The Unity of the Book Isaiah: Neglected Evidence (Re-)considered

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ABSTRACT
Whether the book Isaiah is a unity or not was debated since circa 110 CE and this is still the case. Those who argue for the unity of the book Isaiah argue that it is the prophecies of Isaiah ben Amoz, whereas those who argue for the disunity see it as a compilation of prophetic discourses by Isaiah and other authors. The aim of this article is to evaluate the arguments for and against the unity of the book Isaiah critically. This is done by reviewing evidence that is often neglected and by highlighting weaknesses in the arguments for and against the unity of the book Isaiah. The central theoretical question in this article is: Which argument is more probable? It is argued that the neglected evidence and weaknesses suggest that the unity of the book Isaiah is more probable than its disunity. It is hoped that the article will contribute to the ongoing debate on biblical criticism.

A INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The debate as to whether or not the book Isaiah is a unity is well known in biblical scholarship. The book Isaiah was initially viewed as the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah ben Amoz (hereafter ‘Isaiah’) by Jewish interpreters (e.g. Josephus 1958), the early Church (e.g. Lk 4:17-20; Ecclesiasticus 48:24-25) and by the rabbinic tradition (e.g. Baba Bathra 15a). But the biblical criticism changed this view.

The doubt in circa 110 CE that it might not be a unity triggered the debate on the disunity of the book. The debate began as an ‘innocent’ attribution, but later became an academic stance. It began with Moses ben Samuel Ibn Gekatilla, as he is known from references to his commentary in the works of Ibn Ezra, in circa 110 CE and reached its academic height in the commentary of Bernhard Duhm in the 19th century. Moses ben Samuel Ibn Gekatilla ascribed 1-39 to Isaiah whilst he ascribed 40-66 to someone else in the period of the Second Temple (Ibn Ezra [1873]1966).

It seems that the debate on (dis)unity disappeared after Moses ben Samuel Ibn Gekatilla until it resurfaces during the 18th century CE. During this resurfacing doubts as to the genuineness of any verse, chapter or section of the book
Isaiah started. Döderlein ([1775]1789) doubted the genuineness of the whole book Isaiah, whereas Koppe (1779-1781) doubted the genuineness of chapter 1. Eichhorn (1819), followed by Rosenmüller (1835), maintained that 23 is spurious. Eichhorn (1819), followed by Gesenius (1820), considered 24-27 as non-Isaianic. Gesenius (1820), followed by Rosenmüller (1835), maintained that the prophecy against Babylon in 13-14:23 is not Isaianic. Gesenius (1820) attributed 21:1-10 to Isaiah and he also maintained that the Assyrians and not the Chaldeans must be seen as the ones who destroyed Tyre in chapter 23. Gesenius (1820) further argued that 23 is a prediction which does not extend beyond the horizon of Isaiah. Rosenmüller (1835) pronounced 34-35 to be a poem composed during the Babylonian exile.

The 19th and the 20th century CE’s biblical scholarship suggested that it is a compilation of fragments from different authors and from different historical periods (e.g. Torrey 1928:4-13; Melugin 1968:i). Ewald (1867) understood 24-27 to refer to the time of Cambyses. Delitzsch (1890:38) found nothing objectionable in the view that the book Isaiah is a compilation of prophetic discourses by Isaiah and by different other later prophets/authors. Budde (1891:242) maintained that 56-59 and 61 were not authored by the author of 40-66. Duhm ([1892]1968:8-10) and Marti (1892:40) divided 40-66 into 40-55 (Deutero-Isaiah in Babylon before 538 BCE [Before Common Era]) and into 56-66 (Trito-Isaiah in Palestine after 538 BCE). Suggested divisions continued until Torrey (1928:4-13) considered 40-66 to be an ‘indescribable chaos’ consisting of fragments from different authors and from different historical periods. In a less radical suggestion Melugin (1968:i), after a form-critical analysis of 40-55, concludes that 40-55 is composed of a collection of originally separate units which only occasionally display continuity in message with the surrounding context and that each unit can be isolated by form. The view of Duhm and Marti was quickly adopted in scholarly society as the ‘standard’ explanation for the composition of the book Isaiah (cf. Harrison 1969:766). By the end of the 19th century CE it was already academically unacceptable to suggest views that could be interpreted as maintaining the unity of the prophecy in the book Isaiah (cf. Harrison 1969:769).

At present it seems that the questions of (dis)unity, authorship and historical backgrounds of the book Isaiah have shifted to the background. The division 1-39 seems to be ‘standard’ (cf. the titles of the publications such as Oswalt 1994, 1998; Brueggemann 1998a, 1998b; Tucker & Seitz 2001). The divisions 40-66 or 40-55 and 56-66 are still to be decided on (cf. the titles of the publications such as Korpel and de Moor 1998; Baltzer and Machinist 1999). The division 54-66 by Seitz (2001:323) has not yet been objected to. 1-39 is the prophecy of Isaiah of the 8th century BCE, 40-55 represents the prophecy of someone who lived during the exile in Babylon, whilst 56-66 represents the prophecy of someone who lived after the Babylonian exile in Palestine. Recently Goulder (2004:351-362) has argued that 40-55 represents
the prophecy of someone who lived in Palestine and not in Babylonia as it is generally accepted among commentators. Most scholars (cf. the titles of the publications such as those of Oswalt 1994, 1998; Brueggemann 1998a, 1998b; Tucker & Seitz 2001) appear to accept the hypothetical three Isaiahs as a more or less self-evident truth.

The insistence that the book Isaiah is a compilation of fragments from different authors and from different historical periods, the acceptance of the hypothetical three Isaiahs as an established fact/truth (for what a fact or truth is, see Macdonald 1981:468, 1448) and the disagreements on unity, compilation and redaction, and the strong points and weaknesses in the suggestions, leave one with a sense of bewilderment, if not of defeat.

