

THE UNITY OF ISAIAH

Internal Considerations for the Dividing of Isaiah 40–66 from Isaiah 1–39 Answered

- I. Alleged Differences in Historical Circumstances
 - A. The Israelite monarchy is a thing of the past.
 1. The cities of Judah are ravaged and depopulated (62.4).
 2. Jerusalem and the temple lie in ruins (63.18; 64.9-11; 44.26, 28; 51.3; 52.9; 58.12; 60.10).
 3. The people are in Babylonian exile (42.22, 24; 52.2-3).
 - a. “The return from exile is always present to this seer’s thoughts.”¹
 - b. The time of punishment is over (49.1).
 - c. The object of the prophet is to prepare the exiles for approaching salvation and departure from Babylon (48.21; 52.11).²
 4. “These historical circumstances are not predicted for some time in the future, but are assumed to be existing in the *present* (44.26; 49.19; 51.3).”³
 5. In reply, Freeman mentions two basic approaches of conservative scholars.
 - a. First, “the standpoint of chapters 40–66 is *not* the Babylonian exile but the eighth century BC.”⁴
 - (1) The author of Isaiah 40–66 was a Palestinian writing from an eighth century Palestinian viewpoint.
 - (a) The writer shows an acquaintance with Palestinian geography (44.14; 40.4; 41.19).
 - (b) “The center of the prophet’s thought hovers over Zion and Jerusalem (40.2a; 41.27; 44.26).”⁵
 - (I) “In 40.9 the cities of Judah, as well as Zion, are yet in existence.”⁶
 - (ii) “In 62.9 the walls of Jerusalem are standing.”⁷

¹Orelli, 211.

²Ibid.

³Anderson, 442.

⁴Freeman, 197.

⁵Young, *WWI?*, 64.

⁶Young, *IOT*, 209.

⁷Ibid.

- (c) Babylon is depicted as distant.
 - (I) “In 43.14 the Lord speaks of sending to Babylon, a passage which is clearly addressed to those who are not in Babylon.”⁸
 - (ii) The phrase “the ends of the earth” (45.22; 41.9) is the Old Testament representation of nations and lands distant from Palestine.
 - (iii) “In 46.11 such phrases as ‘from the east’ and ‘from a far country’ are more understandable when spoken from a Palestinian viewpoint than from a Babylonian one.”⁹
 - (iv) The words “from thence” (52.11) clearly deny a Babylonian origin.
- (2) In chapters 40–66 the direct references to Babylon strikingly are few.
 - (a) In Isaiah 40–66 the word “Babylon” occurs only *four* times “whereas within Isaiah 1–39 the word occurs *nine times*, more than twice as often.”¹⁰
 - (b) “The word ‘Chaldeans’ occurs in 40–66 *five* times, but in 1–39 it is found only *twice*.”¹¹
- (3) Payne suggested that since 52.3-6 directly refers to deliverance from Assyrian captivity the background of 40–66 is the historical conditions of the eighth century.¹²
- (4) The evils of chapters 40–66 are the evils which prevailed in the time of the eighth-century Isaiah.
 - (a) Bloodshed and violence (1.15; 59.3, 7), injustice and oppression (10.1-2; 59.4-9), and hypocritical religion (29.13; 58.2, 4) are prevalent.
 - (b) “In 40–66 the author refers to an extreme degeneracy and breakdown of morals which accords with no known period of Jewish history so closely as with the age of Manasseh (cf. 2 Kings 21; Isaiah 59).”¹³

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Young, *WWI?*, 61.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Freeman, 198.

¹³Archer, 341.

