CHAPTER FIVE

ISAIAH 58-59

A. INTRODUCTION

Whilst noting the similarity in style and content between chs 58 and 59, Muilenburg concludes that "they form two separate units, as is clear from an analysis of their literary structure and style".1 This view has been echoed by the majority of commentators. Thus, Hanson, though noting the similarities in metre and internal structure, still treats them as separate, if closely related, units.2 Cheyne concludes that the two chapters are "a pair of related prophecies, written at nearly the same time".3 More recently, Koenen has noted the affinities between chs 58 and 59, but explains them by ascribing the basic layer of text in chs 58-59 to the same author. 58:3-12 and 59:1-4, 9-12, 13b-15a are the work of TI, but have subsequently been placed within the wider redactional framework of 58:1-63:6.4

Against these conclusions, a few commentators have perceived stronger signs of unity between chs 58 and 59. Skinner observes concerning ch. 59: "The chapter is closely connected in thought with the preceding, and may perhaps be regarded as a continuation of the same discourse."5 Fischer writes concerning 58:1-14 and 59:1-15a: "nach Stil und Stimmung und Inhalt bilden die beiden Abschnitte eine literarische Einheit".6 This approach to the material has been advocated more recently by Steck, who treats 58:1-59:21 as an original, integrated unit, which is part of the larger literary piece 56:9-59:21. 58:1-59:21 mirrors the structure of 56:9-57:21, the latter addressing the leaders of the people, the former addressing the people themselves. 58:1-59:21 itself falls into two main sections: 58:1-12, a prophetic commissioning in which Yahweh addresses the prophet and 59:1-21, the prophetic address to the people. 56:9-59:21 was written in the early Hellenistic period (before 302/1 B. C.) and functions (along with 63:1-6 and

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1 Isaiah 40-66, p. 686.
2 Dawn, p. 118.
3 Introduction, pp. 323-324.
4 Ethik, pp. 59-103. Koenen’s analysis has been rightly criticized by Steck in Studien, pp. 192-213.
5 Isaiah XL-LXVI, p. 168.
additions in the earlier parts of the Isaiah tradition) as a level of redaction of
the book of Isaiah as a whole.\textsuperscript{7}

As will be outlined in detail below, some commentators have not only
entertained scepticism concerning the original connection of chs 58 and 59,
but have also questioned the extent to which the two chapters cohere within
themselves. Thus, in ch. 58, the originality of vv. 3b-4 and 13-14 has often
come under critical scrutiny.\textsuperscript{8} A number of commentators have defended the
coherence and unity (either original or redactional) of ch. 59 by describing it as a “liturgy”. Thus, Muilenburg writes: “Vss. 1-8 contain the prophet’s
preaching of repentance, vss. 9-15b the Confiteor of the congregation, vss.
15c -20 the Absoluto.”\textsuperscript{9} Other commentators have described 59:1-20 as a
“prophetic sermon”,\textsuperscript{10} and Hanson has defended the original, rather than
redactional, unity of 59:1-20 in form-critical terms by designating it a
“salvation-judgment oracle”.\textsuperscript{11} In response to the designation of 59:1-20 as a
“liturgy”, Whybray comments: “it is difficult to conceive of a liturgy in
which the simple confession of sin in verses 12-13 would be regarded as
sufficient to cancel the effect of the extremely grave sins condemned in

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\textsuperscript{7} “Beobachtungen”. Although Steck has highlighted some parallelism in structure
between 56:9-57:21 and 58:1-59:21, I find his analysis unconvincing for two reasons: first, it
is difficult to agree that 57:3-13 is directed to the leaders of the people alone; second, the
parallels in structure that are present may reflect no more than common authorship (cf. the
parallels in structure between 56:1-7 and 58:1-8 that appear in the analysis by Lescow,
[“Tora”, pp. 369-370]), and they do not go sufficiently far as to suggest that the two units
were written at the same time.

\textsuperscript{8} Commentators have been divided over the extent of the original unit in ch. 58. Lescow
Michel thinks that ch. 58 consists of three levels: vv. 1-3a, 5-9a; 9b-12; 3b-4, 13-14
(“Eigenart”, pp. 226-229). Similarly, Whybray questions the originality of vv. 9b-12 (Isaiah
40-66, p. 216). However, one must agree with Koenen that there is no real tension between
vv. 9b-12 and the preceding strophe (Ethik, p. 97). Hanson defends the unity of 58:1-12 by
designating it a “salvation-judgment oracle”, which combines elements of judgment speech,
torah, and disputation (Dawn, pp. 104-108); cf. Pauritsch (Gemeinde, p. 73). Westermann
describes 58:1-12 as an admonition made up of disparate elements (Jesaja 40-66, pp. 265-
266).

\textsuperscript{9}Isaiah 40-66, p. 687. Cf. Fohrer, who divides the chapter into two invectives (vv. 1-4, 5-
8), a community lament (vv. 9-15a), and a promise (vv. 15b-20) (Jesaja III, p. 214). Elliger
describes the chapter as a liturgy, but only as a secondary, redactional, unity. Verses 1-4 are
invective, vv. 9-15a a penitential hymn, and vv. 15b-20 a promise (Einheit, p. 15-16). Volz is
also only prepared to envisage a secondary, redactional unity for 59:1-20 (Jesaja II, pp. 230-
231).

\textsuperscript{10} Herbert, Isaiah 40-66, p. 150; Knight, Isaiah 56-66, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{11} Dawn, pp. 118-120. The original unity of this chapter has also been defended by
Westermann (Jesaja 40-66, p. 274). Vermeylen regards 59:1-20 as basically a literary unity,
although the author may have used some pre-existing material (Du Prophète, p. 467).