B OBJECTIVE, PROCEDURE AND APPROACH IN THIS ARTICLE

The objective of the present article is therefore to critically evaluate the arguments for and against the unity of the book Isaiah and offer evidence to suggest that the book Isaiah is a unity and that Isaiah most probably prophesied the prophecies in the book Isaiah. The sources available to this study are from three categories: the biblical text, extra-biblical texts and archaeological evidence. The investigation will therefore be done by weighing the probabilities of the arguments for and against the unity and adducing evidence from Isaiah’s days, Isaiah’s activities, the book Isaiah itself, the other prophetic books, the New Testament, the nature of prophecy and tradition.

Since the biblical text and the extra-biblical texts are reports on the events, there are differences between the events and the reports on the events. An event is ‘something’ which took place (cf. Macdonald [1972]1981:593), whereas a report is a transmission, as found in the biblical text or in an extra-biblical text, of what has been said, done or observed (cf. Macdonald [1972]1981:1145-1146). Therefore the reliability of a report, for example the MT, depends indirectly upon the credibility of the reporter, that is, s/he who produced the MT of the book Isaiah, and directly upon whether the report is a true reflection of what happened.

A credible reporter is one who reports ‘things’ as they happened. The capability, honesty and contemporaneity aspects, as suggested by Anstey (1973:55) are not sine qua nons, but corroborators. Therefore, a report on the events must be a ‘photograph’ or a ‘mirror’ of the events. In all matters relating to the events which happened in the past there is one and only one kind of proof possible, that is not deductive proof as in Mathematics and not inductive proof of the kind admissible in the Natural Sciences, but legal, evidential, or historical proof of the kind required in a Court of Law (cf. Anstey 1973:55). A Mathematical fact can be demonstrated deductively in order to demonstrate its truth so as to compel belief, for example, that 1 + 1 = 2 (cf. Anstey 1973:55) and not 1 + 1 = 3 or 11 or 111. A Natural Science fact can be inductively veri-
fied and ocular demonstration of its truth can be performed so as to compel belief, for example, that two atoms of Hydrogen plus one atom of Oxygen form a water molecule; whereas a biblical fact can neither be demonstrated deductively nor verified inductively nor can an ocular demonstration of its truth be performed so as to compel belief. Therefore, the insistent demand that all statements of the Bible shall be illustrated or corroborated by tangible evidence in support of their trustworthiness and accuracy rests on a false assumption (Adams 1946.ix). This means that the truth of a biblical fact will depend upon the credibility of the testimony and the weight of the evidentiary evidence adduced and not solely on the support of tangible evidence.

Above all, a biblical fact is given a double sanction and a supernatural authority by the Bible itself, because the Bible claims that both the reporters (givers of testimony) and the reports (testimony) were inspired (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21). The double sanction, supernatural authority and the historicity of the Bible by the Bible are accepted by some, while rejected by others maintaining that the biblical text is irrelevant or unreliable as a direct historical testimony, because it has a theological/ideological/political bias (cf. Finkelstein 1998; Shanks 2000:6, 64). Therefore, whether or not the biblical text is reliable/credible depends upon the conviction of each individual. Whether or not the biblical accounts should be read as historical accounts depends upon the conviction of each person. Furthermore, archaeological evidence is attributed to certain dates or periods by humans. Scholars have sometimes attributed one and the same archaeological artefact to different periods.

Therefore, since archaeological artefacts may be attributed differently and there is no consensus regarding the reliability/credibility of the testimony of the biblical text and extra-biblical material, the present investigation will subject available relevant testimony of biblical texts, extra-biblical texts and archaeological evidence to examination and cross-examination before such testimony is accepted or rejected. Therefore, evidence that is suggested below may be applauded by some, whilst being rejected by others.

C EVALUATING THE ARGUMENTS

Some scholars have already indicated some strong points and weaknesses in the debate for and against the unity of the book Isaiah. Craigie (1987:155), for example, has realised that for all the strength of the hypothetical Isaiahs, there are also several severe limitations inherent in them. But due to the scope of this article it suffices to only give some examples of major points of immanent and transcendental criticism.

1 Immanent criticism

The general consensus that a biblical text developed in the hands of writers and/or editors makes sense in line with the suggestion that the book Isaiah is a
compilation from ‘documents’, but not with the idea of unity. The headings in the book Isaiah (e.g. 1:1; 2:1; etc.) support the compilation hypothesis to an extent. Unfortunately the compilation hypothesis works with at least two fallacious presuppositions: (1) that the book Isaiah is a compilation of fragments from different authors/editors and different historical periods, and that these fragments, authors/editors and these historical periods can be separated, and (2) that the book Isaiah must refer to the days of Isaiah. The fact that Torrey (1928) refers to 40-66 as an ‘indescribable chaos’ and the fact that there is still a wide divergence of opinion on the unity of the book Isaiah testify to the effect that it is impossible to convincingly separate the fragments, authors/editors and historical periods perceived to be in the book Isaiah. Therefore, if some verses appear to refer to periods other than the days of Isaiah, then, according to the compilation hypothesis, they are spurious. The problem with the second presupposition is that no one can be absolutely sure of what happened and of what did not happen in the days of Isaiah. Inherent in the second presupposition is the presupposition that prophecy is always vaticinium ex eventu. Evidence disproves this vaticinium ex eventu. Isaiah could probably have prophesied about things to come (Eccl 48:24-25; Jewish Antiquities, Book XI, paragraph [1.1] and [2]; cf. also 1 Kgs 13:1-2).

On the other hand, anyone who argues for the unity of the book Isaiah is confronted with the silence in 40-66 about Isaiah or any of the kings mentioned in 1:1; the probability that Isaiah could not have prophesied for almost one hundred and thirteen years; the lack of dating in 40-66 and the difficulty of ascribing any reference in 40-66 and some sections in 1-39 to a specific period in the history of Judah and Jerusalem. The main weaknesses in these confrontations are that an argumentum e silentio cannot be conclusive and that one hundred and thirteen years of prophetic profession is not an improbability.

Furthermore, there is no division between 39 and 40 in the ancient manuscripts (cf. e.g. 1QIsa¹ in Parry & Qimron 1999:64, 65) which may suggest that 39 and 40 do not form a unity.

