Vision and Purpose

The Isaiah Scroll is unique among the collected messages of the Israelite Prophets. It contains materials from at least five centuries. There is evidence that the Persian Empire was the context in which the Scroll first came into being. Granted it is a collection of collections, it seems to have been shaped by the questions and searchings of the Exilic and Post-Exilic Community of Israel, living in Babylon, under Persian domination and finally resettling in Judah and Jerusalem. This community had suffered the trauma of destruction, deportation and displacement in a land of foreign and strange customs, practices and beliefs. Questions about the Divine, about their own identity and purpose in relationship to the God they had experienced as the Holy One in their midst, about their sense of failure and abandonment by the God with whom they had a covenanted relationship, became the “stuff” of everyday life. Would they go the way of all other Peoples who had experienced such utter destruction and dissolution? John Bright describes it thus:

The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile mark the great watershed of Israel’s history. At a stroke her national existence was ended and, with it, all the institutions in which the national life expressed itself; they would never be re-created in precisely the same form again. The state destroyed and the state cult perforce suspended, the old national, cultic community was broken and Israel was left for the moment an agglomeration of uprooted and beaten individuals, by no external mark any longer a people. The marvel is that her history did not end altogether. Nevertheless, Israel both survived the calamity and, forming a new community out of the wreckage of the old, resumed her life as a people. Her faith, disciplined and strengthened, likewise survived; and gradually found the direction that it would follow through all the centuries to come. In the exile and beyond it, Judaism was born. (Bright 2000, 343)

Judaism did not come into being in a vacuum. The community of Judeans reclaimed their roots in a Persian world and under the influence of the religion, culture, social and political institutions, and the encouraging and directional impulses of her Persian “overlords.”

As we examine the Scroll, its message, and the community to whom these words were addressed we will focus our attention on the following:
- the Persian world, its religion and religious beliefs and practices (context)
- the questions of the exiled Community which the Prophet can be seen to address (Is 40–55);
- the words which went unseen, unheard, unheeded in the eighth century community of Israel and the internal and external consequences of such stubborn indifference (Is 2-33) as seen in its historical reality (Is 36-39);
- Apocalyptic visions of a future victory of the God of Israel (Is 24-27; 34-35);
- Answers to the later question of the restoration community: why do we not yet experience the redeeming and hoped for Presence of our God? (Is 56-66).
This is a research seminar and will require a searching mind and heart, a spirit willing to look outside of the assumed parameters of present and published and unpublished research. We need to dare to ask new questions of very familiar words and scenarios. Together we need to hear again what we thought was “the life and after life” of this material. We need to walk into the world of this community and LISTEN and HEAR the message and meaning from the perspective of their struggle and despair, their search for meaning and direction. (Not unlike the context of our present world!)

**Method and Expectations**

The materials on Reserve have been divided into two sections:

1) The Persian and Zoroastrianism background of Israel’s life in the time of Exile and Restoration;
2) Studies and Commentaries on the Texts and Community of the Scroll.

Both collections need to be supplemented by journal articles on texts, traditions, religious practices of both the Persian World and Formative Judaism. Can we find evidence of borrowings and influences? As we build the portrait of this world and their culture and tradition we can then focus on the questions which their Prophets attempted to address for them when they finally opened minds and hearts, ears and eyes, to the broken and corrupt realities of their lives and their failure to believe the Prophets in their midst.

- **Text studies** from the proclaimed messages of Isaiah of the Exile will allow us to hear the words of hope and encouragement given to a People who doubt the very nature and promised intentions and commitments of their God. (an exegetical essay)

- Text studies of major segments of the words/messages of Isaiah of Jerusalem (chapters 2-35) will be explored under the rubric of study questions about their past failure and collapse which the People are now open to hear and to heed.

- We will then explore the nature and function of Apocalyptic in the lives of marginal communities and the placement of these apocalyptic passages in the materials of the Scroll. (chapters 24-27 and 34-35)

- Finally, we will examine the lives and practices of the Restoration Community, where the best of intentions seem to have remained merely words (chapters 1 and 56-66). What have they yet to put into practice in their lives? What can they hope for in the Communities of Judaism, and what does their God hope for from them?

