

CHAPTER IV. THE PROHIBITION OF MAKING ANY IMAGE OF GOD IN ISAIAH 40:18-20

4.0 Introduction

Many studies have tried to explain the meaning of Isaiah 40:18-20, which have been one of the most polemic passages in Isaiah and in the whole of the Old Testament (Cf. Spykerboer 1976:35-46; Holter 1995:15; Dick 1999). These studies share the view the idea of God's incomparability stems from the theological crisis of the exilic period of Israelite history. Holter (2003:112) suggests that "Second Isaiah's polemics against idol-fabrication provides clear parallels" to legal commandments prohibiting cult images. Holter (2003:112; cf. Holter 1995:203-206) regards "the series of rhetorical *וְיִשְׁאַל* - questions which introduce the four idol-fabrication passages: Isaiah 40:18/19-20; 41:4/6-7; 44:7/9-20; 46:5/6-7...that the rhetorical function of accentuating Yahweh's incomparability" as the parallel preventing Yahweh from being understood like the other gods, who are known through their image and thus securing God's incomparability. Holter's (2003:112) idea that God's incomparability stems from the background against theological crisis of Yahweh's monotheism in Israel's exilic period is shared by other scholars. Dohmen (1985:38; cf. Dick 1999:2) represents that the strict aniconic monotheism as a late response to the theological crises of the Babylonian Exile (586 B. C. E.) is shared with Deutero-Isaiah's polemic arguments. Dick (1999:2) summaries it as follows:

The theological stress of 586 B.C.E. assured both [the] triumph of Yahwistic monotheism and of aniconic worship: Yahweh's cult had probably always been

iconic, but now there were no god but Yahweh, so there was utterly no room for any cult image. The prophetic parodies respond to the same contemporary crises. Although they stem from different traditions, the legal and the prophetic understandings of a monotheistic and aniconic Yahwism cope with the same catastrophe.

Dick (1999:2) follows Dohmen (1985), who suggests that legal texts in the Old Testament, especially in the legal commandments prohibiting cult images (*'Bilderverbot'*)¹⁰⁴ stems from the theological crisis of Israelite religion in exilic period. Dick (1999:2) starts out from Dohmen's (1985) supposition that legal commandments prohibiting cult images and prophetic idol parodies are all products of 6th-century BCE redactions and are the results of an evolution of prohibiting divine images (Ex 20:4, 23; 34:17; Lv 19:4; 26:1; Dt 4:15ff.; 27:15) and relates essentially it to the prophetic idol parodies.

Dick (1996:16) says that "the voice of prophets of the criticism against the making images come from other independent Hellenistic thought", which is not related the early Sinaitic tradition, is supposed. As Oswalt (1998:63; cf. 1986:34-35; Sarna 1986:144) points out, one who assumes that such a concept was risen as a result of a long process of theological evolution has some burden to prove their thesis: "They must prove that the winners, the anti-idolaters, had to rewrite all the documents of Israel's past to their own advantage, because the present text is univocal on this subject." Nevertheless, it is

¹⁰⁴ According to Dohmen (1985:38; cf. Dick 1999:1), there are five different types of texts in the Hebrew Bible that deal with cult images. Dohmen (1985:36-37) wisely differentiates between the Bild ('image'), Götterbild ('divine image'), and Kultbild ('cult image'). Dohmen (1985:38) insists that "image ban" texts can be dated prior to the fall of the Northern kingdom.

noteworthy for him to pay attention to the fact that the same theological theme on the prohibition of making of cult image is shared with the prophetic parodies (Cf. Dick 1999:16-45).

These studies have mainly concentrated on the critique of idol-fabrication, that is, making images of other gods and comparing Yahweh with an idol of other god or its fabricator.¹⁰⁵ From this passage, there can, however, be a discussion on the prohibition of making any image of God. On account of God's incomparability, interpreting it as the command to forbid any making of an image of God can be justified. This study will try to show that Isaiah 40:18-20, not only prohibits the making and serving of other gods and their images, but also forbids the making of any image of God himself to worship him.

Firstly, this chapter will try to give exegetical confirmation for the conclusion that the incomparability of God requires the prohibition of the "worship of God through an image" in Isaiah 40:18-20, in relation with its macro-unit as the context of the passage.

Secondly, the theological-thematic consideration of Isaiah 40:18-20 will be discussed in this chapter. The prohibition of making any image of God will be dealt with in the context of God's incomparability.

¹⁰⁵ Such passages are intended to establish a comparison between the idol or the created one and the creator, Yahweh (Guillet 1959:428-434; Beuken 1979:215-217; Clifford 1980:450-464; Leene 1984:111-121). Holter (1995:29; Rudman 1999:114-121) argues that the author depicts the idol-fabricators as Yahweh's adversaries, who somehow challenge his incomparability in all idol-fabrication passages. Holter differs with other scholars who say that Yahweh is contrasted with the other gods or idols as his adversaries.

Thirdly, the comparison of the prohibition of making any image of God in Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 will be represented. Both texts show a negative attitude toward the worship of God through an image. This similarity between two texts, firstly, can be seen in respect of its linguistic aspects. Inner-biblical interpretation can be employed as a means of exploring the linguistic aspects of the correlation between the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct and the passage dealing with God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20. Secondly, the theological-thematic continuity of the prohibition of making any image of God within the context of God's incomparability as found in the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct in the book of Isaiah can be indicated. Isaiah's message is in line with the Pentateuch's. The prophet is the plenipotentiary of God to condemn the transgression of the covenantal law. This study will be a try comparing the contents of the prophet Isaiah's accusation with certain of the Pentateuchal laws (Cf. Bergen 1974:161ff.). It illustrates the correspondence in the content between the prophetic accusation and the Pentateuchal legislation.

4.1 Exegetical consideration of Isaiah 40:18-20

Isaiah 40:18-20 is to be read within the context of its macro unit Isaiah 40:12-31. Isaiah 40:18-20 will be analyzed from this perspective against this macro units. It will also analyze other passages in Isaiah 40-55 dealing with God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God: Isaiah 41:1-7, 44:6-20 and 46:5-7, and the book of Isaiah as a whole.

A striking feature of the pericope in Isaiah 40:12-31 is the accumulation of rhetorical questions. The relation between these questions and the answers surrounding these questions have to be focused upon.

Within the larger unit of Isaiah 40-55, the pattern of a rhetorical question emphasizing the incomparability of Yahweh, followed by an idol-fabrication passage, is no exception. The other idol-fabrication passages in Isaiah 40-55 like Isaiah 40:18-20, use the structure of the *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל*-question and an idol-fabrication.

Isaiah 40:18-20 will also be placed in the context of the book of Isaiah as a whole. Treating the book of Isaiah as a unified composition is an adequate way to read and understand it (O'Connell 1994:15). As Oswalt (1986:31; cf. Clements 1982: 117-129) remarks, "the book of Isaiah is a great theological document that can be elucidating when we read the book of Isaiah as a whole. It cannot be interpreted unless we recognize that independent literary units are structured together to form larger units and these again structured into still larger units, forming the book as a whole." Each unit contributes to the larger unit forming a unity, probably written by a single author dealing with prophetic covenant disputation.

In the following analysis of Isaiah 40:18-20, this study will discuss a few exegetical questions and structural features and confront the findings with the thesis of this study: does this passage show the relation between the incomparability of God and his prohibition of making any image of God to worship him?

4.1.1. The exegesis of Isaiah 40:18-20

4.1.1.1 Isaiah 40:18

Holter (1995:60) shows that the function of the rhetorical question **מִי**,¹⁰⁶ is to emphasize the incomparability of Yahweh in verse 18.¹⁰⁷

According to Labuschagne (1966:29; cf. Young 1972:51), the piel of **דָּמָה** in verse 18a is a synonym for the qal of **עָרַךְ** in v. 18b,¹⁰⁸ meaning “to resemble, to be like in outward appearance, to look like” or “to liken, to compare” (Cf. Labuschane 1966:16-23). As Holter (1995:67) indicates, an interesting feature of **דָּמָה**, is that in all its Qal, Pi’el and Hithpa’el forms it is respectively found in texts that-explicitly or implicitly-affirm the incomparability of Yahweh (Cf. Ps 89:7; Is 40:18, 25; 46:5; Is 14:14). Holter

¹⁰⁶ In general, rhetorical questions address people who already know the answer (Gitay, 1981:81). The point of what these rhetorical questions address is rather the contents of the address, but the form of address. According to Gitay (1981:81), “the primary issue in understanding this series of questions centers on the prophet’s purpose in utilizing such a form of address.” Abrams (1971:149) also stresses this as follows: these questions are asked “not to evoke an actual reply, but to achieve an emphasis stronger than a direct statement.” According to Gitay (1981:88), “although the addressees are not required to answer, the fact that they are addressed with this kind of question causes them to respond, and thus, to take an active role in the persuasive process.”

What is the relationship between these rhetorical questions and the passages between them? Although the answer to a rhetorical question is self-evident, some kind of a reply is occasionally given, especially in poetic texts (Watson 1984:338-342, especially in 338). It is the basic feature of Old Testament rhetorical questions that they do not need “answers”, at least not in the normal meaning of the word. For an introductory survey of how rhetorical questions are used in the Old Testament, Watson (1984:338) defines a rhetorical question as “... a question which requires no answer, since either the speaker or the listener (or even both of them) already knows the answer.” Schökel (1988:150-152) also distinguishes between “rhetorical questions in the strict sense”, into which category he places the questions in Isaiah 40:12ff., and “wisdom questions”. The latter being defined as questions a teacher puts to his students to arouse their interests and provoke their collaboration. For further discussion see Gordis 1932-33:212-217, and Held 1969:71-79. While the stress on the function of rhetorical questions, this study focuses on the contents contained in the rhetorical questions with recognition of the rhetorical function of the questions.

¹⁰⁷ In the wider context, this use of **מִי** “who” can be seen clearer. O’Connell (1994:163f.) represents the use of complex framework which the rhetoric question **מִי** is seen.

¹⁰⁸ According to Holter (1995:70), **עָרַךְ** is used with **דָּמָה** as **דָּמָה תַּעֲרֹכֶנּוּ** in verse 18 and which is paralleled with **דָּמָה**, and corresponds to **תִּדְמֶינִי** in 46:5.

(1995:68) also points out that “the accumulation of קָדְשׁ in the introductory question, which makes it evident that this word plays an important role, is significant in relation with God’s incomparability, being used as a *terminus technicus* to utter dealing with the incomparability of Yahweh.” (Holter 1995:68; cf. Spykerboer 1976:36)

In verse 18 the name אֱל , “El” is used for God.¹⁰⁹ According to Elliger (1978:72), when it is used without an article, it is “comparable with our word ‘God’”.¹¹⁰ In the progress of the argument that runs from verse 18 to verse 20, there is seen the purpose to choose and use El as the name for God (Baltzer 2001:73). According to Oswalt (1986:62), the word אֱל instead of אֱלֹהִים , the most common term for God is identical to that of the high god in the Cananite pantheon. Isaiah intends to indicate the absolute superiority of the Lord and that there is nothing like him in all the universe (Oswalt 1986:62).¹¹¹ From the use of the name of God in Isaiah 40:18-20 which is a disputation type of speech,¹¹² “a very early form of divine self-predication that had its original setting in God’s revelation of himself to Moses” can be found (Harner 1988:147-148).

¹⁰⁹ אֱל is the most transcendent of the God-words, connotating dominion over all (Is 42:5), absolute deity (Is 43:10, 12; 46:9), the unique God of Israel (Is 45:14) and the God of inscrutable purposes (Is 45:15). Cf. for its ironical use, see 44:10, 15, 17; 45:20; 46:6.

¹¹⁰ Baltzer (2001:73) argues that the name “El” differs from the name Yahweh in that it already implies the claim that this is the only God: that the one so named is alone truly God. But it still has no consensus among scholars.

¹¹¹ As Oswalt observes, an interesting wordplay is at work in several of these references where אֱל is also the word used for “idol” (Is 46:6-9).

¹¹² Among the various forms of speech employed by Isaiah in Isaiah 40-55, perhaps the disputation has the tendency mostly to resemble other forms or incorporate motifs from other forms. Begrich (1963:48-52) noted that the disputation is related to the trial speeches, and he observed that it sometimes incorporates themes from Israel’s hymns. Westermann (1981:47, 49-51) also noted the similarity that the disputation showed with the trial scenes and hymns. In his analysis of the disputation in Isaiah 40:12-31, he argued specifically that the “descriptive Psalm of Praise” (*beschreibende Lobpsalm*) underlies the passage as a whole. Some scholars say that Isaiah depicts Yahweh in it as disproving the exiles’ abandoning any hope that they had of returning to their homeland. But in it Isaiah prophesizes Yahweh will give redemption.

According to Holter (1995:69), the word, **דְמוּת** in verse 18 being used with **תַעֲרֹכוּ** in the expression **תַעֲרֹכוּ דְמוּת**, has to be seen in relation with its parallel word, **דְמוּת. דְמָה**. **דְמוּת** is never actually used elsewhere in the Old Testament for an idol except in Isaiah 40:25 (Cf. North 1964:85), but is part of the expression denoting a comparison (Holter 1995:70). Holter (1995:69; cf. 1995:70) suggests that **דְמוּת** can be rendered as an abstract, “likeness”, on the ground of its use, as shown in the expression **תַעֲרֹכוּ דְמוּת** in verse 18. Mettinger (1978:79) also says that **דְמוּת** has an abstract sense in verse 18. Its use is, however, made evidently in verses 19-20, in which its reference is to patently concrete idol. The distinction between the concrete and abstract use of the noun is at least not made in the mind of a Semitic thinker to whom an image represents the power of a god (Spykerboer 1976:36).

On whether **דְמוּת** can mean the image of God or not, Elliger (1978:72) says that it never means the image of God, while Westermann (1946:46f.; cf. Baltzer 2001:73; Spykerboer 1976:36), and most modern commentators translate the word as “likeness” or “image” to refer to the image of God.¹¹³ Whatsoever **דְמוּת** means, concrete idol or

¹¹³ Westermann points out that “the use of **דְמוּת** here could recall Genesis 1:26.” Westermann contends that “the association of likeness with idol as in the following verses, was not the author’s intention.” He was thinking solely in abstract terms, and verses 19-20 are an intrusion here, perhaps from a piece of what now appears in chapter 41. However, “examination of a passage like 2 Kings 16:10, where **דְמוּת** is a model or drawing, makes plain that [the] word, while not limited to “idol”, can certainly have [a] concrete connotation, as it is understood to have here.” (Cf. Oswalt 1998:63) Young (1972:52) points out that “God created man in His image and likeness. We can, thus, say that man is the image of God. But, nevertheless, there is also a[n] absolute distance between God and man, and Creator and creature.” According to Holter (1995:79-89; cf. Dick 1992:22), “in Genesis 1:26 God pronounces his work “good” like the craftsman in Isaiah 41:7.”

abstract sense of likeness, it can include the image of God in that God is compared with something in this context.

According to Mettinger (1978:79), עָרַךְ implies “something more than a mere comparison and means a challenge to the listeners to advance a counterpart to God, that could be claim to be his equal and that could match him in a competition.” Thus Mettinger (1978:79) suggests that ““match” has a range of meaning which is very similar to עָרַךְ.” Although Holter (1995:69) points out that עָרַךְ is never used for erecting an idol in the context of the Canaanite pantheon setting images of gods in a row, it is also attested in the texts dealing with the incomparability of Yahweh, there having the meaning “to compare”, which is parallel with דָּמָה (Cf. Ps 89:7).

In conclusion, verse 18 clearly says that God is not comparable with other gods who can be replaced by images. The incomparability of God is clearly stated in verse 18 (Naidoff 1981:72). Moreover, making of any image of God is prohibited because God himself cannot be compared with an image, even the image of God.

Thus, the prophet is asking in verse 18: וְאֵל־מִי תִדְמֶינּוּ אֵל וּמַה־דִּמּוֹת תַּעֲרֹכּוּ לוֹ “To whom will you [pl.] liken God and to what image will you [pl.] compare him?”

4.1.1.2 Isaiah 40:19

In verse 19: **הַפֶּסֶל נָסַךְ חָרָשׁ וְצֹרֵף יִצְרָהּ בְּזָהָב יִרְקַעְנֶנּוּ וּרְתִקוּת כֶּסֶף צֹרֵף**, which is connected with v. 20, the prophet explains the process of how an image was made in those days (Cf. Fitzgerald 1989:426-446). Isaiah presents his own polemics against idolatry and idol-fabrication with it (Holter 1995:35).¹¹⁴ There is a consensus that this passage deals with the description of the technical process of idol-fabrication. Nevertheless, there are problems in translating and substantiating the thesis. Spykerboer (1976:43) summarizes them as follows: “firstly, although it is an explicit depiction of idol-fabrication, it is not easy to decide whether it describes the manufacture of one or two idols. Secondly, it evokes in us the question whether this idol in verse 19 consists of a wooden core, or a metal core. Thirdly, the obscure phrase **הַמִּסְכָּן תְּרוּמָה** poses a problem for interpretation.” These questions are to be answered by the result of exegesis of verses 19-20.

The first word, **הַפֶּסֶל** contains two exegetical problems. The first is the different renderings of **הַ** added to **פֶּסֶל**, that is, whether it is the definitive article or the interrogative particle (Mettinger 1978:79). For the former, Holter (1995:37-38; cf. Elliger 1978:59-60) thinks that this **הַ** is a definitive article. The questions in verse 18 are followed by two imagined answers in verses 19-20. **הַפֶּסֶל** and **הַמִּסְכָּן** are the direct objects of the verb, **עָרַף** in verse 18 (Mettinger 1974:79). According to Mettinger (1974:78; cf. Holter 1995:34), in the context of verses 18-20, **מִסְכָּן** in verse 20a must in

¹¹⁴ In the other three idol-fabrication passages, Isaiah 41:6-7, 44:9-20; 46:6-7, which show a clear terminological connection between them, the same intention of the author is founded.

some way or another correspond to the word לִּפְנֵי in verse 19a and form a parallelism between them (Mettinger 1974:78).¹¹⁵ Moreover, the word order *object – verb – subject*, which emphasizes the object, supports the rendering of it as a definitive article (Mettinger 1974:78).

