

LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 17

LECTURES ON ISAIAH

Chapters 40–66

HILTON C. OSWALD

Editor

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Saint Louis, Missouri

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General Introduction

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; Weimar, 1883 ff.). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial – especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.
H. L.

Introduction to Volume 17

THIS volume contains the second half of Luther's *Lectures on Isaiah*, translated from the Latin lecture notes in the Weimar edition, XXXI-2, 261–585, under the title "Second Book of Isaiah." Most of the information concerning the setting and the style of the lectures on Isaiah (1527–1530) has already been given in the Introduction to Volume 16 and need not be repeated here. The additional data pertaining particularly to the chapters commented on in this volume (chapters 40–66) may now be added.

Begun in the summer of 1527 (cf. *Luther's Works*, 16, p. ix) and interrupted at least twice (once, in 1527, during the temporary removal of the university from Wittenberg to Jena on account of the plague and once, in 1529, because of Luther's sojourn at Marburg), the lectures were brought to a close on February 22, 1530, as the note at the end of the lectures indicates. An intermediate date is established by a remark of Johann Mathesius (1504–1565) in his sermons on the life of Dr. Martin Luther. Mathesius had come to Wittenberg "in 1529, on the Friday after Pentecost" (May 21), had heard Luther preach, and had "heard the Doctor expound the last 22 chapters of Isaiah in about 40 weeks." Incidentally, Mathesius adds: "From these lectures I repeatedly returned home full of comfort and joy." Accordingly, Luther may have been at chapter 44 in the week after Trinity (May 23). This presupposes that Mathesius visited Luther's lecture hall almost immediately upon his arrival in Wittenberg. He does tell us that on the day after his arrival, at Vespers, he heard Luther preach an unforgettable sermon on Baptism. It would be natural for his enthusiasm to lead him to hear Luther's lectures forthwith.

The interruption in the lectures occasioned by Luther's journey to Marburg is outlined by the dates of Luther's Wittenberg sermons, as indicated in the Weimar edition, XXIX, xxv, 20–24. The interruption extended from about September 12 to October 25, 1529 (p. 260, n. 1). After Marburg, the lectures resumed with chapter

56, as the note at the head of that chapter informs us. A further date has been derived from a remark by George Röer (1492–1557), who attached to 1 John 1:6 the direction, “See the lecture on Isaiah of November 15, 1529.” The remark applies to John’s phrase “we walk in darkness” and obviously points to Luther’s comment on Is. 59:9, “we walk in gloom.” Cf. W, XXV, 80. On November 15, 1529, then, Luther was presumably lecturing on Chapter 59.

The special commentaries on Isaiah 9 and Isaiah 53, originally planned for inclusion in Volume 17, have not been included for reasons of space.

Beginning with this volume, Jaroslav Pelikan will no longer serve as editor of the exegetical series of *Luther’s Works*. The press of other work made it necessary for him to withdraw from the editorship with the completion of Volume 15. In the 17 years of his editorship he read every line of 22 volumes editorially, prepared all the notes and introductions, furnished translations for large sections of six volumes, and authored the Companion Volume, *Luther the Expositor*. Readers and users of *Luther’s Works* will always be grateful to him for his outstanding scholarly contributions as designer, author, translator, and editor.

H. O.

LECTURES ON ISAIAH

Chapters 40–66

Translated by
HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN

THE SECOND BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER FORTY

1. *Comfort, comfort My people, says your God.*

WE rightly divide Isaiah into two books. We have heard the first one, in which the prophet has functioned as a historical prophet and leader of the army, because so far he has prophesied concerning Christ and concerning the defeat of the king of Assyria. Then he has both comforted and reproved the people.

In the following book the prophet treats two matters: Prophecies concerning Christ the King and then concerning Cyrus, the king of Persia, and concerning the Babylonian captivity. This second book is nothing but prophecy, first external, concerning King Cyrus, and then spiritual, concerning Christ. And here the prophet is the most joyful of all, fairly dancing with promises. The next four chapters prophesy the most joyful things concerning Christ and the church in our time.