- Each one will prepare a final presentation, of your own creative devising, on some aspect of the life, practice, beliefs of the members of the Community in evidence in the Scroll. Submit an outline of your research presentation.
Goals

- To learn to ask questions of the text as a means of searching for the meaning and message of a text
- To learn to enter the Hebrew thought world of the people of Israel as we seek to understand the text
- To understand the influence of the surrounding cultures & traditions in the development of Judaism and its Scriptures
- To further refine the skills and ability to do exegesis as a way of understanding a text in context.
- To understand the redaction process and its theological message and purpose in the formation of Sacred Scriptures
- To practice the gathering and editing of research materials for exploring and understanding the text in context

Requirements

1. **Weekly preparation** of the assigned segments of the text and the articles which will provide further insight into the text in context. Participation in the discussion
2. **Exegesis** of a text from Isaiah 40 – 55. Submit a paper presenting a clear articulation of the context and message of the text for the despairing community in exile.
3. **Research and presentation of a topic** which will provide background for our understanding of the text and context of the Isaiah Scroll and the Community of Tradition bearers who preserved its message. Lead the discussion of this material.
4. Submit an outline of the **Research paper** on the topic you have chosen for presentation and discussion.
**Required Texts**

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible.*  Eds. Bruce Metzger and Roland E. Murphy  
New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. (or any other well annotated  
translation of the Hebrew Scriptures)


Cohn, Norman.  *Cosmos, Chaos & the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of  
Apocalyptic Faith.*  

Leclerc, Thomas L.  
*Yahweh Is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah.*  
ISBN 0-8006-3255-9  Paperback

A major commentary on the Book of *Isaiah.*  It will be important that each member of  
the Seminar make use a different commentary so that we can all become familiar with the  
many and varied perspectives on the Isaiah materials and the multiple theories on the  
composition and organization of the Scroll.
Background and Context


Isaiah Text and Context


January 22, 2013
Historical Setting
Isaiah Scroll: A Collection of Proclaimed Messages
Reading
From Oral to Written: Rhetoric of Persuasion
Redaction Criticism, what is it?
What are the historically marked parts of the Scroll?
Who is the possible Redactor of the Scroll?
Tradition Bearers: A Community of Disciples

The Learning Community – Introductions
Syllabus: Requirements & Expectations

January 29, 2013
The Scroll and Its Component Parts
Evidence of Continuity & Discontinuity
What did you find in your reading of the Whole?
Exile a Theological Crisis

Read the whole
Noting elements
of likeness & of difference
*Rendtorff “Bk of Isaiah A Complex Unity”
*Seitz “Making Sense of The Whole”
Cohn, Norman
Chap 8 Exile

February 5
Life under Persian Overlords
1. Political
2. Social
3. Religious
Zoroastrianism & the Religion of the Persian Overlords

*Boyce article
*Applegate article
Select a topic for presentation
Cohn: Chapter 4
Cohn: Chapter 8
February 12

II Isaiah: Message to a Broken and Despairing Community

Who is their God - Theology
What is Israel called to be – Teleology
What is her Task in the World? – Messianism

SERVANT SONGS

Choose a text from II Isaiah for exegesis

February 19, 2013

II Isaiah and the Message to the Broken & Despairing Community

ISAIAH 40 – 48

February 24 – March 2, 2013  READING and RESEARCH WEEK

Exegesis of your text from II Isaiah

Due: Week of March 5-12

March 5, 2013

II Isaiah Message to a Returning Community

Text Studies

*Benjamin D. Sommer
“Allusions and Illusions: Unity of the Book of Isaiah in Light of Deutero Isaiah’s Use….”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Author/Book</th>
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<td>March 12, 2013</td>
<td>II Isaiah: Tradition Bearer &amp; Redactor</td>
<td>Knight</td>
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<td>Redaction Criticism</td>
<td>Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel</td>
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<td>Prologue &amp; Chap 1</td>
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<td>If II Isaiah has arranged the collections</td>
<td>*Collins</td>
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<td>With a theological purpose, what is the Message given by the Shape of the Redacted Pieces?</td>
<td>The Bk Called Isaiah</td>
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<td>*“The Second Isaiah Consolation in Exile”</td>
<td>Intro to the Prophets</td>
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<td>Pp305-332</td>
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<td>March 19, 2013</td>
<td>I Isaiah’s Message</td>
<td>Clements</td>
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<td>Why did we fall apart?</td>
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<td>Who was “in charge?”</td>
<td>pp. 8-25</td>
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<td>What was the message that went</td>
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<td>Unheard, unseen, unheeded?</td>
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<td>ISCIAH 1 – 12 [“the denkschrift”]</td>
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<td>His calling</td>
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<td>His Message</td>
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<td>His Followers</td>
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<td>*“Isaiah, Prophet of Zion “ in Introduction</td>
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<td>March 24 March 30</td>
<td><strong>HOLY WEEK and EASTER</strong></td>
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<td>April 2, 2013</td>
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<td>Effect of Israel’s corruption on the Surrounding Nations</td>
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<td>April 9, 2013</td>
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<td>What is Apocalyptic?</td>
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<td>Why &amp; when is it used?</td>
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<td><strong>BREAK WEEK</strong> <em>Prepare Presentation materials</em></td>
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<td>Why do we still not know &amp; experience</td>
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<td>Shape and Message of the Redacted Text?</td>
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