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ABSTRACT

Isaiah used apologetics in three distinct areas: Yahweh’s creation and sovereign control (Past), Yahweh’s divine intervention in delivering Judah (present) and Yahweh as the controller of the future (Immediate, Exilic, Messianic and eschatological) to argue that Yahweh was the one true God, unique and superior to all pagan deities, to both his contemporary audience and to future generations. In chapter one, the research questions are addressed, a literary review is presented, and the methodology of the dissertation is given. In chapter two, the dissertation addresses how the book of Isaiah argues apologetically that Yahweh is the Creator and therefore is incomparable. In chapter three, the dissertation presents how the book of Isaiah argues apologetically that Yahweh’s ability to divinely intervene in history shows His incomparability. In chapter four, the dissertation addresses how the book of Isaiah argues apologetically that Yahweh can know and predict the future and therefore is incomparable. A conclusion is given in which the theological and apologetic implications are addressed and further areas of research is identified. Finally, two appendixes address authorship of the book and the develop of monotheism in the Old Testament.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing wife Natalie and my family who has supported me throughout my educational career, my spiritual family at Safe Harbor Community Church who have been so supportive throughout this process and to all my professors at Liberty University, especially Dr. Ed Hindson and Dr. Randall Price, who have played such a prominent role in my educational development.
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Chapter 1: Introduction, Literary Review and Research Questions

Significance of the Study

The area of apologetics has become a major emphasis within Christianity over the past thirty years as the western world has moved from a Judeo-Christian background to a more secular worldview. Norman Geisler has stated, “Today, the Christian worldview remains under attack on an industrial scale as the world searches for meaning and significance…Thankfully, in the last few decades, we have experienced a resurgence of lay interest and scholarship in the area of apologetics.”¹ Volumes have been written on the subject of apologetics, both on the methodology of apologetics, such as presuppositionalism, classical and evidential apologetics, and on how the New Testament authors used apologetics, such as Paul’s ministry on Mars Hill. However, very little has been written on how the people of the Old Testament used apologetics in their own day to defend Yahweh to the pagan nations around them that all had their own national deities.

Indeed, while there are many books on the apologetics of the Old Testament, they almost universally are written to defend Yahweh’s actions in the Old Testament, such as the “genocide” of the Canaanites or the call to sacrifice of Isaac. Little has been written on how Yahweh Himself or His prophets used apologetics in their writings or actions to present Yahweh as the one true God. This dissertation will look at the book of Isaiah and see how it used apologetics to try to

¹ Norman L. Geisler, “What is Apologetics and Why Do We Need It?” in The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics, ed. Joseph M. Holden (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2018), 22. This is not to assert that apologetics is a new idea, but simply that cultural shifts have brought it to the forefront in many theological circles that are attempting to defend the truth of the Christian faith in a culture that no longer assumes that the Bible is trustworthy.
argue not only to Israel but also to the nations that Yahweh was the one true God and was superior to all forms of idol worship.

**Survey of Research**

The survey of research will demonstrate two distinct but connected ideas. First, it will establish that there has already been a strong foundation established in this area and much work has already been written. However, it will also help to establish the academic gap in research that is present in the current research in this area that will then be established in the following section that demonstrates the need for the current research. The survey of research is divided into four sections: creation studies in Isaiah, prophets/prophecy, divine Incomparability/polemic research in Isaiah and finally apologetic/ methodological research.

**Creation Studies in Isaiah**

**Matthew Hudson- “Creation Theology in Isaiah 40-66”**

Dr. Matthew Hudson’s dissertation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995, entitled “Creation Theology in Isaiah 40-66: An Expression of Confidence in the Sovereignty of God” is an excellent resource in understanding how the book of Isaiah develops creation theology. Hudson identified sixty-eight times in Isaiah 40-55 in which verbs directly referring to the act of creation are used and showed that, “No other sixteen chapters in the Bible contains such a high concentration of creation terms as does Isaiah 40-55.” He completed extensive studies on Isaiah 40:12-32, 42:5-9 and 44:24-45:13. In his work, he did a masterful job

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2 Matthew Hudson, “Creation Theology in Isaiah 40-66: An Expression of Confidence in the Sovereignty of God” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995), 63. Indeed, Hudson makes a strong point to argue that in reality, the book of Isaiah actually spends a greater amount of words on the creation power and work of Yahweh than even the book of Genesis, which spends only three chapters on this area and then largely moves to the narrative accounts.
at arguing that much of the monotheistic argument for Yahweh in 40-55 is grounded in this creation theology.

For example, Hudson argues that, “In the passages which focus specifically on this tradition, creation serves as the foundation for the prophet's message. All that he says hinges on the belief that Yahweh is the creator. If creation faith was removed from these texts, the proclamation would be weak and futile.”

Thus, Deutero-Isaiah, who he argues is a post-exilic prophet, is writing a defense for Yahweh in comparison to foreign deities and showing that Yahweh is greater than all because Yahweh is the creator. He also argues that Deutero-Isaiah specifically defends against Marduk because of the mindset of the exiles. He states

They were surrounded with Babylonian theology that taught Marduk created the world with the advice of his council. The prophet directly attacked this myth by asserting creation came from the royal council of Yahweh where he stands as the head. Furthermore, unlike Marduk, he did not need advice on how to form the universe. In Israel's view, the members of the heavenly council were there to praise Yahweh and serve as his messengers. No one was qualified to fill the position of advisor. With one stroke, the prophet mocked the incompetence of the Babylonian gods and asserted the omnipotence of Israel's God.

Therefore, Hudson rightfully argues that the book of Isaiah uses creation as one of the primary methods of arguing for the incomparability of Yahweh. His work is very helpful in understanding the overwhelming amount of creation theology found in Isaiah 40-66 and showing how fundamental this creation theology is to the overall apologetic argument of the book.

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3 Hudson, “Creation”, 78.

4 Ibid, 85. Hudson spends significant time addressing Marduk specifically because of the situation of the exiles. While this dissertation will disagree with Deutero-Isaiah authorship, the focus on Marduk could still be understood if Isaiah the prophet is looking to the future and writing this section to a future generation of exiles. Indeed, Marduk was specifically mentioned by Isaiah in 46:1 as “Bel” was another name for Marduk, sometimes referred to as Bel-Marduk. Edward Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 219.

5 Somewhat ironically, Hudson, although talking in very apologetic terminology, never uses the term in his dissertation, perhaps because he was writing in an Old Testament setting and did not want to cross over into the area
However, while Hudson’s work is very helpful, he did not connect this creation theology emphasis to the first half of the book, did not connect it to other aspects of the apologetic argument throughout the book and greatly struggled in how to interact with Cyrus in Isaiah 44-45. The first point was probably ignored because Hudson holds that chapters 1-39 were written by a different author. The second point may have simply been outside of his area of study. The third point is the greater weakness to his overall argument. When Hudson did arrive at Isaiah 44-45 in his dissertation, he completely ignored the prophetic elements of the passage, probably because he did not view them as prophetic based upon his own dating of the authorship of the book. Instead of holding that the author of the section was writing a prediction of a future Cyrus that would prove Yahweh’s ability to predict the future, which seems to be the focus of the passage and will be addressed in great detail in chapter three, Hudson argued instead that Deutero-Isaiah’s argument was simply to argue why Yahweh had chosen Cyrus, a Gentile, to save the nation. He writes, “The goal of the passage is to justify the use of Cyrus as God’s agent. The passage is best perceived as a disputation which uses a hymn of praise to build its case.” While this is certainly a part of the argument, it appears to miss the major focus of the entire section, that Yahweh can predict the future and indeed had predicted Cyrus by name over 100 years in advance. Overall, Hudson does lay a solid foundation in showing the book of Isaiah’s use of creation language, but there is still much to add to his work.

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6 This is the very purpose of this dissertation.

7 Hudson, “Creation”, 104. Hudson seems to realize that his dating does not allow for any type of predictive nature to the passage as Cyrus would have already been either in power or even dead at the time of his writing. Therefore, instead of calling the prophet a deceiver for writing prophecy after the fact, he simply ignores the prophetic elements in the passage entirely.
Terrance Wardlaw Jr. - “The Significance of Creation in the Book of Isaiah”

Terrance Wardlaw Jr.’s work, published in JETS in 2016, while not as comprehensive as Hudson’s also brings tremendous insight into the creation texts of Isaiah. Wardlaw spends significant time working with the potential sources of Isaiah 40-55 and argues that the author does not simply borrow his creation language and information from other Mesopotamian creation myths, but instead draws direct connections between these chapters and Genesis 1-3.8 Wardlaw thus effectively shows that the author of the book of Isaiah was specifically writing in the Judaic creation context and was not simply borrowing from other ANE sources.

Wardlaw also identifies three areas in which the creation theology of the book has a direct impact.9 First, it is used to contrast the Lord with idols as part of Isaiah’s monotheistic impulse. God is the creator and the idols are not only creators but are created themselves. Second, it is used to point toward the greatness and the majesty of God. God as creator is greater than anything that the idols could bring forth. Finally, it is used in order to affirm God’s omniscient knowledge of the weakness of those who have experienced judgment. Therefore, Wardlaw shows in his work that the creation theology of Isaiah 40-55 has major implications in showing apologetically that Yahweh is special in comparison to the gods of the other nations, represented by their idols.

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8 Terrance Wardlaw Jr., “The Significance of Creation in the Book of Isaiah,” JETS 59, no. 3 (2016): 452. Wardlaw does not make a commitment on whether Genesis was written before Isaiah and who was the primary source that the other is based upon.

9 Ibid, 459.
Prophets/Prophecy

Barstad- “No Prophets?”

Hans Barstad, in his article “No Prophets? Recent Development in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy”, published in 1993 by *JSOT*, gives a solid overview of the recent critical position on prophets and prophecy. Barstad asserts that much of modern critical scholarship has, “Reduced what we find in the ‘prophetic writings’ of the Hebrew Bible to postexilic literary creations with little or no connection at all back into the history that went before, it may seem that recent scholarship has postulated an impassable tradition gap, and made whatever pre-exilic prophetic activity there was quite unavailable to us.”\(^{10}\) Thus, while they do not deny that there may have been “prophets” in a Pre-exilic Israel, they just deny that modern scholarship can know anything about these specific individuals.

Barstad, however, challenged this view. He instead argues that, just as there are stories and prophecies of other prophets in the ANE, there are similar stories in Israel, essentially arguing that they served in the same manner and function as their other ANE contemporaries. He then argues that, while these stories are clearly not historical, they are also not ahistorical, but represent similar stories. He writes, “Sprung from historical environments long lost to us, all of these stories reflect the historical and social surroundings that created them, and illustrate to us the significance of war in ancient Near Eastern societies, and of the role of ‘prophets’ in times of crisis.”\(^{11}\) In his view, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah may not have existed, but prophets like them probably did and therefore the stories reflect similar circumstances. Thus, Barstad attempts

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\(^{11}\) Ibid, 54.
to find what he argues is position between the tradition critical position which denies any historicity at all and a traditional belief in the historicity of the prophets and their works. Regardless, he ultimately lands squarely in the critical camp because one still could not accept anything in the prophetic books as historical. Therefore, the critical view on prophets and prophecy is that the books are unreliable for historical information and cannot be viewed as telling real stories about historical events.

**Kitchen- On the Reliability of the Old Testament**

Kenneth Kitchen, in his work *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, when discussing prophecy in the ancient world made a very important distinction between what he called “options and predictions.” He wrote, “Both are always set in the future, even in daily life, whether in those days or now. Options are conditional; “if you do this, then such and such will happen.” Predictions are meant to stick-this is going to happen- full stop. Most prophecies of curse/blessing are in terms of options; some are more firmly expressed. Historically, both lots largely came to pass.” This distinction is very important when it comes to interpreting prophecy.

For example, in the book of Jonah, Jonah proclaimed that judgment was falling on Nineveh, but after they repented the judgment did not come. It is not that the prophecy was

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12 Barstad, “No Prophets?”, 46.

13 This would also eliminate prophecies given by the prophets as being reliable because the historical events themselves are not viewed in this manner. If Isaiah may not even have ever existed, then critics argue he clearly never made historical prophecies that were fulfilled many decades later.

14 K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 378. He is not attempting to downplay prophecy, but merely to show that sometimes an individual is given a choice by God that ultimately depends on their actions, while at other times God simply makes a prediction that will occur in the future, regardless of human activity.

15 Ibid, 378.
wrong, but instead that the prophecy was an option prophecy where the prophecy was essentially dependent on the response to the judgment call. However, at other times, God put forth predictions of judgment that were already guaranteed, such as when He even told the prophet Jeremiah to not pray for the nation anymore because judgment was coming. Both of these types of prophecy are future-oriented calls by the prophets, but they are each distinctive based upon the specific circumstance at the time of the prophecy.\textsuperscript{16}

**Sandy- *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks***

D. Brent Sandy also has established some important principles when looking at prophecy. In his work *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* published in 2002, Sandy identified three separate functions of the prophets, stating, “The nature of prophecy, then, is threefold- in descending order of prominence—prosecution, persuasion and prediction.”\textsuperscript{17} Sandy rightfully points out that at times people have overemphasized the prediction elements of prophecy and have ignored that the majority of the function of the prophet’s ministry was to prosecute the nation for their inability to follow the Torah and to persuade the nation to return to the Lord before judgment would come upon the nation.

However, there is also an element in academia that wants to go to the other extreme and downplay prophecy. While Sandy does not go to this extreme, he does adhere to the viewpoint

\textsuperscript{16} Messianic prophecy is always viewed as predictive. Future restoration is also always viewed as predictive in response to the covenant promises that God had already established with the nation. It is only judgment predictions that appear to be able to fall into the “option” category.

\textsuperscript{17} D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 131. Indeed, as will be shown in this dissertation, the book of Isaiah uses all three of these distinctions apologetically to try to both turn his own generation back to Lord as well as prepare future generations.
that prophecy is almost impossible to understand prior to its completion, writing, “Is prediction part of prophecy? Yes. After the fact, the fulfillment of predictions may be transparent. Before the fact, the fulfillment of predictions is generally translucent.”\textsuperscript{18} This viewpoint, very common in evangelical circles, argues that the initial prophecy given by a prophet is vague and unable to be understood until the prophecy has been fulfilled.\textsuperscript{19} Only after the fulfillment has occurred can the initial prophecy be understood.\textsuperscript{20}

While this could be argued at times in the Old Testament, there are also many prophecies that seem very clearly understood by their recipients. For example, Jeremiah predicted a seventy year captivity for the Babylonian Exile and Daniel understood this this was close to ending in Daniel 9 before the seventy years had been completed. Perhaps the clearest example of understanding a prophecy occurred in Matthew 2:5, when the advisors to Herod clearly understood the prophecy of Micah 5:2 even though they did not know that the Messiah had been born there and therefore fulfilled the prophecy. If the prophecies were so difficult to understand that they could not be understood initially, then it becomes difficult to understand how they would be understood as being fulfilled. It seems more prudent to argue that, while all of the details of how a prophecy would be fulfilled may not have been understood, the main objective of the prophecy was understood prior to fulfillment on a much greater level of understanding.

\textsuperscript{18} Sandy, \textit{Plowshares}, 154.

\textsuperscript{19} This also argues that prophecies were generally very mysterious. While there certainly are prophecies that are difficult to understand, there are also many prophecies that are very straightforward. For example, God promised to Hezekiah that he would deliver Judah from Assyria in Isaiah 36-37. While Hezekiah may not have known all the details of how the prophecy would be fulfilled, he understood the major emphasis of the prophecy, that God would defend Judah from Assyria. One has to make a distinction between understanding a prophecy and knowing exact details of a prophecy. Sandy and others appear to go too far at times and argue that if the initial audience did not understand all of the details of how a prophecy would be fulfilled, then the prophecy could not be understood at all until it was fulfilled.

\textsuperscript{20} A Messianic version of this idea is propagated by Bateman, Bock and Johnston in their work \textit{Jesus the Messiah}. This will be addressed to a greater extent in chapter three.
than Sandy and others give to the Old Testament audiences who received these initial prophecies.

Sailhamer- “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible”

A very helpful article by John Sailhamer, published in JETS in 2001, gives a very detailed history and analysis of how scholars have interpreted Messianic prophecy over the past 200 years. Sailhamer traces Evangelical views on the Messiah and the Hebrew Bible back to Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869) and Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810-1877). He argues that for both men, “The last word on the meaning of messianic prophecy in the OT was that of Jesus and the NT. Both believed fulfilled prophecy offered essential support for the truth of the gospel. Both also believed that in giving us messianic prophecy, God had intervened in a real way in human history.” Sailhamer then argues that Hengstenberg created three assumptions in his own views on Messianic prophecy.

First, Hengestenberg believed that the meaning of any specific Messianic prophecy is not immediately transparent in the Old Testament. Thus, Sailhamer states, “For Hengstenberg, the NT held the key to the meaning of the OT.” Second, Sailhamer argues that Hengstenberg believed that to be messianic, the OT must accurately predict the historical events in the life of Jesus, meaning that the NT again held the key to the meaning of the OT. Finally, Sailhamer argues that for Hengstenberg, the value of messianic prophecies in the OT is largely apologetic, but both people in his own time and modern scholars have largely rejected this push. While his

22 Ibid, 7.
23 Ibid, 8.
stance on Messianic prophecy was commendable, his emphasis on the New Testament alone serving as the key to understanding the Old Testament was problematic for understanding the Old Testament in its one context.

Second, in addressing von Hofmann, Sailhamer identifies von Hofmann’s big push in this area as moving beyond the text of Scripture to the historical events they recorded.25 Thus, the text itself was not messianic, but Israel’s history was messianic. Therefore, all of the Hebrew Bible could ultimately be about the Messiah because any passage could be seen as a development of a prophecy. Thus, Sailhamer argues that, “A second, and important, legacy of von Hofmann is that OT messianic prophecy could no longer be viewed apologetically. Having assigned the meaning of the OT to a history that finds its meaning in the events of the NT, one could no longer speak of fulfillment in terms of verification or validation.”26

Sailhamer then concludes his study by looking at three assumptions both Hengstenberg and von Hofmann made and his response to them. First, both men thought of prophecy as a “history of the future”. However Sailhamer critiques this view by arguing that “Prophecy is not just a “history of the future.” It is also a “history for the future.”27 Thus, he distinguishes between simply viewing prophecy “seeing the future” like in a vision but God instead giving directions on how to get to the future. Second, Sailhamer asserts that both men assumed that one cannot understand OT messianic prophecy without first understanding how it is fulfilled in the NT. Sailhamer reverses this position, arguing that the OT, not the NT, is the messianic searchlight

25 Ibid, 8.
26 Ibid, 10.
27 Ibid, 11.
that guides interpretation. Finally, Sailhamer argues that both men saw the messianic picture in the Old Testament as scattered and not straightforward or holistic. Sailhamer counters and argues instead that, while this is partly true, there is a pattern that develops throughout the Old Testament that allows, through progressive revelation, a clearer picture to occur the farther one gets into the Old Testament. 28

**Chen- The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch**

A recent work by Kevin Chen, a former student of Sailhamer that has built upon Sailhamer’s work, entitled *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* also has much to say on the subject of Messianic prophecy. While Chen’s focus is on the Messianic message found in the Pentateuch, his introduction makes a very strong argument in two major areas on understanding Messianic texts in the Old Testament. First, Chen argues that many scholars have taken away the authorial intent of the Old Testament authors in the area of Messianic prophecy, either through simply denying the prophecies or through turning the prophecies into typology. He argues against the idea of separating the divine author’s intent and the human author’s intent, arguing that this leads to what he calls “muddled hermeneutics” and leads to increased subjectivity in the hermeneutical process. 29 The only thing present is the final form of the text and therefore to try to decide what came from the human author, who was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and what came from God is subjective at best.

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28 This article is incredibly important because it shows that Hengstenberg and von Hofmann have had a major impact on the idea of how to interpret Messianic prophecy. They combined to lead to the idea that the New Testament is responsible for interpreting the Old Testament and therefore Old Testament prophecies cannot be understood until they are fulfilled in the New Testament. They started the movement that Sandy and others continue in a modern context.

Chen understands that his position will be attacked by those that argue that the Old Testament authors could not have known the types of details that are present in the Messianic texts. However, he challenges this argument by showing many New Testament passages, including passages attributed to Jesus Himself, that argue that Old Testament authors did write about Him directly. For example, in John 5:46-47, Jesus argued that if the people had believed the words of Moses, then they would have believed that He was the Messiah. He is clearly arguing that Moses wrote about Him. Thus, for Chen, the writers of the Old Testament that made Messianic predictions, all who were prophets, knew the material that they were writing and that the major distinction was the timing of when the event would occur.

While Chen is not against all typology, he is against turning Messianic prophecies into mere typology. Instead of seeing the prophecies as specifically about Jesus, they can sidestep the argument by arguing that it typologically is about Jesus, but may not textually be about Jesus. For example, when looking at Genesis 3:15, he writes, “As it relates to a Messianic vision in the Pentateuch itself, the problem with such an approach is that if, for example, Genesis 3: 15 is not intended by the author as a Messianic prophecy, then it cannot be part of an authorially intended Messianic vision that the Pentateuch sets forth.”30 He also argues that typology takes the intent away from the Old Testament author and places it on the New Testament author. Instead, the Old Testament author himself could have been making a predictive, exegetical point on his own that does not need further explanation to be understood by a future New Testament author.

The second major thrust that really comes from the first point is that Chen argues the New Testament clearly portrays that people could/should have been able to understand the

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Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament without a New Testament explanation. This argument is broken into two main points. First, both Jesus and Paul clearly argued that people should have known about Jesus and His mission from the Old Testament. Chen writes,

> From Jesus’ perspective, they should have understood from the Old Testament itself that the Messiah would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Although he presumably could have confronted them for not believing his words that predicted the same (e.g., Lk 9: 22), instead he held them responsible for not believing what the Old Testament had already said. Even more to the point, Paul testified to King Agrippa that these same essential elements of the gospel were “nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would happen” (Acts 26: 22-23). In other words, the gospel preached by Paul and fulfilled in Christ did not in any way go beyond what the Old Testament had predicted beforehand. In both of these examples, Jesus and Paul assume that the Old Testament can be read and understood on its own terms by nonscholars as declaring the good news of the Messiah and the new covenant. Moreover, they nowhere suggest that a new hermeneutical method is needed, which would have undercut the force of their arguments.\(^{31}\)

He also argues the book of Acts shows numerous occasions when Paul argued for the death and resurrection with a Jewish audience from the Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15 makes a similar argument. However, the only Scriptures written during that time were the Old Testament; the New Testament was still in the process of being written. If the Old Testament was not Messianic or is Messianic but could only be understood in that way after the New Testament had been written, then Jesus and Paul’s argument would not be possible.

Second, Chen argues that there had to be a way to read the Old Testament Messianically prior to the coming of Jesus and the New Testament because there are many examples in the Gospels of people that did that very idea. He writes, “Philip, one of Jesus’ early disciples and a believing Jew, recognized this very truth when he told Nathanael, “We have found the one that Moses wrote about in the Law and the prophets wrote about as well” (John 1: 45)…Philip’s words further imply that he already had Messianic expectations that had been formed by the

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Pentateuch and the prophets, even before he had met Jesus (John 1: 43).” He also lists Simeon (Luke 2:25-26) and Anna (Luke 2:36-38) as examples of people who had a future Messianic expectation. Chen’s work is a very helpful and insightful work that digs into some of the issues around interpreting Messianic passages in the Old Testament.

**Rydelnik-Messianic Prophecy**

Michael Rydelnik, in a recent chapter entitled “Interpretive Approaches to Messianic Prophecy” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, has given a very detailed overview of the various interpretive approaches used in understanding Messianic prophecy that is an incredibly helpful overview of this issue. Rydelnik’s overview begins with a history of the modern interpretation, beginning with Anthony Collins in his *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724) and then in his *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered* that has challenged the traditional view and asserted that the literal meaning of the texts of the Old Testament could not support the messianic interpretations that were used in the New Testament. Thomas Sherlock attempted to counter this view in his work *The Use and Intent of Prophecy* (1732) by creating a dual fulfillment view on prophecy, a view that has become very common in Evangelicalism today. Rydelnik then spends nine pages going through a very detailed history of Messianic interpretation from Collin sand Sherlock to modern scholarship.

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33 Michael Rydelnik, “Interpretive Approaches to Messianic Prophecy,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Exposition of the Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 73. This idea then strips apologetics of the argument from prophecy that had been used by Christian apologetics for centuries since the early Church Fathers.
Rydelnik then lays out a summary of the seven different methods that have arisen out of this historical context on how to interpret Messianic prophecy. First, the historical fulfillment position, held by Anthony Collins, many critical scholars and medieval and modern Jewish scholars, holds that the Old Testament has no Messianic prophecy at all and that everything spoken of in the Old Testament must be traced to historical figures. Second, the dual fulfillment view, held by Sherlock and many modern Evangelical and Roman Catholics, sometimes also called the “Sensus Plenior” view, holds that the divine author of the text may have held a second meaning behind the human author. Thus, the human author spoke of immediate fulfillments in his own time and the divine author knew that these prophecies would also one day be fulfilled by the Messiah. Third, an offshoot of the dual fulfillment view is the typical fulfillment view, held by Aage Bentzen, that asserts that the literal meaning of the prophecy is a historical figure in the Old Testament, but that figure then becomes a type that Jesus then fulfills in the New Testament.

Fourth, the progressive fulfillment view, held by Willis Beecher and Walter Kaiser, holds that “The biblical prophecy was given in seed form and developed progressively until it culminated in the Messiah.” Fifth, the relecture fulfillment view, held by R.E. Clements and P.D. Wegner, holds that the literal prophecies refer to historical figures in the prophet’s own day. Then, prophecies were re-read later (LXX translators, New Testament authors)

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34 Rydelnik, “Interpretive Approaches”, 83-88

35 For example, Messianic Psalms would only refer to a historical David, etc. This view would hold that both Immanuel and the Suffering Servant must have been individuals alive in the time of the author.

36 Rydelnik, “Interpretive Approaches”, 86.
in new ways so they have new meanings. The new readings then “fill up” the original meaning with a messianic sense.\(^{37}\) Sixth, the midrash or pesher fulfillment view, held by R.L. Longnecker and Donald Juel, holds that, “The OT prophecies commonly referred to historical figures present in the prophets’ own days. Then, the NT interpreted these passages according to the intertestamental Jewish method called midrash or pesher. The NT cited these ancient passages in creative ways to show their fulfillment in contemporary events.”\(^{38}\)

Finally, Rydelnik breaks the direct fulfillment view into two approaches. The Dogmatic/confession approach, held by Hengstenberg, makes the New Testament the final authority on Messianic prophecy and does not worry about the original audience or context. The compositional/canonical approach, held by Sailhamer and William Horbury, holds that the original authors had a messianic intention and that when the Old Testament was canonically shaped, it pointed toward a messianic interpretation. Rydelnik himself agrees with this final position, arguing that, “The OT according to its literary strategies and canonical shape will yield a clear messianic intent, with far more direct messianic prediction than is commonly held.”\(^{39}\) This is the position taken in this dissertation.

**Divine Incomparibility/Polemic Research in Isaiah**

**Labuschagne- The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament**

Perhaps the most influential book in the area of God’s incomparability, specifically in the Old Testament, is C.J. Labuschagne’s *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, published in 1966 but still cited heavily to this day. Labuschagne identified Isaiah 40:15-25,
which focused on God’s creative activity, as the starting point, “To argue with his audience in order to convince them that Yahweh cannot be compared with the things they regarded as gods. In his arguments the prophet never gave a thought to the possibility that the heathen gods might be “creators”, on the contrary he merely emphasized that these were “made” by craftsman.”

Hudson, addressed earlier, took much of Labuschagne’s work on God as creator in Isaiah 40-48 and built upon it.

However, Labuschagne addressed two other areas of Isaiah that Hudson did not address, Yahweh against the idols and Yahweh’s work in history. First, Labuschagne argued that Deutero-Isaiah spent considerable time arguing that Yahweh was greater than any idol. He wrote, “The primary object is to compare Yahweh with the idols in order to prove that He is not on a level with “gods” of wood, silver and gold, but a supreme, incomparability unique Being…Because the people in the pagan environment were inclined to regard Yahweh, as one of the many gods, on a level with the idols, Deutero-Isaiah was convinced that it was essential emphatically to stress the incomparability of Yahweh.” Labuschagne clearly believed and argued that Deutero-Isaiah was specifically arguing that Yahweh was greater than other gods.

Second, Labuschagne also argued an important point that Yahweh was unique and incomparable because of His work in history. He wrote, “It is important to note that in spite of the emphasis laid on Yahweh’s creative activity, the prophet never lost sight of the most outstanding aspect associated with Yahweh’s incomparability, for in 40:21 and 23, he implicitly referred to Yahweh’s activity in history and in vs. 26, by using the terms “greatness of his own

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41 Ibid, 74. He does not see a problem in comparing YHWH to idols because the ancient mind would have no other way of comparing YHWH to other deities without involving idols in some manner, as YHWH was the only God of the ancient world that was not represented by some form of idol or symbol.
might” and “strong in power”, he obviously hints at Yahweh’s mighty deeds performed in history.” He argued that Yahweh was not simply a God that was the creator, like a deist view, but also was a God that was involved in His creation. Therefore, Labuschagne laid a foundation that this dissertation will build on in both chapters one with creation and chapter two with Yahweh’s interaction in history.

**John Currid- Against the Gods**

John Currid’s work, *Against the Gods* published in 2013, is an incredibly important work in understanding how polemical writing works, both in the Old Testament and in the ANE at large. Currid defines polemical theology as, “The use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meaning.” Thus, the Biblical writers would take stories or concepts in their own culture and change them to reflect Yahweh’s power and dominance. Currid states that the purpose of polemical theology is to “Demonstrate emphatically and graphically the distinctions between the worldview of the Hebrews and the beliefs and practices of the rest of the ANE.” While Currid’s work largely focused on examples of polemics in the Pentateuch, his definitions and purposes are very helpful in understanding what the book of Isaiah does with polemics.

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42 Labuschagne, *The Incomparability*, 112. Interesting, he does not specifically address the various ways in which Yahweh interacts within history within the book of Isaiah itself, which is specifically what chapter two of this dissertation will address.

43 John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), loc. 394. It is not that the Old Testament authors were copying blinding the stories of their neighbors and using them as their own, but instead were taking familiar concepts and ideas already present in the culture of their day and changing their meaning to make them useful in describing Yahweh or denouncing the pagan gods.

44 Currid, *Against the Gods*, loc. 394. Polemics were effective because they were combative to the pagan gods and their concepts. They argued that Yahweh, not the pagan gods, had the power to create, the ability to deliver etc. Many times they were used to show that Yahweh held the very strength of the pagan deities, such as when Elijah showed that Yahweh, not Baal, was the God who could call down fire from heaven, which was supposedly Baal’s strength.
Robert Chisholm—“To Whom Shall You Compare Me?"

Robert Chisholm’s paper “To Whom Shall You Compare Me?”, given at the Evangelical Theological Society convention in 1994, lays out three solid observations about Yahweh’s incomparability in the second half of the book of Isaiah. First, Chisholm argued that, “During the OT period Yahweh was active in the world and demonstrated his incomparability in tangible and incontrovertible ways. In the process the pagan gods were revealed to be impotent, unworthy of devotion, and incapable of thwarting Yahweh’s purposes.”45 This is established in the book of Isaiah when the author and Yahweh satirically attack the idol’s inability to intervene on behalf of their nations. Second, Chisholm argued that, “Yahweh demanded exclusive worship and tolerated no rivals. He was unwilling to share his glory with any other “god”. One senses that the word “pluralism” does not exist in the divine vocabulary; indeed the spirit of religious pluralism was antithetical to Yahwism.”46 This becomes apparent in the book of Isaiah as Yahweh shows that He is superior to anything else in the created order.

Finally, Chisholm argued, “Yahweh sometimes contextualized his self-revelation, but such contextualization had a polemical design and rode on the back of a clearly articulated demand for exclusive allegiance. Contextualization compelled one toward exclusivism; it did not promote syncretism.”47 Thus, Chisholm argued that Yahweh would use the culture at times to interact with the world, but this does not mean that He was succumbing to the fallen nature of the world and instead at times uses this polemically to argue for His superiority over creation.

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46 Ibid, 9.

Chisholm laid solid groundwork on how the book of Isaiah, specifically chapters 40-55, uses these strategies to develop these theological themes of God’s uniqueness and power.

**Eugene Merrill- “Isaiah 40-55 as Anti-Babylonian Polemic”**

Eugene Merrill, in an article entitled “Isaiah 40-55 as Anti-Babylonian Polemic” published by *Grace Theological Journal* in 1987, similarly to Chisholm argues that Isaiah 40-55 is full of polemic theology, mainly aimed at the gods of Babylon. In the article, Merrill traces the history of polemic, arguing that Isaiah 40-55 may be one of the first detailed polemics in the ancient world. He wrote, “The only nonbiblical examples of such a literary type surviving from the ancient near east are a dozen or so Sumerian and Akkadian disputations of a fabulous nature…One may say, then, that the use of polemic in Isaiah 40-55 originated in Israelite soil, or, at least, not in Mesopotamia.”

After establishing a history of polemics, Merrill then argued that the major reason why the book of Isaiah has such an emphasis is to show the future exiles that their God Yahweh is stronger than the Babylonian gods even though they have been defeated in combat. Merrill writes, “It is a shifting of the contest from the battlefield to the law court for the purpose of demonstrating forensically that Yahweh is the Lord of history… It was necessary for them to see both the bankruptcy of pagan life and institutions-especially as manifest in the gods and cult and, by contrast, the incomparability of their God and his historical and eschatological purposes for them.”

Thus, Merrill establishes a strong foundational reason why the book of Isaiah would use these polemical attacks decades in advance; Yahweh is attempting to prepare the Israelite

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mindset so that when they are defeated by the Babylonians, which Yahweh allows, they will understand that Yahweh is still the Lord and will not turn away from Him and shift their allegiance to the Babylonian deities.

**John Oswalt - Isaiah 40-66**

In John Oswalt’s commentary on Isaiah he has a special note on page 192 that becomes very important in this discussion. Oswalt argues that the argument presented in Isaiah 40-45 is that Yahweh is God because He can predict the future. Oswalt writes,

Isaiah claims that the evidence for the uniqueness of God, that he is the sole creator, rests on his ability to predict novel turns of history in advance, an ability the idols and their technicians do not have...The shape of the present book and the absence of any authorial identification except that of Isaiah ben Amoz lead me to believe that these predictions had been made far in advance of the events, and that their eventual confirmation would be the crowning evidence that Israel’s God is God alone. One cannot escape this logic. One must either accept the evidence as given and adopt the conclusion, or else admit that the evidence has been tampered with and deny the conclusion. One cannot accept the conclusion while denying the evidence.⁵⁰

Thus, Oswalt makes it clear that if one takes Isaiah’s argument seriously, then there is no other outcome but to accept that the author of Isaiah 40-48 believed that Yahweh could and did predict the future and that this offered direct evidence that Yahweh is the true God.⁵¹

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⁵¹ The only way around this is to argue that Isaiah is not the author of the second half of the book and that someone else wrote the book after the fact and pretended to predict the future. However, as will be addressed under the upcoming authorship section, this creates major interpretive problems for the New Testament and essentially makes the author of Isaiah 40-55 into a deceiver if he is only pretending that God is predicting the future when the events have already occurred.
A new work, published in 2019 by Siegbert Riecker entitled *The Old Testament Basis of Christian Apologetics*, is very unique in that it is one of the few books that looks at apologetics from an Old Testament perspective. While the book is brief, 92 pages, Riecker does effectively make the argument that the Old Testament has been completely overlooked in the area of apologetics. For example, he writes, “In the realm of apologetics, the Old Testament is only rarely considered when apologists look for a biblical vindication of their tasks…Textbooks on Christian apologetics usually start with the New Testament.”

In Riecker’s chapter on what he calls prophetic apologetics, he outlines five different ways in which the prophets create apologetic arguments: creation, figural depictions of gods, prophecy, moral offenses by the representatives and judgment on foreign gods. As a survey, the book does an excellent job at introducing many of these concepts. However, the weakness of the book is its brevity. Riecker only gives brief overviews of each of these concepts with a few passages as examples, but does not go in depth on how these are used or give any type of exposition on any of the passages. The book is highly useful in introducing that the Old Testament does use apologetics, but ultimately needs to be expanded upon greatly with exegesis and comprehensiveness in each of these ideas presented.

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Gerhard von Rad- *Old Testament Theology Volume Two*

Gerhard von Rad’s masterful work *Old Testament Theology Volume Two*, published in 1960 and brought to English in 1965, has a very important section in terms of research for this dissertation. While von Rad assumed the existence of Deutero and Trito Isaiah, he did briefly look at the unique impact of Deutero-Isaiah as a prophetic apologist for Yahweh in a way that was unique.\(^{54}\) For example, von Rad asserts that Deutero-Isaiah was the first of the prophets to use creation as an argument for Yahweh’s ability to rescue His people and validated His message. He wrote:

> Very surprisingly however, there is still another tradition in Deutero-Isaiah, now upon which no previous prophet had called. It deals with the creation of the world by Yahweh. Because Yahweh had the power to subdue chaos, appeal could also be made to him to help his people in times of tribulation in the historical realm; and because Yahweh created the ends of the earth, the message which he is now sending to Israel is also trustworthy...for him creation is the first of Yahweh’s miraculous historical acts and a remarkable witness to his will to save.\(^{55}\)

Thus, von Rad understood that Isaiah 40-55 used creation as one of the justifications for trusting Yahweh’s actions and intervention.

Von Rad also sees Deutero-Isaiah as a prophetic apologist for Yahweh. He wrote, “This theological aspect of history has much more practical application- he uses it for apologetic purposes, to counter the anxiety that in the long run the Babylonian gods may prove to be more powerful than Yahweh.”\(^{56}\) He also addressed the idea that Deutero-Isaiah used proof from prophecy as apologetic arguments for Yahweh’s power and used the idols negative ability to

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\(^{54}\) While this dissertation disagrees with the position the existence of a Deutero-Isaiah that wrote Isaiah 40-55, the ideas that von Rad presents can still be viewed as important even if one attributes them to First Isaiah in the 8th century.


\(^{56}\) Ibid, 2:242.
predict as a negative argument for their inherent weakness.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, while von Rad does fall into the critical viewpoint of Deutero-Isaiah, which ultimately greatly weakens the apologetic ability of the prophet, he did recognize, albeit briefly, some of the major apologetic emphasis found in Isaiah 40-55 that will be expounded upon in a much greater focus in the later sections of this dissertation.

**Douglas Scott- *Is Jesus of Nazareth the Predicted Messiah?***

A recent dissertation by Douglas Scott, 2017 at Liberty University, entitled “Is Jesus of Nazareth the Predicted Messiah? A Historical-Evidential Approach to Specific Old Testament Messianic Prophecies and Their New Testament Fulfillments” is also very helpful in this area for several important reasons. First, Scott, who attempts to use a minimal facts approach to predictive Messianic prophecies, shows how incredibly difficult it is to use Old Testament Messianic prophecies in an apologetic manner. He lays out five shortcomings that appear in this process: (1) approaching the topic uncritically, (2) presupposing some form of divine inspiration, (3) offering sparse historical evidence, (4) providing little interaction with textual difficulties or historical context (i.e., both OT and NT contexts), and (5) offering little interaction with the objections of critical scholarship.\textsuperscript{58} These objections tend to be the reason that critics reject prophecy as evidence.

Scott shows that the hardest part of using Old Testament prophecies apologetically is dating books and showing that the prediction was actually a prediction and not made after the fact. For example, one of Scott’s six criteria is, “The prediction should occur well in advance of


the fulfillment. There should be no valid reason to suspect that the event occurred after-the-fact.”59 This makes finding fulfillment of any Old Testament prophecy that is fulfilled later in the Old Testament basically impossible to prove critically because the earliest manuscripts currently found cannot go back far enough historically to prove that any predictions were made in advance. Thus, while Scott’s dissertation does not directly impact this dissertation, it does offer insight into the difficulties of using prophecies in apologetics and impacted the direction taken in the methodology of this dissertation.60

**Jonathan Kirsch- God Against the Gods**

While the focus of this dissertation is on the positive side that the book of Isaiah plays in promoting Yahweh apologetically as the true God greater than the false gods of idolatry and polytheism, not all authors have seen the book of Isaiah, the prophets, or even the Old Testament at large in this manner. Jonathan Kirsch, in his work *God Against the Gods*, makes an argument in the exact opposite of what this dissertation asserts. He puts forth a major point of contention in his work by arguing that the God of the Old Testament is not greater than the gods of polytheism, but instead was a failure. He writes, “The unmentioned but unmistakable subtext of these and many other biblical passages is that Yahweh, no less than Aton, is a failure. The God of Israel is rejected by the majority of the Israelites, the very people whom he has chosen...repeatedly over the long and troubled history of ancient Israel.”61 He argues that


60 This dissertation takes a much different approach than Scott or a Josh McDowell. They attempt to use Old Testament prophecies to prove Jesus as Messiah or New Testament events. This dissertation instead is merely showing how the book of Isaiah used apologetics. Also, whereas Scott’s minimal facts approach is meant to try to prove prophecies to critical scholars, this dissertations approach is not aimed at accomplishing that task.

polytheism was a much more natural, better and more tolerant religious system than monotheism and that Israel rejected Yahweh because polytheism was a better system than monotheism.

Kirsch makes this argument through three major points, all which have serious problems that he either downplays significantly, uses false comparisons or ignores completely. First, Kirsch’s main argument that he uses against the Old Testament prophets is that they overdramatized the negative aspects of idolatry and paganism in the ANE and that polytheism was not nearly as bad as what the prophets claimed it was in the Old Testament. For example, he argues that human sacrifice, something that the Old Testament prophets condemned strongly and stated was common in pagan religion, was not something that was tolerated in paganism in a meaningful manner. In describing the myth of Agamemnon and comparing it to the story of Abraham, he writes, “The myth suggests that human sacrifice was already in decline in the Greco-Roman world in distant antiquity.” 62 He uses this myth to try to show that paganism also did not accept human sacrifice in the same manner that the Old Testament prophets argued. However, the myth that he describes is from the Greco-Roman era, which is over a thousand years after the time of Abraham. One cannot compare two stories over a thousand years apart and then state that the two systems believed in equal ideas. He consistently does this throughout the book in making similar arguments.

Second, Kirsch argues that archaeological evidence in Israel shows that many Israelites worshiped Asherah as a divine wife figure for Yahweh and that other pagan deities have also been found in the nation. He seems to think that this is a definitive proof that monotheism failed in Israel and that the Bible tried to downplay or even hide this idea and promote monotheism.

62 Kirsch, God Against the Gods, 54.
However, the Bible itself constantly admits that the Israelites kept falling away and worshiping other gods. Indeed, it makes no attempt to try to hide this, but instead is one of the major concerns of much of the Old Testament, such as the book of Judges and much of the prophets. Therefore, Kirch’s argument loses its surprise appeal when one actually looks at the text of Scripture and understands that the Bible does not try to hide the fact that the Israelites did struggle with polytheism.\textsuperscript{63}

Finally, Kirsch’s major thrust is that polytheism was much more tolerant than Jewish monotheism and that it should therefore be viewed as a much more acceptable form of religious belief. He makes statements about the great tolerance of the ancient polytheistic worldview, such as stating, “The core value of paganism was religious tolerance-a man or woman in ancient Rome was at liberty to offer worship to whatever god or goddess seemed most likely to grant a prayerful request.”\textsuperscript{64} However, when actually looking at the historical data, this seems more like a naïve utopian pipedream than anything actually practiced in the ancient world. Wars were regularly fought to show the dominance of one nation’s gods over another nation’s gods. After victory, nations would either take the conquered nations idols from their temples or simply destroy them to show that their god’s were superior.

Even Kirsch’s model nation, Rome, was not nearly as tolerant as he likes to portray, as Rome itself was guilty of major persecutions against Christianity. Kirsch even has to admit this, but tries to play it off as merely a stubbornness on the part of the Christians and not the fault of

\textsuperscript{63} One could even argue that, based upon the text of Scripture, it would be more detrimental to the historicity of the Old Testament if archaeology never found any other pagan deities within the borders of Israel. The Bible clearly endorses monotheism and the worship of Yawheh as the one unique God, but never tries to hide that the Jews did not always understand or accept this idea.

\textsuperscript{64} Kirsch, \textit{God Against the Gods}, 7.
the Roman persecutors that he identifies as the “model” for religious tolerance. For example, Kirsch writes, “Sometimes the pagan magistrates literally begged the Christians to make some gesture of compromise in order to save their own lives.”\(^{65}\) For Kirsch, failure to compromise one’s religious beliefs is the problem, not that the Romans were guilty of harsh persecution and complete intolerance to other religious ideas. In conclusion, Kirsch’s work, while at first provocative and seemingly a hammer against the positive message of Judeo-Christian monotheism in favor of polytheism, offers little in actuality that would destroy the foundation of the uniqueness of Yahweh in the Old Testament in relation to the pagan neighbors and religious systems that surrounded the nation of Israel.

**Chatraw and Allen- Apologetics at the Cross**

A recent work in the field of apologetics that is important to this research is Joshua Chatraw and Mark Allen’s *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness*, published in 2018. While the majority of books on Christian apologetics begin with either the New Testament’s example of apologetics or go straight to modern examples, Chatraw and Allen briefly go back to the Old Testament.\(^{66}\) Specifically in relation to Isaiah, they argue that Isaiah 41 and other passages show that God’s deliverance of the Israelites has apologetic purpose. They state, “In the Old Testament, God’s acts of power serve as both a defense against alternative deities and an argument for the reality of the living God.”\(^{67}\) The very existence of Israel as a nation, through all the struggles that they had been through, was an apologetic that Yahweh was

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\(^{65}\) Kirsch, *God Against the Gods*, 16.

\(^{66}\) For example, Avery Dulles well-known work *A History of Apologetics* begins with the New Testament concept of apologetics and never mentions how apologetics was used in an Old Testament concept.

faithful and was a strong enough deity to protect His people. They also argue that Yahweh did not show favoritism toward Israel simply because He was their God, but also in order to reach the nations by using Israel as His representative or mouthpiece.\textsuperscript{68}

Another area that Chatraw and Allen address that is very influential in this subject is the area of polemics in the Old Testament. They write, “In the Old Testament world, the primary question was not whether or not a god or gods existed, but which god was true. For this reason, Old Testament prophets often employed polemics against false gods. Much of the Old Testament was written in defense of the true God and against ancient Near Eastern gods.”\textsuperscript{69} There is significant aspects of the book of Isaiah that fall under this category of polemic and therefore this idea is significant. While Chatraw and Allen’s work is brief in this area, it is one of the rare apologetic works that addresses the use of apologetics in the Old Testament and is therefore important in this study.\textsuperscript{70}

**Need for the Current Study**

As can be seen through the survey of research, there is a research gap in the study of how the book of Isaiah itself presents its apologetic argument for both the existence and superiority of Yahweh. While work has been done on sporadic elements of this overall study, such as work on creationism in Isaiah and some of the polemic elements of Isaiah, no one to this point has created an overarching study of all of the apologetic elements and arguments presented in the book.

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\textsuperscript{68} Chatraw and Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross*, 35.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 34.
\textsuperscript{70} While much has been written on Old Testament apologetics, in defending the God of the Old Testament and His actions, such as *Is God a Moral Monster* by Paul Copan, there has been very little written recently specifically to address how the writers of the Old Testament used apologetics in their own ministry, both for their own audience and for future generations.
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Therefore, this dissertation will serve as a comprehensive study of how the book of Isaiah used apologetical arguments in various ways to argue that Yahweh was the one true God.

**Research Questions**

The main questions that then need to be answered in this dissertation are first, did Isaiah use apologetics in his defense of Yahweh, and second, if so, then how did Isaiah use apologetics in his ministry?

**Thesis Statement**

Isaiah used apologetics in three distinct areas: Yahweh’s creation and sovereign control (Past), Yahweh’s divine intervention in delivering Judah (present) and Yahweh as the controller of the future (Immediate, exilic, Messianic and eschatological) to argue that Yahweh was the one true God, unique and superior to all other pagan deities, to both his contemporary audience and to future generations.

**Key Definitions/Concepts**

**Definition and Purpose of Apologetics**

Apologetics is both ancient and contemporary in its emphasis on identifying both the God of the Bible as the true God as well as Jesus Christ as the Messianic Son of God.\(^{71}\) While scholars may disagree on a proper methodology for apologetics, most scholars generally agree on a definition.\(^{72}\) For example, Norm Geisler defined apologetics as, “The discipline that deals with

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\(^{71}\) The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, defined as giving a reason or defense, used in 1 Peter 3:15.

\(^{72}\) It is hard to put the book of Isaiah in a specific apologetic category because these categories are foreign to the author. If someone today asked Isaiah if he was an evidential, presuppositional or classical apologist, he would not understand the modern distinctions. He seems to lean to a more classical approach, but other methods could be argued.
a rational defense of the Christian faith whether the challenges comes from inside or outside the church.”73 Steven B. Cowan defines apologetics as, “The defense of the Christian faith against charges of falsehood, inconsistency, or credulity.”74 Chatraw and Allen define apologetics as, “The practice of offering an appeal and a defense for the Christian faith.”75 This dissertation will use Chatraw and Allen’s definition as it specifically allows for positive apologetics, “appeal”, and negative apologetics, “defense”.

The purpose of apologetics is then derived from its definition; apologetics aims to both defend the existence of God and persuade individuals to believe in that God. The book of Isaiah does not necessarily spend significant time defending the existence of Yahweh because during its time, every culture believed in gods of some sort. Therefore, the book of Isaiah did not have to spend significant time arguing the existence of God. However, because every culture had their own gods, the book of Isaiah had to spend significant time in addressing which of the gods was the correct and most powerful God and which of the gods was worthy of worship. This dissertation argues that it accomplishes that apologetic task through the threefold approach of creation, divine intervention and predictive prophecy.

Role of the Prophet

Much has been written on the role of the prophets and what purpose they served in both the Ancient Near East and in ancient Israel. While in other cultures they were viewed as predictors of the future that leaders would ask for divine oracles from the gods, the Hebrew

73 Geisler, “What is Apologetics and Why Do We Need It?” loc. 534. Geisler quickly points out that apologetics can serve as both offensive, proving the existence of God and the Christian faith, and defensive, defending Christianity from attacks by skeptics but not specifically in the definition like Chatraw and Allen.


75 Chatraw and Allen, Apologetics, 17.
prophets were so much more. Richard Patterson in addressing one of the biggest challenges in interpreting prophetic literature wrote, “Prophetic literature is not simply a “coded blueprint for the future that must somehow be decoded” but instead is primarily a “proclamation of God’s revealed will in sermonic fashion.”76 This was not to argue against the existence of predictions in prophetic literature, as many critics assert, but instead Patterson wanted to show that the majority of prophetic literature was forthtelling instead of foretelling, which is the popular idea surrounding prophetic literature.77

Indeed, J. Carl Laney has argued that the prophets not only predicted the future, but also served as divinely appointed preachers and were messengers and official representatives of Yahweh in the administration of His covenant with Israel.78 They served as Yahweh’s covenant lawyers who tried to hold the nation accountable and would call for judgment on the nation when they failed to live up to their covenantal stipulations. Walter Brueggemann delineates three methods of prophetic speech in the Old Testament prophetic literature: 1) lawsuit speech in which Israel’s actions have created an alienation with Yahweh, 2) appeals for repentance in which, after the sins of the nation have been recounted the prophet commands them to repent, and finally 3) oracles of promise in which, “Prophetic utterance breaks completely beyond the limits of the conditional covenant of Moses in order to assert the unconditionally positive resolve


77 It is clear in the text of the prophets that they believed they, through the words of YHWH, were making predictions about the future. Hengstenberg rightfully asserts that the authors of the Bible “believed the Scripture to contain genuine predictions, is evident from the passages in their writings already referred to, as well as from a great number of others to be hereafter quoted in the proper place.” E.W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament (1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 10.

of Yahweh.” The prophet then functions as the conscious for the nation, calling them back to repentance when they strayed from the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, the role of the prophet serves as a preacher, covenant lawyer and future predictor.

One issue that has arisen since the rise of German criticism is whether the prophets could have served as covenant lawyers if the book of Deuteronomy had yet to be written. For example, Julius Wellhausen argued in his landmark Prolegomena to the History of Israel (1883) that the prophets antedated the law codes and therefore could not have discharged the function assigned to them by the tradition. On the contrary, it was the ethical and spiritual religion of the prophets that made the law codes possible. Thus, for Wellhausen, the prophets came prior to the Law and their standard was the very concept that created the Law much later. This would eliminate the major role of the prophet as covenant lawyer as there would be no law code for them to judge by. However, it seems clear in the text of the prophets that there was a law code in Israel established in the Mosaic Covenant that was used by the prophets to evaluate the nation’s conduct.