- (5) The widespread idolatrous practices of the people referred to in Isaiah 40–66 indicate a preexilic date.
- (a) Isaiah 44.9-20 (cf. 57.4-5) suggests idolatry to be a major problem in contemporary Judah.
 - (b) The sacrificing of babies to Molech and Adrammelech was carried on during Manasseh's reign (2 Kings 21.6; 2 Chronicles 33.6).¹⁴
 - (c) Isaiah 57.7, an allusion to worship in the high places, refers to "a type of worship which flourished in the preexilic period but never thereafter."¹⁵
 - (d) But conclusive is the fact that postexilic Jews were not familiar with idol worship.
 - (I) "The terrible ordeal of the Babylonian captivity had brought about a complete rejection of graven images on the part of the Jewish remnant."¹⁶
 - (ii) Furthermore, none of the postexilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) or chroniclers (Ezra, Nehemiah) even hint at the practice of idolatry.
 - (e) Orelli argued against this conclusion by affirming "it is quite in the nature of things that before the impenitent the prophet should rather speak in the strain of the preexilian prophets, charge on them the sins of their fathers, and rebuke the present rulers as the former ones were rebuked."¹⁷
 - (f) But "if this section was written in Babylon by an unknown prophet of the exile, as liberal scholars have so commonly assumed, it is curious that the author should have been so actively preoccupied with something which had long since been a dead issue."¹⁸

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 342.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Orelli, 213.

¹⁸Harrison, 779.

- b. Second, “the standpoint of chapters 40–66 is the exile, since this is precisely the writer’s intention. . . . It is ideal, not a real standpoint.”¹⁹
- (1) This standpoint is that of the eighth century Isaiah who “has withdrawn entirely from his actual present and leads here a life in the spirit among the exiles.”²⁰
 - (2) Hence, “the question is merely whether one believes in the biblical view of prophecy whereby God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit can reveal the future to his prophets.”²¹
 - (3) But this view of spiritual projection has its objectors.
 - (a) Although Driver admits that prophets sometimes “throw themselves forward to an ideal standpoint, and describe from it events future to themselves, as though they were past,”²² he objects to any sustained projection in Isaiah on the basis of his *analogy of prophecy*.
 - (I) The prophet always speaks to his own contemporaries.
 - (ii) “The message which he brings is intimately related with the circumstances of his time.”²³
 - (iii) The prophet’s promises and predictions rest on the historical basis of his own age.
 - (iv) “The prophet never abandons his own historical position, but speaks from it.”²⁴
 - (b) Anderson argues similarly and says that the prophets “were not clairvoyants who gazed into a crystal ball, as it were, and predicted the details of a political situation far in the future. . . . Their predictions about the future were oriented to the present situation of Israel.”²⁵

¹⁹Freeman, 198.

²⁰Delitzsch, 73.

²¹Freeman, 198.

²²Driver, 224.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Anderson, 444.

- (4) But “no scholar holds the theory in this form, for by its own principles it demands to be carried much further.”²⁶
 - (a) Based on this criterion many other passages must be declared as not from Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 13.1–14.27, etc.)
 - (b) Moreover, “the critics’ objection loses its force by their own admission that such instances do occur but to a lesser degree.”²⁷
- (5) Furthermore, this lengthy projection is not without biblical parallels (e.g., Ezekiel 40–48; Nahum 2–3; the book of Revelation).
6. However, the best refutation of the liberal’s alleged historical differences is not an either/or route as Freeman suggests, but rather a combination of the two.
 - a. The prophet writes from an eighth century Palestinian perspective.
 - b. And the prophet through God’s Spirit bore witness to future events of significance to his eighth-century audience.
- B. The ruling world power is not Assyria but Babylon (chapter 47).
 1. As before, this argument fails to give credit to the reality of predictive prophecy.
 2. And, the Babylonian emphasis of chapters 40–66 harmonizes perfectly with the total structure of the book of Isaiah.
 - a. “The first thirty-nine chapters constitute a staircase, as it were, which gradually leads one from the Assyrian to the Babylonian period.”²⁸
 - b. Chapter 39 depicts the *situation* leading to the concluding chapters.
 - (1) Hezekiah’s boastful actions merited rebuke.
 - (2) So Isaiah declared to Hezekiah that “the time is coming when Babylon will succeed in doing what Assyria had failed to do.”²⁹
 - (3) “What more natural, then, than that the tenderhearted prophet . . . should direct his gaze toward that future which seemed so weighed with disaster and should hear the voice of his God saying to him: ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people’?”³⁰

²⁶Kidner, 589.

²⁷Freeman, 199.

²⁸Young, *WWI?*, 71.

