

1. The speaker throughout this section is Yhwh, who addresses Babylon and the exiles.

2. Address to Babylon, 47

   a. Yhwh will reduce Babylon from queen to mistress, 1, 5, 7

   b. Babylon dealt unmercifully with the exiles, though God had only meant to punish them, 6

   c. Babylon wrongly presumed that she would rule the world, 7.

   d. Babylon had declared herself divine, 8, 10

   e. Babylon’s riches made her overconfident in her abilities, 8, 10
f. Babylon’s religion was based on superstition, sorcery, and astrology, 9, 12-13; cf. Isa 13:1-14:23; Jer 50:51

3. **Address to the Exiles, 48:1-16c**

a. They are externally worshiping him, but insincerely, 1; cf. 43:22-24

b. They were not faithful, 4, 8

c. They had not declared to the nations what God had done for them, 6

d. Even though the exiles deserve to be destroyed, God has resolved to deliver them for his own sake, 9, 11; cf. 43:25; Ezek 36:22

e. Yhwh has repeatedly summoned his people to obey his message, 1, 6-8, 12, 14, 16.

f. Because Yhwh had announced what he was going to do, Israel had been unable to give credit to their idols for these things, 3, 5; cf. 42:9; 44:7-8; 45:21.

g. He is about to declare new things he will do which no one can predict, 6-8

h. God had sent Israel into exile and now would deliver them for his glory as the only living God, 9-11

i. He has raised up Cyrus to overthrow Babylon, 14

H. **Decree for Exiles to Depart Babylon, 48:16d-22**

1. Contains new introduction and content.

2. Yhwh laments the fact that the exile was necessary, 17c-19

3. Charges the Exiles to depart Babylon, assuring them of protection, 20-22