2 Transcendental criticism

Not all is well with the view that the book Isaiah is a compilation from fragments. The claim that ‘some’ of the evolving stages (e.g. redaction stages and processes) and their respective ‘discourses’ in the present book of Isaiah can be traced, is, humanly speaking, improbable if not impossible. The claim that the same writer cannot write in the same text prose and poetry, is also unrealistic. These weaknesses make the claim that the book Isaiah is a compilation from discernable fragments highly questionable, but does not necessarily overthrow the claim of disunity of the book Isaiah.

But all is also not well with the view that the book Isaiah is a unity. The unity hypothesis subtly assumes that the book Isaiah was written by Isaiah.
This assumption is made difficult by the headings in the book Isaiah (e.g. 1:1; 2:1). These headings suggest at least that some material in the book Isaiah are the result of an editorial hand. But this does not necessarily render the view that what is in the book Isaiah is the prophecy of Isaiah impossible.

D EVIDENCE FOR THE POSSIBLE UNITY OF THE BOOK ISAIAH

A survey of literature on the book Isaiah suggests that those who deny that Isaiah prophesied the prophecies in the book Isaiah do it mainly on the basis of historical, theological and literary considerations (cf. Skinner 1896-1898; Duhm [1892]1968; Driver 1909; Robinson 1960:1495-1508). This survey also suggests that these considerations are not conclusive on whether or not Isaiah prophesied the prophecies in the book Isaiah (cf. Kasher 1970; Adams 1972). Therefore these considerations will not be rehearsed here.

1 Evidence deduced from Isaiah’s days

Both the biblical text (2 Kgs 15-20; 2 Chr 26-32; Isa 1-39) and the extra-biblical evidence (cf. Younger 2000a:284, Younger 2000b:287; Younger 2000c:291, 302) suggest that Isaiah lived in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (kings of Judah), Pekah and Hosea (kings of Israel), Tigrath-Pileser (or Pul), Shalmaneser, Sennacherib (or Sanherib) and Esarhaddon (or Esarhaddon) (kings of Assyria), Rezin (king of Aram) and Tirhakah (king of Cush) and in the days of Merodach-baladan (king of Babel). These contemporaries suggest that Isaiah lived during the 8th century BCE.

The evidence from Isaiah’s days is complicated by several factors. There is lack of dating in 40-66 and other sections of 1-39. There is neither mention nor suggestion that Isaiah was a contemporary of Uzziah’s predecessor (Amaziah), nor explicit reference to Manasseh, Hezekiah’s successor. Neither Isaiah nor the kings who speak or are spoken of in 1-39 are mentioned in 40-66, nor are the oracles in 40-66 dated. The content of 40-66 is of a general nature and does not purport to give any historical account of events; hence, it can be attributed to any date.

But there is a seeming suggestion in 15:28; 38:1, 9; 39:3, 5 and 8 that the events during the reign of Hezekiah are recorded in 15 to 39 and possibly beyond 39. Isaiah 37:38 records the death of Sennacherib which is understood to have occurred circa 681 BCE. 2 Chronicles 32:32 claims that Isaiah wrote the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds in the vision of Isaiah and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. Hezekiah is understood to have died circa 686 BCE (cf. Freeman 1968:193). An apocryphal legend claims that Isaiah died a martyr’s death under Manasseh (cf. Freeman 1968:193; Sellin 1970:364), who reigned for fifty-five years (2 Chr 33:1). But there is no indication as to how many years of Manasseh’s reign was Isaiah a contemporary.
If Isaiah and Uzziah were born in the same year, Isaiah would have been one hundred and twenty-nine years when Hezekiah died (cf. 2 Kings 15:1-3, 32-33; 16:1-2; 18:1-2). This means that if Isaiah also lived during the reign of Manasseh, then his lifetime could have become at least one hundred and thirty years and at most one hundred and eighty-four years when he died (see the years Uzziah to Manasseh reigned).

There are two explicit references to Koreš (Cyrus) in the book Isaiah (44:28; 45:1) and twelve explicit references in the other Bible books (2 Chr 36:22 [2X], 23; Dan 6:29; 10:1; Ezra 1:1 [2X], 2, 7, 8; 4:5; 6:14). The Hebrew Koreš is almost always translated as ‘Koreš’ or ‘Cyrus’ (cf. RSV; AV; NIV), except in Wordsworth (1939:327) where it is translated as ‘the crushed’ on the supposition that the original text read lekha resh which is construed to refer to Hezekiah, and the anointed of 45:1 is construed to refer to Jerusalem as represented by its head Hezekiah.

The acceptance or rejection that there are references to Cyrus in 44:28 and 45:1 has several implications for at least 41:1-45:3. The translation of Koreš in 44:28 and 45:1 as ‘the crushed’ (Wordsworth 1939:327) eliminates explicit references to Cyrus and seems to bring smoothness to this admittedly problematic Hebrew passage and focuses attention upon Jerusalem and giving a rich promise of restoration in the future in harmony with other portions of 40-66 (Harrison 1969:794). But it raises questions as to whether or not Hezekiah could order the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple (44:28), and as to how nations were subdued by Hezekiah (45:1). The rebuilding of the temple and subjugation of nations by Hezekiah is historically unlikely.

The merits and demerits of the suggestion that ‘Cyrus’ in 44:28 and 45:1 is either prophetic predictions of the work of Cyrus, or words written in the exilic period or as explanatory glosses imposed upon the original text by a post-exilic copyist (Young 1949:219; Allis 1950:51-53; cf. Harrison 1969:793-794) cannot be discussed here since it is based on speculation.