There is, however, a reason to choose the rendering of it as an interrogative pronoun. Baltzer (2001:72) shows how the passages can easily be constructed with a double question at the beginning: “With whom...?” and “What...?” corresponding to the double answer “image” (v. 19) and “stele” (v. 20), containing implicit answers to the first two questions. The rhetorical question of the prophet in verse 18: To whom will you liken God and to what image will you compare him?, which is addressed to his audience, is answered by himself in an ironical way, by asking, “An image perhaps?” in verse 19 (cf. Young 1972:52; Labuschagne 1966:16-23) and may be “craftsman?” in verse 20.¹¹⁶ As Williamson (1986:14; cf. Köhler 1923:19) observes, verse 19 and verse 20 may thus be related in terms of “whether... or” by the double use of the interrogative מִי , in answer to the question in verse 18. This rendering, however, has to overcome the disadvantage that the combination of an interrogative מִי plus a noun is not attested elsewhere in Isaiah 40-55 (Holter 1995:38; cf. Talstra 1981:42).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Mettinger states that verses 18-20 are a unit with an inner structure. Verse 18 consists of two questions. These two questions are taken up by verses 19-20, which contain two imagined answers and thus form a corollary to verse 18.

¹¹⁶ See NRSV: “An idol?— A workman casts it”. Oswalt suggests that this punctuation is probably too strong, since MT does not even have a mild stop on the word. But it does highlight the author’s emphasis (Oswalt 1998:57).

¹¹⁷ In most cases in Isaiah 40-55, The מִי is used as an interrogative with a negated verb.

Two renderings can make sense in the present text. This study, however, prefers to take the הַ as a definitive article as rather than an interrogative pronoun. In the context of emphasizing the incomparability of God by rhetorical questions, its answer is so explicit and doesn't need to be stated. However, the idop-fabrication passage followed functions as an answer to the rhetorical question.

The second problem concerns whether the meaning of פֶּסֶל is used in an abstract sense or of concrete idols. Many scholars have difficulty with the interpretation of the image, פֶּסֶל, which is translated as the image of a god in verse 19.¹¹⁸ The word פֶּסֶל, always refers to a cult-image which could be made of stone, wood or metal (Dohmen 1985:692).¹¹⁹ When it was considered that it always refers to a complete statue, as Korpel (1991:220) points out, it cannot refer to a hollow part which was subsequently put together to form the complete statue. In general, in Isaiah 40-55, especially in the idol-fabrication passages in Isaiah, פֶּסֶל is explicitly used for a (non-Yahwistic) “god” (Holter 1995:37). But when it is used in relation with the incomparability of God, it can also imply the image of God (Labuschange 1966:141)

In verse 19a, the description of the fabrication of פֶּסֶל starts with נָסַךְ and thus, a craftsman, חָרַשׁ casts, נָסַךְ a פֶּסֶל.¹²⁰ According to Korpel (1991:220), “it can...be

¹¹⁸ But this interpretation offers apparently insurmountable obstacles in verse 20a (Baltzer 2001:74).

¹¹⁹ According to *HALOT* (3:949) this can be “a divine image carved from wood or sculpted from stone, but later cast in metal.”

¹²⁰ As Holter (1995:35) points out, there is a clear terminological connection between this passage and the other idol-fabrication passages in term of the same occurrence of some words: פֶּסֶל, חָרַשׁ, נָסַךְ, צַרְף, , מוֹט, עֵץ כֶּסֶף, זָהָב.

considered as the casting of metal, probably bronze, into a mould. Images cast in solid bronze and coated with a plating of gold and/or silver were very common in Canaan. In Babylon, the inner shape of an image was often cut from wood.”¹²¹ However, since the verb **נָסַף**, cannot be connected with wood, bronze is more likely (Cf. Salonen 1970:122).¹²²

צוֹרֵף, the second artisan, who is the gold- or silversmith works with metal to overlay, **וַיִּרְקַעֵנּוּ**, the gold, **זָהָב** onto the statue (Baltzer 2001:74; cf Holter 1995:54-55). The artisan uses a small hammer because precision is required. The verb **רָקַע**, used here in the imperfect tense, refers to a general statement, to the beating of metal into thin sheets (Baltzer 2001:74). According to Korpel (1991:220), although the prophet could have used the normal verb *sph* II, he chooses and uses **רָקַע** to contrast it with the creative work of God as stated in Isaiah 42:5; 44:24.¹²³ The prophet intends “his audience to savour the irony, choosing and using this word” to indicate “the contrast between the divine and the human activity in this laborious process.” (Korpel 1991: 221)

In verse 19b, the manufacture of **רִתְּקוֹת**, chains is described as the work done in the third stage (Baltzer 2001:74). The line, **וַיִּצְרֵף צֹרֵף כֶּסֶף רִתְּקוֹת**, with a so-called double-duty preposition, can be translated as follows: “And a **צֹרֵף** (goldsmith) plates with silver

¹²¹ Cf. J. Renger, “Kultbild”, *RIA*, Bd. 6, 310f. For coating with silver, see also *CAD (L)* 21f.

¹²² For a bronze statue plated with gold in an Old Babylonian letter, see Salonen 1970:122.

¹²³ In Isaiah 42:5 and 44:24, it designates the creative work of God (Korpel 1991:220). According to Korpel, this external parallelism is at the same time antithetical. It sets off the making of an image by a human craftsman against God’s “making” of the firmament and the earth. For **רָקַע** as a technical term for God’s work of creation, his spreading out of heaven and earth, see also Psalm 136:6; Job 37:18.

chain” (Korpel 1991:221).¹²⁴ Korpel (1991:221) suggests that “in the ancient Near East a smith often used silver to join sheets of gold by soldering.” The reason for using silver or silver-alloys as solder was the lower melting point of silver which prevented the handsomely wrought sheets of gold to smelt again when a new sheet had to be soldered on to them (Cf. Lucas 1962:216-217, 252; Aldred 1971:88ff). Baltzer (2001:74) suggests the artisan can be another smith, who is manufacturing chains of silver wire. It may well be that the mention of “chains” is much more closely linked with the context than the notion of mere decoration (Baltzer 2001:74).¹²⁵ The goldsmith uses gold and silver together to weld the individual plates to link them together (Baltzer 2001:74).

The process described in verse 19 may be summarized as follows: “Firstly, an image of bronze is cast in a mould. Secondly, thin plates of gold are hammered out as plating for the bronze statue. Thirdly, where these plates of the gold needed to be joined they are soldered with silver-solder” (Koole 1985:65).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ The Hebrew verb *rtq* means “to connect, chain” (Korpel 1991:221). The Semitic cognates of *rtq* indicate that the basic meaning is “patch, to sew”. For Arabic *rataqa* we find meanings like “to close up”, “to sew”, “to repair” (Lane 1867:1027), but the verb can be also be used metaphorically of a “closed-up” woman, a woman *impervia coeunti* (Lane 1867:1027; cf. Fegnan 1923:61), a meaning also attested in Ugaritic (More 1980:309). In modern Arabic we find the meaning is apparently derived from the primary meaning “to mend, repair, patch up, sew up” (Wehr 1979:376). The Syriac *retaq* “to make a needle-hole, to puncture” is apparently derived from the primary meaning “to sew” (Brockelmann 1928:748). However, one of the meanings of the verb *rtq* in Arabic interests us in particular. According to Kazimirski (1860:817), it occurs in the meaning of “to solder”. For Mesopotamian, see Korpel 1991:221. In this connection, it may be significant that in the parallel passage Isaiah 41:7 the term *debeq* is used which everyone translates by “soldering” (Korpel 1991:221-222).

¹²⁵ Surely not for decoration with chainlets or the like (Schroer 1987:210ff), because he continues his description of the plating process. Also unlikely is the supposition that the smith would combine plates of gold with plates of silver. The targumists have translated רַתְּקוּתָא בְּסֵפֶר by *šyšln dksp* “chain of silver”, a translation which is taken over by many lexicographers. But since the translation of the targum is obviously derived from the meaning of the verb, it is not a convincing basis.

¹²⁶ Many of the bronze images from the ancient Near East show holes for wooden pegs under its feet, which must have been anchored to a pedestal.

Thus, verse 19: חָרַשׁ חָרַשׁ וְצָרַף וְצָרַף בְּזָהָב וְרָקַעַנּוּ וְרָתְקוּת כֶּסֶף צוּרָף can be translated as follows: “A craftsman casts the image and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and solders it with silver.”

4.1.1.3 Isaiah 40:20

The key to render verse 20 is whether it describes the offering of the poor in contrast with the rich, or fastening the idol made in the process described in verse 19. The first two words תְּרוּמָה מְסִכֵּן are the major crux of interpretation.

Mettinger (1974:81) points to three requirements to interpret this crux: “First, it must fit into the structural framework of the passage. מְסִכֵּן has its counterpart in הַפֶּסֶל in verse 19a. Secondly, it has to make sense of תְּרוּמָה. Thirdly, it has to account for the vocalization of מְסִכֵּן.”

Williamson (1986:2-13) groups the different proposed interpretations of this crux. According to Williamson (1986:4), the traditional interpretation¹²⁷ takes מְסִכֵּן as subject of the sentence, connected with the adjective תְּרוּמָה which is understood as “a contribution for sacred uses”, and thus...“offering” was rendered by “he who is impoverished”, that is, “a poor man”.¹²⁸ With this rendering, verse 20 stands in contrast

¹²⁷ It is represented by the Revised Version, the Authorized Version, the international Version and Good New Bible.

¹²⁸ Traditional interpretation of the phrase is supported as follows: “Since מְסִכֵּן occurs five times in Ecclesiastes with the meaning “poor” and מְסִכֵּנָה appears in Deuteronomy 8:9 with the meaning “poverty,”

with verse 19: the man of verse 19 is wealthy, and so can afford an idol made from precious metal. The poor man of verse 20, however, can afford only wood with which to make his image (Williamson 1986:4). Driver (1935:396-398) suggests that it can be rendered as “the poor man...was choosing a wood (that) would not rot.” A similar view was also raised by Trudinger (1967:220-225). He thinks that verse 19 and verse 20 describe the making of two different idols. The progression of the writer’s argument demands that idol of verse 20 be of superior quality to that of verse 19 (Williamson 1987:8). Oswalt (1998:64) states that most scholars nowadays agree that “poor man” is not correct. There is no support elsewhere in the text for this contrast between rich and poor (Williamson, 1986:4). Several factors are pointing in the opposite direction (Williamson 1986:4-5): The supposed contrast between the metal idol of the rich in verse 19 and the wooden one of the poor in verse 20 really doesn’t work, since, first of all, imperishable wood was very expensive and required a craftsman to work it. “The allegedly poor man of verse 20 is evidently able to afford the services of a חֲרָשׁ חָכָם, “a skilled craftsman.” If this contrast was intended by the writer, he did not make a reference to it in verse 19. It is expecting too much of the reader to retrace his steps mentally in order to comprehend what verse 19 was all about. The next question to be raised is whether such an interpretation has justice to the overall context, which is governed by verse 18. In verse 18 the reader was challenged to produce anything that could be compared with God. The response expected, is a description of the very best that man can produce; the polemic rather loses its point if a second-rate idol is put up as

AV accepts that the meaning of מִסְכֵּן in verse 20 is “a poor man...Depending on how the sentences are divided, however, LXX either has nothing here or “He set[s] up a likeness,” while Targ. has “he cut down a fir tree” (cf. also Vg). The form of the pu’al participle and its adjective *miskēn*, “poor” can be derived from the same root. It occurs four times in Ecclesiastes (only). The noun *miskēnut*, “poverty”, “scarcity” occurs once, in Deuteronomy 8, 9. There is no need to doubt the meanings of this noun and adjective, despite their restricted attestation; they fit their context and are common in Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew “(Levy 1883:169).

a candidate. Smith (1944:172) has queried whether a wooden statue would really have been so much cheaper than a metal one. He writes, “[g]ood wooden statuettes were probably more expensive than bronze”... after all, the closing words of the verse show that something far more substantial than a mere statuette is in view. We may thus conclude that there is no justification for contrasting verse 19 and verse 20 in terms of rich and poor.

The second difficulty was confronted in its linguistic understanding of **הַמִּסְכֵּן**. If the Masoretes intended it to mean “the poor man”, it is surprising that they vocalized the word as a pu‘al participle of a root whose use as a verb is not attested anywhere else. It can be raised why they did not simply use the more common vocalization *hammiskēn* (Williamson 1986:5).

A third difficulty for this approach may lie in its translation of **תְּרוּמָה** because it cannot suit the traditional understanding of “heave-offering” (Williamson, 1986:5).

In contrast with the traditional rendering to assume two idols in verse 19 and verse 20, most now agree that two verses are speaking of the same idol, with verse 19 referring to the idol itself and verse 20 to the base on which it was fastened (Oswalt 1998:64). The view can be ramified into two.

Each has its own interpretation on the phrase, **הַמִּסְכֵּן תְּרוּמָה** as following: “One is, as Ugaritic # 1754 attests a verb *skn*, meaning “to set up.” Thus the Pu‘al participle could

mean “something that was set up” in accord with the latter part of the verse. The other suggestion is that the word is the name of a type of wood, sissou.” (Oswalt 1998:64).

The former is the second group of interpretations of Williamson (Cf. 1986:17-18).

Mettinger (1974:78) suggests that מִסְכָּן with the root *skn* means “to make a statue or image,” as the *Pual* participle can be rendered as “something that is given form, an image.” Connected with it, תְּרוּמָה could be rendered as the more or less voluntary contribution of the cult. According to this view, the translation will be: “Maybe an image which is a sacred contribution.” (Mettinger 1974:78)¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Duhm (1914:270-271) proposes to emend the first two words of verse 20 to *hamekōnēn terûmâ*, “he who would set up an image (chooses...).” Levy (1925:123-124) suggests the reading *hammassikēhu litemûnâ* “he that causeth the casting thereof for a likeness”, i.e. “he who has an image cast.” But, according to Williamson (1986:6) this interpretation is deficient: “They suffer, however, from the inevitable difficulty of being unable to explain how a straightforward and intelligible text was corrupted into something which on this view was quite unintelligible” (Cf. Reider 1952:113-130).

Trudinger (1967:220-225) suggests that *hamesukkân* should be vocalized *hamesakkēn*, the pi’el participle of a root *skn*, whose primary meaning is “to dwell with”, and from which is derived (in the hiph’il) the meaning “to be familiar with”, “well acquainted with”. Hence, he conjectures, the pi’el participle might have the meaning “he who really knows”, that is, “the connoisseur of idols”.

According to Williamson (1987:8), Trudinger’s solution of the verse’s problem is less than convincing in some points: “First...He[Trudinger] postulates an otherwise unattested pi’el of the root and gives it a meaning, which the root nowhere else conveys, as a hypothetical development of only one of several possible meanings of the hiph’il. Second, Trudinger gives no evidence that trees were ever used in this way, nor am I aware of any such practice as he presupposes. Finally, although he does not discuss the meaning of תְּרוּמָה or offer a translation of it, he presumably understands it in traditional sense of “offering”.

Appealing to the Amarna tablet, and to Qatabanian as well as to Ugaritic, Reider (1952:113-130) postulates a Hebrew root *skn* meaning “to keep, to guard, to care for”. He, therefore, vocalizes the first word as *Ham^ssakkēn* and renders the phrase “the keeper of sacred contributions.”

Gray (1957:192) also appeals to the Ugaritic noun of *skn* meaning something “set up”, “a stele”. He thus revocalizes the first word as a pi’el participle of this root (*ham^ssakkēn*) and reverts to the emendation of *ġrûmâ* to *ġmûnâ* to arrive at a translation “he who would set up an image.”

Mettinger (1974:77-83) retains the masoretic vocalization of *ham^ssukkân*, construing it as an interrogative ה with pu’al participle of this same verb *skn*, meaning “a thing formed”, hence “an image”. Mettinger (1974:77-83) also accepts that תְּרוּמָה has its normal sense of “contribution for sacred uses”, but he wishes to follow Elliger in defining this word more narrowly as something that one is required to give rather than as an offering dedicated of one’s own free will. He, therefore, translates “Maybe an image, which is a prescribed offering”.

Although Mettinger avoids the need for any emendation, and a strong part of his argument is the fact that he brings the openings of verses 19 and 20 into a parallel relationship. However, as Williamson (1987:11) observes, Mettinger’s redering has some difficulties: First, Mettinger re-introduce a contrast between the two verses in terms of the value of the idols in question, and that in a way which is fundamental to the passage’s rhetoric as he understands it. Although this is achieved without reference to “the poor man”, the

The third group of interpretations of Williamson (1986:17-18) suggests that the word מִסְכָּן, which is pronounced *m^esukkān*, is the name of kind of a tree (Cf. Stummer 1928:3-48; 1963:462; Zimmern 1894:111-112; Gershevitch 1957:317-320; Millard and Snook 1964:12-13)¹³⁰ and then תְּרוּמָה, is rendered as “offering,” as an objective genitive describing this wood.

Taking this view, as Williamson (1986:11f) points out, *t^rûmâ* “basically denotes something raised or made high.” They think that “it might be a suitable word for a plinth or podium”. Thus, the translation, “One choose *sissoo*, an unrotting wood, for the base ...”¹³¹ is proposed. The verb of *skn* [מִסְכָּן] probably means “to shape”.¹³² Thus it seems that *skn* “shaping” was one of the skills of such an artisan. At last, the translation can be drawn as “One who chooses the wood not to be rotten for the image not to be shaken.” What we are looking for is a fresh subject for the verb that follows: לֹא יִרְקַב לִבְחָר, “choose...that will not rot.”¹³³

underlying problems noted above to the traditional English versions are applicable also in this case. Secondly, Mettinger’s understanding of *terûmâ* and of its function in this verse is very subtle – over – subtle, some might think... The third difficulty on Mettinger’s view is one which also confronts Gray and Schoors, but for no one of them offers any explanation. They are obliged to postulate that a word attested only in Ugaritic, many centuries before Deutero-Isaiah, continued to exist in Biblical Hebrew, only to surface at the literary level in the exile...”

¹³⁰ The name of a type of wood, *sissoo* is mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions.

¹³¹ Two criticism of this view can be indicated here: Williamson (1987:13) suggests that apart from the root meaning of “*t^rûmâ*”, a base, plinth or podium can hardly be said to be “raised or made high”, a noun of this formation can be expected to have a passive meaning (Cf. GKC § 84^a *m*); Attempts to interpret *mskn* as a name of a species of tree like Williamson’s view, is pointed out by Korpel (1999:222) as unjust and points to resorting to a forced exegesis of the following cola.

¹³² Earlier proposals to explain *mskn* with the help of Ugaritic are found with Gray 1965: 262-263; Fohrer 1964:26; Beuken 1974:46. Usually *skn* “stele” is referred to. It is striking that in the Ugaritic text the divine craftsman [חָרָשׁ] pours silver and gold, overlays various pieces of furniture with silver, gold and electrum, among them a socle [*kt*], and finally fashions a bowl that is shaped [*sknt*] like one from the Yam ‘anu’ country (Cf. Korpel 1991:222).

¹³³ The craftsman, *mskn* [מִסְכָּן], יִבְחָר, “chooses” wood that will not rot (Is 40:20), but Yahweh בְּחָרְתִּי, “chooses” Israel in Isaiah 41:8 (Dick 1992:21).

