RIGHTeousness IN ISAIAH:
A STUDY OF THE FUNCTION OF CHAPTERS 55–66
IN THE PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

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I. THE THREE PARTS OF ISAIAH

It is a truism that chaps. 56–66 of the book of Isaiah exhibit many differences from the other two sections of the book, chaps. 1–39 and 40–55. The differences are striking enough to have led Bernard Duhm to propose a third Isaianic author, Trito-Isaiah.1 While not everyone has accepted Duhm’s proposal,2 it has gained a large measure of support.3 The reason for this degree of acceptance is clear: the theory succeeds in explaining the manifest differences between this section and the others. Recent study has carried Duhm’s conclusions further, affirming that these chapters were not the work of an individual (as still tends to be maintained of chaps. 40–48, at least), but of a community.4

But as useful as these proposals have been in explaining the differences of this section from the rest of the book, they have, by their very success, raised another problem: why are these materials included in the Isaianic corpus at all? The proposal that it is included because the authors were disciples of Deutero-Isaiah,5 even if it

1 B. Duhm, Das Buch Jesaia (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892) 14-15, 19.
3 As witnessed by the number of recent commentary series in which chaps. 56–66 are accorded a separate volume written by a different commentator from those who may have commented upon chaps. 1–39 and 40–48 in the same series (e.g. The International Theological Commentary; and Torch Bible Commentaries; see also E. Achtemeier, The Community and Message of Isaiah 56–66, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982).
4 See Achtemeier, Community and Message, 16. See also Paul Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 32-41.
5 As per Hanson, Dawn, 99, etc. On Hanson’s speculative reconstruction of these chapters and his resulting hypothesis concerning the development of
could be proven true, still would not solve the dilemma. What was it about these writings, given their apparent differences in outlook from those of the authors' supposed mentor, which caused the believing community to attach them to the larger collection? A historical connection is clearly not enough to explain the phenomenon. Nor is it enough to say that these chapters have been included with the rest because they form a kind of informed reflection upon Deutero-Isaiah's writings. The reflections on chaps. 40–55 are neither so explicit nor so thoroughgoing as to require, or even to suggest, inclusion with chaps. 40–55 in a single book. As has been shown by M. Fishbane and others, intertextuality is a feature of the entire Biblical tradition, and does not, in and of itself, call for inclusion of the reflection in the same scroll with the text being reflected upon.

I believe the reason chaps. 56–66 of Isaiah have been included with the rest of the book, despite their different focus and context, is not that they are a reflection on chaps. 40–55, which are in turn a reflection on chaps. 1–39, but that chaps. 56–66 are written in the full knowledge of the entire preceding corpus and function to unify that corpus. Without these materials, chaps. 1–39 and chaps. 40–55 stand in very serious conflict.

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apocalyptic, J. Blenkinsopp (A History of Prophecy in Israel [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983] 283-84) comments that there are so many gaps in our knowledge of Judaism in the post-exilic period "that trajectories of this kind risk being too speculative to be useful."

6 This problem is as real, or more so, for those who accept the single authorship of Isaiah. What could have motivated Isaiah to write this final section of his prophecy in this way, markedly differently from chaps. 40–55?
