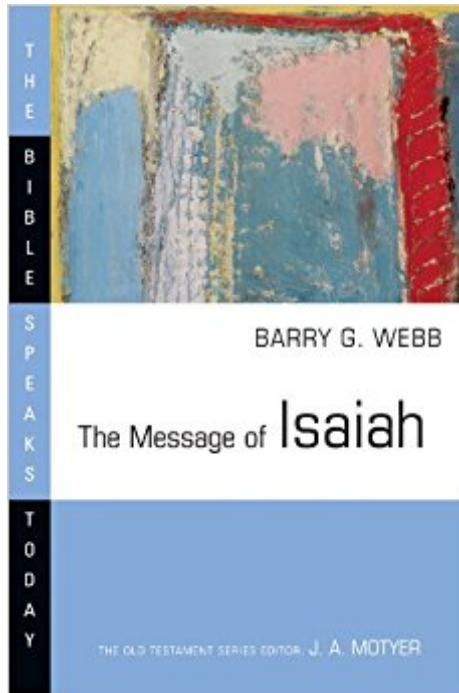




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The Message Of Isaiah (Bible Speaks Today)



Synopsis

Ever since Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, Christians have gravitated to this great prophecy as the interpretive center of the Old Testament. Here the story of Israel, scourged by judgment and exile and hopeful of restoration, is framed by its witnesses, heaven and earth. How will Israel be brought through its school of suffering and be propelled toward its divine destiny as the vanguard of a new heaven and earth? In the visionary world of Isaiah, the varied themes and imagery of the Old Testament converge and blend to transcend their plainest meanings as they project an extraordinary climax of the story of Israel and of the world. Barry Webb calls Isaiah the "Romans" of the Old Testament, where all the threads come together and the big picture of God's purposes for his people and for his world are most clearly set forth. Attuned to the magnificent literary architecture of Isaiah, Webb escorts us through this prophecy and trains our ears and hearts to resonate with its great biblical-theological themes.

Book Information

Series: Bible Speaks Today (Book 24)

Paperback: 252 pages

Publisher: IVP Academic (February 13, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0830812407

ISBN-13: 978-0830812400

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #205,560 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #144 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Sacred Writings > Hebrew Bible \(Old Testament\)](#) #267 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation > Old Testament](#) #284 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Commentaries > Old Testament](#)

Customer Reviews

Barry G. Webb (PhD, Sheffield) is emeritus senior research fellow in Old Testament at Moore Theological College in New South Wales, Australia. He has written *The Book of Judges* (JSOT Press).

Love it.

It is helping me better Understanding God's Love for his Children and fills in and clarifies my Pastors Sermon Series on Isaiah

With this book, Barry Webb, Senior Research Fellow in Old Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, intends to expound the book of Isaiah with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable (p. 9). These three elements shape the book that Webb hopes will be "of benefit to God's people and help give fresh impetus to the study and exposition of what is arguably the most theologically significant book in the Old Testament (p. 13)." Webb calls Isaiah the 'Romans' of the Old Testament and says, "It is here that the threads come together and the big picture of God's purposes for his people and his world are most clearly set forth (p. 38)." The following review consists of five sections, including: summary, evaluation, highlights, usefulness, and audience specificity. The content of the book progresses through what Webb determines to be seven distinct sections of Isaiah, those being: the Lord is king (1-12), Lord of the nations (13-27), Human schemes and God's plan (28-35), In whom shall we trust? (36-39), Comfort my people (40:1-51:11), Grace triumphant (51:12-55:13), and Waiting for a new world (56-66). There are three perspectives that arise from the book's content that are worth highlighting. One, the content of the book reflects Webb's notion of complete literary unity in Isaiah. This, in turn, effects what Webb believes to be the various theological messages of Isaiah. Webb says that despite the diversity of material in Isaiah, "The opening verse points the reader in a fundamentally different direction. It tells us that what we are about to read is fundamentally one thing, an integrated whole (p. 27)." Webb, while agreeing that there are several valid exegetical interpretations within Isaiah, holds the position that Isaiah is a narrative unit held together by its own theological impetus. While Webb does separate various corpuses within Isaiah itself, he uses these divisions, not to create divisions within the Isaiah text, but to highlight theological turning points and climaxes. The result is that the unity of Isaiah allows theology to take precedent over other critical issues that surround Isaiah. For Webb, theology sets the stage for contemporary exegesis and hermeneutics of Isaiah, not the historical or redactional methodologies, which are often applied to Isaiah. For example, Webb brings the story of Isaiah's vision to a climax near the final section of the book when he says, in reference to chapters 56-66, "These two parts of the book, and the second in particular, have brought us to the fulcrum [emphasis added] on which the whole of Isaiah's vision turns. Only one part remains to bring us to its final outworking in the new heavens and new earth of chapters 65 and 66 (p. 218)." For Webb,