Authorship of Isaiah

One of the most difficult and controversial issues in Old Testament studies is the issue of authorship and the book of Isaiah is not immune to these inquiries. Indeed, the standard critical view on authorship is that the prophet Isaiah only wrote the first half of the book (chapters 1-39),

81 Even if one did not agree with Mosaic authorship to the Pentateuch, there still could have been a law code established well before the time of the writing prophets, which began around the 8th century.
82 The introduction will give a brief overview of the position taken in this dissertation on Isaiah authorship. For a more comprehensive study of the various positions and arguments, see Appendix A.
a second author, called Deutero-Isaiah, wrote chapters 40-55 and a third author, Trito-Isaiah, wrote chapters 56-66. However, there is much debate on these chapters as well, with many Isaiah scholars calling into question much of Isaiah 1-39 and asserting that there may be even more than three authors.\footnote{Richard Schultz argues that some critical scholars have put forth so many authors that the “authentic” Isaiah content is barely a few hundred verses. Richard Schultz, “Hearing the Major Prophets: “Your Ears Are Open, but You Hear Nothing,”” in Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God’s Address, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J.H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), loc. 3971-3973.} The two major arguments used to argue for multiple authors are that an 8th century Isaiah could not have known some of the details found in the second half of the book, such as the Cyrus prophecy, and that the wording/writing style of the second half of the book looks very different from the first half of the book and therefore must be from a different author.\footnote{Sometimes conservative scholars only assert that critical scholars use the multi-author solely because of the Cyrus prediction. For example, Andrew Davis writes, “I reject the antitemple bias of scholars who must have a “Second Isaiah” (or even a “Third Isaiah”) because they cannot accept how any human could name Cyrus as Israel’s deliverer more than a century before his parents named him (44:28; 45:1,13). Bible-believing Christians have no such problem. We know that God has spoken through the prophets.” Andrew M. Davis, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2017), loc. 423. While this defense of God’s Word is powerful, it also ignores some of the other arguments that are presented by the multi-author position, which are discussed in Appendix A, and makes it seem like the critics are only concerned with predictive prophecy. While this is certainly one of if not the major issue critics have with an 8th century prophet, it is a bit disingenuous to only attribute that argument to their position.}

While there certainly are arguments that can be made against Isaianic authorship, there are also strong arguments to be made in favor of holding to the traditional view that Isaiah is the author of the entire book. While many arguments can be brought forth, the two strongest arguments are the New Testament witness and the historical evidence of Isaiah authorship. First, the New Testament authors, who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, identified Isaiah as the author of a specific passage on twenty different occurrences, as seen in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage in Isaiah</th>
<th>New Testament Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 Different Identifications</td>
<td>20 Different Quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 1:9</td>
<td>Romans 9:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 6:10</td>
<td>John 12:39-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 9:1-2</td>
<td>Matthew 4:14-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 10:22-23</td>
<td>Romans 9:27-28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 11:10</td>
<td>Romans 15:12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 29:13</td>
<td>Matthew 15:7-9, Mark 7:6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 40:3</td>
<td>Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 40:3-5</td>
<td>Luke 3:4-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 42:1-3</td>
<td>Matthew 12:17-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 42:7</td>
<td>Matthew 4:16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 53:1</td>
<td>John 12:38, Romans 10:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 53:4</td>
<td>Matthew 8:17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 53:7-8</td>
<td>Acts 8:28-30, 32-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 65:1</td>
<td>Romans 10:20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three points can be argued from this table. First, each of these passages from Isaiah are not simply quoted in the New Testament, but the New Testament authors specifically identify
them as coming from the prophet Isaiah.\textsuperscript{85} Second, this issue impacts a significant portion of the New Testament, as all four gospels, the book of Acts and the epistle of Romans all present Isaiah the prophet as the author of the book of Isaiah. If Isaiah is not the author of the book, then it creates a serious credibility problem for the New Testament authors. Finally, perhaps the most important point from the chart is that all three sections of the book of Isaiah are identified as being written by Isaiah on multiple occurrences in the New Testament, including nine times for 40-55 and twice for 56-66. Therefore, the New Testament not only does not know about a different author for Isaiah outside of the 8\textsuperscript{th} century prophet, but also asserts on twenty occasions that Isaiah is the author of the work.

Second, historically the book of Isaiah has almost unanimously been attributed to the prophet Isaiah until the 1700s. As seen, the New Testament viewed Isaiah as the author of the entire book. Judaism, outside of two rabbis, believed that Isaiah was the author of the entire book.\textsuperscript{86} All of the church fathers believed that Isaiah was the author of the entire book. All of the Catholic theologians prior to 1700 believed that Isaiah was the author of the entire book. All of the Reformers viewed Isaiah as the author of the entire book. Historically, there is no concrete

\textsuperscript{85} There are three arguments one could present against this argument. First, critics will simply argue that the New Testament authors were men of their time and just did not know that Isaiah was not the author of the whole book. One major issue with this position is that Jesus Himself asserts Isaiah authorship. Second, critics argue that the New Testament authors is simply quoting the book of Isaiah and not Isaiah himself, but this becomes a challenge because several passages specifically say the prophet Isaiah and not the book of Isaiah. Some argue that they are making literary arguments about “Isaiah the prophet” as presented in the text but not a historical Isaiah. Finally, others argue that the other authors were prophets that were also named Isaiah, such as Ben Witherington III who asserts that the other Isaiah was Isaiah’s grandson, named Isaiah as well after his grandfather. Ben Witherington III, \textit{Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 451.

\textsuperscript{86} For example, Sirach 48:17-25 described Isaiah as a prophet that predicted future events. Josephus, in Antiquities of the Jews Book XI, stated that Cyrus had read Isaiah 44-45 and identified Isaiah the prophet as the author that section, which occurred in the second half of the book.
evidence that any part of the book ever existed without the other parts.\textsuperscript{87} Therefore, there is a
strong tradition and strong evidence that Isaiah is the author of the entire book.

Authorship becomes a significant issue for the focus of this dissertation because of the
significance of how the book of Isaiah uses prophecy in its apologetic for God. In chapters 40-
48, the book argues that the audience can know that Yahweh is the true God because He and He
alone can predict the future and then the book uses the prediction of Cyrus as the major example
of how this is possible. If Isaiah is not the author and the author is much later, after Cyrus has
already conquered Babylon as many critics argue, then the entire apologetic emphasis that the
book portrays is destroyed. Therefore, holding onto Isaiah authorship is incredibly significant for
the apologetic argument that the book itself presents.\textsuperscript{88}

**Methodology**

**Limitations/Presuppositions**

In conducting this dissertation, three major limitations/presuppositions will be presented.
First, the dissertation will assume that the 8\textsuperscript{th} century prophet Isaiah was the author of the entire
book of Isaiah and that any prophecies given in the book were true prophecies that were given in
advance and not written by a different author after the fact. While it is true that a different author

(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 18. As shown in Appendix A, both Christianity and Judaism were united that
Isaiah was the author of the entire book. Few before the 1700s even commented on the authorship because it was
assumed as fact. For example, John Calvin did not even mention in his massive Isaiah commentary that there was a
different view on authorship during his time. It was not until Doederlein (1745-1792) and Eichhorn (1752-1827) that
anyone seriously questioned that Isaiah was the sole author.

\textsuperscript{88} Some, such as Brevard Childs and John Goldingay, attempt to bypass this problem by either arguing that
the different author was still writing prior to Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon and therefore was still being prophetic, or
that the God could still be seen as telling the future because chapter thirteen had already predicted that Babylon
would fall. While these can still serve as a possibility and salvage the apologetic value to an extent, they do weaken
the overall apologetic value that the book places on these predictions and events. While predicting Cyrus’ victory
150 years in advance or ten years in advance are both technically still prophecies, the first option is clearly a
stronger and more emphatic prediction than the second option.
writing later but still in advance of the coming of Cyrus could technically argue that Deutero-Isaiah was still arguing for Yahweh’s ability to predict, it significantly weakens the overall argument that the book portrays if the prediction is only mildly in advance, such as when Cyrus became ruler of Persia, than the large gap of time, around 150 years, that the book itself portrays. Both this introduction and Appendix A have argued that the traditional view that Isaiah was the author of the entire book and that there are solid Biblical and academic arguments presented that maintain this view as a legitimate position.

Second, while the New Testament serves as a significant work in the study of the Bible, this dissertation will limit itself to the study of the book of Isaiah as portrayed in the Old Testament except for the specific passages that are directly quoted in the New Testament. Thus, the focus will be on how the various passages would have been understood to the original audience of Isaiah, which includes not only the people of his own time but also the audience that the second half of the book was written to address during both the Babylonian Exile and the return. While this will not greatly impact chapters two and three, chapter four will address how

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89 This is an important point, as many times critics argue that Christians read the New Testament back into the Old Testament and do not allow the Old Testament to speak for itself. Anderson writes, “The field of modern biblical studies has not always been kind to the study of Christian doctrine. Deep in the mindset of every well-trained biblical scholar is the fear that his or her exegetical work will be labeled “apologetic.” By that is meant a less-than-honest grappling with Scripture’s literal sense and a willingness to let an objective enterprise be twisted into an act of special pleading for one’s own religious predilections. For those working in the field of Old Testament there is an additional danger lurking: the tendency to allow Christian presuppositions to run roughshod over the literal sense of the scriptural text and in so doing impugn the dignity of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves.” It is vital to understand the passages in their original Old Testament context before looking at how the New Testament used the material. Gary Anderson, Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1.

90 Isaiah writes predictions and passages that impact those Jews that both went through the Babylonian Exile and to those that returned. He was able to accomplish this through the use of predictive prophecy, which will be addressed in chapter three.
particular Messianic prophecies found in Isaiah were seen as fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament as well as how the book of Revelation portrays the fulfillment of Isaiah 65.

Third, the dissertation will also limit its apologetic emphasis to specifically how the book of Isaiah makes its apologetic argument and not necessarily how modern Christians can use the same arguments. For example, the book of Isaiah uses the prediction that Cyrus will come as an apologetic argument for Yahweh. However, it is much more difficult for a modern reader to use this same argument because of limited access to historical documents that could “prove” that the prediction was made in advance.\[91\] There are several apologetic arguments used by Isaiah that modern Christians can still use today, such as his argument from creation. The dissertation will make these distinctions in the conclusion but regardless of what can be used by a contemporary reader, the book of Isaiah itself can still make apologetic arguments during its own time to its own audience and that is the focus of this dissertation.

Approach to Exegesis/Apologetic Significance

The dissertation will contain a fourfold approach to understanding each passage that is discussed. First, the dissertation will look at each passage exegetically, briefly addressing historical and literary context when needed and then looking at the passage exegetically to interpret the original meaning of the text and then theologically to understand how the passage relates to the overall theological emphasis in the book of Isaiah. Research into the meaning of the original language, historical background and literary functions will all be addressed when necessary. The goal of this section is to understand the specific text and arguments of the book.

\[91\] This occurs because a scroll of Isaiah has not been found to this point that predates the appearance of Cyrus. Similar arguments have been used to downplay the use of Messianic prophecies in apologetics.
Second, the dissertation will then look at the apologetic significance of each passage. Each passage has been selected specifically because they are used in various manners apologetically by the book. The goal of this section of interpretation is to understand both how and why the passage is used by the book to convey its apologetic message/argument for Yahweh.

Third, at the end of each major section, creation, divine intervention and predictive prophecy, the apologetic significance of each section will be addressed. For example, how and why does the book of Isaiah view Yahweh as the Creator? How does Isaiah’s portrayal of divine intervention make an apologetic case for Yahweh? What role does predictive prophecy play in Isaiah’s apologetic argument? Each section will address how the various passages combine to make the specific apologetic arguments from the book. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the various apologetic arguments presented in the book and also address their significance and application, both in their original context and in a modern context.
Chapter Two: Yahweh as Creator in the Book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah has as much if not more to say about God’s creative work than any other book in the Old Testament, including Genesis. The root “to create” (ברא) appears twenty-one times in Isaiah. Hudson points out that in Isaiah 40-55 verbs directly referring to the act of creation appear over sixty-eight times. Creation terms appear once for every five verses. No other portion of the Bible contains such a high concentration of creation terms as does Isaiah 40-55. Isaiah uses the idea of Yahweh as Creator as a foundational doctrine and argues that because Yahweh is the Creator, then He is also the only true God. Isaiah makes the argument for Yahweh’s creative power in several different ways: through the use of ancient creation myth language, through a declaration of Yahweh’s creative power and through polemics against the creative power of the idols and the pagan deities that they represent.

Yahweh as the Creator

Isaiah 27:1

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Leviathan/ the Chaos of the Sea in the Ancient Near East

Isaiah 27:1 has been viewed by scholars as a creation verse because of its mention of Leviathan, which was viewed as an ancient creation chaos enemy that the gods had to defeat in

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92 Richard Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 535. For comparison, “ברא” occurs 11 times in the book of Genesis and 6 times in Psalms, which have largely been regarded as the two books that have the most emphasis on Yahweh as the Creator. While other terms can be used to describe creative work, the number of occurrences of “ברא” in Isaiah does show the emphasis that Isaiah places on creation in the book.

93 Hudson, “Creation Theology” 63. This dissertation will give an overview of three of the major passages in this section to show how the book of Isaiah uses creation theology in its argument. These three passages give a solid representation of the book’s use of creation as an apologetic argument for Yahweh as Creator.
order to become the head of the pantheon. John Day writes, “The background for this terminology is found in the Ancient Near Eastern mythology of the ascendancy of the local deity to active headship of the pantheon by defeating the power of Chaos—represented by the dual picture of the raging Sea or a fearsome Dragon—at the creation of the ordered world.” For example, Baal, the Canaanite god, was able to defeat the sea and river (Yamm/Nahar), banishing them back to the sea and establishing Baal as the lord of the earth. Thus, the defeat of Leviathan or the chaos of the sea was seen in some Ancient Near Eastern theological circles as a mandatory action by the gods to establish their dominance over the created world.

Jessica Lee has also argued a slightly different approach in looking at the defeat of the sea. She argues that in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic traditions the defeat of the sea was linked to kingship. The defeat of the sea monster and the chaos of the sea showed that the god who defeated it was king. Inherently, either position shows that this defeat of the sea/sea monster established dominion over creation by the gods. Therefore, the question that then arises in the

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94 Whether Isaiah is using the term in this manner or in a different manner will be addressed in the following section.


96 Ibid, 428. Other examples of similar ideas occur all throughout the Ancient Near Eastern literature. A similar motif occurs in Egypt, where Seth kills the snake deity Apophis. In Egypt, different creation myths sought to elevate the cities in which they were held by giving a key role to the deities of each in creation, kingship, and the netherworld: in Hermopolis, the Ogdoad (“group of eight”), in Heliopolis, the Ennead (“group of nine”), and in Memphis, Ptah the craftsman. In the Emma Elish, Marduk defeated Tiamat, a sea goddess in dragon form. David W. Baker, Isaiah, ed. John H. Walton, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), loc. 3957.

97 Paul House specifically argues that these usually are found in creation accounts as part of the process of creation. Paul R. House, Isaiah 1-27: A Mentor Commentary (Glasgow: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 1:713.

text is whether Isaiah is using similar terminology and replacing the pagan gods with Yahweh in a polemic or if there is another interpretation of the text?

**Interpretations of Leviathan in the Old Testament/Isaiah**

One interpretative issue that arises in this discussion is that Isaiah is not the only Old Testament author to use the idea of a chaos/sea monster. Leviathan is mentioned also in Job 3:8; 41:1-32; Psalm 74:14; and 104:26. In Job 3:8 and Psalm 74:14, Leviathan appears as part of a comment on God’s power in creating the heavens and earth. Edward Young argues that in Job 41, Job was speaking of some type of literal crocodile. Alden agrees, arguing that an Egyptian papyrus from ca. 1430 BC shows a crocodile with a rope to its jaw. Thus, there are various ways in which Leviathan is used in the Old Testament. For this particular passage in Isaiah, the two views presented are the symbolic view and the polemic view.

For centuries, scholars have argued that Leviathan was merely a symbol of the neighboring nation of Israel. Gary Smith argues that Leviathan is a symbolic term for Assyria. He writes, “Although the Israelites and the prophet Isaiah were well aware of ancient mythological beliefs concerning monsters that battle one another, the imagery in this passage is demythologized and functions as a symbolic metaphor of a strong nation. Since Isaiah does not identify that political power, one can assume that his audience would have automatically

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99 House, *Isaiah 1-27*, 713. Psalm 74 especially focuses on Yahweh’s work in creation, describing how He parted the oceans, created the heavenly bodies in the sky, formed the earth and even created the various seasons. Defeating the Leviathan was seen in Psalms as a part of that creative process.

100 Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19-39*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 233. Some have even tried to argue that it was referring to some type of dinosaur still living in Job’s time, but this is unnecessary and speculative.

connected it with the evil enemy of Judah at the time (Assyria).”

John Day argues that the immediate referent is Babylon, but that Babylon typologically morphs into the figure of Satan through progressive revelation in the book of Revelation. He writes, “Isaiah here remolded the mythic symbol of Leviathan, the Great Dragon, that Ancient Serpent, to refer to Satan, the great and final enemy of Yahweh whom He will defeat in the eschaton. Isaiah, in anticipation of the eschatological climax of the conflict between God and Satan, described the archenemy of Yahweh in the most potent and explicit terms known in the ancient world.”

Others have seen three nations as representatives in play because of the threefold nature of the passage, usually picking Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt, the three superpowers of the Ancient Near East. Rashi argued that the nations were Assyria, Egypt and Tyre. Others have seen the nations as the Ptolemies, the Seleucids and the Parthians. Young argues that Isaiah did not specify the nation(s) because it was already known to the original audience and therefore,

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103 Day, “God and Leviathan” 434. John Walton also takes a similar position and argues that the chaos monster was always Satan, represented in the garden by the Serpent in Genesis 3 and represented by Leviathan throughout much of the Old Testament. He writes, “Such an understanding is confirmed finally in the Apocalypse of John, in which the serpent, now Satan, is described as a great dragon (Rev 12: 9), the chaos creature par excellence. We could therefore conclude that the serpent in Genesis 3 is a chaos creature based on its role in the story and other supporting contexts.” John H. Walton, Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 211.

104 Day, “God and Leviathan”, 435. The difficulty with this view is that Isaiah would have been describing an enemy that really had yet to be fleshed out in the Old Testament and Satan, while connected with the serpent in Genesis 3, was not referred to as a dragon until Revelation 12. It could be that the serpent in Genesis 3 was viewed as a type of Israelite version of the chaos creature in the creation account that was later identified as Satan as progressive revelation continued to be revealed.

105 Ibid. While it is true that Yahweh defeated all three of these nations in different manners throughout the Old Testament, it does not fit well with the language of the text itself.

106 John Day, God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 143. Ultimately, most scholars have given up on the threefold approach since the discovery of Ugaritic texts that have shown the threefold form was a poetic device referring to one idea.
he did not have to name the nation(s). He wrote, “Isaiah rather is merely employing these terms as descriptive figures of speech to refer to certain nations which are the enemies of the Lord.” While this argument does have its strengths, especially if the original audience knew of the nation of which Isaiah was speaking, the weakness of this view is that if Isaiah was using this terminology to refer to a nation/nation(s), then it is strange that he never identified them or that he would have used terminology that was already familiar in the Ancient Near East with another concept.

The strongest argument in favor of the representative nation approach is that Isaiah 30:7 uses a similar term, Rahab, as a name for Egypt. Rahab can be used at times with a similar meaning to Leviathan in representing a great chaos sea monster, such as in Job 9:13, 26:12, Psalm 89:10 and Isaiah 51:9, but also is used in this passage to represent Egypt. Therefore, proponents of this view hold that Leviathan in Isaiah 27 is being used like Rahab in Isaiah 31. However, the major distinction between Isaiah 31 and Isaiah 27 is that Egypt is mentioned by name in chapter 31 and no nation is mentioned in chapter 27.

The second view, the polemic view, argues instead that Isaiah is using Ancient Near East creation myths in a polemic manner to show that it is Yahweh and not the Ancient Near Eastern gods that was the Creator. Gordon asserts that the Hebrews ascribed to Yahweh the cosmic victory over the same symbol of evil that the Canaanites had ascribed to Baal and Motyer argues that Isaiah not infrequently used pagan mythological concepts illustratively without subscribing

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to their truth. Oswalt argues that while the original audience would have had to have been familiar with the myth to understand its significance, Isaiah would not have used it if he knew the audience was unfamiliar with it because it would lose its significance. Thus, it seems likely that what Isaiah is doing in the passage is polemically using ideas already present in the culture to show that Yahweh is the Creator of the world and not the other pagan deities that were commonly associated with these creation myths.

The weakness of this position is that the passage appears to be eschatological and not necessarily set in a creation context. However, what Isaiah may be doing is showing that because Yahweh is the Creator and has power over the forces of nature, He also has the power to set everything right at the end of time. Indeed, if Yahweh is the sole Creator and everything else in the universe is a part of creation, then Yahweh alone has ultimate power and authority. Oswalt writes, “They knew a God who was in absolute control. So the language of myth could be bent to new purposes, as here, where Isaiah, in need of strong imagery to cap his vision of God’s victory over sin, oppression, and death, seizes on the Leviathan story and makes it say something much more profound than it had ever said before.” Therefore, Isaiah shows that Yahweh as the

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110 John Oswalt, “The Myth of the Dragon and Old Testament Faith,” The Evangelical Quarterly 49, no. 3 (1977): 167. If the people were constantly falling away to worship pagan idols, including Baal, then it makes sense that they would be familiar with some of the mythical tales of the pagan deities of the region.

111 The literary context of the passage occurs in a section of Isaiah, chapters 24-27, that is widely called “the Apocalypse of Isaiah” because of its emphasis on the end of time. Motyer, Isaiah, 182. Also, the term “In that day” usually refers to the end of time when God would both judge His enemies and resurrect the saints. However, as will be seen in chapters three and four, because Yahweh is the Creator, He also can both intervene in history and predict/control the future. Thus, the act of creation is not limited to the event itself at the beginning of time, but also influences current and future events. This can be even stronger argued if Satan is seen as both the ultimate representative of the chaos monster in Genesis 3 in the form of the serpent, as he was both present for the early creation account but also will be defeated in the future.

Creator has multiple implications. Because He is the Creator, He has sovereign control over the universe and has the power and authority to defeat sin, death and His enemies.

Apologetic Significance

This passage is used by the book of Isaiah to argue that Yahweh is the true Creator and is greater than any of the other Ancient Near Eastern deities. Indeed, by using the own exploits of the other deities and assigning them to Yahweh, the book is showing apologetically that Yahweh is the Creator, not the Canaanite or other Ancient Near Eastern deities. Because He is the Creator, He has ultimate power in the universe. House sums it up best stating, “His ability to overcome Leviathan here is one more piece of biblical evidence that God’s authority in creation exceeds that of the chaotic forces that oppose Him.”

Isaiah 40-44:25

While Isaiah 27:1 is a very brief statement on Yahweh’s creative work, Isaiah 40-44 expands upon this work in much greater detail. This section is found in the middle of the greater section of 40-55, which has some of the strongest creation language in the entire Old Testament. Lessing asserts that Isaiah had a deep love for the created order which shows in his emphasis on Yahweh as the Creator. When addressing creation in this section, two major emphasis are present in the text. First, the idea of Yahweh as the Creator is essential to

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113 House, Isaiah 1-27, 714.

114 C. Greg Long, in his dissertation entitled, “An Investigation of the Work of the Lord in the Book of Isaiah”, argued that creation should not be viewed as an independent doctrine in the book and instead was only viewed as a secondary and minor argument. However, when one looks at the sheer amount of occurrences of creation theology in the book, it seems impossible to argue that creation is not a significant doctrine developed through the book. C. Greg Long, “An Investigation of the Work of the Lord in the Book of Isaiah” (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984), 160.

understanding these passages. Specifically, the dissertation will look at two foundational passages in this regard: Isaiah 40:12-31 and 42:5-9. Second, the idea that the idols and false gods of the pagans are not only not the creators, but themselves are created is also foundational to understanding the creation theology of this section. Specifically, the dissertation will look at both Isaiah 44:9-20 in this area. This section will first look at the historical and literary context of this section, then look at God’s creative work, the idols/false gods non-creative work and finally finish the section by looking at the apologetic significance of this section.

**Historical Context**

The historical context is very important to this particular section of Isaiah because it ultimately explains why the book has such a major emphasis on both Yahweh as Creator and the other false gods as impotent in creation. Judah’s defeat in 586 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem combined with the Babylonian Exile would have shaken the core of Jewish theology. Webb is correct in stating, “The fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC tested Israel’s faith more profoundly than any other single event in the entire Old Testament period.” Therefore, Isaiah, writing both in advance to prepare the nation, uses both Yahweh’s creative power and His predictive prophecy to assure the nation that He was still the unique and only God (predictive prophecy will be addressed in chapter four).

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116 As noted in chapter one, this dissertation assumes that Isaiah the prophet wrote this sometime from 740-680 BC and this section was written to an audience after the destruction of Jerusalem.

117 Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997), 166. The two most significant events in the Old Testament can be seen as the Exodus and the Babylonian Exile. While the Exodus did test the faith of the people, the nation had yet to be established in the land and, while Yahweh had established a relationship with the Patriarchs, it was still a fairly new relationship. The Babylonian Exile would have been a shocking test to the nation, especially with the destruction of the temple and the deportation from the Promised Land.
Indeed, the nation during the Babylonian Exile would have been influenced by their captors to identify Marduk as the creator god instead of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{118} In exile, they were surrounded by the belief that Marduk created the world with the advice of his council. Isaiah instead in this section argues that Yahweh alone is the Creator and that Yahweh did not need a council or help in His creative work.\textsuperscript{119} They would not have to succumb to Babylonian theology just because Babylon was cultured and powerful, but instead could know that Yahweh was still the Creator of the universe. Historically, Isaiah is writing in advance to encourage, explain and enforce the belief in Yahweh’s creative power to a generation who may be questioning that power due to the destruction and exile of the nation.

\textbf{Literary Context}

Two literary contexts are important in understanding the passage, both the context within the book of Isaiah and the context of Jewish literary theology at the time of Isaiah. First, chapters 40-44 begin a completely new section in the book of Isaiah. The historical interlude in chapters 36-39 is complete and the book shifts to both a new setting and a new message. As addressed in Appendix A, some scholars view chapters 40-66 as either written sermons by Isaiah or sermons that occurred much later in his ministry, which would explain why they look different stylistically from the first half of the book. They also appear to be written to a different audience compared to the first half of the book, which focused more so on events during the life of the prophet himself and the audience of his own time. Finally, Sehoon Jang argued that these

\textsuperscript{118} The book of Daniel makes it clear that the Jews in the exile were under great pressure to conform to Babylonian culture and religious beliefs. Some of the exiles were placed in Babylonian training programs and even had their lives threatened if they failed to worship the Babylonian deities and follow the orders of the Babylonian officials.

\textsuperscript{119} Hudson, “Creation Theology”, 85.
chapters were placed in this specific location strategically by the compiler of the book. He argued,

Since the exiles are challenged to depend completely on God in the midst of a hostile atmosphere which is overwhelmed by polytheistic practices, it is clear that the image of Hezekiah as a failed king in Isaiah 36-39 serves as a negative example to warn the community not to repeat their ancestors' failure to place their whole trust in God. The Israelites in Babylon could be in danger of abandoning their monotheistic conviction that Yahweh is the sovereign God who rules over the whole of creation and has the power to subdue his foes. This is the reason why the monotheistic proclamation of Yahweh’s uniqueness is set forth more prominently in the second half of the book of Isaiah than in any other biblical books in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{120}

Hezekiah, while viewed largely positive in the book of Isaiah, did make a major mistake in chapter 39 with the Babylonian emissaries. Isaiah admonished him for his mistake and declared that the Babylonians would one day return. Thus, there is also a clear connection between Hezekiah’s actions with the Babylonians emissaries in chapter 39 and the exiles in Babylon in 40-66.\textsuperscript{121}

Second, Terrance Wardlaw Jr. has spent significant time and research in identifying whether the book of Isaiah’s creation language’s foundation was found in the Jewish tradition, such as the book of Genesis, or if it was simply borrowed from Ancient Near Eastern creation myths and texts. Wardlaw argues that scholars that push for the second argument do so through vague generalities and that, “They draw conclusions based upon generalizations about

\textsuperscript{120} Sehoon Jang, “Is Hezekiah a Success or a Failure? The Literary Function of Isaiah's Prediction at the End of the Royal Narratives in the Book of Isaiah,” \textit{JSOT} 42, no. 1 (2017): 134. This also shows that the two sections of the book as a whole, chapters 1-39 and 40-66, are not two books that were forcefully placed together but instead were masterfully arranged by the prophet to show the future generations that Yahweh, even in an Israelite defeat, was still the Lord of all the earth.

\textsuperscript{121} This is especially significant because most scholars agree that chapters 36-39 were chronologically out of order and were placed in that specific arrangement for theological/thematic purposes to connect the coming of Babylon to the second half of the book.
Mesopotamian creation texts and the text of Isaiah rather than treating linguistic particulars.”

Essentially, these critical scholars argue that the book of Isaiah must be borrowing from Mesopotamian creation texts, in large part because they argue that had not been written yet, but do not provide meaningful evidence to support their proposition. He ultimately concludes that the book of Isaiah shows strong linguistic connections with the opening chapters of Genesis, specifically the use of the terms “בּוֹהו”, “ברא”, and “בֻּהוּ”.

Isaiah 40:12-31

12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? 13 Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? 14 Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? 15 Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. 16 Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. 17 All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

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122 Wardlaw Jr., “The Significance of Creation”, 452. For example, critical scholars argues that Deutero-Isaiah was using similar language to the way the Persians described the creative work of Ahuramazda. However, when one actually looks at the texts, the similarities are greatly exaggerated. Ahuramazda was described as, “A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.” Critics tie this with Isaiah 45:18 which states about Yahweh, “The One who created the sky, the One who is God, who gave the earth form and substance, who firmly established it. He did notcreate it an empty void, but formed it to be inhabited.” While the general concepts of each deity as creator are present in the text, it is a stretch to argue that the passage share specific linguistic particulars. Indeed, all ancient cultures had deities that were viewed as creators and therefore general creation overlaps should be expected.

123 Wardlaw Jr., “The Significance of Creation”, 458. While these linguistic connections do not prove that Isaiah specifically was using Genesis as a foundation for his creation writing, it certainly shows that there may have been creation language already present within Judaism that had already been developed prior to Isaiah and therefore Isaiah did not have to simply borrow terminology from other Ancient Near Eastern pagan creation myths. Blenkinsopp also addresses this from a different approach. While he argues that Deutero-Isaiah could not be using Genesis 1-11 as a literary foundation because it either had yet to be written or was written almost simultAncient Near Eastously with Isaiah 40-55, he also admits that “ kodem” appears with God as the subject in Genesis 1:1-2:4a seven times and in Isaiah 40-55 sixteen times while rarely occurring in the rest of the Old Testament. Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Towards a Biblical Theology of Creation,” in Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary On Genesis 1-11 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 178-79.
To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.

Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:12-31 is one of the most significant creation texts outside of the book of Genesis in the whole Old Testament. In this passage, Isaiah will argue that Yahweh is the Creator of the universe and therefore because He is the Creator, He alone is God and is incomparable. Blekisopp asserts that the idea of the passage is to lead those addressed to put aside their doubts and give their assent to faith in Yahweh as the all-powerful Creator. This passage can be divided into six sections (12-14, 15-17, 18-20, 21-24, 25-26, and 27-31) all of which are connected but with different emphases.

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Verses 12-14 begin the first section with a series of four rhetorical questions, each beginning with “מי”. First, Isaiah asked who created the seas, heavens, dust of the earth and the mountains. These four concepts were viewed as some of the strongest forces in nature. The sea was feared in the ancient world. It was vast and beyond calculation. The ability to measure would be an immense sign of creative power. The heavens were viewed with great wonder, even being worshipped in some cultures and larger than the sea itself. To measure the heavens was the ultimate sign of creative power. The earth and the mountains were signs of great power because of their immense size and strength. Motyer observes that these four concepts, “Exemplify the Hebrew idiom of ‘totality expressed by contrast’. This Creator God is the Creator of all.”

While other pagan cultures had several gods associated with different sections of creation, such as a god of the sea, Isaiah saw Yahweh in control of all aspects of the created world. Indeed, by using the rhetorical question narrative, Isaiah challenges the pagan gods to prove that they were in control of creation instead of Yahweh.

Second, Isaiah asked who has measured the Spirit of the Lord. Some view this as the Holy Spirit while others think it seems more likely to refer to the mind of God. Either option

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125 Lessing points out that three-fourths of the earth’s surface is comprised of water and yet Isaiah argues that all of it fits into the hollow of Yahweh’s hand. This shows Yahweh’s immense power and control over his creation. Lessing, “Yahweh Versus Marduk”, 238.

126 Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 278. It is the Hebrew way of making the argument that Yahweh is the Creator of every part of the universe.

127 Young argues that this must be the Holy Spirit, writing, “The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of intelligence and understanding who hovered above the waters at the creation (cf. Isa. 34:16; Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4, etc.). It is the Spirit that brings life and makes alive, who brought order out of chaos. No one has brought this Spirit into line with a measure so that He must be subjected to the control and direction of man. Young, Isaiah 40-66, 45. Watts also sees something more than the common mind writing, “Spirit” is a literal translation; includes mind, purpose, and plans, but moves beyond them to include motivation and implementation.” Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 742. Several other scholars hold the second position. For example, Goldingay argues that LXX takes it to mean “mind”, which would parallel way it is used in Proverbs and also how it is quoted in Romans 11:34. Goldingay, The Message of Isaiah, 37. Paul House argues that, while Isaiah does speak about the Holy Spirit in 11:2 and 63:7-14, it is more likely that he extols Yahweh’s spirit of wisdom, which is vast and incapable of measurement. House, Isaiah 28-66, 279. Smith argues, “The word רוּחַ means "spirit" in most cases, but in light of the emphasis on knowing in this
shows the power and majesty of Yahweh, who is beyond the ability of mortal man to comprehend in any comprehensive manner. Yahweh is in control of creation and does not need the counsel or advice of mankind in order to rule and create. Third, Isaiah expanded on that concept by then asking a bigger question about if Yahweh needed anyone to consult with Him or to help Him understand anything in the creative world. While the second section focused on humanity, this section now asks if Yahweh needed other gods to give Him wisdom and counsel. Koole writes, “Verse 14A says that, far from anyone telling Yahweh what his plan must be, Yahweh has not even conferred with anybody.”

Shalom Paul sees this as an attack against the Babylonian god Marduk, as Marduk had personal advisors and a pantheon whereas Yahweh needs no one else.

Therefore, Yahweh is different than all forms of paganism in that He alone is God and He does not need help in ruling His creation.

Fourth, Isaiah asked who was responsible for teaching Yahweh about justice and understanding. The significance is that it is not enough to have the power to create, but Yahweh must also be able to understand the how, what and why of creation. For example, a construction worker may be able to follow a blueprint on how to make an X-ray machine, but may not know how to use the machine after it has been created. Yahweh must be able to understand the

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verse, "mind" (the Old Greek also translates this as "mind") is appropriate (also in passages like Ezek 20: 32; 1 Chr 28: 12).” Smith, Isaiah 40-66, loc. 18104. Oswalt attempts a mediating position, writing, “Spirit here is not precisely the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, but neither is it merely “mind” (as per LXX, quoted in Rom. 11:34 and 1 Cor. 2:16) in the sense of intelligence. Rather, it is the sum total of the interior life, including the volitional, affective, and cognitive aspects. Who can accurately comprehend that aspect of God and so tell him what to do?” Oswalt, Isaiah 40-66, 59.

128 Ian L. Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, Volume 1 of The Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1997), I:93. While Yahweh divulges His plans with mankind at times, such as Genesis 18 when He told Abraham in advance of His plans, He does not need mankind or any other divine being to help in His rule.

workings behind creation. If Yahweh needed someone else to tell Him these ideas, then He would not be the ultimate power in the universe. The implication is that no one taught Yahweh these things because He alone is the Creator and He alone is the ultimate power behind creation. These four rhetorical questions show that Yahweh has both power over creation and has the ability to create without the advice or instruction of others.

In the second section, Isaiah then temporarily shifts away from the rhetorical question structure to argue for Yahweh’s greatness in comparison to the nations in verses 15-17. The nations, the powerful entities that surround God’s people and have brought them so much trouble throughout their history, are like “a drop from a bucket” in comparison to the strength and majesty of Yahweh. Goldingay phrases it well in stating, “In themselves they can be neither threat nor assistance to Yahweh’s exercising authority in a discerning way in the world.” They are like dust on a scale in comparison to the greatness of Yahweh. Yahweh will use the nations to accomplish His purposes, as He used Assyria and will use Babylon and Media-Persia, but in comparison to Yahweh they hold no power. Also, Yahweh is not bound to a single nation (i.e., a local deity) like other pagan deities. While He is associated with Israel and Judah, He holds power over all of the nations.

130 John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 42. While Yahweh at times used nations as conduits for His divine judgment, such as Israel as a judging nation on the Canaanites in the book of Joshua or the Babylonians as a judging nation on Judah, He is not limited or dependent on nations. Indeed, Sodom and Gomorrah were judged and destroyed without any human intervention. While Moses served as Yahweh’s representative to Pharaoh, it was Yahweh who judged Egypt and it was His power alone that sent the plagues that devastated the nation. In contrast, the concept associated with pagan deities was that they needed their nations to conquer other nations in order to spread their power and influence throughout the world.

131 The picture here is that when weighed on a scale against the greatness of Yahweh, the nations cannot even move the scale at all. They are like dust that has been left on the scale from a previous weighing instead of a true comparison to Yahweh’s greatness.
Verse sixteen is a surprising verse in the context of the ancient world. Lebanon not having sufficient fuel would be almost unimaginable for an Ancient Near Eastern reader. The cedars of Lebanon were famous and Lebanon was known around the entire region for their great timber reserves. That Lebanon’s timber and livestock is not enough to compare to the power and superiority of Yahweh shows just how mighty Yahweh is in comparison to the wealth and resources of any nation. Isaiah has previously asserted His power over the resources of Lebanon (2:13; 10:34; 29:17; 33:9). If verses fifteen and sixteen were not enough to make Isaiah’s argument, then verse seventeen concludes the matter. The nations of the earth are nothing in comparison to Yahweh. Isaiah uses three separate Hebrew words in the verse to signify the impact of the nothingness, אָבִּינָּה אֶפְסָּא and תֹהו. While Isaiah is using hyperbole because the nations do exist, in comparison to Yahweh they have absolutely no power or influence on what actually occurs in the world.

The third section (vss. 18-20), begins again with a rhetorical question, similar to the first section, but argues that there is no comparison between an idol and Yahweh. It is almost as if Isaiah in verse eighteen, reading his audience, answers the question, “If the nations are nothing to Yahweh, then maybe the power behind the nations, the deities of the nations, will be able to compare to Yahweh.” The argument has been building. First, man could not compare. Then, the nations themselves could not compare. Finally, Isaiah will argue that the gods of the nations cannot compare either.

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132 In an American culture, it would be similar to saying that Texas did not have enough oil, Iowa enough corn or Idaho enough potatoes to compare to Yahweh.

133 Oswalt notes that "תֹהו" is a favorite word for Isaiah, occurring eleven times in the book, which is significant because it only occurs twenty times in the entire Old Testament. Oswalt, Isaiah 40-66, 61.

134 Isaiah builds on this in chapter 44, which will be addressed as the conclusion of this chapter.
In verses nineteen and twenty, Isaiah shows the pitfalls of idolatry and that idols cannot compare to Yahweh. First, the idol itself must be created by a craftsman. Thus, the idol is not a creator, but instead is itself created. Not only is it created, it is both created by man and is created out of the very elements of creation. Therefore, it cannot truly be God if it is so reliant on creation for its existence. Second, it cannot even “dress itself”. After the craftsman casts it, the goldsmith is the one that overlays it with gold and makes for it silver chains. The weakness of the idol is so apparent to Isaiah that it is almost laughable that one could compare it to Yahweh.

Then, in verse twenty, a woodcraftsman has to select wood, valuable wood that will not easily rot, in order to create a platform for the idol to stand on so that it will not move. House asserts that this is the case because idols tended to not be created out of strong and durable metals and were therefore easily damaged. The idol cannot even protect itself from falling over if it is not properly set up and fastened down by its creators. Perhaps the best example of this is found in 1 Samuel 5, when the idol of Dagon continued to fall over in the presence of the Ark of Covenant. The idol could not raise itself back up once fallen and the god Dagon also was powerless to intervene. This section makes the argument that the idols and their gods that they represent are merely created objects and therefore cannot compare to the true God, Yahweh, who is Lord over all creation.

Section four (vss. 20-24), begins with four questions and then shifts back into describing the creative power of Yahweh. First, the four questions that Isaiah poses all refer to the idea that Yahweh has always been viewed as the Creator and that it is not new information, but has been

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135 Some have objected to Isaiah’s take on idolatry, arguing that he misunderstood the difference between the idol and the god it represented. This will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

told to the people for generations since the beginning of history. Blenkinsopp rightfully argues, “The four questions addressed to the hearers imply that they should be familiar with and have already accepted belief in Yahweh as a creator deity.”\(^\text{137}\) If Genesis has been written already, which the traditional view has always attributed to Moses, then Israel should have known Yahweh as the sole Creator from the very beginning of their existence. That the nation would even question if Yahweh or the idols/false gods were the creators of the universe show that the nation has fallen off course and stumbled into idolatry.

Verse twenty-two shows the absolute power and authority of Yahweh. Yahweh is the one that “sits above the circle of the earth”. Young explains this phrase when he writes, “The phrase sitting upon the circle of the earth is a figurative expression for God’s providential upholding and maintaining of creation.”\(^\text{138}\) One would not be impressed with the knowledge that God is the Creator, unless God continually upheld His creation. At the same time, the participle refers to God’s being seated upon a throne. Seated as a king, He constantly upholds His creation, and governs it.”\(^\text{139}\) It is also clear that Isaiah views Yahweh as outside of creation. His throne is above the earth and therefore He alone is not affected by the events of creation, but instead controls that creation. Unlike the pagan gods that were affected by the events of men, the inhabitants of the earth, mankind, are simply like grasshoppers compared to Yahweh. They hold no power and cannot affect His plan and purposes.

\(^\text{137}\) Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 192.

\(^\text{138}\) Creationist’s have used this verse to show that the Bible said the earth was a sphere and therefore demonstrated the inerrancy of the Bible during a time when the majority view of the world was that the earth was flat.

\(^\text{139}\) Young, The Book of Isaiah, 57. Some see this as Isaiah declaring that the earth was a globe and not flat. While this is certainly possible through divine revelation, it is not necessary to understanding the significance of the text.
The second half of the verse shows that it is Yahweh who is in control of the heavens and it was He who created them and the stars that occupy them. Hudson argues that this would be very important to the exiles because of the Babylonian emphasis on astrology. He writes, “Marduk was in control of the Babylonian pantheon which was represented by the other astral bodies. The prophet employed the strongest word for divine creation to declare that it is Yahweh and him alone that created the objects the Babylonians worship. They are not gods, but mere objects of Yahweh's creation.”

Through the power of the Holy Spirit that inspired him, Isaiah was able to know exactly what the future generation would need to hear after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and they were carried away into exile. Even though Marduk was the Babylonian deity, it was Yahweh and not Marduk that was the Creator of the heavens, the very stars that fascinated the Babylonians.

Verse twenty-three then shifts from the heavens to the earth once again. The rulers of the earth are nothing in comparison to Yahweh. The great kings that went against the nation, such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar believed that they, through the power of their deities, were the rulers of the earth. Sennacherib was called המלך הגדול (“the Great King”) by his servant in Isaiah 36, but it was Yahweh who brought him down in chapter 37. Nebuchadnezzar had immense pride in his own accomplishments in Daniel 4, but it was Yahweh who drove him mad.

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140 Hudson, “Creation Theology”, 92. If the astral phenomenon were not gods themselves but instead were created by Yahweh, then Yahweh’s power must be significantly more powerful than the object of the Babylonian’s beliefs.

141 This is not as impossible as critics like to make seem. Babylon had existed for centuries and already had established a religious system. Isaiah was not creating something out of thin air.

142 Isaiah makes it clear that Yahweh brings down the rulers of the earth. For example, in 37:7 it is Yahweh who will make Sennacherib fall through His own intervention. This would go counter to a deistic God that was uninterested in His creation. Instead, Yahweh is the controller of the earth and history and makes the decision on who rules the nations.
Perhaps no ruler in history has had such contempt for Yahweh as Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, but Yahweh defeated him and his kingdom through His powerful plagues. Verse twenty-four brings a similar message, using the imagery of the kings as plants that are barely growing before Yahweh blows on them and they are blown away by the wind. The kings of the earth believed that they controlled and ruled the earth, but Yahweh had consistently shown throughout history that He alone controls the nations and therefore is the ruler of the earth.

Section five consists of verses twenty-five and twenty-six with the focus again being on Yahweh’s incomparability and His role as Creator, this time as the Creator of the stars. First, Yahweh, through Isaiah, again makes the rhetorical question about who can be put forth to compare to Him. Indeed, Yahweh even puts forth that if someone or something can be put forth, then should He be like it? In a vacuum, this challenge to Yahweh might seem legitimate. However, in the context of the passage, there is nothing that can be put forth to compare to Yahweh because Yahweh alone is the Creator and is greater than man, nations, the heavens and even the pagan gods. The title “Holy One”, short for Isaiah’s title for Yahweh, “The Holy One of Israel”, appears throughout the book as Isaiah’s signature title for Yahweh as the name that shows Yahweh’s power and purity.

Verse 26 again calls for a focus on the heavens and the dwelling place of the stars. Isaiah calls on the audience to look up to the stars and ask who is the Creator of the heavens. Many pagans believed that the stars were gods themselves or that they were created by their own gods. However, Isaiah makes it clear that it is Yahweh who is the Creator of the heavens. He knows all the stars by name, and He is so powerful that not a single star is absent from His creation. Paul
again points out that Marduk was supposed to be the Creator of the heavenly host, but Yahweh was taking credit for their creation.143

Section six, verses 27-31, shows the implications of the fact of Yahweh’s creative power for the audience. Because Yahweh is the Creator, then it greatly impacts His relationship with His people. In verse 27, Isaiah again asks a rhetorical question, this time from the perspective of his audience. The people believe that Yahweh has abandoned them and no longer has interest in them. While this clearly could have been asked by the exiles after the destruction of Jerusalem, it is symptomatic of Israel’s history.144 They constantly doubted Yahweh’s care and ability to deliver them even though Yahweh had always been faithful to them.

Verse 28 repeats many of the same concepts of Yahweh’s creative work that Isaiah had already established in the passage. Once again Isaiah declares that Yahweh is the Creator of the entire earth and that He is beyond time itself. He is not bound to the ways of man and never gets tired. He knows all and nothing can evade his understanding. Koole sums the argument up well stating, “The prophet counters Israel’s complaint by pointing to the unlimited power and wisdom of God, the theme of vv. 12-26. God’s power is demonstrated in his dominion over the heavenly bodies and in his government of the earth and earthly events.”145


144 The people doubted Yahweh in the wilderness when they thought they would starve. They doubted His ability to help them take the Promised Land. Gideon complained that Yahweh had abandoned them even when the nation was in sinful rebellion. Time and again the nation blamed Yahweh and doubted Him.

145 Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, 123. It is as if Isaiah made a list of every possible concept in the world that could be compared to Yahweh and systematically went down the list, showing that Yahweh was more powerful than anything else in the universe.
Baker makes a strong emphasis that Yahweh is portrayed in this section very differently than many of the gods of the pagans. He writes

While Israel’s God is portrayed as powerful and independent, their neighbors’ gods are not always so, but rather are at times weak and dependent, even on humanity. In the Akkadian fable of the Tamarisk and the Palm, there is mention that “the gods became tired” (but in a broken context where the exact significance is unclear). In the Erra epic, the warrior god Erra is called out to battle, but “Erra himself felt as weak as a man short of sleep.” In the Gilgamesh Epic, the gods gather around Utnapishtim’s sacrifice “like flies” because the destruction they had wrought left them without either food or drink. Thus, Yahweh is not like the gods of the nations that were created in the images of man and suffer some of the same weaknesses of the flesh. Instead, Yahweh is completely unique and all-powerful. In the Old Testament, mankind is created in the image of God (imago Dei), while in the pagan religions the gods were created in the image of man (imago hominis).

Verses 29-31 conclude the passage by declaring that Yahweh wants to empower His followers if they will wait and trust in Him instead of running away to paganism. Yahweh has proven through His creative power that He is both willing and able to interact and save His creation. The mention of “wings like eagles” may be a reference back to Exodus 19:4, in which Yahweh delivered the nation during the Exodus and, “bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” Thus, just as Yahweh actively empowered and delivered the nation during the time of the Exodus, so too is He willing to empower the nation again if they will return to Him. The nation can trust and believe in this promise because Yahweh has proven Himself as the Creator of the universe.

146 Baker, Isaiah, loc. 5073.

147 The Hebrew term “מרחפת” also is found in Genesis 1:2 in describing the Spirit “hovering” over the water in the act of creation. It is also found in Deuteronomy 32:11 again in connection with Yahweh’s deliverance in the Exodus. Thus, the ability to create and the ability to preserve are both actions of the Creator God.
Isaiah 42:5-9

5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. 9 Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

Isaiah 42:5-9 is a second creation passage in this section of Isaiah that focuses on both the creation of the world and Yahweh’s sovereignty over history. Critics argue that verses 5-6 were taken by Deutero-Isaiah from a Persian creation formula from the reigns of Darius I, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, Artaxerxes II, and Artaxerxes III. If the creation account was written by Isaiah as the dissertation has suggested, then it makes a strong argument that Yahweh was the Creator of the universe. Thus, Isaiah continued to build upon the foundation already established in Isaiah 27 and Isaiah 40. Indeed, this passage will make it clear that Yahweh’s ability as Creator also influences other aspects of his powers, specifically His ability to control history.

In verse five, two aspects of Yahweh’s creative power are illustrated by Isaiah. First, Isaiah describes Yahweh’s power in the creation of the earth and the heavens. It was Yahweh who both created and spread out the heavens and it was Yahweh who both created and spread out the earth. The idea of Yahweh spreading out the heavens was a common thought in the Old

148 Christine Mitchell, “A Note On the Creation Formula in Zechariah 12:1-8; Isaiah 42:5-6; and Old Persian Inscriptions,” JBL 133, no. 2 (2014): 305-8. This would put the writing at a very late date, sometime in the 400s.

149 Childs believed that, although the passage appears to be independent in form and content, that it clearly has a connection with the creation language already established in chapter 40. Brevard S. Childs, Isaiah: A Commentary, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn, 1st ed., The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 326.
Testament as already has been addressed in 40:22. The idea also shows Yahweh’s continued influence on His creation. Yahweh is not simply a deistic God who created the universe and then turned away, but instead is active in sustaining His creation. Motyer comments, “The verbs created … stretched … spread … gives are in Hebrew all participles expressing the unchanging relationship between the Lord and his world. He, who in the beginning created, continues in creative care and dominance; heavens and earth are maintained in place by his constant activity; all life comes from him.” The final line shows that Yahweh not only created the earth itself but also created everything that comes from the earth. Thus, Yahweh is the Creator of all of the natural world.

Second, Isaiah asserts that it is Yahweh who is responsible for the creation of mankind and He is the one that gives breathe into the lungs, enabling life for mankind. Young writes, “Isaiah had remarked in 2:22 that man’s breath was in his nostrils. Now he affirms that it is from God that the peoples receive their breath, the vital principle of life without which men cannot live.” While other cultures may have argued that their gods were responsible for mankind, Isaiah argued that it is Yahweh alone who is responsible for the creation of mankind. One cannot miss the unmistakable connection Isaiah makes with Genesis 1-2, where Yahweh breathed the breath of life (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים) directly into Adam, the first representative of mankind. Thus, if

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150 Motyer, Isaiah, 294. Creation was not merely a singular action of Yahweh, but requires constant attention and supervision.

151 This is important because in pagan pantheons, different gods were responsible for the creation of various pieces of creation. However, Isaiah asserts that Yahweh is the sole Creator of all of creation and therefore the ruler of all.