The last part of verse 20 reads **לֹא יִמוּט פֶּסֶל לְהִכִּין** “(he seeks out a skillful craftsman) to set up an image that will not move” (Spykerboer 1976:43). Watts (2005:623) indicates the irony in the expression, “that cannot be moved”: “Of course, anything that people can set up, they can also remove. Only God cannot be moved.” Who is it that chooses “a wood” or “a tree” that does not decay? “Although it is not as simple as it was in verse 19, where it is possible to identify the craftsmen, [a] “wise expert” is sought for the work, and he will no doubt see to it somewhat forcefully that the **פֶּסֶל**, the image of a god, is no longer shaky, unstable. But that it will really be firm.” (Baltzer 2001:74)

Holter (Cf. 1995:44-48) also opts for the second and third group suggested by Williamson (1987:1-21) and considered to be fitting the context (Cf. Mettinger 1974:77-83).

When we consider the structure of the text again, in all lines in which a new part of the process is mentioned a specialized artisan is named. In verse 19a α it is the craftsman [חָרָשׁ] who cast the image. In verse 19b β it is the goldsmith [צִירָה] who covers the image with gold and silver-solder. Then, in verse 20a α , it is the mskn [מִסְכֵּן] who makes the pedestal in which the חָרָשׁ anchors it (Korpel 1991:222).¹³⁴ Oswalt (1998:64; cf. Koole 1985:65) also summarizes the process of verse 20 as three fold, considering verses 19-20 as a description of a single process for one object by two or three craftsmen¹³⁵:

¹³⁴ In Ugaritic a verb skn occurs in a text about the technician among the gods who is fabricating various objects from metals like gold and silver.

¹³⁵ Thus we can say, according to this rendering, it is not unlikely that in Isaiah 40:20, the one who shaped the pedestal is the third artisan, and as Baltzer (2001:74) supposes, that verse 20 is talking about

“choosing the wood, finding a craftsman capable of working it, and fastening the idol to its base in a permanent way.”

Thus, the interpretation of verse 20 can be suggested as follows:

הַמְסַכֵּן תְּרוּמָה עֵץ לֹא-יִרְקַב יִבְקֹשׁ-לוֹ לְהַכִּין פֶּסֶל לֹא יִמוּט יִבְחַר חֲרָשׁ חָכָם
“the one who choose the wood *sissoo* that will not rot for a plinth seeks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not be shaken.”

4.1.1.4 The relationship between Isaiah 40:18 and Isaiah 40:19-20

The structure of the unit in verses 18-20 needs further investigation. Many scholars consider verses 19-20 to be intrusive in the structure and unsuitable to the overall theme, disturbing the climax created by verse 18 and therefore leading to misunderstanding verse 18 (Motyer 1993:304).¹³⁶ Several scholars have suggested to regard these verses as a secondary expansion and have urged that verse 18 should be moved or even expunged altogether (Elliger 1978:65f; Merendino 1981:87ff; Westerman 1966:46f).

only one object too, depending on the interpretation of verse 19.

¹³⁶ Many modern scholars on Isaiah were shaped by the major commentary of Bernhard Duhm, on the one hand, and by the form-critical work of Joachim Begrich, on the other hand. They have been consistently suspicious of the integrity of the main idol passages (Is 40:18-20; 41:5-7; 44:9-20; 46:5-7). Scholars counting among the majority of modern commentators have continued this tradition of skepticism. Naidoff (1981:67-68) separates the polemic against idolatry in verses 19-20 from the rhetorical question in verse 18; McKenzie (1968:23) says that verses 19-20 do not harmonize with its context. He explains Second Isaiah's purpose as follows: “It is sufficient that the claims of Yahweh were unparalleled [and] hence no god can be presented as a rival to him. But this audience still has difficulties to prevent that they recognize their own belief which is the traditional faith on God as creator, and that they are willing to stand by them.” (McKenzie 1968:24).

For the most part they regard the main idol passages as displaced or a non-Isaian insertion. Consequently the idol passages play a small role in their assessment of the prophet's total message (Clifford 1980:450; cf. Westermann 1969; McKenzie 1968; Elliger 1978). For Duhm's view, see Duhm 1968. Duhm holds that 41:5 was added as a link between verses 1-4 and verses 6-7, after the latter verses had been moved from non-Isaian insertion that breaks up the unit 44:6-8 + v. 21 (Duhm 1968:333). Isaiah 46:6-8 also was judged an insertion (Duhm 1968:352). Begrich (1969:13) puts 41: 6-7 with 40:18-20, declared 44:6-20 unecht, and characterized 46:5-11 as an independent *Disputationswort*, though authentically Isaian. For the most parts they regard the main idol passages as displaced or non-Isaian insertions. Consequently the idol passages play a small role in their assessment of the prophet's total message (Clifford 1980:450).

They conclude that verses 19-20 contain a number of unusual expressions in comparison with verse 18 and as for the content, the literary form and the grammar, they do not seem to fit the context. Thus, several scholars have suggested to regard these verses as a secondary expansion (Elliger 1978:65f; Merendino 1981:87ff). The structural analysis of the text, however, shows a remarkable symmetry. Judging from the overall structure of Isaiah 40, the passage against the idols (vv.18-20) appears in no way to be a “Fremdkörper”. It is just as carefully thought out in its craftsmanship and theology as is its context (Preuss 1971:193ff.; Baltzer 2001:72; cf. Mettinger 1974:77f). It is also pointed out that the elimination of verses 19-20 destroys this beautiful symmetry in Isaiah 40 (Motyer 1993:304; cf. Korpel 1991:219; Elliger 1978:76; Melugin 1997:90-91; Spykerboer 1976:35-46; Clifford 1980: 450-464):

Structurally, adding verses 19-20 to verse 18 balances addition of verse 26 to the questions in verse 25. In each case the questions bring the preceding verses to a biting climax, and bridge over into a further and final application of the same theme. In verses 19-20 this is that the glory of the Lord is in no way challenged by so-called gods. In verse 26 it is that the detailed rule of the Creator in history is seen in his detailed rule of the stars. The question in verse 18 does not in fact invite comparison of the Lord with anything, but is an interrogative assertion of his incomparability. Finally, verses 19-20 are not concerned with the sin of making idols, but with the uselessness of the product.

Next, we have to enquire about the background of the prophet’s words in verses 18-20. If the structure proves that the verses belong to the original text of Isaiah 40, why has

the prophet used such unusual language? (Korpel 1991: 219). These verses make sense as “rhetoric” answers to the rhetorical questions in verse 18 (Mettinger 1974:77).

Motyer (1993:304) points out that the rhetorical question: “To whom will you compare God?”(v. 18a) is concerned not with the folly of making idols, but with the wrongness of comparing the true God with other gods.¹³⁷ It can be said that the theological point of departure in Isaiah 40:18-20 is the self-assertion of God (v. 18).

Baltzer (2001:72) says the solemn seriousness of the hymn is followed in vv. 18-20 by an entr’acte in which the same theme, namely Yahweh’s incomparability is presented on a different level.

The answer to the rhetorical question in verse 18 is self-evident and thus unexpressed. However, the process of idol-fabrication is indicated in verses 19-20.

As Holter (1993:77-78) indicates, we can draw two conclusions from these rhetorical questions and answers.

First, vv. 19-20 act as a theological reply to the rhetorical questions in v. 18. Vv. 19-20 are rather “neutral” descriptions of idol-fabrication, without any direct theological polemic against idolatry. This question and answer are echoed in v. 25 and v. 26 respectively.... Secondly, the role of the idol-fabricators in vv. 19-20 corresponds with the role of the nations in vv. 15-17, and with the role of the inhabitants of the earth

¹³⁷ Within Isaiah 40-66, this statement (Cf. Is 40:25; 46:5), presents us with a wonderful irony. This is one of the Hebrew Bible’s strongest statements concerning the incomparability of YHWH, yet it is within a literary corpus which is particularly rich with comparisons with YHWH.

with its princes and rulers in vv. 22-24....This indicates that idol-fabricators are thought of as examples or representatives of the nations and its rulers.

Holter (1993:77-78) indicates that the comparison between Yahweh and the idol-fabricator in Isaiah 40:18-20 is extended to the comparison between Yahweh and the nations (Is 40:15-17) and Yahweh and the princes and the rulers of inhabitants of the earth (Is 40:22-24). It implies that nothing, even the image of God can be compared with God. In relation with God's incomparability, the prohibition against making idols and images of other gods is always tightly bound up with the prohibition to worship God through images.

What Isaiah 40:18-20 states is that Yahweh is the incomparable; there is none like him. It is, therefore, prohibited to Israel, to represent Yahweh with images. Because by doing so, Israel is comparing Yahweh with other gods who are represented with images (Harner 1988:152). In Isaiah's critique on the comparison of Yahweh with an idol or idol-fabricator he declares Yahweh to be the sole God over the world, who can never be compared with anything made as an image. Therefore, in Isaiah's idol-fabrication passages, the proclamation of the incomparability of God demands the prohibition of his worship through images. Isaiah 40:18-20 that deals with the incomparability of God and idol-fabrication forbids not only making images of other gods, but also the use of images to serve God (Labuschagne 1966:139; Holter 1993:78).

Isaiah 40:19-20 use the verbs **נָסַף**, **רָקַע**, **רָקַב**, **בָּחַר**, and **בָּקַשׁ** to depict the process of making an image. They have the same meaning as the verb **עָשָׂה** used with **פְּסִל**, the

image of God in Exodus 20:4. Thus, Isaiah 40:19-20 is not only critique on idol or idol-fabrication, but also the prohibition of making any image of God, by which He is compared with other images and other gods.

The meaning of the passages on the incomparability of God and idol-fabrication by comparing Yahweh with the idol or idol-fabricator in Isaiah 40:18-20 is, thus, not only a critique on making and serving other gods and their images, but also implies the prohibition against serving God through images, as forbidden by the second commandment.

It can be pointed out that a close connection between the proclamation of the incomparability of God or of his sovereignty and the prohibition to worship God through images is found in Isaiah 40:18-20.

4.1.2 Isaiah 40:18-20 in the context of its macro unit.

The meaning of Isaiah 40:18-20 is to be found next in the context of Isaiah 40:12-31, then in passages dealing with the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God passages within Isaiah 40-55: Isaiah 41:1-7, 44:6-20; 46:5-7, and lastly in context of the book of Isaiah as a whole (Cf. Holter 1995:59-60). The following section will study the three macro units, in which Isaiah 40:18-20 stands from the point of view that it forms a unity, probably written by a single author.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ In general, "the redactional investigation to explain the origin and process of Isaiah 40-55 is done to explain the unity of it, although it is considered that the origin of the process that eventuated in Isa 40-55 cannot be recovered and an author cannot be accessed." (Blenkinsopp 2002:73) But it seems justified to

4.1.2.1 The structural features of Isaiah 40:12-31

Elliger (1978:94) rejects the unity of the passage in Isaiah 40:12-31 and rather distinguishes three separate units: verses 12-17; verses 18-26; and verses 27-31.¹³⁹

It can be said that the argument in Isaiah 40:12-31 is logical. Isaiah 40:12-31 follows a logical argument:

Begrich points out that “[i]t starts with general prepositions and moves forward to the particular and details with which he is concerned, and with a series of questions from common knowledge moving to the specifics.” (Begrich 1963:48)

Isaiah 40:12-31 should not be divided into smaller units. Scholars, who view chapter 40 as a single poem (Wilson 1986:136; cf. Schoors 1973:257-8; Spykerboer 1976:49-51; Clifford 1980:457; Torrey 1928:301-302), indicate that it has integrity as a structurally complete whole, especially when analyzing the genre and the structure of this section (Spykerboer 1976:31-32). Although only Isaiah 40:12-26 is suggested as a unit by some scholars (Schoors 1973:257-259),¹⁴⁰ most scholars take verses 12-31 as a unit. In recent

assume a single author. See <Excursus 2> A brief history on the authorship and composition of Isaiah for detail.

¹³⁹ Elliger (1978:94) indicates each unit in verses 12-17 (exc. v. 16), 18-26 (exc. vv. 19-20), and 27-31 as a *selbstständiges Disputationswort*.

¹⁴⁰ Schoors (Cf. 1973:257) recognized a large scale parallel structure in four stanzas: verses 12-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-26. He distinguished type A and B stanzas that both begin with rhetorical questions. The questions about Yahweh as creator in the A stanzas serve as argument for a second set of assertions about nations and rulers. The verses in the B stanzas serve as evidence for the initial dispute. As a unity, depicting Yahweh’s superiority to every rival, Schoors (1973:257-259; cf. Gitay 1981:83) outlines the structure of Isaiah 40:12-26 as follows:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| A. 12-17: | a. The great creating God |
| Hymnic | b. Thus, before him the nations are nothing (Yahweh not active) |
| B. 18ff.: | b’. To whom [do you] liken God |
| | a’. For the idols are nothing (Yahweh not active) |

years, as Naidoff (1981:62) observes, “scholarly discussion of Isaiah 40:12-31 shows some unanimity among modern interpreters that this section is a unit”,¹⁴¹ of which Isaiah 40:18-20 forms a part.¹⁴² In Isaiah 40:12-31 the contrast is specifically between the idols as created being and Yahweh as creator. This analysis also confirms the integrity of the polemic against idolatry in verses 18-20 being an integral part of the unit. It can by no means be assigned to a separate redactional stratum (Wilson 1981:150).

Isaiah 40:12-31 can be divided into either two or three poetic stanzas. Gitay (1981:82; cf. Wilson 1986:138) divides it into two main parts: verses 12-26 introduces the matter which is summarized in verses 27-31, while Melugin (1976:33) analyzes it as three passages: “(1) the question: “To whom will you compare God?”; (2) a sarcastic

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- A. 21-24: a. The great creating God
 Hymnic b. Thus, he makes princes as nothing (Yahweh active)
B. 25-26: b'. To whom [do you] liken God
 a'. For he has created the star-gods (Yahweh active)

¹⁴¹ It reflects the debate over the composition of the Isaiah 40-55 as a whole. The contention on the composition of Isaiah 40:12-31 is that “it is a collection of originally independent speeches or an organic unity?” Naidoff 1981:62. For the former, see Westermann 1964:127-132; idem, 1976:46-62; the latter, Melugin 1971:326-337; 1976:31-36.

¹⁴² Spykerboer (1976:30-31) also sums up the whole passage as follows:

Yahweh is the Creator

vv. 12-17: Who can measure up to Yahweh?

The nations? They are not but a drop from a bucket, nothing and emptiness.

vv. 18-20: To whom will you liken God (El)?

The idol? It is man-made and set up so that it will not fall.

Yahweh is the sustainer

vv. 21-24: Have you not known?

God the Creator! He brings rulers to naught.

vv. 25-26: “To whom then will you liken me?”, says the Holy One.

The Star-gods? It is the mighty God, who arrays the host of heaven.

Yahweh is the redeemer

vv. 27-31: Why do you say Jacob/Israel: “My way is hid from the Lord?” Do you not know?

The everlasting God, the Creator, gives strength to those who wait for him.

At this point Watts (2005:619) says:

Who can gauge YHWH’s spirit or teach him (including four questions) (vv. 12-14)?

Not the nations (vv. 15-17)

To whom will you compare God (v. 18)?

Not the idols (vv. 19-20).

From the heavens, he is superior to rulers (vv. 21-24).

To whom will you compare the Holy One of Israel (v. 25)?

Not even the stars (v. 26)

Why is Israel unhappy (v. 27-31)?

description of idols; (3) and an imperative or interrogative appeal to remember the cultic instruction, the content of which is then given in participles like those of hymns.” Isaiah 40:12-31 must at least be read in relation with its surrounding passage, even when scholars differ among themselves on its real scope (Cf. Gitay 1981; Watts 1987).

Holter (1995:75), who divides Isaiah 40:12-31 into three stanzas, indicates that the two next stanzas in both Isaiah 40:25-27 and 40:28-31¹⁴³ show a different prosody, but are likewise intimately related in theme and rhetorical structure. Each begins with a nearly identical opening question “to whom do you liken God/me?” “The rhetorical question in verse 25, which is echoed in v. 18, highlights the incomparability of Yahweh.” (Holter 1995:75) Verses 18-20 contain a request to Israel to prohibit the representation of Yahweh by image because of the incomparability of God. This should be read in the context of verses 12-31 that deal with the covenant (Harner, 1988:152; Wilson 1976:129).¹⁴⁴

Isaiah 40:12-31 that comprises of 12-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-26 and 27-31 is a tightly structured whole as shown by compositional analysis. In the first four units, the same pattern of question and answer is followed. Although 27-31 also follows the pattern of question and answer, the theme is different with other units. Gitay (1981:83) points out that “the structure of the discourse can assist in determining the rhetorical unit. A structure of questions and responses distinguishes all parts of the discourse.” As Wilson

¹⁴³ The next stanzas in verses 18-24 are also rhetorically linked to the following stanza, so much so that Melugin (1976:33) considers verses 18-24 to be a single unit, and Clifford (1984:47) analyzes verses 18-24 and 25-31 as comparable sections. Melugin (1976:92; cf. 1971:333-334) considers verses 18-24 to be parallel to verses 25-26.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson is interested in verses 18-20 which contains a polemic against the nation’s manufacture of idols in the context of Isaiah 40:12-31.

(1986:140) indicates “the repeated interrogative pronouns **מִי** answered by repeated emphatic particles **אֵין** is the major rhetorical device which structures this stanza, and this rhetorical demarcation between initial rhetorical questions and consequent assertions will continue through the other stanzas of the same type.” Naidoff (1981:68) points out that “the questions beginning with **מִי** in verses 12-14, like their counterpart in verse 26, are rhetorical in the strict sense of the word: they merely assert what is already known to the listeners, and is the basis for the conclusion in verses 15-17.” In the first stanza of verses 12-17, a series of questions begins and answer are given whether “their answer(s) are God (v. 12) or no one (vv. 13-14), the purpose of these questions is to illustrate God’s sovereign and independent creative power, to act without anyone’s help or advice” (Wilson 1986:140; cf. Spykerboer 1976:33; Schoors 1973:248). In verses 15-17 a conclusion, introduced by **אֵין** follows, depicting “the relatively paltry scale of the nations in comparison to Yahweh” (Wilson 1986:140). In spite of this self-evident reply, another answer is immediately given in verse 15-17. According to Gitay (1981:83), “the repetition of the refrain (v. 18, 25) holds the unit together; verse 15 and verse 17 relate to verse 23 and verse 24; and the whole passages from verses 21-24 relates to the concluding passage, verses 28-31. Thus verse 21 is parallel to verse 28, and verse 23 relates to verse 29. But while in verse 23 God appears as the mighty and powerful One, in verse 29 God encourages Israel.”