The explicit references to Cyrus in the other Bible books (2 Chr 36:22, 23; Dan 6:29; 10:1; Ezra 1:1, 2, 7, 8; 4:5; 6:14) and Cyrus’ cylinder (cf. Cogan 2000:315) suggest that Cyrus’ activities took place when the people of Judah and Jerusalem had completed seventy years in the Babylonian exile. These activities of Cyrus most probably started with his edict in the first year of his reign (cf. 2 Chr 36:22-23 = Ezra 1:1-3a) and most probably continued throughout his six years of reign. Daniel 6:29 and 10:1 refer to Daniel as a contemporary of Cyrus and Darius. Cyrus was succeeded by Darius (Ezra 4:5) and Darius by Artashasta (Ezra 4:5; 6:14). Cyrus’ Cylinder maintains that Cyrus took and subdued Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon who reigned from circa 555 to 539 BCE (cf. Cogan 2000:315).
The claim that Cyrus had already embarked on his campaigns is generally based on the interpretation of Isaiah 41:2-3, 25; 44:28; and 45:1-3. 41:2-3 reads ‘Who raised up one from the east whom righteousness met wherever he set his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over his kings; his sword makes them as dust, his bow as driven stubble. That he pursued them, and passed on safely; even by a path that his feet have not trodden’ (The Jerusalem Bible 1988). 41:25 maintains that he raised up one from the north, and he has come from the rising of the sun, and he shall call upon the name of the speaker: and he will come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treads clay. 44:28 says of Cyrus that he is the shepherd of the speaker, and will perform all the pleasure of the speaker: and saying to Jerusalem ‘You will be rebuilt’; and to the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid’. 45:1-3 maintains that Yhwh holds the hand of Cyrus and he will make Cyrus successful in his campaigns. So, in dealing with the campaigns of Cyrus there are two main things which are important and significant: whether Cyrus was raised from the east or from the north, and whether the campaigns of Cyrus were in the past, present or future (cf. Allis 1950:51-61). The question as to the religious unsuitability of Cyrus is out of the question, because Yhwh may cause anything to do what he wants (cf. 65:1; Num 22 especially verses 28).

The question as to whether the campaigns of Cyrus were in the past, present or future cannot be answered with certainty. The prophetic vividness in 40-66 confuses the historical and chronological sequence of the passages, hence confusing most scholars regarding the date(s) of the prophecies in 40-66. The tenses of Hebrew verbs offer no solution because since the publication of Driver (1874) through this day (cf. Watts 1951; Brockelmann 1956; Niccacci 1990; Eshkult 1990) it has been generally maintained, with the exception of Blake (1951), that tenses of Hebrew verbs are employed to express types of action rather than time.

There are also possibilities of textual corruption in both 41:2 and 41:25 with reference to the directions (east or north?) and confusion and uncertainty of tenses of the verbs (Hiph’īl perfect 3rd pers. sing. masc. or Hiph’īl perfect 1st pers. sing.?). These possibilities make it difficult to establish the text and the times of the campaigns with certainty (cf. Morgenstern 1961:30).

Certain internal evidence in 41; 45; 46; 47 and 48 suggests that the campaigns and triumphs are probably of the past, though, of course, not of a too distant past (cf. Morgenstern 1961:30). If this is correct, then the address in 41 could have been spoken in 539 BCE somewhat later than Cyrus’s conquest of Babylon (cf. Morgenstern 1961:30). 41:2 and 41:25 may, on the basis of ‘from the east’ and ‘from the north’, either be interpreted as referring to one person or two different persons. If they refer to one person, then they are either written by one person at two different places or written by two different persons at two different places. If they refer to two different individuals, then these two
individuals may either be Cyrus and someone else or any other two individuals. The direction north and east are adjacent to each other. Therefore, Cyrus could be perceived as either from the north or from the east.

In 45 the writer reports in direct speech what Yhwh says to Cyrus, his anointed one (45:1). The activities of Cyrus which are being referred to would take place in the future in contrast to the creation which took place in the past (cf. the Hebrew tense 45:1, 2, 3 in contrast to the Hebrew tense in 45:8). That Cyrus will release the exiles and build Yhwh’s city are also in the future (45:13). Cyrus’ edict is anticipated and had not been proclaimed (cf. Morgenstern 1961:32). That Cyrus will release the exiles does not necessarily mean that the people are already in exile. Therefore, to interpret ‘he will build my city and release my exiles’ in 45:13 as meaning that the exile and the building of the city had already taken place (cf. Morgenstern 1961:32) has no textual foundation.

46:10-11 suggests that the prophecy of the counsel of Yhwh, the man from the east (most probably the one referred to in 41:2) is to be fulfilled in the future (48:15). In 47, the impending Yhwh-ordained judgement of the collapse of the nation Babylon is announced (cf. Morgenstern 1961:33). The total absence of the prophetic motive and tone, coupled with the fact that Cyrus is not mentioned at all make it difficult to date 47. Babylon was to be conquered (48:14) and if 48 refers to the campaigns of Cyrus, then they were manifestly still to come (cf. Morgenstern 1961:35). Most prophecies had probably future references (48:6-8, 14-15).

Attempts to reconcile the biblical texts with extra-biblical evidence regarding the synchronisation and contemporaneousness of the kings in the biblical texts and kings in the extra-biblical evidence are either fraught with historical problems, inconsistencies and/or contradictions (cf. Anstey 1973:154-156, 387-389; Motyer 1993:276; Brueggemann 1998a; Na’aman 2005:98-102). To say the least, these inconsistencies, contradictions and historical problems may be due, for example, to an incorrect reworking of the information from sources (cf. the awareness of other information in 2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:32), redactionally putting written fragments together, incorrectness of dates attributed to certain events, bringing in line dates from biblical texts and dates from extra-biblical evidence, or due to using as a basis dates from scholars based on conjectural foundations. Some scholars (e.g. Anstey 1973:154-156, 387-389; Motyer 1993:276; Brueggemann 1998a) and I spent a great deal of energy seeking to sort out the historical particularities behind the evidences and apparently failed.

From the preceding discussion it is evident that the content of the book Isaiah stretches from the 8th century to the 5th century BCE. This raises the question as to whether or not it is probable that Isaiah could have lived for four centuries. But the years Isaiah lived are more of a question of fact than a ques-
tion of mortality expectation or probability. In the days of Noah persons could live up to nine hundred and sixty-nine years (Gen 5:27). Joseph, who lived before Moses, died when he was one hundred and ten years old (Gen 50:22, 26), while Moses died when he was one hundred and twenty years old (Deut 34:7). But it is more probable that Isaiah could not have lived to see Cyrus’ days and that Cyrus’ activities could not have taken place during the days of Isaiah, but that Isaiah instead could have seen these events in visions (1:1; 61:1). For example, the name of king Josiah was announced three centuries before his birth (1 Kgs 13:1-2) and the subjugation of Tyre by the Babylonians was promised by Ezekiel and Zechariah before it took place (cf. Ezek 26:2-4; Zech 9:1-3).