152 Edward Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 117-118. Young argues that the idea of spirit in the tense is synonymous with breath and is not distinct from the breath.
Yahweh is the Creator of mankind, then Yahweh is ultimately the ruler of mankind and has sovereign control over humanity.

While Yahweh’s creative work itself is warrant of praise and worship, Isaiah does not stop there but also shows the implication of Yahweh’s creative work. In verses 8-9, Isaiah argues that because Yahweh is the Creator, He also is the only deity worthy of praise and is the controller of history. First, Yahweh, through Isaiah, declares that He is both worthy of glory and will not share His glory with the idols. This follows directly back to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 when Yahweh outlawed idolatry and worshipping other gods throughout the nation. Young called this Yahweh’s “divine jealousy” and argued that this showed Yahweh’s exclusiveness in Israelite religion. While the dissertation has already argued that Isaiah did not create monotheism, this passage shows that Isaiah clearly believed in a monotheistic system in which Yahweh alone was the Creator God and He alone was worthy of worship and glory.

Next, Yahweh declares that He has the power to declare things in advance because of His creative power and control over the earth, humanity and history. Leupold writes, “The Creator-character of God is the guarantee of His power to achieve any and all of the things He proposes to undertake.” This is in direct response to the idols, who cannot create and cannot predict the future and therefore cannot truly be God and should not be worshipped. Baker, in describing pagan divination in the ancient world compared to Yahweh writes

The former things have taken place, and new things I declare (42:9). Among Israel’s neighbors, the past was predictive of the future in the form of omens and divination. Rather than actual predictions of an unknown future, these prognostications were based on an understanding that the past would repeat itself. While the gods seek to control the

153 Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66, 123.

154 H.C. Leupold, Exposition of Isaiah (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 64.
future, they do not choose to share it with humanity. This is in stark contrast with Isaiah’s God, who does not act in secret but openly reveals his plans through his prophets.155

Yahweh not only can declare the future, but He has declared the future and He can do this because He is sovereignty in control of the universe as the Creator.156

Apologetical Significance of Isaiah 40, 42

The apologetical significance of these two passages are hard to ignore. Isaiah clearly makes the argument that Yahweh is not only a Creator but is the only Creator. Because He is the Creator, then He also is the controller of the universe. Therefore, His ability to create leads to other implications of His divine rule, such as being able to intervene in history and being able to predict the future.157 Apologetically, Isaiah argues that Yahweh is the Creator over the other gods and their idols because He is above creation while they have been made from creation. Thus, Isaiah 40 and 42 lay out a positive argument for Yahweh as Creator, while mildly arguing that the idols and the gods they represent are not, which because a major emphasis in chapter 44. Von Rad, while denying many of the tenants of this dissertation on authorship, summarized the apologetical significance of the book’s creation theology well, stating

Very surprisingly however, there is still another tradition in Deutero-Isaiah, now upon which no previous prophet had called. It deals with the creation of the world by Yahweh. Because Yahweh had the power to subdue chaos, appeal could also be made to him to help his people in times of tribulation in the historical realm; and because Yahweh created the ends of the earth, the message which he is now sending to Israel is also

155 Baker, Isaiah, loc. 5306.

156 More on Yahweh’s use of prediction will be addressed in chapter four. Craigen argues that this section makes a strong argument against open theism, as Yahweh declares that He both knows and controls the future, something that open theism denies. Trevor Craigen, “Isaiah 40-48: A Sermonic Challenge to Open Theism,” The Master's Seminary Journal 12, no. 2 (2001): 167.

157 Creation lays the foundation for both of these activities, which is why the dissertation has placed creation first.
trustworthy…for him creation is the first of Yahweh’s miraculous historical acts and a remarkable witness to his will to save.\textsuperscript{158}

Yahweh’s ability and power in creation both shows that He is God and lay the foundation for other arguments that Isaiah used throughout the book.

\textbf{Idols/False Gods as Created}

Isaiah 44:6-20

6 Thus says the \textsc{LORD}, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the \textsc{LORD} of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. 7 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. 8 Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”

9 All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. 10 Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

12 The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. 13 The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with pl Arkadaş Near Easts and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. 14 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”

18 They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. 19 No one considers, nor is there

\textsuperscript{158} von Rad, \textit{Old Testament Theology}, 2:240. One can debate whether Isaiah was the first prophet to use creation theology as proof of Yahweh’s divinity. Much of this depends on dating and authorship of several Old Testament books. Indeed, if Moses, who the Bible identified as a prophet, is the author of the Pentateuch, the traditional view of authorship, then technically he would have been the first prophet to develop creation theology.
knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

While Isaiah has a strong emphasis on Yahweh as the Creator in this section, he also had a strong emphasis that the idols were not only non-creators but were themselves created and therefore powerless and non-divine. Abernathy asserts that one of the major themes of Isaiah is that, “Yahweh is the supreme king, a status that belongs to no other god.” Perhaps no passage in the entire Old Testament makes this argument more powerful and persuasively than Isaiah 44:6-20. Beginning in verse six, Yahweh declares that “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” Goldingay writes, “Yahweh alone has been behind world events from the beginning (creation, Abraham, the Exodus) to the end (the fulfillment of Yahweh’s intention to restore Jacob-Israel and be recognized by the whole world).” This is not a new concept within Israelite theology, as Yahweh made similar claims even dating back to the Exodus. However, with a nation full of idolatry and surrounded by pagan nations, Yahweh once again must remind his people exactly who He is and what the other pagan idols and gods are not.

An important point to note both in this passage and in other passages in which Isaiah interacts with idols and gods is that Yahweh is not merely declaring that He is greater than the other gods of the nations. Instead, He is declaring that He alone is the God of all the nations and that the other gods are false and not truly divine, thus declaring the incomparability of God. This is a major distinction between Yahweh and the views of the other nations. When another nation


in the Ancient Near East conquered a nation, they did not believe their gods were the only gods, but that their gods were stronger than the enemy gods. Yahweh, through these passages showing the weaknesses of idolatry, is instead showing that there are no other gods and He alone is God.

In verse 7, Yahweh once again challenges the idols and their gods to predict the future. However, He portrays this ability in a little different way than in the previous section. He directly associates himself with the creation of His own people Israel. Just as the other gods supposedly had their own people to do their bidding, Yahweh is associated with Israel. However, He then challenges the idols that He has been able to predict future events and tell them to his people and they are then challenged to do the same, which they cannot do. James Hamilton Jr. argues that Yahweh’s ability to predict the future is so pivotal to the argument against idolatry because they cannot that if Yahweh could not predict the future, then He would be no better than the idols. 161

In verse 8, He continues and identifies Israel as his witness, as He has consistently predicted future events and told the nation since the beginning. Oswalt writes, “Before all the world Israel will be a living witness to the fact that God had predicted all of this far in advance, and that he had the power to make his promises come true.”162 Idolatry cannot offer the same level of comfort and guarantee that Yahweh can afford because they cannot control history or predict future events. An Israelite does not have to live in fear because God has control of history and warns his people in advance, whereas a follower of idolatry has no promise that their gods can do anything to affect future events.

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161 James M. Hamilton Jr., God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 205. This ability to predict the future will be the focus of chapter four.

162 Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah: 40-66, 172-173. In contrast, if Yahweh was not able to back up His claims, then He should not be viewed as the true God.
Beginning in verse nine, Isaiah moves into what can be described as a satirical assault on idolatry. This shift has caused many liberal scholars to argue that this passage is not original, either to Isaiah or even to Deutero-Isaiah. For example, Klaus Baltzer argued that, “Even the language displays peculiarities, and the difference in rhythm and style is more striking still; above all, it is impossible to see the grandiloquent Deutero-Isaiah engaging in this finicking painting.” However, there is a very good reason for Isaiah’s use of satire in this specific situation. Writing to the future nation that has been defeated by Babylon, Isaiah writes to show the weakness and folly of idolatry so that the nation will not turn away from Yahweh to worship the Babylonian gods. Indeed, what Isaiah does in his argument is very similar to what Elijah did at Mount Carmel to the worshippers of Baal in 1 Kings 18 when he mocked Baal as sleeping, using the restroom or making a journey instead of being able to send down fire for his worshippers. Like Isaiah, Elijah was dealing with a nation in the grips of idolatry and had to act drastically to get the people’s attention. Similarly, Isaiah too uses the dramatic satirical argument to try to make the people understand just how undesirable worshiping idols truly was when looked at objectively.

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163 Claus Westerman, Isaiah 40-66, trans. David M.G. Stalker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 146. It is not enough for critical scholars to author that Isaiah is not the author, but they even go farther and cut the book up even greater in situations like this, which would lead to perhaps dozens of different authors piecing together the book.

164 Klaus Baltzer, Deutero-isaiah, Hermeneia, trans. Margeret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 192. Baltzer maked no historical argument that this should be separated, instead simply argued that he believed Deutero-Isaiah was too sophisticated to make this claim. This seems highly speculative at best and good arguments can be made for why the author would use this method.

165 Webb sums it up well when he states, “This is the context in which we must see Isaiah’s broadside against idolatry in verses 9–20. Its purpose is to expose the real character of idolatry so that Israel will have no illusions about it.” Webb, The Message of Isaiah, 181.
Isaiah begins his mocking of those who create and worship idols in verse nine. First, he argues that the creators of idolatry are nothing but mere men and therefore do not have the power to create gods that are anything more than them and therefore it is shameful to go through this. The term that Isaiah uses for those that make idols is “תֹהו”, a word used in Genesis 1-2 to describe a world filled with nothingness. Thus, just as the earth was nothing before the creative work of Yahweh, so too is the power and authority of men when they create idols. Verses ten and eleven continue to make this argument, declaring that the craftsman of the idol is only human and that any who create the idol should be terrified and put to shame.

In verses twelve through seventeen, Isaiah described the creation of an idol by an ironsmith, but he also highlights several weaknesses throughout the process. First, the ironsmith prepares the tools to create the idol, but his own humanity is his weakness as he becomes hungry and tired. In verse thirteen, he measures out the work but he makes it in the shape and likeness of his own image. In Genesis 1-2, Yahweh made mankind in his own image, but in this section, mankind makes the gods and idols into their own image. Second, the idols are made from creation, as the man cuts down a cypress or oak tree and uses it as the main source for the idol. Instead of creating, the idol is made from creation. The word used in Yahweh’s creation of man in His image is “צלם”, a word used for “idols”, although the term “פסל” is employed here. There is a play on the concept that a god created man in His image, and now man is attempting to

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166 Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66, 172.

167 Koole expands on this idea of the connection between the craftsman and his humanity. He writes, “The text plays with the word adam= man. The manufacturers of idols are merely men, what they produce is merely something that looks like men and man is more in need of wood for warming himself and making food than for the production of an idol. This puts ‘man’ in his place, which is significant in a world that humanizes gods and deifies people. The infinite qualitative difference between God and man can only be overcome by God. Otherwise it is human pride which goes before a fall.” Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, 378. Mankind cannot create an idol with power because he himself is merely a man and not a deity and therefore he cannot create anything more powerful than himself.
create god in his own image, and this is in addition to the worship of the thing made in the image of man (cf. Rom. 1:25).

The true satire begins in verse fifteen. The man takes the wood from the tree and uses half of it for firewood to bake his bread and keep himself warm and uses the other half to create the idol that he then worships and asks for deliverance. The idol has no power, was created by the same items that he used to cook his food, and yet he begs the idol to deliver him from his problems. Isaiah clearly is trying to show his audience the folly of idolatry and show how incredibly powerless the entire process is when it is seen objectively. Goldingay rightfully concludes, “It is a mystery to the Poet how people can be so stupid.”

Verses eighteen through twenty give the divine response and explanation for why people continued to worship idols if they were powerless. The people had fallen so far into idolatry that they had become blind and they were no longer able to see correctly. Oswalt writes, “To Isaiah it is evident that the only reason why a person would not see the obvious contradictions in the picture he has just drawn is that, for some reason, they cannot. In the normal course of human intelligence, the implications would surely be plain. So what has happened? Why do they not know? The answer is familiar to him: They have become blind and insensitive.” They cannot understand that their sin has blinded them and they no longer recognize that they are forming their own gods out of the very elements that they use to cook and warm themselves.

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168 Goldingay, Isaiah, Understanding, 256. The poet is Goldingay’s term for the author of this specific section.

169 Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66, 184. Paul in Romans 1 makes a similar argument when he admits that those under the power of sin have worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. False worship is not without consequences. It only leads to spiritual blindness which blinds mankind to the revelation that Yahweh is the true God and the Creator of the universe.
exactly what Yahweh had told Isaiah in his commissioning in Isaiah 6:9-13, that the nation would become so blind that they could no longer see the truth or foolishness of their actions.\textsuperscript{170}

In verse twenty, Isaiah argued that those who worship idols have a deluded heart and this has led to him not understanding that he is lying to himself in order to justify his actions. Motyer writes, “The emphasis throughout is on the human, earthly, origin of such a ‘god’ and the fact that its ‘powers’ cannot extend beyond that which it naturally is. Note how verse 19 begins and 20 ends with a reference to a craftsman. That says it all; it is a human invention.”\textsuperscript{171} Thus, the idols are created from the earth and therefore have no power outside of the natural norm. They do not have the ability to predict the future, control history or deliver their people in the same way as Yahweh, who is independent of the natural world. Indeed, all the power and craftsmanship of the idol has come from the human crafter, not from the divine. Instead of being the Creator like Yahweh, the idols were merely created themselves. Oswalt writes, “The proofs of their deity that the gods are required to bring is some evidence that they are independent of the cosmos and its functioning.”\textsuperscript{172} In contrast, Genesis 1:1 speaks of the creation of the universe, but not the creation of Yahweh. He stands outside of the created universe and instead is the very source of all of Creation. The false idols could not accomplish this because they were made by man and had no power outside of what mankind could grant them. To Yahweh, those that follow

\textsuperscript{170} Also see Deuteronomy 4:28, in which Yahweh told the nation, “And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.” That the nation would fall into idolatrous worship was not a surprise to Yahweh.

\textsuperscript{171} Motyer, \textit{The Prophecy of Isaiah}, 280. Power cannot be transferred from creator to creation if the Creator never held that power.

\textsuperscript{172} Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah: 40-66}, 100.
idols are foolish and should live in fear because their trust and faith has been placed in an object that cannot deliver instead of the true God that can deliver them.¹⁷³

Did Isaiah Misunderstand Paganism?

One minor issue that arises in looking at this passage is that critics sometimes argue that Isaiah oversimplified idolatry in his critique and that he either misunderstood paganism or deliberately made it seem untenable. For example, Claus Westermann wrote, “Even the simplest idolater no more confuses image with numen than does the Jew Elijah with his mantle. There is no denying that, to say the least, the poem makes idolatry out to be courser than it is.”¹⁷⁴ Whybray argued that the author of the passage was wrong in his assumptions about idolatry and made this argument out of ignorance.¹⁷⁵ Critics argue that ancient people knew that the images and idols themselves held no actual power and were instead merely a physical representative of the spiritual deity.

However, if Isaiah the prophet or even Deutero-Isaiah wrote the passage, then it is highly unlikely that he would not be familiar with how paganism worked in the ancient world. He was surrounded by paganism on all sides, including in the nation itself. There is simply no way in

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¹⁷³ This must have been very frustrating for both Yahweh and Isaiah as this was not a hypothetical argument that they were making. Indeed, Isaiah probably saw this very type of action occurring regularly during his ministry and Yahweh had seen Israel struggle with this issue for hundreds of years. Yahweh had continually demonstrated his power and deliverance for the nation time and time again and yet Israel continued to build idols and worship foreign deities that never were able to deliver them or predict the future in any meaningful way. The passage shows Yahweh and Isaiah’s frustration with the nation and their idolatry because it just did not make sense to continue to follow idols when Yahweh had proven himself trustworthy and powerful.

¹⁷⁴ Westerman, *Isaiah 40-66*, 151. Many modern critics have attempted to downplay the negatives of ancient paganism in an attempt to argue that it was similar to ancient Judaism. However, Judaism itself never had an idol/image, rejected worshipping images/idols and was therefore significantly different than anything else in the ancient world.

¹⁷⁵ R.N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (Edinburgh: Oliphants, 1975), 56. It seems ironic that someone thousands of years after the fact would argue that they know more about an ancient custom than someone who grew up during that time and saw the effects of it every day.
which Isaiah would not have been familiar with how paganism worked.176 Oswalt argues that, “It is difficult to believe that this man, everywhere agreed to be the finest theological mind of Israel, was so obtuse as not to understand this fact...he was surrounded by paganism in all of its forms.”177 While the idols themselves may not have been viewed as gods in theory, in practicality the people worshipped the idols as if they were the deities themselves and the deities that were behind them were supposedly the ones that gave power to mankind. When Isaiah attacked the idols ability to create as in vain, he ultimately was attacking the pagan deities that they supposedly represented and therefore he ultimately attacked the power of the gods behind the idols and showed that they were powerless in comparison to Yahweh. Also, the Prophet is representing the divine viewpoint, as a representative of Yahweh, and that the God of Israel can see into Israeli hearts and knows that even in their syncretistic worship their dependence is more upon the idol than upon Him and that any worship of anything alongside Yahweh is sin and a violation of the Mosaic agreement (Ex. 20:3-4).

Apologetical Significance of Isaiah 44:6-20

This section of Isaiah is incredibly significant for its apologetic purposes. The first three passages examined showed Isaiah arguing that Yahweh was the Creator. However, all ancient religions held that their own gods were the creators or played some significant role in creation as part of a pantheon of deities. Thus, one could argue that what Isaiah was doing was simply standard practice in his time. Marduk was viewed as the creator within the Babylonian religion.

176 It is not as if Isaiah was writing about a different religion that he had rarely/never encountered personally, such as when the reformers or the Puritans wrote about Islam or the Eastern religions but had very little interaction with their followers and often times misunderstood their beliefs or did not understand the significance of their devotion. Isaiah had seen idolatry, both in pagan contexts and in his own nation, from the time he was old enough to understand.

Ra was the creator in Egyptian religion. Thus, one could simply argue that Isaiah was merely putting forth Yahweh as Creator in the same manner, albeit in a very different manner as Yahweh was viewed as the only God responsible for creation without the help or guidance of a pantheon of other deities.

However, Isaiah took the message one step further and argued that not only was Yahweh the Creator and the other deities of the Ancient Near East were not, but also that the other gods themselves were created as well. Not only were they created, but they were created by mankind through the use of the created elements that Yahweh Himself had created. Isaiah then is not simply arguing that his God is a Creator but is the Creator that is responsible for all of the Creation and that everything else in the universe was created from His created work. He also limits the power of the gods of the other nations because they are created by mankind and therefore cannot hold power over creation. In conclusion, Isaiah ends this creation section by making the apologetic argument that Yahweh is the true God because He alone is the Creator, standing outside of creation, and everything else in the universe was both created by Yahweh and stands inside of the Creation.
Chapter Three: Yahweh’s Divine Intervention in the Book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah not only emphasizes that Yahweh is the Creator, it also demonstrates two other ways Yahweh is the one true God. From an apologetic standpoint, this chapter will examine Yahweh’s divine intervention on behalf of His people will be the focus, as well as the inability of divine intervention from the foreign gods and their idols. The two passages that promote Yahweh’s intervention that will be addressed are Isaiah 38 and Isaiah 36-37. The passage that shows the weakness of the idols and their lack of intervention will be chapter 46.

Isaiah 36-38

Historical Context

This section, Isaiah 36-38, occurred during a very important historical time in the Ancient Near East. Assyria, called the neo-Assyrian empire from 745 BC until their destruction, had finally overcome their internal problems and began to expand into the area around Israel and Judah. Tiglath-pileser II (r. 745/744-727) took the throne and began his expansion into the west, first by putting down a Chaldean revolt in Babylon and then moving west. It was due to this move that Israel and Syria allied together during the reign of King Ahaz in Isaiah 7. This Assyrian push ultimately destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and placed Assyria on the doorstep of Judah.

178 Two other passages that could be used to show Yahweh’s divine intervention, chapters 7 and 44-45, will both be addressed in the next chapter that focuses on predictive prophecy. Both passages have instances of divine intervention, but their focus is on the predictive elements of these interventions and therefore they will be addressed later.

King Hezekiah began his reign as a coregent with his father Ahaz for thirteen years of his forty-two years of reign from 729 to 686 BC. Hezekiah reversed the spiritual bankruptcy that he had observed in 715 BC when he began to rule independently of his father. He initiated a return to Yahweh and severed all ties with Assyria (2 Kings 18:3-7). In 712 BC, King Azuri of Ashdod revolted against Assyria and was removed by Sargon II and replaced by his brother, showing everyone in the region that Assyria would not tolerate rebellion or a withholding of tribute. However, Sargon II had to stop his move west because of other rebellions within his kingdom, including a rebellion by Merodach-Baladan in Babylon.

In 705 BC Sennacherib, Sargon’s son, took power and began to look westward again. After putting down another rebellion in Babylon from Merodach-Baladan, which Hezekiah used as a diversion to make his own revolt against Assyria. Sennacherib then marched west in 701 BC to engage both Judah and a possible Egyptian threat. He first laid siege to the Judean stronghold of Lachish, which was pictured on Sennacherib’s palace walls in Nineveh. While Sennacherib was still in the process of destroying Lachish, 2 Kings 18:14-16 states that Hezekiah paid a tribute of 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold. This was not enough for

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180 Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 376. Motyer also agrees that, while this is not in the text, it is the best solution to establishing how Sennacherib invaded in Hezekiah’s fourteenth year and yet he was coronated in 729 according to 2 Kings 18:1. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 249.

181 Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel*, 376.

182 Ibid, 377.

183 Ibid, 378.

184 Ibid, 379.

185 There is great debate on why Isaiah left out this passage. Child’s argues that it is not a textual error, but was intentionally left out by the author. However, he also argues that one must first give attention to the book’s own version of the account to understand the reasons behind leaving out any historical events instead of merely rushing off to judge the document historically. Childs, *Isaiah*, 271. Smith argues that Isaiah only selectively included the information that served his theological purposes and thus did not include the attempted bribe for theological reasons, that Hezekiah ultimately trusted Yahweh for deliverance in the story. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 593. Smith’s argument
Sennacherib so he sent his representatives to speak to the Judeans still in Jerusalem, trying to force a surrender by Hezekiah through the use of threats and theological intimidation (Isaiah 36-37).

Literary Context

Chapters 36-39 form what some call the historical interlude of the book. It is unique in the book because it tells a narrative story of events in Isaiah’s own time in which he interacted with King Hezekiah. While many have denied the historical nature of these accounts, there is nothing within the text itself that makes it seem that they should not be taken as historical events that occurred in the life of Isaiah the prophet. It also connects both halves of the book, finishing the Assyrian threat and introducing the Babylonian threat. Thus, it serves as the conclusion of chapters 1-35 in which Isaiah has attempted to show the people that trusting in the nations is futile. Chapters 38-39 are connected to 36-37, showing that, although Yahweh has taken care of Assyria, Babylon will ultimately become a threat because of the actions of Hezekiah.

holds much weight, arguing that Isaiah did not want to paint Hezekiah in an unfavorable light, as he did his father Ahaz but instead wanted to show that ultimately Hezekiah, in this situation was faithful, regardless of the attempted payoff. This is not to say that Isaiah only paints Hezekiah in a favorable light, as the book does show his faults in chapter 39.

186 While much of the book of Isaiah focused on his sermons and prophecies, there were passages that described events in his own life and ministry.

187 They would argue that the Assyrian invasion did occur, as shown in Assyrian documents, the actual events as portrayed in these chapters were not necessarily historical, especially the story of Hezekiah’s healing. For example, Beuken calls chapter 38 a “prophetic legend” and denies that the events ever occurred in this manner. Willem A.M. Beuken, Isaiah II: Isaiah 28-39, Volume 2 of The Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 386.

188 The Taylor Prism, found in 1830, documents that Sennacherib invaded Judah during this time period and encircled Jerusalem, but has no mention of conquering the city. Hezekiah’s tunnel, built during this time to supply the city with water during the siege has also been located in Jerusalem.
One problematic issue is the timing of these chapters. They appear to be out of order chronologically, as Merodach-Baladan could not have been seeking allies after the Assyrians had been defeated in chapter 37; this was more likely during Merodach-Baladan’s brief rebellion against Sennacherib in 703 BC. Indeed, it would make sense that if he was in rebellion against Assyria, then he would have been seeking allies and thus was seeing if Hezekiah would join in an alliance. Thus, it will be assumed that chapters 38-39 occurred prior to the Assyrian invasion but were placed out of chronological order in order to connect Babylon to the second half of the book, where this is the focus.

Isaiah 38

1 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover.” 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD. 3 and said, “Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 “Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city. 7 “This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised: 8 Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.” So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.

21 Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a cake of figs and apply it to the boil, that he may recover.” 22 Hezekiah also had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the LORD?”

189 Another issue is whether Isaiah himself wrote these chapters or if the author of 2 Kings wrote the chapters, as there is major overlap in the stories. For the purpose of this dissertation, whether Isaiah was the original author of the material or merely used the material from 2 Kings is irrelevant. The final form of the book uses the story in its own unique method to show how Yahweh’s divine intervention shows that He alone is God.

190 Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19–39, 508.
Isaiah 38 is a significant chapter in the book of Isaiah, as it establishes Yahweh’s divine intervention in the life of Hezekiah. This is especially important if, as argued earlier, this chapter occurred prior to the events of chapters 36-37 as it would show that Hezekiah’s faith in Yahweh’s ability to deliver the nation was founded in part on Yahweh’s ability to intervene in his own life. The chapter began in verse one describing the sickness of Hezekiah, a sickness that was so severe that it brought him to the point of death. While the text does not describe the type of sickness that Hezekiah suffered, it seems apparent from the text that it made him bedridden (vs.2).

Hezekiah was probably in great fear for his life at this point, as he was on the point of death and so Yahweh sent Isaiah the prophet to see Hezekiah and to give him a message from the LORD. The message was probably not something that Hezekiah was expecting to hear as Isaiah declared to Hezekiah that the LORD had spoken, and Hezekiah would not recover from this sickness but would instead die from the illness. This statement made by Isaiah shows his great courage in serving Yahweh, as his very life could have been put in danger by making this statement. Baker, in describing the nature of Ancient Near Eastern court prophets explains, “Professional prophets received a livelihood from the palace and were loath to jeopardize it.

191 Many critical commentators see chapters 38-39 as a mere appendix to the end of the first half of the book that has little to do with the overall story or message of the book. For example, see Ronald Clements, Jerusalem and the Nations: Studies in the Book of Isaiah (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 2011), 120-127. However, if one sees this story as a testing of Hezekiah’s faith prior to Sennacherib’s invasion, then it has a direct connection to the previous chapters, explaining in part why Hezekiah had such great faith in Yahweh’s ability to intervene on behalf of the nation. Chapter 39 would then be used by Isaiah to show that just because Yahweh had intervened on Judah’s behalf did not mean that He would always intervene for them if they were unfaithful.

192 At first glance it seems that this could be seen as either a lie or a false prophecy from Isaiah, since Hezekiah did not die at that time. However, it becomes clear throughout the Old Testament that when Yahweh make a judgment claim, many times it could be reversed if the judged party turned to Yahweh. The greatest example of this in the Old Testament is found in the book of Jonah, where Yahweh gives no indication that there is any chance for repentance and yet stays His judgment when the Assyrians turn from their wickedness.
They and diviners could circumvent a negative pronouncement by pursuing omens until a satisfactory one appeared. Isaiah does not depend on these magical means; rather, he turns to his God, Who is not loathe confronting even kings with illness and death.”

The problem presented was twofold. First, Hezekiah himself was a Godly king, responsible for making strong spiritual reforms in Judah (2 Kings 18, 2 Chronicles 29). His death would set the kingdom back both politically and spiritually, especially at a time when Judah was coming out of the spiritual chaos of his father Ahaz and was in a dire political situation under the threat from Assyria. Indeed, losing Hezekiah during this difficult time would probably lead to both political and spiritual destitution for the nation. Isaiah himself may have been disheartened in delivering the news as Hezekiah was a Godly king whose reign was completely different than the reign of his father.

Second, Young argues that the situation may have been even more severe as Hezekiah would not have had an heir yet to continue the Davidic dynasty. He wrote, “Furthermore, it is quite possible that Hezekiah at this time had no heir. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign (2 Kings 21:1). If Hezekiah was to live yet fifteen years, and if Hezekiah’s death and the termination of his reign coincided, then Manasseh would not be born for three years.” Hezekiah, as a member of the Davidic dynasty, would have clearly understood the Davidic Covenant that Yahweh had made with his ancestors. If he were to die without an heir, the great dynasty would have ended, and the Messianic line would be cut off. This was the very problem

193 Baker, Isaiah, loc. 4761. Other prophets were not so fortunate in giving negative news to kings of Israel and Judah, such as Jeremiah and Elijah who were both persecuted for their words. Even Isaiah himself was largely ignored by Hezekiah’s father Ahaz in chapter seven and may have later been killed by his son Manasseh.

194 Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19–39, 509. Goswell also points out that the belief that Hezekiah’s tears were not for his own death but the death of the Davidic line was found in both Josephus and the Talmud. Greg Goswell, “The Literary Logic and Meaning of Isaiah 38,” JSOT 39, no. 2 (2014): 167.
that his father had faced in chapter seven, which will be addressed in the next chapter. Thus, at the end of verse one, it appears that Hezekiah will die, Judah will be thrown into both political and spiritual turmoil and the Davidic Messianic line will be cut off, ending the Davidic Covenant.

Nevertheless, the situation begins to change beginning in verse two. Hezekiah, presumably so sick that he cannot even get out of bed, turned his face to the wall and made a final prayer to Yahweh for healing. Young explained the situation well when he stated, “According to natural causes he (i.e., Hezekiah) would have to die, unless with His aid God should intervene beyond the ordinary.” Hezekiah, as the king, would have had access to the best medical care in the nation and yet nothing could be done. Yahweh had spoken and without divine intervention, he would perish. Divine intervention in answer to his prayer was his only hope.

In verse three, Hezekiah poured out his heart and soul to Yahweh, pleading for deliverance in a threefold prayer. First, he reminded Yahweh of how he had walked in faithfulness, which was true as Hezekiah had been a faithful king. Second, he reminded Yahweh that he had worshipped Yahweh with his whole heart. This is similar to his ancestor David, who followed Yahweh and was a man after Yahweh’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Finally, he reminded Yahweh his actions had been good in the sight of Yahweh. After his prayer, he was so sick and weary that all he could do was weep. Hezekiah had placed his life and trust in Yahweh and now had to wait to see if Yahweh would intervene and deliver him.

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In verses four to six, Yahweh delivered an answer to Hezekiah’s prayer through a message given to him through Isaiah. The message was also threefold in nature. First, Yahweh declared that He had heard Hezekiah’s prayer and seen his tears (v. 5).\footnote{Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 155.} While this at first sounds trivial, it shows that Yahweh has the ability to hear and see his followers. In order for a deity to intervene in the world, the deity must be able to understand what is happening in the world. These abilities are exactly what the idols lack in their inability to intervene on behalf of their followers.

Second, Yahweh declared that He would extend Hezekiah’s life for another fifteen years (v. 6). This would not only extend the reign of the Davidic dynasty with Hezekiah, but would presumably allow him to have an heir, which occurred when Manasseh was born around three years later. Third, the extra years would not come without opportunities and challenges. Hezekiah was told by Yahweh that Assyria would attack the city during this time period and that he would be the king that would deal with the invasion (v. 6). Therefore, the fifteen years, while a gift from Yahweh, did not come without a cost. Still, Yahweh completed the promise by declaring to Hezekiah that Yahweh alone would both deliver Hezekiah and the entire city from the Assyrian invasion. Thus, the promise made in chapter 38 was both a promise of personal and national deliverance. This may explain why Hezekiah was both frustrated and yet trusting at the same time in chapters 36-37 because he trusted that Yahweh would deliver the city and yet he did not know how it would occur.\footnote{It is interesting that Yahweh identifies Himself as “the God of David your father”, as Yahweh is making this connection back to David and the Davidic Covenant, the very line and covenant that was in danger of elimination. Later in Isaiah 37:35 (2 Kgs, 19:34) Yahweh will also declare that He will defend the city for “His servant David’s sake”, thereby underscoring the centrality of the Davidic Covenant in relation to the Chosen city, Jerusalem (Ps. 132:13) and the promise of fulfillment in the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam. 7:14-15; Ps. 89: 3-4, 20-37).}
The answer continued in verses seven and eight when Yahweh declared that Hezekiah would receive a sign to confirm Yahweh’s promise.\textsuperscript{198} Signs were given on many occasions throughout the Old Testament to confirm prophecies and promises made by Yahweh. They were also used at times to confirm that a prophet who claimed to be the mouthpiece of Yahweh was a true prophet, as there were many false prophets in the nation.\textsuperscript{199} The sign that Yahweh gave to Hezekiah was a simple yet miraculous sign as the shadow on the sun dial would turn back ten steps (v. 8). It is unclear how Yahweh completed this sign from a scientific perspective, but the sign was given and confirmed that everything Isaiah had declared to Hezekiah were the very words of Yahweh and would occur exactly as Yahweh had predicted.

Verses 9-20 gave a reply from Hezekiah written after he had recovered from his sickness and show both the despair he was in when he was sick and the thankfulness and praise that he declared for Yahweh after his healing and divine intervention. Verses twenty-one and twenty-two are difficult to interpret and place in the story. Indeed, 2 Kings 20 in the parallel passage places these two verses at the end of Yahweh’s first speech prior to his giving of the sign, which seems to fit better chronologically within the text. In the text of Isaiah, the story has already been completed and then the verses are placed at the end of the story. Young argued that the verses were not misplaced in Isaiah but were placed there on purpose by Isaiah to give a conclusion to

\textsuperscript{198} Yahweh giving a sign to Hezekiah should not be viewed as a sign of any lack of faith on Hezekiah’s part, but rather another gift from Yahweh to strengthen Hezekiah’s faith.

\textsuperscript{199} Critical scholars view these signs as legendary, as they were many times associated with miraculous events. For example, Roberts states, “In semi-legendary narratives about famous prophets, these signs sometimes have miraculous qualities…Prophets may occasionally have claimed the power to give such signs.” J.J.M. Roberts, “Prophets and Kings: A New Look at the Royal Persecution of Prophets against Its Near Eastern Background,” in God so Near: Essays On Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 344.
the entire account, instead of ending with the song of Hezekiah. Oswalt argues that these verses were not original to Isaiah but were placed there by a later editor to match better with the 2 Kings narration. Regardless of why the verses have been placed in this location, they do give greater information to how Hezekiah was healed.

Isaiah told Hezekiah, and presumably his doctors or attenders, to take a cake of figs and apply it to Hezekiah’s boil and that would allow Hezekiah to recover from his illness (v. 20). The question then sometimes arises if Hezekiah was healed by a natural herb or if he was healed by divine intervention? However, this appears to be a false distinction. Yahweh, through Isaiah, was the source of the information for how to heal Hezekiah. Therefore, regardless of whether the figs healed Hezekiah or Yahweh used his own powers to heal him, Hezekiah was healed, and Yahweh was the source of the healings. Ultimately, the use of the figs does not take away from the act of divine intervention by Yahweh in the passage.

**Isaiah 36**

1 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. 2 And the king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field. 3 And there came out to him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder.

4 And the Rabshakeh said to them, “Say to Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this trust of yours? 5 Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? In whom do you now trust, that you have rebelled against me? 6 Behold, you are trusting in Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. 7 But if you say to me, “We trust in the LORD our God,” is it not he whose high

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200 Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19-39*, 529. While this is possible, it seems weird that Isaiah would just tag these verses onto the story when they do not fit the narrative.

201 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, 690. While this is a possibility, it seems strange that the editor did not place them in the same location.
places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, “You shall worship before this altar”? Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them. How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you trust in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, “Go up against this land and destroy it.”

Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it. Do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall.” But the Rabshakeh said, “Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and drink their own urine?”

Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah: “Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, “The LORD will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” Do not listen to Hezekiah. For thus says the king of Assyria: Make your peace with me and come out to me. Then each one of you will eat of his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink the water of his own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, “The LORD will deliver us.” Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?’”

But they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, “Do not answer him.” Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

Chapters 36-37 contain the climax story in the first section of the book as the coming invasion of Assyria had finally arrived. Verse one identified that in Hezekiah’s fourteenth year of reign, 701 BC, Sennacherib invaded Judah and conquered the fortified cities of Judah. Indeed, Isaiah was establishing that the might of Assyria was unmatchable and there was simply no way

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202 It is clear in the text that he was in the process of conquering Lachish and was preparing for a siege against Jerusalem.
that Judah militarily could fight them without divine intervention. Most of their own cities had been destroyed, their forces had been beaten and there was nothing left for Judah to do but try to hang on to Jerusalem and wait for a miracle from their God. Richter points out that while Hezekiah ultimately saved the nation, at least temporarily, the Assyrian’s did incredibly significant damage to the infrastructure of the nation and Lachish and its western province was ceded to Philistia because of Hezekiah’s resistance. Judah survived the invasion, but they did so at the last possible instance and were completely decimated.

Verse two established that Sennacherib, still at Lachish either sieging the city or just after his victory, sent an army under the command of someone identified in the text as the Rabshakeh in order to threaten Hezekiah and make him surrender. The identity of the Rabshakeh has been highly questioned throughout history. Jerome tells of two different ancient Hebrew claims of his identity. Some claimed that he was the son of the prophet Isaiah and was a betrayer while others believed that he was a captured Samaritan, which was why he could speak the Hebrew language. That an advisor to the king would be able to speak Hebrew at first seems strange,

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204 The text of the Taylor Prism, the Assyrian account of the invasion, states, “As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I besieged forty-six of his fortified walled cities and surrounding smaller towns, which were without number. Using packed-down ramps and applying battering rams, infantry attacks by mines, breeches, and siege machines, I conquered (them). I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil. He himself, I locked up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthworks, and made it unthinkable for him to exit by the city gate.” W.W. Hallo and K.L. Younger, eds., “Sennacherib’s Siege of Jerusalem,” in Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical World (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2:302-3.

205 That Sennacherib sieged Lachish is supported by Assyrian reliefs of the event. David Graves, Biblical Archaeology: An Introduction with Recent Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Electronic Christian Media, 2018), 1:171.

but it is more plausible when one understands that Assyria had previously conquered the
northern kingdom. Furthermore, he was very familiar with the religious beliefs of the conquered
nations of Assyria, thus he may have been a personal advisor of the king that served as a
spokesperson when conquering new lands. This would explain his knowledge and position in the
military, as well as his ability to speak for the king.

Perhaps a more difficult interpretation is whether the speech of the Rabshakeh should be
viewed as historical. Three views are generally accepted. The first view is that the entire story is
fabricated, and that the Rabshakeh possibly never even existed but was a creation of the author
or, if he did exist, the wording was completely created by the author. For example, Ehud Ben Zvi
writes, “Some collective memory about an Assyrian Rabshakeh, who came to Jerusalem at that
time with a message from the Assyrian king, probably a frightening one, restricted him.”²⁰⁷ Ben
Zvi argues that there was a memory of the Rabshakeh in the Hebrew mythology and therefore
the author, certainly not Isaiah or anyone alive during the events, had to create a story about the
Rabshakeh threatening the people. However, from a literary perspective, the speech itself was
unnecessary to the plot and therefore it would have only been included if an actual event was
being reported.

The second view is that the speech, while not directly the word for word speech given by
the Rabshakeh, is a historical representation of something similar to what he would have said.
For example, Beuken writes, “The speeches of the Rabshakeh which endeavor to further the
surrender of the city have parallels in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources. They contain topics
and expressions which were employed in the diplomatic service of the empires in question… The

argues that although some of the wording is very similar to Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, the speech should only be
seen as a piece of biblical literature and not an actual Assyrian speech.
speech itself is an authentic sample of biblical literature and not a translation or adaption of an originally Assyrian address.”208 For Beuken, the speech is not original to the Assyrian, but has many items that would have occurred in the historical speech. The author took Assyrian sounding rhetoric and placed it into his speech to make it sound like a historical speech given by a historical figure.

Michael Press similarly argues that the speech should not be viewed as historical because it seems to have problems in information presented. For example, in identifying problems in the story, he writes, “The fact that Sennacherib (through the Rabshakeh) appears to take credit for the conquests of his predecessors (e.g. Samaria, conquered by Shalmaneser V and Sargon), and the puzzling suggestion that the gods of foreign cities (in Syria) failed to rescue Samaria from the Assyrians.”209 He argues that the first statement would be a mistake on the part of the Rabshakeh and shows that the author was unaware of Assyrian history. However, there are examples of Assyrian kings taking credit for what their predecessors accomplished. For example, the capture of Samaria is attributed to Shalmaneser by the Babylonian Chronicles, but Sargon II also claimed to have been the ruler when Samaria fell in the Khorsabad Texts.210 Sennacherib may have taken credit for the actions of his predecessors or he may simply been referring to Assyria’s might itself as the one that captured Samaria. Either way, the argument can be explained without the historical error.

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210 Kaiser Jr., A History of Israel, 364.
Press also argues that the Rabshakeh mistakenly attributes the gods of Sepharvaim, pagan gods, with the failure to deliver Samaria and therefore this shows that these words are not historical. However, two possibilities could be present. First, the lack of an antecedent does make the verse difficult, but Oswalt argues that the next verse, “Suggests that the sense is, “Which gods were able to save their own cities and thus save Samaria?” Therefore, he could simply be stating that no gods can stop the Assyrian army. Second, there is a strong possibility that Israel, who the Biblical text clearly shows worshipped many foreign gods, might have worshipped these gods or gods like them. The Rabshakeh may not have known who the people in the northern kingdom worshipped because they worshipped so many gods.

Perhaps more importantly, it is clear that the northern kingdom was so backslidden that their own enemies outside the nation did not recognize that they were supposed to be worshipping the same God as Judah. If the Rabshakeh had known that, he certainly would have argued that Assyria had already defeated the God of Judah by defeating Israel. Nevertheless, this position, while closer than the first, seems to have problems because it still argues that the statements made by the Rabshakeh were not truly historical but were comparable to historical fiction. The third view, and the view taken in this dissertation, argues that the Rabshakeh’s words are correctly presented in the text and therefore are historical.

The Rabshakeh stood outside the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field, the very spot that Isaiah had gone to meet with Ahaz in chapter seven. Instead of Hezekiah coming out to speak with him personally, he sent three of his advisors to meet with the emissary: Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna the secretary and Joah the son of Asaph. The

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212 Isaiah, by making this point, is clearly making a connection between Ahaz’s rejection of Yahweh and Hezekiah’s trust in Yahweh.
first two men had already been identified in chapter twenty-two. It is possible that Hezekiah himself did not go out to meet with the emissary because of politics in that Sennacherib had sent a lesser envoy to negotiate and therefore Hezekiah matched the act or Hezekiah may have been busy preparing the defenses of the city for the coming siege. In fact, 2 Kings 18 specifically asserts that Hezekiah gave a tribute to Sennacherib to stop the invasion but Sennacherib continued the assault, which may have caught Hezekiah unprepared for the assault and busy preparing the defense as quickly as possible.

Verse four began a speech by the Rabshakeh that can be characterized as demanding, rude and even terrorizing. Webb calls the speech a classic study in the Satanic art of sowing doubt.\(^{213}\) The Rabshakeh immediately made a distinction between Hezekiah and Sennacherib, refusing to call Hezekiah a king and identifying Sennacherib as the great king. He had no respect for Hezekiah or the nation of Judah at large and viewed them only as a minor nuisance in the way of the mighty Assyrian war machine. He then began a series of questions in rapid succession, the idea being that there was no logical answer for Hezekiah’s actions.

He first questioned what Hezekiah was putting his trust in to rebel against Assyria (v. 5). It was almost as if he could not believe that someone would be ignorant enough to commit this deed. Verse five moved to more questions, beginning with a question on what power Hezekiah actually has in his nation. The Rabshakeh thought that Hezekiah’s only power was in his speech and that he had no strength to back up his words. Finally, he asked about who Hezekiah was trusting in to rebel, thinking that Hezekiah must have had some unknown reason for rebellion as it did not make sense from a military or political perspective. He was unaware that Yahweh had already guaranteed protection from Assyria during the event of Hezekiah’s sickness.

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Beginning in verse six, the Rabshakeh attempted to attack the two possible sources of Hezekiah’s confidence, both politically and spiritually. First, he believed that Hezekiah was placing his trust in a possible alliance with Egypt, something that Isaiah himself had warned against (28:15). Motyer writes, “Egypt had made its one attempt to redeem its promises (28:14) and its army had been beaten at El Tekeh. The Rabshakeh had himself seen this, but his words were more far-reaching and damaging, exposing the criminal stupidity of Judah’s leaders: surely, he said, they knew that anyone who ever trusted Egypt suffered for it.”

The word picture that the Rabshakeh uses was brilliant, describing someone trying to hold up their body weight with a broken reed, which obviously could not hold the weight. Essentially, he was arguing that if Hezekiah was placing his trust in Egypt, then he had already failed and would pay for it.

In verse seven, the Rabshakeh switched to both psychological and theological warfare, arguing that Hezekiah himself should not trust in Yahweh because Hezekiah had angered Yahweh by removing His places of worship. It is clear that the Rabshakeh had solid intelligence, knowing about many of the religious reforms that Hezekiah had made since becoming the king. However, he had also misunderstood the action of Hezekiah. Yahweh was not angry at Hezekiah for removing the high places and altars, but instead was very pleased with Hezekiah’s actions. While attempting to discourage Hezekiah, he ultimately was reminding Hezekiah of his faithfulness to Yahweh and why Yahweh would ultimately come through and defend the nation from the Assyrian threat.

The Rabshakeh’s sarcasm came through again in verse eight, mockingly wagering that even if Sennacherib gave the people two thousand horses for a cavalry, they would not have enough manpower available to create the cavalry regiment. It is a twofold assault: two thousand

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214 Motyer, Isaiah, 250.
horses to Assyria was like a drop in the bucket with their mighty army but was more than Judah can mobilize. He then again attacked a possible trust in Egypt, declaring that Judah could not fight a single captain and his men when they trusted in Egypt for troops and weapons. It was obvious that the Rabshakeh had great confidence in his own military might and thought that Judah attempting to rebel, even with Egyptian help, was almost comical.

He ended this first verbal assault in verse ten by attempting to make a common ANE theological argument by stating that it was Yahweh Himself that commanded Assyria to destroy Judah. Indeed, perhaps the most famous example of this occurred in the Cyrus Cylinder, when Cyrus the Persian made this very claim that Marduk, the Babylonian deity, had commissioned him to capture Babylon. The Rabshakeh had probably used a similar argument against other enemies of Assyria and assumed it would be the same with Judah. However, what he failed to realize was that Yahweh communicated with Hezekiah through Isaiah the prophet and therefore Hezekiah already had confidence that Yahweh was on Judah’s side. Grogan argues that this theological misunderstanding by the Rabshakeh, “Argues for the speech’s authenticity, making it unnecessary to dub it “a free creation by the author of the narrative” Thus, it is highly unlikely that a later editor would make the Rabshakeh so ignorant of Jewish theology if they were creating his verbiage at a later time.

Eliakim, Shebna and Joah had heard enough to understand that, while Hezekiah may have had faith in Yahweh’s ability to intervene and save, the average Judah soldier on the wall may not have that faith and therefore attempt to lessen the intimidation by asking the Rabshakeh

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215 Interestingly, one hundred years later, the Babylonian’s could have made this very argument against the nation and would have been completely accurate in their theological intimidation as Yahweh had turned and empowered Babylon to take the nation into exile.

216 Grogan, Isaiah, loc. 9255.
to speak in Aramaic, a trade language that they as court officials would understand but the average Judean would not understand. However, the Rabshakeh, never willing to miss a chance for intimidation, answered with another threat, this time asserting that the only future that the soldiers had would be to eat their own feces and drink their own urine (v. 12). Smith argues that the Rabshakeh wanted each man on the wall to have to process what will happen in a siege when the people ran out of food and water, hoping that the intimidation would dishearten the army and cause Hezekiah to make a quick surrender.

Beginning in verse thirteen, the Rabshakeh switched his audience from the three officials to the common soldiers on the wall. He started by attempting to sway the soldier’s loyalty to Hezekiah. Blenkinsopp asserts that this was a common practice in Assyria as they would hold the entire population of the vassal state responsible for keeping the peace and not revolting, hoping to encourage the general population to depose or assassinate their own rulers if they attempted to rebel against Assyria. The Rabshakeh argued that Hezekiah was deceiving his soldiers by making them think that he could save them. He also conveniently left out that Hezekiah was a king; exclusively focusing on the “great king” of Assyria. From a human standpoint, the Rabshakeh was not wrong in his assertions as Hezekiah was powerless to deliver the nation. He had already tried a bribe to appease the Assyrians and his military might was no match to Sennacherib. If he had stopped at that point, he may have been justified in his verbal assault.

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217 Aramaic, eventually the common language of Israel, was at this time the lingua franca of the Fertile Crescent, used normally in diplomatic exchanges but unintelligible to the mass of the people.

218 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 602.

However, the Rabshakeh crossed the line in verse fifteen when he argued that the soldiers should not trust Hezekiah’s words that Yahweh would deliver the nation from the Assyrians. To attack Hezekiah’s ability to save was one thing, but to question Yahweh’s purpose and power to save His people crossed the line. Motyer points out that it is clear that the Rabshakeh was well informed and must have had some knowledge of Isaiah’s pronouncements to Hezekiah that had occurred previously during his sickness. Otherwise, it would make no sense for him to focus so heavily on subverting trust in Yahweh’s deliverance.\textsuperscript{220} If the events of Hezekiah’s sickness had occurred sometime prior, it is possible that word may have gotten around to Assyria that a Judean prophet was declaring victory over Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-19; 38:6), especially once Assyria had already attacked most of Judah’s cities and infrastructure.\textsuperscript{221}

Verses sixteen and seventeen served as both a warning and a temptation to compromise for the soldiers on the wall. First, the Rabshakeh warned them again to not trust Hezekiah, which also inferred not to trust Isaiah and Yahweh as well (v. 16). Second, he told them to abandon the city and the walls and to make peace with Sennacherib by surrendering to the Assyrians. Third, he offered a counter to his previous threat from verse twelve: if they stay on the wall then they will eat their own feces and drink their own urine, but if they surrender then they will each have his own vine, fig tree and water source (v. 17). He was offering them a chance to return to their own homes and leave the war behind, if only they would become vassals of Assyria.

\textsuperscript{220} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 251. While it is possible that the Rabshakeh may have just assumed the Judah’s deity would claim to save them and that is why he makes the claim, it seems very specific, almost as if he has been told about the prophecy that Yahweh made to Hezekiah in chapter 38 prior to the invasion. It is possible that captured Jewish leaders from some of the other cities may have told the Assyrians about the prophecy, which would explain why the Rabshakeh was so adamant in his verbal assaults on the promise of deliverance by Judah’s God.

\textsuperscript{221} If this was their first battle, it would seem very suspicious but Assyrian had already captured so much territory it is very plausible that high ranking Judean officials had been captured already that would have heard about Yahweh’s promises and told the Assyrians about Isaiah’s prophecy.
Fourth, he concluded the offer with a promise of exile, but framed the exile in positive terms (v. 17). Sennacherib would take the people away, back to Assyria, but would place them in a good land that had similar resources to Judah. This was standard protocol for the conquered people of Assyria and similar circumstances had already occurred when Israel had been exiled two decades previously. Ackroyd points out that what Sennacherib was doing was essentially taking the place of Yahweh. He writes, “If God cannot fulfill his promises, giving the people peace and a land flowing with milk and honey, grain and vineyards, at least the Hebrews can be assured that Sennacherib will do this.” However, Smith points out that the exile would have been brutal and many would have died well before making it to another land, thus the Rabshakeh was making a terrible situation try to sound more appealing.

The Rabshakeh concluded his pronouncement in verses 18-20 with another assault on the strength and power of Yahweh, asserting that Yahweh was just another deity that could not stand up to the power and supremacy of the Assyrian military might, and also inferring that the Assyrian gods were superior to both Yahweh and the gods of the other nations. First, he again declared that Hezekiah was attempting to mislead the nation into believing that Yahweh both could and would deliver them (v. 18a). Second, he used recent military history to attempt to prove that Yahweh could not defend the city (vs. 18b). None of the other gods of the other

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222 The people of Judah had already seen what happened to Israel and the other nations around them when Assyria captured them, so it would have been useless for the Rabshakeh to attempt to lie and deny that they would be exiled.


224 Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 605. Indeed, the Rabshakeh was truly a master negotiator. He knew exactly when to threaten with the stick and when to offer the carrot. That Judah stayed faithful was a testament to Hezekiah’s leadership and trust in Yahweh.
nations that Assyrian had conquered had been able to intervene on behalf of their nation, so why should Yahweh be any different?