Comfort, comfort My people. The apostles are clearly entrusted with a new kind of teaching by the Holy Spirit, namely, with the Gospel and the consoling ministry of the Word. For until now before the Gospel nothing was taught but the Law, terrifying and killing. Now a new teaching, the Gospel, is given to Peter, Paul, and the other apostles. *Comfort, comfort.* "Preach a sweet, consoling, joyful message, the Gospel." *My people.* *My* has the accent, as if to say, "I have a people which I will not forsake." But they are God's people not according to the flesh but rather as people who are of a crushed and humble conscience and of a troubled heart and who call upon God in the day of trouble. Others who trust in their own merits, resources, riches, etc., are not the people of God. They do not need comfort, they are not in sadness and tribulation, because their vessel is full and can hold no consolation. Summary: God's people are those who need comfort because they have been wounded and terrified by the Law and they are an empty vessel capable of receiving comfort. Only those who are afflicted have comfort and are capable of it, because comfort means nothing unless there is a malady.

Says your God. Your is emphasized. A troubled conscience does not think it has God but considers God to be a devil, a judge, a prosecutor, and an enemy. This word *your* contradicts that opinion, as if to say, "Don't be afraid, because God is not your enemy. Rather, He is on your side, He is gracious to you."

2. *Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.* The Hebrew word אָרָן denotes speaking in public, not in a subdued voice. *To speak tenderly*, or "to the heart," is a Hebraism which means to flatter, to cajole, as in Gen. 34:3: "He spoke tenderly to her." So here, the heart, groaning and sighing, is comforted by the Spirit, for the Spirit speaks to the heart as He wills. Do you want a gracious God? He answers: "You have a gracious God." Do you want to be comforted? He answers: "You are comforted." Here, then, you observe God's people, afflicted and sad. To them the Gospel is spoken, to their heart and feeling. For Gospel preachers are commanded to say joyful things, more than the heart can grasp, as Paul says (Rom. 8:26), "with sighs too deep for words." So these groans are comforted with consolations too deep for words. Let the preacher say, then: "I not only preach Christ to you as the One who forgives, but I also give you His righteousness, so that, clothed with Him, you may have all that is His. The comfort is therefore far more excellent than all groanings. Do you want to be holy? I will make you holy, yes, most holy through Christ."

And cry to her. Cry aloud, shout boldly, let yourselves be heard. It is necessary to speak with a very loud voice so that consciences afflicted with the worst despair may be banished and downcast spirits lifted up. For a troubled conscience is like a condemned man who has nothing to look forward to but the sword.

That her warfare is ended. I have treated this passage in my book against Erasmus.¹ We must read "warfare" (*militia*), not "wickedness" (*malitia*). Here the prophet explains what the words of comfort are and what his treasure is: "Our warfare is ended, and double gifts are given in its stead." Let these words avail against the advocates of free will. *Warfare.* In the Sacred Scriptures every striving, attempt, and religious exercise represents this warfare of the Law. May the Spirit change it into the warfare of Christ!

¹ Luther is referring to his *De servo arbitrio* (1525). For this passage, see W, XVIII, 736—737.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

1. *Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen.*

WE shall treat this passage briefly because it is dealt with in Matthew. We heard how copiously the prophet in the preceding chapters treated the power of the Word and of faith. With the greatest ostentation he made his boast against the self-righteous, the idolaters, and their religion, that it is empty and amounts to nothing. All of this serves the purpose of confirming our faith against their ostentation in outward show. Now he draws near to the Leader Himself, Christ, concerning whom he earlier began, "Comfort, comfort" (Is. 40:1). This is an outstanding statement. He speaks of the Head, who is nevertheless a man, and he unites a man with divine glory and calls Him Servant. From various idolatries and sects he calls us to this one Christ, who is the unique sign that heals us.

Behold. These are words of demonstration, as if he were pointing to something worth seeing. He is calling us away from errors and therefore showing us someone else. This also applies to our Enthusiasts, who dream that they are masters and stand in their own opinions, trusting in the heavenly Spirit. Here, however, the prophet points us to the Incarnate One and says that in this Head alone, in the unity of faith, we who were formerly scattered must be brought together. To one who asks, "Where can I gather all the scattered people?" he replies by pointing us to the means, *Behold My Servant*. Here He gives Him the doctor's degree. "If you want to know and be wise, look to this Christ, the Doctor and the One in charge and up and doing. Him I have put in charge. Keep your eye on Him, observe what He does, says, and teaches, because He is My Servant." This was not written for Christ's sake but for ours, so that we may be sure about His work and teaching and may have certainty about the emptiness of our idolatry. Nobody understands these things unless he believes. You must believe that Christ is a servant. It is as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:2): "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Meanwhile