²⁹Allis, 48.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

- C. Cyrus of Persia is mentioned two times (44.28; 45.1).
1. The appearance of Cyrus is not *predicted* but is “assumed as fact known to the readers.”³¹
 - a. According to 41.2f., Cyrus “has already made his appearance in history as a victorious conqueror.”³²
 - b. A preexilic prophet could not have “regarded Cyrus as the restorer of the fortunes of the Jews. For it is clear that Cyrus has initiated his great conquests (41.2f.; 45.1-4; 46.11; 48.14f.) and is on his way toward Babylon (41.25; 43.14).”³³
 - c. So, “Cyrus, in short, is not presented as a prediction, but as the proof that a prediction is being fulfilled. Unless he had already appeared in flesh and blood, and was on the point of attacking Babylon, with all the prestige of unbroken victory, a great part of Isaiah 41–48 would be utterly unintelligible.”³⁴
 2. How could Isaiah have predicted the name of Cyrus who lived some hundred and sixty years after his time?
 - a. “No one who believes in a living, personal, omniscient God and in the possibility of His revealing future events will ever deny that He possesses the power to foretell the name of a future monarch.”³⁵
 - b. “The Bible does not hesitate to specify the names of men and places even centuries in advance.”³⁶
 - (1) “Josiah’s reign was foretold about three centuries in advance and his name was given (1 Kings 13.1-2).”³⁷
 - (2) “Bethlehem is named by Micah (5.2) as the birthplace of the coming Messiah, seven centuries before the birth of the Lord Jesus.”³⁸

³¹Skinner, xx.

³²Weiser, 198.

³³Pfeiffer, 456.

³⁴Smith, 9-10.

³⁵Young, *BOI*, 546-547.

³⁶Archer, 333.

³⁷Freeman, 203.

³⁸Archer, 333.

- (3) “Other exact prophecies are the seventy years of exile by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25.11-12; 29.10), Daniel’s mention of Christ (Daniel 9.24-26), Zechariah’s of the piercing of the Shepherd (12.10) and of his being sold for thirty pieces of silver (11.13), and Ezekiel’s and Zechariah’s against Tyre (Ezekiel 26–27; Zechariah 9.1-8).”³⁹
- c. Also, “the historical situation confronting Isaiah in 690 BC gave ample warrant for so unusual a sign as the prediction of Cyrus by name 150 years in advance of the fall of Babylon.”⁴⁰
 - (1) Judah’s low religious and moral conditions were such that “the very honor of God demanded a total destruction of the kingdom and a removal of the populace into exile.”⁴¹
 - (2) But because such an ordeal never before had transpired, “there was no prospect that the dispersed Judah of a future generation would ever return to the land of promise.”⁴²
 - (3) So, it was appropriate for God to provide a definite sign indicating coming deliverance and restoration to Palestine.
 - (4) The sign was supplied in the giving of the name of the future redeemer of the Jews.
- d. Cyrus is appointed for his task long before he appeared on the stage of history (48.5; cf. 45.21).
- e. Although there is the “rather startling commingling of past, present, and future”⁴³ in reference to Cyrus, Allis regards the presence of this climactic arrangement in Isaiah 44.24-28 as irrefutable proof of the eighth-century Isaiah as author.
 - (1) The prophet constructed the poem according to a definite chronological sequence “with the three logical divisions of past, present, and future clearly indicated.”⁴⁴
 - (2) The first strophe refers to the remote past, the second to contemporary events, and the third to the distant future.

³⁹Raven, 188-189.

⁴⁰Archer, 333.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Allis, 52.

⁴⁴Ibid.

- (3) “The mention of Cyrus by name in the last line of this strophe is clearly a climax of definiteness and supplies the reason for the remarkable construction of the poem.”⁴⁵
- (4) If the aim of the prophet had been to depict conditions of the exile, the structure of the Cyrus poem is ill calculated.
- (5) But since the poem clearly depicts Cyrus as a future character, the mention of his name becomes an argument for the unity of Isaiah instead of against it.