Next, he listed some of the kingdoms that Assyria had conquered as examples of God’s failure to intervene (v. 19). Hamath was a major Syrian city located on the Orontes River about one hundred fifty miles north of Damascus and two hundred seventy-five miles northeast of Jerusalem. It had been conquered by Sargon II.²²⁵ Arpad was to the north of Hamath. Sepharvaim’s location is currently unknown but was probably in a similar region to the first two cities. He concluded with the city of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, which had fallen to Assyria two decades earlier. It seems evident that the Rabshakeh was unaware that the god of Samaria was supposed to be Yahweh as well or he would surely have used that as proof in his argument that Yahweh could not stop Assyria. Indeed, this shows just how far the Northern Kingdom had fallen away from Yahweh in that their enemies could not even identify Him as their God.

He concluded his argument with a final summary of the failure of any god to stand up to Assyria (v. 20). Young summarizes his argument by stating, “Just as these gods were not present at the time when help was needed, so Yahweh also will not be present to help when Jerusalem needs that help.”²²⁶ This was ultimately the crux of his argument. Yahweh was no different than the other gods of the nations and therefore Yahweh could do nothing more than the other nations deities. If the gods of the nations could not intervene on behalf of their people, then Yahweh would not be able to intervene on behalf of Judah. The challenge then becomes, if Yahweh was


²²⁶ Young, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19–39, 470.
truly the one true God and had promised that He would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians, then a failure to intervene and save the city would prove the Rabshakeh correct and shows that Yahweh was no different than the pagan gods who could not intervene on behalf of their own people.

The chapter concludes without a response on behalf of Judah as Hezekiah had specifically instructed the three Judeans to remain silent before the Assyrian representative (v. 21). However, while the three men did not answer the Rabshakeh, their physical actions revealed their concern (v. 22). They went back to Hezekiah to tell him the message, but first tore their clothes in anguish. In Hebrew culture, tearing one’s clothes and putting on sackcloth was frequently associated with mourning and lamenting because someone has just died or was about to die. It also occurred when blaspheme occurred, which was exactly what the Rabshakeh had stated when he demeaned Yahweh by comparing Him with the pagan gods. Hezekiah had a similar response at the beginning of chapter 37. The Judeans knew that they faced certain doom if Yahweh did not intervene on their behalf.

Isaiah 37

1 As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. 3 They said to him, “Thus says Hezekiah, ‘This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.’”

5 When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, “Say to your master, ‘Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard,

227 Smith, Isaiah 1–39, 608.
with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me. 7 Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.’”

8 The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. 9 Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, “He has set out to fight against you.” And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 “Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: ‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. 11 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?’”

14 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. 15 And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: 16 “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. 17 Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. 18 Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, 19 and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. 20 So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD.”

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: ‘“She despises you, she scorns you—the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you—the daughter of Jerusalem. 23 “Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel! 24 By your servants you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon, to cut down its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses, to come to its remotest height, its most fruitful forest. 25 I dug wells and drank waters, to dry up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt. 26 “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins, 27 while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded, and have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops, blighted before it is grown. 28 “I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me. 29 Because you have raged against me and your complacency has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.’
“And this shall be the sign for you: this year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that. Then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. “Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”

And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh. And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword. And after they escaped into the land of Ararat, Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Chapter 37 began with Hezekiah’s response to the threats issued by the Rabshakeh. As soon as Hezekiah heard the news from his advisors, he too tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth (v. 1). However, Hezekiah also knew where to go to for help in his time of desperation; he immediately went to the temple and sent the advisors to go find Isaiah the prophet (v. 2). When they found Isaiah, they delivered Hezekiah’s message of great distress conveyed through a birth metaphor. Oswalt explains the birth metaphor in vivid details writing

The metaphor of labor is a telling one. All too familiar to them was the breech birth, or some other complication, which caused the mother to be unable to deliver the child although she labored herself to exhaustion and death. Furthermore, once labor began there was no turning back; either the child was delivered or both mother and child died. Hezekiah sees himself in that predicament. Jerusalem must be delivered, but neither he nor his government nor his people has the strength to do it

228 This was a very common practice in the ANE. Consulting a prophetic intermediator at a time of crisis is attested throughout the Near East as early as the reign of Zimrilim of the Kingdom of Mari in the eighteenth century BC, if not earlier. Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1-39, 474.

Hezekiah understood the seriousness of the situation and knew that without divine intervention, the kingdom was doomed.

Nevertheless, in verse four Hezekiah’s message changed to one of hope for divine intervention. First, he asserted that Yahweh had heard the mocking words of the Rabshakeh. He understood that if Yahweh was truly God, then He could not sit idly by while the king and his representative blaspheme. He trusted that Yahweh would intervene, both on behalf of the promises that He had made to Hezekiah and the nation as a whole as well as a response to the blaspheme against Him. The intervention is explained in 2 Kings 19:34 as on behalf of Jerusalem and based on the Davidic Covenant. Second, Hezekiah asked Isaiah to pray for the remnant that was left in the nation. Smith points out that usually this term is a negative term that refers to exiles in a foreign land after the destruction of the nation, but Hezekiah used the term for the people still in Jerusalem. Hezekiah knew that without divine intervention, the people of the city were in for a difficult time, as a siege would lead to destruction, starvation, lack of water and ultimately exile for those that survived.

When the officials found Isaiah and told him Hezekiah’s message, Isaiah had a strong and confident twofold response from Yahweh. First, Isaiah told Hezekiah not to be afraid. Yahweh understood the predicament that Hezekiah was in and the intimidating verbiage that the Rabshakeh had used in describing Judah’s future (v. 6a). It would only be natural, even if Hezekiah believed that Yahweh could deliver, for him to be greatly distressed and afraid. His kingdom had been decimated. His strongest fortress, Lachish, was destroyed. The Rabshakeh had

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a large army with him with more reinforcements on the way with Sennacherib. However, Yahweh reassured Hezekiah that he had no reason to fear, for Yahweh would be with him.

Second, Yahweh made a prediction about His deliverance of the city and about the fate of Sennacherib (v. 7). Yahweh would make Sennacherib hear a rumor about a coming enemy and cause him to return to his own land. Once he returned to his own land, he would be killed. The rest of the chapter flushes out the details of how this prediction came to pass, but ultimately this prediction gave Hezekiah the needed confidence to stand firm against Sennacherib. Interestingly, Yahweh did not mention destroying Sennacherib’s army in this prediction. It is almost as if the battle would never be fought. It is possible that Yahweh was giving Sennacherib a chance to turn away his army and avoid their destruction. However, when Sennacherib ignored the warning and sent messengers again, Yahweh then announces his defeat in battle.

Verse eight moved back to the story of the Rabshakeh as he returned to Sennacherib, who had moved from Lachish to Libnah, which was north of Lachish and on the way to Jerusalem. As only the Rabshakeh was mentioned and not the military leaders or the military forces, it was likely that he left them outside Jerusalem to begin preparation for the siege and to continue to threaten the city while he went for more instructions. It seems Sennacherib had defeated Lachish and was making his way up to meet with the army outside of Jerusalem. One has to assume that either Hezekiah sent a message to the Rabshakeh stating that he would not surrender, or the Rabshakeh heard nothing and assumed that meant that they would not surrender. Some commentators speculate that verses 9-20 was simply a retelling of chapter 36, arguing that it
would not make sense for Sennacherib to send the same person back to Jerusalem if he failed to secure the surrender previously. 231

Sennacherib then heard a rumor that Tirhakah, identified as the king of Cush, had set out to fight against him (v. 9). The mention of Tirhakah presents two challenges in the text. First, there is some debate on whether this rumor is the rumor that Yahweh had spoken about in the previous verses. Young argued that the news of Tirhakah was not the rumor that Yahweh had promised because it did not immediately lead to an Assyrian withdraw, but instead to sending another threat. Young believed that it was more likely that the rumor came to the king from another part of his empire, possibly from Babylon or Nineveh. 232 Therefore, according to Young’s argument, because the Assyrians did not immediately withdraw, it could not be the rumor that Yahweh addressed in verse seven.

The problem with this view is that there is no other mention of a rumor in the rest of the story. It would be strange that Yahweh would speak of a rumor, have Sennacherib hear about the rumor a few verses later, not have it be the rumor and then never give another option. Instead, one can argue that the rumor was what leads Sennacherib to rush his timetable and send the threat again to Jerusalem, which ultimately leads to Yahweh’s own divine intervention. Thus, while the rumor itself did not immediately lead to Sennacherib’s withdraw, it was the catalyst

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231 Claus Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament*, trans. Keith Crim (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 71. Chapter 37 never states that the Rabshakeh was sent back to Hezekiah but messengers. It is possible he was sent back but it is not directly in the text.

232 Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19-39*, 477. It seems that Young thinks that there can be no time or events between the hearing of the rumor and the retreat of Assyria. However, the text does not use any timing words. If Yahweh had said when Sennacherib would hear the rumor he would immediately retreat, then Young’s argument would be much stronger.
that started a series of events that ultimately lead to the destruction of his army and his retreat back to Assyria.

The second problem is the dating of Tirhakah and if he was actually a king during this time period. Tirhakah did not become king of Egypt before 689 BC, which leads many critics to argue that the author either made a mistake or just fabricated the entire story. However, Oswalt argues that it is possible that Tirkakah was simply identified by a position which he held later in his life and would have been familiar to the reader. T.R. Hobbs also argues that Tirhakah’s birthdate, while unknown, was probably earlier than originally thought and therefore it would be possible for him to have been in his late teens during this time period. Therefore, what was a major historical error has reasonable explanations and should not be viewed as evidence that the events themselves never occurred.

Others have questioned the coming of Tirkakah in 701 BC because there is no historical mention of Assyria fighting his forces during this time. However, the text never stated that Assyria ever fought against his forces. Instead, Sennacherib advanced his plan and was defeated by Yahweh instead of Tirkakah. It is unnecessary to have Tirkakah advance historically because the text calls it a rumor. Thus, even wild speculation on behalf of Sennacherib’s scouts, who

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235 John Bright, in an attempt to make the details work, argues that Sennacherib underwent two separate campaigns against Hezekiah. The first, occurring in 701 BC, was the account when Hezekiah paid the tribute to Sennacherib from 2 Kings. The second, occurring later around 688 BC, was the story of deliverance found in Isaiah 36-37. However, there is no mention in the Assyrian records of a second invasion and Bright makes the argument to try to avoid a problem with dating Tirkakah in 701 BC John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 307-9.
could have mistakenly thought Tirkakah was coming and relayed the information to Sennacherib would be sufficient to make the event historical.

The rumor of Tirkakah’s move against him apparently caused Sennacherib to quicken his timetable for Hezekiah’s surrender, which was understandable as no commander would want to fight a war on two fronts. He sent messengers again to Hezekiah, this time with a letter with similar threats of destruction as previously stated by the Rabshakeh (v. 9). In verses ten through thirteen, instead of trying to convince the soldiers on the walls, Sennacherib attempted to change Hezekiah’s trust in Yahweh’s ability to deliver, for he knew that if a quick victory was to be achieved, then he had to make Hezekiah change his mind and destroy his confidence and trust in his God.\(^{236}\) He began his verbal assault in a slightly different manner than the Rabshakeh’s assaults that had stated that Hezekiah was deceiving the soldiers, He stated that it was Yahweh who had in fact deceived Hezekiah when He promised Hezekiah deliverance from Assyria (v. 10). By making this statement, Sennacherib doomed himself by blaspheming Yahweh and calling Yahweh a liar could not intervene on behalf of His people.\(^{237}\)

In verse eleven, Sennacherib described the foreign policy accomplishments of Assyria, stating that the Assyrian military had not only conquered, but decimated the lands of their enemies. The Assyrians were known throughout the ANE for their brutality when they conquered their enemies. They were incredibly feared by their enemies, which was exactly why these types of intimidation worked so well and why Sennacherib tried to use the same tactics

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\(^{236}\) As the king of Assyria and one who had consistently conquered all who stood in his path, he was probably used to seeing kings believe that their gods would deliver them, only to see them crushed under the might of his armies. He had no reason to believe Judah would be any different, but he failed to know that there was a significant difference between the God of Judah and the other gods.

\(^{237}\) Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 615.
against Hezekiah. Hezekiah would have understood, especially after seeing the destruction of the
northern kingdom, that if Yahweh did not deliver them, they would be destroyed and never
recover.

Verses 12-13 give what Watts describes as a list of major Assyrian victories over their
enemies.\(^{238}\) By listing all of these various nations that had been conquered by the Assyrians,
Sennacherib hoped to make it overwhelmingly clear to Hezekiah that Assyria’s record of
dominance was unmatched. Judah was a small nation in comparison to many of the nations
conquered by Assyria and had lost most of their territory and strength. Why should Hezekiah
trust that Yahweh could defeat the Assyrians when all of these other gods failed to defeat
Assyria? That was the question that Sennacherib ended the message with and the question that
Hezekiah would have to wrestle with in making the decision to trust Yahweh for deliverance.

When Hezekiah received the letter from Sennacherib, it clearly overwhelmed him, but
also caused him to return to the temple to seek Yahweh’s help (v. 14). He then spread out the
letter in the temple, symbolically showing that he was placing all of his trust in Yahweh (v. 15).
Young writes, “The action is symbolical, in which the king places before God all his need; it is
furthermore an action of childlike trust, for the king is confident that God will come to his
aid.”\(^{239}\) Blenkinsopp asserts that this type of action was very common in the ANE. For example,
he writes, “We have seen that the motif of the temple visit, piety towards the deity, and defeat of
the tyrant also occurs in Herodotus’ story about Pharaoh Sethos who, when attacked by

36. This is similar to what the Rabshakeh already had tried, but Sennacherib added even more nations to the list.

\(^{239}\) Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 482.
Sennacherib, prayed to the god Ptah and received assurance of success.\textsuperscript{240} Other kings had assuredly attempted similar actions when the Assyrians invaded their kingdom, but Yahweh would now have the opportunity to show that He could deliver when the other gods could not.

Verse sixteen has largely been panned by critics as not authentic to First Isaiah because of his emphasis on both monotheism and creation. However, if one takes Isaiah as the author, as the dissertation has (see Appendix A), and the words as authentic to Hezekiah, it shows that Hezekiah had a strong foundation both in Yahweh’s creative power as well as in Yahweh’s divine incomparibility. Wildberger identified the idea of Yahweh’s enthronement above the cherubim as a sign of Yahweh’s kingship.\textsuperscript{241} Cherubim-like images were scattered all throughout the Ancient Near East around both temples and palaces, in part to guard these locations as protective spirits but also to represent the strength and power of the nations’ king and deities. Hezekiah argued that Sennacherib was not the great king, but instead Yahweh was the Great King of kings.\textsuperscript{242}

In describing Hezekiah’s prayer in verse sixteen, John Watts identified three distinct aspects of Hezekiah’s theology that combined to paint his picture of Yahweh. He wrote

\begin{quote}
You are God, you alone is not a theme found for the first time in chaps. 40-48. It had appeared in the first commandment and in 2 Kings 19:15, 19. It is basic to Israel’s distinct religious consciousness. To all the kingdoms of the land asserts Yahweh’s total authority over all the governments involved, including Assyria. You have made the heavens and the earth: the monotheism of Israel’s worship encompassed its doctrine of creation, which in turn was the basis of its doctrine of Yahweh’s sovereignty over history.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{240} Blenkinsopp, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 476.


\textsuperscript{242} This can be seen as a direct response to the Rabshakeh’s insistence on calling Sennacherib the great king.
These three confessions lay the foundation for Hezekiah’s appeal for divine intervention.²⁴³ Essentially, Hezekiah was bringing out every theological truth that he could muster in calling for Yahweh’s deliverance. If Yahweh was truly the Creator and the king of the universe, then He could intervene on behalf of His people and defeat the forces of Assyria.

In verse seventeen, Hezekiah made a distinction between Yahweh and the idols, setting a historical precedent that Isaiah will build upon later in the book (Isaiah 46). In calling for Yahweh to both hear the words of Sennacherib and see the situation that was occurring, Hezekiah believed that Yahweh was active and had the ability to see and hear the events of the world. Young argues that Hezekiah was not questioning Yahweh abilities, but rather pleading with Yahweh to intervene on behalf of the nation.²⁴⁴ He could have been thinking that the reason the other nations fell to Assyria was because their idols could not hear, see and intervene, but Yahweh could and therefore that was the major distinction between the true God of Judah and the false pagan gods of the nations.

Verses eighteen and nineteen combine to show two different arguments connected, but also show that either Hezekiah had listened to Isaiah’s messages or that Isaiah would later use some of Hezekiah’s own theology. First, Hezekiah agreed with the statements of Sennacherib because they were not idle boasts (v. 18). The Assyrians had destroyed all the nations that they had claimed to have destroyed. Second, Hezekiah then made a theological argument to explain

²⁴³ Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 36. This is why the dissertation first described how Isaiah saw Yahweh as Creator, as it was foundational to all other beliefs. For more information on Isaiah’s monotheistic beliefs, see Appendix B.

²⁴⁴ Young, Isaiah 19-39, 484.
their destruction; the reason was the weakness of their idols (v. 19). The idols themselves were not gods, but were made by men and were created from wood or stone.

Therefore, the idols did not hold the power to intervene on behalf of their nations and instead were simply tossed into the fire by the Assyrians when they conquered the very nations that the idols were supposed to protect. It is not a coincidence that Isaiah made similar arguments later in the second half of the book, specifically chapters 41 and 44. Either Isaiah had already made those statements, or similar statements like them, and Hezekiah had listened to the words of the prophet, or Hezekiah himself had thought through these concepts and then Isaiah used that theology later in writing the second half of the book. Regardless of where the theology originated, Hezekiah was arguing that the idols failed because they were powerless, but he trusted that Yahweh could deliver and intervene for the people because Yahweh was so much greater than the idols.

Verse twenty becomes the climax of Hezekiah’s prayer and also adds another apologetic emphasis to the passage. Hezekiah concluded his prayer with a cry for deliverance, but also argued that the deliverance would serve as evidence to all of the nations that Yahweh alone was the one true God. In effect, Hezekiah was using the argument presented first by the Rabshakeh and then by Sennacherib in reverse. They argued that Yahweh could not deliver the nation because he was just like the other gods that they had already defeated. Hezekiah turned that argument around by declaring not only to Judah, but also to the nations of the earth that Yahweh was greater than the other gods because of His deliverance from the Assyrians.\footnote{Obviously, a bit of hyperbole is present in the text, as not all the nations of the earth would hear about Judah’s deliverance. However, because of the immense power and prestige of Assyria, many nations in the ANE could have heard about their defeat at the hand of Judah’s God. One could argue that the nations did not turn to}
Similarly to the story of Hezekiah’s healing in chapter 38, he did not have to wait very long for a response from Yahweh as Isaiah received a message from Yahweh and sent a message to Hezekiah with Yahweh’s response (v. 21). While Hezekiah was the audience of the message, the content of the message was the doom of Sennacherib. First, Yahweh pictured Jerusalem as a virgin daughter who brushed off the advances of an unwanted suitor (v. 22). Motyer says, “Virgin is used here in the sense of being untouched by the marauder. The Assyrian came intent on rape but his victim remains unharmed.” In the same way, Sennacherib wanted Jerusalem, but the city would not accept him.

Second, in verses 23-25 Yahweh made it clear exactly who Sennacherib had insulted with his blaspheme. Sennacherib was not blaspheming a pagan god, but instead was blaspheming the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah’s unique term for Yahweh (v. 23). Sennacherib believed that he and his gods empowering him were greater than Yahweh and that they could take the resources of the earth without intervention. The reference to Egypt (“all the streams of Egypt” v. 25) may refer Sennacherib believing that he could defeat the coming Egyptian force under Tirkakah or may simply be used as an example that nothing can stop Sennacherib from reaching his ultimate goal,

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Yahweh and therefore Hezekiah’s argument failed, but the nations failure to turn to Yahweh could be seen more as a result of their own spiritual blindness than a failure on any part of Yahweh.

246 While a timeframe is not given in the text, it does not appear that Hezekiah had to wait a long time for his response.

247 Motyer, Isaiah, 256.

248 Baker points out that the trees of Lebanon were significant writing, “The power of conquering a distant country with its mighty trees is a motif used by Assyrian kings to glorify themselves. Shalmaneser III wrote that he went up “to the Amanus Mountains (in western Syria). I cut down cedar wood and juniper wood.” Since the cedar symbolized Lebanese power and pride, Assyrian destruction of it brought Lebanon shame (see 1:7; 10:18–19). This type of claim is noteworthy for an Assyrian king, since trees were sparse in Mesopotamia.” Baker, Isaiah, loc. 4704.
which was to reach and conquer Egypt. What is clear in the text is that Yahweh had noticed the terrible pride of the Assyrian monarch.

In verses 26-29, Yahweh declared that it was He, not Sennacherib, that had allowed the Assyrians to defeat their enemies. Yahweh determined in the past that He would allow the Assyrians to crush their enemies. Goldingay says, “Sennacherib has forgotten who is God. His achievements have made him talk and think as if he is. He has behaved as if he could stand tall and look God in the eye…He has taken no account of the fact that his achievements were part of a broader picture whereby God’s purpose was being achieved.” This was an amazing claim by Yahweh. Though viewed by outsiders as simply a local Judean deity, He was claiming that He had authority over the most powerful nation on the planet.

Yahweh concluded his speech against Sennacherib by declaring his upcoming defeat. Yahweh first professed that He knew exactly what Sennacherib did at every moment, including the moments when Sennacherib raged against Him (v. 28). This can be seen as a response to Hezekiah’s prayer for Yahweh to see and hear what Sennacherib had said and did. Not only did Yahweh hear Sennacherib’s blasphemous insults but heard everything that Sennacherib did and said. Yahweh had not idly by while the nation had been attacked, but had seen everything and was ready to act on behalf of His people.

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249 Goldingay, Isaiah, 4201. It is never a good end for the human that places himself in the place of God throughout the Bible. Pharaoh believed he was greater than Yahweh and had his kingdom decimated. King Herod Agrippa in the New Testament was called a deity in a prideful manner and was killed. Putting oneself in the place of God usually led to a quick death.

250 More on Yahweh’s sovereignty over the nations through his control of history will be addressed in chapter four.
Verse 29 concluded Yahweh’s response to Sennacherib and declared His ability to overcome the Assyrian forces. Yahweh would turn Assyria away from the city, just as if they were a horse with a bit in its mouth. Baker points out that this type of language and action was similar to Assyria’s own policies. He writes, “God will treat Assyria like recalcitrant animals, turning the tables on those who treated others similarly. Tukulti-Ninurta I stated metaphorically: ‘with a bridle I controlled the land.’ This treatment is also depicted on reliefs, showing that it was literally applied to captive people in addition to animals.”251 Yahweh basically argued that He would drive Assyria away just as easily and humiliating as the Assyrians had defeated their own enemies.252 In doing so, He was asserting His dominance over not only Sennacherib, but also the entire Assyrian empire, including their own gods.

Verses 30-32 shifted the message of Yahweh from Sennacherib back to Judah. First, Yahweh would give the nation a sign in that the people will not be carried away into exile, but instead will reap their harvests and plant new harvests in the coming years (v. 30). This would be an impossible task if the Assyrians were not driven away. Abernathy points out that Yahweh was using similar terminology to the Rabshakeh’s pledge in the previous chapter about allowing the nation to reap their crops and have success in their land.253 A remnant was promised to come out of the nation, which would be the surviving citizens of Jerusalem, as well as the continuing of

251 Baker, Isaiah, loc. 4712.


253 Abernathy, The Book of Isaiah, 49. The difference is that Yahweh actually means his statement and was not trying to simply trick the nation.
the Davidic dynasty through Hezekiah (v. 32).\textsuperscript{254} The nation would continue on for another century after what looked to be certain doom with the Assyrian invasion.

Verses 33-35 conclude Yahweh’s message with a final message about Yahweh’s judgment on Assyria and His divine intervention for the nation. First, Yahweh proclaimed that Sennacherib not only would fail to take the city, but that he also would never even attempt to assault or siege the city (v. 33). This would have sounded impossible to the original audience if it had not come from Yahweh. Sennacherib had already destroyed most of the nation and had an army waiting outside of the city in preparation for an assault and siege. At the very least, one would have expected for Yahweh to declare the siege would fail, not that it would never occur.\textsuperscript{255} Smith identifies a sense of timing in the pronouncement, arguing that if Yahweh is to intervene, it must happen quickly for the assault to not occur.\textsuperscript{256}

Second, Yahweh explained the twofold reason for His deliverance of the city (v. 35). Yahweh defended the city for His own sake, which at first sounds selfish but was understood when one realized that Yahweh’s integrity had been called into question by Sennacherib.\textsuperscript{257} Sennacherib had endlessly told lies about Yahweh’s character and power.\textsuperscript{258} For such blatant blaspheme, Yahweh had to take action and defend His city, especially after He had already promised its deliverance. A failure to defend the city would ultimately be a mark on Yahweh’s

\textsuperscript{254} The idea of the remnant occurs throughout the book of Isaiah. Motyer comments, “Remnant: the word always looks beyond immediate experiences to the fact that the Lord will always preserve a people for himself.” Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 258.

\textsuperscript{255} That the assault would never occur makes the miracle of Yahweh’s deliverance even greater. He alone defeats the army without intervention by the Judean army.

\textsuperscript{256} Smith, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 629.

\textsuperscript{257} This is similar to Ezekiel 36:22 in which God’s Name had been profaned by the nations.

\textsuperscript{258} House, \textit{Isaiah 28-66}, 220.
trustworthiness and power. A failure to defend the city would prove that Sennacherib was correct and that Hezekiah should never have trusted that Yahweh would keep his word and intervene for the city.

Also, Yahweh mentioned that He would deliver the city for the sake of David. The line of David, the Messianic line, was in danger, as Hezekiah could have been killed in an assault and the city would be destroyed. Smith argues that the Davidic Covenant is not in question because it never promises the deliverance of the city and, if this was true, then Yahweh would not have allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed later by the Babylonians. However, Oswalt makes a convincing argument that the time was not right to allow for the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes, “Had Jerusalem succumbed at that point, might not the Judeans, like the Northern Israelites, simply have been absorbed into their new homes and disappeared as the covenant people? As it was, through this deliverance and through the subsequent prophetic ministries, there was sufficient commitment on the part of some for the faith to survive the Exile and: to provide the basis for the messianic revelation in Christ.” By giving Judah another century, it enabled them to have a strong enough foundation to return from the Exile while Israel did not.

The chapter concluded with the fulfillment of Yahweh’s proclamation (vs. 36-38). Yahweh sent the angel of the Lord to slay the army of Assyria and Sennacherib, after retreating,

\[259\] Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 630.


\[261\] Also, the Persians allowed the Jews to return to the land as part of their foreign policy. The Assyrians and Babylonians would not have allowed this.

\[262\] The Taylor Prism verifies the events and does not deny the Biblical account. Sennacherib stated that he had Hezekiah trapped in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage, but never mentions that he actually conquered the city, just as one would expect to find if the events of the Bible were historical. That Sennacherib never mentioned his defeat is not problematic as many in the ANE, especially the Assyrians, did not admit to their losses. Randall Price and H. Wayne House, Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 136-138.
was assassinated by his two sons back in Nineveh.\(^{263}\) While the chapter describes the ultimately victory and validation of Yahweh, two significant interpretive issues arise as well. First, the text states that the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.\(^{264}\) Critics of the text argue that the number is not possible. For example, Wildberger states, “The number 185,000 is fantastically high. Even if circumstances had been excellent it would have been impossible to provide for such a large army.”\(^{265}\) Clements argues that the story is impossible and that Hezekiah merely surrendered to Sennacherib but later editors during the time of Josiah wanted to make both Hezekiah and Yahweh look better and therefore created a fictitious account.\(^{266}\)

However, one can make an argument that the numbers should be taken historically. The Taylor Prism itself states, “I took out 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil.”\(^{267}\) There is nothing in the text that hints at the story being mythical or legendary and there are other similarly large numbers in the Old Testament and in other Ancient Near Eastern documents. Thus, the details at the very least are plausible. Interestingly, Seitz points out that the defeat of the Assyrian army was almost an afterthought in the book, as no details on how they were defeated were given and it only was recorded in one verse. Instead, he argues that the author was

\(^{263}\) The Babylonian Chronicle identifies his assassination by his sons in a coup and his other son Esarhaddon ruled after him. (Isaiah 37: 38; 2 Kings 19:37; 2 Chronicles 32: 21)

\(^{264}\) Josephus wrote that a plague was used to destroy the army, but this is speculation. However it occurred, the Assyrian army was defeated. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: 1-39*, 667.

\(^{265}\) Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 433. He does not see a significant textual problem because he sees it as a miracle story that cannot be taken as historical anyway.


much more focused on the death of Sennacherib, since he was viewed as the ultimate threat as the king and also as the major source of blasphemy against Yahweh.\textsuperscript{268}

Second, some see a problem with the text stating that Sennacherib went back to Nineveh and then died when his sons assassinated him because historically this event occurred twenty years later. However, the passage never gave a timeline for when these events would occur. Verse 7 had declared that Sennacherib would return to Nineveh and die by the sword, but never said it would occur quickly. Historically, Sennacherib’s death was confirmed by Esarhaddon and the Babylonian Chronicle.\textsuperscript{269} Therefore, Yahweh’s pronouncement did occur just as He had declared, although twenty years later. At the end of the chapter, Yahweh had achieved victory, He had affirmed His deity by delivering the city just as He had promised, He established that He was greater than the idols of the other nations, including Assyria, because He had delivered His people when other deities could not. Finally Sennacherib paid the ultimate price for blaspheming Yahweh by his defeat and death, proving that Yahweh was greater than the king of Assyria.

**Apologetic Significance**

The apologetic significance of these three chapters are twofold: 1. Yahweh may intervene on behalf of his people and 2. Yahweh is different than the pagan gods that surrounded Him. The first point is that Yahweh not only could intervene, but choose to intervene on both occasions. When Hezekiah was sick to the point of death, Yahweh intervened and sent him a message that he would die. This message of certain death motivated Hezekiah to pray to Yahweh. Hezekiah’s prayer then led to Yahweh sending another message of hope and deliverance to Hezekiah and of

\textsuperscript{268} Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 252-253. He views the story as much more important theologically, the defeat of Yahweh’s enemies and His power over the pagan gods, than historically.

Yahweh’s intervention to heal Hezekiah from his sickness. Because Hezekiah was the king, it is possible that the entire nation heard of the miracle that Yahweh had performed in healing him. Thus, for both Hezekiah and the nation, the healing served as evidence that Yahweh was a powerful God who could intervene on behalf of the nation.

Chapters 36-37 present the ultimate test case for Yahweh’s ability to intervene for several important reasons. First, the challenge presented was impossible from a human standpoint to overcome as Judah could not defend itself from the Assyrian might. Only Yahweh’s intervention could save the nation. Second, because Yahweh had already promised deliverance from Assyria when he delivered Hezekiah from his sickness, Yahweh Himself made this a test case on His power to intervene. If He could not deliver the nation, then He was untrustworthy and unworthy to be called the true God.

Third and perhaps most importantly, the Rabshakeh, speaking on behalf of Sennacherib, made the ability to deliver the nation a test case for deity. Young stated it well when he wrote, “The Assyrian king is perfectly willing to regard this as a contest of the gods, a warfare between Yahweh and his own deities.”270 The Rabshakeh continually blasphemed Yahweh and declared that He could not save Judah and that it was deception on behalf of Hezekiah to tell the people that He could save the nation. Therefore, Yahweh Himself intervened on behalf of the nation by sending His own angel to slay the army of Sennacherib. He did it without Judah’s military presence showing that Yahweh did not need his servants to carry Him to victory. Instead He could take matters into His own hands and defeat the Assyrians by Himself. Indeed, Judah could not even attempt to take credit for the victory because the battle was never actually fought. The

Rabshakeh made deliverance a necessity element of deity and Yahweh proved that He was the true God, greater than Assyria and their idols, because He was able to deliver the nation.

Another point from chapters 36-37 may be seen indirectly in the speech of the Rabshakeh and Yahweh’s response to it. The Rabshakeh made the argument that Yahweh could not deliver the city because Yahweh was just like all of the other gods of the other nations that had failed to intervene on behalf of their people. Abernathy views this as a mistake in part because the Assyrians did not recognize a distinction between the pagan gods and Yahweh, “The argument is that no king is worthy of trust other than the king of Assyria, for no king can stand against him. What is more, the gods of the nations could not protect their people, so Hezekiah’s God will be unable to deliver Zion as well.”\(^{271}\) The Assyrians viewed all gods as similar and thought that because they had defeated the rest of the pagan gods, they could easily defeat Yahweh in a similar manner.

However, the Assyrians did not understand who they were blaspheming. By Yahweh delivering the city from the Assyrians, just as He had promised years before, He proved that He was different than the gods of the other nations. The gods of the other nations failed to intervene for their people but Yahweh intervened, destroying the Assyrian army and delivering the city. In addition, Yahweh also proved that He was greater than the Assyrian gods, as they were powerless to intervene and protect their own army or to empower Sennacherib to achieve victory over Judah. In conclusion, Yahweh’s ability to intervene on behalf of His people, both through healing and through intervention in warfare, presented a strong apologetic argument that Yahweh was greater than any of the gods of the Ancient Near East, including the gods of the superpower

\(^{271}\) Abernathy, \textit{God’s Kingdom}, 47.
Assyria, and should be viewed as the one true God. Therefore, the major apologetic emphasis of this entire section of Isaiah is showing the divine incomparability of Yahweh.

Idolatry’s Failure in Divine Intervention: Isaiah 46:1-7

1 Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. 2 They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. 3 “Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; 4 even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. 5 “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? 6 Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! 7 They lift it to the ir shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

Isaiah 36-38 clearly established that Yahweh was not only capable but willing to intervene on behalf of His people. While this was incredibly important from an apologetic perspective, it means little if it was not a unique phenomenon. If other foreign deities could also intervene on behalf of their own people, then the only argument that could be presented would be that Yahweh was a god, but not the only God. However, the book of Isaiah took this into account in chapter 46 and made the argument that the idols and the gods that they represent were powerless to intervene on behalf of their people.272 Perhaps most importantly, Isaiah did this through showing the weakness of the Babylonian gods, the very gods that would have claimed victory over Yahweh with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile.273

272 This was already established to an extent in chapters 36-37 but greatly expanded in this chapter.

273 While it is true that this chapter only specifically addresses Bel and Nebo, the larger question is whether this is all that it is referencing? For example, Koole writes, “The polemic here is not aimed against the idols in general but specifically against Marduke and Nabu. Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, 496. If this was the only passage in the book that attacked idolatry, then perhaps one could make that argument. However, since Isaiah has already attacked idolatry throughout the book, as seen in chapter two with creation and will be seen in chapter four with predictive prophecy as well, it can be argued that Bel and Nebo serve as representatives of idolatry and that if they cannot intervene on behalf of their people, then no idols can intervene.
In verse one, Isaiah specifically identified that one day Bel and Nebo would bow down and be carried away on carts in defeat.\(^{274}\) Catlin points out that throughout the book, the idols were nameless, but that in this passage, they are identified as the Babylonian gods. This was nothing less than a direct assault on Babylonian religion.\(^{275}\) Marduk had long been one of the chief Babylonian deities, dating back to the Old Babylonian period.\(^{276}\) Nabu appeared later during the time of Hammurabi as the god of writing and as Marduk’s son.\(^{277}\) These were two of the major deities of Babylon and yet Isaiah argued that the only purpose they served was as burdens for beasts to bear. They could not even move themselves but were reliant on animals to move them. John Watts rightly asserts that Yahweh was unafraid to “take on all the aggressor nations of the eight to the sixth centuries BC”.\(^{278}\)

In verse two, Isaiah made it clear that these deities could not save Babylon but would go into captivity along with their people. The question then becomes was Isaiah simply making a statement of history or making a future prophecy? Some argue that Isaiah was simply making a

\(^{274}\) Some have seen a direct correlation between this passage and the Babylonian New Year festival in which Nebo’s idol was carried from his temple to a procession with his father Bel-Marduk’s idol through the streets of Babylon to the Esagila shrine. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 187. If this is true, and it is speculative at best as there is no way to know if Isaiah would have been familiar with this event, then Isaiah is using this event to show that instead of celebrating a new year, the idols are being carried to escape destruction.

\(^{275}\) Mark Catlin, “Sennacherib's Invasion and Yahweh's Incomparability: Reconsidering the Historical Referent of Isaiah” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 74. It seems likely that Isaiah, through Yahweh, knew in advance that Babylon would be the one that destroyed Jerusalem (Isaiah 39) and that he is preparing in advance to show the people that they should not follow after the Babylonian gods during the Exile, but should remain faithful to Yahweh.


\(^{277}\) Ibid, 157-158.

\(^{278}\) John D.W. Watts, “Images of Yahweh: God in the Prophets,” in *Studies in Old Testament Theology: Essays in Tribute to David a. Hubbard*, ed. Robert L. Hubbard Jr., Robert K. Johnston, and Robert P. Meye (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 140. Yahweh was not merely combating other minor deities of smaller nations or tribes, but went against both Assyria and Babylon, the two strongest nations during this period. To outsiders, it would have been comical for tiny Judah’s God to claim sole deity in comparison to the gods of the great nations, but the people of Judah should have known, based upon Yahweh’s record, that Yahweh was the one true God.
statement of history, arguing that Isaiah was referring to times in the past when Babylon had been defeated. Westermann writes, “Deutero-Isaiah here describes what was probably a not uncommon happening in the world of history, an account found in an inscription of Sennacherib relating to Merodach-Baladan on the occasion of a military defeat.” Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 178.279 Gary Smith argues that this defeat could be related to Tiglath-pileser III who defeated Babylon in 729, Sargon II in 710, Sennacherib in 703 or 689, Cyrus in 539 or Xerxes in around 400.280 Regardless of who was the reference, this position held that the Babylonian gods could not defend their own city and were powerless to intervene.

A second view is that this was a prophecy about Babylon’s destruction. Isaiah had already predicted the destruction of Babylon (Isaiah 13) so it was not impossible for him to be referencing the same destruction. Also, the immediate context of the passage seemed to be linking it with the Cyrus prophecy in the preceding chapter. The difficulty with this view is that Cyrus did not take Marduk and Bel into captivity, but instead attributed his victory to Marduk. Thus, the events of Cyrus’ capture of Babylon do not appear to be the historical referent in the text. However, Grogan does make a convincing argument that the defeat of Babylon was a defeat and shame of Babylon’s gods, even if Cyrus claimed they commanded the invasion. He says, “It is true that Cyrus attributed his victories to Marduk, but there can be little doubt that those who heard of the downfall of Babylon saw in this a colossal defeat for her gods.”

279 Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 178.

280 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, loc. 6292. Smith does not believe that it is a prophecy about Cyrus because he argues that Cyrus did not take Marduk away to captivity, but instead claimed Marduk was the one that told him to capture Babylon.

281 Grogan, Isaiah, loc. 10930.
Critical commentators argue that Isaiah (or Deutero-Isaiah) simply made a wrong prophecy and thought that Cyrus would destroy the idols in his conquest. However, there are two other possible interpretations that do not make Isaiah a false prophet. First, Isaiah may not have had a specific event in mind when making the prediction. This view argues that whenever Babylon fell, and the idols were destroyed ultimately fulfilled this prophecy. A second view is that the prophecy was fulfilled by Cyrus and the prophecy was only arguing that Babylon would be defeated, and their gods would not be able to help them, not specifically that their gods would be carried out into captivity. Motyer writes, “There is no recorded evacuation of Babylon in anticipation of Cyrus’ assault, but in a strikingly visual way Isaiah presents the truth that these gods cannot save (cf. 2:20) and, when the crunch comes, are themselves dependent on pack-animals!” Watts similarly states, “The sight of the awesome idols in a horizontal position, being transported just like the other refugees from one place to another to avoid the approaching invader, elicits this sarcastic comment.” Ultimately, regardless of the timing of the event, the argument being presented is that the pagan gods could not intervene on behalf of their people and instead would be carried away.

Verses three through seven expand upon this argument by making a direct comparison between Yahweh and the pagan gods/idols. First, Yahweh reminded the people that He had been there since the beginning for the nation (v. 3). It was Yahweh that had born the nation and carried them to birth. While the pagan idols needed to be carried by beasts and taken care of by

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282 For example, Whybray claims that “this is a further example of a prophecy which was not fulfilled.” Whybray, Isaiah 40-66, 114.

283 Motyer, Isaiah, 331.

284 Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 711.
their worshippers, Yahweh instead carried His own people.\textsuperscript{285} It was Yahweh who established the covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It was Yahweh who rescued the nation from captivity in the Exodus. Isaiah was reminding the nation who exactly it was that they worshiped and all He had done for them throughout their history.

Second, verse four continued this belief, identifying Yahweh as the one that would save the nation and allow them to continue into their old age. Oswalt identifies the focus on the verses on the divine intervention and protection of Yahweh. He writes, “This is the significance of the fourfold repetition of the emphatic first-person pronoun in v. 4. I will bear; I have made; I will carry; I will bear. It is he, not we; it is he, not someone else; it is he and no one else who can deliver his people in every age.”\textsuperscript{286} This promise from Yahweh was ultimately fulfilled when Yahweh allowed the nation to return to their homeland under Cyrus and reestablish their nation. The pagan gods could not save their nation, but Yahweh would preserve His people, even after their capital was destroyed and they were carried away into exile.

Third, verses five through seven shifted back to Isaiah’s attack on idolatry. This passages’ use of satire was reminiscent of Isaiah 44, where Isaiah described the idols failure to create and also in chapter 46 where he described the idols failure to intervene. In verse five, Yahweh called out a challenge to those that followed idolatry and dared them to compare Him to the pagan idols. This was exactly the type of comparison that the people of Israel had been making for centuries when they chose syncretistic worship (which is tantamount to idolatry)


\textsuperscript{286} Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66}, 231.
rather than the pure worship of Yahweh. Isaiah argued that Yahweh can and had saved, but the idols cannot. There was simply no comparison to be made because Yahweh was incomparable.

However, Isaiah took it one step farther in verses six and seven by again attempting to show the foolishness of idolatry. First, the idol worshippers in creating their idols used their own such as gold and silver (v. 6). They then hired a craftsman to turn their resources into an idol. Thus, the idol was seen as a product of both human capacity and created resources. After the idol had been created by humans, these same humans turned around and bowed down in worship to their own creation. They could not see that their creation had no power and authority and was nothing in comparison to Yahweh.

If Isaiah’s point had still yet to be proven, verse seven puts the final nail in the coffin of idolatry. Yahweh had carried His people like a nurturing mother and had been there with them from the beginning. In contrast, the idols were completely helpless to intervene for their worshippers. The worshippers had to lift the idol up and carry it with them. They had to set it in its place, presumably in their temple, and all the idol could do was stand in place. Finally, when worshippers cried out to it for salvation and deliverance in their time of need, the idol was unable to intervene. Goldingay sums up Isaiah’s argument well stating, “What use is a god that is fixed securely in its place so that it can no more move than do anything when you need it (vv. 5–7)?”

Apologetic Significance

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287 This is the fourth such occurrence in this section as 40:19-20, 41:6-7 and 44:9-20 all attempted to do the same. It is clear that Isaiah is trying to get the attention of the audience and show them that idolatry is not only foolish, but will only lead to destruction, while worship of Yahweh will lead to salvation.

288 Goldingay, Isaiah, loc. 5227.
This section was very important in Isaiah’s overall apologetic argument for Yahweh as the true God. Isaiah was not simply arguing that Yahweh was a god or Israel’s god, but for the incomparability of Yahweh. However, only making a positive argument about Yahweh’s divine intervention would not make a definitive argument about Yahweh as the only God. By Isaiah arguing that the idols, and the gods that they supposedly represent, were impotent and could not intervene on behalf of their subjects, he was making the argument that Yahweh was greater and in fact incomparable to the idols. Isaiah’s argument for the people was that they had to put their faith in Yahweh over the idols, as only Yahweh had the power and ability to intervene on their behalf.

Conclusion

The book of Isaiah has a major emphasis on both the divine intervention of Yahweh and the lack of intervention by the false gods. The book uses this emphasis apologetically to make the argument that Yahweh was completely unique and incomparable to the foreign deities. While they could not intervene for their followers, Yahweh could and did intervene on behalf of His followers when they prayed and asked for deliverance, both medically by healing Hezekiah and political/militarily by His intervention against Sennacherib. Therefore, the book of Isaiah has laid the foundation with Yahweh as the Creator and has shown that Yahweh can not only create, but will intervene for His people. Both of these elements are used apologetically by the book to argue that Yahweh is the one true God.
Chapter 4: Predictive Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah

The dissertation has shown that the book of Isaiah made apologetic arguments for Yahweh’s ability to create and His ability to intervene on behalf of His people. The third manner in which the book makes an apologetic argument for Yahweh is through the use of predictive prophecy, arguing that Yahweh can predict the future while the pagan gods cannot. This will be shown in three steps. First, Isaiah 41:21-29 will be used to show that the idols/pagan gods cannot predict the future. Second, Isaiah 44:6-8 will be used to make the argument that Yahweh can predict the future and is therefore the true God. Finally, to support point two the dissertation will address the four time periods of predictions made by Yahweh throughout the book: immediate, exilic, Messianic and eschatological.289

The Idols cannot predict the future, but Yahweh Can

Isaiah 41:21-29

21 Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. 22 Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. 23 Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. 24 Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.

25 I stirred up one from the north, and he has come, from the rising of the sun, and he shall call upon my name; he shall trample on rulers as on mortar, as the potter treads clay. 26 Who declared it from the beginning, that we might know, and beforehand, that we might say, “He is right”? There was none who declared it, none who proclaimed, none who heard your words. 27 I was the first to say to Zion, “Behold, here they are!” and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news. 28 But when I look, there is no one; among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. 29 Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind.

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289 This will serve as an overview of the types of predictions made throughout the book but will not be an exhaustive list of every prophecy in the book as that would be a massive undertaking and is unnecessary to show the use of apologetics in the book. Instead, 2-3 representative samples from each time period will be presented to show that Yahweh can and did predict future events and therefore the book’s apologetic argument was valid.
Isaiah 41:21-29 is an incredibly important passage in establishing the apologetic emphasis of predictive prophecy in the book of Isaiah. Along with 44:6-8, it serves as the foundation for Isaiah’s apologetic argument that Yahweh was the one true God because He alone could predict the future and the pagan gods could not. In the passage, Isaiah created a courtroom case in which idolatry was put on trial. The strange aspect of the court case was that God was not necessarily the judge but instead was the prosecutor. Goldingay writes, “Yahweh is the plaintiff not the judge, but is absolutely sure of the court’s verdict.” The idols were put on trial and in vs. 21 they were asked to provide proof for their deity.

The proof that God required was established in vs. 22; He wanted the idols to be able to explain history, both the significance of past events and to predict future events. Motyer states, “The challenge is expressed in general terms: predict the future (22ab)! This is then set out in its two aspects: first, 22 explains the ‘flow’ of history, so that in the light of former things (what has happened already) they might deduce what the outcome will be.” An interesting aside in the passage was that God was not ordering that they had to be able to make the events happen, but simply to predict them. Young states, “If the idols are truly gods, let them now come forward with their messages and declare the future. They are not even challenged to control the future: it

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290 “קרב” in the imperative in vs. 21 refers to a legal proceeding where God calls on those addressed to present their evidence. Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, 189.

291 Goldingay, Isaiah, 132.

292 Baltzer points out that Babylon and the Chaldeans were known for their prophecies. Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 117. Thus, Yahweh again was going after the pagan gods at a supposed strength.

293 Motyer, Isaiah, 290. While predicting and controlling the future is the main charge, understanding the past is also something of divine origin. Knowing what happened historically and understanding why God would allow certain events to take place are two very different ideas. God claims that a divine being should be able to do both.

294 Here the future is meant, as is shown by the disjunctive “ות”. Koole, Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48, 190.
is sufficient merely to state what it will be.” It was almost as if God was giving them a test of controlling the future but understood that they could not even pass the first requirement of truly predicting major future events. Goldingay writes, “The god’s inability to make sense of events or predict where they are going is the evidence that they are no-gods. They are helpless and silent.” It was not even that they failed the test, they could not even take the test in the first place.

In verse 23, Isaiah then laid down the challenge; if they were really gods, then they would be able to do this simple task; if they could do this, then they would be recognized as deity. God in this passage was opening himself up to a direct challenge because if another deity could predict and control future events, then He would no longer be unique, the One True God. However, God already knew that they were not able to accomplish the task and thus He had no problem challenging them to accomplish something that was impossible for them.

The lack of the idol’s abilities in vs. 23 led directly to a condemnation by God in vs. 24 in which God declared of the idols, “You are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.” Childs comments on this idea, stating, “The fictive form of a trial only serves as a vehicle to arrive at a conclusion that the prophet assumed at the outset, namely, that the gods were not a real adversary but only a delusion and fraud.” In vs. 28-29, God explained why they were nothing because they could not give an answer to his challenge.

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295 Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3 Chapters 40-66*, 96. Koole points out, “It is not the nations but the gods which are addressed. This is understood by the LXX. Targum and Vulgate in the sense that the gods should now “approach.” Koole, *Isaiah III: Isaiah 40-48*, 146.


The idols and the deities behind them failed the test because they were not able to predict the future or control history. Smith writes, “If the Israelites were to follow the line of argument from 21-24, then they would have to conclude that the pagan gods have no power.” Indeed, God used strong terms to refer to those that would put their faith in idols by labeling them an abomination because they had blasphemed God by allowing for idolatry.

An important aspect about this passage was that by default God was claiming divinity in order to prosecute the idols and therefore inherently needed to defend Himself, requiring the same evidence that He demanded from the idols. It was one argument to say that someone else was not a god, which itself would be shocking to the audience. It was a completely different argument to say that someone else was not a god because you are actually God. That was the argument that God through Isaiah would make, both in this chapter and in chapter 44.

While verses 21-24 focused on idols, beginning in verse 25 God began to assert why He should be viewed as divine. He asserted that He was the one that raised up “one from the north.” Three major views are taken about this passage. First, some argue that this was a reference to Abraham and his call from Haran. For example, the Targums, some church fathers and John Calvin took this position. However, there is nothing else in the text that seems to point to

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299 Young states, “This not only implies that none of the idols has made such a prediction, but it also implies that Yahweh the God of Israel has so predicted.” Young, The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3 Chapters 40-66, 102.

300 Goldingay asserts Cyrus or Abraham could be the referent. John Goldingay, The Theology of the Book of Isaiah (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 6

301 Oswalt, Isaiah 40-66, 81.
Abraham and even though Abraham did fight in Genesis 14, he was not remembered as a valiant warrior like King David.

Smith argues that this was Sennacherib, raised up by Yahweh to judge the nation, although this seems highly unlikely because Sennacherib not only did not call upon Yahweh, but actively mocked and blasphemed Yahweh. While it is true that Isaiah 45:3-4 says that Cyrus also did not know Yahweh, Cyrus is viewed positively in the book of Isaiah, even called Yahweh’s “מְשִיחַ, anointed” in 45:1. Also, Young argues that both Ezra 1:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 both view Cyrus as pronouncing the name of Yahweh. Young said, “The phrase may mean, “call by means of My name,” in the sense of calling upon the name (cf. Zeph. 3:9; Jer. 10:25), or it may mean calling out or pronouncing the name (cf. Isa. 43:1; 44:5; 45:3, 4). Perhaps the latter is to be preferred, for it appears to be exemplified in the proclamation recorded in the opening verses of Ezra.”

Thus, Cyrus did have some possible intertextual connections as Yahweh’s representative, even if he never truly worshipped Yahweh, while Sennacherib was always viewed as a blasphemer and was never viewed as Yahweh’s agent. This, combined with the context of chapter 44-45, argues against Sennacherib being this one from the east.

The third option, by far the most dominant view, is that this is an early reference to Cyrus. Later, in 44:28, Isaiah would explicitly name this one from the north as Cyrus, who as ruler of the Persians conquered Babylon. This both showed that God could predict that Cyrus

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302 Smith, Isaiah 40-66, 291. This is very different than Cyrus who is called an anointed one in 45:1.

303 Young, Isaiah 40-66, 102.

304 Held by John Watts, Claus Westermann and Joseph Blenkinsopp, among many others. Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 118. Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 89. Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40-55, 206. This does not mean that everyone views this as prophecy, as critical scholars date Deutero-Isaiah during the time of or after Cyrus.

