

Isaiah 7:14
Identity and Function within the Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah

by

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

2008

Declaration

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	vi
Key Terms	viii
Chapter One:	
Misconceptions and Issues Regarding the Understanding of Isaiah 7:14	
I. Introduction: Justin Martyr and <i>Dialogues with Trypho</i>	1
II. Two Fundamental Problems.....	5
1. The Traditional Church Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.....	5
2. The Historical and Literary Context of Isaiah 7:14.....	6
III. An Overview of the Evolution of Modern Biblical Methodologies.....	8
IV. The Shortcomings of Historical-Critical Methods.....	11
V. Provan, Long, and Longman: The Historical Reliability of the Bible.....	16
VI. Provan, Long, and Longman: The Bible as Literature.....	26
VII. Michael Fishbane: Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel.....	27
VIII. The Bible: History, Literature, and Prophecy.....	32
IX. An Understanding of the Historical Reliability of Biblical Texts.....	35
X. The Main Arguments of this Thesis.....	39
1. Isaiah 7:14 is a Prophecy about Hezekiah.....	39
2. A Revised Chronology of II Kings 16-20.....	39
3. The Primacy of Isaiah 36-39 over II Kings 18-20.....	40
4. The Historical Reliability and Literary Coherence of Isaiah 36-39.....	40
5. The Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah and the Historical Impetus for the Writing of Proto-Isaiah.....	41

XI. Looking Forward: The Chapters of this Thesis.....	41
1. Chapter Two: Exegetical Issues Concerning Isaiah 7:14.....	42
2. Chapter Three: The Chronological Problems in II Kings 16-20.....	42
3. Chapter Four: Historical Reliability/Literary Coherence of Isaiah 36-39..	43
4. Chapter Five: The Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah.....	43
5. Appendixes: Chronological Charts, Parallel Texts, and Thematic Strands of Emphasis	43

Chapter Two: Isaiah 7:14 in its Immediate Context

I. Introduction.....	45
II. Past Scholarship of Isaiah 7:14.....	46
1. The View that Immanuel is Jesus.....	49
2. The View that Immanuel is a General Term.....	53
3. The View that Immanuel is Isaiah’s son.....	54
4. The View that Immanuel is Hezekiah.....	58
5. Concluding Thoughts Regarding Past Scholarship.....	61
III. Textual Variants of Isaiah 7:14 in MT, DSS, and LXX.....	65
1. The Meaning of the Word עִלְמָה 65	65
2. The Proper Understanding of הֶרְהַר 77	77
3. The Naming of the Child.....	79
4. The Significance of the Name עִמָּנוּ-אֵל 80	80
IV. Isaiah 7:14 within the Larger Context of Isaiah 7:13-25.....	82
V. Isaiah 7:13-25 within the Larger Context of Isaiah 7-12.....	87
VI. Final Comments.....	98

Chapter Three: The Problem of Chronology in II Kings 16-20

I. Introduction.....	100
II. Overview of the Relevant Texts Regarding Ahaz and Hezekiah.....	104
III. Chronological Problems in II Kings 16-20.....	111
IV. Note on the Lunar and Solar Calendars.....	113
V. Possible Answers to the Chronological Problems in II Kings 16-20.....	115
1. Scenario One: 721 BCE as Hezekiah’s Sixth Year as King.....	116
2. Scenario Two: 701 BCE as Hezekiah’s Fourteenth Year as King.....	117
3. Further Problems with the Chronology of II Kings.....	118
VI. Making Sense of the Chronology of II Kings.....	119
1. <i>The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings</i> : Edwin Thiele.....	120
2. <i>Did Thiele Overlook Hezekiah’s Co-regency?</i> : Leslie McFall.....	129
3. <i>The Date of Hezekiah’s Birth</i> : John McHugh.....	132
4. <i>The Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah</i> : J. Barton Payne.....	133
VII. Proposed Revisions to the Chronologies of Ahaz and Hezekiah.....	135

Chapter Four: Isaiah 36-39 vs. II Kings 18-20: Priority and Historical Reliability

I. Introduction.....	143
II. Isaiah 36-39 and its Parallels in II Kings 18-20 and II Chronicles 29-32.....	146
III. Overview of the Scholarship Regarding Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18-20.....	148
1. The Priority of II Kings 18-20 over Isaiah 36-39.....	149
2. II Kings 18-20: Sources, Literary Structure, and Historical Reliability...	151
3. Isaiah 36-39: Literary Structure, Date, and Purpose.....	155
IV. The Shortcomings of the Prevailing Current Scholarship.....	156
V. R.E. Clements: <i>Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem</i>	159

VI. A Question of Priority: Isaiah 36-39 or II Kings 18-20.....	169
VII. The Literary Unity of Isaiah 36-39.....	174
VIII. The Occasion and Purpose of Isaiah 36-39.....	177
IX. Historical Reliability of the Biblical Accounts of Sennacherib’s Invasion.....	188
X. A Proposed Understanding of Sennacherib’s Invasion.....	195
XI. Final Thoughts on Isaiah 36-39 and the Occasion for Proto-Isaiah.....	197