II. Alleged Differences in Language and Style

- A. Those who deny the unity of Isaiah “affirm that there are very different and marked contrasts in style between Isaiah I (1–39) and Isaiah II (40–66), and that these can be accounted for only by a difference in the author.”⁴⁶
 1. “The study of vocabulary, poetic structure, and meter gives further support for the view that the poems in Isaiah 40–66 were written by an author other than Isaiah of Jerusalem.”⁴⁷
 2. “The oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem are expressed in a balanced, stately, poetic form that was appropriate to the seriousness of his warnings of the impending day of disaster. In the last section of the book, however, we encounter poetry of great beauty and power.”⁴⁸
 3. Chapters 40–66 are “characterized by a certain uniformity, by repetitions, by the prominence of particular types of speech, namely oracles of salvation, songs of lament and thanksgiving, hymns and controversies, whilst the genuine prophetic forms of speech are remarkably scarce.”⁴⁹
 4. These arguments may be classed into three basic groups.
 - a. Various words and expressions appearing in 40–66 do not appear in the earlier portions of the book.
 - b. “Isaiah’s style is stately, terse and grave, whereas the prophet of 40–66 is more flowing, lyrical, warm, and impassioned.”⁵⁰
 - c. “Personification” and “dramatic representation” frequent chapters 40–66.⁵¹

⁴⁵Ibid., 79.

⁴⁶Archer, 344.

⁴⁷Anderson, 442.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Weiser, 198.

⁵⁰Freeman, 197.

⁵¹Driver, 228.

- B. But the argument from style may be refuted sufficiently with three basic points.
1. First, “such literary arguments are wholly subjective and always precarious.”⁵²
 - a. Any author’s style can be derived only from works attributed to him.
 - b. Therefore, “to derive our knowledge of his style from a part of that book on the presumption that he wrote it and then to deny him as author of the remainder of the book is reasoning in a circle.”⁵³
 - c. Further, this type of argumentation (i.e., that an author only can write in one style) drastically limits the author’s artistic ability.
 2. Second, whatever changes in language and style there are can be explained.
 - a. The change in subject matter in chapters 40–66, and especially the ideal standpoint from which they are written, account for these variations.⁵⁴
 - b. Kidner notes, if chapters 40–66 are Isaiah’s at all, “they are the product of his old age; a message written, not preached; concerned to comfort rather than warn; directed to a future generation with scarcely a glance at the present. These are immense differences.”⁵⁵
 - c. “It would be still more extraordinary if so radical a shift of situation, method, and object were to produce no great change of thought and expression.”⁵⁶
 3. Third, “against the divergences there are striking points of similarity.”⁵⁷
 - a. “There are innumerable linguistic parallels between the two parts.”⁵⁸
 - (1) “Conservative scholars have pointed out at least forty or fifty sentences or phrases which appear in both parts of Isaiah, and indicate a common author.”⁵⁹

⁵²Freeman, 200.

⁵³Raven, 189.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Kidner, 590.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ridderbos, 573.

⁵⁸Margalioth, 34.

⁵⁹Archer, 345; cf. Raven, 190ff.

- (2) And Margalioth has found many similar or common expressions in each of the following areas: designations of God (“Holy One of Israel”), designations of the people of Israel (“the plant of the Lord”), formulas of prophecy (“the Lord will say”), Zion and Jerusalem, the ingathering of the exiles, messages of consolation, expressions of joy and gladness, the universal millennium, words of admonition, words of chastisement, thesis and antithesis, and so forth.⁶⁰
 - b. Even Skinner agrees with this large number of common expressions, but he attempts to evade the force of the argument by affirming that “on examination these lists shrink to very insignificant dimensions, and really prove little more than that both sections are written in good Hebrew.”⁶¹
 - c. But his rebuttal does not take account of the fact that many of these similar words and phrases appear seldom in the Old Testament outside of Isaiah and some not at all.
 - d. Others have sought to attribute these similarities to the influence of Isaiah on a later writer.
 - e. But as Archer aptly states, “This type of evasion appears to savor of circular reasoning: Isaiah II must have been written by a different author from Isaiah I because of the stylistic differences; but where the most striking stylistic similarities are pointed out, these indicate only that the later author was a pupil or imitator of the original author.”⁶²
- III. Alleged Differences in Theological Ideas
- A. Three basic divergences in theological conceptions of chapters 40–66 from the earlier chapters are postulated.
 1. Isaiah depicts the majesty of Jehovah, but in 40–66 the prophet emphasizes his infinitude.⁶³
 - a. Chapters 1–39 exalted Jehovah above all other gods.
 - b. But “the remaining chapters of the prophecy denied their very existence, and instead discussed the concept of God as the sole deity.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰Margalioth, 43ff.