2 Evidence deduced from Isaiah’s activities

Some scholars divide the activities of Isaiah into different periods. For example, Sellin (1970:364-365), and Deist and Du Plessis (1985:66), divide Isaiah’s prophetic activities into four periods ranging from the call of Isaiah to the days of Hezekiah. Sellin (1970:364-365) maintains that events of the first period are found in 1-3 and 5, those of the second period in 7-8; 9:7-20 + 5:25-29; 17:1-6; 28:1-4 (736-711 BCE), those of the third period in 14:28-32; 18; 20; 28:7-22; 29:1-14; 30:8-17, and while those of the fourth period are found in 1:4-9; 10:5-15, 27b-32; 14:24-27 and in the portion of 28-32 of those that do not belong to earlier periods. Deist & Du Plessis (1985:66) in turn maintain that events of the first period are found in 6:1-11; 1:2-3; 2:12-17; 3:1-9, 3:12-4:1; 5:1-13, 18-23; 10:1-3; 11:10-17, those of the second period in 7-9; 17:1-6; 22:15-19; 28:7-22; 30:8-17; 18:1-6, those of the third period in 14; 18; 20; 22; 28; 30, while those of the fourth period are found in 10; 14; and 28-32.

All these writers leave among others 33-66 out of Isaiah’s prophetic activities/periods and at certain points attribute sections of the book Isaiah haphazardly to different historical periods. The suggestion that Isaiah’s activities stretch from his call to the threat of destruction of Judah by Sennacherib king of Assyria in the reign of Hezekiah (36-37) and leaving 33-66, especially 36-39, out of Isaiah’s activities in the reign of Hezekiah makes the division untenable.

1:1 read with 6:1 suggests that Isaiah’s prophetic activities started in the days of Uzziah. But, 6:1 raises the question as to whether 6 is a call narrative or a spiritual deepening. This question was raised as early as 1888 CE (e.g. Driver 1888:15). Inherent in this question is the question as to whether a person could prophesy before he is called or not. Driver (1888:15) claims that the assertion that Isaiah 6 is a call narrative is confirmed by internal evidence. On the contrary, Davis (1925:338-340) claims that what is described in 6 is a deepening of Isaiah’s spirituality similar to that which other prophets like Ezekiel (Ezek 33:21-33), Peter (Acts 10) and Paul (Acts 16:9 and 10) also experienced. The
most important exponent of the view that Isaiah 6 is a call narrative is Egnell who in 1949 published a book on Isaiah 6 entitled ‘The call of Isaiah: an exegetical and comparative study’.

This view is followed through to the present by several scholars such as Sellin (1970:364), Motyer (1993:40) and Koole (1997:1) with a few, like Milgrom (1964:164-182), opposing it. This view maintains that either Isaiah or a ‘careful editing of the book’ makes use of oracles in 1-5 (that were originally preached after the call) in order to depict the situation into which Isaiah was called by constructing 1-5 into an author’s preface (e.g. Motyer 1993:40), or that 6:1 maintains that 6 is a call narrative (e.g. Koole 1997:1). 1-5 is therefore considered a ‘backdrop’ of the book (cf. Koole 1997:1). Milgrom (1964:172-174), in contrast, dates 1:10-6:13 in the reign of Uzziah and maintains that 6 is a continuation and transformation of Isaiah’s message while 1:2-9 stand in contradiction to the verses that follow after it and must be relocated.

Relevant to whether 6 is a call narrative or not is that which is described in it. Isaiah saw Yhwh (6:5); Isaiah cried out ‘woe to me! for I am silenced because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips’ (6:5); Yhwh touched Isaiah’s lips (6:7) and his iniquity was turned away and his sin covered (6:7). And then Yhwh instructed Isaiah to go and tell the people of Israel (6:9). He was silenced most probably from singing with the seraphs because his lips were unclean (6:5; cf. also Motyer 1993:77) and he was ruined/destroyed (6:5; cf. Ps 49:13, 21; Jer 14:17; 47:5; cf. also Motyer 1993:77; for I am silenced in 6:5) because he had seen Yhwh (6:5) and no-one sees Yhwh and lives (cf. Ex 3:6; 19:21; Judg 13:22). Isaiah’s sin has three dimensions: he lived among people of unclean speech, accepted unclean speech in his society and he spoke unclean speech before the incidence in 6 (cf. 6:5).

It is important to note that a prophet does not necessarily live sinlessly after a call (e.g. Abraham [Gen 20]; Moses [Ex 3; Deut 32:48-51]; Samson [Judg 13:5; 16:6-20]; Jonah [1; 4]). Seeing Yhwh or his glory (6:5) and thereafter being sent to do something, does not necessarily mean being called (6:9). Otherwise, for example, Isaiah and Ezekiel would have been called several times to prophetic activities (see Is 6:9; 7:3; 38:5; Ezek 1; 43). Therefore, 1:1; 2:1 and that which is in 6 cannot be construed to necessarily mean or imply that 6 is a narrative call or that it is not. Furthermore, a prophetic call does not necessarily mean seeing YHWH or visions or exhibiting abnormal external phenomena, as Driver (1888:16) maintains, but the word of YHWH which comes to a person (see Jer 1; Hos 1; Joel 1; Amos 1; 7:14-15; Obad 1; Jon 1; Mic 1; Hab 1; Zeph 1; Hag 1; Zech 1; Mal 1).

The visible external phenomena in relation to the call of a prophet are not alluded to in fourteen of the sixteen so-called ‘writing prophets’ of the Old Testament (cf. Jer; Dan; Hos; Joel; Amos; Obad; Jon; Mic; Nah; Hab; Zeph;
Hag; Zech; Mal). 2 Chronicles 26:22 mentions that Isaiah wrote the earlier and the latter history of Uzziah. 2 Chronicles 26:22 tends to suggest that Isaiah was called to prophetic activity before the incidence described in 6.