Chapter Five:

The Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah: Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39

I. Introduction.....	200
II. The Structure of Proto-Isaiah.....	201
III. Intertextuality within the Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah.....	207
IV. Recurring Themes and Motifs throughout Proto-Isaiah.....	210
V. The Narrative Artistry of the Three Strands of Emphasis.....	212
VI. The Literary Parallels between Isaiah 7-12 and Isaiah 36-39.....	222
1. Announcement of Foreign Oppression.....	223
2. The Conduit of the Upper Pool on the Highway to the Fuller’s Field.....	225
3. A Sign.....	225
4. Isaiah’s Appeal not to be Afraid.....	227
5. The Basis for Confidence.....	228
6. The Zeal of YHWH.....	229
7. The Focus on Assyria.....	229
8. Assyria’s Arrogance and Boasting.....	230
9. References to Egypt.....	234
10. The Glory of the Jewish King as a Standard for the Nations.....	235
11. A Concluding Chapter of Praise to YHWH.....	236
12. The Remnant.....	236

13. Agricultural Imagery.....	238
14. Planning and Counsel.....	240
VII. Similar Parallels in II Kings 16-20.....	245
VIII. Final Thoughts on the Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah.....	249

Chapter Six:
Conclusions: Coming to a True Understanding of Immanuel

I. Introduction.....	251
II. A Review of the Findings of this Thesis.....	252
III. The Significance of this Thesis to Old Testament Studies.....	257
IV. Further Implications this Thesis has for New Testament Studies.....	259

Appendixes

I. Appendix A: Accompanying Charts to Chapter 3: Chronological Problems.....	263
II. Appendix B: Comparison of Isaiah 36-37 and II Kings 18-19.....	267
III. Appendix C: The Three Strands of Emphasis in Proto-Isaiah.....	272

Abstract

Title: Isaiah 7:14: Identity and Function within the Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah

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This thesis seeks to show that the traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 equating Immanuel with Hezekiah is correct by demonstrating how it helps us understand the literary bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah. The traditional interpretation of the early Church Fathers, along with the tendency within modern biblical scholarship to both divide literary and historical concerns and hold to an unhealthy suspicion of the biblical text, has long prevented a clear understanding of this verse.

The most viable interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 is that the עִלְמָה was either Ahaz's wife or concubine and that Immanuel was Hezekiah. The prevailing objection to this view, that the chronology of II Kings 16-20 does not allow for it, is baseless because the chronology itself is deeply flawed: Hezekiah could not have been in his sixth year when Samaria fell (727 BCE) and in his fourteenth year when Sennacherib invaded Judah (701 BCE). We attribute these chronological errors to two probable scribal errors. Once resolved, we see that the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah remains a historical possibility.

This identification is further solidified when we look at the bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah, specifically chapters 7-12 and 36-39. This thesis asserts that chapters 36-39 were written shortly after the death of Hezekiah, when Manasseh was restoring pagan worship in Judah. In reaction to such actions, scribes faithful to YHWH collected the prophecies of Isaiah, wrote their account of Sennacherib's invasion and of other events during Hezekiah's reign, and fashioned them into Proto-Isaiah, making numerous intertextual connections between Isaiah's earlier prophecies and their account of Hezekiah's reign. Their aim was to show Isaiah as a true prophet of YHWH and Hezekiah as the righteous and faithful king about whom Isaiah prophesied during Ahaz's reign. The devastation wrought by Sennacherib was a consequence of Ahaz's lack of faith in YHWH and Jerusalem's deliverance came about as a result of Hezekiah's demonstration of faith in YHWH. Thus the sections of Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39 serve as literary bookends that shape the entire structure of Proto-Isaiah by highlighting the similar circumstances, yet completely contrary characters, of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Key Terms

Biblical Criticism: The study of biblical writings that seeks to make discerning judgments about these writings. The most notable criticisms are form, source, redaction, canon, and narrative.

Falsification Principle: The practice by some scholars in which the historical reliability of a text is assumed unless there are good reasons to consider them unreliable.

Inner-biblical Exegesis: The process in which ancient Israelite scribes received previous authoritative texts and creatively reinterpreted and reapplied them in light of their present situation in order to preserve and pass on what they believed to be God's revealed Word to his people.

Intertextuality: The phenomenon of a text quoting, alluding to, or echoing an earlier text, and thus whose meaning is shaped by that earlier text.

Signifier: The actual word that acts as an identifier of something.

Signified: The actual concept that comes to mind when we hear the signifying word.

Textual Variant: An alternative reading within a biblical text.

Traditio: The reinterpretation and reapplication of received authoritative biblical texts that seek to preserve God's revealed word for the scribe's present situation.

Traditum: Earlier authoritative biblical texts that are creatively reinterpreted and reapplied by scribal exegetes to their present situation.

Verification Principle: The practice by some scholars in which they determine the historical reliability of a text by seeing if certain historical claims are verified by other texts or evidence.