305 Two arguments are made against this position. First, the text says that the figure would come from the north, whereas Persia was in the east. However, if one combines this verse with 41:2 that states the conqueror came
would come and destroy Babylon, but also that God was ultimately the one to control history. It was also important that God was saying that He raised up a Persian ruler, as ANE gods generally only took credit for events that happened within their borders and to their nation. God was then going above and beyond what He required the idols to accomplish in order to be considered divine. He not only could predict the future but could control history through other nations outside of His own land and nation.306

In verse 26, God also asserted that He alone was the only one to predict that Cyrus would come.307 This was important because God was declaring that He was superior to the Babylonian gods because they did not recognize and predict the danger that Persia would bring against their nation. He was not merely arguing that He was better than the idols of Babylon, but any idol and the gods behind it. Grogan, who asserts that Isaiah himself wrote this prediction, states, “Cyrus was to emerge on the international scene at least a century and a half later. Here, then, is evidence indeed that what the gods of paganism cannot do, the God of Israel can and does do.

from the east, then it can be argued that Cyrus originated in the east but ultimately attacked from the north through the fertile crescent. Perhaps the harder argument against this view is that the text states that the conqueror would “call upon my name”. Smith argues, “It is hard to believe that Cyrus actually called on the name of Yahweh, since he was a Zoroastrian from Persia and proclaimed his allegiance to the Babylonian god Marduk in the Cyrus Cylinder.” Smith, Isaiah 40-66, loc. 3250. However, Motyer argues that the passage could argue, “In this context the suitable meaning is that, since the rise and career of the conqueror confirms the predictions, he will by his coming and actions proclaim the Lord as the only God. He was right: used in lawcourts of the one in whose favor the verdict was pronounced.” Motyer, Isaiah, 291.

306 There was a belief in the Ancient Near East that a deity’s power never extended beyond its own territorial borders. Merrill, Everlasting Dominion, 261. Yahweh declaring that He could control events outside of His territory would have been viewed as incredible in the ancient world.

307 Inherent in the coming of Cyrus was the idea that Persia would destroy Babylon. While it was important that God did name Cyrus by name, perhaps the more important prediction historically would be that Persia would be the nation to take down Babylon. Persia was not considered a world power during this time period and really had never been considered a world power, unlike Babylon or Egypt. If Isaiah was the author, then this prediction becomes even more impressive as Babylon was not even the major world power during Isaiah’s life. Isaiah was looking significantly into the future to identify Persia as a world power strong enough to overcome the nation that would be strong enough to destroy Assyria.
Here is prediction indeed!“308 Others have taken a different approach, arguing that if Cyrus was still 150 years away in the future, then Isaiah’s prophecy would have no impact because one could not verify it. Seitz writes, “For a prediction to be valid, it must have been uttered meaningfully to contemporaries; yet it cannot at the same time carry weight as having been uttered long ago to special witnesses, whose posterity can claim to know something no one else knows.”309

However, while Seitz would be correct if Isaiah had hidden his message or kept it to a select few individuals, he instead had written it for the entire nation to see and hear in the future.310 Thus, it would be possible to be used by a different audience that could later verify the claims because they could still read his prediction a century later. Oswalt argues that the prediction is only really amazing and really authenticating for divinity if it is predicted well in advance.311 Indeed, if the prediction was either after the fact or in concert with the rise of Cyrus, then it was not a prediction of the future which would undermine a major part of the apologetic significance of Yahweh’s argument in the passage. Ultimately, the primary message of the passage was that the pagan gods could not predict the future and therefore could not pass the deity test that Yahweh had established. However, Yahweh had predicted the future and therefore He should be worshipped as the true God.

308 Grogan, Isaiah, loc. 10086-10087.

309 Christopher R. Seitz, “How Is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book? The Logic of Chapters 40-66 within the Book of Isaiah,” JBL 115, no. 2 (1996): 222. The argument that a prediction must have use for the audience of the writer’s day will be addressed in greater detail in the Messianic prophecy section.

310 This is similar to Moses’ address on the Plains of Moab in which he predicts what will happen to Israel in the far future (Deuteronomy 29-30). Because Isaiah, like Moses, had given near prophecies that were soon fulfilled, such as Isaiah 8, he had already validated his prophetic ministry.

Isaiah 44:6-8

6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. 7 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. 8 Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”

A second and similar passage to Isaiah 41:21-29 occurs only a few chapters later in Isaiah 44:6-8. In this passage, Yahweh again challenged the pagan gods to the predictive prophecy test for deity and again claimed that He alone was God because He alone had passed the test. Beginning in verse six, Yahweh asserted both His kingship and His uniqueness with a threefold title: Yahweh was the king of Israel, not Ahaz, Hezekiah or any of the human kings. Yahweh was the redeemer of Israel, as He had consistently rescued the nation time and time again from destruction, such as the Exodus and the Assyrian crisis. Finally, Yahweh was the Lord of hosts. The idea of the first and the last shows Yahweh’s power over history: nothing came before Him and nothing will survive without Him.

The final line of verse six presents a significant challenge in interpretation to the critical interpretation that rejects an early date for the Pentateuch and see monotheistic theology occurring very late within Judaism. For example, Westermann writes concerning Isaiah, “The concept of abstract monotheism, in the sense of the existence of one God and one only, would have been impossible for him.” Some critical scholars have even argued that Deutero-Isaiah

312 Motyer asserts that this title was used by Isaiah to show the power and majesty of Yahweh in direct comparison to the feeble nature of the idols. Motyer, Isaiah, 312. Baltzer argued that Deutero-Isaiah made it clear that Yahweh was king because after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC the nation itself had no human king. Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 188.

313 A similar type of argument is made using the terms Alpha and Omega in Revelation 22:13.

314 Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 140. Westermann argues that if there are no other gods, then Isaiah could not be putting the other gods on trial in these courtroom-like scenarios and therefore the text cannot be a claim that the
was making the first monotheistic claims in the history of Judaism, which would later be placed into the Pentateuch, which they argue had yet to be written. However, for scholars that argue Judaism had always been monotheistic, this was simply a restatement of the first commandment given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Watts writes, “It is in fact a challenge to Israel in its Babylonian setting to affirm again the First Commandment. They are challenged to bear witness in that pagan setting that Yahweh alone is God.”

Verse seven presented another challenge by Yahweh to the pagan gods, making the contention that if any deity wanted to be compared to Yahweh, then they would have to present evidence that they could predict future events. The idea of Yahweh appointing an ancient people, the nation of Israel through Abraham, showed that Yahweh both was the God of the nation and also had cared for the nation from the very beginning. It is also interesting to note that Yahweh shared predictions of the future with the nation, starting with the prophecy of the future Egyptian captivity to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-16). The verse concluded with another call out to the pagan gods to declare the future. This claim inferred that Yahweh could predict the future was the idea of absolute knowledge of history. If Yahweh could predict the future as He declared, then the pagan gods could not deceive Yahweh with vague generalities or deceptions of future events but would actually have to know the future in order to pass the test.

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315 For more on this topic, see Appendix B.

316 Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 143. Indeed, similar arguments in the book have already been shown in chapter two in the area of creation. Isaiah was writing to prepare the exiles and the returners, who would both be under pagan control and influence, to stay strong in their belief that Yahweh was not only their God, but the only God.
Verse eight concluded the passage with a message of hope for the nation. First, Yahweh told the nation to not fear. This would have been a very difficult task during the time period of the audience. They had been through the destruction of their nation, the Temple had been destroyed and they were in captivity. It would be understandable to have been afraid as a Jew after all of these events had taken place and it would have been understandable to question if the Babylonian gods were stronger than the God of Israel (Ezekiel 36:20). The people needed a reason to trust that Yahweh was greater, and Isaiah was making this case through the evidence of predictive prophecy.

Second, Yahweh then put forth a statement of a divine record to the nation. He asked the question of the nation if it was true that He had told them of future events since the beginning of the nation. The people could look back on all of the times that Yahweh had declared events prior to their occurrence as examples of Yahweh’s knowledge of the future. Yahweh had continuously made such predictions throughout the history of the nation, both directly and through His prophetic messengers. The people themselves were witnesses because they had not only the entire history of the nation available, but they had experienced Yahweh’s ability to predict the Babylonian Exile in advance.\footnote{Not only had Isaiah prophesied about the coming Babylonians, but Jeremiah too had prophesied that the nation would go there into captivity for 70 years.} Finally, Yahweh concluded his court case with a question that He then answered Himself. Yahweh questioned if there was any god like Him and then answered “Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock?” (v. 8).\footnote{The title “Rock” is a title used for God in the Psalms and describes God as a place of refuge (Psalms 26:4; 18:3, 47; 19:15; 28:1; 31:3; 63:3, 7; 73:26; 91:1). Watts, \textit{Isaiah 34-66}, 145.} Indeed, Yahweh concluded that He alone was God and that the pagan gods could not compare to Him, in part because they could not predict the future.
Apologetic Significance

The apologetic significance of these two passages are twofold. First, Isaiah makes the argument that the pagan gods cannot be true gods because they cannot predict future events. The argument is that if one is truly deity, then he must be able to know the future and thus be a master of time. If the deity cannot control the future, then the deity would ultimately be powerless to control their own fate and therefore could not truly be deity. Because the pagan gods continually failed to answer Yahweh’s challenge to predict and know the future, the book argues that they are not truly deities like Yahweh.

Second, by challenging the pagan gods to predict the future as a test of deity, Yahweh had placed Himself in the same test. He had to show that He was capable to predict the future if He was to be worshipped as the true God. It was not enough to simply show that the pagan gods could not predict the future, but Yahweh had to prove that He could. Ultimately, this is accomplished in a fourfold approach in the book through predictive prophecy: (1) Yahweh will predict immediate events in the life of Isaiah the prophet and events shortly after with the Babylonian Exile, (2) events that will occur at the end of the Babylonian Exile (roughly 150 years after Isaiah), (3) Messianic predictions (roughly 700 years after Isaiah) and (4) end time eschatological predictions.

The Assyrian Invasion and the Babylonian Exile (Immediate Future)

The book of Isaiah made predictions during four different time periods, but without predictions being fulfilled in the prophet’s own lifetime, the people would not be able to evaluate if Isaiah was a true prophet (cf. Numbers 11:23; Deuteronomy 18:22). However, by making predictions about the coming Assyrian invasion and then eventually the Babylonian exile, Isaiah
was able to validate his prophetic office. The texts explored in this passage will be Isaiah 5, Isaiah 6:9-13 and Isaiah 39.

**Isaiah 5**

1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

26 He will raise a signal for nations far away, and whistle for them from the ends of the earth; and behold, quickly, speedily they come! 27 None is weary, none stumbles, none slumbers or sleeps, not a waistband is loose, not a sandal strap broken; 28 their arrows are sharp, all their bows bent, their horses' hoofs seem like flint, and their wheels like the whirlwind. 29 Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey; they carry it off, and none can rescue. 30 They will growl over it on that day, like the growling of the sea. And if one looks to the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.

Chapter five of Isaiah serves as both the conclusion of chapters 1-5 as well as connecting into Isaiah’s call in chapter 6. Oswalt divides the chapter into three major sections: 1-7, 8-24 and then 25-30. Verses 1-7 was a parable to illustrate to the nation of the upcoming Assyrian

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319 Isaiah 5 is about the judgment of Yahweh and within Isaiah’s call in chapter 6 is a prediction of the Babylonian exile, which will be addressed in the next section.

Verses 1-2a established the great care that the husbandman, Yahweh, had taken in preparing the vineyard. He had placed the vineyard on a fertile hill. He had prepared the ground, removing stones and only planted the best vines. He had even prepared a watchtower to guard the vineyard from anyone that would attempt to sabotage or steal from the vineyard. Finally, He had even built a wine vat so that the vineyard could be productive on its own. Watts argues that the passage was meant to show that the husbandman had taken every possible step in preparing the vineyard for success.

However, beginning at the end of verse two, the problem of the vineyard was established; when Yahweh sought to finally taste the grapes from His well-prepared and resourced vineyard, and yet when He tasted the grapes, they were rotten, wild grapes. This would have been shocking to the reader, as they would have expected good grapes based upon the preparation of the husbandman. House writes, “There is no good reason for the vineyard to have brought forth what it did. No enemy has re-sown the vineyard: the owner did not neglect the vineyard. Something strange has occurred, unless the owner is indeed unbalanced. The passage slowly draws readers into a decision that condemns them.”

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321 It seems best to classify the literary type of this periscope as a parable, and to describe its contents as a parabolic song of a disappointed husbandman. John Willis, “The Genre of Isaiah 5: 1-7,” *JBL* 96, no. 3 (1977): 359.


323 The Hebrew term is “בעשים”, which has the connotation of “have a bad smell, stink.” Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 85. The idea is that the grapes were sour and rotten and were completely unable to be eaten.

Verses three and four serve as a rhetorical question that was to be answered by the reader/audience.\textsuperscript{325} Seitz points out that this is where the parable begins to make the switch to a prophetic indictment.\textsuperscript{326} The answer to Yahweh’s question was that there was nothing more that Yahweh could have done to make the grapes grow correctly and the grapes poor quality was its responsibility. Verses five and six show the impact that the grapes would have; Yahweh would remove all of the protections that He had given to the vineyard and let nature take its course. Without its hedge, wall, pruning and watering, the vineyard would quickly fall apart and become a wasteland.\textsuperscript{327}

Verse seven concluded the parable with a shocking twist, the vineyard was the nation itself, which would be laid to ruin. Yahweh had given the nation everything to be successful, but the nation had rebelled against Yahweh and instead of justice and righteousness only bloodshed and distress could be found. In like manner, wild animals would lay waste to a vineyard are the nations that Yahweh would bring against His people. VanHorn writes, “Judgment was portrayed as the vineyard owner allowing the vineyard to be overrun with thorns. Protective hedges and walls would be torn down, resulting in wild animals trampling the vines. The image is applied

\textsuperscript{325} Juridical parables served this function. They were meant to make the audience themselves realize the ending.

\textsuperscript{326} Christopher R. Seitz, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 47.

\textsuperscript{327} Hays argues that the vineyard metaphor was used by Isaiah because it would be easy for an agriculturally minded culture to understand. Rebecca Hays, “Sing Me a Parable of Zion: Isaiah’s Vineyard and Its Relation to the Daughter Zion Tradition,” \textit{JBL}135, no. 4 (2016): 759.
forcefully in 5:7 to the covenant community.”328 Without the protection and provision of Yahweh, the nation could not survive against their much more powerful enemies.329

Verses 8-24 listed a sequence of six woe oracles against the nation. The first woe was against latifundiatization, defined as the process of land accumulation in the hands of a few wealthy landowners to the deprivation of the peasantry.330 Two of the woes were against drinking and many of the other woes focused on the injustice that occurred throughout the nation.331 Verse 24 concluded the section of woes with the true reason for the nation’s failures: the people had rejected both Yahweh’s law and word and instead had fallen into their own evil deeds.332

Verse twenty-five transitions from the woe oracles against the nation to the results of these woe oracles.333 The anger of the Lord would be unleashed upon the nation for their sins and He would stretch out his hand against his own people in judgment. This lays the foundation for an important aspect of the judgment in this section in that Yahweh is not merely telling the

328 W. Wayne VanHorn, “The Use of Imagery in Isaiah 1-12,” *The Theological Educator* (1991): 96-97. This is important because Judah itself, as a small nation faced with Egypt to the south and Assyria to the northeast, had no military hope in defeating the military powers of their day. Yahweh only was responsible for their protection and if He would no longer offer them protection, then they were doomed.

329 Hamilton sees a connection between the vineyard and Eden. Just as Adam was exiled from Eden because of his sin, the nation would be exiled from the Promised Land for their sin. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory*, 193.


332 Verse 13 mentions that the people will go into exile as a result of their lack of knowledge about Yahweh and His ways.

333 Some critical scholars argue that this prediction is not authentic to Isaiah but instead argue that it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem. For example, Otto Kaiser wrote, “In my own view, the author is a theologian of history from the fifth century, in the guise of the prophet, speaking of the annihilating blow of the Babylonians against the kingdom of Judah. Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 2nd ed., trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 112.
nation that He would allow other nations to come and attack Judah but instead, as will be seen in verse twenty-six, Yahweh Himself will initiate this judgment upon Judah. Instead of merely being passive in removing His protection, Yahweh will actively bring judgment upon the nation.\(^{334}\) The repeated phrase “For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still” is significant because Isaiah will later use this same terminology in describing his judgments against the northern kingdom.\(^{335}\) If the people of Judah looked on Israel’s destruction in the north with pride or arrogance, thinking they were safe, then Isaiah was making it clear that they too would soon suffer a similar crisis.

In verse twenty-six, the method of Judah’s judgment is finally revealed in two stages. First, instead of direct intervention, such as a miraculous earthquake or flood, Yahweh will instead raise up a “signal” or “banner” (נֵס) that will serve as a sign for the nations that Judah is no longer under the protection of Yahweh. Grogan points out that this term is, “A favorite with Isaiah (cf. 5:26; 11:12; 18:3; 33:23 [‘sail’]; 62:10), and symbolizes God’s direction of history.”\(^{336}\) Banners were significant in the ancient world as they were used as a rallying sign for armies, usually placed on high ground so that the forces could see it from across the battlefield and rally to that specific point.\(^{337}\) Yahweh then directs the enemies of Judah to attack the nation that He once defended. Calvin wrote that the Assyrians would be “commissioned” by Yahweh to

\(^{334}\) This would be similar to a parent that actively disciplines a child for bad behavior instead merely warning the child that misbehaving is bad and letting someone else, such as a teacher, ultimately distill the punishment on the child.


\(^{336}\) Grogan, *Isaiah*, loc. 5017.

slaughter the nation. Thus, while the nations would come to destroy Judah, they would only do at the direction of Yahweh.

Second, one might wonder about the timing of when the attack would come on Judah and if nations would somehow miss the banner signal that Yahweh would place for them, but the second half of the verse makes it clear that this will happen both soon and is guaranteed to occur. First, Yahweh will “whistle for them from the ends of the earth”, showing that Yahweh will both initiate the call for the nations and that these nations are not merely the same minor nations that Judah has dealt with in the past. Indeed, Smith writes, “This attack will not simply be the work of one of Judah’s traditional enemies (one of the small nations around it), for it is pictured as an invasion by a mysterious nation that will travel a great distance to reach Judah.” The whistle shows Yahweh’s ability to command other nations, like a human to a dog or a beekeeper to his horde. Second, Yahweh will do this quickly and they will come at his call. Thus, the nation does not have decades to live in freedom, but instead will have to soon deal with this crisis.

However, Isaiah at this point does not address who this nation/nations will be. Some interpreters view this as only the nation of Assyria that would come under Sennacherib in chapter thirty-six during the reign of Hezekiah. However, two problems occur with this position. First, verse twenty-six identifies the nations as plural. While it could be argued that Assyrian, because of their conquering prowess, was made up of many nations, it still was viewed

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as a single entity. Second, even though Assyria under Sennacherib laid waste to much of Judah, Jerusalem was not destroyed because of the divine intervention of Yahweh.

Therefore, perhaps a better understanding of the nations is that it represents both Assyria and eventually Babylon, the first will bring Judah to its knees and the second will finally finish the job of their destruction. Both Oswalt and Goldingay argue that these nations represent the enemies of the nation, under divine control that will destroy Judah and send it into exile. Goldingay writes, “This army stands for the armies of all the distant nations that are from time to time summoned to Yahweh’s angry purpose.”342 Oswalt builds upon this even more, arguing that it is not the strength of Assyria and Babylon that should scare Judah, but that Yahweh is now on the side of Judah’s enemies.343 Indeed, Isaiah was not merely proclaiming that Yahweh was merely the God of two little nations of Israel and Judah and could only fight on their sides against the opposing gods, which was the common view of the ancient near east, but instead that, “Yahweh was already the Lord of those other countries (their gods being no gods at all), and he was using those nations to accomplish his disciplinary purposes among his people.”344 Yahweh can take even nations that do not know Him and still have them serve the divine purpose.345 Thus, the identities of the nations really do not matter because if Yahweh was against Judah, then He could empower any nation to defeat them.

342 Goldingay, Isaiah, 56.
343 Oswalt, Isaiah, loc. 2421.
344 Ibid, loc. 2480.
Nonetheless, verses 27-30 are then used by Isaiah as a reminder/prediction of the type of military might and power that these nations can bring to bear upon the nation.\textsuperscript{346} The enemies are tireless and physically fit. Their weapons are sharp and their horses are numerous. They are like lions that strike at their prey quickly and efficiently. The land will be full of darkness and distress when the enemy finally comes. In conclusion, Judah is ripe for judgment, Yahweh himself will raise the “נֵס” and whistle for the enemy to come to annihilate the nation and there is nothing that Judah can do militarily to stop them. Therefore, when the nations would come against Judah, Judah could understand that Yahweh not only was the controller of these nations but had even predicted that the events would occur.

**Isaiah 6:9-13**

9 And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” 11 Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, 12 and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. 13 And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Isaiah 6 is a very familiar passage about the call of Isaiah, but sometimes verses 9-13 are overlooked when considering both the prophetic ministry of Isaiah and the predictive ability of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{347} The historical context of this passage is very important in understanding the call and

\textsuperscript{346} Even though Isaiah did not name the enemy specifically, the people would still recognize by these verses the type of enemy that would be coming against them and could guess if they did not know that it would be Assyria or something that would be similar to Assyria, like Babylon or Egypt. Regardless, they would understand that the enemy would be superior militarily in every way in comparison to their own army.

\textsuperscript{347} One reason the passage is often overlooked is because of the concept of judicial hardening, the idea that Yahweh allows individuals to continually rebel and harden their hearts against Him until judgment ultimately falls. The best example in the Old Testament of this type of hardening is the Pharaoh in the Exodus account. Oswalt writes, “Yet these verses depict God as preventing repentance so that total destruction may occur. The only glimmer of hope appears in the enigmatic final phrase.” Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 187-188. While this may sound like a harsh
mission of Isaiah. Historically, King Uzziah had just passed away at the time of Isaiah’s call. Uzziah was a godly king who reigned for over 50 years. Many of the people of the nation had never lived under another king. Isaiah and the nation at large would have been in a state of mourning but also apprehension, unsure of what the future would bring. It is into this situation that Yahweh had called Isaiah to be a prophet to the nation.

Beginning in verse 9, Yahweh began His prediction about Isaiah’s ministry, declaring that the people would not understand or identify the message that Isaiah would be given by Yahweh. Robinson argues this sinful rebellion against Yahweh and His laws was not new to the nation, but simply was a continuation of the sinful rebellion that the nation had constantly battled throughout their history. He writes

This tendency began in the Garden of Eden and continued in the days of Noah and at Babel. Even in the wilderness, at the birth of the nation, Israel struggled to remain faithful to God—to understand the significance of the Exodus, to see God in the pillar of fire and cloud, and to hear the voice of God through the voice of his spokesman Moses. The period of the Judges is a low point in this respect, where the characteristic refrain is "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25). The period of the monarchy continued this failure of faith with some notable exceptions (David, Solomon, Hezekiah). The lure of the gods of the nations, the temptation to seek help from the nations and not from Yahweh all betray the same fundamental malfunction of spiritual seeing, hearing, and understanding.348

Indeed, this rebellious attitude would not stop with Isaiah’s ministry, but continued even into the ministry of Jesus, who quoted this passage in John 12:40 about His own generation.

judgment by Yahweh, one has to remember that the nation also had the opportunity to repent and that Yahweh had consistently sent prophets to the people calling for repentance. While Yahweh knew in advance what would occur, the people chose their own fate by their continued sinful rebellion.

Verse ten served as both a cause and effect that ultimately would occur in Isaiah’s ministry. Isaiah would preach, but the people would not listen and instead would merely harden their hearts. Beale argues that this hardening occurred because of their continued idol worship. He writes, “The expressions describing Israel as 'having ears but not hearing' (vi 9-10) and "like a burning tree" (Isa. vi 13a) are best understood as metaphors of idolatry which are applied to the disobedient nation in order to emphasize that they would be punished for their idol worship by being judged in the same manner as their idols, i.e. by being destroyed.”

That Isaiah would have such an emphasis on the folly of idolatry throughout the book gives credence to this position. The people would have access to the very words of Yahweh as given through Isaiah, but instead would be so focused on their idols that they ultimately would lead to their own destruction.

Verses 11-12 identified both the length and ultimate consequences of Isaiah’s ministry. First, Isaiah questioned how long he would have to continue in his ministry, a valid question given the difficult nature of his ministry. The answer was given by Yahweh; Isaiah would preach until Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were carried away into exile. While exile seems incredibly harsh, the nation had been previously warned of this consequence if they failed to obey the Mosaic Covenant; Leviticus 18:25-27 had warned that the land would vomit the nation out if they followed other gods and the curses of Deuteronomy 28 laid out exile as the ultimate curse of disobedience to the covenant. If the people doubted Isaiah’s message of exile, they

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350 While Isaiah died in about 680 BC well before the Babylonian Exile, he did live through the Assyrian crisis that almost led to exile if not for the prayer of Hezekiah and divine intervention of Yahweh. He also preached his entire ministry to a people that continually turned away from Yahweh and was well on their way to exile at his death.
would soon see a demonstration of its reality when Samaria was destroyed, and the people of the Northern Kingdom were taken captive to Assyria.\(^{351}\) Hence, Yahweh, in the very call of Isaiah, predicted the coming of the Babylonian Exile that would take place some 150 years after Isaiah’s call.

Verse 13 concluded the passage with a ray of hope, albeit one that would be difficult to stomach for his audience. Even the remnant would suffer a purging in the captivity. Evans, in describing Isaiah’s ministry, writes, “It could be, then, that the prophet Isaiah came to view his judgmental commission in terms of a purificatory purge. Whereas the prophet understood fully well that his word would bring about further spiritual insensitivity and so guarantee divine wrath, he was able—or at least so it seems—to foresee the survival of a remnant through which would come restoration and a better day.”\(^{352}\) When Yahweh’s judgment was complete, only a stump would remain, but the stump would represent the holy seed, the remnant, that would survive the exile and return to the land.\(^{353}\) The prediction then, was that the exile would occur and that a remnant would survive the exile to continue Yahweh’s plan for the nation. This was fulfilled with the return from exile under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

**Isaiah 39**

1 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly. And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah

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\(^{351}\) Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 57. Both Assyria and Babylon followed similar practices of deportation of their conquered enemies.


\(^{353}\) The stump may be referenced in chapter 11 in which the Messiah will arise from, which would be accurate as the Messiah would come from the returned exiles.
did not show them. Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” Hezekiah said, “They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.” 4 He said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. 7 And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” 8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

Isaiah 39 is a critical passage that both ends the historical interlude section of the book and leads directly into the second half of the book. The story found in the chapter occurs historically between the healing of Hezekiah in chapter 38 and the Assyrian invasion in chapters 36-37. This can be deduced from several key factors. First, Merodach-baladan is mentioned in the story. He was the leader of Babylon from 721 to 710 BC and again in around 705 BC for a short period of time, so the events of chapter 39 must occur during one of these two timeframes. Second, if Babylon was looking for allies against Assyria, then it is unlikely that the events occurred after the Assyrian invasion of Judah since with the deliverance of Yahweh the nation was still decimated. Finally, Hezekiah showed off the treasures of the nation, which according to 2 Kings were sold off in large quantities as tribute to Sennacherib prior to Yahweh’s deliverance.

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354 Critical commentators assert that this chapter was added much later because of the prediction that Babylon would one day come for Judah. For example, Childs stated, “It is difficult to imagine the shaping of Isaiah 39 apart from knowledge of 587.” Childs, Isaiah, 286.

Beginning in verse one, Isaiah described the envoys from Babylon that came to Jerusalem, both with letters from Merodach-baladan and a present for Hezekiah, who had been healed from sickness. Many see it as a recruitment mission, hoping Judah could serve as an ally for Babylon. For example, Roberts states, “Its more fundamental underlying goal was probably to confirm his continued participation in the anti-Assyrian league.” Smith argues, “Isaiah’s strong negative reaction to these events (39:5–7) indicates that this visit from a Babylonian ambassador and the gifts that accompanied it had significant political implications.” Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father, had trusted in political alliances instead of trusting in Yahweh and it seems that Hezekiah was following the same path.

Verse two showed the flaw of Hezekiah; he trusted in his own power and his ability to craft alliances instead of trusting in Yahweh. Clearly Hezekiah showed the Babylonians all his resources to establish his alliance. It is likely that the Babylonians wanted to see the strength of Judah before making a formal alliance and Hezekiah was more than willing to show them his strength. 2 Chronicles 32:25 spoke of Hezekiah’s pride, which was evident in this text. Also, 2 Chronicles 32:31 pointed out that Yahweh had left Hezekiah on his own in order to test his heart.

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356 Blenkinsopp argues that the envoy did not hear about Hezekiah’s sickness until they arrived in Jerusalem and therefore the mission was clearly never about giving him a present for his healing. Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 1-39, 487.

357 Roberts, First Isaiah, 489. Young similarly wrote that his major purpose was political. Young, Isaiah 19-39, 533.

358 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 656.

359 Interestingly, Hezekiah later would learn to trust Yahweh as seen in chapters 36-37. Yahweh had already declared that he would defeat Assyria, but Hezekiah did not quite trust Yahweh yet, just as when he would later give the tribute to Sennacherib. It was not until the Rabshakeh showed up at the gate that Hezekiah truly trusted Yahweh.
Yahweh understood that Hezekiah, who had trusted Yahweh for healing earlier in his life, still did not fully trust Yahweh in all areas of life.

Verse three and four then shifted to Yahweh’s response to Hezekiah’s actions through a message given by Isaiah. It is unclear whether Isaiah’s question was a legitimate question, as if Yahweh did not tell him, or if he was using a rhetorical question. Either way, he wanted to know where the messengers came from and what they wanted with Hezekiah. Hezekiah ignored the first question about the reason for the messengers, perhaps because he knew what Isaiah’s response would be if Hezekiah revealed his faithless intent. Motyer argues that Hezekiah’s statement of where they came from also showed his heart, declaring that people from mighty Babylon had come all the way to see him.\textsuperscript{360} When Isaiah asked what Hezekiah showed the Babylonians, Hezekiah truthfully answered that he had opened everything to the visitors.

Verses five through seven mark a change in tone, as Isaiah shifted from questioning Hezekiah to making a prophetic announcement divided into two parts.\textsuperscript{361} First, all the wealth and resources that Hezekiah had shown Babylon would one day be taken away by Babylon. Second, Hezekiah’s own line would suffer at the hands of the Babylonians. Essentially, Isaiah was stating that Babylon would not soon forget the wealth of the nation and would one day come for what they had seen in the treasury of Judah. The idea of the descendants becoming eunuchs in

\textsuperscript{360} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 270.

\textsuperscript{361} Whether Hezekiah’s actions had any impact on this prophecy is highly debated. Most commentators agree that he is looked at very unfavorably in the text. However, it seems that Hezekiah’s actions are not directly the cause of the Babylonian Exile. Young writes, “We must not think that Hezekiah’s folly was the cause of this captivity. It was not the cause, but rather the occasion. As early as the Pentateuch we read that Israel will be taken from her land (cf. Lev. 26:33; Deut. 28:64–67; 30:3).” Young, \textit{Isaiah 19-39}, 536. Seitz argues that the captivity is simply stated as a matter of fact and not as a response to Hezekiah’s actions. Seitz, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 263. One can argue that responses like Hezekiah, trusting in other nations or other gods instead of Yahweh, was one of the major reasons for the exile and thus Hezekiah in this story is an example of Judah’s greatest challenge.
Babylon showed that his descendants would not go willingly to Babylon but instead would be in captivity. Isaiah thus was declaring the future Babylonian Exile to Hezekiah over a century prior to its occurrence.362

Verse eight concluded the passage with Hezekiah’s response to Yahweh, which some commentators argue was justifiable but others argue showed great weakness. For example, Roberts argued that Hezekiah thought what Isaiah was saying was that the rebellion would be successful and Merodach-baladandan would remain in power in Babylon.363 Calvin argued that Hezekiah had a positive response to the prophecy, stating, “Having heard the judgment of God, he does not argue or contend with the Prophet, but conducts himself with gentleness and modesty, and thus holds out to us an example of genuine submissiveness and obedience.”364

Others see the statement as a selfish response by Hezekiah. Oswalt writes, “While it may be that Hezekiah is humbly thankful for God’s grace in not bringing the deserved punishment upon him immediately, it is hard to avoid the implication that the real reason for his saying that God’s word is good is merely the very human relief that he is not going to be destroyed. Whether his descendants are to be consumed does not seem to affect him.”365 It is also difficult to not see

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362 This reference is one of the main reasons why many critics argue that Isaiah could not have written this passage during his own time period. Critics may argue that Isaiah simply guessed that the Babylonians would one day attack Judah. However, Babylon itself, although being a world power, had suffered greatly under the pressure from Assyria and would not severely challenge Assyrian dominance for many years. Also, Yahweh would have had to have known that Assyria would not destroy Judah, but Babylon would later, which itself showed that Yahweh had knowledge of the future as no person would have dreamed that Judah could have withstood Assyria. Indeed, by stating that Babylon would take Judah and Hezekiah’s line would survive the Assyrian threat itself was a major prophetic undertaking.

363 Roberts, First Isaiah, 489. Roberts seems to be reading into the text as Isaiah never declared that Hezekiah’s ally would be able to resist Assyria.

364 Calvin, Isaiah, 190.

365 Oswalt, Isaiah 1-39, 697.
the emotion Hezekiah presented when his life was in danger in chapter 38 and his life and kingdom were in danger in 37 and not see a complete difference in his response in this situation. Hezekiah seemed content that he would remain in power and the nation would survive but had little concern for the future with the coming Babylonian Exile. Ultimately, this passage showed that Yahweh could predict the future as He predicted the coming Babylonians over a century in advance.

**Apologetic Significance**

The immediate predictions of Isaiah are incredibly significant apologetically as they would be the only predictions that could truly be tested by his original audience. When Yahweh declared that the enemy Assyrians would attack and punish the city in the early chapters of the book, the people saw firsthand that the judgment of God fell upon the nation. When Yahweh declared that He would deliver Judah from the Assyrian invasion in chapters 36-38, the people saw that the prediction that He made came to pass. Finally, when the Babylonians came in 605 BC, the people could look back on Isaiah’s prediction a century before and understand that Yahweh was not caught off guard by the Babylonian invasion but instead predicted that they would come. They could see that Yahweh was the God of history and could predict the future.

**The Destruction of Babylon and The Coming of Cyrus (Exilic)**

While Isaiah had much to say about the events that occurred during his own day, he also had much to say about future events beyond his lifetime. In this section, Isaiah 13 and Isaiah 44:24-28 will look at some of the predictions that Isaiah made about both the destruction of Babylon and the future coming of Cyrus.

**Isaiah 13**
The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

On a bare hill raise a signal; cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.

The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless. I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger. And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, each will turn to his own people, and each will flee to his own land. Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or lived in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there; no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. But wild animals will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there wild goats will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

Isaiah 13 is one of the most challenged passages in all of the book, especially within the first half. Within the passage, the future destruction of Babylon is predicted by Isaiah, who is actually named in verse one of the passage as the receptor of the oracle/vision. While many of the other predictive passages in the book do not specifically say they came from Isaiah, although
that can be inferred from chapter one, this passage does make that claim. Four views are presented on how this claim could be made: the addition/fake view, the Babylon was Assyria view, the Babylon during Isaiah’s own time view and the Neo-Assyrian prediction view. Each view will be addressed because of the significance of the predictive elements in this passage.366

First, even though Isaiah son of Amoz is attached to the prophecy, it has not stopped critical scholars from attempting to argue that this passage was not an oracle from Isaiah. Franke simply writes, “No reference to Babylon is given in chapters attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem.”367 Roberts writes, “Despite the heading it is difficult to attribute this oracle to Isaiah son of Amoz, in the late eight or early seventh century BCE.”368 Blenkinsopp argues that the date of composition cannot be fixed, but that “The anti-Babylonian poems, for example (13:1–22; 14:3–21; 21:1–10), could not very well have been written before the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BCE.”369 Sweeney argues that the nations listed in Isaiah 13-23 were all conquered by Persia and therefore this passage must have been written after the rise of Persia as a way to “Identify Yahweh’s sovereignty over the nations with Persia’s conquest.”370

366 Because Isaiah’s own name is attached to this passage, this passage becomes one of the most significant passages for the prophecy argument.

367 Chris Franke, “Reversals of Fortune in the Ancient Near East: A Study of the Babylonian Oracles in Isaiah,” in New Visions of Isaiah, ed. Marvin Sweeney and Roy Melugin (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 105. Franke believes that the name of Isaiah was attached to the passage to make it seem as if Isaiah had made this prediction.

368 Roberts, First Isaiah, 194. Roberts argues it was written sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem but prior to the rise of Cyrus, which is why the author used the Medes instead of the Persians.

369 Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 183. He argues that because the Medes were mentioned, it proved that it could not come from the time of Isaiah and therefore Isaiah’s name must have been attached by a later editor.

370 Marvin A. Sweeney, “Eschatology in the Book of Isaiah,” in The Book of Isaiah: Essays Honoring Joseph Blenkinsopp and His Contribution to the Study of Isaiah, ed. Richard J. Bautch and J. Todd Hibbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 58. While this argument at first seems interesting, one must also realize that Assyria and
All of these positions are given not because there is actual evidence presented, but simply because they do not allow for predictive prophecy and therefore assume Isaiah could not have been the legitimate author. These views suggest that his name must have been added by Deutero-Isaiah or another editor when the second half of the book was written to make it look like Yahweh had predicted these events. If this argument is true, then two concerns arise. First, if a chapter that is directly asserted to be written by Isaiah the prophet was not actually written by him, then it is impossible to know if anything else in the book was actually written by him and if he even existed at all. Second, if a later editor added Isaiah’s name intentionally, not only did the author blatantly deceive his readers, but the readers themselves, the Jews, allowed themselves to be deceived into thinking Isaiah wrote a prophecy that he never actually wrote. Ultimately, this view must be rejected unless one is willing to allow for inspired authors of the Bible to be deceptive in their writing.

The second view argues that when Isaiah referred to Babylon, he was really using Babylon as a figure for Assyria. For example, Brueggemann writes, “If it is from the eighth century, then Babylon here may be a figure for Assyria.” Hence, Babylon would be a codename for Assyria. This may not be without Biblical precedence, as Peter may have used Babylon as a codename for Rome in his epistles (1 Peter 5:13). The significant difference is that Isaiah in other places condemned both Assyria and their king and therefore it makes little sense for him to use a codename for the nation in this instance. Furthermore, if Babylon was a

Babylon also conquered many of these nations and then were conquered by Persia. This does not prove that Isaiah was not the author of chapter 13 specifically.

371 This may sound strong, but if critics are unwilling to allow for Isaiah to have written a chapter that has his name attached, then no other passage in the book can definitively be attached to Isaiah.

The third view argues that the Babylon mentioned by Isaiah was not the Neo-Babylonian Empire but was the Babylon of Isaiah’s own day. Irvine and Hayes write, “Isaiah’s oracle in 13:1-22 belongs to the period of Tiglath-pileser’s efforts to subdue the rebellion in the city of Babylon…The reference to the Medes in 13:17 does not mean that they were the main force attacking Babylon. During Tiglath-pileser’s reign, the Medes, or at least some of them were subordinate to the Assyrians.”

Smith, while leaving the possibility open to Cyrus, also argues that it is possible that Isaiah was referring to the fall of Babylon in 689 BC, which would have happened during Isaiah’s own lifetime. However, Childs argued against this view because the symbolic language used of Babylon did not seem like it was referencing a Babylon struggling to survive against Assyria, but a later Babylon that ruled the Ancient Near East. He writes, “The symbolism attached to Babylon is that of the sixth-century Neo-Babylonian empire, not the struggling forces of Merodach-baladan. The analogy with Assyria as “the rod of his anger” breaks down, since vv. 3–16 depict the final denouement of history and the defeat of cosmic evil.”

Likewise, if the prediction was about Babylon in Isaiah’s day, then it could not fulfill the predictions made by Yahweh since the city would be lived in again during the times of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

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374 Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 305. Smith dates every event in the book as early as he possible can allow.

375 Childs, *Isaiah*, 123.
The fourth view is that Isaiah made a prediction that Babylon would one day fall in an invasion by the Medes and that it was fulfilled when Cyrus conquered Babylon. Three arguments can be made in favor of this position beyond what has already been presented. First, the mention of the Medes seems to eliminate a fulfilment during the time of Isaiah. While Irvine and Hayes argued that it was possible that some Medes were in the army of Assyria, that is both speculative and it would be strange to call the Assyrian army a Median army. Instead, Davis argues, “The Medes were allies with Babylon in finding opportunities to resist the Assyrians. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah looks down the corridors of time and predicts the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Medes (v. 17) almost two centuries later (539 BC).”

Second, Oswalt argues that if someone was writing later, during the time period of the fall of Babylon, then it would be almost impossible for them to mention the Medes without mentioning the Persians. This helps to eliminate someone writing later and attaching Isaiah’s name to the passage. Finally, if someone was trying to pass off the passage as being written by Isaiah, they never would have had to try to force his name on the passage in deception in the first place as the whole book had already been assumed to have been written by Isaiah the prophet. Ultimately, there seems to be no argument presented that would eliminate the heading from 13:1 that attributes the chapter to Isaiah and therefore one must assume that Isaiah the prophet made this prediction.

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376 Davis, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Isaiah, loc. 2241.


378 Keil and Delitzsch draw out an interesting point, arguing that the reason that Yahweh may have had Isaiah place his name in this location is because, through divine foresight, Yahweh understood that without the name of Isaiah present, it would be hard to make the argument that the prediction was legitimate. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, loc. 151409. Ironically, even with the name present critical scholars still do not accept the prediction as legitimate.
Looking at the passage itself, it can be divided into two sections: 1-16 and 17-22. While verse one identified Isaiah as the author and the oracle against Babylon, verses 2-16 focus on the future judgment of the Day of the Lord, which at times refers to eschatological judgment but can also refer to specific judgments on nations, which in Isaiah 13 was Babylon. Beginning in verse 17, the Medes are mentioned as the source of Babylon’s destruction. The Medes existed during Isaiah’s ministry, but they were also not a world power and therefore their prediction by Isaiah shows the specific nature of Yahweh’s ability to know the future. While Cyrus the Persian led the armies against Babylon, the Medes as his allies played such a significant role that Daniel 5:30 stated that Darius the Mede was given a high place as the ruler of Babylon. They could not be bribed and therefore nothing could stop their advance. However, it is also important to note that it was Yahweh that was stirring up the Medes against Babylon; He was in control of the nations and history and everything that happened only happened according to His will and purpose. Verse 18 declared the extent of their judgment; they would slaughter everyone in their path, including the youth and children.

Verses 19-22 declared the absolute destruction that Babylon would endure. They would be completely decimated by Yahweh’s judgement, just as Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). No one would permanently inhabit the city again and it would only be a place for wild animals. While the text seems clear that Babylon would be decimated, some have argued that this work

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379 While verses 2-16 are important in the text, the specific prophetic elements outside of verse 1 begin in verse 17 and therefore the dissertation will only specifically address 17-22 for its purposes of showing Yahweh’s ability to predict the future.

380 For example, Isaiah was not predicting a nation that did not exist during his own time, such as Great Britain, which would have made the prediction harder to believe as legitimate. Oswalt shows that the Assyrians began to view them as a threat as early as 836 BC Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah: 1-39, 308.

381 Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah, 131-132.
could not be the work of Cyrus because he did not destroy Babylon when he conquered the city. Young argues that the prediction was progressively fulfilled over time. He wrote, “Cyrus left the walls and the city of Babylon itself still standing. Later, in 518 BC, the walls were destroyed. Then Xerxes ruined the Temple of Belus. As Seleucia rose, so Babylon declined, and in Strabo’s time Babylon was a desert of which he says, “a great desert is the great city.” Babylon was ultimately destroyed and never rebuilt just as Isaiah had predicted would occur. One can argue that the Medes were a part of this destruction, as Babylon would never recover from its defeat by Cyrus. Hence, Yahweh showed that He could predict the future and that even mighty Babylon, a power for centuries, would one day be destroyed.

Isaiah 44:24-28

24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, 25 who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish, 26 who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited,’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins’; 27 who says to the deep, ‘Be dry; I will dry up your rivers’; 28 who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the Temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

It is without question that Isaiah 44:24-28 is both one of the most significant and yet one of the most controversial passages in the entire book of Isaiah. The predictions found within these verses are one of the major reasons why the Deutero-Isaiah theory was created because critical commentators could not believe that Isaiah the prophet, ministering from 740-680 BC, could accurately name Cyrus the Persian 150 years in advance. For example, Blenkinsopp

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382 Young, The Book of Isaiah 1-18, 427.

383 Cyrus came to power in Persia around 550 BC He would conquer Babylon in 539 BC, roughly 140 years after the time of Isaiah’s death. Kaiser, A History of Israel, 419.
writes, “Not much needs to be said in support of the proposition that these chapters date from a later epoch than that of Isaiah of Jerusalem. The historical context is no longer the kingdom of Judah during the period of Assyrian supremacy but the Jewish diaspora in the last years of Babylonian rule. Reference to the Iranian Cyrus king of Anshan (44:28; 45:1), to Babylonian deities, to the anticipated fall of Babylon, to the repatriation of the exiles, put this conclusion beyond any reasonable doubt.”  

However, if Cyrus was indeed predicted by Yahweh in advance, then it would be a major evidence for Isaiah’s argument that Yahweh was the true God because He could pass the deity test and predict future events.

The literary context of this passage is especially significant in understanding the reason for the Cyrus prediction. As shown in the beginning of this chapter, Isaiah 41:21-29 and 44:6-8 had established a certain criteria for deity, the ability to predict the future. While Yahweh had accomplished this task previously in the book, He had yet to directly demonstrate this ability in the second half of the book, specifically to the Exilic generation. While they could read Isaiah 13 and know that one day Yahweh would judge Babylon, there was no specific timeframe when that would occur in the passage. However, the explicit naming of Cyrus revealed that when he came into power, Babylon would face their destruction and the nation would be allowed to return to the Promised Land. Therefore, Isaiah 44:24-45:14 serve as the climax to the entire argument of Yahweh’s ability to predict the future as presented in chapters 40-45.

Beginning in verse 24, Isaiah introduced a new statement with Yahweh as the speaker. The verse declared that Yahweh was the Creator, tying back into other passages in 40-45 that

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385 Isaiah 41:2, 25 could be considered a prediction if the one arising from the east and north was Cyrus, but he was not specifically named in that text and therefore the prediction was vague. This passage solves the vagueness problem by specifically naming Cyrus.
were addressed in chapter two. Hence, as was argued in chapter two, Yahweh based his ability to predict the future on the foundation that He was the Creator. Because Yahweh had made everything, both the heavens and the earth, He is sovereign over all parts of the universe. This power allowed Him to not only predict history, but also to control history.\(^{386}\)

In verse 25, Yahweh then turned His attention to those that attempt to predict the future outside of His direct intervention.\(^{387}\) Yahweh frustrated those that attempted to pass themselves off as readers of signs and made fools out of diviners. Wise men who attempted to predict the future were made to look foolish. Interestingly, the audience did not have to look outside of Scripture to see many examples of this action by Yahweh. Joseph had the ability to both interpret dreams and predict the future when the wise men of Egypt could do nothing. Daniel would be able to do virtually the same type of dream interpretation and predictions for Nebuchadnezzar.\(^{388}\)

Verse 26a served as a counter to verse 25. In contrast to the foolishness of trying to predict the future without Yahweh, Judaism held a special place because Yahweh was directly involved in telling the nation of future events. The people could trust the messengers that Yahweh sent them because He empowered them to know the future while the pagan gods could not. Watts writes, “The result was a plethora of priests, prophets and diviners in Babylon

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386 The significance of this difference cannot be understated. It is very different to make a prediction of a future event and to have the power to ensure that the event happens. For example, someone may make an educated guess about a sporting event and correctly predict the outcome of the game. However, they did not ensure that the event would happen. Yahweh argues that He not only can predict events but has the power to enable the events to occur.

387 For example, when Yahweh would give a message of prediction to a prophet.

388 While Isaiah and his original audience would not have known this, the exiles possibly would have known about this story.
representing a variety of gods. They all issued forecasts about the city’s future. Yahweh proclaims that none of these will be allowed to turn Him from His course of action.”

Verse 26b then served as a proclamation that Jerusalem and the rest of Judah would be restored and rebuilt from ruins. Two major points come from this verse: Jerusalem would be destroyed but would be restored. First, this implicit prophecy of Jerusalem’s destruction has encouraged critics to use this as evidence that Deutero-Isaiah was writing after 586 BC, at a time when the city had already been destroyed. However, as shown earlier, Isaiah had already predicted that Babylon would come and destroy the city and therefore had divine knowledge of its coming destruction. Second, the exiles may have questioned if they would ever return and rebuild Jerusalem, which Isaiah positively affirmed in this passage. The question of how this would occur after the Babylonian destruction and exile would be answered two verses later.

Verse 27 is a very difficult verse to interpret as commentators vary greatly in understanding the meaning of “the deep” and “the rivers”. Watts argues that the verse was either a reference to the creation waters that Yahweh controlled or was a reference to the moat that surrounded Babylon that Cyrus dried up in order to invade the city. Motyer and Smith argued that it was a reference tying back to the Exodus. Just as Yahweh had delivered the nation from captivity in Egypt and taken them back to the Promised Land, so too would Yahweh deliver

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389 Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 155. While Watts was specifically highlighting Babylonian future predictors, one could make the argument that all of the ANE future predictors would fall in the same category. They were all trying to predict future events without the benefit of being empowered by the only God that could actually know the future. The only exception would be in the book of Numbers when Balaam the prophet actually did make correct predictions only because Yahweh continued to intervene with His own purposes.

390 For example, Isaiah had already predicted the coming Babylonian invasion in Isaiah 39.

391 The restoration of Jerusalem, both after the exile and in the eschatological future, is a major theme in the second half of Isaiah. See the eschatological future section at the end of this chapter as well.

them from Babylon and return them home.\textsuperscript{393} Regardless of which position is taken, the idea behind each view is similar; Yahweh will bring about a Second Exodus and allow the people to return. However, the question still remains of how this would be accomplished if Babylon was still in power?

Verse 28 served as the ultimate answer to this problem; Cyrus would come and allow the Jews to return to the land and rebuild the Temple. Very few verses in the Old Testament have come under the scrutiny that this verse has underwent by critical scholars. They have put forth many variations of how this verse came about outside of predictive prophecy.\textsuperscript{394} One of the older arguments that was presented was that a later author simply inserted Cyrus’ name into the passage. For example, R. K. Harrison suggested that the two mentions of the name Cyrus (44:28; 45:1) could have been later glosses added after the actual name of the predicted deliverer had become known.\textsuperscript{395} However, O.T. Allis’ argument, which will be presented when positive evidence is addressed, has shown that the poetic nature of the passage makes this a difficult proposition.

Modern critical scholars have for the most part abandoned the addition view and instead have simply argued that the entire passage was written at a later date once Cyrus had already been established as the ruler of Persia. Paul Hanson, taking Deutero-Isaiah as the author, argues that the author was not making a specific prediction as given to him by Yahweh, but instead was

\textsuperscript{393} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 320. Smith, \textit{Isaiah 40-66}, loc. 5529. This view would fit with the Second Exodus motifs that are found throughout the second half of the book.

\textsuperscript{394} Lester Grabbe argued that this type of predictions/prophesy did not occur in Second or Third Isaiah and was more reminiscent of the oracles against the nations in First Isaiah. Lester L Grabbe, \textit{Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel} (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 74.

merely looking at the political landscape of his day and found Cyrus as a possible solution. He writes, “Convinced that God was the sovereign Lord of all reality, he scanned the world stage for signs of God’s activity in a process of discernment that combined deep faith with critical-historical knowledge…Cyrus was the one chosen by God for the specific task.”396 Basically Hanson was arguing that Deutero-Isaiah saw Cyrus was a political leader that could conquer and therefore must be Yahweh’s solution, but was not allowing for prediction or for Yahweh’s own guidance in the process.