Therefore, the form of the content in 1:1, as also found in the beginning of all fifteen books (Isaiah to Malachi) of the ‘latter prophets’ in the Hebrew Bible, suggests that the utterances in the book Isaiah are Isaiah’s (cf. Dillard and Longman III 1994:272). Furthermore, the content in 1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 20:2; 37:2, 5-6; 38:1, 4 and 39:5, and the preceding discussion suggest at least that the activities of Isaiah probably started in the days of Uzziah and continued into the days of Hezekiah, and that the events of these days are found from Isaiah 1 through to at least Isaiah 39. That Isaiah authored a history of the reign of Uzziah as we are told in 2 Chronicles 26:22 does not prove that he was prophetically active during that time because in writing this history he might have used sources (cf. Davis 1925:338; Gehman 1944:268-271), but it suggests that the book Isaiah most probably contains the earlier history of Uzziah and not only Uzziah’s death.

3 Evidence deduced from the biblical text

a Evidence deduced from the book Isaiah itself

(i) Editorial attribution and contents

The contents of 1:1; 2:1; 6:1; 7:1; 13:1; 14:28; 20:1-2; 36:1; 37:1-2; 38:1; 39:1, 5, 8 editorially attribute at least that which follow after each of them to Isaiah. 1:1 claims that the contents of the current book Isaiah date from the days of Uzziah to the days of Hezekiah (1:1; 39:8) and not beyond Hezekiah’s days as other writers claim (cf. Dillard and Longman III 1994:388). This may imply that the writing of the book could possibly have been done by at least one person from either memoirs or individual collections (cf. 1:1; 6; 7) in prospect (cf. 7; 53:1-12) and/or in retrospect (cf. 1:1; 2:1; 6:1; 36-39).

The silence in 40-66 about Isaiah and the kings mentioned 1:1 creates some problems with regard to applicability of the content of 1:1 to 40-66. The manuscripts of the Book Isaiah do not show a break between 39 and 40 or have a superscription or title separating 39 and 40 (cf. a facsimile of the MT according to the Leningrad Codex in Freedman et al. 1998:481; the transcription of the great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) in Parry & Qimron 1999:64, 65; the Hebrew Masoretic text in Kittel 1935:662; the Greek Septuaginta text in Rahlfs 1935:619). Therefore, the evidence jointly suggests that the book Isaiah was considered to be a unity by its authors/editor(s)/compiler(s).

But, the conditions described in 40-66 may suggest otherwise. For example, allusions to the ruined and deserted condition of Jerusalem (e.g. 44:26; 63:18; 64:10-11), the suffering which the Jews have experienced (e.g. 42:25;
47:6) or are experiencing at the hands of the Chaldeans (e.g. 42:22; 52:5), the prospect of return which is imminent (e.g. 40:2; 46:13; 48:20), the people who are frequenting the high places (e.g. 57:3-7) in hilly terrain uncharacteristic of Babylon and the walls of Jerusalem standing (e.g. 62:6), forced an explanation as to why 1-39 and 40-66 were coalesced into a single volume. Pfeiffer (1941:415) explains that a scribe had a space left on his scroll after copying 1-39 and then decided to fill out the scroll with the writings of an anonymous prophet (40-66).

But, the content of 40-66 can be safely considered not an ‘appendix’ to 1-39. Both 1-39 (e.g. 6:11-13; 7:7-25; 10; 11; 38:5) and 40-66 (e.g. 40:2; 46:13; 48:20) mention things to come. The other prophets do the same (cf. Jer 16:14-15; 29:10; Dan 2; Joel 2:27-32 read with Acts 2:14-21; Am 7:16-17). The superscription and the future prophecies in both 1-39 and 40-66 therefore suggest that 1-39 and 40-66 probably belong together.

(ii) Similarities across the book Isaiah

There are historical, theological and literary similarities between 1-39; 40-55 and 56-66 (for examples of similarities and discussions thereof see the book of Allis 1950; the book of Adams 1972; and the article by Clifford 1993:1-17). These similarities suggest that there are at least similarities of vocabulary, thoughts, contents and themes. What do these similarities suggest other than, at least, the unity of the book Isaiah?

b Evidence deduced from the other prophetic books

(i) Superscriptions

Some of the prophetic books have superscriptions (headings/introductory notes) applying to the whole book (Jer 1:1-3; Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Am 1:1; Ob 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Mal 1:1), while others have individual subheadings for sections of the book (Ezek 1:1-2; 8:1; 20:1-2; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 31:1; 32:1; 40:1; Dan 1:1; 2:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1; Hag 1:1; 2:1; Zech 1:1; 1:7; 7:1; 9:1; 12:1). The book Isaiah has both a superscription (1:1) and individual subheadings (e.g. 2:1; 6:1; 7:1; 13:1; 14:28).

These headings and individual subheadings at the least link the prophet mentioned in the first section(s) of the book with the whole book. They have been taken up to now at least as prima facie evidence for the authorship – meaning that the prophet whose name is linked to each book is the originator of what is found in that book, and the unity of each book.

The headings in the MT book Proverbs also succinctly suggest something similar. For example, in Proverbs 1:1; 10:1 and 25:1 the proverbs are attributed to Solomon, whereas in Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1 the words (not proverbs) are attributed to Agur and Lemuel respectively. But the LXX lacks a heading at
10:1 and at both 30:1 and 31:1 the names Agur son of Jakeh and Lemuel are lacking in the LXX version. In all cases the MT appears to be more original and it is more likely that LXX has suppressed the names (cf. also Whybray 1994:157).

The headings at 30:1 and 31:1 suggest that verses that form a unity with each heading do not belong to Solomon, suggesting that a book may consist of materials from different persons. In the book Isaiah there is no similar indication that some material come from other persons.

Therefore, the seeming tradition of the purpose of the superscriptions/headings and the evidence that Isaiah could even prophesy about things to come suggest that Isaiah could have probably prophesied even the prophecies in 40-66. Furthermore, if the idea of dividing the book Isaiah into different ‘Isaiahs’ could be consistently applied to the book Isaiah and other prophetic books, it would have serious untenable repercussions for the authorship and unity of each of the prophetic books.