How, then, do verses 18-20 function within the context of verses 12-31? Isaiah 40:12-31 opens with a chain of rhetorical questions (vv. 12-14). These rhetorical questions are mostly introduced by the interrogative pronoun **מִי** “who” with a negative force, due to

the negative answer implied by the question (Labuschagne 1966:18).¹⁴⁵ A striking feature of Isaiah 40:12-31 is the accumulation of rhetorical questions throughout this pericope. According to O’Connell (1994:163), “a disposition of consolation in Isaiah 40:1-11 shifts suddenly to one of disputation, beginning with the cluster of insinuating rhetorical questions that introduces Isaiah 40:12-41:7.” The use of the rhetorical question **מִי** “who” is seen in the broader context of Isaiah 40:18-20 as well as in Isaiah 40:18 (O’Connell, 1994:163).¹⁴⁶ As Holter (1996:60; cf. Köhler 1923:62-63; Gordis 1932-33: 212-217; Held 1969:71-79; Melugin 1971:332-333; Terrien 1966:304f.) points out “the one way to get a grip on the structure of Isaiah 40:12-31 is to proceed from its questions.” **מִי** is found in verses 12, 13, 14, 18, 25, and 26.¹⁴⁷ Rhetorical questions

¹⁴⁵ The alliteration of the sound **נ**, which is repeated five times in verse 12: **מִי מִיִּם וְשָׁמַיִם הָרִים בְּמַאֲזָנֵיהֶם** ties the verse together. The prophet repeats not only the sound **נ** of the **מִי** but also the sound **ש**, which is one of the strongest consonants. He does so in order to focus the attention and to strengthen the impact of the question. They are **שֶׁעָלוּ שָׁמַיִם בְּשֵׁלֶשׁ וְשִׁקְלָה** (Gitay 1981:89). An interrogative style dominates the heart of the scene from verses 12-29, but underneath this are several units of a different genre that Melugin calls a disputation speech (Watts 2005:620). Verses 12-17 consists of a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 12-14) and concluding assertions (Schoors 1973:247) twice introduced by **הֲיֵן** (Watts 2005: 620). Melugin (1997:32) has noted that this disputation form also occurs in Exodus 4:11 and 2 Kings 18:35. The latter is particularly interesting in light of the close connection between this passage, Isaiah 36:20 and the ideas and forms that have shaped the Vision (Watt 2005:620).

¹⁴⁶ In the wider context, this use of **מִי** “who” can be seen clearer. O’Connell (1994:163) makes a schema to represent the complex frameworking of this ‘disputational complex’ as follows:

- aa: Incomparability of YHWH’s power and council in creation [concentric] (40:12-14) 2x **מִי** / 1x **אֲתֵּי-מִי**
 - b : Insignificance of the nations before YHWH [concentric] (40:15-17)
- a: Incomparability of YHWH to crafted idols [concentric] (40:18-20) 1x **וְאֵל-מִי**
 - bb: YHWH’s power to subjugate world kingdoms [complex frame] (40:21-24)
- a’: Incomparability of YHWH the creator [to crafted idols] (40:25) 1x **וְאֵל-מִי**
- aa’: Incomparability of YHWH’s creative decree in the heavens (40:26) 1x **מִי / יִקְרָא**
 - axis**: YHWH’s protest against accusations of covenant disregard (40:27)
 - bb’: YHWH’s power and knowledge available to his people [complex frame] (40:28-31)
 - b’: YHWH’s summons to trial of impotent nations (41:1)
- aa’: Incomparability of YHWH’s decree as lord of history (41:2) 1x **מִי / יִקְרָא**
 - bb’’: YHWH’s power to subjugate world kingdoms (41:2b-3)
- aa’’: Incomparability of YHWH’s decree as lord of history (41:4) 1x **מִי / קָרָא**
 - b’ Impotence of the nations against YHWH (41:5-6)
 - a’’: Impotence of crafted idols (41:7)

In this section, rhetorical questions are posed eight times with the interrogative **מִי** (O’Connell 1994:165).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. also **מִה** in verse 18.

often tend to occur in series, and they are therefore interesting from a compositional point of view.¹⁴⁸

Holter (1995:61-62) shows how the rhetorical questions are organized within verses 12-31,¹⁴⁹ and what the relationship between these questions and the passages in them is.

The questions are grouped into three groups by Holter (1995:60):

- A) מִי -questions, emphasizing Yahweh as creator in vv. 12, 13, 14, 26.
- B) מִי - and מִהָּ -questions, emphasizing the incomparability of Yahweh in vv. 18, 18, 25
- C) אֵלֹהֵי -and אֱלֹהִים -questions, emphasizing Israel's knowledge of Yahweh in vv. 21, 21, 21, 21, 28, 28

The section of Isaiah 40:18-20 commences with a *waw* which connects it with the previous passage and which brings out the contrast to the narratives in the last verse (Spykerboer 1976:35).¹⁵⁰ As Spykerboer (1976:35, 36) points out, verse 17 and verse 18 are connected by a *waw*, which precedes the interrogative and thus commence a speech which is already in progress, increase the force of the rhetorical question that follows. In Isaiah 40:18, it commences a new section that is an integral part of the larger composition of Isaiah 40:12-31 (Spykerboer 1976:36). The preceding passage, verses

¹⁴⁸ Watson gives examples of three (e.g. Jr 2:14, 31) to as many as sixteen (Job 40:24-31) rhetorical questions in a row; this tendency to occur in series is mostly interpreted as originating from wisdom circles, and in the Old Testament this feature is represented in a striking number in Job. See especially Job 38, which is almost entirely made up of rhetorical questions. Several exegetes see wisdom influence behind the series of rhetorical questions in Isaiah 40:12-31. Cf. Melugin 1971:332-333; Terrien 1965(1966):304f.

¹⁴⁹ Holter (1995:61-62) interprets this pericope of Isaiah 40:12-31 according to the following pattern:

	A	/	B	/	C	/	ab	/	c
1) Rhetorical questions	12-14	/	18	/	21	/	25-26	/	28
[2] Self-evident answer, unexpressed]									
3) Replies	15-17	/	19-20	/	22-24	/	26-27	/	28-31

¹⁵⁰ According to Spykerboer, the *waw* is often used to create a contrast between what precedes and what follows, at the same time introducing a question.

12-17 opens with three rhetorical “who”-questions (vv. 12-14). Even though they have different structures and wordings, they seem to act as one single question, “who is like Yahweh.” The self-evident answer is “[n]o-one but Yahweh himself!” (Holter 1995:71; Labuschagne 1966:27; Naidoff 1981:30).¹⁵¹ Some interpreters have discussed the issue whether the questions in 40:12-14 actually request similar answers to those in following section. Some scholars argue that the answer to the question in verse 12 is “Yahweh”, while the questions in verses 13-14 require the answer “no-one” (North 1964:83-84). Others believe that the answer is “no-one” in all of these cases (Westermann 1976:44). However, since verse 12 concerns typical creation figures, it is difficult to see how the answer could be anything else but “Yahweh” (Holter 1995:71). Verse 12 forms the introduction to a longer discussion on the incomparability of Yahweh (vv. 12-31), and the opening questions, “who measured...?”, demand a presentation of the incomparable Yahweh. The questions in verses 13-14 reflect the same pattern (Holter 1995:71; cf. Labuschagne 1966:27; Naidoff 1981:69).

After Israel and the nations are shown to be incomparable to God in verse 15-17, a vignette of idol-making follows the challenging question of verse 18 (Clifford 1980 :459). The relation between verses 12-17 and verse 18 is thus very close (Spykerboer 1976:38). Isaiah 40:18-20 can be seen as the final conclusion of Isaiah 40:12-17, that is, the nations and their gods are nothing (Spykerboer 1976:37).¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ According to Labuschagne, rhetorical questions expressing Yahweh’s incomparable acts, have as their obvious answer, “none but Yahweh alone”. In his critique on Labuschagne, Naidoff argues that “it is difficult to imagine Yahweh teaching himself.” But, as Holter points out, “the questions are rhetorical, and their point is not that Yahweh teaches or consults himself, but to emphasize that the only being comparable with Yahweh is Yahweh himself.”

¹⁵² On the authenticity of Isaiah 40:19-20, see the argument in Spykerboer (1976:38-42).

Naidoff (1981:67-68) points out that verse 18 deals with the incomparability of God. The same happens in verses 21-24 and verses 25-26. Each time, a set of questions is followed by new questions which begin in verses 21, 26aa, and 28aa. These questions are rhetorical, since they serve to make emphatic assertions which should be obvious to the listeners. This second set of questions is then followed by hymnic passages which can be seen as implicitly answering the questions, “Can anything be compared with God?” Verses 19-20 serves as theological reply to the rhetorical questions put in verse 18 in the same way as verses 15-17 and 22-24 are theological replies to the questions in verses 12-14 and 21 respectively, although basically the rhetorical questions are answered already (Holter 1995:77-78). The ending of each verse is also in parallel, like the first two words of verse 19 and verse 20 are paralleled to each other (Williamson 1987:14f; Korpel 1991:220-221). This external parallel suggests that the prophet deliberately chose ambiguous verbs for his description of the “creative” process of making an image to let his audience savour the irony (Korpel 1991:221). What is not said explicitly in Isaiah 40:19-20, but is implied, is that idols, like the nations in the previous passage Isaiah 40:12-17 and the rulers in Isaiah 40:21-24 are nothing or less than nothing (Spykerboer 1976:45). The answer, of course, is “No”. Thus these sections, verse 18-20, verses 21-24 and verse 25-26, do stand out as complete, self-contained disputations, whose purpose is to demonstrate the incomparability of God. Moreover, in terms of the hidden question with which all of verses 12-26 is concerned, “[i]s Yahweh able to help?”, an implied answer is also found in the references to the “rulers” in verses 23-24 and to the astral deities in verse 26 (Naidoff 1981:25).¹⁵³

¹⁵³ This analysis of verse 21-24 differs from that given above. The difference depends on what one views as the issue in dispute. If the issue is “Can anything be compared to God?”, then all of verses 22-24 serve as the conclusion. If the issue is, “Can Yahweh save, specifically from the power of foreign rulers?” the conclusion is not reached until verse 23 (or 24). It is suggested here that this ambiguity is an intentional result of the present arrangement of the sections. Verse 18 and verses 21-24 refer primarily to God’s

As Naidoff (1981:68) observes, when the three sections are placed side by side, a parallel structure emerges:

	18 + 21-24	25-26	27-31
statement of issue	18	25	27
Basis	21	26aαb	28-29
Conclusion	22-24	26aβb	30-31

The verses of Isaiah 40: 18 + 21-24 form a self-contained disputation, which seeks to prove (as the statement of issue in verse 18 makes clear) the incomparability of God (Naidoff 1981:72).

It would seem that verses 12-17, 18-20, 21-24 and 25-26 each forms a self-contained disputation intended to prove something about the transcendent nature of God - his immeasurability or incomparability.

Holter (1995:77) suggests the following structure for verses 12-31:

Rhetorical question	/	Reply
vv. 12-14: Who is like Yahweh	/	vv. 15-17: The nations are as nothing before Yahweh.
v. 18: To whom will you compare God?	/	vv. 19-20: As for an idol -a craftsman casts it
v. 21: Do you not know?	/	vv. 22-24: The inhabitants of the earth and the rulers of the nations-are nothing before Yahweh.
v. 25: To whom will you compare me?	/	vv. 26: Lift your eyes and look to the heavens?

incomparability; in the larger context they serve as an assurance of Yahweh's power to save.

vv. 27-28: Why do you say, O Jacob and / vv. 29-31: He gives strength to the weary
complain, O Israel

4.1.2.2 The structural features of the passages dealing with rhetorical question followed
by idol-fabrication within Isaiah 40-55: Isaiah 40:1-7; 44:6-20; 46:5-7

The structure of Chapters 40-66 is studied by form criticism, with its tendencies toward atomization (Oswalt 1998:12; cf. Merrill 1987:24-43). Since Duhm, scholars widely accept that chapters 40-66 contain two independent books: Chapters 40-55 and chapters 56-66. The unity of chapters 40-55 can, however, be indicated in terms of style, theme, organization, and so on (Oswalt 1998:12).¹⁵⁴ Although some scholars assume that Isaiah 40-55 is composed using different sources, it is concurred that the text in its present form shows fairly clear lines of an argument, at least through the first half of chapters 40-55. The texts exhibit a high level of coherence and continuity. There are also indications of large-scale artistic arrangements of some themes, as shown in that Isaiah 40:1-11 and 40:12-31 are dual introductions to what follows, namely Isaiah 41:1-49:4 (Watts 1987:621). Gitay (1981:128, 193, 287, 398) has made an exhaustive study of Isaiah 40-48 from a rhetorical-critical standpoint. O'Connell (1994:149) also indicates that Isaiah 40-55 forms a theological unity with the rhetoric of the covenant disputation that governs the book of Isaiah. Thus scholars points out the unity of Isaiah 40-55. O'Connell (1994:152) suggests that the overall repetition pattern that governs Isaiah 40-55 shows it to be the structural, as well as the rhetorical climax of the whole book of Isaiah. O'Connell (1994:149-154) shows that a schema represents the complex

¹⁵⁴ For the study of the unity of Isaiah 40-55, see Muilenburg 1956:381-773; Westermann 1964:92-170; Lack 1973; Bonnard 1972:23; Melugin 1976:63, 175; Merendino 1981:571-572.

framework of this ‘disputational complex’ in Isaiah 40-55 as well as that of Isaiah 40:18-20. In Isaiah 40-55, as O’Connell (1994:149-214) shows, Isaiah 40:18-20 is located in the context of the rhetoric of a prophetic covenant disputation of Isaiah 40-55 that is comprised of major sections and subsections.

As Holter (1993:63-64) points out, within Isaiah 40-55, the pattern of a rhetorical question emphasizing the incomparability of Yahweh, followed by an idol-fabrication passage, is no exception, but actually the way in which all four idol-fabrication passages, Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:1-7, 44:9-20 and 46:5-7 are introduced, with the structure of the *”*question.

- The relation of the proclamation of God’s incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 41:1-7

Although there is an old exegetical tradition of rejecting the authenticity and present position of Isaiah 41:6-7. Holter (1995:116) points out how these two verses actually function in their present literary context. There is two of the major problem in dealing with Isaiah 41:6-7. First, whether Isaiah 41:6-7 originates from Second Isaiah, and secondly, the actual placing of these two verses. Scholars are divided about the place and authenticity of verses 6-7. There are also questions about whether verse 5 belongs to verses 1-4 or opens a new unit followed by verses 6-7. Duhm (1902:253-265) was the first to suggest that verses 6-7 are out of place in the present context, and that their original context is Isaiah 40:19-20. Baltzer (2001:87) insists that the text of 41:1-5a can be viewed as separate unit. He points out that the beginning (v.1) and ending (v. 5a) of

the unit all talk about the “islands” and “nations”. But according to Melugin (1976:93), the transfer of verses 6-7 behind Isaiah 40:19 is arbitrary, as well as assumption that verse 5 is secondary because these three verses are integral to the structure and intention of the poem Gitay (1984:103; Spykerboer 1976:59-60; Muilenburg 1956:452) suggests that verses 5-7 have to be read together as an ironical response to God’s deeds and historical domination expressed in verses 1-4.

Gitay (1984:99; cf. Smart 1965:65) points out that the addressee of this address is the people of Israel.¹⁵⁵ Isaiah arouses his addressee’s curiosity by speaking about a trial between God and the nations. A question is then asked: “Who has aroused (him)...?” (v. 2a) (Baltzer 2001:87). These questions are reminiscent of the series of questions: “Who...? Whom...?” (וַיִּשְׁאֵל) in the previous chapter. Two questions are then asked: “Who has aroused (him)...?” (v. 2a) and “Who has done (this)?” (v. 4a). The answer is given in verse 4 in hymnic predictions: it is Yahweh himself who has acted. The text of verses 1-5 is therefore relatively self-contained, but is also linked with its context (Baltzer 2001:87).

What is, then, the relationship between the trial depicted in Isaiah 41:1-4 and the following idol-fabrication passage in verses 5-7? (Holter 1995:116). According to Holter (1995:117), there are two features in the trial. First, this particular passage is placed in contexts where they are preceded by rhetorical וַיִּשְׁאֵל-questions, which emphasize

¹⁵⁵ According to Gitay (1984:99), Isaiah’s use of the device of rhetorical question already at the beginning of the unit, that is, at verse 2, indicates that he assumes that his audience understands his arguments even though they are only hinted at. Such a device can be utilized only in front of addressees who do not need to be introduced to the details of the subject, that is, people who actually share the speaker’s opinions but for some reason ignore them. These people cannot, therefore, be the nations, but the people of Israel themselves.

the incomparability of Yahweh (Holter 1995:117). The contextual feature is hardly accidental, and it seems reasonable to take verse 2 and verse 4, in which the **מַה**-questions appear and are replied to in the Isaiah 41:5-7 (Holter 1995:117). God's incomparability is also stressed and contrasted with the vivid description of the idols (vv. 5-7) (Spykerboer 1976:59-60; Melugin 1956:452). Hence, Isaiah presents in the introduction the heart of his argument (Gitay 1981:103).¹⁵⁶

Holter (1995:117) charts its structure as follows:

- a) Rhetorical **מַה**-question (v. 2a and v. 4a): “Who stirred up Cyrus?...” and “who has done this?”
- [b) Self-evident answer: unexpressed]
- c) Reply (vv. 5-7): “The islands have seen it...” and “The idol-fabricators...”

This pattern from Isaiah 40:12-31 also makes sense here in Isaiah 41:1-7. The idol-fabrication passage then acts as an ironical reply to the preceding rhetorical questions (Holter 1995:117). Isaiah 41:1-7 is preceded by symmetrically framed rhetorical questions which emphasize the incomparability of Yahweh (Holter 1995:117). The introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct dealing with

¹⁵⁶ Cicero (*De Oratore*, 2. 318, 313-314 cited by Gitay 1981:103) stressed as follow: “The opening passage in a speech must not be drawn from some outside source but from the very heart of the case... for the situation demands that the anticipation of the audience should be gratified as quickly as possible, and it is not satisfied at the start, a great deal more work has to be put in during the remainder of the proceedings, for a case is in a bad way which does not seem to become stronger as soon as it begins to be stated. Consequently as in the choice of speaker the best man on each occasion should come first, so in argument of the speech the strongest point should come first.”

the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God clearly figures in the passages of Isaiah 41:1-7.