Blenkinsopp argues that Deutero-Isaiah saw that Cyrus had come on the scene and would eventually conquer Babylon. Therefore, the passage became “pro-Cyrus party propaganda.”397 Essentially, the author wanted the people to pick the winning side and attempted to get the nation to side with Cyrus by making him seem like Yahweh’s choice. He also argues that the author, who was unknown, may have even been a member of the entourage of Cyrus himself.398 Duperreault argues that once Cyrus had freed the nation, Deutero-Isaiah went back and placed this “prediction” into Israel’s history to show that Yahweh was in control of contemporary


397 Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 186. Blenkinsopp makes the argument that, in order to get the people to back Cyrus, he wrote his propaganda as if it were a prediction by Yahweh. He writes, “No doubt anticipating such a response, he attempted to disarm criticism by claiming that he spoke in the name of a god who had already demonstrated his ability to inspire predictions of the future and then make them happen. This is a cardinal point in Second Isaiah’s apologetic. The proof of divinity is to predict the future and then bring it about. Unlike the Babylonian deities, Yahweh stood behind his prophets (Isa. 44:26). The very disasters through which the people had passed were turned into occasions for faith, in that they had happened in fulfillment of prophecy and therefore provided grounds for confidence now that judgment lay in the past (48:3–8). Repeatedly the seer called his contemporaries, understandably reluctant to put themselves on the line once again, to witness that this reading of contemporary events was the only one that made sense for them, that in effect they had no alternative but the one now being held out to them.” Thus, it was never a prediction, but was framed in this manner as a way for Deutero-Isaiah to make the people both listen to what he had to say and follow his council.

affairs. All of these options represent critical approaches to eliminate the predictive elements in the passage.

The major problem that arises with these positions is that they attack the character of the author, the apologetic argument presented in the passage and they make the Jewish audience look very foolish for accepting the deception. First, Oswalt strongly defends the necessity of the prediction of Cyrus because it was the very argument that the text uses to argue that Yahweh was the true God. He writes,

The centerpiece of the whole argument against the idols is that they cannot declare the future. Nothing they have said in the past can explain the present, and nothing they say now is anything but a vague rehash of what has already happened. But God not only has done so in the past, he does so now, and evidence clearly supports both claims (41:21–24, 26–29; 43:8–13; 44:6–9, 24–26; 45:20–21; 46:9–11; 48:3–5; 14–16). Three of the four references to Cyrus (41:25; 44:28; 46:11) are directly connected to this argument, and the other (41:2) is connected by implication because it opens a statement that concludes with the argument of 41:21–29. These facts cannot mean anything else but that the person or persons responsible for the final form of the book wish us to believe that the specific predictions of Cyrus were given far enough in advance that they could not have been part of any normal process of forecasting future events. The Cyrus predictions are thus made the specific evidence that God can and does tell the future. As such, they are made the very fulcrum on which the whole argument for God’s uniqueness turns. The entire apologetic argument that Yahweh was greater than the idols rests on Yahweh’s ability to predict the future and particularly the coming of Cyrus. If this argument was fabricated by a later author after the event had already occurred then the argument loses its entire apologetic foundation.

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Second, if the Cyrus passage was not actually prophetic, then it leads to both deception and foolishness. If Deutero-Isaiah already knew that the events had occurred or were close to occurring and yet passed the information off as a prophecy, then it is hard to view this as anything other than outright deception by the author, who created a prediction for Yahweh and then had based on it his entire argument for Yahweh’s supremacy.401 At the very least, one must argue that the author would have been playing loose with the definition of prophecy, as the critics do with their view of ex eventu prophecy (prophecy “after the fact”). Second, Whitcomb argues that critics have never given a solid argument why the Jewish people, so guarded of their Scriptures, would have been duped into accepting the prophecy as coming from Isaiah himself if it had only been written during their own time period.402 The Jewish people were not ignorant and would not have attributed a prophecy given during their own time by an unknown author to Isaiah, one of the most revered prophets of their faith.

Recently, even some evangelical scholars have limited the predictive nature of the passage while attempting to work around directly attacking the author’s character and argument. Richard Hess argues that Isaiah was not necessarily predicting Cyrus the Great, but just a Cyrus. He writes,

The assumption that a prophet in the eighth century BC would name a king who would rule a century and a half later has been rejected by critics as fanciful. Yet perhaps even in the eighth century (or early seventh century), Judeans may have known of the name

401 Smith attempts to downplay this by arguing, “Commentators have sometimes been accused of not believing in prophecy, but the issue is more related to the time when the prophecy was given and fulfilled. Some critical commentators do not believe in prophecy that refers to events far in the future; instead, they claim that all prophecy referred to events in the prophets’ context or in the near future.” Smith, Isaiah 40-66, loc. 19757. However, when one reads many of the critical commentaries, as shown above, they completely downplay or downright deny the prediction of Cyrus.

Cyrus among rulers in the east. A grandfather of the emperor also ruled in Iran under the name of Cyrus, and an earlier Cyrus ruled around 646. Still earlier Cyruses may have ruled in Iran. Given these facts, it is no longer possible to assume that an early Persian leader named Cyrus was necessarily unknown to Isaiah.  

Hess then is arguing that Isaiah may have simply been searching around to see a possibility of someone conquering Babylon and used the Cyrus name because he was a ruler in Persia during this time. Therefore, the passage was never meant to be about Cyrus the great but inadvertently was fulfilled by him. However, if this was not an actual prediction of a future person, then the argument itself would be nullified.

John Goldingay, building much of his argument alongside Brevard Childs, accepts Deutero-Isaiah authorship and denies that the passage was written as a predicted prophecy. He offers perhaps the most compelling argument for a later author while maintaining God can predict. He argues that this unknown prophet can argue that Yahweh already established that Persia would one day destroy Babylon in chapter 13 of First Isaiah and therefore the author was not being deceptive when he argued that Yahweh could predict the future, even though Cyrus would have already been in power at the time of the writing. While Goldingay, as an evangelical, may see this as a way to both hold to prophecy in general and yet deny that Cyrus was named 150 years in advance, his position weakens the apologetic argument dramatically.


404 This view seems highly speculative and is really an argument from silence. Hess seems to want to keep Isaiah as the author but find a loophole to get around the prediction. It is actually very similar to Hanson’s view, but places Cyrus during a different time.

405 Not to mention the fact that if Isaiah had been referencing a different Cyrus, then he would have been wrong with his original concept, as that person never rescued the Jews, etc.


407 It is very different to predict that a nation would defeat another nation than to identify the leader of the nation 150 years in advance. For example, someone in 1790 could have predicted that Germany would one day defeat France, which would be impressive. However, if that same person said Hitler would one day defeat France, it would be incredible.
One must also question why Goldingay accepts that Isaiah the prophet could predict that Babylon would fall to Persia in advance when Persia was not yet a world power, but have a problem with Cyrus being named in advance. While Goldingay may make a credible argument on the surface, it weakens the apologetic argument severely and therefore should be rejected, especially when solid evidence can be put forth to argue for the predictive elements of the text.

The question then arises, are there positive arguments to hold to the Cyrus prediction as legitimately Isaianic? Six reasons can be given in support of this position. First, the entire argument of Isaiah 40-45 is based upon the ability of Yahweh to predict the future and the Cyrus prediction serves as a primary example. Second, O.T. Allis, writing in 1950 in response to the argument that a later editor might have added the name Cyrus into the text, put together a strong argument showing that the entire passage poetically leads up to the climax of naming Cyrus. At the time, his argument was unanswerable by critical scholars, The argument was important in establishing that the Cyrus name could not have simply been added at a later date after he had conquered Babylon unless one wanted to ignore the linguistic formula that was used by the author.

Third, the prophecy is not isolated in the book, instead- the book is filled with prophecies, including prophecies that span much longer periods than 150 years. Isaiah himself had already

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408 See Oswald T Allis, Unity of Isaiah (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), 62-80. Allis argued that the poem consisted of three different strophe that build upon each other to climax in the prediction of Cyrus. The first strophe relates to the distant past, the second strophe relates to God’s dealings in providence and in redemption and the last strophe refers to a distant future. He wrote, “We hold it to be equally clear that, if the aim of the poet to represent the desolation of Israel as already taken place, the exile as nearly ended, and Cyrus as already present, an invincible warrior on the point of attacking Babylon, the structure of the poem is ill-calculated, to say the least, to bring out and emphasize these important matters. For it places Cyrus, who belongs, we are told, to the present and immediate future-immediacy is stressed by the critics- in the distant future and gives his mighty deeds an entirely different setting from the one which the critics hold to be the correct one…We conclude, therefore, that the claim that Cyrus is referred to in a way which requires us to see in him the contemporary of the prophet is not supported by, but is in direct conflict with the entire structure and argument of the poem, which aims to make it clear that Cyrus belongs to a distant future.”
predicted the destruction of Babylon in chapter 13. If Isaiah 7, 11, or 52-53 were about the future Messiah, as will be argued later in the chapter, then Isaiah could not only predict a future Messiah 700 years in advance, but predict specific details about his death.\footnote{Allis, \textit{Unity of Isaiah}, 122.} The Cyrus prophecy is not found in a narrative section that lacks prophetic elements, but fits into the prophetic content found throughout the book.

Fourth, the prophecy is not isolated in the corpus of the Old Testament. Whitcomb points out that even before the birth of Cyrus, Daniel prophesied to the king of Babylon that “after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee”, referring to the two-armed silver kingdom, Medo-Persia.\footnote{Whitcomb Jr., “Cyrus in the Prophecies of Isaiah,” 393. Again, the predictive nature of this passage also depends on the early date of Daniel.} The book of Habakkuk described a coming Median invasion of Babylon and Jeremiah predicted the doom of Babylon (Jeremiah 50). Thus, Isaiah was not the only prophet to predict a future defeat of Babylon.\footnote{One could argue that the other passages did not name Cyrus by name. While this is true, none of the other passages were making the same type of argument that Isaiah was making as well.}

Fifth, while predictions naming someone in advance are very rare in the Bible, it is not entirely unique. Motyer points out that 1 Kings 13:2 portray a prediction of Josiah, by name, 300 years in advance.\footnote{Motyer, \textit{The Prophecy of Isaiah}, 34.} In addition, Isaiah never gave a time period for the Cyrus prediction. Therefore, Isaiah may not have known that it would take 150 years until the prophecy would be fulfilled. Finally, Allis argued that the Cyrus prediction was not mentioned once but several times throughout chapters 44-45.\footnote{Allis, \textit{Unity of Isaiah}, 51.} Therefore, it is not a singular insert, but was used on several occasions.
occasions. In conclusion, there is ample evidence to argue that the Cyrus prediction was a legitimate naming prediction in the original text.

Cyrus was given two functions by Yahweh when he was introduced in verse 28. First, he was called Yahweh’s shepherd. This has led many, such as Baltzer, to argue that if Cyrus was described as the shepherd and the founder of the second Temple, there would be no other new Davidic king expected at that time because Cyrus was the new Davidic king. However, Choi argues that the text merely states that Cyrus was called Yahweh's "shepherd," the one who would fulfill Yahweh's will. There is no evidence that the shepherd and the Davidic king were linked in this text. Also, there seems to be too many other passages in the book that show a focus on a future Davidic ruler (e.g., Isaiah 11) to make the argument that Isaiah had given up on the Davidic Covenant. Finally, if Cyrus was a replacement for the Davidic line, then there would be no explanation for why the Jewish people continued to look for the future Messiah after Cyrus.

Second, he was to fulfill the purposes of Yahweh by providing for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. Historically, the Cyrus Cylinder, found in the Temple of Marduk in 1879 by Hormuzd Rassam, confirms that Cyrus was responsible for the return of the Jewish

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414 Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 218. It would be as if Deutero-Isaiah, seeing the nation destroyed and the line of kings ended, had given up hope on the Davidic line and had instead placed his hope in Cyrus.

415 Cheol Choi, “A Critical Evaluation of the Proposal That Cyrus Replaced the Davidic King in God's Program in Isaiah 40-55” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010), 159. One issue that does arise in the passage is that Cyrus in 45:1 is called the Lord’s “anointed, (מָשִיח).” However, this does not automatically mean that Isaiah was arguing that Cyrus was a Messianic figure that replaced the Davidic Messiah, as the term was also used for priests, such as Leviticus 4:3.

exiles to Jerusalem. The people returned to the land because of this edict, thus beginning the
restoration of Jerusalem. Ezra 5:6-17 show that, when the second Temple was under construction
and Tattenai and Shethar attempted to stop its rebuilding, the edict of Cyrus was used as
justification for rebuilding the Temple. Hence, Cyrus did ultimately fulfill the purposes of
Yahweh and was ultimately responsible for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Second Temple.
Yahweh’s predictions in this section were all literally fulfilled: Cyrus defeated Babylon and
Cyrus was used by Yahweh to allow the exiles to return to the land and rebuild Jerusalem/the
Temple. This showed that Yahweh could predict the future unlike the pagan gods.

Apologetic Significance

The apologetic significance of these two passages, which are united in content, are
significant, especially when looking at the generation that suffered through the Exile. These
people, certainly disheartened by Jerusalem’s destruction and being carried off into exile, could
look forward to the coming of Cyrus and his conquest of Babylon. Likewise, they could look
back at the message of their prophet with confidence that their God was great because He alone
had predicted the events that had occurred in their very lifetime. If Josephus was correct, Cyrus
may have read this prophecy of Isaiah about himself. It is no wonder that Isaiah was viewed
with great reverence by the Jewish people as he made these types of predictions under the power
and authority of Yahweh.

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417 David Graves, *Biblical Archaeology: An Introduction with Recent Discoveries That Support the

418 More was written about Cyrus in chapter 45. However, the purpose of the dissertation was fulfilled in
showing Isaiah’s use of prediction prophecy and therefore a study of chapter 45 is not necessary in this context.

Rapids: Kregel, 1988), 188.
The Future Messiah (Messianic)

The book of Isaiah does not stop with the coming of Cyrus, but also argues that Yahweh can predict future events well beyond the time of Isaiah. Indeed, the book makes predictions about the future Messianic figure who would not come for 700 years until the time of Jesus. Some choose to argue against the idea of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{420} For example, Joseph Klausner argued that the Messianic predictions in Isaiah were originally meant to be about Hezekiah but only after his death did the Jews switch the interpretation to a future Messianic figure.\textsuperscript{421} However, in both Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 52-53, the prediction of a future Messianic figure can be found.

The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7

1 In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. 2 When the house of David was told, “Syria is in league with Ephraim,” the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

3 And the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. 4 And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised

\textsuperscript{420} If and how the Old Testament Messianic prophecies are to be understood has become a major issue, with some going as far as saying there are no such thing as Old Testament prophecies, such as Tremper Longman III who wrote, “It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.” Tremper Longman III, “The Messiah: Explorations in the Law and Writings,” in \textit{The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments}, ed. S.E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 13.

\textsuperscript{421} Klausner writes, “For the most part it is possible to say definitively that Isaiah prophesied of days very near at hand: many of the Messianic promises were undoubtedly intended for the time and person of Hezekiah king of Judah…The prophets hoped that the Messianic era would not be far distant…Thus Hezekiah was considered at one and the same time as the restorer of Hebrew sovereignty and the spiritual head of the other people. Therefore, I consider these prophecies as an aspiration…When the Messianic expectations were not fulfilled in the time of Hezekiah, the nation-and perhaps also the prophet himself- postponed the fulfillment to a later time.” Joseph Klausner, \textit{The Messianic Idea in Israel: From Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 56-57.
“Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,” thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most controversial passages in the Old Testament and is regarded as the most controversial of all the messianic prophecies. The dissertation will first address the context and text of the passage and then evaluate the three major views regarding the passage. The historical context of the passage is paramount in understanding the threat that Ahaz faced. The Assyrian army had begun to move west and was threatening the region of Syria, Israel and Judah. This caused the kings of Syria and Israel, Rezin and Pekah, to threaten Judah to join an alliance against Assyria. If he refused, they would invade Judah, kill Ahaz and his family and put the son of Tabeel on the throne. Ahaz thus was in a difficult position and thus Yahweh sent Isaiah the prophet to Him to give Godly council.

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422 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2010), loc. 4092. As will be shown in the next section, the Suffering Servant passage is also controversial, but most evangelical scholars hold to the strict Messianic view unlike 7:14.

423 The identity of this son of Tabeel is unknown.
In verse three, Yahweh commanded Isaiah to go and meet Ahaz and to take his son Shear-jashub with him. This seems like a strange and overlooked aspect of the account and will be addressed later. Isaiah found Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field, possibly checking on the water system before a possible invasion. It probably would have been strange to Ahaz to see the prophet bringing his small child with him in the middle of such a dire situation. However, House argues that the boy’s name should have given Ahaz hope, as his name means “a remnant shall return.”

Beginning in verse four, Yahweh’s message to Ahaz is revealed. First, Yahweh wanted Ahaz to stay strong and remain unafraid of the situation. He also made it clear that He was aware of the current events and the threat posed by Rezin and Pekah. Ahaz understandably would have been afraid in this situation as his life and his son Hezekiah’s life were on the line if their plan succeeded. However, Yahweh made it clear that the threat would not stand, and that Ahaz’s enemies would be defeated. Motyer argues that the 65-year reference, which could not refer to the fall of Samaria in 722 BC, instead was to 671 BC when Esarhaddon of Assyria imported foreign settlers to the northern kingdom and thus put an end to any hope that the nation could be revived. Yahweh concluded the message with a challenge; if Ahaz would not trust Yahweh in this occurrence, then He would never trust Yahweh (v. 9).

Yahweh may have been sensing Ahaz’s skepticism and therefore asked Ahaz for a sign to confirm that His words would be true. Usually a human asked Yahweh for a sign, but in this occurrence, it was Yahweh who asked Ahaz to ask for a sign. Yahweh made it clear that it could

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424 Hezekiah is found in the same location in chapter 36 during the Assyrian invasion.


426 Motyer, Isaiah, 87.
be a miraculous sign, anything that was possible to imagine on the earth or heaven. However, Ahaz rejected the sign, using a false piety argument that he would not test Yahweh. Instead, he really should have said that he did not trust Yahweh as his actions with Assyria would prove.\textsuperscript{427} This then leads directly into the Immanuel prophecy in verse 14. Wegner offers no less than eight possible options for the identity of Immanuel: any child born during this time, a specific child born of a woman that was present at the time of the prophecy but unnamed, a son of Ahaz (Hezekiah), a son of Isaiah (Maher-shalal-hash-baz), the Messiah, a possible virgin child legend, a Messiah that Isaiah thought would be born soon but was not or that Immanuel was simply a faithful remnant of the nation.\textsuperscript{428}

Throughout history, two major interpretations have been understood about this passage, with a third more recent view developed within the last 200 years. First, the non-Messianic view argues that the Immanuel child was born during the time of Isaiah as one of options 1-4 presented above. Four major arguments are given in support of this position. First, the most influential argument given is that the passage must have a relevance for Ahaz during his own time period and if the passage was only Messianic, then it would have no immediate application. Also, verse 16 asserts that before the boy knows how to refuse evil and choose good, the enemies of Ahaz would be defeated. Thus, holders of this position argue that this must be a reference to an actual child born during this time period. It could have been a specific child, Hezekiah, Maher-shalal-hash-baz or even a random nameless child.

\textsuperscript{427} The Biblical texts are generally interpreted with the sense that, after rejecting Isaiah’s advice, Ahaz appealed to Assyria against the Syrian-Samarian axis with the result that Judah became an Assyrian vassal. Blenkinsopp, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 230.

\textsuperscript{428} Paul Wegner, \textit{An Examination of Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35} (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992), 115-21. Options 1-4 would fall under the Non-Messianic view or dual fulfillment view, option 5 would be the Messianic view and 6-8 will not be addressed as they are not widely held views.
Second, they argue that there is nothing exegetical in the text that leads one to assume that the child would be born much later in the future. The only reason that a future Messiah was ever attributed to this passage was because Matthew read the LXX translation, which mistakenly translated *almah* as *parthenos* and therefore attributed this passage to Jesus. Roberts argues Matthew was more interested in finding prophecies about Jesus than in explaining the Old Testament. Schibler similarly argues Matthew basically ignored the Old Testament context of Isaiah in order to assert his argument that Jesus was divine. Walton, while not going to Roberts or Schibler’s level, argues that one, “Cannot make an exegetical argument and therefore should not force it just to fit New Testament or theological concerns.” Hence, this position argues that Isaiah never meant for the passage to be Messianic and Matthew only read that back into the text, which caused Christianity to adopt the Messianic interpretation of the passage.

Third, some who hold this position contend that Immanuel was Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the child that Isaiah was about to have at the beginning of Isaiah 8:1. Grabbe argues that the prophetess in 8:1 was not Isaiah’s wife but instead was the ‘*almah* of 7:14. He writes, “Who the prophetess was is not elaborated, but the frequent suggestion that it was Isaiah’s wife seems unlikely. There is no indication that a prophet’s wife was referred to as a prophetess, and the failure to designate the woman as his wife seems strange if she was indeed his wife. Also, she

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429 Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 118.


seems to be the “young woman” of 7:14.”\textsuperscript{432} Wolf similarly argues that, “A close study of Isaiah 7 and 8 reveals the same picture. Isaiah was about to be engaged to a prophetess.”\textsuperscript{433}

Finally, some interpreters argue that Immanuel should be seen as a reference to Hezekiah. The argument is that Hezekiah was largely seen as the future righteous king who would come and resolve the problems experienced by Ahaz. For example, both Laato and Seitz argue that there is a connection between the child in 7:14 and the child of chapter 9. However, they both argue that the child of chapter nine was viewed as Hezekiah.\textsuperscript{434} Isaiah thought that Hezekiah would become the righteous king, possibly even the Messiah, but Hezekiah ultimately failed to accomplish this task. Consequently, while there are several options for who Immanuel would be in this view, they all were born in Ahaz’s time and were not Messianic.

Several problems can be presented against this position. First, the biggest issue is that no legitimate option for Immanuel can be argued. Kings asserts that Hezekiah had already been born 9 years before Ahaz took the throne, thus it seems impossible to argue that he is Immanuel unless one allows for an error in the text.\textsuperscript{435} Maher-shalal-hash-baz also seems problematic for two reasons. First, as will be argued in the next section, ‘almah means a young woman of marriageable age who is in fact a virgin. However, if Isaiah already had a son, then his wife cannot be an ‘almah. As seen earlier, some argue that Isaiah’s wife died and he remarried, but this is an argument from silence. The biggest problem with Maher-shalal-hash-baz occurs in

\textsuperscript{432} Grabbe, Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages, 74.

\textsuperscript{433} Herbert M. Wolf, Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 91.


\textsuperscript{435} Seitz, Isaiah 1-39, 74. Seitz even admits this in his own argument.
Isaiah 8:8, when the land is called the land of Immanuel. It is hard to believe that the land would be called the land of the son of the prophet instead of a child in the Davidic line (like the child/son in 9:6-7).

Second, it seems difficult to assert that Immanuel was born during the time of Ahaz and yet no one in the story has the characteristics attributed to him. Hezekiah, while important in the book of Isaiah, is never called Immanuel or described with divine/Messianic characteristics. Instead, he was viewed as a good king that also made mistakes in chapter 39. Maher-shalal-hash-baz was not named Immanuel and was in fact named for a different purpose, as his name symbolizes the quick destruction that will come, not the salvation of God with us. A child born to a nameless virgin, such as Ahaz’s wife or a member of his harem, that was never mentioned would be a major oversight by Isaiah.

Third, many have argued that if the birth was not in some way miraculous and was simply an ordinary birth, then how could it serve as a sign? Hindson writes, “In Scripture the word refers to something addressed to the senses to attest the existence of divine power. Often extraordinary events were given as a sign to assure faith or to demonstrate authority.” Chrysostom wrote centuries ago, “If the one who was to give birth was not a virgin but the conception occurred in the natural manner, then what sort of sign would this be? A sign must be

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436 Calvin wrote in his day against this position, stating, “As to those who think that it was Isaiah’s son, it is an utterly frivolous conjecture; for we do not read that a deliverer would be raised up from the seed of Isaiah, who should be called Immanuel; for this title is far too illustrious to admit of being applied to any man.” Calvin, Isaiah, 244.

extraordinary and strange, or how else could it be a sign?\footnote{438} The announcement seems overdone if it was simply a regular birth.

Finally, let us examine the argument that Matthew’s Messianic interpretation was influenced by the LXX and ignores other areas of evidence. One could argue that the scholars were mistaken, but it does show that there were Jews, prior to the writing of the book of Matthew, that translated the word as virgin. While this argument does not definitively prove the Messianic interpretation, it does argue that Jews translated ‘almah virgin.\footnote{439} Also, Matthew himself was a Jew and as a tax collector would have been able to read and write, so it is very unlikely that he would have made a mistake in his translation.

Perhaps more importantly is that there are other passages, written by Isaiah and a contemporary of Isaiah, that also described a birth of a divine Messianic child. Micah 5:2 not only described the birthplace of the Messiah, Bethlehem, but also attributed a divine nature to the child. Indeed, the wording “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (\textit{meqqedem}), points to deity, to a being from the beginning of time.\footnote{440} Isaiah 9 speaks of the coming of a divine child who has the characteristics of Yahweh. Isaiah 11, in the same section as 7 and 9, is


\footnote{439} While this argument was very important in previous decades when critical scholars argued that almah did not mean virgin, it has lessened in impact to an extent. Many non-messianic scholars now argue that the woman in question was indeed a virgin at the time of the proclamation, but then had intercourse and had a child during Isaiah’s time. Thus, the argument is less about the virginity itself and more about which virgin was being described.

also Messianic.\textsuperscript{441} Thus, one cannot simply argue that Matthew’s interpretation is the sole reason Christians view the passage as Messianic.

The second view, the Messianic view, argues that the passage was a direct prediction of the coming Messiah. Many of the Messianic arguments have already been presented in response to the previous view, but two more will be addressed. First, contrary to the non-Messianic view, that asserts that there must be a contemporary relevance for Ahaz to make the sign valid, the sign can only have validity if it is Messianic.\textsuperscript{442} Adamthwaite argues that the major point of contention in the passage was that the Davidic line was in danger if Ahaz’s enemies succeeded.\textsuperscript{443} If the Messiah would be born in the future, then it would show that Ahaz and his line would not be killed and replaced. Feinburg states it well writing, “The assurance that Christ was to be born in Judah, of its royal family, might be a sign to Ahaz, that the kingdom should not perish in his day…that the further off it was, the stronger the promise of continuance of Judah, which it guaranteed..”\textsuperscript{444} Essentially, if the Messiah would one day come, then it was impossible for the Davidic line to be destroyed during Ahaz’s time. This would be very relevant to the current situation in Ahaz’s time.

Second, the greatest challenge to this interpretation is the timing elements in verse 16ff. If the Messiah would not be born for 700 years, then how would the defeat of Ahaz’s enemies happen before the child could learn to know right and wrong? Rydelnik argues that the key to

\textsuperscript{441} See next section for argumentation on Isaiah 11.

\textsuperscript{442} This assumes that this premise is even correct. Because Ahaz himself rejected the sign, it could be argued that the sign did not even need to have relevance for Ahaz.


explaining this problem was Shear-Jashub, who came with Isaiah in 7:3. He, along with many other Messianic Jews, argue that the text has two predictions: a long term prediction addressed to the house of David in 7:13-15 and a short-term prediction to Ahaz in 7:16-25. He writes

While many have considered v. 16 to be a continuation of the prophecy in 7:13–15, the grammar of the passage suggests otherwise. The opening phrase in Hebrew can reflect an adversative nuance, allowing for a disjunction between the child described in 7:13–15 and the one described in verse 16. There is a different child in view in this verse. It makes most sense to identify the lad as Shear-Jashub. Otherwise there would be no purpose for God directing Isaiah to bring the boy. Thus having promised the virgin birth of the Messiah (7:13–15), the prophet then points to the very small boy that he has brought along and says, “But before this lad (using the article with a demonstrative force) knows enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.”

Also, the grammar shifts in the passage from second person singular with Ahaz (v.10) to second person plural for the prophecy to the house of Judah (v. 13) and then back to second person singular with reference to Ahaz (v. 16). Thus, it is highly likely that two different referents are in view in the passage. This argument answers the immediate context question and explains why Yahweh would tell Isaiah to bring his son to confront the king.

The third view, the dual-fulfillment view, while recent, has become the dominant view within evangelicalism today. This view is a combination view of the previous two views. It takes the same arguments presented by the non-Messianic view to argue that there must have

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445 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, loc. 4276. Rydelnik also connects this to Isaiah 8:18, saying, “In this way, Shear@jashub functioned as a sign to the king. Appropriately, Isaiah could tell Judah in the very next chapter, ‘Here I am with the children the LORD has given me to be signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of Hosts who dwells on Mount Zion.’” Michael Rydelnik, “Isaiah 7:14,” 823.


447 The view was first developed by Albert Barnes in 1845. He admitted in his work that he originally believed the passage was not about Jesus but then changed his mind and created the double fulfillment view. However, a flaw in his argument was that he admitted he was basing his view only on chapters 7-8 and thus ignored the literary context of the entire 7-12 section that also has the divine child prediction in chapter 9 and the branch prediction in chapter 11. Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1845), 1:163.
been an original child born during the time of Ahaz that served as the fulfillment of the sign. However, it also argues that secondarily the sign was a prediction of the virgin birth of the Messiah, which is why Matthew used the passage. For example, Blomberg writes, “In no sense can this prophecy be taken as less than messianic or as fulfilled in a merely human figure. So it is best to see a partial, proleptic fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in his time, with the complete and more glorious fulfillment in Jesus’ own birth.”

While this position at first seems to take the strengths of both arguments, it also has two significant problems. First, although proponents of the view claim that it does not, it does seem to downplay the power of the prophecy if Jesus was only a secondary fulfillment and was never the true emphasis of the prophecy. Second, the view struggles to answer the question of why Isaiah used the definitive article in front of ‘almah if he really had two possible ‘almah’s in mind when making the prediction. It seems that Isaiah had a specific woman in mind when he made the prediction, hence why he used the definitive article. While the view attempts to take the strengths of both views, it also inherently takes some of the weaknesses and creates another weakness.

In conclusion, the Messianic view appears to be the strongest position of the three outlined, although technically for the purpose of this dissertation all three views serve the purpose of showing that Yahweh can predict the future. The non-Messianic view, while denying a future Messianic prediction, still makes the argument that Yahweh both predicted the downfall

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448 Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 60. Wilkins similarly argues, “The most satisfactory interpretation takes the best of these views and recognizes that God was giving through Isaiah a sign that had historical significance and fulfillment in the days of Ahaz, but that God was also giving through Isaiah a prophecy of a future messianic deliverer that was fulfilled in the conception and birth of Jesus.” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 80.
of Ahaz’s enemies and the prediction of a child, although the apologetic significance is devalued because of the lack of a direct reference to the child. Both the dual-fulfillment and Messianic views predict both the downfall of Ahaz’s enemies and a coming Messianic child, although the dual-fulfillment view lessens the emphasis of the future Messiah. Therefore, each position in some way argues that Yahweh can predict the future in some manner.

The Suffering Servant 52:13-53:12

13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. 14 As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—15 so shall he sprinkle[c] many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured
out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The Suffering Servant passage located in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is one of the most debated passages in the entire Old Testament. Early Judaism and orthodox Christianity have largely viewed the passage as a Messianic prediction while medieval and contemporary Judaism has denied its Messianic interpretation, instead arguing that the Servant was Israel or the remnant of Israel or some other historical figure. Critical scholars (Jewish and Christian) may also argue a non-Messianic interpretation of the passage, usually that the Servant was Deutero-Isaiah. In recent times some evangelical scholars have also accepted a non-messianic interpretation. While other passages that the dissertation has looked at can be valid in terms of Yahweh’s ability to predict in a variety of views, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is different in that the Messianic view on this passage is essential in allowing it to show Yahweh’s predictive power. Therefore, an evaluation of the three views will be presented to argue that the Messianic view, which allows for Yahweh’s ability to predict the future, is the correct interpretation of the passage.

First, the medieval and contemporary Jewish view is that the nation of Israel was the Suffering Servant for three major reasons. First, the term “my servant” in Isaiah 40-55 and beyond is often a reference to Israel as God’s servant people, not to an individual. Schreiner writes, “Because in the remainder of the book of Deutero-Isaiah, which forms the context of the Servant Songs, it is always Jacob/Israel that is meant or addressed as the “servant” this must also be the case in the songs themselves.”449 Some rabbis argued that the servant was not Israel as a whole, but only a remnant. For example, Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki, writing in the mid-

16th century, argued that the Servant was not the people of Israel absolutely, but the people of Israel suffering in exile. Second, Jews argue that this is an ancient interpretation and cite both Origin and Justin Martyr as examples of Jewish arguments that were taking this view very early.

Third, rabbis have argued that the passage was a description of the suffering that the nation had to endure during the exile. Isaac ben Abraham argued that the “he” was a reference to the Servant as Israel and the “we” plural suffixes referred to the nations of the world and therefore, if that is true, then the author was saying Israel suffered vicariously for the sins of the nations. All three of the major medieval Jewish rabbis, Rashi, ibn Ezra and Radaq all made this argument. Rashi said, “Israel suffered in order that by his sufferings atonement might be made for all other nations.” Ibn Ezra said, “The expressions pains and sickness allude to the distress occasioned by exile…By our transgressions are meant the sufferings inflicted on Israel by the nations.” Radaq said, “For the transgression of my people. Each nation will make this confession, saying that in consequence of their own transgression, and not Israel’s had the stroke fallen upon them.” Hence, the modern Jewish view is that Israel suffered for the sins of the nations around them during the exile.

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450 Schreiner, “Isaiah 53 in the Sefer Hizzuk Emunah of Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki,”, 431.

451 Ibid, 432. The idea is both Justin Martyr and Origin wrote arguments against Jews in which they cited that Jews were making this argument. These early Apologist Church Fathers were recording their opponent’s view.

452 Ibid, 432.

453 AD Neubauer S.R. Driver, ed., The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters (Maharashtra: Varda Books, 2005), 2:38. Rashi also argued that the idea of the Servant being cut off from the land of the living was not that he died but that he was exiled from the land of Israel.

454 Neubauer and Driver, ed., The Fifty-Third Chapter, 2:45.

455 Ibid, 2:52.
The major problem that arises from this view is that the nation of Judah was itself a sinful nation and deserved the exile. The idea that the exile occurred so that the Jewish people would suffer for the sins of the nations is completely alien to the rest of the Old Testament. The very book of Isaiah argues that the people would go into exile because of their own sins (especially chapters 1-5). Jeremiah 25, in which the seventy-year captivity was foretold, specifically linked the captivity with the sins of the nation. Ezekiel 8-10 specifically addressed that idolatry had swept through the nation and the glory of Yahweh had already left the Temple because of the sins of the nation. Even if one argues that it was only a remnant within the nation and not the entire nation, both Daniel and Nehemiah, two of the most faithful survivors of the exile and return, both had significant prayers of confession, including themselves and the nation at large, within their accounts (Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 1). Thus, if one reads the prophets and the Old Testament at large, it is incredibly difficult to make the argument that the nation went into exile as a sinless sacrifice to take on the sins of the other nations.

The second view, held by many critical scholars, argues that the passage was not referring to a future Messianic figure, but instead was a reference to Deutero-Isaiah, either written by himself or by one of his disciples. Two major arguments are put forth. First, proponents of this view hold that the passage was a description of the life of the prophet. Deutero-Isaiah’s ministry was hampered by difficulties because of the failure of the people to

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listen and therefore his disciples wrote about his troubles in the passage.\textsuperscript{457} The passage then served as a thanksgiving song from Deutero-Isaiah for Yahweh’s deliverance during his life.\textsuperscript{458}

Seitz’s continues this argument, writing

In my judgment, the servant who is described in 49:1-7 and 50:4-9 was an actual historical figure as well as the prophetic voice at work in these chapters (40-55). That is, more is at work in these passages than literary representation for the purpose of resolving prophecy’s complex legacy. Furthermore, in my view a genetic relationship exists between this voice and the servant who speaks in the first person in 61:1-7, and for this and other reasons a new description of the relationship between chaps. 40-55 and 56-66 is called for. In the first-person account of 50:4-9, an individual describes a vocation of suffering and affliction not unlike that of Jeremiah or of many other figures in Israel’s experience. Prophecy is being described in a way that comports with what we know from Israel’s record of it, including its unclear completion according to God’s designs for it. A real figure, who is the speaker of God’s word in the sections surrounding these descriptions, here understands his suffering as consistent with and the culmination of prophecy as it has taken form in Israel’s past. What is less clear is whether this same figure is being described, now in a lengthy and detailed third-person report, in the dramatic fourth poem (52:13-53:12). My view at this juncture is that the same figure is being described, now by other servants (54:17), who reflect on the significance of the servant’s death. The narrator of 52:13-53:12 is one of the servants who joins in the plural confession found at 53:1-6.\textsuperscript{459}

Therefore, the passage was never meant to be a prediction, but instead was a summary of the prophet’s life.

Second, proponents of the view hold that the passage should not be viewed as Messianic and instead should be viewed as Deutero-Isaiah because the Messiah had not been mentioned in Deutero-Isaiah. For example, Goldingay writes, “It seems unlikely that the servant in 52.13-53.12 is some person who has not been mentioned before and who is not actually identified here

\textsuperscript{457} Paton-Williams, “The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah,”, 98.

\textsuperscript{458} Whybray, \textit{Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet:} 127.

\textsuperscript{459} Seitz, “How Is the Prophet Isaiah Present in the Latter Half of the Book?” , 238.
(e.g. Jehoiachin or Zerubbabel or the Messiah)—or if this is so, the book does not give us enough information to come to a conclusion on the matter. More likely the starting point for identifying the servant is the interplay between people and prophet that has characterized preceding chapters.”

As to why the New Testament authors attributed these passages to Jesus, Mowinckel writes, “It may be said at once that these prophecies were not intended to be Messianic, but that Jesus gave them decisive importance for the concept of the Messiah.”

Two major problems arise with this view. First, it must assume either Deutero-Isaiah authorship or authorship by his disciples. If Isaiah the prophet wrote the text, then it is much harder to argue that Messianic arguments were not already present in the book. The many Messianic passages in the first half of the book could connect to the Suffering Servant as a picture of the Messiah. Second, the Suffering Servant dies as a substitute for the nation. It is hard to argue that any prophet, regardless of what they went through personally, died through vicarious suffering.

The Messianic view argues that the Suffering Servant should be viewed exclusively as the Messiah. Four arguments are put forth to support this view: The Servant suffers vicariously for the sins of others, the Servant is “high and lifted up”, Jewish interpretative history and links to the Davidic Messiah. First, the text asserts that the Servant suffers vicariously for the sins of

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460 Goldingay, Isaiah 40-55, 273.


462 Whybray argues Christians read the vicarious suffering of the Servant back into the text after Jesus’ life. Whybray, Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet, 75. This will be addressed in the Messianic position.

463 A distinction needs to be made between arguments for the Messiah in Isaiah 52-53 and arguments for Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah 52-53. For example, one can argue that Jesus was humiliated just as the Suffering Servant was humiliated and therefore the passage points to Jesus. However, if one only has Isaiah’s message, the idea of humiliation itself does not necessarily point to the passage as Messianic. These four arguments were
others in several places all throughout 53:4-12. In verse four the Servant bore the griefs and carried the sorrows of the people and was smitten and afflicted by Yahweh (v. 10). This is a shocking statement, especially when one considers the belief system of the ANE. Oswalt writes, “Part of the shock of recognition is due to the typical ancient Near Eastern understanding of the source of suffering: if a person is suffering, it is because he or she has done something to deserve it (the book of Job is the classic example in the OT). Thus, if a person is smitten, it is because he or she is a sinner. But this man has been stricken because we are sinners.” The fact that the Servant had done nothing to deserve this punishment will be expounded upon in verse nine, but even in this early verse it is clear that he is taking on the punishment of others.

The idea of borne “נשא, nasah” and carried “סבל, sabbal” also play a critical role in understanding the nature of his substitution. “נשא” is used in Leviticus to show that the sacrificial animal bares the sins of the offeror away so that he no longer must carry the sin. Similarly, “סבל” was used to show the bearing of a burden for another as in Isaiah 46:4, 7 and Lamentations 5:7. These are already established terms that Isaiah was using to argue that the Servant was suffering for others’ sins in their place.

Verse five continues this trajectory of substitution. The Servant was both pierced and crushed for the sins of the people. Young argued that the idea of piercing was not simply a wounding, but was pierced through unto death, a violent death. However, the substitution of

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464 Oswalt, Isaiah 40-66, 386.
466 This assumes that the book of Leviticus or some form of it had already been written.
467 Young, Isaiah 40-66, 346.
the piercing and crushing of the Servant was beneficial for the people. His actions of sacrifice led to peace and healing for others but ultimately not for himself as he instead suffered the punishment for sin for others. Koole notes, “The contrasting prepositional phrases ‘upon him’ and ‘for us’, all this is due to the vicarious suffering of the Servant.” The audience, the “we” in the text, understood in verse five that the sufferings of the Servant were substitutionary for them.

Verse six expands on the substitutionary elements to an even greater extent. The people admit their own failures and that they, like wandering sheep, have turned away into sin. However, instead of receiving the punishment for their sin that they deserved, Yahweh has instead placed the sin of the people on the Servant. That it is Yahweh that does this is significant; it is not that people are falsely accusing the Servant and attempting to blame Him for their sins. Instead, Yahweh Himself is placing the sins of the people on the Servant and therefore the action is justified and acceptable to Him.

The response of the Servant is addressed in verse seven. One would assume that the Servant would be upset at being wrongfully punished for others’ sins. Instead, even though he was oppressed and afflicted, he never defended himself or blamed others. Like a lamb before his shearsers, the Servant remained silent in the face of danger and oppression. Smith sees a contrast between the sinful sheep that wandered away in verse six and the silent sheep, the Servant, who was punished for the sins of the other sheep.

The Servant was then taken away in oppression and judgment and ultimately was “stricken” (killed) because of the sins of the people. Some argue that “cut off out of the land of

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“the living” does not inherently mean that the Servant died. However, Childs argues strongly against this assertion stating, “It has been suggested that it is possible that the servant only risked death or was exiled, allegedly a fate worse than death. In my opinion, these are torturous interpretations and run against the plain sense of the text. The implicit mention of his grave in v. 10 rules out these figurative options.” Indeed, the passage has moved from the Servant being punished for the sins of others to officially dying in place of others for their sins.

Verse nine becomes important to Isaiah’s description of the Servant because it establishes that the Servant was not dying because of his own sins, as Isaiah described that “he had done no violence” and had “no deceit”. Motyer argues that this combination served to affirm that the Servant was sinless in both word and deed. This is a stark contrast to the nation who had turned to idolatry, abused the poor and even had blood on their hands because of their lack of respect of the poor (Jeremiah 2:34-36). That his grave is mentioned also is strong evidence of the death of the Servant, which some Jews and critical scholars deny occurred.

Verse ten continues the theme with the idea of a human offering for guilt after the Lord would crush the Servant. Motyer, in describing the guilt offering, writes, “The guilt offering is found in Leviticus 5:1 – 6:7. The heart of its distinctiveness is its insistence on minute exactness between sin and remedy. It could well be called the ‘satisfaction-offering’. It is used here not so much to affirm that the Servant bore and discharged the guiltiness of our sin, but that what he did

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470 Whybray argues that the Servant never dies in Isaiah 53, arguing instead that it was merely hyperbole. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet*, 105-106.


472 Motyer, *Isaiah*, 380. If Leviticus had not yet been written, this idea must have originated in Judaism as some point.

473 Just as His suffering was underserved, so His burial in a rich man’s tomb was undeserved (from the people’s perspective, since the Servant was deemed a criminal).
is exactly equivalent to what needed to be done.” The offering is also assured to be both received and accepted as legitimate because Yahweh Himself was involved in the process and it was His will for the Servant to accomplish this task.

Verse eleven points to two separate but connected events; the servant will make many righteous but will also bear their sins. First, the Servant must be a righteous person in order to bestow righteousness on others. Spieckermann writes, “The one who intercedes for the sins of others is himself sinless and righteous. In 53:11 his righteousness, which is important for what he effects vicariously, is bound up with his sinlessness.” Childs sees that the two are connected; because the Servant will bear the sins of the people, they can then be counted as righteous. This figure is not simply an ordinary Jewish figure, like a prophet or king, but was uniquely righteous.

Finally, verse 12 concludes the passage with a final declaration of the Servant’s substitutional sacrifice. The Servant died (poured out his soul to death) and yet he bore the sins of the people and then makes intercession for them. Young writes, “The conjunction suggests a gradation; in addition to having borne the sins of many, the servant will also make intercession for the transgressors. Here again there is reflection upon a priestly work of the servant, who pleads before God the merit and virtue of his atoning work as the only ground of acceptance of the transgressors for whom he dies. The basis of the intercession is the substitutionary expiation.

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of the servant.\textsuperscript{477} He essentially serves as the high priest for the nation, interceding on their behalf. Therefore, the Servant, because of his actions, can and does intercede on behalf of the sinners by taking their sinful death and punishment on himself in their place.

Based upon this overview, the text clearly teaches the idea of vicarious suffering on the part of the Servant. Spieckermann lists five criteria based upon the passage.\textsuperscript{478} First, one person intercedes for the sins of others. Second, the one who intercedes for the sins of others is himself sinless and righteous. Third, the vicarious act of the one occurs once for all, meaning the death that he suffers can only occur once. Fourth, the Servant intercedes for the sins of others of his own will. Finally, God brings about the vicarious action of the Servant for the sins of the others intentionally, meaning the action was preordained as both the plan of God and will of God. Brown sums the argument up well when he states, “I cannot see any legitimate reading of Isaiah 53 that denies the effectual, vicarious nature of the Servant’s sufferings.”\textsuperscript{479}

While the Servant’s substitutionary death is established, it alone does not argue that the passage should be viewed as Messianic. For example, Robert Ellis writes, “What the prophet was not able to foresee is that the individual who finally fulfilled the role of the servant was also the Davidic messiah, as well as the ultimate prophet and the great high priest. All the Old Testament offices of Yahweh’s redemptive activity are united in Jesus Christ. While many descendants of Abraham have served in the roles of king, prophet, and priest, Jesus alone has fulfilled the

\textsuperscript{477} Young, \textit{Isaiah 40-66}, 352.


portrait of the remarkable suffering servant of Isaiah 40-55."  The question that arises is whether the New Testament was needed to understand the Messiah as the Suffering Servant or if there is evidence within Isaiah and the Old Testament for that conclusion? The other three arguments presented will address this issue.

First, Oswalt argues that the phrase “High and lifted up” (rwm and nšʾ) shows that the Servant is not just an ordinary man, but shares traits with deity. He argues, “High and lifted up are used in combination four times in this book (and no place else in the OT). In the other three places (6:1; 33:10; 57:15) they describe God.” Goldingay also acknowledges this connection, linking the passage with 6:1 and arguing that the Servant will end up as exalted as Yahweh Himself. If Isaiah 7, 9 and 11 are Messianic and depict a divine child that will grow up as the Messiah, then having a Servant identified with similar Godlike language establishes an identity between the two characters.

Second, there is strong Jewish historical support in identifying the passage as Messianic. Michael Brown has identified nine different pieces of rabbinic literature that connect the Messiah to Isaiah 53: Targum Jonathan interprets Isaiah 53 with reference to the Messiah, the Talmud refers Isaiah 53:4 to the Messiah, Ruth Rabbah interprets 53:5 with reference to the Messiah, Midrash Tanchuma applies both 52:13, speaking of the Servant’s exaltation and 53:3 to the Messiah, Yalkut Shimoni applies 52:13 to the Messiah, Maimonides refers Isaiah 53:2 with the Messiah, Nachmanides connects the Messiah to 52:13, Rabbi Moshe Alshech connected the

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480 Robert R. Ellis, “The Remarkable Suffering Servant of Isaiah 40-55,” Southwestern Journal of Theology 34 (1991): 30. Ellis does not deny that it is the Messiah, only that it is not apparent in this particular text.


482 Goldingay, Isaiah, loc. 5878.
Messiah to Isaiah 53 and the Zohar does as well.\textsuperscript{483} Arnold Fruchtenbaum listed 27 different Jewish Messianic interpretations of Isaiah 53, all given before the tenth century AD.\textsuperscript{484} While one can argue that these views have been rejected by modern Jewish rabbis, it does show that there was a substantial amount of Jewish thought throughout history, especially prior to Rashi, ibn Ezra and Radaq, that have viewed the passage as Messianic.\textsuperscript{485}

Finally, Daniel Block has laid out eight connections between the Messiah and the Suffering Servant passage of Isaiah 53.\textsuperscript{486} First, the expression “my servant” is commonly used of royal figures in both Isaiah 37:35 and other Old Testament passages. Second, the declaration that Yahweh has put His Spirit on His servant accords with a royal identity and finds explicit support in Isaiah 11:1-3. Third, the role of the servant as one who brings forth justice and establishes it to the ends of the earth accords with royal functions. Fourth, the reference to the response of kings and the promise of victory supports a royal interpretation. Fifth, the botanical imagery in 53:2 recalls 11:1 and other horticultural Davidic messianic references. Six, the reference to his “superhuman anointing” in 52:14 points to a connection with Isaiah 11. Seventh, the notice of a rich burial in the passage suites a royal person. Finally, Zechariah 11:8 and 12:10 joins his predecessor in portraying him as one whom the people reject and as one who is struck in accordance with the will of Yahweh.

\textsuperscript{483} Brown, \textit{Gospel According to Isaiah 53}, 63.

\textsuperscript{484} See Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “A Survey of the Rabbinic Interpretations of Isaiah 5212: 13-53” (paper Presented at the annual meeting of the Pre-tribulation Research Center, Dallas, TX, December 12, 2019).

\textsuperscript{485} However, a modern Hasidic movement in Judaism known as the Lubavitchers recognized their Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson as “King Messiah” in the 1990’s. His death was interpreted as messianic based on Isaiah 53 and the group still expects his return from the dead, also based on their understanding of this text.

In conclusion, the Messianic view has significant support both in the passage of Isaiah itself as well as other connecting passages in the Old Testament and Judaic support. The Servant has some divine qualities and yet humbles himself to the point of death. This would mean that Yahweh predicted that a future Messianic figure would suffer a violent death as a substitute for others. This passage, in combination with Isaiah 7, shows that Yahweh had the ability to predict future events well beyond the scope of Isaiah’s immediate context.

Apologetic Significance

While the Messianic predictions of Yahweh in the book of Isaiah did not have a major apologetic impact in Isaiah’s lifetime, except for perhaps the sign given to Ahaz that he ultimately ignored, they were used apologetically in the life of the early church. Matthew 1:23 cited Isaiah 7:14 as a prophetic fulfillment of Jesus’ birth 700 years earlier. Litwak argues that there are what he calls “passion apologetics” in which the various authors make a link between the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 to Jesus in Matthew 8:17, Luke 22:37, John 12:38 and Romans 10:16. Also, both John the Baptist (John 1:29) and John the Apostle (Revelation) identify Jesus as the lamb of God, very similar to the lamb imagery found in the Suffering Servant passage.

However, perhaps no other passage shows a greater apologetic emphasis from these passages in Isaiah as Acts 8 and the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. In this passage, the eunuch, newly departed from Jerusalem, was reading the scroll of Isaiah when Phillip was sent to him by

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488 Jesus is referred to as the lamb over twenty times in the book of Revelation. Revelation 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9, 9; 21:9, 14, 22; 22:1, 3.
the Holy Spirit. The eunuch did not understand what the message of Isaiah 53 entailed and the identity of the Servant until Phillip showed him that the passage had been fulfilled in Jesus, who was the Suffering Servant. After understanding that the passage had been fulfilled by the death of Christ, the eunuch was then baptized, a sign that he was allying himself with Christ. Fernando argues that the resurrected Jesus in Luke 24 most likely attributed this text to Himself and hence it was used apologetically by the early church to show His fulfillment of the prediction. Consequently, these two passages serve as both an apologetic argument for Yahweh’s ability to predict the future and were later used by the early church to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah.

Messianic Kingdom and New Creation (Eschatological Future)

The book of Isaiah does not stop with the predictions of the Messiah but continues to make the argument that Yahweh can predict future events, even to the end of the age. This will be addressed in Isaiah 2:1-5, Isaiah 4:2-6, Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 65:17-25.

**Isaiah 2:1-5 and Isaiah 4:2-6**

1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, 3 and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his

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489 Polhill writes, “The passage is one of the most difficult texts to interpret of all the servant psalms and even more obscure in the Greek than the Hebrew. In general, however, it depicts the basic pattern of the suffering, humiliation, and exaltation of Christ. The picture of the slaughtered lamb evokes the image of Jesus’ crucifixion, the lamb before his shearsers, that of Jesus’ silence before his accusers. The deprivation of justice reminds one of the false accusations of blasphemy leveled at Christ and the equivocation of Pilate...There is no question what the final phrase would mean to a Christian like Philip. When Christ’s life was taken from the earth, it was taken up in the glory of the resurrection, exalted to the right hand of God.” John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 in The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 224–225.

ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the
word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide
disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their
spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they
learn war anymore. 5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.
2 In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the
land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. 3 And he who is left in Zion
and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in
Jerusalem. 4 when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and
cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a
spirit of burning. 5 Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over
her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for
over all the glory there will be a canopy. 6 There will be a booth for shade by day from
the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 2:1-5 and Isaiah 4:2-6 serve as sister chapters/bookends to the section of Isaiah
2:1-4:6. 491 Both serve as eschatological pictures of a renewed Jerusalem in the future, possibly
during the Messianic Kingdom. 492 Chapter two began with a timing phrase, “in the latter days”

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491 Lim writes, “The beginning oracle in 2:2-5 and the ending one in 4:2-6 form an inclusio, portraying the
fate of Zion/Jerusalem in a very positive way. The elevation of Yahweh’s Temple Mount in 2:2 corresponds to
Yahweh’s creation of his glory over all of Mount Zion in 4:5.” Yongsub Lim, “The Nations in the Book of Isaiah:
Inclusion of the Nations in Yahweh’s Eschatological Salvation on Mount Zion” (PhD diss., Trinity International
University, 2004), 23. Price argues that the passages are connected and function together. He writes, “How Isa 2:2-4
is interpreted affects how Isa 4:2-6 will be understood in the larger context. The reason for this, as shown above, is
that the prophet interrupted his description of the Messianic Age in 2:2-4 to explain how the coming judgment of the
nation would not cancel this hope, now continued in 4:2-6. The structure of these two texts argues for their being
understood in continuity. As Isa 2:2 began with the glory of the future Temple, so 4:6 ends with a description of its
glory. Both Isa 2:3 and 4:3 center on Zion and Jerusalem and the sanctification of its people. As Isa 2:4 ended a
restoration section with Messiah’s rule, so 4:2 begins the renewed restoration focus with this theme. This
A:B:A:B:A arrangement indicates that the prophet joined these two sections in his thought as complementary
descriptions of the Messianic Age. Because most commentators view Isa 2:2-4 as being messianic and as having its
setting in the Messianic Age, textual consistency argues for 4:2-6 being messianic as well. J. Randall Price, “Isaiah
4:2: The Branch of the Lord in the Messianic Age,” in The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and
Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody

492 Critical scholars do not view the passages as authentic to Isaiah and instead argue that they were added
much later. Sweeney and Clements argue that the passages were merely describing the restoration of Jerusalem
during the reign of Cyrus or shortly after. Marvin Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39 with an Introduction to Prophetic
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 40. Clements even argues that all modern commentators have argued that these
passages are not authentic and that this view must be unquestionably upheld. Otto Kaiser dated the passages to the
late 5th century or 4th century after Nehemiah had restored the city walls and the people again had hope for the
future. Kaiser, Isaiah 1-12, 52. However, leading Jewish scholars throughout history, including Rambam, Radak,
Ibn Ezra, Rashi and modern Jewish commentators all see the passage as referring to a future Messianic kingdom. J.
(‘acharit hayyamim), that was used regularly throughout the Old Testament to refer to the distant future in an eschatological sense. It seems highly implausible that the author would use this term if he was either referring to an event in his lifetime or shortly after. Whether the raising of Mount Zion is literal or figurative is highly debated. Keil and Delitzsch argue that the mountain would “one day tower in actual height above all the high places of the earth.” Oswalt takes the opposite view, instead arguing that Isaiah was simply arguing that the nations would understand that Yahweh was the true God in a figurative way that ancient people could understand.

The purpose for this raising is found in the end of verse two through verse three in a threefold description. First, the nations will come to the mountain of the house of the Lord. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was to serve as a drawing place to gather the nations of the world to worship Yahweh, but the nation had largely failed in its mission because of its own sinful condition. At times the people were able to reach their neighbors and some Gentiles did follow Yahweh, but not in overwhelming numbers. However, in the future, the nations will finally flock to Yahweh’s mountain, the Temple Mount (Isaiah 2:2-3).

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493 Roberts argues that the term only means “some indefinite time in the future”. J.J.M. Roberts, First Isaiah, 40. In contra, Keil and Delitzsch argued the expression, “The last days” (acharit hayyamim, “the end of the days”), which does not occur anywhere else in Isaiah, is always used in an eschatological sense. It never refers to the course of history immediately following the time being, but invariably indicates the furthest point in the history of this life - the point which lies on the outermost limits of the speaker's horizon. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary On the Old Testament, loc. 147575. Price states, “Jewish translations all understand this as referring to the ‘messianic times’ though variously translate it as ‘the days to come’ or ‘the end of days’, ‘the time of the end’ or ‘in future days.’ Each has understood this as an eschatological time indicator. Price, Isaiah 2:2-4, 794.

494 Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary On the Old Testament, loc. 147580.

495 Oswalt, Isaiah 1-39, 117. Many of the ancient religions saw their gods as dwelling on a high mountain (Olympus for the Greeks or Cassius for the Phoenicians).
Second, the reason that the nations will come will be for spiritual instruction to learn from Yahweh and will walk in obedience to His ways. This verse has been highly contested by scholars as to whether it is advocating that the nations will become monotheists and only worship Yahweh or if they will simply add Yahweh to their pantheon. For example, Zimran writes:

Does Isaiah believe that they will eventually abandon their idolatrous belief and worship the God of Israel in full or does he merely posit that they will acknowledge God alongside their own gods? Analysis of the vision as an autonomous periscope allows no easy or conclusive answer to this question. It is possible to contend that in describing the nations going up to the Mount of the LORD and expressing their desire that God instruct them in His ways so that they might walk in His paths and asserting that the Torah will go forth from Jerusalem, Isaiah is portraying a scene in which the nations fully recognize God’s sovereignty and seek to follow His ways—which includes forsaking their idols. Alternatively, the vision may be understood as depicting a partial acceptance of the God of Israel’s ways, the nations continuing to worship their own gods at the same time.496

Roberts similarly argues that the nations are only going to know how to serve Yahweh because He is supreme and not serving Him would be dangerous, not because they have turned to Him spiritually.497

However, the third description seems to clear up this argument as Isaiah describes that the law would be sent out from Zion as a part of this teaching. It is very difficult to argue that the law, which denied worshipping other deities, would allow the nations to merely worship Yahweh as a part of their pantheon and not as the true and only God. If Yahweh through His prophets had constantly rebuked the nation for worshipping idols, there is no logical way for one to argue that Yahweh would allow for pagan gods to be worshipped alongside Him in the future. Based upon


this passage, it seems that Isaiah is predicting that one day the nations will finally turn to Yahweh and worship Him alone as the true God.

Verse four declares the radical change that will take place among the nations because of their spiritual turn to Yahweh. Yahweh will judge all the nations and settle their disputes. Because the people will have a perfect judge, there will no longer be a need for war or weapons to settle disputes between nations. A time of unprecedented universal peace will descend upon the earth as Yahweh rules from Jerusalem. Wolf identifies that this must occur in a future time, as this has never happened in the history of the world. The passage ends with an invitation to the people of Isaiah’s own time. It as if Isaiah was declaring, “If the nations will one day turn to Yahweh, then why will you not turn back to Yahweh now?”

4:2-6 builds upon the foundation laid by 2:1-5 describing how this utopia could be accomplished. The ‘branch of the Lord’ is mentioned in verse two. The identity of this branch is debated. Clements argues that ‘the branch’ is the survivors of Israel because it related to the fruit of the land. Watts similarly argues that the branch is connected to Yahweh and not David and parallels the fruit of the land. However, others view the term as a reference to the coming Messianic figure. Motyer argues that Isaiah 4:2 is the earliest occurrence of the Messianic branch that is developed throughout Isaiah and other prophets. Also, Judaism, beginning with the

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498 Waymeyer does point out that this cannot be the eternal state, as disputes and sin still exist. Matt Waymeyer, *Amillennialism and the Age to Come: A Premillennial Critique of the Two-Age Model* (Woodlands: Kress Biblical Resources, 2016), loc. 656-657.

499 He argues that this will occur after the second coming of Jesus during the Millennial Kingdom. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah*, 77.


501 Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 75.

502 There will be more on the branch concept in Isaiah 11.
Targum, has interpreted the passage as referring to the Messiah.\footnote{Oswalt, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 145.} In this view, the fruit of the land would be the abundance that came with the coming Messianic Age.

Verses 3-4 shows that the survivors who live into the Messianic kingdom will have a spiritual transformation after the Lord had purged Jerusalem of its sinful rebellion.\footnote{Proponents of the non-Messianic view argue that this purge and restoration occurred after the exile, which could not be the case if the branch is the Messiah.} Verse 5 uses Exodus terminology to show the permanence of Yahweh’s presence with the restored people. During the Exodus, Yahweh directed His people with a cloud by day and a flaming fire by night. However, in the future the cloud and fire will instead serve as a canopy for the entire nation. Many commentators see this canopy in relation to a wedding canopy that covered both the bride and groom, possibly a reference to a restored marriage between Yahweh and his bride Israel.\footnote{Young, \textit{The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–18}, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 187.} Thus, the presence of Yahweh would fill the entire site of Mount Zion. Finally, Yahweh will provide a sanctuary for the restored nation, giving them a “booth” (\textit{sukkah}) that will protect them both from the heat and the weather.

Young argues that this would be a familiar picture for Isaiah’s audience, writing, “As in the fields there is a booth in which the shepherd may find refuge, so in the new age will there also be such protection. To an Oriental this would be a beautiful picture of the blessing and protection that was so much needed.”\footnote{Ibid, 187.} While some want to place this event during the return from the exile, the language would have to be severely downplayed to make it fit that period of history. While the Jews came back to the land, they were destitute in many ways and were under Persian dominance. While they did rebuild the Temple, they still never had the type of spiritual
revival that is presented in the text. In addition, in the Old Testament Yahweh’s presence (Shekinah) never returned to the Second Temple. Finally, if the passage is connected to Isaiah 2 and the Messianic figure is viewed as the branch, then it could not occur after the exile because the Messiah had not yet arrived. Therefore, it seems better to understand the passage as a reference to a future event during the time of the Messianic Kingdom (Ezekiel 43:1-7). These two passages then both show that Yahweh could predict future events, even to the point of the eschatological future.

Isaiah 11

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. 9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

12 He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. 13 The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. 14 But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. 15 And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will
wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

Isaiah 11 is a complicated passage to interpret but presents a significant argument that is both Messianic and eschatological. Verse one opens up the chapter by identifying a future Messianic figure that Isaiah refers to as the “shoot” and the “branch”. Three terms appear in this passage in Hebrew that are all similar but show different elements. The idea of the shoot is the Hebrew term “חטר, choter” which has the idea of “new growth sprouting from a root-stock stump.” Thus, it shows the humble origins of the Davidic figure. The idea of the branch is the Hebrew term “נצר, natsir” has the idea of “implying a plant of the same kind of the next generation.” Thus, the Davidic root is from the same line but a future generation.

Some have tried to connect this figure with Ahaz or Hezekiah, including medieval Jewish rabbis and many critical scholars. However, ancient Jewish rabbis in the Targum tied this to

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508 Ibid.

509 Kahn points out that critical scholars have dated the passage anywhere from 734 BC to 170 BC Dan’el Kahn, “Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah 11: 11-16,” Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections 12 (2016): 11. Corley argues that the passage was not originally Messianic in its original context but later was viewed as Messianic after the return from exile. Jeremy Corley, “Elements of Coronation Ritual in Isaiah 11: 1-10,” Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association 35 (2012): 2. The problem with this view is that the earlier Jewish sources viewed it as a reference to the Messiah and only later Jewish sources changed this position, the opposite of Corley’s view. Blenkinsopp argued that the passage should be dated during the exile or most likely postexilic because it sounded comparable to Third Isaiah. Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 109. Roberts argues that the passage was not Messianic but referred to any new king that would arise and lead the nation back to glory. J.J.M. Roberts, First Isaiah, 189. Westermann argues that the concept of a royal savior only occurred in the exilic or postexilic period. Claus Westermann, Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament, trans. Keith Crim (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 86. Sweeney argues that this passage must belong to the time of Josiah because Hezekiah and Ahaz’s positions were never seriously threatened. Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39, 204. However, Ahaz was invaded by Syria and Israel and Hezekiah was invaded by Assyria, both which threatened their lines. Clements argues that the stump must mean that the passage was exilic or postexilic after the destruction of Jerusalem. Clements, Isaiah 1: 39, 121. Johnston argues that the passage was originally about Hezekiah, but after he failed was vague enough to be shifted to the Messiah. Gordon H. Johnston, Darrell L. Bock, and Herbert W. Bateman IV, Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 149. Hindson counters this argument writing, “Johnston’s suggestion that Isaiah initially believed this King to be Hezekiah is not
the Messiah. The Dead Sea Scrolls also clearly link this figure to the end times. In fact, other Old Testament passages use the term to refer to the Messiah: Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15 and Zechariah 3:8. Therefore, it seems that these medieval rabbis changed their own ancient interpretation to make it look less Messianic. It also seems impossible based upon the characteristics of the figure in the following verses, as well as Messianic figures that Isaiah has already laid out in chapters seven and nine. This figure is clearly not just another member of the Davidic line but has supernatural characteristics. The idea of the “stump” is important because it shows that the current Davidic dynasty will have great trouble and be cut down all the way to its very roots. Ahaz or Hezekiah therefore cannot be this figure because the stump had not been cut down until the destruction of Judah and the Babylonian exile.

supported by the biblical text. First, the Davidic line was not “cut down” or reduced to a “stump” in Hezekiah’s time. In response to Isaiah’s later warning about the coming disastrous Babylonian invasion, Hezekiah remarked, “For there will be peace and security during my lifetime” (Isa 39:8). Second, the Babylonians, not the Assyrians, removed the last Davidic king from the throne in Jerusalem (2 Kg 25:5-7). Third, the context of Isaiah 11:1-16 is clearly eschatological (“on that day”) and is in no way limited to Hezekiah’s time. Edward E. Hindson, “Isaiah 11:1-16: The Reign of the Righteous Messianic King,” in The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 847.

510 Young, Isaiah 1-18, 380.

511 4Q161 states, “This saying refers to the Branch of David, who will appear in the last days.” This cannot be Ahaz or Hezekiah. The Isaiah Targum renders the verse, “And a king shall come forth from the sons of Jesse, and the Messiah shall be exalted from the sons of his sons” (cf. Targum Isaiah 11:6: “In the days of the messiah of Israel”…Messianic interpretation underlies 4Q295 5:1-6 and probably Testament of Levi 18:7 as well.” Evans, “The Messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 93.

512 Smith argues that these passages were written later and used Isaiah’s terminology that had already been established. James Smith, What the Bible Teaches About the Promised Messiah (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 246.

513 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 268. None of the Davidic kings that came after the time of Isaiah ever even come close to the ideal nature that Isaiah writes about with this Messianic figure.

514 Chisholm argues that Isaiah and the other prophets understood that the normal Davidic dynasty would ultimately fail and that only the Messianic Davidic king would make the ideal a reality. Robert Chisholm Jr., “The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah's Servant Songs,” Bibliotheca Sacra 163 (2006): 389.
The connection with Jesse also plays an important role in connecting this branch to the Davidic line. This is not merely some future figure that will come and save Israel, but from the very kingly line of David, which is the same line of Ahaz whose sin was leading Judah into disarray. One might wonder why Isaiah used Jesse instead of David. First, it may be to show that God began the Davidic line from very humble origins. Jesse was not from a kingly line, but instead through David formed the kingly line of Judah. God did not start the kingly Messianic line from a high and mighty kingly line, but instead from a small Israelite family and a young shepherd boy.

Second, Oswalt believes that Isaiah is going to the very foundation of the Davidic line and bypassing David himself, in part because of David’s sinful actions while he was king. While David was a godly king, he was not without his faults, including covering up murder and adultery. Oswalt writes, “Although the tree of Davidic pride has been cut down and burned, there is still life in the original root, a life that resides finally in the faithfulness of God.” This new future king will come from a clean slate by starting at the very foundation of the dynasty. Therefore, by bypassing David, Isaiah may be showing that the new Messianic figure is even greater than David.

Finally, the branch is not an ordinary branch, but instead a branch that bears fruit. This contrasts with Ahaz and his line that had failed to live up to God’s standards that not only was not bearing good fruit but was bearing bad fruit by subjecting the nation to paganism and in trusting Assyria for help. Smith writes, “This twig/branch/shoot, which is the sign of life within the stump, will bear fruit—it will not die out or be cut off. The “shoot” (ḥōter) is a symbol of

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515 Oswalt, Isaiah, loc. 3976.
hope and a clear contrast to the hopelessness of Ahaz’s policies, which nearly destroyed the nation and its Davidic line of rulers (the stump).\textsuperscript{516} In Isaiah’s day, the people would have had little confidence in looking to their king for wisdom and success, but in the future this Messiah will bear fruit which will lead to a successful kingship.

In verse two, Isaiah gave characteristics of the coming branch. First, Isaiah declares that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon the branch. This is important because it shows that the branch continues a long line of figures in the Old Testament that were anointed by the Holy Spirit. Moses, Joshua, many of the judges, kings and prophets were all given anointings from the Holy Spirit. Even Saul and Samson were filled with the Spirit, although the Spirit departed from them due to their rebellious actions. Thus, this branch will continue a long line of Israelite leaders that have led the nation through the Holy Spirit that God had placed upon them.

Second, the Spirit will give the branch wisdom and understanding. This is in direct contrast to Ahaz. Smith writes, “This new ruler will not make the foolish mistakes of Ahaz who acted based on what made sense from a shortsighted, human, political perspective.”\textsuperscript{517} This new ruler will have the ability to understand and interpret the proper action to take. Whereas the line of Davidic kings had failed because they had used their own wisdom and understanding instead of looking to God, with exceptions such as Hezekiah, the new Davidic ruler will have the wherewithal to know where to look to for proper understanding.

\textsuperscript{516} Smith, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 271.

\textsuperscript{517} Ibid. This is one of the major problems that all of humanity must address. Mankind, without the omniscience of God, will always be limited in their understanding and therefore must trust God when it comes to future events.
Third, the Spirit of God will equip leaders with gifts related to the practical accomplishment of tasks by giving him council and might. Smith notes, "It is not enough to only be a wise ruler, but also a ruler that has the strength to carry out this wisdom and understanding. If the Messianic king was merely a ruler that was under a Gentile nation and had little power to implement decisions, then he would be a lesser figure. Instead, he will have the strength and might to accomplish his purposes. Young writes, “Having chosen the right means and made the right decisions, the Messiah exhibits a firmness and constancy in executing these decisions.” The Messiah is both wise and strong and will be able to accomplish his purposes with firmness and tenacity.

Fourth, the Messiah will have divine knowledge and the fear of the Lord, which Proverbs identifies as the beginning of wisdom. The people will not have to worry about whether or not the ruler is in line with the Lord, but instead will be able to trust him completely because he models a fear of the Lord. Oswalt writes, “Because the Messiah will be characterized by this fear of the Lord, he can be depended upon to perceive correctly and to act with integrity.” Ahaz had no thought about Yahweh when he made his decisions and had no fear of the Lord. On the other hand, the Messiah will be the exact opposite of Ahaz and will lead the people back to Yahweh.

Verses three and four describe the actions of the Messiah. First, the Messiah will not need to use human understanding to make correct judgments. He will not need to base his understanding only on his powers of sight and sound as a normal king would need to do.

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519 Young, *Isaiah 1-18*, 382.
Therefore, Isaiah is beginning to hint in the passage that this ruler is not merely another Davidic king, but instead a figure with supernatural power. Young states, “Step by step, as it were, the veil is being removed from the figure of this King, and we are learning that not only in His human nature is He miraculously equipped, but that He is also Himself a divine person.”

In verse four, Isaiah declares first the positive things the Messiah will do for the people and then the negative things he will do against His enemies. First, the Messiah will judge the poor with righteousness, something that was often overlooked in Israel. Through the Torah, God had established a system of justice for the nation, but unfortunately many of the kings had failed to attribute justice to the nation. Many of the prophets had condemned the leaders of the nation for not taking care of the poor and oppressed. The Messiah will correct this because He will not be swayed by people’s position. Smith writes, “Status, money, or political influence will not derail this new Davidic ruler’s perspective on justice, for idle boasts, excuses, deceptive lies, and false information by the guilty will not prevent the truth from being known.”

The second half of the verse describes the Messiah’s stance against his enemies. His very words will crush his enemies and he will be the judge of the earth through royal decree. Oswalt writes, “The Messiah will carry out God’s function of judging the earth, while the second stich emphasizes that it is the wicked who will have cause to fear that judgment.” This shows

521 Young, Isaiah 1-18, 384. It is important to understand the idea of progressive revelation when it comes to Messianic prophecy. God did not give a detailed manual of all the characteristics of the future Messiah in Genesis, but instead gives piece after piece spread out throughout the Old Testament. As the Old Testament progresses, more of the picture becomes clearer until the arrival of the New Testament where Jesus is able to connect all of the pictures in his own ministry.

522 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 272. Hezekiah and Josiah, while good, do not come close to this standard.

523 Ibid.

524 Oswalt, Isaiah 1-39, 281.
once again that the Messiah will have divine power, as only God has the power and authority to judge the earth and defeat the wicked.\textsuperscript{525} The Messiah will not only have the power and authority to treat his own people well but will also have the power and authority to bring justice against the enemies of Yahweh. Thus, the Messiah is both Yahweh’s king and judge that will execute his work in the world.

Finally, verse five shows the character of the Messiah. His actions will be righteous and faithful. The Davidic kings had struggled with staying faithful to God and righteous in their actions. The coming Messiah will be the contrast to them; he will act in faithfulness to God and will only deal in righteousness. The theme of this section of Isaiah 11 is that a Messianic figure is coming, and he will be greater than any Davidic king that has every sat on the throne. He will rule and judge as God’s representative on earth and develop a nation that is righteous and faithful to Yahweh. Oswalt sums it up well, stating, “He will one day bring a true descendant of the house of Jesse to rule over his people. Instead of the cowardly shepherd who depends on force to secure his kingdom, this One, filled with the Spirit of God, will rule with fairness and justice and will bring about true šalom.”\textsuperscript{526}

The scene shifts in verse six from the coming Messiah to the coming Messiah’s kingdom.\textsuperscript{527} This passage is difficult to interpret because it is hard to interpret if Isaiah is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[525] While this idea may not be strongly developed in the Old Testament, it becomes clear in the New Testament that Jesus, as the Messiah, has the authority to judge the nations and forgive sins, things that only God could do.
\item[526] Oswalt, \textit{Isaiah}, loc. 3961-3964.
\item[527] Some have tried to downplay the Messiah’s role in the coming of this kingdom of peace. Goswell writes, “I will seek to show that the paradisial conditions of 11:6-9 are not due to the actions of the promised ruler.” However, this appears to be making too great of a distinction between the work of God and the Messianic figure. Greg Goswell, “Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 11,” \textit{WTJ} 79 (2017): 123-35.
\end{footnotes}
speaking literally or figuratively in the passage. Some of the language appears to be so different from the current world that some people view this as strictly metaphoric. Goldingay writes, “A literal interpretation of verses 6-8 would also have difficulty in explaining how wolves and leopards can remain themselves if they lie down with lambs and goats.” However, regardless if one takes the passage literally or figuratively, the idea is still present that the Messianic kingdom will be a time of peace and prosperity in which the curse of sin is radically different than in the current world.

First, in verse six, Isaiah creates several pairings of animals that are normally predatory living together in peace and harmony. Wolves eat lambs and leopards eat young calves in the world, but in the Messianic kingdom those animals will not only not hunt each other but will also lie down with each other in peace. Oswalt lays out three ways to interpret these animal passages. First, there is the literal interpretation that this will occur in the millennial kingdom. This would infer that the desires of animals would change in some manner, possibly similar to pre-fall conditions. While this is certainly a possibility, it seems to be a stretch to change the animal population in such a great detail.

A second form of interpretation is a spiritualistic interpretation in which the animals represent humans in various spiritual conditions. However, this creates a host of other problems.

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528 Smith, Isaiah 1-39, 268.
529 Goldingay, Isaiah, 88. While this is difficult to understand in human terms, it is not impossible for God, the Creator of the universe, to make changes in the animal kingdom during this time.
530 Van EE argues that the idea presented is not that nature is at peace, but that the predators that were feared by humans were no longer a danger. Joshua Van EE, “Wolf and Lamb as Hyperbolic Blessing: Reassessing Creational Connection in Isaiah 11:6-8,” JBL 137, no. 2 (2018): 319. However, this argument seems very weak because the concept presented is that animal would not eat animal, not that animal would no longer eat human. While that may be inferred, it is not the only reason for the passage.
531 Oswalt, Isaiah 1-39, 283.
Oswalt writes, “It depends solely upon the exegete’s ingenuity to find the correspondences.”

Thus, it would be completely open to the interpreter to figure out which animals represented which group of people, because Isaiah never gives any interpretation of how the animals correspond to humans. It would almost lead to an allegorical interpretation of the passage in which the meaning of the text is solely based upon the understanding of the reader. Therefore, of the three interpretations, this one seems to be the least precise and thus the least likely to be accurate.

A third interpretive view is the figurative view. In this view, the animals are not really at peace with one another, but Isaiah is merely showing symbolically just how peaceful the time of the Messiah will be during his kingdom. Oswalt writes

In this approach one concludes that an extended figure of speech is being used to make a single, overarching point, namely, that in the Messiah’s reign the fears associated with insecurity, danger, and evil will be removed, not only for the individual but for the world as well. Precociously how God may choose to do this in his infinite creativity is his to decide. But that he will do so we may confidently believe.

Thus, for Oswalt, the how is not as important as the completion. The Messianic kingdom will be a time of great peace and Isaiah only used the animals symbolically just to show how peaceful the kingdom will become. Most proponents of this position, such as Young and Oswalt, believe that the Messianic kingdom is the church age.

The end of verse six and verse seven continue with this theme of showing peace between mankind and animals. Verse six ends describing that a young child will be able to lead a calf and

532 Oswalt, Isaiah 1-39, 283.

533 Ibid.

534 If Isaiah had lived in a modern context and had chosen to use nations, he might have said something like Israel and Iran will become great allies and lead to a great peace.
a lion, something that no parent would ever allow and no child would ever be able to accomplish in a contemporary world. Then, a cow and a bear will not only graze together, but will place their children together, something that is completely foreign to a contemporary world. Finally, Isaiah refers to a lion eating straw like an ox. Young writes, “The lion, losing his lion nature, pastures like an ox, eating the straw which sledges had cut to make it suitable for the tame beasts.” It seems like the lion has changed his nature and acts like a domesticated animal instead of a predator.

In verse eight, Isaiah dramatizes the peacefulness of the kingdom to an even greater extent by declaring that the enmity between man and serpent, started in the early chapters of Genesis, will be reversed as a child will not only play over the den of serpents, but a child will also be able to put his hand in the den of the serpent. Motyer writes, “The sequence in verse 6 moved from the beasts to the child; but now the relationship of humankind to reptiles is in focus: not the restoration of true ‘dominion’ as in verse 6, but the lifting of the curse of Genesis 3:15. The ‘enmity’ has gone.” Young argues that the enmity between man and serpent is the oldest of enmities and that even that age old struggle will be destroyed by the Messiah and his coming kingdom.

Finally, in verse nine, the real purpose behind the Messianic kingdom is revealed. The world will be different because the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The idea of

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535 Young, Isaiah 1-18, 389.

536 This verse is used by many in the literal interpretation to show that animal’s natures will change during the millennium.

537 Motyer, Isaiah, 119.

538 Young, Isaiah 1-18, 389.
fullness comes from the Hebrew term “מֶלֶךְ, molah” which is a farming term used to show a full crop.\(^{539}\) Thus, it comes with the idea that everyone will know of the Lord, but not necessarily that everyone will follow the Lord. Young states, “The reason for this absence of harm is to be found in the knowledge of Yahweh. Men will know God, which involves first of all a theoretical knowledge, but it includes practical knowledge also.”\(^{540}\) In Isaiah’s day, not only did the nations around Judah fail to know the Lord, but most of the nation itself had no knowledge of the Lord. However, in the kingdom, the knowledge of the Lord will spread to every corner of the globe and be recognized by all, both Jew and Gentile. Thus, with the coming of the Messiah, a new world will arise. Van Gronigan writes, “The universal seeking of the nations is a fulfillment of what Yahweh had promised Abraham and what had taken place in an initial way when Solomon, the wise king, ruled in peace. A greater than the first Solomon is to come and serve more purposefully and fruitfully.”\(^{541}\) Thus, the coming Messiah will one day reign and literally change the world by bringing great peace and knowledge of the Lord to the earth.

Verses 10-16 shift from the Messiah and his kingdom to how the Messiah will interact with the nations, including a renewed Jewish state. In verse ten, the Messiah will stand as a signal to the people, both Jew and Gentile. Some have attempted to distinguish this “root of Jesse” as different from the branch of 11:1, arguing that this new figure is the remnant of Israel,

\(^{539}\) Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Deuteronomy 22:9 is an example of this term, stating “You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited.

\(^{540}\) Young, *Isaiah 1-18*, 392.

but that is unlikely because this leader reunites Judah and Israel. The Hebrew term, while not identical, is also similar, as “שׁוֹר, sores” continues the idea of “a kinship of successive generations.” The idea of standing is important because it shows the power and influence of the Messiah. Oswalt connects this passage to chapter five, stating, “The contrast with 5:26 is one of these. There God raises an ensign to call the nations to the dismemberment of his people. Here he raises another ensign to call his people home.” He will be the figurehead that unites the nation when it returns and is restored, something that no king had been able to accomplish since the reign of Solomon under the united monarchy.

The Messiah will also have a unique relationship with the nations surrounding Israel. Not only will the nations see and recognize him but will inquire of him. Thus, they are gathering information, presumably religious instruction, from the Messiah. Young writes, “Unto him the Gentile nations, who know not Yahweh, will seek for the purpose of obtaining religious instruction.” When the Messiah arrives, Israel will finally accomplish its purpose in bringing the nations to Yahweh, something that they failed to do throughout the Old Testament. Finally, the nation will receive a glorious resting place, something that they had not had under Ahaz and would certainly not have in the following decades with the coming threat of Babylon.

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543 Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*


545 Young, *Isaiah 1-18*, 393. The idea of the gentile nations knowing the Lord through the actions of Yahweh becomes a fairly prominent theme throughout the writings of the prophets, with the greatest example being the ministry of Jonah. However, one does not have to look too far within the book of Isaiah to notice a connection between Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 2. In chapter 2, the nations would come up to learn the law from Yahweh and in chapter 11 the nations will learn from the Messiah. This may be a subtle hint to a divine nature in the Messiah.
In verse eleven, Isaiah declares that a remnant of Israel will return from many nations. The idea of God extending his hand a second time. God will once again intervene in Israel’s history and deliver them from Gentile nations. Fruchtenbaum argues that the regathering of the nation is fundamental for Israelite eschatology. He writes

The regathering of Israel, following the regeneration, is another high point of prophetic revelation to be found in many of the prophets. In Isaiah 11:11–12:6, the final regathering is described as the second of the world-wide regathering of Israel. The first regathering is the one in unbelief prior to the Great Tribulation in preparation for judgment. The regathering described in this passage is the second one (v. 11a), in faith and in preparation for the millennial blessings. This regathering is not merely local from the nations of the Middle East (v. 11b), but from all over the world (v. 12). Isaiah then goes on to develop certain characteristics of Israel’s final regathering.546

The question that arises in the passage then is when this return occurred or will occur in the future. The first possible solution would be that Isaiah is referring to the return from the Babylonian exile with the decree of Cyrus. However, this does not appear to be the case because the Messiah was not responsible for this return and the people only returned from Babylon and not many nations. Oswalt writes, “The Dispersion was greater than anything that happened between 722 and 586 BC, and the return in 538 BC was only from Babylon and not from these other lands. This invites us to consider that the “second time” may point to a second return from exile.”547 The first return under Cyrus, while great, is not the return from the diaspora under the Messiah. Instead, it appears that this return will occur in the future and will bring Jews back from


547 Oswalt, Isaiah, loc. 4025. That the Jews have been separated from their nation for thousands of years and yet still have been able to keep their identity intact plays a significant role in this concept. Had the Jews been destroyed, either in 586 BC or 70 A.D. and lost their identity, then one would be forced to view the Babylonian exile as the fulfillment of this passage. However, a future option is available because of the Jews remaining a unique people.
every corner of the globe. Therefore, this “second time,” based on the context, must be the final time, when the promised regathering and restoration of the nation is completely fulfilled. Verse twelve shows that it will be the signal of the Messiah that will ultimately be responsible to drawing the Jews back to the land.

Verse thirteen shows that the relationship between Israel and Judah will be radically different in the future than in the present time of Isaiah. In the time of Isaiah with Ahaz, Judah and Israel were not only separated, but were enemies because of Ahaz’s refusal to join Israel’s alliance with Israel and Syria against Assyria. However, in the future, this enmity between Yahweh’s people will be gone. The idea of Ephraim’s jealousy is twofold; both the Temple and the Davidic line were in the southern kingdom. Judah would use the same twofold narrative to lord it over Israel because they viewed Judah as the rightful nation and the people of Israel as deserters.

The Messiah will join the two nations together into one nation again and they will defeat their surrounding enemies, found in verse fourteen. These are the same nations that David was able to defeat during his reign. Motyer writes, “This vision of reconciliation is part of Isaiah’s

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548 Williamson takes the critical view, which argues that Israel and Judah were always two separate nations and never a united monarchy, and argues that this is not a regathering of one nation, but instead that this only represents Jews from the north moving to the south after the fall of Samaria. H.G.M. Williamson, “Judah as Israel in Eight Century Prophecy,” in A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville, ed. Jamie A. Grant, Allison Lo, and Gordon J. Wenham (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 82. This view obviously runs counter to the text of Scripture, which holds that the nation was united under Israel’s first three kings and then divided.

549 Maulhehil writes, “Isaiah’s rhetoric of Re-Conquest is militaristic. In a sense, it sounds at odds with the description of the Peaceful Kingdom in the previous section (Isa 11:6-9). However, peace comes only after the total victory of Yahweh, who brings the nations into submission. War and peace are realities of human existence. Peace comes as a result of Yahweh’s intervention (cf. Isa 9:1-7). The submitted nations will come to worship Yahweh on Zion (Isa 2:2-4).” Andrey Muzhchil, “The Son and the Shoot 9: 1-7 and 11:1-16: A Utopian-Eschatological Interpretation of Isaiah 9 and 11” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2016), 207.
forecast of David’s return and the kingdom that will yet be.”\textsuperscript{550} This is no less than a return to the nation under David, the time when the nation achieved its greatest political and spiritual success.\textsuperscript{551} Thus, the new David will restore the glory and power of the kingdom of his ancestor and his kingdom reign.

Verse fifteen and sixteen finalize the chapter by declaring God’s power and might to restore the Jews using language reminiscent of the Exodus. The sea of Egypt will be decimated, and the people will once again cross over the sea. The return then is seen as a complete work of the Lord. Oswalt states, “The result will be a way prepared for the people of God to return. Thus, it is always. God will make a way where human power cannot avail. In this recognition of, and dependence upon, God’s gracious power les the hope of the world.\textsuperscript{552} God would restore the nation that human kings had split and would bring them back to their rightful power.

Finally, verse sixteen is a promise from Yahweh that those that return will have the same safety that the original Israelites had coming out of the Exodus. A highway from Assyria would allow those exiles to return from exile.\textsuperscript{553} The northern kingdom was destroyed and taken away by Assyria. If the northern kingdom would be restored back to Israel, then at least some of the Jews would have to return from that region. Hindson sums up the future elements of the chapter succinctly, writing, “Chapter 11 makes it clear that His coming has moved into the distant future…In contrast to the immediate Assyrian threat, the prophet Isaiah again extends the hope

\textsuperscript{550} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 120.

\textsuperscript{551} Oswalt, \textit{Isaiah 1-39}, 388.

\textsuperscript{552} Ibid, 289.

\textsuperscript{553} This is not to be confused with the return from the Babylonian Exile, as they were taken away to Babylon. This instead points to the people of Israel, not Judah, returning to the land from their exile that occurred in 722 BC.
of a royal messiah (11:1-16). Since the final cutting down of the Davidic royal line was yet to come in 586 BC, it can be concluded that the shoot arising from the stump of that line is coming in the future.” Ultimately, chapter 11 shows that Yahweh was predicting a future time in which the nation would be restored under the Messianic king and a time of peace would occur in the Messianic Age to come.

**Isaiah 65:17-25**

17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20 No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23 They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. 24 Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Isaiah 65:17-25 is a significant passage not only in the book of Isaiah, but in the entire Old Testament in part because it is the only passage that directly references the new heavens and new earth. Judaism, especially in the intertestamental period, had a major emphasis on the new earth as an eschatological phenomenon. The New Testament speaks of the new heavens and new earth in both 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21-22. The question then becomes what did Isaiah

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mean in the original context of this passage? Three positions will be addressed: the return from exile view, the eschatological view and the millennial view. 556

The first view holds that the passage was not a prediction of the end times but instead was merely a hope/prediction of the return after the exile. Westermann argues that this section was merely the hope of Trito-Isaiah, who believed the nation would have more success after the return under Persian control. 557 Watts similarly writes, “Only after the old present order has gone can a new age be created, but the references in chaps. 40–66 presumed a position in which the former age is already gone and a new age with Cyrus and his successors has begun. Here, too, the new order that is being created is (like chap. 45) the one in which Persia holds sway over the entire area so that Jerusalem can be rebuilt.” 558

Goldingay similarly argues that the passage was never about the eschaton but instead was about the return from exile. He writes, “The line does not signify a transition to eschatological or apocalyptic thinking. The prophecy is not referring to the creation of a new planetary system or implying that Yahweh is going back to square one of the process of creation.” 559 Goldingay does not see this as occurring at the end of time, but instead places it at the return from the exile or

556 This is not a comprehensive list of all of the views, but is an overview of the three largest views. For example, Hanson argues that this was merely a dream from Third-Isaiah, a hope that the future would be better. He writes, “We can picture the prophet closing his eyes, quietly reflecting, and then, after a period of silence, replying with the words in verses 17-25.” Hanson, Isaiah 40-66, 245. In order for this to be a true prediction of the future, then view two or three make the strongest apologetic argument.

557 He also argues that vs. 17 and 25 were not original and were expanded later. Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 299. Blenkinsopp strongly rejects this view, calling it “an unnecessary elaboration and removes any logical or thematic hiatus between vv 16 and 18.” Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 56-66, 285.

558 Watts, Isaiah 34-66, 958. Watts actually does not comment on verse 20 in his commentary.

sometime soon for the author of Third Isaiah. He writes, “While later thinkers may take the line’s language in this direction (e.g. 1 Enoch 91:16; Rev 21:1-5), this is not the prophet’s idea.”\textsuperscript{560} He argues this through three main points.

First, he argues that to view this as an eschatological new creation, either a new cosmos or recreation, would be very strange based upon the context of not only Isaiah, but also the rest of the Old Testament. He writes, “Neither preceding material in the book of Isaiah nor other material in the Old Testament has suggested any reason for thinking in terms of the creation of a new cosmos.”\textsuperscript{561} He is not arguing that Isaiah does not address eschatological ideas or predict the distant future, but instead that this would be the only section in the Old Testament that would describe this event.\textsuperscript{562} For him, an important event like the creation or recreation of the earth would occur in other prophetic literature if Isaiah was really referring to such a significant event.

Second, Goldingay views the new heaven and new earth in Third Isaiah’s mind as a renewal of Israel, not necessarily a renewal or creation of the cosmos and earth. He writes, “New heavens and a new earth is an image for a transformation of the way life works out for the community, a powerful metaphor for the complete transformation of Jerusalem within history.”\textsuperscript{563} Thus, for Goldingay, the new heavens and new earth do not represent new or recreation by God, but instead a new atmosphere of transformation within the nation of Israel.

\textsuperscript{560}Goldingay, \textit{Isaiah 56-66}, 468. This seems to be Goldingay’s method to avoid arguing John misused the passage in the book of Revelation.

\textsuperscript{561}Ibid, 468.

\textsuperscript{562}He places the mentioning of new heaven and earth in Isaiah 66 as part of this same context. Therefore, Isaiah only describes the event in one section.

\textsuperscript{563}Goldingay, \textit{Isaiah 56-66}, 468.
He ties this directly with the beginning part of the chapter in which the author described a new Israel that God would restore in the land.

Third, Goldingay does not agree that these new heavens and new earth are eschatological because the conditions in verses 20-25 are too comparable to current earth. When the author described the long life during this time, such as babies not dying and people living exceptionally long lifespans, he does not view this as referring to eternal life. Indeed, he believes that there is no indication in this section that death will be abolished.\(^{564}\) Instead, he views the author as merely describing prosperous long human life, such as discussed in Exodus 23:26.\(^{565}\) If Israel is obedient to God, then God will allow for them to live long lives in the land. However, there is nothing that places this passage in the eschaton.

A second view, the eschaton view held by Gary Smith, J. Alec Motyer and G.K. Beale, goes to the other end of the spectrum in comparison to Goldingay’s view. In this view, Isaiah 65:17-25 describes the perfect conditions found in the eternal state with the creation or recreation of the new heaven and new earth.\(^{566}\) Thus, whereas Goldingay viewed the passage as non-eschatological, Smith, Motyer, Beale and others view it as purely eschatological. The problem that arises in this view is a reading of Isaiah 65 seems to show that death, although rarer during this time, does occur. Smith even acknowledges this idea stating, “The reference to death and a curse on the sinner presents some problems for one would not expect these to be present in the new heavens and the new earth.”\(^{567}\)

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\(^{565}\) Ibid.

\(^{566}\) This view tends to be held by Amillennialists.

\(^{567}\) Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 693.
However, proponents of the view argue that Isaiah was not referring to actual death, but only symbolically showing that death was not possible. Motyer, addressing verse 20 writes, “It is not meant to suggest that death will still be present…It simply affirms that, over the whole of life, the power of death will be gone.”\textsuperscript{568} Smith writes, “It was used merely to illustrate the point that people will live a very long time…Of course, people will not live to be just 100 years old and people will not be under a curse in God’s newly created world.”\textsuperscript{569} Thus, Isaiah would be making an impossible hypothetical. If a person died at 100, then it would be difficult (metaphorically speaking, they would be thought accursed), but because no one will die at 100, then it will show that the curse is gone and death is no more. The same would occur with the end of verse 20 describing the death of a sinner. Sinner’s will not be in the eternal state, but if they were then they would face judgment and death. Motyer writes, “There will, of course, be no sinners in the new Jerusalem (6–7, 12, 15c). We are again dealing with metaphor.”\textsuperscript{570} Hence, just as death is an impossible hypothetical, then so is the presence of sin in the eternal state.

They also cite an allusion to Isaiah 25:8 in Revelation 21:4 to show that God will destroy death and that death will no longer occur.\textsuperscript{571} Richard Schultz, another proponent of the view, writes, “This apocalyptic description of future bliss goes beyond Isa 65, being enriched by another Isaianic intertext, Isa 25:6-8, which announces the end of death and tears.”\textsuperscript{572}

\textsuperscript{568} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 451.

\textsuperscript{569} Smith, \textit{Isaiah 40-66}, 693.

\textsuperscript{570} Motyer, \textit{Isaiah}, 451.


problem is nothing like that is stated in the context of Isaiah 65. Indeed, the very opposite occurs where death, although rarer, will still occur. The impossible hypothetical cited by Smith and Motyer does not seem to be taken from the actual text of Isaiah 65, but instead must be inferred from a separate section of Isaiah to match up with Revelation 21. While this is possible, it seems very strange that Isaiah would write that death had been defeated, but then leave open at least the possibility of death in vague symbolism.

The third view, held by Blaising, Oswalt, Fruchtenbaum and Kaiser, holds that Isaiah may be describing two different times in Isaiah 65. In this view, verses 17-19 describe the eternal state and verses 20-25 refer to life during the Millennial Kingdom.\(^{573}\) Kaiser even identifies two different Jerusalem’s- in 17-19 it is the New Jerusalem found coming from Heaven but verses 20-25 describe the Jerusalem of the Millennial Kingdom.\(^{574}\) Blaising writes, “It is conceivable that the differences in these descriptions point to two different phases of the eschatological kingdom, one before and one following the Final Judgment on sin.”\(^{575}\)

While at first unusual, the concept itself is something that occurred many times throughout the prophets. One of the problems that arose during Jesus’ earthly ministry was that many of his followers, even the disciples at times, thought that he would become a ruler, not realizing that those passages in the Old Testament referred to the Second Coming instead of the First Coming. An example of this occurs only a few chapters over in Isaiah 61:1-2. At the

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beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he quotes the verse one and the beginning of verse two but stops in the middle of the verse. The first section that he quoted referred to his earthly ministry, but the section on the Second Coming he did not quote because it was not yet time. Thus, even in Isaiah verses and passages merge the earthly ministry of Jesus with the Second Coming. Therefore, it would not be impossible for Isaiah to have been describing one time and then immediately shift into another time without any noticeable signs in the text itself.

The major evidence laid out for this position is the idea of death in a new creation which appears to pose a problem for a futuristic position. However, this position attempts to mitigate this problem by dividing the new heaven and new earth (eternal state) from the Millennial Kingdom. Death does not occur in the new heavens and new earth of verses 17-19 but does occur in the Millennial Kingdom in verses 20-25. In verse 20, Isaiah describes a Millennial Kingdom in which the curse is suspended, but death is possible, but rarer and less tragic than in previous eras. Thus, the death of a newborn baby, perhaps one of the most tragic events in all the world, will not occur in the Millennial Kingdom. People will live out their natural lives without the fear of untimely demise. Kaiser writes, “The point of Isaiah 65:20-24 is that in the future one may disregard any thoughts of an untimely death.” While death will still occur in the Kingdom, longer life and less tragedy will be the focus of Kingdom living.

A second argument for the position occurs at the end of verse 20. Isaiah argues that “the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed”. If one takes these verses to be describing the final state, then Kaiser and Oswalt argue that the concept of a sinner would still be present in the final

576 Motyer, Isaiah, 500.
state. Kaiser writes, “The reason I take this view is because when the universe is renewed in eternity, sin, sorrow, and death will no longer appear, while all of them still appear in the millennial kingdom.” Thus, the presence of sinners as a possibility point to verses 20-25 as part of the Millennial Kingdom, while verses 17-19 describe the eternal state.

Finally, the ages presented in the passage seem to refer to a time outside of the present condition, but the presence of death seems to make it impossible to be the eternal state. Vlach writes, “So notice two important things here with Isaiah 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.” Similarly, Waymeyer argues that even in a modern time of having a human lifespan of 70-80 years, which was significantly longer than Isaiah’s own day, it still does not come close to the conditions described in the passage. This long of a lifespan has never occurred historically since the time of Isaiah. However, it does sound like the early pages of Genesis prior to the Flood. Thus, there is precedent for long lifespans in the human condition that could be renewed again during an earthly millennial kingdom.

Overall, all three views attempt to identify how Isaiah saw the new heavens and new earth. Goldingay’s argument attempts to place the events closer to the life of Isaiah (Third Isaiah) but to argue that it is not possible to be eschatological because only Isaiah references the new heavens and new earth in the Old Testament and seems to be an overgeneralization of a lack of future prophecy in Isaiah and the other prophets. While other prophets may not have identified

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581 Adam, Noah and even Methuselah were fallen humans that lived almost 1,000 years, showing that with different conditions humans could live for the timespan described in the passage.
the new heavens and new earth, they did reference future events. Isaiah also references other future events in the coming of the Messiah and judgment on the nations. Thus, it would not be out of the range of possibility for Isaiah to be referencing new eschatological material.

The difference between the final two positions is whether Isaiah is describing the Millennial Kingdom or the eternal state in Isaiah 65: 17-25. The second view goes to the other extreme and seems to put too much emphasis on symbolic language. If Isaiah wanted to describe the eternal state where death and sin could not occur, then it seems unlikely that he would have created a hypothetical impossibility to show that this is possible. He merely could have written that death and sin were no longer present in the eternal state, just as what was written in Isaiah 25. Thus, while this view maintains a better eschatological position than Goldingay, it still fails to adequately answer all the difficulties of the passage.

The third view seems to be the strongest of the three positions, but it too has difficulties. One must assume that Isaiah would be referencing two separate times in the same passage. While there are examples of this occurrence in Isaiah, without stronger direct information from Isaiah himself, it is difficult to clearly understand Isaiah’s original intent. Thus, while the third view offers the strongest argument, like many eschatological concepts it is not possible to prove this position strictly from the text. Ultimately, Isaiah was arguing that Yahweh could predict the future; if the first view accepts that this is a prediction of the future and not simply a hope on the part of the author, then it can make this argument. However, if either the second or third view are correct, they make a stronger apologetic significance because they argue that Yahweh could see not just the future, but the end of the age.

Apologetic Significance
While at first it may seem that these passages offered little apologetic significance for the people of Isaiah’s own time, nothing could be further from the truth. Because Isaiah’s audience knew that he was a true prophet of Yahweh based upon his immediate predictions, they could take comfort in knowing that when Isaiah spoke about the distant future, these events will occur exactly as he predicted. The people could take heart that Yahweh is not only God, but also is a just and powerful God that can accomplish all that He sets out to accomplish. By showing that Yahweh ultimately would restore creation to its original intent and would fulfill the promises that He had made to His people, Yahweh was declaring apologetically that the future was just as much in His control as the present and that the world, currently in a sinful condition because of the fall of man in Genesis 3, would one day be restored by Yahweh.

Conclusion

The ability to predict the future was established as a test for deity in the book of Isaiah. The book argues that the pagan gods could not predict the future and therefore could not be true gods. The question was could Yahweh pass His own test? Yahweh established that He could pass the test of predicting the future and did so by predicting events in Isaiah’s time, the coming of Cyrus, the future Messiah and finally the eschatological future. Therefore, Yahweh was the true God while the pagan gods were not.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

Summary of Arguments

The thesis statement of this dissertation is that Isaiah used apologetics in three distinct areas: Yahweh’s creation and sovereign control (Past), Yahweh’s divine intervention in delivering Judah (present) and Yahweh as the controller of the future (Immediate, exilic, Messianic and eschatological) to argue that Yahweh was the one true God, incomparable and superior to all other pagan deities, to both his contemporary audience and to future generations. Each chapter in the dissertation showed one of these three arguments made throughout the book of Isaiah.

First, chapter two showed that Isaiah argued Yahweh’s ability to create showed that He as the Creator was God. In contrast, the idols were created by humans and therefore were not true gods because they were a part of the created universe. Second, chapter three showed that Isaiah argued Yahweh had the ability and desire to intervene on behalf of His people through His intervention in both Hezekiah’s life and the Assyrian Crisis. In contrast, the pagan gods, specifically the Babylonian gods, were unable to intervene on behalf of their people and were taken captive by their enemies, showing that they were not gods. Finally, chapter four showed that Isaiah argued Yahweh had the ability to predict and control the future by making predictions about four different time periods. Only Yahweh Who started history had a plan for history and the power to fulfill His plan. In contrast, the pagan gods could not predict the future, showing that they were not gods.

Contribution to the Field of Apologetics

The dissertation has found six areas where this study on the book of Isaiah makes significant contributions to the field of apologetics. The first two deal with concepts/arguments,
the next three deal with apologetic tactics and the last is a general overview of apologetics in the Old Testament as a whole.

Concepts/Arguments

1. New Testament credibility: In chapter four, the dissertation showed that Isaiah developed a comprehensive apologetic argument using predictive prophecy as evidence for the deity of Yahweh. In making this argument, the dissertation showed the single author position, that Isaiah wrote the second half of the book, was essential in making this apologetic case, specifically with the prediction of Cyrus. If Isaiah the prophet did not write this section during his lifetime, then the apologetic argument is greatly weakened if not entirely lost. Therefore, Isaiah’s apologetic argument from predictive prophecy can be used to defend the single author view of the book.

   This plays a role in apologetics by defending the credibility of the New Testament. One may ask why this is the case if Isaiah was written in the Old Testament? The answer is found in the chart presented in chapter one of this dissertation, which showed that on twelve different occasions, New Testament authors specifically identified passages from the second half of the book as authored by the prophet Isaiah (9 from 40-55 and 3 from 56-66). This affects all four gospels, Acts, and Romans. If the New Testament is truly infallible, then Isaiah the prophet must have written the second half of the book or there are at least twelve errors in the New Testament.

   If one wants to argue for the reliability and infallibility of the New Testament, which is commonly one of the most used apologetic arguments and rightfully so, then ultimately one needs to have a strong argument for defending Isaiah authorship. If the New Testament authors could not even attribute Old Testament books to their proper authors, like the multiple author view technically claims, then it leads to a major lack of credibility issue for the authors of these six New Testament books. Critics could argue that other mistakes could have been made, such as
the deity of Christ, if the New Testament authors could not even get the authorship issue correct. The predictive prophecy argument presented in chapter four of this dissertation adds a strong argument that Isaiah is the author of the second half of the book to the various arguments for single authorship that are listed in Appendix A and can therefore help in the defense of New Testament credibility in defending against critical attacks.