the pope and the Enthusiasts are shouting about a glorious Christ. Here, however, we have the most reliable voice, and this teaching is for us. It has in it not so much praise of Christ as doctrine for us. But why is it necessary for Christ to be praised as Servant and Elect One? It is necessary because this Christ is an offense to the whole world. Therefore, in order to give us certainty, this commendation of Christ is necessary. We see from experience that nothing is more absurd to the wisdom of the flesh than Christ, the Servant, and His Word. All are offended because of Him. All of us want to be God's servants while we please ourselves. Everything will be taken up and entrusted to Him alone. We should receive this with thanksgiving, but we attain to it ungratefully. Therefore He says *Behold My Servant*. "He possesses all that I have. Obey Him."

Whom I uphold. The Hebrew almost signifies "I am upheld in Him." He is referring to the incident (Gen. 28:13) when God appeared to the patriarch Jacob, standing above a ladder reaching from Jacob to heaven. "I am upheld in Him." "I rest in Him, I lean on Him, because the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily." This was simply written for us, so that a godly mind might confidently trust His teaching. It is as if He were saying: "I want to tell you for certain that you are not hearing a mere man but Me, because I am present and am upheld in Him. As I was present of old in a specific way in the mercy seat, so I am present here in a general way and altogether." Summary: "If you want to avoid error, if you want to find Me, please Me, then hear Him, receive His Word, teaching, and Spirit, for He is My treasure." Here our ears must be glued to His mouth. Look only at His mouth and Word, and you will not be led astray, though meanwhile Satan rages, by force through the tyrants and by cunning through the Enthusiasts. Pay no attention to the various offenses of the armies of the demon and of the Enthusiasts. "I promise you that I shall be found in Him. You will not be offended if you receive Him."

In whom My soul delights. This is nothing else than the preaching of the Gospel. It is spoken to you to strengthen you. Before the world He will be an abomination and an enemy of God. He will appear as nothing less than an opponent of God. "Before Me He will be a source of delight. By comparison with the flesh, the world, and the devil, in the eyes of the world nothing but the squalid and the weak will be manifest in Him. In My sight, however, He counts for very much. Therefore listen to Him, even if the world should

CHAPTER FIFTY

1. *Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's bill of divorce?*

WE have already entered into the last part of the prophecy, where the prophet treats of the calling of the Gentiles into Christ's kingdom, at the same time consoling the remnant of the Jews, because the branches were broken off (says Paul) so that the Gentiles might be grafted in (Rom. 11:17). On this account the prophet here reviews the divorce of the Jews. It was not permitted to sell wives, but it was permitted to divorce them, with the freedom to contract another relationship with anyone. Yet also the sale was granted in the law of Moses. Therefore the prophet here proceeds as if the separation of divorce had been brought about against Christ's will and without His knowledge. And so he accuses the ungodly synagog, which did not acknowledge Christ's goodness. Accordingly he says:

Where is your mother's bill of divorce? "The moment I do not take notice and am not watching, she is separated in evil, she has turned her back on her husband, and the likes of her ¹ will embrace anyone who brings and promises everything, makes offers and calls." From this it follows that by her own rashness she has become the worst kind of harlot.

Behold, for your iniquities you were sold. "Not because of My false love, offense, or vexation." It is as if He were saying: "You have no excuse for not being received into the Kingdom, unless it is by your own malice. We have not been rightfully divorced, it was not due to our divorce action or our sale but to your immorality." So also the papists were in every way called and admonished, and yet they did not listen and did not accept the admonition. "He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not" (John 1:11). He tried everything in the synagog, but the synagog rejected everything. Hence she is forsaken through her own immorality. It is not due to the cruelty of God that hardly

¹ The Weimar text has the plural *amplectentur*, but the subject of the sentence remains virtually the same, "your mother."

even the meanest kind of remnant is left over. Just so it also appears in the case of the Jews, who are so stubborn that they cannot repent until they utterly perish.