- The relation of the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 44:6-20

The compositional unit, Isaiah 44:6-23 frames a polemic against idolatry (vv. 9-20) with an inclusion formed by a trial speech (vv. 6-8) and a concluding word of assurance with its attendant hymn (vv. 21-22, 23) (Wilson 1986:162).¹⁵⁷ The idol-fabrication passage (Is 44:9-20) is preceded by a presentation of Yahweh as the lord of the history (Is. 44:6-8), and is followed by a presentation of Israel as the servant of Yahweh (Is 44:21-23) (Holter 1995:190). Nearly all recent commentators have denied these verses to the corpus of Isaiah 40-55. On the one hand, the authenticity of Isaiah 44:9-20 has often been disputed; even Muilenburg (1966:505) defers and considers these verses, if the work of the prophets, to be out of context (Westermann 1969:145-146; Elliger 1978, 414-416). On the other hand, Spykerboer (1976:116-118), Clifford (1984:450-464) and Preuss (1971:208-215) have recently defended the authenticity of Isaiah 44:9-20 in its present context. It has thematic similarities to the other idol polemics in Isaiah 40-55, just discussed, which are clearly of a piece with their longer compositional units (Wilson 1986:163).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ With this delimitation Holter (1995:190) says that there is major break between Isaiah 44:23 and 24. Even interpreters who generally acknowledge the larger structures of Isaiah 40-55 usually take Isaiah 44:24 as the opening of a new unit (Muilenburg 1956:516ff; Clifford 1984:114ff; Watts 2005:147ff.)

¹⁵⁸ While BH3 and the RSV render it in prose, most exegetes now recognize it as verse. Its vocabulary and prosody is consistent with that of Deutero-Isaiah. According to Holter (1995:190), from a formal critical point of view, Isaiah 44:6-23 is usually taken as consisting of four more or less independent units; verses 6-8 is a trial speech between Yahweh and the nations, verses 9-20 is a satire on idol-fabrication, verses 21-22 is an exhortation, and verse 23 is a brief hymn. Westermann (1969:112-116) claims that verses 6-8 and 21-22 should be joined together to form one unit, following a suggestion going back to Duhm (1968:305-306, 310-311). Schoors (1973:232-233) and Melugin (1976:118-122) places a greater

On the unity of Isaiah 44:6-23, even scholars who admit the unity of Isaiah 44:9-20 by Deutero-Isaiah's authorship treat verses 9-20 as separate, unconnected to verses 6-8 and 22-23 (Clifford 1984:110). Yet Clifford (1984:110) points out that there is a single idea expressed in the passages that is genuinely Deutero-Isaianic. According to Clifford (1984:110), the double relationship "Yahweh: Israel:: the gods (or their images): the nations", seen already in Isaiah 41:1-42:9, appears here also.

From a structural point of view there are some differences between these two passages which frame verses 9-20 (Holter 1995:191). The first passage, verses 6-8, is characterized by a series of three rhetorical questions, introduced by the interrogative pronoun *מִי*, or the interrogative particle *הֲ* as in *הֲלֹא* and *הֲיִשׁ*, and all with references to "I" i.e. Yahweh (Holter 1995:191). The latter passage, verses 21-23, is characterized by a series of five imperatives. The first two (vv. 21-22) are in the singular - addressing Israel, and the three later ones (v. 23) are in the plural - addressing the heavens, the depths of the earth, and the mountains (Holter 1995:191-192). Common to both groups is that the imperatives in four of five cases are followed by *כִּי*-sentences (Holter 1995:192). There is a structural parallelism between these two passages (vv. 6-9 and 22-23) and the one in between them (vv. 9-20) (Holter 1995:192).¹⁵⁹

emphasis on the ability of these two units to stand alone. Holter (1995:190) points out Rhetorical critics tend rather to emphasize the unity and larger structure of Isaiah 44:6-23. Muilenburg (1966: 505-510) chooses to take verses 6-8 and 21-23 as one poem, "Yahweh glorifies himself in Israel", but is rather uncertain about the present position of verses 9-20. Clifford (1984:107-113) takes this unit as dealing with the ancient idea that each nation reflects the virtue of its patron deity and maker. Gitay (1981:155-176) interprets Isaiah 40-48 according to the classical rhetorical scheme and takes vv. 6-23 as the "refutation" (vv. 6-20) and "epilogue" (vv. 21-23) of the larger rhetorical unit Isaiah 43:14-44:23. Wilson (1986:178-181) also takes verses 6-8 and 21-22 as Second Isaiah's frame around the "pre-existing" verses 9-20.

¹⁵⁹ While Holter says these parallels between Isaiah 41:1-16 and 44:6-23 are interesting, since they place the second (41:6-7) and the third (44:9-20) idol-fabrication passage, they can be also interesting in point that this structure shows us the first and second commandment construct, that is, the relation between the

What is, then, the relationship between the incomparability of Yahweh in verses 6-8 and the following idol-fabrication passage in verses 9-20?¹⁶⁰ According to Holter (1995:195), “an important feature is emphasizing of Yahweh’s incomparability with the help of a rhetorical **מִי**-question. The interrogative questions beginning with **מִי** enter into larger series because the interrogative **מִי** tends to occur in groups within Isaiah 40-55. Here the function of **מִי**-questions is to relate the incomparability of Yahweh to idol (Holter 1995:195; Watt 2001:140-141).¹⁶¹ The **מִי**-question is appeared in verse 7 in the Isaiah 44:6-8.¹⁶² Holter (1995:196) represents its structure as follows:

- a) Rhetorical **מִי**-question (v. 7): “Who is like me?”
- [b) Self-evident answer: unexpressed]
- c) Reply (vv. 9-20): “Those who make idol...”

Yahweh begins with the claim that he alone is God, stated in self-praise hymn style (v. 6). The issue under disputes then becomes apparent in the question introduced by **מִי**: “who is like me?” (v. 7) A summons to trial follows, in which Yahweh challenges his

incomparability of God and the way of worship.

¹⁶⁰ Although whether these passages within the present literary context are authentic part of Isaiah 40-55 or not is discussed, this study will not enter the discussion, and give a brief survey of the major argument.

¹⁶¹ In the cases of the passages to deal with relation between God’s incomparability and Isaiah’s idol fabrication critique, this is common and similar.

¹⁶² According to Holter (1995:195), a possible to the rhetorical question in verse 7a could found in verse 7aβ. “MT here reads **מִי מֵעוֹלָם אֲדַעֲבֶנְךָ וְאֲדַעֲבֶנְךָ**, “from my placing an eternal people and things to come”, a saying which many interpreters find rather odd. The MT is therefore often emended to **מִי מֵעוֹלָם אֲדַעֲבֶנְךָ**, “who proclaimed from of old the things to come?; This suggestion obviously makes the text smoother and it would be fit well into my interpretation. But it is not absolutely necessary, since the MT also makes sense here” Watts (2001:141) says: “when all is said and done, a direct translation of MT remains the most satisfactory.”

opponents to present their case by declaring what is to come (v. 7). Thus Yahweh appeals to common Israelite belief concerning his ability to declare the future as they have experienced his power in the past. It is their experience of the effectiveness of his word that they are summoned to as witness (v. 8).

Isaiah 44:9-20 is situated in a context where it acts as an ironical reply to the question of whom can be compared with Yahweh. “who is like me?”, Yahweh says, and a highly ironical reply is suggested: “Could it be the idol-fabricator? (Holter 1995:196). Idol-fabricators seem to act as representatives of the nations (Holter 1995:196).¹⁶³

The emphasis of Yahweh’s incomparability by means of a rhetoric מִי-שֶׁמִּי-יִשְׁוֶה question in 44:6-8 is a common feature, which features also in the texts preceding the two other idol-fabrication passage, Isaiah 40:18 and 41:5. Like the two previous passages, Isaiah 40:19-20 and 41:6-7, Isaiah 44:9-20 acts as an ironical reply to the question: who can be compared with Yahweh (“Who is like me?” and “Could it be the idol-fabricators?”) (Cf. Holter 1995:196-199).¹⁶⁴

We can also infer the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct in Isaiah 44:6-20 showing God’s incomparability reinforced by capability to

¹⁶³ Holter (1995:196) suggests two arguments in favour of such an interpretation. First, actual wording of the rhetorical question in 44:7, מִי-שֶׁמִּי-יִשְׁוֶה is attested only three times elsewhere in the Old Testament, e.g. Nh 6:11; 49:19; 50:44. In two of these cases, that is, Jr 49:19 and 50:44 we can find out there seems to be an Old Testament tradition of comparing Yahweh and political powers linked to the expression, מִי-שֶׁמִּי-יִשְׁוֶה. Secondly, this interpretation of the מִי-שֶׁמִּי-יִשְׁוֶה in verse 7 is further strengthened by the use of the key word “witness” in verse 8 and verse 9; a key word binding verses 6-8 and 9-20 together. Two different kind of witnesses are depicted here, “my” and “their” witness. The witnesses depicted in verse 8 – are Israel. In verse 9 witnesses of an entirely different kind are depicted. Verse 10f. depicts the gods and idols as witness of the idol-fabricators (Holter 1995:197-199).

¹⁶⁴ In regard to this question in 44:6-20, we can point out arguments in favor of such an interpretation in the history of argument.

witness Himself, otherwise idol as a witness of nation cannot witness, and the following idol-fabrication passage.

- The relation of the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 46:5-7

The fourth and final idol-fabrication passage within Isaiah 40-55 has also been questioned with regard to its authorship. Form critics have usually separated verse 5 from verses 1-4. Many modern commentators consider some, or all of these to be later insertion. But there is no textual support for this position, and other scholars have asserts with equal assurance that some, or all of the passages are integral to the literary, or logical, structure of the passages (Oswalt 1998:231). A further reason why some doubt the authenticity of verses 5-7 is that verses 1-4 seem to distinguish between the deity and the idol, while verses 5-7 (and the other anti-idolatrous polemics) do not (Oswalt 1985:123). There is a strong exegetical tradition of rejecting this idol-fabrication passage also as the work of the prophet Isaiah. And also the arguments produced *pro et contra* authenticity are more or less the same (Merendino 1981:472; Duhm 1968 325-326). Critics also separate verse 5 from verses 6-7 as in other passages: Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:5-7 and 44:6-20. In the opening statement in verse 5 the writer reminds the reader of the language of Isaiah 40:18 (Oswalt 1998:231). To reinforce the foolishness of any attempt at comparison, the prophet launches into the fourth, and last, of his *exposés* of the inner contradictions of idolatrous worship (vv. 6-7) (Oswalt 1998:231). Most important here is the common concentration in verses 4 and 5 on the "I" of Yahweh (Holter 1995:223). In verse 4 Yahweh presents himself as יְיָ no fewer

than five times, thereby clearly emphasizing his own role *vis-à-vis* Israel. And this is then followed up in verse 5, where two of the verbs are suffixed with the corresponding ׀ (Holter 1995:223). Another argument for reading Isaiah 46:1-4 and 5 together, is that the obvious contrasting of Isaiah 46:1-2 vs. 3-4 logically leads to a question like the ones in verse 5 (Holter 1995:223). However, this questioning of the “authenticity” of verses 6-7 has been countered by several recent commentators (Mullenburg 1966:540; Preuss 1971:220; Spykerboer 1976:146-147; Beuken 1979:262-263; Wilson 1986:161; cf. Holter 1995:223).

The rhetorical questions of verse 5a and 5b serve several purposes. These questions introduce this section of the poem in much the same way as the imperatives of the section (Franke 1994:89). They also set the stage for the following scene by implying that there is no one to whom God can be compared (Franke 1994:89). The entire section is united by the fact that the answer to the questions is provided in verse 7: idols cannot be compared to the God of Israel, because they cannot move, answer or save (Franke 1994:89).

Another feature that unites this section is the development of the scene in chronological order. It begins, after the rhetorical questions, with the extravagant people digging in their purses for money, which is then weighed out on a scale. Next they hire a smith, who makes an idol that they proceed to worship. After they lift the idol on their shoulders, bear it away, and then set it down in the place where it is to stand. The people who are making and worshipping idols have been identified (Franke 1994:89).

What is, then, the relationship between Isaiah 46:5 and 6-7? According to Holter (1995:224), two points must be noticed: first, an important feature is the emphasizing of Yahweh's incomparability with the help of a rhetorical "לִּי" question in verse 5 as in Isaiah 46:5-7, closely echoing the one in 40:18. Holter (1995:224) represents its structure as follows:

- a) Rhetorical "לִּי"-question (v. 5): "To Whom will you liken me?"
- [b) Self-evident answer: (unexpressed): "No-one"]
- c) Ironic Reply (vv. 6-7): "Those who pours out gold..."

In Isaiah 46:5-7 appearing in the context of Isaiah 46:3-13 we can also find the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct. Followed by idol-fabrication passage (Is 46:6-7), God's incomparability contained in the rhetorical question (Is 46:5) makes the fabrications to be a reply to its question.

4.1.2.3 The structural features of Isaiah as a whole

Discovering what current literary patterns govern Isaiah as a whole and thereby give it unity, coherence and rhetorical emphasis is to explain something of the rhetorical interrelationships among the various sections of the book as they relate to the whole.

(O'Connell 1994:17).¹⁶⁵ The rhetorical structure of Isaiah as a whole will supply the

¹⁶⁵ To explain patterns of repetition in the book some scholars propose that the unity of Isaiah's message derives from 'reciprocal relationships' between the amalgamated collections of chapters 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66. O'Connell (1994:19; cf. Childs 1979:317; 325-338; 1984: 66-70; Barr 1983:75-104; 158-162)) points out that the tendency to attribute such a unity to the hand producing "a diachronic synthesis of allegedly diverse 'Isaianic' literary traditions, whose leveling of alleged diachronic distinctions, out of concern for the final ('canonical') form of the text, highlights his departure from hermeneutical axiom of

hint to the question of rhetorical function, which is addressed in some passages as a section of the whole book. The question of formal patterning seeks to make an advance on the problem of determining what sets of genre conventions might account for the rhetoric implied by the form of the entire book of Isaiah as an integrated entity (O'Connell 1994:19), not limited to the one or at most two of the three major section of the book of Isaiah.

O'Connell (1994:19-20) says that the rhetoric of the book is closest to that of prophetic covenant disputation, suggesting that the book best manifests its structural unity, thematic coherence and rhetorical emphasis when read as an example of the prophetic covenant disputation genre, by which the major sections and subsections of Isaiah can be seen to cohere. The pattern of repetition of formal structure of Isaiah, which almost always frame a central axis, may involve two-, three-, fourfold repetitions that combine to make up complex framework configuration (O'Connell 1994:20). According to O'Connell (1994:20), the book of Isaiah is arranged, with transitional materials (i.e. 2:6αβ, 22; 12:1-6), into a continuous development of the themes and elements that make up the book's rhetoric of prophetic covenant disputation, comprising seven main sections: an exordium (1:1-2:5), two structurally analogous accusatory threats of judgment (2:6γ-21 and 3:1-4:1), denouncing cultic sins social crimes respectively, two structurally analogous schemes for the punishment and restoration of Zion and the nations (4:2-11:16; 13:1-39:8), an exoneration of Yahweh (40:1-54:17) and a final ultimatum, which again appeals for the covenant reconciliation (55:1-66:24). Isaiah's exordium (1:1-2:5) appears to be a truncated version of the biblical covenant disputation

historical criticism that 'a biblical book could only be properly understood when interpreted in the light of its original historical setting'."

form and an aggregate of rhetorical elements typical of ancient Near Eastern and biblical covenant disputation forms aligns with the rhetorical strategy of the book of Isaiah as a whole (O’Connell 1994:21).¹⁶⁶

This study follows O’Connell’s (1994:242) conclusion that “the book of Isaiah presents the structural unity, logical coherence and rhetorical emphasis that one should expect of a literary entity composed under the controlling conventions of single literary genre can be drawn.” Main sections of the book of Isaiah have been arranged according to a strategy whereby they present progressively rhetorical elements that are germane to and cohere under the rubric of a biblical covenant disputation (O’Connell 1994:242).¹⁶⁷

<Excursus 2> A brief history on the authorship and composition of Isaiah

The traditional view on the authorship and composition of the book of Isaiah is that a single author wrote it, namely, Isaiah, יְשַׁעְיָהּ, (Kitchen 2003:377),¹⁶⁸ and composed it, during his life time (Cf. Oswalt 1986:4).¹⁶⁹ “[A]s far as the book of Isaiah is taken to be one undivided

¹⁶⁶ These explicit examples of a strategy such as disputation against the people (3:13-14aa; cf. 27:8; 45:9; 57:16), vindication his servant before the people in 49:25 and 50:8, and vindication his people before the nations (51:22; cf. 2:4; 41:11) in Isaiah to portray YHWH in covenant disputation may lend further support that it is the genre of covenant disputation that best defines the controlling rhetoric strategy of the book, even though the book contains a variety of speech forms, which would not normally be associated with a covenant disputation form (O’Connell 1994:21).

¹⁶⁷ “It is difficult to imagine that all the various parts of these sections came to be compiled or even composed by a single author into their present arrangement apart from the control of a single rhetorical-structural design” (O’Connell 1994:243).

¹⁶⁸ Kitchen indicates that the third person singular in which each book of prophecy in the Old Testament is casted can be in accord with the common ancient Near Eastern usage of several classes of literature. Three basic elements can be seen in such titles: the prophet’s name (always), his status (sometimes), and a date line (mostly).

¹⁶⁹ The authorial unity of Isaiah, especially by a single author, comes from a theory of divine inspiration, which *named* an individual writer, rather than texts (Cf. Blenkinsopp 2002:69). It can be pointed out that as Blenkinsopp (2002:69) observes, “the concept did not therefore allow for the possibility, which to most scholars must seem theologically unexceptionable, that there could be inspired biblical authors who were

composition from one author, the issue of its formation, *a fortiori* the formation of anyone part of it, therefore, could not be and was not raised.” (Blenkinsopp 2002:69). The position of the traditional view is, however, challenged and replaced by multiple authorship, by two or three individuals or groups. Childs (1974:311ff; cf. Kitchen 2003:378, 379) observes that the interpretation of the book of Isaiah has experienced many important changes, from its unity by one author to multiple authorship, which is based on “the theory of three books in one (1-39; 40-55; 56-66), with, at least, three different dates (pre-exilic, exilic, post-exilic and variations thereof) and periods of composition, and finally, down to heaps of fragments often consigned to late dates.”¹⁷⁰ In exploring the composition and extent of the macro unit, this study cannot, however, enter into the current debate concerning the composition of Isaiah, that is, whether the Book of Isaiah can be divided into two or three sections, the so-called Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah. It is enough to just mention the history of the debate briefly here. Scholars hold the view that the three sections address three quite different historical situations (Cf. Davies 2000:6). Many scholars attribute the unity of the book to an author called “Deutero-Isaiah” who lived in exilic or post-exilic times as Clements (1985:96) says: “The sixth c. Babylonian background of chapters 40-55 is so explicit that to deny its relevance for an understanding of the contents is to ask for a totally different understanding of prophecy from that which clearly pertains elsewhere in the Old Testament prophetic books.”