(ii) Similarities

There are similarities/resemblances between some texts or verses in the book Isaiah from all the divisions in 40-66 and some texts or verses from other parts of the Bible. For example, Zephaniah 2:15 resembles Isaiah 47:8; the announcement of ‘feet bringing good tidings’ is found in both Nahum 1:15 and Isaiah 52:7; Jeremiah’s reference to the stirring sea and roaring waters in 31:35 is close to a similar statement in Isaiah 51:15; and Jeremiah's reference to Israel as ‘my servant’ in 30:10 possibly reflects the famous servant songs of Isaiah (41:8-9; 42:1, 19; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 52:13; 53:11) (cf. Dillard and Longman III 1994:272).

Some dates in other prophetic books also coincide with those of the book Isaiah. For example, the book Jeremiah dates its prophecies to the days of Josiah son of Amon and to the days of Jojakim and Zedekiah, sons of Josiah king of Judah (Jer 1:1-2), and the book Zephaniah dates its prophecies to the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah (Zeph 1:1), while the book Isaiah dates its prophecies to the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah kings of Judah who reigned before the kings referred to in Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The prophecy in Nahum is not dated, but the dating of the prophecies of the books preceding the book Nahum in the same group of books (Hosea, Amos, Micah - Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) and following it (Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah - Josiah, Darius), suggest that the prophecy of Nahum be dated somewhere between the days of Hezekiah and the days of Josiah. This suggests that the prophecies in Isaiah preceded the prophecies in Jeremiah, Nahum and Zephaniah.
The book Amos claims to be a record of the events which Amos saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel (Am 1:1). Amos prophesied at Bethel in Israel and neither in Judah nor in Jerusalem nor concerning Judah or Jerusalem (cf. Am 1:1; 7:10-13). This means that the events described in the book Amos would not necessarily correspond to the events described in the book Isaiah and vice versa. The book Amos mentions Uzziah only once in its opening verse and mentions Jeroboam only three times (Am 1:1; 7:10, 11). It refers to the judgements on Damascus (Am 1:3-5), Gaza (Am 1:6-8), Tyre (Am 1:9-10), Edom (Am 1:11-12), Ammon (Am 1:13-15), Moab (Am 2:1-3), Judah (Am 2:4-5) and Israel (Am 2:6-9:15), some of which the book Isaiah mentions in 13-23 (Damascus in Isa 17; Tyre in Isa 23; Moab in Isa 15-16; Judah in Isa 22; Israel in Isa 17).

Furthermore, the prophecy which Amos prophesied concerning Judah in the days of Uzziah (Am 1:4-5; 6) is almost the prophecy of Isaiah 1. The preceding evidence suggests therefore that the prophecies in the days of Uzziah are most probably in the book Isaiah and that the prophecies in Isaiah 13-23 have been prophesied by Isaiah.

These similarities therefore suggest that these prophets could have known either at least certain separate sections of an early book Isaiah (cf. Sellin 1970:366) or sections of the current book Isaiah, or at most an early book Isaiah or the current book Isaiah. Since there is no evidence of the existence of separate sections of either early or current book or evidence of an early book Isaiah, it is more probable that the texts of Isaiah similar to the texts of other books are of the current canonical book Isaiah. These similarities would therefore indirectly suggest the unity of the authorship of the whole book Isaiah, implying therefore that Isaiah prophesied all the prophecies in the book Isaiah.

c Evidence deduced from the New Testament

The New Testament cites Isaiah by name about twenty times with reference to 1-66: eight times with reference to 1-39 (cf. Mt 13:14; 15:7; Mk 7:6; Jn 12:39, 41; Acts 28:25; Rom 9:27, 29); ten times with reference to 40-55 (Mt 3:3; 8:17; 12:17; Mk 1:2; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23; 12:38; Acts 8:28, 30; Rom 10:16) and two times with reference to 56-66 (Lk 4:17; Rom 10:20). These instances refer to Isaiah’s person (Acts 28:35; Rom 9:27), that which he ‘said’ (Mt 3:3; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7; Jn 1:23; 12:38, 39, 41; Rom 9:29; 10:16, 20), that which is written (Mk 1:2; 7:6; Lk 3:4; 4:17) and his book (Lk 4:17; Acts 8:28, 30). But, it should be mentioned there is no place where it is stated that Isaiah authored the book Isaiah.

56-66 (61:1, 2; 65:1). Most of these citations come from portions of Isaiah 6 (6:9 [2X]; 6:10 [3X]) and 40 (40:3 [4X]; 40:4).

It should be noted that John (12:38) refers to ‘the word of the prophet Isaiah’ with reference to Isaiah 53:1, the utterances of Isaiah (John 12:39) with reference to Isaiah 6:1, 10; while Luke (Acts 8:28, 30) says that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading ‘the prophet Isaiah’ referring to Isaiah 53:7-8 (cf. Acts 8:32-33). This evidence of John and Luke suggests, if the divisions and form of the MT are presupposed, that John and Luke had at least 1-39 and 40-55 and 56-66, and it further suggests, if the MT arrangement is presupposed, that John and Luke had at least 1-53. Luke (Luke 4:17; Acts 8:28) strongly suggests that the book Isaiah was extant at the time when the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah 53:7-8. Romans 10:20 refers to Isaiah 65:1 as the words which Isaiah ‘said’. This evidence suggests that at least some of the utterances in 1; 6; 10; 28; 29; 40; 42; 53; 61 and 65 were extant during the New Testament period and were considered by the New Testament writers to have originated from Isaiah. Those who consider the book Isaiah as consisting of a nucleus (nuclei) which was (were) later expanded by later hand(s) from later periods (e.g. Kennett 1910:1-22; Sellin 1970:366), or the book Isaiah as a compilation of fragments from different authors and different historical periods (e.g. Torrey 1928:4-13; Smith 1944:183-194; Sellin 1970:366) will probably also agree with this conclusion.

Since there is no evidence of the existence of separate parts of the current book Isaiah, the New Testament evidence suggests either that Isaiah prophesied the whole book Isaiah or parts specifically attributed to Isaiah. But, the last option is unlikely, whereas the first option is more probable.