⁶¹Skinner, xlv.

⁶²Archer, 345.

⁶³Driver, 229.

⁶⁴Harrison, 775.

2. The doctrine of a remnant is characteristic of Isaiah (6.13), but “in 40–66 it is present only by implication (59.20), and not expressed in Isaiah’s terminology.”⁶⁵
 3. The Messianic King (9.6-7) of 1–39 is replaced by the concept of Yahweh’s Servant (52.13–53.12) of 40–66.
- B. But the “differences in theological ideas are to be accounted for in the same way as the differences in style.”⁶⁶
1. Due to the lofty subject matter, the theological ideas are broader and more elevated (cf. Zechariah 9–14).
 2. And the concepts of 40–66 are not “different” ideas from those expressed in 1–39, but rather they are logical compliments.
 - a. “There is no doctrine set forth in 40–66 which is not already contained, in germ at least, in 1–39.”⁶⁷
 - b. And these prophecies of 1–39 “lead up to the prediction of a devastating historical punishment which poses serious theological problems in view of the doctrines and promises set out elsewhere in those chapters.”⁶⁸
 - c. Thus, chapters 40–66 are “a solution without which 1–39 would end in unresolved discord.”⁶⁹
 - d. And “if a prophet can be inspired to declare God’s truth in the context of history, . . . it is no great demand that he should also be inspired to find the solutions to the theological problems raised by those revelations.”⁷⁰
 - (1) “The Messiah, who had appeared in earlier passages as a king of the Davidic lineage, was subsequently described in terms of the divine Servant (cf. Isaiah 55.3).”⁷¹
 - (2) The monotheistic conception of God was heightened due to the overwhelming influx of idolatry in the reign of the wicked Manasseh.

⁶⁵Freeman, 197.

⁶⁶Raven, 192.

⁶⁷Archer, 347.

⁶⁸Kidner, 590.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Harrison, 777.

- (3) And the doctrine of the remnant is not omitted from 40–66 “for the precise reason that the entire section concerns the salvation and deliverance of a remnant both in Israel and from among the Gentiles.”⁷²

⁷²Freeman, 201.

QUOTATIONS FROM ISAIAH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT⁷³

<u>NT Reference</u>	<u>Introductory Phrase</u>	<u>Passage Quoted</u>	<u>Section/Source</u>
Matthew 3.3	the prophet Isaiah	Isaiah 40.3	II Isaiah
Matthew 8.17	Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 53.4	II or III Isaiah
Matthew 12.17	Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 42.1	II Isaiah
Matthew 13.14	the prophecy of Isaiah	Isaiah 6.9, 10	I Isaiah
Matthew 15.7	Isaiah prophesied	Isaiah 29.13	I Isaiah
Mark 1.2	in Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 40.3	II Isaiah
Mark 7.6	Isaiah prophesied	Isaiah 29.13	I Isaiah
Luke 3.4	in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 40.3-5	II Isaiah
Luke 4.17	the book of the prophet Isaiah	Isaiah 61.1, 2	III Isaiah
John 1.23	the prophet Isaiah	Isaiah 40.3	II Isaiah
John 12.38	Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 53.1	II or III Isaiah
John 12.39	Isaiah said again	Isaiah 6.9, 10	I Isaiah
John 12.41	Isaiah . . . said . . . saw . . . spake	Isaiah 53.1; 6.9, 10	I & II Isaiah
Acts 8.28	reading Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 53.7-8	II or III Isaiah
Acts 8.30	reading the prophet Isaiah	Isaiah 53.7-8	II or III Isaiah
Acts 8.32	the passage of the scripture	Isaiah 53.7-8	II or III Isaiah
Acts 28.25	well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet	Isaiah 6.9, 10	I Isaiah
Romans 9.27	Isaiah cries	Isaiah 10.22, 23	I Isaiah
Romans 9.29	as Isaiah said before	Isaiah 1.9	I Isaiah
Romans 10.16	Isaiah says	Isaiah 53.1	II or III Isaiah
Romans 10.20	Isaiah becomes bold and says	Isaiah 65.1	III Isaiah

⁷³Adapted from Edward J. Young's *An Introduction to the Old Testament*.

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