the change in structure of Isaiah does not divide the book but rather unites the book more completely. Two, Webb's narrative methodology has not only impacted the subsequent theological interpretation and application in his book, but also allows the content matter to be permeated with macrostructural themes, something not often found by the majority of critical scholars concerning Isaiah. Specifically, Webb finds judgment and comfort as juxtaposed and occurring throughout Isaiah. This theme of judgment and comfort often influence the twists and turns of the narrative, giving the story of the book its present shape. For example, in regards to 34:1-17, Webb says, "The judgment on Edom is pictured as a terrible slaughter, but also a sacrifice, which alerts us to something very significant about judgment as the Bible understands it. Sacrifice is about recognizing who God himself is and giving him his due (p. 143)." Isaiah 35:1-10 is juxtaposed with the previous passage when Webb says, "In chapter 35 it is as though a brilliant shaft of light breaks through the clouds and all is bathed in splendor again. Arid wastes burst into bloom as the glory of the Lord comes down like refreshing showers, and the whole earth shouts for joy (1-2) (p. 144)." Additional examples of judgment and comfort influencing the narrative flow of the book's content can be found in 3:1-4:1 and 4:2-6 as well as 6 and 40. Because Webb views Isaiah as a literary unit, he is also able to trace theological themes that run throughout Isaiah. Third, while the content of the book is reflects a narrative framework complete with macro-themes, Webb also finds Isaiah encapsulating one grand theological directive: it is a book about Jesus Christ. Webb says, "By far the greatest importance of this book, however, lies in the witness it bears to Jesus Christ (p. 38)." Webb, in citing the reading of the Isaiah scroll by Jesus, says, "If we want to understand fully who he (Jesus) is and what he came to do, we must read this (Isaiah) book (p. 38)." In addition, Webb also views the use of Isaiah within the gospel of John as well as the citation of Isaiah 53 in Acts 8 as prime examples of the importance of Jesus' mission as seen through the vision of Isaiah. Webb says, "This exposition of the book of Isaiah is sent forth with the prayer that it may help all who read it to see and speak the glory of Christ with the same clarity and power (p. 39)." Interestingly, the reader does not find a high level of Christology where they normally would in Isaiah, in the so called "Servant Songs". Instead, Webb has opted to apply New Testament Christological themes and ethics in more unlikely places. For example, Webb applies 4:2-6 to the New Testament church concerning the return of Christ. Webb says, "That salvation, which will be fully realized when Christ [emphasis added] returns to draw history to its triumphant conclusion, is represented here under four images: the branch of the Lord (4:2a), a fruitful land (4:2b), a holy city (4:3-4), and a canopy of glory (4:5-6) (p. 52)." Webb's Christological perspective is focused less on the person and work of Jesus Christ and more on New Testament theology in general. In all, the book is structured as a narrative which

emphasizes theology overall. In addition, the macro-theme of judgment and comfort impact the book's New Testament exegesis, thus attempting to bridge the gap from the ancient text to contemporary relevance. Webb's thesis for the book is the same as that of the commentary series: to expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable (p. 9). Webb has placed the book of Isaiah within its crucial yet tentative time frame in history, thus remaining accurate to the text itself. Webb also seeks to relate Isaiah's message to today's contemporary context. Webb takes the words of Isaiah--in poetry, prose, narrative, lament, dirge, and hymn--and gives them new life for the faith community today. In order to remain readable, Webb has largely set aside critical issues that often engulf the study of Isaiah. The book is readable because Webb does not become overly concerned with any sort of critical analysis of Isaiah. Because Webb can be seen as showing competence within the three pronged thesis of the book, I believe this book should be counted as a success. One strength of the book worth noting is Webb's ability to decipher what Isaiah's eighth century message means for today's twenty-first-century audience. The question that continually arises throughout a study of the book of Isaiah is: how does the text have meaning today? Webb not only has a keen sense for the timelessness of Isaiah's vision, but also does not overdue the contemporary application. Although contemporary issues are peppered throughout the book, they are never forced or presented with any sense of obligation. Instead of using a formalized method to bridge the gap of space and time between text and reader, Webb has opted to instead use his own intuition, inserting contemporary issues where he feels appropriate. In doing so, Webb provides the reader with only the best insights. The reader will find the contemporary applications insightful and generally spot on, although many of these applications need more exegetical support to move toward their given conclusions. One weakness worth noting is the abrupt ending to the book. When the book of Isaiah is finished, Webb is finished writing also. For a book such as this, a summary statement regarding the previous exposition of the 66 chapters of Isaiah is certainly in order. As recourse of action, Webb might, in a future edition, "bring it all together" for the reader in the form of a few paragraphs restating each of his main theological insights, shaping them into a coherent whole. This would give the book more completeness and allow the reader to grasp Isaiah in its entirety. As with any book concerning a biblical text, it is necessary to note how the book can be useful for ministry. This book can benefit three areas of ministry, those being: the Bible class teacher, preacher, and also the layperson, who studies their bible independently. The teacher who desires to grasp the overall literary techniques and writing style of Isaiah would do well with this book. As previously mentioned, the book is neither rigorously structured nor overly technical. The concepts in this book are then relatively easy to grasp and