According to Watts (1985:xxvi), some scholars propose that chapters 40-66 belong to the time of the exile and thereafter, with the contents coming from an unknown prophet designated as Deutero-Isaiah. This anonymous prophet is distinguished from Isaiah, בְּנֵי־אֱמוּנָה, whose speeches are considered typically to be restricted to chapters 1-39. This idea was further refined by claiming that Deutero-Isaiah was limited to chapter 40-55, with chapters 56-66 continuing a third corpus ascribed to Trito-Isaiah.¹⁷¹

anonymous.” No scholar insists that the text of Isaiah was inspired by an anonymous author. It is argued that there are two or three authors, who were not inspired.

¹⁷⁰ In general, the history of Old Testament interpretation shows that the evident impossibility or absurdity scholars are confronted with, brings doubt to them and abandonment of the composition by a single author (Blenkinsopp 2001:69). For example, it is noted that Moses, author of the Pentateuch, wrote a circumstantial account of his own death and burial (Dt 34:1-12); or that Samuel, as author of the book that bears his name, wrote the phrase “and Samuel died” (1 Sm 25:1). For the book of Isaiah, thus, a writer other than Isaiah was assumed to have written about Cyrus and the Babylonian exile. The book of Isaiah is considered as one of those *Kollektivnamen* like Moses, Solomon and David and chapters 40-52 are considered to be composed during the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C.E. As a result, the idea of one author is not maintained.

¹⁷¹ The considerable linguistic and thematic overlap of Isaiah 56-66 with 40-55 is considered to attest not to an authorial unity in terms of single authorship, but to continuity in the interpretative activity by

Such an approach leads to the atomization of the book and fragmentation.¹⁷² Thus, as Merrill (1987:24) observes, “scholars have long felt a disjunction between the material in chapters 40-55 and the following chapters, although noting that several themes and rhetorical usages connect the two units.”

There have arisen new interests and attempts to discuss the book of Isaiah as a whole (Melugin 1997:39).¹⁷³ The tendency in the approaches by critical scholars to deal with the composition

redactional hands, which differ markedly from the traditional view that defends unity in terms of single authorship (Holter 1995:11; Childs 2001:1-3; Blenkinsopp 2002: 69-71). Duhm is considered to be the first to assign chapters 56-66 to a separate author, called Trito-Isaiah. Duhm posed on different author and different time and circumstances for Trito-Isaiah. He assumed, for example, that the author of Isaiah 56-66 lived in Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah or even before Nehemiah’s administrative and religious reforms. For Isaiah 40-55’s authorship, he assumed another location somewhere in Phoenicia, approximately 540 B.C.E. by a different author, with the exception of the *Ebedlieder* (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), which were composed by another author, later than Deutero-Isaiah, but before the composition of 56-66. It was addressed to a different community that was well established, their temple had been rebuilt, the people were going about their business sacrificing, fasting, and engaging in other religious practices, and there are clear signs of internecine conflict and division.

Since Duhm, the division into Second and Third Isaiah has been generally accepted among critical scholars (Cf. Whybray 1975:196; Elliger 1928). Critical scholars (Adams 2006:8) have predominantly assumed that the book of Isaiah contains the speeches of three historical prophets from three different periods and geographical locations: Proto-/ First Isaiah (chapters 1-39), Deutero-/ Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55), and Trito-/ Third Isaiah (Chapters 56-66).

Duhm’s dating of this last section of the book has not been generally accepted nor has his insistence on its authorial unity (Cf. Blenkinsopp, 2001 Vol. III). About Duhm’s separation of 56-66 from 40-55 there are both occasional dissenters (Torrey 1928; James D. Smart, 1965), and doubters (Seitz 1992:501-507).

¹⁷² Since Ibn Ezra indirectly made the point that detaches Isaiah 40-66 from 1-39, Döderlein joined him and proposed this hypothesis for the composition of the Book of Isaiah. Gesenius also concentrated on the distinctive profile of Isaiah 40-66. For Gesenius, 40-66 was the longest of several pseudepigraphical compositions in the book, the product of one prophetic author, with his own distinctive agenda (Cf. Watts 2001:xxvi).

Duhm, however, can be considered as the scholar who “brought to bear on the text a new level of penetrating literary analysis, and his division of the book into three major parts (chapter 1-39; chapter 40-55; chapter 56-66) has been a major influence on the study of the book ever since.” According to Duhm, each larger division of the book had developed mostly independently of each other, and that only at a very late date they were joined. Since Duhm, the form critical approach assumed the distinctions in general, and interpreted each section without reference to the other, or sought to demonstrate the separateness of the sections, primarily on account of style and language (Cf. Childs 2001:2).

¹⁷³ For different discussions on the unity of the Book of Isaiah, see Steck 2000:25-26; Carr 1996:164-65.

and extent of the Book of Isaiah can be summarized as follows: “Older scholarship has stressed the disjunctures; some of the newer studies emphasize the continuity, in some cases, attributing the similarities between Isaiah 40-55 and 56-66 to a school of second Isaiah who completed the book.” (Wilson 1986:17-18; cf. Seitz 1993:264; 1996:219-40; Williamson 1995:211-265; Clements 1996:65-104; Schramm 1995:11-52; Gruber 1983:353; Sommer 1994:6-16, 311-323; Smith 1995; North 1967:9). Few authors see these evidences on the unity of the book as pointing to single authorship, rather than to explain it by redactional hands (Clements 1985:96).

The phenomenon can, however, be interpreted as “the different background[s] or division[s] of the book of Isaiah based on a lifetime’s close work [on] the book of Isaiah” as Motyer (1993:13-16) says.¹⁷⁴ As Oswalt (1986:4) points out, the unique features of Isaiah’s book, which has three different historical settings,¹⁷⁵ can be an excuse to make changes and challenges against the unity of the book as of one author.

This phenomenon can be explained under the unity of composition by one author.

It is possible to speculate with some degree of confidence on the general time frame which these chapters seem to be addressing. Chapter 40-55 seem to be offering hope to a people yet in exile, while chs. 56-66 appear to speak to a returned people who face old and new problems (Oswalt 1986:13)....although that the three main sections of the Book differ significantly can not be gainsaid (:17).

For the traditional approach, see Oswalt 1998; Motyer 1993; 1999; Vangemeren 1989:471-514. For some of the argumentation in favor of its compositional unity, see Allis 1950; Margalioth 1964; Young 1958. For the redaction critical approach, see Clements 1980; 1996a; 1996b:57-69; 1997a:3-17; 1997b:441-454; Rendtorff 1997; Sweeney 1993:141-162; 1996:50-67; 1996; Muilenburg 1956:381-773; Preuss 1971; Roth 1975:21-47. For the canonical approach, see Childs 2001; 1987:41-49; Seitz 1988:105-126; 1991; 1993; House 1998; Childs 1979:325-334. For the literary and theological unity of Isaiah, see Liebreich 1955-1956:259-277; 1956-1957:114-138; Becker 1968; Ackroyd 1978:16-48; 1980; 1982:117-129; Sweeney 1983; Evans 1988:129; Sanders 1980:180-181; Childs 1979:331; Carr 1996:188-218. For the literary approach, see Conrad 1991; 1996:315-316; 1997:3-18; 2000:109-124; Miscall 1994; Webb 1990:65-84).

¹⁷⁴ Motyer (1993:13) suggests a structure with three parts:1-37, 38-55, and 56-66, with “three portraits of a messianic king, varying in detail but based on a consistent model.”

¹⁷⁵ The historical settings can be shown as follows: “The first of these is during Isaiah’s lifetime, from 739 to 701 B.C. This time span is covered in chs.1-39. The second and third periods are long after Isaiah’s death. They are the periods of exile (605-539 B.C.), chs. 40-55, and of the return (the total period is 539-400 B.C., but probably here restricted to 539-500 B.C.), chs. 56-66.” (Oswalt 1986:4).

While this division of the book has served its purpose, Oswalt (1985:5) points out that “although contemporary scholars are more and more compelled by the evidence to admit the ideological and theological unity of the book, they choose not to change their conception of the nature of prophecy, instead of taking the step that the book itself clearly asks its readers to take”, that is, “accepting these writings as the result of the encounter of a single human being with the self-revealing Lord of the cosmos.”¹⁷⁶

As Oswalt (1998:5-6) observes, this position is to reject the voice of the text that itself insists on.

Without doubt, the theme of chs. 40-55 is the superiority of Israel’s God over the idols of the nations as proved in three ways: his ability to explain the past (41:22), tell the future (41:23), and do things that are radically new (43:18-19). That is, he alone transcends the bounds of the cosmos. But, the conviction that these chapters had to be written about 540 B.C. rests squarely on the prior conviction that Isaiah of Jerusalem could not have known the future in any supernatural way. This conviction then involves the unknown Babylonian prophet in an irreconcilable contradiction. His God Yahweh cannot tell the future any more than the gods can, but he wishes his hearers to believe that Yahweh can. In order to prove this point, the prophet tries to get his readers to believe that it was Isaiah of Jerusalem who said these things, all the while knowing this was not true. He even goes so far as to alter some of the earlier writings (e.g., ch. 13 with its reference to Babylon), or to insert some of his own (chs. 34-35) in order to make those writings correspond more closely to his own work.

But perhaps it can be said that the putative prophet did not himself promulgate the fiction, but only later redactors did so. For this, Oswalt (1998:6) answers as follows: “recent scholarship has concluded that “II” and “III” Isaiah are organically related to “I” Isaiah. In their very conceptions they depend on the supposedly prior writings. From the outset they are written as logical

¹⁷⁶ “[I]f Isaiah of Jerusalem did write these chapters, then he had a knowledge of the future that was more detailed than that displayed by other Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, this view means that these chapters are speaking *to* people in the future, not merely *about* them. This is also unique. Assuming that such uniqueness is not possible, one has to conclude that chs. 40-55 were written in the 6th century B.C.” (Oswalt 1998:5) Consequently, most contemporary scholars prefer to explain this as a theological response of the community in later periods, rather than a prophecy about the future: “because unknown persons, 150 years after the original Isaiah, felt that what they were saying was not new, but only a development of what the old prophet was saying, they consciously submerged their identities in his.” (Oswalt 1998:5) This hypothesis comes from an inability to accept the assertion of the book. The great flaw in this assertion is that “so-called “II Isaiah” makes such strenuous efforts to deny it.” (Oswalt 1998:5)

extensions of the previous material. Thus “II Isaiah” can not be saved from himself. He had to manufacture evidence for the marvelous theology that he taught. Not only, did his glorious predictions not come true, the very theology out of which the predictions grew was hollow. God had not predicted Cyrus in advance, nor had he predicted the return from exile in specific detail before the fact. Thus “II Isaiah” ’s claims for the superiority of Yahweh are groundless. Yet we still hear of the great theologian of the Exilic [period].” Consequently, as Oswalt (1998:6) points out, “it is the scholarly understanding of the phenomenon of biblical prophecy that needs to be corrected, not the traditional view of the book’s authorship.”

We can accept that what the book suggests to us about its origins, is true. “Isaiah of Jerusalem did indeed predict the Babylonian exile, and in so doing showed how the towering theology that he had applied to events in his own lifetime would become even more towering in relation to those new situations that he could see in outline, but not in detail.” (Oswalt 1998:6).¹⁷⁷

Although the study of the Isaiah 40-55 in the context of the discussion of the unity of the Book of Isaiah by redactional history dominates the study of the unity of the text, we have to choose the way of inductive study, rather than one imposed from outside to understand the compositional unity of the Book of Isaiah. Thus, “the better way to understand the thought of the book can be said as not imposed from the outside like a complex redactional process extending over hundreds of years, since there is no external evidence that such a process ever existed, but emerged from an inductive study.” (Oswalt 1986:21)¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Oswalt (1986:6) contends that “it is no longer necessary to posit either deception or a kind of rewriting that is, in effect, a denial of what the original author may have said. It does require that we accept the possibility of revelation and prediction. But if it is true that it is not so much vocabulary and style that prove the author of chapters 1-39 could not have written chapters 40-66, but that the latter chapters seem to have been written to another historical context than the author’s own, it is the scholarly understanding of the phenomenon of biblical prophecy that need to be corrected, not the traditional view of the book’s authorship.”

¹⁷⁸ The inductive study of the book suggests, as Oswalt (1986:4) observes, that “no other author is mentioned in the book, and indeed, Isaiah is specially named again in 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2; 37:2, 6, 21; 38:1, 4, 21; 39:3, 5, 8 and that Isaiah is not mentioned as the author of chapters 40-66 and it causes scholars some question on the authorship of the book”. But it can be explained “no other author is mentioned in present book and that no form of the book other than the present one is known makes it clear that original transmitters of the book intended it to be understood as a unit whose meaning was to be found solely by reference to the life and teachings of the prophet Isaiah.” (Oswalt 1986:4).

The second argument for the unity of the composition in the present form of the book is suggested by some scholars (Oswalt 1986:19; Ackroyd 1978:29; Cf. Clement 1980:434-435; Watters 1976:67-68). If in fact the present composition is the work of at least three major authors and a large number of editors or

redactors, it becomes very hard to explain how the book came to exist in its present form at all. The degree of unity which is to be found in the book (e.g., the use of “the Holy One of Israel” 13 times in chs. 1-39 and 16 times in chs. 40-66 and only 7 times elsewhere in the Bible) becomes a problem. Thus it becomes necessary to posit a “school” of students of “I Isaiah” who steeped themselves in the style and thought of the “master.” It would be out of such a group “II Isaiah” sprang during the Exile and from which, later still, came the writings which now constitute chs. 56-66. Aside from the fact that there is no other evidence for the existence of this “school,” it is hard to imagine how it ever would have come into existence for Isaiah (and not the other prophets) in the first place.’ (Oswalt 1986:19)

The third argument is, as Oswalt (1986:21) points out, the unity of thought which runs through the book. Its thought structure has been largely ignored in recent years, because of the attempt to isolate the supposed component parts. Each part has been exegeted by itself without reference to its larger literary context. But unless one assumes that the process of the formation of Isaiah was completely random or was controlled by societal reasons unrelated to the actual statements of the book, this is an unreasonable way to proceed. Without automatically assuming that one writer sat down and started writing at 1:1 and worked straight through to 66:24, one may still logically expect that there were reasons for putting one set of ideas in conjunction with another that were more significant than mere word association (to which some scholars resort to explain why one statement followed another). In fact, whoever assembled the book and however it was assembled, there is an observable structure about its thought that explains the power of the book and without which the book becomes little more than a collection of sayings put together for no apparent reason.

Consequently, as Oswalt (1986:23) mentions, although the name of the author in Isaiah 40-55 is not explicitly mentioned, it can be attributed to Isaiah, who is mentioned and considered as the author of Isaiah 1-39. The historic position of the Church was derived from the apparent claims of the book beginning at 1:1. That verse seems to say that everything which follows is a report of the visionary experiences of Isaiah the son of Amoz. Furthermore, in 2:1; 7:3; 13:1; 20:2; 37:6, 21; and 38:1 words are attributed directly to Isaiah. While Isaiah is not named as the source of any of the materials in chs. 40-66, it is evident that the burden of proof is upon those who propose other sources, for no other sources are named.

Oswalt (1986:26) defended the authorship of a single author for the trustworthiness of the theological assertion of the book, because it is difficult to accept the message of the book as trustworthy, if the concept of single authorship is not grasped. “Should further studies point more conclusively to a different hand (or hands) at work in the latter part of the book, I would be driven to conclude that Isaiah used amanuenses to assist him in putting his final thoughts together. I cannot conceive of the present unity being arrived at without the guiding hand of a single master. Furthermore, as soon as the compilation of the book is moved beyond the lifetime of Isaiah, it becomes well nigh impossible to avoid the conclusion that the book’s great theological assertions are based upon falsehoods.”

Seitz (1993:109-110) argues the proof of the single authorship of the whole book of Isaiah as follows: “[F]irstly, the book contains only one superscription (Is 1:1). Secondly, only one narrative describes the prophet’s commission (Is 6:1-13). Hence, Isaiah 40:1-11 is not a prophetic commission for a Deutero-Isaiah, but must be interpreted in the light of chapters 1-39. Thirdly, no literary boundaries can be clearly drawn between the three historical-critical Isaiahs (Seitz 1993:109-110)...Consequently, nothing of a new Second Isaiah in chapters 40-55 nor a Third Isaiah in chapters 56-66 exists (:117)...In addition to this, it is not certain to assume that the prophecies in chapters 40-55 have a Babylonian setting (:117).”

In light of the external evidence on the authorship and composition of the Book of Isaiah, the skeptical voices on them can be rejected (Cf. Millard 1985; Gordon 1995; Heinz 1997).

Kitchen (2003:379-380) represents the internal and external evidences that evince that the theory of three books in one (1-39; 40-55; 56-66). That Isaiah 40-55 is based in Babylon is simply not true.

This study presupposes the unity of the book of Isaiah and that the unity of the Book of Isaiah comes from a single author, i.e. בֶּן-אֲמוֹץ, the son of Amoz (Is 1:1) (Cf. Oswalt 1986:25). This study accepts the view that Isaiah 40:18-20 dealing with the incomparability of God and the prohibition of making any image of God is given to Israel in the pre-exilic period under the threat of Assyria. Isaiah 40:18-20 dealing with the incomparability of God, and the prohibition of making any image of God will be studied with this presupposition on its authorship and composition.

4.2. The theological-thematic consideration of Isaiah 40:18-20

Isaiah as a whole is a genre of prophetic covenant disputation. Isaiah 40-55 represents the exoneration of YHWH to his people before nations. Isaiah 40:18-20 is a passage dealing with the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God as in Isaiah 41:1-7, 44:6-20; 46:5-7 in other rhetorical questions followed by idol-question passages Isaiah 40-55. Isaiah 40:18-20 is located in Isaiah 40:12-31 as part of Isaiah 40-55 and Isaiah as a whole dealing with the prophetic covenant disputation.

According to Harner (1988:62), Isaiah declares Yahweh to be the sole God who controls the course of history. God's sovereignty over history demonstrates the uniqueness of his divine being. As Harner (1988:62) points out, Israel's affirmative and fair response to God's self-predications would have been to abandon the idols of other

gods and of the worship of God through images. Harner (1988:67) depicts one of the most distinctive features of Isaiah's thought as follows:

His frequent use of statements beginning with the words "I am", in which Yahweh makes an assertion about himself that serves to define his identity, describes his attributes, or depicts his relationship to Israel. When Isaiah represents Yahweh as saying "I am Yahweh", "I am your God" or "I am He", these divine self-predications constitute Yahweh's word to Israel, in which Yahweh takes the initiative and reminds Israel of his own existence and his relationship to her.¹⁷⁹

The formula, "I am Yahweh, your God", which derives from God's self-prediction at Mount Sinai reflects the responsibilities that his people accepted under the terms of the Sinai covenant." (Harner 1988:61). God expects his people to fulfill their fundamental obligation under the covenant, which is suggested in the first commandment, to worship him alone and is suggested in the second commandment not to use any image of God for his worship based on God's incomparability, which was experienced by Israel in the event of the exodus (Harner 1988:63).

