From the perspective of form criticism and tradition history, the
genre of Isaiah 6 is the prophetic call narrative,\(^1\) comparable to the
call narratives of Moses (Exod 3:1-4:17), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and
Ezekiel (Ezek 1:4-3:15).\(^2\) From the perspective of the Hebrew
canon, these four narratives occupy a strategic place in the Torah,
and in the first three books of the Latter Prophets.\(^3\) From the
perspective of Israel’s history, each call narrative is a response to
Israel’s crisis occasioned by the threat of Near Eastern empires.\(^4\)
The order of these responses corresponds to the succession of empires in
Ezekiel’s critique of Israel/Judah’s diplomatic history: Egypt (Ezek
23:2-4; Exod 3:1-4:17), Assyria (Ezek 23:5-12; Isaiah 6), and
Babylon (Ezek 23:14-18; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1:4-3:15).

The Isaiah collection of oracles advances this history of the
relationship of prophetic call and Near Eastern empires to include
Persia. Although the call of Isaiah 6 is associated directly with the
threat of Assyria, it provides a “center” for the entire book;\(^5\) it is
reflected in the call of Deutero-Isaiah two centuries later (Isa
40:3-11)\(^6\) and in the call of Yahweh’s servant (Isa 49:1-7), both of
which are positioned as responses to the rise of Cyrus.

The strategic placement of this prophetic call genre as “centers” of

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\(^1\) W. Zimmerli, Ezekiel I (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 97-100. Zimmerli distinguishes between two types of such narratives, one dominated by
vision, the other by audition.

\(^2\) M. Greenberg, Ezekiel I-20 (AB 22; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 75.

\(^3\) Exodus 3-4; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1–3.

\(^4\) Obviously, other prophets who do not include a formal call narrative in their
writings also were involved in meeting the threat of empire.

\(^5\) Cf. R. Rendtorff, “Jesaia 6 im Rahmen der Komposition des Jesaja-
et leurs relectures. Unité et complexité de l’ouvrage (BETL 81; Leuven: Peeters and

\(^6\) Rendtorff, “Jesaia 6,” 79-81. For a discussion of authorship and date, see
H. Haag, Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterojesaja (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buch-
Torah and prophetic book and as Israel’s responses to the threat of Near Eastern empires, is without parallel in the extant writing of other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Ancient Near Eastern history and other writing is replete with the divine call of kings, rulers who were called to effect the will of the gods based on the threat of military force. Israel itself was tempted to adopt this concept of its God and of its relationships to the nations, but was frustrated in this by the mission of its great prophets and by the reality of Near Eastern power politics. It is the purpose of this essay (1) to examine the prophetic call narrative of Isaiah 6 for its concept of political power, (2) to determine how this theme relates to Israel’s international politics in Isaiah’s memoirs, chaps. 7–8, (3) and how the theme of chap. 6 relates to the theme of the internal politics of Jerusalem and Judah-Israel in Isaiah 2–5.

ISIAH’S VISION AND THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL POWER: ISAIAH 6

1. “The King, Yahweh of Hosts” (דומדומד מֹלֶך יְהוָה; אָשֶׁר פִּגְלָל): Isaiah 6:5

This appellation forms an inclusio with that of “the King Uzziah” (דומדומד מֹלֶך עָזִּיָּה, 6:1), making an envelope around Isaiah’s portrayal of theophany. Although the appellation of v. 1 mainly designates the time of the vision, it also marks the vision as dealing with public policy, the policy with which kings are occupied. If the traditional date of Uzziah’s death is accepted, there is no known event in ancient Near Eastern history which may have triggered Isaiah’s vision. A revised chronology, however, fixes Uzziah’s death at the beginning of the Aram-Ephraimite war; if this date is correct, the vision is a


8 Cf. 1 Sam 8:4-22; 10:17-19; 12:6-25. The call of kings in Israel was never direct as was that of the prophets, but was mediated through the prophets (1 Sam 10:1-8; 16:1-13). Gideon’s call moved toward this, since he was not a prophet, but a warrior. He was held back from this, however, by Israel’s ancient traditions of holy war and anti-kingship. For a discussion, see Lind, Monotheism, Power, Justice.

9 One might extend this study to the entire book, but it must be limited because of time and space.