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

by

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria

2008
Declaration

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

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

The most viable interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 is that the was either Ahaz’s wife or concubine and that Immanuel was Hezekiah. The prevailing objection to this view, that the chronology of II Kings 16-20 does not allow for it, is baseless because the chronology itself is deeply flawed: Hezekiah could not have been in his sixth year when Samaria fell (727 BCE) and in his fourteenth year when Sennacherib invaded Judah (701 BCE). We attribute these chronological errors to two probable scribal errors. Once resolved, we see that the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah remains a historical possibility.
This identification is further solidified when we look at the bookend structure of Proto-Isaiah, specifically chapters 7-12 and 36-39. This thesis asserts that chapters 36-39 were written shortly after the death of Hezekiah, when Manasseh was restoring pagan worship in Judah. In reaction to such actions, scribes faithful to YHWH collected the prophecies of Isaiah, wrote their account of Sennacherib’s invasion and of other events during Hezekiah’s reign, and fashioned them into Proto-Isaiah, making numerous intertextual connections between Isaiah’s earlier prophecies and their account of Hezekiah’s reign. Their aim was to show Isaiah as a true prophet of YHWH and Hezekiah as the righteous and faithful king about whom Isaiah prophesied during Ahaz’s reign. The devastation wrought by Sennacherib was a consequence of Ahaz’s lack of faith in YHWH and Jerusalem’s deliverance came about as a result of Hezekiah’s demonstration of faith in YHWH. Thus the sections of Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39 serve as literary bookends that shape the entire structure of Proto-Isaiah by highlighting the similar circumstances, yet completely contrary characters, of Ahaz and Hezekiah.
Key Terms

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Textual Variant:* An alternative reading within a biblical text.

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

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

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