The understanding of the origins of the book of Isaiah (BI), such as it was accepted almost generally since B. Duhm (1892), has been undermined in the last decennia.¹ The book is no longer considered as a compilation of three originally independent documents, Proto-Isaiah (PI), Deutero-Isaiah (DI) and Trito-Isaiah (TI), which have each individually undergone their own editorial history. The book is rather the result of a complicated process in which extensive Vorlagen of the current three major parts have been joined together by means of fundamental editing, which fitted all the pieces of material to one another. This process is characterized by two elements: (1) DI forms the core around which BI has come into being. (2) TI has to an important extent originated from the editorial process in which sections of PI and DI were connected. The congress volume of the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense XXXVII in 1987 (published in 1989) bears witness to this sort of interpretations in many articles.²

Against this background new questions arise concerning the closure of BI. 1. Do chs lxv-lxvi form the end of TI or has the extensive editing given these chapters such a form that we can read them as the end of BI as well? 2. Is it possible to draw a sharp line between the ending of TI and the ending of BI, or is it more a matter of a smooth transition, in which the topics of TI gradually make way for the topics that encompass the entire BI? The conclusion of this inquiry will be that TI alone (I), but also together with DI (II), and finally BI as a whole (III) come to an end in chs

¹ Commentaries on the book of Isaiah are mentioned only by the name of the author. For a full bibliographical list cf. W.A.M. Beuken, Jesaja Deel III B (Nijkerk, 1989).
lxv-lxvi. The fact that these chapters offer a threefold closure does not undermine the fact that they form a well-composed whole (Conclusion).

I. Isa. LXV 1-LXVI 14: the main topic of Trito-Isaiah, “the Servants of YHWH”, concluded

The following information fits well the new interpretation that the second and third major parts of BI have not been composed independently of each other. Whereas DI speaks exclusively about “the Servant (of YHWH)” (singular), TI speaks solely of “the servants (of YHWH)” (plural), but on the understanding that the first mention of the concept in the plural takes place just before the end of DI (liv 17). In the last text where there is talk of the Servant, he is promised that “he shall see offspring” (lii 10). The first text concerning the servants of YHWH is related closely to this: “This is the heritage of the servants of YHWH and their righteousness from me” (liv 17). Thus the promise of offspring is taken seriously in the continuation of the text. The reader leaves DI with the question who these servants of YHWH are, and what their heritage is like, and at the same time with the expectation that TI will answer this question.

The prologue of TI (lvi 1-8) presupposes this question and gives the concept “the servants” an apparently programmed place (lvi 6). On the one hand, they are pictured in a much more concrete manner as people who honour the sabbath, and adhere to the covenant, and because of that are assembled by God on his holy mountain and in his house of worship; on the other hand, this category undergoes an expansion since foreigners can join YHWH in order to serve him, something that could at the most have been suspected in Isa. liii (vss 11-12: “many”). The concept of “the servants” thus acquires a number of new connotations here. The subsequent chapters of TI will therefore have to clarify the extended contents of the concept. In this sense the prologue is programmatic.

In the larger section of lvi 9-lxiii 6 the term “the servants” is missing completely. The word comes back no sooner than in lxiii 17, and after this verse in an important concentration in chs

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3 The fourth Song of the Servant has indeed laid the foundation for the universal understanding of salvation by means of the term “(the) many” (lii 11-12: rabbim; cf. W.A.M. Beuken, Jesaja Deel II B [Nijkerk, 1983], pp. 194-7, 232-5), but there the wording is such that the reader is only vaguely aware of this purport. Moreover, the idea that the nations are admitted on the base of equality is still missing.