should therefore be adaptable and transferable to the classroom setting. The minister who desires to preach from Isaiah will find Webb's material convenient and easy to access. The book is littered with several sermon generating ideas as well as helpful methods for understanding Isaiah's message overall, which should remain central for anyone preaching from Isaiah. For Isaiah to be correctly proclaimed today, the text must be grasped in its entirety. The person of faith who seeks to engage in intelligent dialogue regarding Isaiah, but is not yet sure how to communicate that message, would also benefit from this book. Webb will assist those readers attempting to grasp Isaiah's message as he attends to the problem of deciphering what Isaiah's somewhat complex language system means for English speaking Americans today. The book will give these types of readers helpful guidelines for understanding the message, intent, and application of Isaiah's message. As a whole, this book can help ministers or ministry students relate, proclaim, and understand one of the more complex and misunderstood books of the Bible. Audience Specificity. The person who would profit most from reading this book is the individual who desires to teach and/or preach from Isaiah. The central strength of the book is its relevance. Communicating a message that permeates today's audience is the primary challenge facing those who attempt to teach and reach others with God's word. Communicating a message that has relevance is no easy task even with the New Testament, and even more challenging utilizing the Old Testament! Webb does not let his readers off the hook: the theology of Isaiah still applies within the context of current society, maybe more so now more than ever. Those who proclaim the message of Isaiah in any sort of public manner will do well to add this book to their library shelf.

This commentary makes Isaiah very accessible to all readers. I really like the short paragraphs on each section of the book. It is in depth enough to give you the inside perspective but not overly academic to keep the information from being out of reach for most readers.

I bought this commentary based in part on the glowing reviews that I've read in [...]. Barry Webb offers an excellent overview of the message of Isaiah -- he does a great job of getting the reader to know the forest. However, the sad part is that he does not help us to know the trees (or certain very important ones at least). Case in point: In his treatment of Isaiah 9: 6-7, the famous Messianic passage, Webb completely leaves out any explanation or exposition of the meaning behind the names "Wonderful Counselor," "Mighty God," "Everlasting Father," and "Prince of Peace." In fact, Webb does not even discuss those verses at all! By contrast, J. Alec Motyer's recent commentary on Isaiah (in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series), offers a very brief explanation of each

of those names. However, in the Servant passages such as Isaiah 42: 1-4 and Isaiah 53 chapter, Webb does give a brief exposition of the respective passages. I don't understand why he chooses to totally ignore Isaiah 9: 1-7 and then explain the other Messianic/Servant passages. Other reviewers have done an excellent job of evaluating the strengths of Webb's commentary. I would give a better evaluation of Webb's commentary if he did a more consistent job of explaining key Messianic passages. Hence 4 stars. I felt that J. Alec Motyer did a more consistent and better explanation of the key Messianic passages.

A while back I started reading through Isaiah again--one chapter a day. I wanted to supplement to my reading with a commentary that would give me historical background and help me better understand this wonderful book in Scripture. I wanted something that would help me apply the inspiration and insights of Isaiah to my own life. I found this book well suited to the purpose of personal devotional study. It is a fine exposition of Isaiah. It provides enough material to clarify its message and put it in context without getting the reader bogged down in technical details. It treats the book of Isaiah as a unified whole rather than a fragmented collection of writings from 2 or 3 sources. It is written from the conviction that God speaks to us through Isaiah today as well as He did to the prophet's primary audience.

Great companion for reading through the book of Isaiah.

Very useful book on a difficult book of the Bible. I have found it very helpful to open up Isaiah which is one of the more difficult book in the OT to get to grips with

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