Isaiah 40:19-20 in relation with verse 18 has been sufficiently demonstrated that Isaiah 40:18-20 fits perfectly into its context, and proceeds from the preceding verses with the theme of Yahweh's incomparability (Spykerboer 1976:45). To speak in terms of

¹⁷⁹ Harner (1988:70) points out that the formula of the divine self-predication is used a total of thirty times in Isaiah 40-55. The expression "I am He," is used a total of eight times, six times in the form of 'ani hu' (Is 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6), twice in the longer form 'anoki anoki hu' (Is 43:25; 51:12); "I am Yahweh" a total of eighteen times, fifteen times in the form of 'ani Yahweh,' (Is 41:4, 13; 42:6, 8; 43:3, 15; 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 18, 19; 48:17; 49:23, 26), twice as 'anoki Yahweh,' (Is 44:24; 51:15) and once as 'anoki anoki Yahweh' (Is 43:11); and "I am God," only four times, once as 'anoki eloheka' (with the suffix "your") (Is 41:10), twice as 'ani el' (Is 43:12; 45:22) and once as 'anoki el' (Is 46:9).

nothingness of the idol is a different way to speak about Yahweh's incomparability (Spykerboer 1976:46). Isaiah 40:18-20 should be understood in light of the context in which it stands (Spykerboer 1976:46). The center of this passage is expressed in the question, to whom or what will you liken God? It seems rather odd to reply to the question whom might be compared with God with a description of idol-fabrication (Holter 1995:63).

The main characteristic of Yahweh to be incomparable is his miraculous intervention in history as the redeeming God (Spykerboer 1976:37). This thought fits in very well with the line of argument in the whole passage of Isaiah 40:12-31, in which the climax comes when this incomparable God, who is the Creator, address himself as the redeemer (Spykerboer 1976:37).

According to Watts (2005:619), "Isaiah 40:12-31 starts with six questions (v. 12-13) addressed to the assembled people of Israel." Nevertheless, many studies are only interested in its relation to the nations (Vasholz 1979-1980:389).¹⁸⁰ While the address is polemic against the nations and their gods, it is the message specific for Israel. Thus, this study is interested in its relation to Israel which is the actual audience to be instructed by the message.

In Isaiah 41:1-7, the rhetorical question (vv. 2-3) stresses clearly God's incomparability, an issue, which is strengthened through the statement of verse 4. In verse 4, having put forward the evidence of the coming conquests of Cyrus, the Lord recaps the opening

¹⁸⁰ Vasholz points out that the message of the prophet in Isaiah 40-48 includes polemic. The chief object of the prophet's attack is the foreign gods.

question and demands of his hearer to know who has done this (Oswalt 1998:83). With a sweeping assertion of his creatorship, his eternity, his uniqueness, and his self-existence, the Lord answers his own rhetorical questions (Oswalt 1998:83-84). God will be the one who call out Cyrus as he has been “calling the generations from the beginning” (v. 4aβ) (Oswalt 1998:84).¹⁸¹ It is to be stressed this is not statement from nationalistic bombast as Persians say (Oswalt 1998:84).¹⁸² What gives particular weight to the Lord’s claim is that Cyrus’s victories are prophesized in advance (Is 41:25-29; 44:6-8; 45:20-21). They are in accord with an overarching plan that is as old as creation itself (Is 41:22-24; 42:1-4; 44:6-8; 45:9-13), and they will result in something radically new: return from exile (Is 42:9-10, 21-25; 43:18-21) (Oswalt 1998:84). As Oswalt (1998:84) says, only if the God responsible for them is a different order of being from the gods of the nations. These arguments are only implicit at this point, but they are implicit, as the statement of self-predication makes plain: *I am he* (Oswalt 1998:84; Walker 1962:205-206).¹⁸³ God is the one who called everything into being at the first, and the one whom the last will not be able to escape. He is the one like whom there is no other; he is the only non contingent being in the universe, the only one who can say “I Am”. If this statement is true, then Judah’s God deserves the worship of the whole world: if it is not true, where did they all of people come up with it? (Oswalt 1998:84). Yahweh himself is acknowledged as the real cause of political events. Although the one whom he “awakend” deposes kings, his power is merely relative compared with the power of Yahweh himself. Even the sovereignty of a Cyrus is limited (Baltzer 2001:89).

¹⁸¹ When יהוה is used of all humanity it is normally used in a future sense (“unto all generations” e.g. Ps 45:18 [Eng. 17]). Here “from the first’ turn it around.

¹⁸² How can we know this is not statement from nationalistic bombast as Persians say. Cf. *ANET*, 312-316.

¹⁸³ Walker suggests that יהוה may have been construed as a form of *hawa*, “to be” thus explaining the LXX.

The present context suggests an interpretation of these declarations in terms of time. Yahweh's claim to recognition as Lord of the world rests on creation (Baltzer 2001:89). We shall see that the attempt to make statement about creation fruitful for the present is one of the author's main concerns (Baltzer 2001:89). How is the general concept of God's sovereignty related to concrete historical experience? It is this that is argumentatively developed in the form of a lawsuit (Baltzer 2001:89). The concept of the sovereignty of God makes possible an understanding of past experience in the light of faith (Baltzer 2001:89).

In Isaiah 44:6-20, the outer inclusion enclosing the polemic against idolatry (vv. 6-8, 21-23) begins with a trial speech against the gods of nations (Wilson 1986:172). As a similar trial speeches, Yahweh challenges the gods of the nations to appear in court: "Who is like me? Let him take the stand and declare his case..." Yahweh challenges the gods to demonstrate their efficacy in human events by predicting the future (Is 41:22, 26; 43:9; 45:21) (Wilson 1986:172). Yahweh declares that the Israelites are his witnesses, for Israel can testify that Yahweh had indeed forewarned them of what was to happen. But here is an additional, more direct point of comparison concerning Yahweh's person, the phrase מִי־קָמוּנִי, reminiscent of other polemics against idolatry (Cf. Is 40:18; 46:15) (Wilson 1986:172).

Isaiah 44:9-20 is situated in a context where it acts as an ironical reply to the question of whom can be compared with Yahweh. "who like me?", Yahweh says, and a highly ironical reply is suggested: "Could it be the idol-fabricator? Idol-fabricators seem to act as representatives of the nations. Verses 9-20 offers a developed mocking account of the

process whereby divine image are made, set in the framework of an explicit polemical assertion of the theological implications of the process. The satire functions implicitly to support the polemical statement in Verses 6-8.

In Isaiah 46:5-7 the line of thought is this: Yahweh cannot be compared to anyone, he is only God, who rules history and therefore can say: “My plan will be executed”. Now it is his concrete will that Cyrus will be the executer of his decrees. Verses 5-7 seems to be the counterpiece, harking back to the idols and verbs of carrying in Verses 1-4 and pointing forward to Cyrus in Verses 10-11 (Clifford 1980:456). The idol is acquired by the nations through expenditures of much gold and silver, is laboriously carried home and set up so that it cannot be moved, yet never answers the anguished pleas of its owners (vv. 6-7) (Clifford 1980:456). Yahweh in contrast simply summons by a word his bird of prey from the east according to his plan to save Israel (vv. 10-11). Verse 13 seems to reverse verses 1-2: Israel returns to Zion her home, while the nations go to exile (Clifford 1980:456).

The idol scenes thus unify the passage by alluding to and reinforcing the initial contrast in verses 1-4 between idols who are carried by beasts into captivity and Yahweh who carries his people safely (Clifford 1980:457). Secondly and most importantly, they show the idol is brought into the worshiper’s home having nothing to do with money and labor, whereas Yahweh by a word brings his man Cyrus to accomplish the salvation of Israel (Clifford 1980:457).

There is a comparison between Yahweh and idols as follow: “Yahweh// idols: Yahweh is in no way like idols (Franke 1994:198). Their existence depends upon a contrast

made with a smith and a process of manufacturing. The idol must be lifted up and carried through the streets to its resting place, where it stands, immobile. The idol is stolid, unhearing, unheeding, and does not answer cries for help. By contrast, Yahweh's existence does not depend on a process of manufacturing, nor does his ability to move depend on a parade of workers. He is not in any way immobile, and he can and does respond to the pleas of his people. Yahweh is contrasted to the idols or gods in that he is able to describe events that have not yet happened, to make and execute plans, to control the processes of history. In fact, Yahweh is incomparable" (Franke 1994:98).

In Isaiah's critique on idol-fabrication he declares Yahweh to be the sole God over the world, who can never be compared with anything made as an image. Therefore, in Isaiah 40:18-20, the proclamation of the incomparability of God demands the prohibition of his worship through images. Israel's affirmative and fair response to God's self-predications would have been to abandon the idols of other gods and of the worship of God through images.

In Isaiah 40:18-20 the allusion to God's incomparability expressed in God's self-predication "I am Yahweh, your God", the expression can be deduced from the rhetorical questions: "To whom will you liken God and to what image will you compare him?" (v. 18)

The purpose of verses 19-20 is not the description of how one can make an idol (Spykerboer 1976:43). According to Baltzer (2001:72; cf. Holter 1995:15-25; Westermann 1976:54), "the text has ethopoetic functions: the senselessness of idol worship is demonstrated by way of the 'idol production'". The specific reference is to

visible and tangible idols. It ridicules the worship of something made by human hands (Watts 2005:620).¹⁸⁴ Of all the likenesses one might choose to image God with, surely the silliest, to Isaiah, is an *idol* (Oswalt 1998:63).

The immovability of the idol is an important element in Isaiah's polemic and it brings out the absurdity of the reliance on idols, and stands in sharp contrast to the incomparability of God (Spykerboer 1976:43). The mocking songs on the fabrications of idols commence each time with a rhetorical question, describing the process of fabrication and end with a mocking of the immovability of the idols (Spykerboer 1976:45; cf. Kim 1962:55). The statue of the god is firmly established-but this means that it cannot be moved either; that is the irony of it, an irony that we can see is taken up again later in the further polemic against idols in Isaiah 40-55 (Baltzer 2001:74).

As Baltzer (2001:73) points out, any other image, such as those usually "set up in rows" in the sanctuaries of the ancient world, infringes on the prohibition of images formulated in the Decalogue. The prohibition of the image of other gods also demands the prohibition of the image of God.

To make an image of God by placing God in the same position along with other gods in a row is essentially the same as making images of other gods, and brings God down to the level of a creature (Young 1972: 50, 51). To make an image of God is to regard him as a finite being, which is essentially idolatry (Young, 1972:52). If one makes any

¹⁸⁴ The rest of the structure implies that there are other forms of idolatry of which Israel may be more guilty than the actual shaping of idols. In Isaiah 40, God is contrasted with nations (vv. 12-17), idols (18-20), princes and rulers (vv. 21-24), and with the stars (25-26).

likeness of God, it is not only wrong, but also makes God controllable by doing it (Oswalt, 1998 :62-63).

4.3 The comparison of aniconism in Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20

This study affirmed that the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus is the explicit evidence of the provenance of this ban in the rest of the Old Testament. The prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue is commanded in the context of God's incomparability in the introduction and the first commandment of the Decalogue. This study, thus, proposes that the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20 is based on the persuasion of God's incomparability. The Prophets share a common view on the prohibition of making any image of God with the Law. Considering the relation between God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God, this study will substantiate the relation between the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Historically speaking, the Law was available to the prophets and their prophecies were in line with the legal prescriptions.

4.3.1 Inner-biblical interpretation of Exodus 20:2-6 in Isaiah 40:18-20

When we compare Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 in terms of inner-biblical interpretation and apply the principles mentioned above, a link can be indicated between Exodus 20:1-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20. The structure of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God can be found in both. The following is a collation of the examples presented in previous chapters.

4.3.1.1 Inner-biblical interpretation between Exodus 20:2-3 and Isaiah 40:18-20

אַנְכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים (Ex 20:2)

לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי (Ex 20:3)

וְאֵל-מִי תִדְמֶינָה אֵל וּמַה-דְּמוּת תַּעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ (Is 40:18)

הַפֶּסֶל נֹסֵף חָרֵשׁ וְצֹרֵף בְּזָהָב יִרְקַעֵנוּ וּרְחֻקוֹת כֶּסֶף צוֹרֵף (Is 40:19)

הַמְסַפֵּן תְּרוּמָה עֵץ לֹא-יִרְקַב יִבְחַר חָרֵשׁ חָכֵם יִבְקֹשׁ-לוֹ (Is 40:20)

לְהַכִּין פֶּסֶל לֹא יִמוּט

A couple of points can be suggested on the name of God shared in two passages. In Exodus 20:2-3 the name of God can be seen in the form of אַנְכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:2) with a 2nd person plural pronominal suffix, “your God” and the form of its extension connected אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַנְכִי יְהוָה (Ex 20:2) with the subordinate clause following it by which God identifies himself in relation to a peculiar history. The addition of אֱלֹהֶיךָ, “your God” to אַנְכִי יְהוָה, “I am Yahweh” makes a “holiness or sublimity formular” into a “saving history or grace-formular.” This expression has the connotation that by announcing their names, the Eastern kings were accustomed to begin their solemn declarations that respecting their deeds..., the King of the universe commences His declaration to man - in man’s style: I, the Speaker, am called YHWH, and I am your God specifically.” The opening word of the Decalogue can be divided into numbered sentences as follows: “(1) who Yahweh is, by use of the self confessional phrase יְהוָה אַנְכִי; (2) who they are, by the addition of the self-giving phrase אֱלֹהֶיךָ since Yahweh can only have become *their* God by his act of giving himself; and (3) that these

assertions are validated by their completely discontinuous new situation, as a people brought forth from Egypt, and from the non-status of slaves to the status of a people to whom Yahweh has given himself. The introduction of the Decalogue shows explicitly that God is incomparable with other gods because he redeemed his people, Israel from the land of Egypt. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn here that Exodus 20:1-3 clearly shows the incomparability of God. Moreover, this phrase **אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ** represents God's self-prediction. By using the formula God's incomparability is asserted. According to Keiser (1996:490), "the combination of the phrase **יהוה אלהיך** with **אֲנֹכִי** gives the decisional use to the meaning of the name of God. The expression **אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ** is a formula of God's self-declaration used in the context of other gods." Thus, **אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים** (Ex 20:3) with the singular verb and the singular subject and indirect object, along with the plural direct object, "gods" which differ from **אֲחֵרִים אֱלֹהִים**, ['other gods', plural], not, **אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים**, ['another god', singular] makes it clear that not only is it forbidden to associate with one deity but with all the deities in general, whoever they may be" in verse 3a (Cassuto 1966:241).

Keiser says that "the context in which these self-declarations occur also argue for such a dependency.... In these texts the statement is made within a call to recognize that, in contrast to false gods, "I am He," [is] the one who controls history.... The occurrences in Isaiah declare Yahweh's incomparability with the emphasis on the comparison to false gods, and that He is the one who controls history.... His people recognize that "I am He." (Keiser 1996:490)

The name אֱלֹהִים “El” is used for God in Isaiah 40:18. אֱלֹהִים is used without an article, so that it designates ‘God.’ It differs from the name Yahweh that implies the claim that is the only God. The word used for God in Isaiah 40:18 is not אֱלֹהֵי הַיָּמִים, the most common term for God, but אֱלֹהִים. It is intentional for Isaiah to choose the latter, which is identical to that of the high god in the Canaanite pantheon, to indicate the absolute superiority of the Lord and that there is nothing like him in all of the universe (Oswalt 1986:62). The request here is not to place God in a row in the pantheistic shrine with other gods, degraded as a mere god among other gods in the pantheon.

From the use of the name of God in Isaiah 40:18-20, “a very early form of divine self-predication that had its original setting in God’s revelation of himself to Moses” (Harner 1988:147-148) can be found. The self-predication which introduces Yahweh as the God who can not be comparable because he shows his incomparability in delivering Israel from bondage, also “presents him as the God who expected Israel to fulfill her religious and ethical responsibilities within the covenant relationship.” (Harner 1988:147) Isaiah’s use emphasizes the same features of its occurrence in the Pentateuch (Keiser 1996:490)

As shown in the exegetical considerations, these two passages have the same theological context to prohibit making any image of God account of God’s incomparability. The prophet Isaiah reuses the passage from the second commandment of the Decalogue, in which God prohibits any image of God in the context of his incomparability.

4.3.1.2 Inner-biblical interpretation between Exodus 20:4-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20

(Ex 20:4) לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל בְּמִתְחַת

בְּאָרֶץ מִתְחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתְחַת לְאָרֶץ

(Ex 20:5) לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֶקֶד

עֵינַי אֶבֶת עַל־בָּנָיִם עַל־שֹׁלְשִׁים וְעַל־רַבְעִים לְשֹׁנָאֵי

(Ex 20:6) וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי

(Is 40:18) וְאֵל־מִי תִדְמִיּוּן אֵל וּמַה־דְּמוּת תַּעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ

(Is 40:19) הַפֶּסֶל נֹסֵף חָרֶשׁ וְצֹרֵף בְּזָהָב יִרְקַעְנוּ וּרְתַקוּת כֶּסֶף צֹרֵף

(Is 40:20) הַמִּסְכָּן תְּרוֹמָה עֵץ לֹא־יִרְקַב יִבְחַר חָרֶשׁ חָכֵם יִבְקֹשׁ־לוֹ

לְהַכִּין פֶּסֶל לֹא יִמוּט

“The noun פֶּסֶל (Ex 20:4a) refers to an image, which is made for use in the worship of deity. This image indicates the image of God in the context of God’s incomparability, which can be seen in the form of אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:2), as synonym for God’s incomparability. Thus, פֶּסֶל (Ex 20:4a) can also refer to an image of God not to be made by those who were brought out of the bondage of Egypt (Ex 20:2) with whom God made his covenant to become his people (Ex 19-24). God demands his people that even his image has not to be made because it can be compared with other god’s images in the pantheon. In Exodus 20:5 it can be seen clearly that אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:5b) is presented as the ground of the covenantal curse (Ex 20:5bβ-6). It shows that the

prohibition of פֶּסֶל (Ex 20:4) is preserved because God's incomparability is seen in his redemptive act (Ex 20:2).

Isaiah 40:18-20 really criticizes and prohibits making any image of God. Verse 18 emphasizes the incomparability of God, which is confirmed in the connection of the word with Isaiah 40:12-17. דְּמוּת תַּעֲרֹכוּ in verse 18 can might contain a hidden hint to the concept of man as image of Yahweh because it is placed in the context of God's incomparability (Holter 1995:70). The image of God can represent both of them whether it is a concrete image or abstract because the distinction between the concrete and abstract use of the noun was, at least, not made in the mind of a Semitic thinker. The syntax of verse 19 that emphasizes the word פֶּסֶל shows which interpretation has to be taken. For the former, "A image?" the question sentence stresses פֶּסֶל (Is 40:19). For latter, in the word order and the structure of the sentences: *object – verb – subject*, the object, פֶּסֶל (Is 40:19) is emphasized here.