2. Why? *For I came* before Jesus and Gentiles. Christ crucified appears most foolish, for He "saved others; He cannot save Himself" (Matt. 27:42). They laugh at the carpenter's son, bereft and forsaken. They look for a stately and triumphant king, surrounded by a countless army of fighting angels. They laugh at the water of Baptism and the breath of words. Who would have such power to wash away sin and bestow salvation? But the Holy Spirit must be received. He invigorates and supplies strength, He does wonderful things that cannot be grasped by the senses, so that the weakness of the water, which otherwise falls on man for destruction, has in Baptism so much power that it drives out demons and yet seems so weak. But it shows its power through weakness, because the Lord delights neither in the strength of a horse nor in the legs of man. But the Jews despise this weakness. They refuse to eat soup and so certainly will get no meat. The same water that piled up for the Egyptians and destroyed them now makes alive contrary to all grasp of wisdom and reason. Weak Jonathan together with his armor bearer provided a brilliant defeat for the enemies.² Thus there is victory under the pretext of weakness, there is life under death, glory under disgrace.

Behold, by My rebuke I dry up the sea. I have dried up the strongest streams, as is written in Exodus (14:16 ff.), I can also turn all wisdom into folly.

3. *I clothe the heavens with blackness.* "The heaven, which you think is not subject to any evil. By My power I can dim it, turn it black, and reduce it to nothing, even though you think that My power is weak." If God were to grant us a grasp of His power, He would put an end to His glory, because our reason always wants to be made sure, otherwise it is offended. But the Lord protects His own and rules them by the strength of His Word.

4. *The Lord God has given Me the tongue of those who are taught.* The power of the Word parted the Red Sea because the Lord said, "Strike it!" (cf. Ex. 14:16). By this Word the sea was divided, and He commanded them to cross over. Here dullness and weakness depart from them. So weakness departs from the Word;

² See 1 Sam. 14.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

1. *Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.*

THIS is the beginning of the passage dealing with the fact that there was murmuring and complaint among the common people who said, "Why is it that we do much fasting, praying, and observing the Sabbath, and yet He has not heard? This in spite of the fact that we are innocent." Then the ungodly answer: "Do you not see that these evils threaten us because Isaiah condemns all that we hold good? Therefore let us burn the ungodly prophet." So the cry goes up today: All sedition, high prices, and affliction come to the world because of apostates and heresy, as they say. Meanwhile they trust in their own works "until the overwhelming scourge passes through" (Is. 28:15). Thus in this chapter the prophet does away with and casts back such murmurings. So they also murmured in Jer. 44:18: "Since we left off burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, all evils have threatened us," as if to say, "You, Jeremiah, were sent for the purpose of destroying us. If we had offered libations to the queen of heaven, we would have been preserved." Here you see how Satan fights against the Word to lead us to neglect it and have recourse to the old ceremonies. By this text in this chapter their objections are to be swept away. It is not the fault of God but of our sins. It is you who want to be righteous while you are ungodly. It is not God's will.

2. *But your iniquities.* The papists have twisted this passage to refer only to gross sins. They have often cited it, not to rebuke internal sins but to create hypocrites, and so they have made sinners in a double sense.

3. *For your hands.* This they do not believe. It is as if the prophet were saying, "You kill and drive out the true prophets, you do not want to hear them. Thinking that you are offering worship to God, you believe that you are in no way sinning." This is one point.

Defiled, etc. "Your best endeavors and ceremonies, which you perform with your fingers, are not forms of righteousness but iniquities." Hypocrites have a hypocrisy which they have performed with their fingers. In this they boast and meanwhile, in a remarkable way, they persecute the Word of God and His servants. At the same time they conduct Masses and processions like the most ungodly people.

Your lips have spoken lies. "You teach evil things and lies." They do not believe this but slander us and the Gospel as heresy and insist that they are the truthful ones. We, however, must always accuse them of being liars. This is a constant struggle.

4. *No one enters suit justly.* The Hebrew verb denotes crying, teaching, or preaching. So he says here, "You are noisy enough, you teach many things, but these things are of no avail toward the knowledge of God. They are thoroughly unjust."

No one goes to law honestly, that is, teaches faithfully. To judge means to teach. Judgment is the office of teaching and preaching. Then it is also a discerning of the spirit, because they are unable to distinguish between true and false. He is attacking doctrine and life.

They rely on nothing, etc. Here you see that the people put their trust in those things that are of no benefit, yes, they even trust in their sins and teach reliance on works which are worse sins than the sins of prostitutes.

Nothing, that is, all Masses, vows, and prayers are nothing, because they are not in accord with the Word of God.