4 Evidence deduced from the nature of prophecy

There is a suggestion that Isaiah was not the author of 40-66, because it is assumed that the local and historical allusions of a prophet must always be those of his own time (e.g. Allis 1950:129). If the prophet talks about the future, the future described must be the one toward which men living at the time had ‘a responsible relation by the choices they make; it is not a fated future...’ (Gottwald 1959:275). In line with this suggestion, Gottwald (1959:275) argues that interpreters who interpret the prophets as predictors of Jesus obscure the settings in which the prophets functioned.

Gottwald’s argument boils down to: (1) that it is contrary to the nature of prophecy for a prophet to predict beyond the generation in which he lives, and (2) that scripture which predicts events of a future century is a violation of the historical context of the Old Testament scriptures. The prophecy concerning Cyrus in 44 and 45, and Babylonian references were offered as evidence that these sections were not written by Isaiah. This means that prophetic biblical passages could be dated according to the historical setting they exhibit or describe. Evidently McKenzie (1985:397-403) took the prophecy assumption for
granted when he writes that the book Isaiah is a compendium of many types of prophecies from diverse periods. This observation was followed by an ‘analysis of contents’, in which the chapters and verses of the book Isaiah were divided and subdivided according to contents together with suggested dates for various passages.

Contrary to Gottwald’s above assumption, other writers maintain that (1) Isaiah, as a prophet of YHWH, and others inspired by YHWH, prophesied of events in generations yet to come; but (2) agree with the non-futuristic assumption of the historical theory, but still argue for a unity of the book. This was done on the assumption that editors had made minor changes to the text in order to emphasise fulfilment of a general prophecy uttered centuries earlier. Robinson (1960:1495-1508) rebutted the non-futuristic prophecy assumption when he insisted that it is not always possible to trace a mere snatch of sermonic discourse to a definite historical situation apart from its context because the prophets often spoke consciously, not only to their own generation, but also to the generations to come. For example, the prophecy about king Josiah in 1 Kings 13:1-2, the claim by John the Baptist in John 1:23 that he had already been announced by the prophet Isaiah (40:3), and the subjugation of Tyre by the Babylonians which was promised by Ezekiel and Zechariah before it took place (cf. Ezk 26:2-4; Zech 9:1-3). This argument apparently remains unchallenged.

The main theme of Is 40-66 is Israel’s promise of redemption and her mission to the world (cf. Cross & Livingstone 1974:716). While Israel wait for the redemption, Yhwh comforts them (40:1; 51:12; 52:9; 57:18; 61:1, 3; 66:13), instructs them not to be afraid (41:10, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2; 54:4, 14), by telling them of the good tidings (40:9; 52:7; 61:1; 66:19) and the salvation which is at hand (46:13; 49:23; 56:1; 60:20, 23; 62:1, 11; 66:20). Yhwh confirms this by elaborating on it by a court case (41:21; 44:8; 51:22). The author of Ecclesiasticus (Eccl), from the mid-second century BCE, writes that at the time of Hezekiah, Isaiah ‘comforted them that mourn in Zion’ by revealing things before they took place (Eccl 48:24-25).

Furthermore, we already know about the end of this world, the resurrection of the dead and the life-hereafter from the prophecy of John in the book Revelation (Rev 20-22). For those who argue that Isaiah prophesied only vaticinium ex eventu, this prophecy of John in Revelation 20-22 would be an embarrassment and inconceivable because John is now long dead, while the events are still to happen in the future. Why should 40-66 be treated differently then?

5 Evidence deduced from tradition

1994:268). But it should immediately be acknowledged that the word ‘author’ can be used inclusively or exclusively as meaning ‘one who brought something into being’ either by prophesying it and/or by writing it down (see also the meaning of ‘author’ in Macdonald 1981:86). The most obvious reasons for regarding Isaiah as the author of the prophecies in the book Isaiah could be the fact that the book bears his name in its first heading (1:1; cf. also Dillard and Longman III 1994:272) and that his utterances are found in the book, as already indicated above.

The rabbinic tradition (Baba Bathra 15a), the Early Church, and the Jewish and Christian interpreters regarded Isaiah to be the one who prophesied the prophecies in the book Isaiah (cf. Cross and Livingstone 1974:716; Dillard and Longman III 1994:268).

Josephus writes in Jewish Antiquities, Book XI, paragraph (i.1) and (2):

‘(i.1) ...Thus says King Cyrus. Since the Most High God has appointed me king of the habitable world, I am persuaded that He is the god whom the Israelite nation worships, for He foretold my name through the prophets and that I should build His temple in Jerusalem in the land of Judaea.’

‘(2) These things Cyrus knew from reading the book of prophecy which Isaiah had left behind two hundred and ten years earlier. For this prophet had said that God told him in secret, ‘It is my will that Cyrus, whom I shall have appointed king of many great nations, shall send my people to their own land and build my temple.’ Isaiah prophesied these things one hundred and forty years before the temple was demolished’.

The remarks by Ralph Marcus under footnote a on Josephus (1958:317) that ‘Actually the passage in Is. xliv. about the restoration under Cyrus was made, not by the prophet Isaiah who was a contemporary of Hezekiah in the late 8th century, but by a later prophet (whom scholars call Deutero-Isaiah for convenience) living in the 6th (or 5th) century’ does not satisfactorily refute evidence that the activities of Cyrus were prophesied long before they were executed. It is noteworthy that Josephus claims that Cyrus himself read about it in the book Isaiah.

**E SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

One may argue that the stance and conclusion in this article as to whether or not the book Isaiah is a unity is in most cases dictated by author’s conviction, world view and point of view. That may be the case in this article. But the weaknesses highlighted under C above and the evidence from Isaiah’s days, Isaiah’s activities, the book Isaiah, the other prophetic books, the New Testament, the nature of prophecy and tradition, as discussed in this article, together
suggest that the book Isaiah is most probably a unity or that its final form suggests that the final editor intended it to be a unity.

The compilation hypothesis is found to be based on speculative foundations of unverifiable sources/fragments or ‘Isaiahs’, hence less probable. This criticism against the compilation hypothesis could also be raised against the redaction hypothesis as it is also speculative because it is based on speculative and unverifiable redaction texts at redaction stages and redaction processes.

Whether or not the reader is convinced by the arguments in this article, I hope I have at least given you a sense of what is more probable under the circumstances about the (dis)unity of the book Isaiah.

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