Isaiah 40:19-20 use the verbs נָסַךְ, רָקַע, רָקַב, בָּחַר, and בִּקֵּשׁ to depict the process of making an image. They have the same meaning as the verb עָשָׂה used with פֶּסֶל, the image of God in Exodus 20:4. Isaiah 40:19-20 explicitly mocks the making an image of God. That פֶּסֶל (Is 40:19) can refer to an image of God evidently in the context of God's incomparability (v. 18).

The question on the prohibition of making any image of God, וַיִּמַּהֲדָמוֹת תַּעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ, וְאֵל-מִי תִדְמִיּוּן אֵל in verse 18, is not replied, because its answer is too explicit. Rather, the critique of idol-fabrication can be rendered as the prohibition of making any image of God because God can't be compared with anything whatsoever. Thus, verses 9-20 function as another answer on the rhetorical question in verse 18, developing the topic further.

Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 show similarity of theological themes. Each reveals its theological theme, and in some respects, they can be considered as identical. This study points out that God's incomparability requires the prohibition not only of other gods and their images, but also of making any image of God to worship him. This study, therefore, represents that Isaiah 40:18-20 dealing with idol-fabrication in the context of proclaiming God's incomparability is explicitly referring to the prohibition against the worship of an image of God. It can be guessed that in the context of Isaiah's covenantal disputation on the deviation of Israel as the covenant people making a covenant with God Isaiah reused the theme of God's incomparability and the prohibition of not only other gods and their image and making any image of God in the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct (Ex 20:2-6).

4.3.1.3 Determining one text's dependence on another: Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20

This study argued that the prophet reused the Pentateuch as a written material, even the form of present text by inner-biblical interpretation. This study investigated how textual

allusions are to be confidently identified. Now this section will evaluate it in terms of their direction of dependence and determine it as follows.

Exegetical study of Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 demonstrated that both passages all have the structure of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God. The variety of affinities between Isaiah 40:18-20 and Exodus 20:2-6, demonstrates that the first and second commandment of the Decalogue and the Isaianic passages dealing with the incomparability of God and the idol-fabrication are linguistically linked.

Both Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 say that God is incomparable, and, that He therefore prohibits the making of his image. Considering the rules of the nature of analogies between texts, there is a correlation between the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct in Exodus 20:2-6 and the passage dealing with the incomparability of God and the prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20.

The rhetorical pattern in Isaiah 40:18-20, which expresses the same theological theme as Exodus 20:2-6, can be suggested to be relevant to the questions mentioned above used as the standards to determine the direction of the allusion between two texts.

In both passages the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct can be found, linking God's incomparability and the prohibition of making an image of God. This study will try to show the pattern as a witness of one text's borrowing from and dependence on others in the context of a prophetic covenant

disputation. It is, for example, easier to understand how the prophetic lawsuit in the Bible could bear marks of dependence on the covenantal law of the Sinai covenant in Exodus, than to suppose that the covenantal law of the Sinai covenant in Exodus could have traces of influence of the prophetic lawsuit.¹⁸⁵ The Bible plot also strongly supposes this relation between two parts of the Bible. If this point can be granted, that the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6 would be, in cases where influence or allusion between two texts can be determined, the source from which the passages to deal with the incomparability of God and the prohibition of making an image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20 is drew (Cf. Bergey 2003:52-53). In Isaiah 40:18-20, we can see the construct of the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God. These may be the cases of aggadic exegesis that "[i]f a text repeatedly use the wording of ideas of earlier texts in certain ways...then examples of shared vocabulary which display those tendencies are likely to represent genuine cases of borrowing" (Sommer 1996:485). This construct also is seen in the other passages in Isaiah 40-55: Isaiah 41:1-7; 44:6-20; 46:5-7. This is the case of aggadic exegesis that "assertions that allusions occur in a certain passages become stronger as patterns emerge from those allusions. In any one passage that may rely on an older text, the critic must weigh evidence including the number of shared terms and their distinctiveness, *the presence style or thematic patterns that typify the author's allusions, and likelihood that the author would allude to the alleged source*[italic is mine]." (Sommer 1996:485). The repetition of this construct in these passages evince that the Isaiah re-uses older material (Sommer 1996:485).

¹⁸⁵ According to Eslinger (1992:2-53), at least, we can speak of the prophetic reliance on the tradition of the Pentateuch. This study, furthermore, dare to proceed in speaking of the prophetic reliance on the tradition of the Pentateuch, not oral but written, which contains the same passage in the final form of the Pentateuch, although we cannot be sure that the Pentateuch in final form of the canon has already appeared or not yet, when we consider the custom of the ancient Near Eastern world to write and deposit the word of gods as soon as they receive it.

From a linguistic perspective, the words, phrases, structure and composition of Isaiah 40:18-20, 40:12-31, God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God construct passage: Isaiah 41:1-6; 44:6-20; 46:5-7 in Isaiah 40-55, and Isaiah as a whole, shows a consistent pattern that points to inner-biblical allusion and influence between two texts. Exodus 20:3-6 is the alluded and source text, and Isaiah 40:18-20 is the alluding one (Cf. Bergey 2003:51).

The concluding linguistic correlation between Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20 satisfies the guidelines given above to indicate one text's dependence on another, as Leonard (2008:246) suggests, as well as determining the direction of these allusion, as Leonard (2008:257) suggests.

Having now made a linguistic inventory, it is necessary to inquire next whether inner-biblical interpretation (reusing or borrowing) has occurred (Cf. Leonard 2008:262-263; Sommer 2003:71). Isaiah 40:18 also makes the incomparability of God clear (Cf. Naidoff 1981:72). Isaiah 40:18, presenting no answer to the rhetorical question, because it is self-evident, represents the affirmation of God's incomparability. It shares this idea with Exodus 20:2 and gives the evidence of the dependence of one text upon the other.

The expression of God's self-predication "I am Yahweh, your God" is not directly found in the context of Isaiah 40:18-20. But the allusion to the expression can be deduced from the rhetorical questions: "With whom will you compare God and to what image you compare him?" (v. 18). In the prophetic covenant disputation Isaiah reuses the construct of Exodus 20:2-6 and recalls Israel to the covenant obligation in Exodus

20:2-6. Thus, a direction of the allusion between the two passages can be suggested. As Leonard (2008:246) mentions, the rhetoric pattern in Isaiah 40:18 maybe the evidence that this passage uses another text, i.e. Exodus 20:2-6.

4.3.2 Theological-thematic comparison of Exodus 20:2-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20

As a result of the exegesis of each passage, it became clear that both passages express the same theme, which seems to be too consistent to be coincidental or simply attributable to a common tradition. Thematically seen, this continuity comes from the office of prophets as covenantal plenipotentiaries. The prophets condemn the human partner of the covenant in a covenantal lawsuit, using the law, which originated in the Sinai covenant. Thus, the Ten Commandments as the law of the Sinai covenant was used by the prophets in their role as covenantal plenipotentiaries. The prohibition of making any image of God, expressed explicitly in the structure and theme of the introduction and the first two commandments of Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6 as the Sinai event, explicates the provenance of the prohibition of making any image of God in the Old Testament. The prohibition of making any image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20 follows the theological idea found in the Decalogue of Exodus 20:2-6

4.3.2.1 God's incomparability in Exodus 20:2-3 and Isaiah 40:18

Exodus 20:2-3 and Isaiah 40:18a all represent that Yahweh is incomparable with other gods. Whereas God's incomparability is represented in his intervention in history as the redeeming God, other gods didn't so. The first commandment of the Decalogue in

Exodus 20:3 requires exclusive loyalty to God against background of God's incomparability in the introduction of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2.

Isaiah 40:18a argues the idea of God's incomparability against the background of the whole passage of Isaiah 40:12-31 that this incomparable God address himself as the Creator and the redeemer and against the background of wider context in Isaiah 41:1-7 that God will be the one who called everything into being at the first, and the one whom the last will not be able to escape, having put forward the evidence of the coming conquests of Cyrus, in Isaiah 44:6-20 that Yahweh demonstrates his sovereignty in human events by predicting the future, and in Isaiah 46:5-7 that Yahweh is only God, who rules history.

4.3.2.2 The prohibition of making image of God in Exodus 20:4-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20

In Exodus 20:4-6 God prohibits making any image of God to Israel because he is the only one God who delivered them from the land of Egypt (v. 5). In the background of God's incomparability (Ex 20:2) and exclusive loyalty of God (Ex 20:3), sometimes by only the first commandment of the Decalogue and sometimes by both the introduction and the first commandment of the Decalogue, is making any image of God prohibited (Ex 20:4-6).

Isaiah 40:19-20 in relation to verse 18 demonstrating that God is incomparable with idols represents their existence depends upon a contrast made with a smith and a process of manufacturing: The idol must be lifted up and carried through the streets to its resting place, where it stands, immobile. The idol is stolid, unhearing, unheeding,

and does not answer cries for help. In Isaiah's critique on idol-fabrication he declares Yahweh to be the sole God over the world, who can never be compared with anything made as an image. To make an image of God by placing God in the same position along with other gods in a row is essentially the same as making images of other gods, and brings God down to the level of a creature and is essentially idolatry.

With regard to the use of the Pentateuchal laws (the introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue dealing with the incomparability of God and the prohibition on idol-fabrication) by the prophet Isaiah in his agitation against idol-fabrication, it is obvious that the former is a covenantal law in the form of an apodictic law, given in the context of the making covenant, whereas the latter is a prophetic covenantal lawsuit. A thematic affinities with the first and second commandments of the Decalogue, framed in the Sinai covenant was shown in the passages dealing with the incomparability of God and the idol-fabrication in Isaiah in question, especially in the passages dealing with the incomparability of God and the idol-fabrication, as well as in the rest of the Old Testament. It is plausible and makes sense, that the reference to the date of the events the Bible itself describes, is chosen rather than a contemplative historical interpretation, or reconstruction of the Bible history (Eslinger 1992:53). A historical approach to the inner-biblical interpretation of thematically related passages dealing with the making of a covenant and the execution of the prophetic lawsuit can be formed by following the plot of the Bible itself. It is easier to understand how the prophetic lawsuit in the plot of the Bible itself could bear marks of the dependence on a covenantal law of the Sinai covenant in Exodus, than it is to suppose that the covenantal law of the Sinai covenant in Exodus could have traces of influence of the prophetic lawsuit when we follow the plot of the Bible itself is followed. For if it is denied, there

is little basis for consensus about Israel's history. The latter is borrowed from the former. If we consider that the Exodus and the making of the covenant at Sinai are cited almost throughout the Old Testament, at least, the tradition that has come down from the Sinai event, and if we, furthermore, consider what the witness within the Bible itself and other extra-biblical witness about the writing down of the divine word indicate (Kitchen 2003; Vasholz 1998), it can even be assumed that the report of the Bible on these events can be accepted to be the same as the present form in which it is found in the Bible. If this point is granted, the first and second commandments of the Decalogue would be, in cases where inner-biblical interpretation can be determined, the source from which the passages to deal with the incomparability of God and the idol-fabrication in Isaiah drew (Cf. Bergey 2003:52-53).

4.4 Summary

The prophet Isaiah's prohibition of making any image of God on account of God's incomparability is in line with the prohibition of divine images by the Sinai covenant in Exodus. In relation with God's incomparability, the prohibition against making idols and images of other gods is always tightly bound up with the prohibition to worship God through images. Isaiah 40:18-20 that deals with the incomparability of God with idols forbids making images of other gods, as well as the use of images to serve God (Labuschagne 1966:139; Holter 1993:78).

Firstly, this chapter looked at the exegetical confirmation of the conclusion that the incomparability of God requires the prohibition of the "worship of God through an

image” in Isaiah 40:18-20, in relation with its macro-unit as the context of the passage. Isaiah 40:18-20 was analyzed with its macro units, i.e. Isaiah 40-55 and 40:12-31.

The meaning of the passages on the incomparability of God and idol-fabrication by comparing Yahweh with the idol in Isaiah 40:18-20 is not only a critique on serving other gods, but also implies the prohibition against serving God through images, as forbidden by the second commandment.

The fact that God is not comparable with other gods who can be replaced by images is clearly said in verse 18 and thus clearly states the incomparability of God (Naidoff 1981:72). The center of this passage is expressed in the question, “To whom will you compare God?”(v. 18) (Moor 1996:92). As Baltzer (2001:72) says, in Isaiah 40:18 “the theological point of departure is the self-assertion of God” and it is an “entr’acte in which the same theme, namely Yahweh’s incomparability is presented on a different level.” Holter (1995:29) points out that the idol-fabrication passages belong to a context which emphasizes the incomparability of Yahweh as expressed by the two rhetorical *וְיִשְׁאַל*-questions in Isaiah 40:12-31. One of these passages is his rhetorical contrasting of Yahweh with the gods and idols (Cf. Holter, 1993:88-98).

The process described in verse 19 may be summarized as follows: Firstly, an image of bronze is cast in a mould. Secondly, thin plates of gold are hammered out as plating for the bronze statue. Thirdly, where these plates of the gold needed to be joined they are soldered with silver-solder. The process of verse 20, considering verses 19-20 as a description of a single process for one object by two or three craftsmen, can be

summarized: choosing the wood, finding a craftsman capable of working it, and fastening the idol to its base in a permanent way.

It could seem rather odd to reply to the question of whom might be compared with God with a description of idol-fabrication (Holter 1995:63). The purpose of verses 19-20 is not to describe the way to make an idol (Spykerboer 1976:43). According to Baltzer (2001:72; cf. Holter 1995:15-25), “the text has ethopoetic functions: the senselessness of idol worship is demonstrated by referring to ‘idol production’”. As Westermann (1976:54) points out, “the way in which he[Isaiah] stresses the idol’s solidity and stability (that does not move) hints at a delicate indirect mockery.” The statue of the god is firmly established-but this means that it cannot move either; that is the irony of it, an irony that is taken up again later in its further polemic against idols in Isaiah 40-55 (Baltzer 2001:74). The immovability of the idol emphasizes the absurdity of the reliance on idols when contrasted to the incomparability of God (Spykerboer 1976:43). The mocking songs on the fabrications of idols commence each time with a rhetorical question, describing the process of fabrication, and end with mocking of the immovability of the idols (Spykerboer 1976:45; cf. Kim 1962:55).

The meaning of Isaiah 40:19-20 must be seen in its relation with v. 18 that establishes the incomparability of God. It has been sufficiently demonstrated that Isaiah 40:18-20 fits into its context, and develops the theme of Yahweh’s incomparability from the preceding verses (Spykerboer 1976:45). It is “a different way to speak about Yahweh’s incomparability in terms of the nothingness of the idol.” (Spykerboer 1976:46) The resume of Isaiah 40:18-20 stated that Yahweh is the incomparable; there is none like him and Israel is, therefore, prohibited to represent Yahweh with images. Because by

doing so, Israel is comparing Yahweh with the gods who are represented with images (Harner 1988:152). It is the theme of the introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6. In Isaiah's critique on idol-fabrication he declares Yahweh to be the sole God over the world, who can never be compared with anything made as an image. Therefore, in Isaiah's idol-fabrication passages, the proclamation of God's incomparability demands the prohibition of his worship through images. The meaning of the passage on a rhetorical question followed by a idol-fabrication in Isaiah 40:18-20 is, thus, not only a critique on serving other gods, but also implies the prohibition against serving God through images, as forbidden by the second commandment.

Secondly, the theological-thematic consideration of Isaiah 40:18-20 was discussed. The prohibition of God's image was dealt with in the context of God's incomparability.

This section demonstrated that the idol-fabrication passage belongs to a context, which emphasizes God's incomparability. To Israel as the covenantal community, it substantiates the prohibition against representing Yahweh with an image.

The specific reference is to a visible and tangible idol. It ridicules the worship of something made by human hands (Watts, 2005:620). Of all the likenesses one might choose to image God with, surely the silliest, to Isaiah, is the *idol* (Oswalt 1998:63). As Baltzer (2001:73) points out, any other image, such as those usually "set up in rows" in the sanctuaries of the ancient world, infringes on the prohibition of images, formulated in the Decalogue. The prohibition of images of other gods implies the prohibition of the image of God. To make an image of God is essentially the same as making images of

other gods, because it places God in the same position with other gods, and brings God down to the level of the creature (Young 1972: 50, 51). To make an image of God is to regard him as a finite being, which is idolatry (Young 1972:52; cf. Oswalt 1998:62-63).

It was indicated above that the pattern used in the context of a prophetic covenant disputation can be used to determine the direction of the allusion between two texts. The prophetic lawsuit in the Bible could bear marks of dependence on the covenantal law of the Sinai covenant in Exodus. The introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6 would be, in cases where influence or allusion between two texts can be determined, the source from which the passages to deal with God's incomparability and the prohibition of making an image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20 is drew. As seen in the other passages in Isaiah 40-55: Isaiah 41:1-7; 44:6-20; 46:5-7, a certain passage can become stronger as patterns emerge from those allusions. In any one passage that may rely on an older text, the critic must weigh evidence including the number of shared terms and their distinctiveness, the presence style or thematac patterns that typify the authors allusions, and likelihood that the author would allude to the alleged source. The repetition of this construct pointed out in these passages evinces that the Isaiah re-uses older material.

From a linguistic perspective, therefore, from the words, phrases, structure and composition of Isaiah 40:18-20 in the context of 40:12-31, some passages dealing with God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God construct: Isaiah 41:1-6; 44:6-20; 46:5-7 in Isaiah 40-55, and Isaiah as a whole, a consistent pattern can be demonstrated that points to inner-biblical interpretation between two

texts. Exodus 20:2-6 is the alluded and source text, and Isaiah 40:18-20 is the alluding text.

From a thematic perspective, a consistent used pattern shown above, which points to a covenant disputation by prophets as a plenipotentiary, shows that a close connection between the proclamation of the incomparability of God and the prohibition of making any image of God can be shown in both Isaiah 40:18-20 and the introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6. There can be shown a close connection between the proclamation of the incomparability of God, or his sovereignty, and the prohibition against the worship of God through images in both Isaiah 40:18-20 and the introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6, either as a reiteration or a reversal of it (Labuschagne 1966:139).

Taking these thematic and linguistic agreements in consideration, it can be concluded that the first and second commandment of the Decalogue was the source of the passages dealing with the incomparability of God and the prohibition on idol-fabrication in Isaiah. In terms of provenance, Exodus 20:2-6 predates the passage dealing with the Isaiah's covenant disputation on making of the prohibition of not only other gods and their image, but also any image of God in Isaiah 40:18-20.