They speak lies. See here that their doctrine is censured and that not one of their words is truthful.

They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity. This is proverbial and is taken from Ps. 51:5 and from Is. 33:11: "You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble." To conceive is nothing else than to be puffed up, to be swollen. "The mountains have conceived."¹ Thus all forms of human righteousness are swollen and puffed up and promise a great offspring, but they bring forth grief. They are pregnant with toil and bring forth pain. This is an excellent proverb directed against all hypocrites who rely on their endless works and then bring forth stubble. Then at last we shall see what kind of

¹ The complete line from Horace, *De arte poetica*, 139, is quoted twice before in these lectures, p. 247 above and *Luther's Works*, 16, p. 287.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

1. *They sought Me who before did not ask for Me.*

IT is customary for the prophets to distribute Scripture passages into particular forms, using the present tense in some cases and the future in others, as the situation demands. Having finished the song about the Babylonian captivity, the prophet begins to depict the future calamity in the time of Christ. This is the last and final threat. So among our people there is the threat of Turk and tyranny. Since all mock us, he threatens with the Last Judgment. This is what the prophet is doing here. Since the people were not moved by him, he uses other threats and begins to threaten them with rejection, as if to say, "You will now see another people." *They sought Me.* In Hebrew it is "I was sought and found." The construction is passive. Based on this passage, Paul is bold to say in Rom. 10 that those who do not seek find, etc., so that there may be boasting only in God. This is a strange situation: Those who seek do not find, and those who do not seek find. God says, "Seek first His kingdom" (Matt. 6:33); "Seek, and you will find" (Luke 11:9). Why does He here praise those who do not seek? God is sought in a twofold way: first, in His Word and commandment, second, by means of one's own righteousness. So here the Jews are called seekers who do not find, because God is not sought in this manner. What is this coming to? Here it is not the coarse sins of the world that are condemned, but religion, the act of seeking and worshipping God, as if to say, "Those who worship and seek Me will not find Me." Summary: We must carefully take note that God does not want to be sought and found by our endeavors. Put away speculations and attempts at scaling heaven and cling to the Word, where God offers Himself. It is not we who seek, but God Himself seeks us by means of the Word. Then, after you have been found, then you should seek. Therefore God wants to be found, but He does not want to be sought. Away with our speculations and ideas! From these all heresies have arisen. First they think up a speculation, and then they try to impose that speculation on the Sacred

Scriptures and adorn themselves with it. Summary: Let everyone know for sure that Christ is found nowhere except where He has placed Himself. Beware of all speculations. He does not want to be sought except where He has located Himself. All endeavors and laborious attempts at seeking God outside of the Word are condemned. The monastic life is nothing but an attempt to seek God, but it is done by way of chastity, poverty, and obedience apart from the Word, and therefore they do not find Him. Monkery is nothing but a quest. They do not stop the whole day, as Paul says, "They seek with zeal" (Rom. 10:2). *I was sought*—by the Jews. *I was found*—by the Gentiles. The Gentiles did not have a particular god who would associate himself with them by means of a definite word, as in the case of the Jews, but they roamed about unsure. Yet those Gentiles found God, while the Jews did not find their own designated God.

But is God being fair in thus condemning the zeal of men and in being found by those who do not seek? God is doing the right thing, not only because of the wickedness of the people but also because of His own will. This is the perpetual will of God, that He offers Himself to the people by means of the Word and by means of what has sprung from the world by miracles, but they do not want to find Him in this way; they would rather do it by their own ideas. Therefore He says, "I will come to a place where the people will be glad to receive me." It is as Paul says in Acts 13:46: "It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, we turn to the Gentiles." Therefore, because of our wickedness as well as because of His goodness, God does not want to be found, since we are unwilling to do it in accordance with His prophets and preachers. Here He is dealing with the most important matters and with the highest virtues, not with coarse sins. This is something human reason cannot grasp, because the highest form of worship assumed by the flesh is rejected. The godly man sees that he may serve God in a twofold way. One way is by the prescribed Word, the other, by one's own design. The flesh occupies itself with them without distinction. Thus God says here *I was found by those who did not seek Me*, as if a jealous husband would say to his wife, "If you do not want to, another will." So here: "Do you want to serve Me the way you like it?"

I said: Here am I, here am I. "I shall say." This is a threat concerning the coming rejection. "First I said, 'You are My people.'