2. God as the sole Creator as an apologetic argument in Scripture: God as the Creator is one of the most used apologetic arguments. Apologists have consistently argued that there must be a God who is the Creator of the universe. Unfortunately, in many cases, the arguments for the Christian God as the Creator have almost exclusively come from either the book of Genesis or the Psalms. Two issues arise when these two books are used. First, many attack Genesis 1-11 as mythology and unhistorical. For example, Dennis Lamoureux, a theistic evolutionist who does not believe Yahweh created everything but merely started the process of creation, writes, “Real history in the Bible begins roughly around Genesis 12 with Abraham. Like many other evangelical theologians, I view Genesis 1–11 as a unique type of literature (literary genre) that is distinct from the rest of the Bible.”

Critics attack the Psalms as merely wisdom literature that cannot be taken as historical. However, as shown in chapter two of this dissertation, the book of Isaiah not only has an immense amount of information that expands on God as the sole Creator, but also makes an apologetic argument in the text that God is the Creator, arguing that if He is not the Creator, then He is not truly God. The book of Genesis does not even specifically make this argument in its creation accounts, although it can be inferred because God is the only being present at creation. This dissertation hopes to show the area of apologetics that there is a strong apologetic argument already formed in the

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book of Isaiah that has often been underused in the area of creation apologetics and also to encourage apologists to break out of only using the Genesis 1-11 sandbox and expand their horizons by looking at many other passages in the Old Testament that could also be used in making the apologetic argument of God’s creative work. This would help to limit critics from simply arguing that Genesis is mythological and force them to actually address the entire creation argument used throughout the Bible.

Apologetic Tactics
1. Comparing worldviews in a pluralistic society: One of the major challenges in the field of apologetic tactics in a contemporary culture is how to argue for the exclusivity of Christianity in a pluralistic world that allows for the presence of multiple worldviews and challenges any worldview that declares itself “better” than another worldview. However, this dissertation has shown that the book of Isaiah was written at a time when the world was very similar to a modern context. For example, when the Rabshakeh in Isaiah 36:20 stated, “Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand”, it is not that unsimilar to a modern critic stating “Why should I trust that your Christian God is any different than Allah, Brahma or Vishna?” Ultimately, even in a pluralistic society, worldviews clash and some offer more evidence and support than others.

The dissertation has shown that Yahweh modeled His own approach throughout the book of Isaiah in dealing with a pluralistic environment. Yahweh’s main apologetic tactic was to compare Himself against the other gods. He did this in all three areas of creation, intervention, and predictive prophecy. He consistently challenged the other gods to open competition, knowing that He could provide the evidence to back up His claims while the other gods could
not support their own claims. Yahweh was not scared to compete against other gods because He ultimately knew that He was greater than any challenger.

Many times, Christians are afraid to compare Christianity against other competing worldviews, either because they do not have enough knowledge about their own view or because they are scared of what might happen if their view is challenged. However, if God is not scared to challenge other gods, then Christians should not be afraid to challenge other competing worldviews. If Christianity is true, then it will be able to overcome any competition. It will have more evidence, tell a better metanarrative story, and outperform all competition. While many apologists already do these types of debates and critiques, this dissertation hopes to lend more biblical support behind the tactic of comparing worldviews in the field of apologetics because Yahweh Himself modeled this very approach throughout the book of Isaiah.

2. Reversing the Burden of Proof: As an offshoot of the first tactic, Isaiah also modeled a apologetic tactic similar to the tactic that Greg Kouki calls “reversing the burden of proof.” As shown in chapter two, Isaiah, when addressing the creation of the world, made both positive and negative apologetic arguments. He defended Yahweh’s ability to create the world and gave evidence that Yahweh should be viewed as the Creator. For example, it was Yahweh that “sits above the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22). In chapter three, Isaiah argued that Yahweh could deliver the city of Jerusalem from the Assyrians. In chapter four, Isaiah argued that Yahweh could predict the future.

However, Isaiah did not stop by merely making positive arguments for Yahweh, in part because positive apologetic arguments alone do not prove anything. If Yahweh can predict the

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future, but so can fifteen other gods, then Yahweh is not special. If Yahweh can create, but so can Baal, then Yahweh is not special. Isaiah took it one step further and reversed the burden of proof. He put the idols on trial throughout Isaiah 40-48. The idols were asked to predict the future. The idols were asked to intervene for their people. The idols were asked to create instead of merely being created themselves. Thus, Isaiah becomes the model apologist on reversing the burden of proof in the apologetic debate. He did not avoid presenting his own evidences for God, but also did not let the idols avoid answering the same types of questions and ultimately showed apologetically that Yahweh was incomparable when compared to the pagan gods. This could not happen, however, unless the burden of proof was switched and the pagan gods had to defend themselves.

In a contemporary setting, this tactic is especially important in the field of apologetics because Christianity is faced with holding up the burden of proof in almost every discussion while other worldviews, specifically naturalism, do not have to argue their side. Christians at times can be wary of “going on the offensive” because they do not want to appear aggressive or rude, but there are times and ways to do it in a proper manner. Otherwise, Christianity will consistently be attacked and mocked while other worldviews get a free pass without giving their own answers and evidence. The dissertation shows that the book of Isaiah gives a biblical foundation and examples of how to use this apologetic tactic when engaged in a worldview debate.

3. Varied apologetic arguments: A final apologetic tactic that the book of Isaiah demonstrates is the book varied its apologetic arguments. Isaiah used several different styles of apologetic argumentation in combating the pagan gods of his day. First, he made the argument of creation, arguing that Yahweh was the true Creator and that the pagan gods who also claimed to
be creators were themselves created by mankind. Second, he made the argument of divine intervention, arguing that Yahweh was incomparable because Yahweh could intervene in history and the pagan gods could not intervene but instead needed their own followers to take care of them. Finally, he made the argument that Yahweh was incomparable because He could both predict and control the future, while the pagan gods could not. When the three arguments are combined, it makes for an incredibly strong apologetic argument but also a very diverse apologetic argument.

Isaiah’s model is incredibly important in the field of apologetics for two distinct reasons. First, it shows that apologetics needs to have several different arguments in order to make a comprehensive case for God. While it is important to have very good and well-researched arguments, several different apologetic arguments from various fields can have a very dynamic impact because it brings overwhelming argumentation. Isaiah very easily could have simply argued any one of the three arguments and made a solid case for Yahweh’s incomparability. However, when all three are combined, the argument becomes even stronger and makes a much better overall case.

Second, by using several different apologetic arguments, Isaiah covers all of his potential backgrounds. For example, if someone was concerned about which God was the creator, then Isaiah made his argument. That same person might not have cared about which God could predict the future. However, someone else may have wanted to know which God could predict the future and did not care about who created the world. Moreover, certain arguments are more effective in different times and different situations. At the beginning of Isaiah’s ministry prior to the coming of the Assyrians, his divine intervention argument may not have been that effective because the average Jew was living a comfortable and safe life. However, when the Assyrians
encircled Jerusalem, the divine intervention argument became much more prevalent. Hence, different apologetic arguments, while equally valid, can be more effective based on timing, situation and audience.

Isaiah’s model is very important in the modern field of apologetics. Some people are very scientifically minded and will argue about creation, while other people simply do not care about these topics. Others are philosophically minded and may need answers to questions like the problem of evil, but do not necessarily care about historical evidence. A good apologist, learning from Isaiah’s apologetic model, will understand his audience and formulate several different apologetic arguments so that they can both connect in an area of interest with their audience and also demonstrate several avenues of apologetic arguments.

Overview

Apologetics were a regular aspect of the Old Testament: Perhaps the most important contribution of this dissertation to the field of apologetics is that apologetics was a regular aspect of the Old Testament. As shown in the literature review, apologetic books almost universally begin their study of apologetics with the New Testament, jumping past the Old Testament that had laid the foundation for many of the concepts that were then built upon in the New Testament. The study of apologetics is no different. The Old Testament laid a foundation in apologetics that were then built upon by the New Testament authors. The New Testament authors understood how to use these types of arguments, such as the argument from predictive prophecy, at least in part because these types of apologetic arguments had already been established centuries before in the Old Testament.

The final observation in this section is the limitations of this study in the field of modern apologetics. Each of Isaiah’s three arguments have levels of impact in a contemporary argument.
The creation argument found in chapter two of the dissertation has changed very little from the time of Isaiah and can be used in a similar manner. However, the other two arguments have changed in effectiveness over time. The divine intervention argument that Isaiah specifically used offers little apologetic argumentation in a modern context because we were not alive to see the events in person and live through the events and therefore the apologetic emphasis is lessoned. However, the type of argumentation, divine intervention itself, can still be an effective apologetic tool based on our own life experiences.

Predictive prophecy is a more complex argument because of timing changes. The immediate predictions that Isaiah made are hard to use apologetically in a modern context because we cannot definitively prove that they were made in advance. As seen throughout the dissertation, critical scholars deny that many of the predictions were made in advance or that the events themselves even occurred. Ironically, these predictions offered significant apologetic argumentation during Isaiah’s own life before his audience saw them occur in their own lives. However, Messianic predictions from the book of Isaiah are still highly effective in apologetics today because they are used by the New Testament to identify that Jesus really is the Messiah. Thus, specific predictions can have a greater effectiveness at various times, but predictive prophecy as a whole is still very effective in modern apologetics.

Areas for Further Research

Three areas of future research have come up during the study and preparation of this dissertation. First, more work needs to be done on how individual Old Testament books crafted apologetic arguments for Yahweh. For example, similar style studies could be done for Jeremiah,

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584 This is not to say they are less significant or less valuable, but just that some arguments are more effective at various times.
Ezekiel and Daniel as well as several of the Minor Prophets or even the Minor Prophets as a unit. The books of Genesis and Exodus contain important apologetic arguments and even the historical books and the wisdom literature could be mined for various apologetic arguments. This dissertation has served as an introduction to this field but the field is ripe to be explored.

Second, more work needs to be done on how the Old Testament at large crafted apologetic arguments for Yahweh. This would include both connecting the various arguments put forth by the different Old Testament works and seeing how many arguments are contributed by various sections of the Old Testament. As shown in the literary review, Dr. Riecker’s work *The Old Testament Basis of Christian Apologetics* introduces this area in a brief manner, but more work needs to be done. Creation, divine intervention and predictive prophecy are all elements that Isaiah used and occur in other books of the Old Testament but other arguments might be discovered as well. By accomplishing the first task of addressing the apologetic arguments of individual books, this second task will become easier as one will be able to trace the various arguments presented over multiple books/sections of Scripture and connect them to establish a comprehensive Old Testament apologetic.

Finally, more work needs to be done on how the New Testament authors built upon the foundation laid by the apologetic arguments that were created in the Old Testament. If point two is accomplished and a comprehensive Old Testament apologetic can be completed, then that can be foundational in establishing how the New Testament authors both built upon that foundation and how some of the points were modified as a result of the coming of the Messiah and the creation of the church. Indeed, much of the New Testament arguments were built upon the Old Testament because the New Testament itself was still in the process of being written. Overall,
this is a relatively new field and much work needs to done in the relationship between the Old Testament and apologetic studies.
Appendix A: The Effect of Authorship on the Use of Apologetics in Isaiah

The authorship of Isaiah has been a hotly debated issue for the past 250 years within academia. While most critical scholars view the debate settled and accept multiple authors, conservative scholars have and continue to argue that Isaiah ben Amoz was the author of the entire book.\(^585\) Some scholars have even concluded that authorship does not even matter when interpreting the book.\(^586\) However, as shown in chapter four of this dissertation, if Isaiah the prophet was not the author, then much of the apologetic emphasis in the book’s prophecies would be lost or greatly diminished. This appendix, while not detailing every view or argument on authorship, will address the major points of both the multi-author position as well as the traditional single author position.\(^587\) A brief conclusion will follow after the two views have been analyzed.

Multi-Author View

Overview of Early Development

Bo H. Lim, Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Seattle Pacific University, in his article on the History of Interpretation of Isaiah in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* gives an overview of the early developments of multiple-author view. This view began with J.C.

\(^{585}\) Indeed, the critical position of multi-authorship in the book is so accepted within critical circles that Dr. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, in a recent work on Isaiah 40-66, does not even list Isaiah ben Amoz as a potential author within her four views on authorship of that section. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Continuity and Discontinuity in Isaiah 40-66, History of Research,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Hans M. Barstad (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 13-25.

\(^{586}\) For example, Leupold in the foreword to his two-volume commentary on Isaiah takes the traditional authorship position, but then makes the statement that, “Strangely, the message of the book remains virtually the same whether multiple authorship or unit authorship be upheld.” Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 1.

\(^{587}\) An entire dissertation can be written on this topic. The purpose of this appendix is to give an overview of the two positions and show that the single-author position is still tenable today even though many within critical circles have not only abandoned it but consider it a dead proposition.
Döderlein in 1775 who was the first major scholar to suggest that Isaiah 40-66 was written by a different author, who he also thought was named “Isaiah ben Amoz”.588 J.G. Eichhorn, in his introduction to the Old Testament (1780-1783), reconstructed the historical person of Isaiah to be distinct from the character of Isaiah portrayed in the narratives.589 Heinrich Gesenius, in his 1821 commentary on Isaiah, created a different volume for Isaiah 40-66 in which he called the author “Pseudo-Isaiah”, later termed Deutero-Isaiah.590

Perhaps the foremost proponent of multiple authorship whose work most influenced the acceptance of this view was Bernard Duhm (1847-1928), professor at Gottingen.591 He was the first to separate 56-66 into what he called Trito-Isaiah, which he dated much later than Deutero-Isaiah, placing it in the post-exilic period. Lim says that Duhm argued this because he thought, “That the former (40-55) was a more corrupt text, full of glosses and additions, less poetically refined, and degenerated into a prosaic nature.”592 Duhm also did not view Deutero-Isaiah as being an exile in Babylon, but instead argued that he probably came from somewhere in Lebanon due to his lack of knowledge of Babylon and an intimate knowledge of the natural resources of Palestine.593 Therefore, by the early twentieth century, because of the works of Döderlein,


589 Ibid, 387. This would allow for a later date for the authorship.

590 Ibid, 387.

591 Duhm is also famous for distinguishing the four Servant Songs.

592 Lim, “Isaiah”, 388.

593 Ibid.
Eichhorn, Gesenius, Duhtm and many others, the multi-authorship view became the dominant position in Isaiac studies.  

Contemporary Scholars

**Brevard Childs**

Brevard Childs (1923-2007), professor at Yale, attempted to bridge the gap between liberalism and the text through what he called his canonical approach to interpretation. Childs, while mainly focusing on the final form of the text as the authoritative Scripture, also held the multi-author view to the text for several reasons. First, he wrote, “I remain deeply concerned with the unity of the book, which I agree cannot be formulated in terms of single authorship.” His main argument why Isaiah could not have written the entire book was that Isaiah never appeared in the book after chapter 39. For him, the events in the second half of the book appeared to reflect a much later date that could not be resolved by, “Portraying the eighth-century prophet as a clairvoyant of the future.”

Second, while agreeing with much of modern redactional interpretation, Child’s concluded that it was the canonical text that was authoritative; his concern was how biblical books appeared at the end of the editorial process rather than an analysis of the different layers of interpretation. Third, Childs argued that intertextuality was important theologically in

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594 Other noted scholars that contributed to this field include Ernest Rosenmueller (1763-1835), Charles Cutler Torrey (1863-1956) and Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965).


understanding how the various voices of editors formed the book in message and structure. Finally, Childs admitted that he was not a New Testament scholar and therefore did not attempt to integrate New Testament’s interpretation of the passages of Isaiah it quoted. Thus, Childs moved beyond arguing about authorship issues and focused more on the final form of the text itself.

Childs also argued against the idea that the naming of Cyrus was a future prediction in chapters 44-45. He argued that, “The logic of the prophetic argument demands that the audience of the prophet’s words stands at a point in the sixth century when the former prediction is viewed as part of history.” He essentially argued that it made no sense for Isaiah to argue that people could trust that Yahweh was God because He could predict Cyrus would come if that audience would never live to see that occur. Instead, he argued that the original audience lived during the time of Cyrus and therefore could see his rise and domination of Babylon: “For a prediction to have been recognized as fulfilled and therefore authoritative, the audience addressed must have experienced the coming of Cyrus.”

However, Childs understood that if Second Isaiah was claiming that Yahweh could predict the future, then there had to be a prediction for him to claim. His solution was to connect First Isaiah and Second Isaiah, writing, “The crucial argument of the pattern prophecy—fulfillment in chapter 41 is based on a recognition that the corpus of Second Isaiah presupposes

\[\text{598} \text{ Childs, } \text{Isaiah}, \text{ 4. He called this the final form of the text.} \]
\[\text{599} \text{ Ibid, 4.} \]
\[\text{600} \text{ Ibid, 290. This eliminates a significant argument from being put forth.} \]
\[\text{601} \text{ Ibid, 322.} \]
that of First Isaiah.”\footnote{Childs, \textit{Isaiah}, 322. He understood that the argument could not be completely ignored.} He then identified the prediction of Babylon’s destruction in chapter 13 as the prediction of the coming of Cyrus.\footnote{Ibid, 322.} Therefore, God had correctly predicted that the Medes (Cyrus) would conquer Babylon and Second Isaiah could make the argument based on its fulfillment in his day, that God could predict the future.\footnote{Cyrus was a Persian but was allied with the Medes. It seems strange that Childs was willing to allow First Isaiah to predict the destruction of the Babylonian Empire 150 years in advance but has a problem with “Second Isaiah” predicting future events and writing about them 150 years in advance.} In conclusion, Childs adopted the multi-author view yet still held the book was authoritative in its final form, which was more than many of the liberal scholars were willing to allow.

\textbf{John Goldingay}

John Goldingay, David Allan Hubbard Professor Emeritus of Old Testament in the School of Theology of Fuller Theological Seminary, like Childs, argues for multiple authors but holds that prophecy is possible. In his commentary on Isaiah, one of his main arguments for dividing the book into multiple authors is that Isaiah 40 belongs to the present and not future. He writes, “It does not say “In days to come God will send a message of comfort to people who have been punished,” in the manner of a passage such as 30:19-26. It says, rather, “God is now comforting you who have been punished.”\footnote{Goldingay, \textit{Isaiah}, loc. 4376.} Therefore, he argues that the author of the second half of the book is writing in the present tense during a time of great distress for the nation and is therefore not Isaiah the prophet writing for a future generation.

\footnote{602 Childs, \textit{Isaiah}, 322. He understood that the argument could not be completely ignored.}
\footnote{603 Ibid, 322.}
\footnote{604 Cyrus was a Persian but was allied with the Medes. It seems strange that Childs was willing to allow First Isaiah to predict the destruction of the Babylonian Empire 150 years in advance but has a problem with “Second Isaiah” predicting future events and writing about them 150 years in advance.}
\footnote{605 Goldingay, \textit{Isaiah}, loc. 4376.}
Goldingay argues that there are four human voices found within the book. First, he has the “ambassador”, who he associates with the prophet Isaiah himself. Second, he has the “disciple”, who he identifies as a disciple or group of Isaiah’s disciples who not only collected Isaiah the prophet’s material and gave it organization and structure, but also wrote the introductions and the historical narratives about Isaiah. He also even allows for a fifth voice, a much later prophet, who composed chapters 24-27. He cuts off Isaiah the prophet’s material at 39:3.

Goldingay’s third author is designated the “poet”, who he dates 150 years after Isaiah’s time and is located among the exiles in Babylon, on the verge of being rescued by Cyrus the Great. Similar to Childs, Goldingay argues that this different prophet can argue that Yahweh already established that Persia would one day destroy Babylon in chapter 13. Therefore he believes the poet is not being deceptive when he argues that Yahweh can predict the future, even though Cyrus would have already been in power at the time of the writing. Finally, Goldingay designates the “preacher” as the author of 56-66, who is back in Israel after the return from the exile. He then concludes that there may have been even more voices than just these four because there could have been more than one person serving as the disciple, poet and preacher. He concludes argue that, “Evidence within the book is insufficient for us to achieve anything like

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606 Goldingay, *Isaiah*, loc. 211. As will be seen, he even allows for more than four.

607 Ibid, loc. 243.

608 Ibid, loc. 4638.

609 Ibid, loc. 257.
certainty regarding the process whereby the actual book called Isaiah came into being…But at least these four voices speak from the book as we have it.”

**Kenton Sparks**

Kenton Sparks, professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University, also argued for multiple authorship in his work *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship*, published in 2008. Sparks argued that modern scholarship was increasingly accepting that, “The book of Isaiah in its final form reflects a certain editorial unity.” However, he argues that instead of pointing to an 8th century prophet writing the whole book, it simply shows that later redactors and editors did a very good job at piecing the book together thematically. Therefore, when Sparks says that, “Modern scholars are not entirely antagonistic to traditional views of the book”, he really means that they are willing to allow for editorial unity, but not authorial unity. Richard Schultz, writing in response to Sparks, writes, “Recognizing editorial unity in some vague sense hardly represents a move toward the traditional viewpoint since some scholars locate the final editor as late as the third century BC.”

Sparks also makes a distinction between “predictions” and “prophecies”, arguing that Deutero-Isaiah was not truly predicting the return from exile or the coming of Cyrus, since he was writing during or after the fact, but instead was making, “Genuine prophecies written in to the exiles that predicted their deliverance and told them to go home.” He argues, similar to

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610 Goldingay, *Isaiah*, loc. 270. He does not address how this affects the argument of the book.


613 Sparks, *God’s Word*, 106.
Goldingay, “It strains the imagination to believe that Isaiah addressed these theological debates about a Gentile messiah some one hundred and fifty years before they took place and that his response to those debates was copied and recopied for many years by scribes and read by audiences who could not have understood them.”\footnote{Sparks, \textit{God's Word}, 106-107.} Schultz, in his response, argues that this would eliminate any genuine messianic or eschatological prophecy since the original audience would never understand it in full.\footnote{Schultz, “Isaiah,” 193.} Somewhat ironically, this is exactly what many critical scholars have done in eliminating any type of prophetic elements.

Third, Sparks argues that Isaiah 40-66 cannot be written by Isaiah because it never mentioned his name, unlike 1-39 which mentions his name sixteen times.\footnote{Sparks, \textit{God's Word}, 107.} Two problems arise from this charge. First, Deutero-Isaiah is also never mentioned in the text, so arguing from silence could be used both ways.\footnote{At least Isaiah is mentioned in the text at all, whereas Deutero-Isaiah is never mentioned in the entire book.} Second, as Schultz points out, there are large sections of Isaiah 1-39 that also do not directly mention Isaiah, such as Isaiah 21-35 which is almost as long as 40-56, the passage associated with Deutero-Isaiah.\footnote{Schultz, “Isaiah,” 194.} Fourth, Sparks argues that if Isaiah 40-66 was written by Isaiah, then why did Jeremiah never cite them as prophecy when addressing Babylon?\footnote{Sparks, \textit{God's Word}, 107.} While this at first seems significant, many of the prophets that were contemporaries, such as Isaiah and Micah do not address each other. Therefore, this argument from silence, is not enough to definitively show that Jeremiah did not know Isaiah wrote chapters 40-66.
Finally, Sparks ends his discussion arguing that, “My main point is this: a sober and serious reading of Isaiah will easily suggest to readers that large portions of this prophetic collection were not written by an eighth century prophet whose name was Isaiah.”620 This presents the crux of Spark’s view, which is one founded on a belief that modern critics are better scholars than those that came before them. This, then, would have to also include Jesus, the disciples, the church fathers, and all the Catholic and Reformed theologians through the centuries, as well as Jewish rabbis all of whom must not have read the book of Isaiah “soberly” or “seriously”.

Additional Support

Several other notable scholars have also made minor additions to this position. Joseph Blenkinsopp, in addressing the problem of why Deutero-Isaiah was unknown to history, argued that this was possibly because of potential persecution that he might have faced had he made himself known to the Babylonians, especially after predicting their defeat and attacking their deities.621 Claus Westerman argued for a specific time frame for Deutero-Isaiah, from between 587 and 539 BC. Thus, Cyrus would defeat Babylon but only after Cyrus had already been born and was already the ruler of the Persians.622 Finally, Marvin Sweeney argues that the book of Isaiah, in its final form, was written to a late fifth-century community in order to explain why they had suffered through the Babylonian Captivity, convince them the covenant with Yahweh is still intact and to persuade them to return back to Yahweh.623 When both critical and

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620 Sparks, *God’s Word*, 108.


623 Marvin Sweeney, “Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition” (PhD diss., Claremont, 1983), 1. Sweeney basically takes the same argument that conservative scholars used, but instead of having Isaiah tell a future generation in advance to prepare them and explain their judgment, he switches it to have a
conservative scholar’s make such arguments, it is easy to see why the multi-author position is now the majority view. However, there is also a significant amount of evidence to support the traditional single-author view.

**Single-Author View**

**Joseph Addison Alexander**

Joseph Alexander (1809-1860), professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, was one of the first conservatives to push back against the multiple-authorship view. In his two-volume commentary on Isaiah, published in 1861, he laid out a basic but foundational argument for Isaiah authorship consisting of two main points. First, Alexander argued that no one in history, especially those closest to Isaiah’s time, ever believed that the book changed from its original form and content. He wrote, “The apocryphal writers who make mention of it, use no expressions which imply that it was not already long complete in its present form and size. The same thing seems to be implied in the numerous citations of this book in the New Testament.”

Thus, his argument is that if the book was written by many people, then it seems strange that no one in the ancient world ever mentioned it.

Second, he argued that the quotations/allusions to Isaiah in both the Old and New Testaments came from all parts of the book. He wrote, “The allusions to this Prophet, and the imitations of him, in the later books of the Old Testament, are not confined to any one part of the book or a single class of passages.” He identified 21 passages in the New Testament quoted

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625 Ibid.
from all sections of the book all attributed to Isaiah. Therefore, consisting mostly of textual arguments, Alexander laid a foundation to counter the multi-author approach.626

Oswald T. Allis

One of the foremost defenders of the single authorship of Isaiah was Oswald T. Allis (1880-1973), former professor and founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Allis was a staunch defender of the inspiration of Scripture and argued for Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. His classic defend of the single authorship of Isaiah was his work *Unity of Isaiah* published in 1950.627 Allis argued that critics of the single view argued against it in three major ways. First, they argued that because prophecy could not exist, then anything that looks prophetic in the book of Isaiah must have been added later.628 Second, they argued that because prophecy could not exist, the original message must have been vague and indefinite, allowing a later editor to make it read like predictive.629 Finally, critics argue that since prophecy could not occur hundreds of years in advance because it would not have had meaning to the original audience must have been added later.630

626 It is also important to note that Alexander was writing at a time before the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, so he was very limited in what type of arguments that he could make outside of Scripture.

627 Allis has come under recent attack within some parts of the Evangelical camp that want to push for multi-authorship. For example, John Halsey Wood, in a 2005 *JETS* article entitled “Oswald T. Allis and the Question of Isaianic Authorship”, argued that Allis only defended the single author view because of his desire to hold onto an “obvious sense of predictive prophecy” that he had learned from his Princeton background. John Halsey Wood Jr., “Oswald t. Allis and the Question of Isaianic Authorship,” *JETS* 48, no. 2 (2005): 249-61. Richard Schultz makes a defense of Allis’ position arguing that Wood simplifies Allis’ position and makes broad overgeneralizations. Schultz, “Isaiah,” 189-99.

628 Allis, *Unity*, 3.

629 Ibid, 4. Allis uses Genesis 15 as an example of this approach, showing that critics argue that the 400 years of captivity spoken of by Yahweh to Abraham was probably just an insert much later after the 400 years had occurred and that Abraham, in his own time, would have never heard that specific detail.

630 Ibid, 21. For example, they would argue that in Isaiah 7:14 that Isaiah could not have only been describing a future Messiah because it would have had no significant meaning to the original audience.
Allis presented seven arguments to counter many of the arguments presented by those opposed to the single authorship view. First, Allis argued that the heading in 1:1 should be viewed as the heading of the entire book and that this allows for the entire book to be seen as composed by Isaiah. Allis asserts that every prophetic book in the Old Testament follows a similar format of identifying the author in the beginning of the book. He wrote, “There is the fact that every one of the fifteen books which compose the collection known as the “Latter Prophets” commences with a heading… All agree in at least stating that the name of the prophet whose utterances are contained in the book at the head of which each is placed.” If another author outside of Isaiah the prophet joined in the writing of the book, then it is contrary to any form of Old Testament prophecy to have a distinct prophecy or a series of prophecies without any type of heading identifying these specific authors.

Second, Allis argued that there was no manuscript evidence to show that the book was ever divided as the critics argue. There was no record in ancient history of anyone ever having two different versions of the book of Isaiah. Allis even argues that the Dead Sea Scrolls, newly discovered in his time, show the Great Isaiah scroll to be a single unit.

Third, Allis argued that if there was another prophet that wrote much of the book, then why did no one in history ever speak of him? He wrote, “Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in this period and are known to us by name. Yet that prophet

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631 Allis, Unity, 39.
632 Ibid, 39.
633 Ibid, 39. One example that could possibly be used to argue against this would be Judges 6:8 in which the book identifies a prophet giving a message from the Lord but does not give his name. However, this is a completely different situation than a writing prophet. There is no other example of an anonymous writing prophet in the Old Testament.
634 Ibid, 40.
whom many would regard as the greatest of them all is the Great Unknown.”

Thus, he argued that it would have been impossible for such a prophet to have existed during a time period that was well-attested by other writers and historians and yet no mention of him ever occurred in Jewish writings.

Fourth, Allis argued that the New Testament authors all clearly believed that Isaiah wrote both halves of the book. He identified numerous quotes in the New Testament in which Isaiah was quoted by name and all of the quotes were attributed only to Isaiah. Therefore, to argue against Isaiah authorship was to argue against the inspiration of the New Testament authors themselves.

Fifth, Allis argued that Isaiah 13:1’s heading was very significant, for it has a heading attributed to Isaiah and yet predicts the downfall of Babylon that would not occur until many years after his death. Allis believed that this argument was very hard for critics to rebut, for they had to either argue that the header was inaccurate or that the passage was not prophetic.

Sixth, Allis spends significant time on the passage concerning Cyrus in Isaiah 40-48. He argued that Cyrus could not simply be a later insert because he appeared seven or eight times in these chapters and in various manners, especially as the climax of a poem in Isaiah 44. Finally, Allis argued that one could not simply argue that Cyrus could not have been seen in advance by Isaiah if one held that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53. Allis

635 Allis, Unity, 41.
636 Ibid, 42. See chart presented in the introduction.
637 Ibid, 45.
639 Ibid, 122.
argued that it made no logical sense to argue that Isaiah could predict the coming Messiah 700 years in advance but then not be able to predict the coming of Cyrus 150 years in advance. Therefore, while not the first to argue for the single authorship of Isaiah, his work is viewed as one of the hallmark defenses of single authorship.

**Edward J. Young**

Edward Joseph Young (1907-1968), graduated from Westminster in 1935 and was clearly influenced by O.T. Allis’ views on the unity of Isaiah. While best known for his multi-volume commentary on Isaiah, the original contribution to the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series, he also published in 1958 a work entitled *Who Wrote Isaiah?*. Young’s major thrust in the small book was that authorship of Isaiah was not simply a minor disagreement between rival theologians; the trustworthiness of the Bible itself was at stake because the Bible supported Isaiah as the single author of the work that bears his name. While he repeats many of Allis’ arguments, he also offered some different arguments and strengthened some of Allis’ positions. First, he showed that before 1780, there was unanimous consent that Isaiah was the Isaiah of the entire book within Christianity and that only two Jewish figures had suggested that any part of the book was not authentic to Isaiah. Therefore, the idea that Isaiah was not the author was a relatively new phenomenon and did not have historical support.

Second, Young argued that instead of history arguing for multiple authors, it instead argued for a single author. Young argued that the book of Ecclesiasticus, written by Jewish authors prior to the coming of Christ in around 180 BC accepted that Isaiah the prophet wrote the

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641 Young, *Who*, 7. The two Jewish individuals were an unnamed Jewish scholar of Cordoba in Spain around 1100 A.D. and Ibn Ezra (1092-1167).
second half of the book and had prophetic abilities. 

Third, Young developed Allis’ second argument, contending that it was absolutely impossible that an unknown prophet could have written much of the book and yet remain unidentified in history. He sarcastically wrote, “The greatest proponent of monotheism in all of the Old Testament would be an unknown prophet.”

He also argued that Isaiah would not have been viewed as the greatest of the Old Testament prophets if he had not been recognized as writing the second half of his work, which contains some of his most renown prophecies.

Fourth, Young addressed the argument that an anonymous author or school much later, in showing respect for Isaiah and his prophetic ministry, may have added the second half of the book to continue his legacy. Young argues against this position by showing that Isaiah 40-66 is not just a remake of Isaiah 1-39, but, while connected, takes the book in a much different direction. Therefore, this argument could only work if Isaiah 40-66 were similar to Isaiah 1-39 and the author was taking passages from the first part of the book and repackaging them. However, it seems unlikely that an apocryphal author would continue the legacy of Isaiah by creating an entirely new section of the book that differs substantially in content from the first half of the book. Finally, Young asserts that it is likely that Isaiah 40-66 was never given out orally to the nation, but was written as a last testament to Isaiah’s ministry, given to him by the Holy

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642 Young, Who, 27.

643 Ibid, 28. While the idea of monotheism is present throughout much of the Old Testament, it can be argued that no one better represents this idea than the prophet Isaiah, especially in Isaiah 40-48 with his arguments for the uniqueness of Yahweh’s ability to predict the future and in his attacks against the concept of idolatry.

644 Ibid, 34.
Spirit as his legacy to the nation. Therefore, Young built upon his professor’s arguments and developed new ideas to defend the unity of the book.

**John Oswalt**

John Oswalt, Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, wrote the two volume commentary on Isaiah as the replacement for E.J. Young’s in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series. This work is important because Oswalt serves as the bridge to the next generation after Allis and Young. His work addressed new challenges raised by the critics since the earlier works. In critiquing the methods of the critics, Oswalt argues that in critical circles, “Genuine Isaiah keeps getting smaller and smaller.” Oswalt makes two significant impacts in this area: dealing with new criticisms and creating a thematic approach to understanding how to connect the two halves of the book in relationship to authorship.

First, Oswalt identifies three major objections that critics of the single authorship view present: change of structure, Isaiah addressing his words to people in the future in 40-66 and predictive prophecy. While Allis and Young had already dealt with point three, Oswalt is very effective in combating the first two objections. First, in regards to differences in structure, Oswalt argues that it is possible that Isaiah wrote 1-39 early in his ministry and that he wrote 40-66 later in his life and therefore his style changed based upon age or experiences. This would

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645 Young, *Who*, 79. Motyer builds upon this later, as will be shown in his section.


648 Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 26. For example, if a preacher preached for 50 years, one would hope his sermons at the end of his ministry would sound significantly different than the sermons at the beginning of his ministry.
be similar to the difference in style for the apostle John in his gospel and the book of Revelation. Authors can change their style and structure as they gain experience in their writings and this offers a solution to the stylistic problem. Oswalt also argues that the changes in structure in the second half of the book have been overblown by the critics using computer programs to diagnose changes that are fairly common within an author’s writing style.⁶⁴⁹

Second, Oswalt argues that, while it is not common for a prophet to write to people in advance like Isaiah seems to do in 40-66, it is not without precedent in the Old Testament. He cites Ezekiel 37-48, Daniel 7-11 and Zechariah 8-13 as similar examples in other prophetic works.⁶⁵⁰ If one argues that prophets cannot write in this style, then one has to make divisions in these other books as well. Therefore, the objections put forth by the critics are not nearly as unanswerable as once thought.

A second contribution by Oswalt is his argument about the significance of the timing of Isaiah’s message and how this affects authorship. Oswalt acknowledges that it is strange that God gave Isaiah insight into future events instead of waiting to give knowledge to Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Critics argue that it makes no sense for God to have given Isaiah future information that would not impact the nation for over a century. What makes better sense is for the the author of the second half of the book to have lived when the events occured. However, Oswalt argues that this information does fit with the overall message of the book because it connects with the theme of God’s power and Lordship over the nations. He writes, “Given the theme of the first part of the book-trust in human power, as exemplified in the nations, is foolish, whereas trusting in God,

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.
the Lord of the nations, is wise-and given that God’s triumph over Assyria is the culminating proof of that power, how should one treat the upcoming defeat at the hands of Babylon that Isaiah has foreseen?"\textsuperscript{651} Oswalt is therefore arguing that God, aware of the coming defeat of Judah by Babylon, is preparing the nation beforehand so that they will not lose hope in Him and His ability to overcome nations, but this will only take place when the nation is faithful to God. Therefore, the predictions of the Babylonian Exile are necessary to the theology of the book of Isaiah and are relevant to the times of Isaiah’s ministry. Thus, Oswalt uses the thematic unity of the book as an argument for the single authorship position.

**J.A. Motyer**

J Alec Motyer (1924-2016) was principal of Trinity College in Bristol, England and was a noted scholar on the book of Isaiah, publishing his work *The Prophecy of Isaiah* in 1993. While Motyer used many of the same arguments for single authorship as his predecessors, he also added a few unique arguments to the discussion. First, Motyer argued that the critics that say it would be impossible for Isaiah to have predicted a Babylonian exile simply do not understand history. He wrote, “There is no need to find anything difficult or strange in Isaiah’s prediction of Babylonian captivity. Babylon was plainly a world power; Merodach-Baladan had already once achieved a balance of power in Mesopotamia.”\textsuperscript{652} Isaiah is not creating a new nation, but is merely arguing that one of the nations of the world during his time period will one day come to


\textsuperscript{652} Motyer, Isaiah, 26.
invade Judah and take them away into exile. Motyer argues that, while the prediction does require prophetic ability, it is not so unique as critics try to make it out to be.

Second, Motyer also addressed the critics who argue that Isaiah’s message was not relevant to his own time period by arguing that Isaiah never states and may himself not have known that the Babylonian exile would be as far off as it ended up being in history. He wrote, “Isaiah says nothing about a gap of a hundred years between prediction and fulfilment. It is a caricature to claim he said, ‘Don’t worry! In a hundred years all will be well!’; he did not say so!” Motyer argues that the imminent nature of Isaiah’s predictions show that either he may not have known the timeline of events or he did not share that timeline with the nation. The message itself then would be very relevant to his own culture because they would not have known if the event was happening next week or a century later; all they knew was that judgment would come on them if they did not repent and turn back to the Lord.

Third, Motyer argued that the differences between the first half of the book and the second half of the book are not because it was written by a different author, but because the first half of the book contained sermons and the second half of the book contained writings. While Edward Young had already proposed a similar idea, Motyer fleshed out the idea in a more substantially. He argued that grammatical and stylistic changes can vary greatly if one is speaking rather than writing and therefore that may help to explain the stylistic differences in the

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655 This is not like someone in 1500 A.D. predicted that the “United States of America” would one day invade their nation, as the United States of America did not exist during that time. Babylon did already exist and was even a major player in international events for thousands of years.

654 Motyer, Isaiah, 33.

655 Ibid, 35. Herbert Wolf makes a similar type of argument, but instead argues that the book is like 1 and 2 Timothy. He states, “Similar to 1 Timothy and 2nd Timothy in that the two halves were written at different times during Isaiah’s life.” Wolf, Interpreting Isaiah, 36.
two halves of the book. Indeed, Motyer argued that the second half of the book contains no historical narratives and therefore may have been written at any time during Isaiah’s ministry, but probably later in his ministry than many of his early preaching sermons when he still had access to the kings of Judah and to the palace.

Finally, Motyer, like Oswalt and others, made his own thematic argument of the book that centered around the single authorship view. He argued that the theme of the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah’s special name for Yahweh, was used to tie both halves of the book together, appearing almost equally in both sections.\footnote{Motyer, Isaiah, 37.} Second, he argued that the six major foci of the first half of the book, the Lord as Lord of history (10:5–15), his supremacy over idols (2:12–20), the remnant (8:11–20), God and sinner reconciled through atonement (6:7), Zion restored (1:26–27) and the Davidic Messiah (9:1–7), all show up again in the second half of the book in various ways. This evidences a theological unity within the book that Motyer argued could have only come from the hand of a single author.\footnote{Ibid, 37.} Motyer then built on the foundation of his predecessors, updated and expounded on some of their work and added his own insight and arguments to the single author position.\footnote{Another area that points toward single authorship is linguistic evidence, which points to an earlier date for Isaiah 40-66 in comparison to other books, such as Ezekiel which dates to the Exile. For a more thorough analysis, see Mark F. Rooker, “Dating Isaiah 40-66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?,” Westminster Theological Journal 58 (1996): 303-12.}

\textbf{Alan Millard}

Alan Millard, Rankin Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic languages, and Honorary Senior Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology in the
University of Liverpool, offered additional insight from his discipline into the process of how Isaiah would have written his prophecies down throughout his ministry, which culminated in the Book of Isaiah itself. In countering the idea that Isaiah either could not have or chose not to write down his prophecies, Millard writes,

Why may not a prophet have kept records of his words over several years, during which the content and his style may have changed, added to them, arranged and re-arranged them, quoted from them in later utterances and eventually created his own collection a decade or more later? The impression often received of a prophet delivering his message then disappearing from the scene, showing no more concern for his utterances, is misleading!659

Thus, Millard argues that if Isaiah was spending his entire life as a prophet and was given predictions that he knew were going to be important in the future, then it makes sense that he would have written some of these prophecies down and collected them for future generations.

Second, Millard argues that other Jewish Scriptures and other Ancient Near Eastern writings offer comparative examples of prophetic writings. He states, “The Hebrew epigraphic corpus illustrates the availability of writing, the Deir ‘Alla and Egyptian texts the possibility of lengthier compositions than the oracles in cuneiform. The Mari letters certainly exhibit a readiness to write the prophetic words as soon as they were heard.”660 Finally, Millard argues that because some of Isaiah’s predictions were proven true during his own lifetime, then his words would have demanded preservation, especially with so many future predictions that had yet to be fulfilled.661 It is not as if Isaiah claimed to be a prophet, made only long term

659 Alan Millard, “Take a Large Writing Tablet and Write on It”: Isaiah- A Writing Prophet?” in Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms: A Festschrift to honour Professor John Emerton for his eightieth birthday, ed. Katharine J. Dell, Graham Davies, and Yee Von Koh (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 112.

660 Ibid, 117.

661 Millard, “Take a Large Writing Tablet”, 117.
predictions and then passed, but instead made many predictions that were fulfilled in his own life, thus marking him as a true prophet.

Conclusion

There may never be enough evidence to convince critical scholars whose presuppositions deny the supernatural inspiration that Isaiah ben Amoz wrote the entire book of Isaiah. However, this appendix has shown that there is much internal evidence within the book itself that argues for single-authorship. The belief that Isaiah wrote the entire book is not only plausible and defendable, but still has strong support in the world of academia. While critical scholars have brought arguments against the single-author view, none have definitively proven that Isaiah could and did not write the entire book. These arguments combined with the testimony of the New Testament and near unanimous historical support prior to 1700 AD show that the defense for single authorship can still be maintained with academic integrity.

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662 Indeed, even if archaeology were to find a complete book of Isaiah that was dated in the 7th century, critical scholars would still argue that it would not prove that Isaiah was the sole author of the book.

663 Unless one argues that prediction itself is impossible and therefore Isaiah could not possibly have written the book.
Appendix B: Did the Book of Isaiah Create Monotheism in Judaism?

One of the critical challenges in discussing Old Testament theology is the debate on what exactly the Old Testament believers believed about Yahweh and when they believed it. Critical scholars have maintained that true monotheism did not develop in Judaism until after the Babylonian Exile. By contrast, conservatives argue that Judaism has always been a monotheistic religion, at least in faith if not in practice. This is important in the apologetic emphasis of Isaiah because it identifies whether a 7th century prophet could have argued for monotheism. This appendix will first address monotheism throughout the Old Testament and then take a closer look at monotheism specifically in the book of Isaiah.

Monotheism in the Old Testament

Dating Issues

The first major issue that arises in trying to describe the development of monotheism is when this occurred. Critical scholars argue that monotheism only developed after the Babylonian Exile while conservative scholars argue that Judaism was always monotheistic.\textsuperscript{664} The Old Testament books at the center of this debate are Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Critical scholars place the final composition of both of these works very late, during the exilic or Persian period. Day writes, “Absolute monotheism was first given explicit expression by the prophet Deutero-Isaiah in the exile and became fully operative in the post-exilic period.”\textsuperscript{665} Smith

\textsuperscript{664} Critical scholars argue that this was a long process over a long period of time, when Judaism moved from polytheism to henotheism to monolatry and finally to monotheism. For example, Lynch writes, “Before Deutero-Isaiah, in the exilic period, Israel was more or less henotheistic, and afterwards more or less monotheistic.” Matthew J. Lynch, “Mapping Monotheism: Modes of Monotheistic Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible,” Vetus Testamentum 64, no. 1 (2014): 47. This will be addressed in the next section.

similarly argues, “To use biblical texts to ground monotheism or even monolatry, historically before the seventh century is difficult.”\textsuperscript{666} Even evangelical scholar John Walton thinks that dating these monotheistic ideas is a murky struggle, possibly allowing that passages such as Deuteronomy 4:35-39 and 1 Kings 8:60 that are clearly monotheistic were added later to the books once the ideas became prevalent in Israel.\textsuperscript{667}

Conservative scholars have instead argued that there was always a monotheistic element in Judaism, even if the population at large ignored this and continued to fall into polytheism. Christopher Wright argues

> It seems clear that from a very early stage Israel had a conviction that to be Israelite required an exclusive attachment to YHWH as their God. This is sometimes called “mono-Yahwism.” Whether this commitment to YHWH originally included the conviction that YHWH was the only deity in reality (as distinct from the only deity Israel was to worship), and if not, by what stages and by what date such a conviction eventually took hold, is a matter of continued and inconclusive debate. However, it seems to me that the extent to which affirmations of YHWH’s uniqueness and universality penetrated all the genres of Israel’s texts allows room for believing that there was a radically monotheistic core to Israel’s faith from a very early period, however much it was obscured and compromised in popular religious practice.\textsuperscript{668}

Wright argues that Deuteronomy 32 specifically identifies other gods as demons and that the passage, sometimes called the Song of Moses, is an example of very early Israelite poetry.\textsuperscript{669}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[668] Christopher J.H. Wright, \textit{The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative} (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 72-73. Whether or not Israel actually followed these practices will be addressed in a following section.
\item[669] Ibid, 145. This is the historical position of the church as well, as no major scholar, Jewish or Christian, did not accept Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch until modern times.
\end{footnotes}
Therefore, conservative scholars argue that Deuteronomy was written centuries before the critics proposed date and laid the foundation for monotheism in Jewish thought.\(^{670}\)

**Monotheism, Henotheism, or Monolatry?**

Perhaps an even greater challenge in this area is whether or not the Pentateuch, even if dated early, actually argued for monotheism or for a lesser form of henotheism or monolatry that then developed into a stronger form of monotheism after the Babylonian Exile. Walton develops the differences between monotheism, the belief that only one God exists, monolatry, the belief that one particular deity is able to accomplish what they need but that there are other gods that function in the same manner for other people, and henotheism, which believes that other gods exist, but only one God is truly worthy of worship and the other gods are incompetent.\(^{671}\) While scholars agree that Judaism eventually made it to monotheism after the Babylonian Exile, there is great debate on what stage they started the process.

**Monolatry**

Many scholars argue that Judaism started off with monolatry instead of with monotheism. Nathan MacDonald argues that the book of Deuteronomy does not require Israel to follow monotheism. Instead, he writes, “Deuteronomy does not deny the existence of other gods. The Shema and the first commandment of the Decalogue require monolatry, the exclusive devotion of Israel to Yahweh, but do not deny the existence of other gods… Yahweh is only viewed as

\(^{670}\) Other passages in the Pentateuch, such as the first commandment in Exodus 20, also come into the discussion but will be discussed in the following section as scholars debate whether they truly argue for monotheism.

\(^{671}\) Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 33. Daniel Block argues that many pagans were actually what he calls “territorial henotheists” because in many cases gods became prominent in specific territories and therefore one deity tended to emerge above the remainder. The difference would be that when they moved or visited a different region, then they would change and promote the god of the new region. Daniel Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 63.
unique and is the only god for Israel." Thus, MacDonald argues that Deuteronomy does not create a theological argument for monotheism, but instead merely argues that Yahweh is the God of Israel and therefore they need to remain faithful to Him instead of worshipping the other gods of the nations.

MacDonald also argues that Israel’s practice must also relegate them to monolatry because of their tendency to give into polytheism. He writes, “Israel is not monotheistic because once someone becomes monotheistic, they cannot reverse and return to polytheism.” Essentially, he is arguing that if Judaism was monotheistic, then they would never have had a problem with idolatry because they would have already known that the other “gods” were not gods. Instead, he argues that they struggled with idolatry because they had to choose not which God was the true God, but which of the “gods” should they worship, their god or the other nation’s gods.

Henotheism

A similar but very different concept is the idea that Israel was henotheistic, in that they allowed for the existence of other “gods” but argued that their God was the greatest and the only one to be worshipped. Like MacDonald, Walton argues that the Decalogue does not specifically argue for monotheism. He writes, “When Yahweh first approached Abram, he did not discuss how many gods there were or whether Abram needed to consider him the only God. But when

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672 Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism* (Heidelberg: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 79-85

673 This would essentially eliminate evangelism in the Old Testament. If YHWH is only God over the nation of Israel and not the God over the other nations, then there would be no need for Israel to ever evangelize.

674 MacDonald, *Deuteronomy*, 124.

675 While it is certainly true that Israel struggled with idolatry, the beliefs of a religion can certainly be different than how certain members of a religion practice the faith. This will be addressed in the next section.
we turn our attention to the Decalogue, the first saying indicates that no other gods should be worshiped before Yahweh. Yet it has long been noted that this phrase stops short of saying how many gods there are. Walton essentially argues that the Decalogue says “do not worship other gods” instead of “there are no other gods”. By not denying the existence of other gods, Israel would then be henotheistic instead of monotheistic.

Walton argues that instead of arguing that Yahweh is the only God, the Old Testament largely argues that the other gods are powerless and frauds in comparison to Yahweh. For example, this position would argue the plagues of Egypt do not show that the Egyptian gods did not exist, but just that they were powerless to stop Yahweh and therefore Yahweh should be worshipped over these other gods. Elisha shows that the other gods are powerless on Mount Carmel in comparison to Yahweh’s power. Thus, this position holds that the Old Testament, at least prior to the prophets, allowed for the existence of other gods but spent a significant amount of time showing that Yahweh was more powerful than the other gods of the nations and therefore He alone should be worshipped. 677

Monotheism

The monotheistic position holds that from the very beginning Judaism was always a monotheistic religion for several reasons. First, unlike all the other pagan, polytheistic religions of the ancient world, the Old Testament never gives Yahweh a pantheon of other gods that He


677 It is clear in the text that the Old Testament does show that YHWH is more powerful than the other gods. The difference between the henotheistic position and the monotheistic position is in why this occurs. Henotheism argues that the Old Testament does this to argue that these gods are weak and not worthy of worship. Monotheism argues that these gods are not really gods at all.
interacts with or competes against. Yahweh alone is responsible for the creation of the universe and all that is in it. Richard Bauckham writes, “By attributing to Yahweh the creation of all other reality, by emphasizing that all other creatures without exception have been created by Yahweh, is making an absolute distinction between the unique identity of Yahweh and all other reality.” Oswalt states, “There is no raw power, no meta-divine outside of him that can be appealed to through magic to force our will on him whether he likes it or not.” God is in complete control because He is the creator of all. In the Old Testament story, everything else has its existence as a result of God’s creation and no other deities are presented in the creation account outside of Yahweh.

Second, Yahweh is always seen as the greatest being and in the greatest position. Backham argues that in other ANE cultures, some gods were considered higher than others, but it was usually for specific occasions or specific functions; Yahweh is very completely different because He alone is always in the highest position and serves every divine function. Israel does not need a rain god and a fire god and a storm god because Yahweh is attributed to have control over every function of the universe. While there are other created spiritual beings, angels and demons, none of them are viewed as ever having the same positional authority as Yahweh.

Third, this position holds that when the Old Testament does seem to admit the existence of other gods, such as Exodus 20:3 and Exodus 23:32, that it never places those beings on the

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680 John Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 76.

same level as Yahweh. Heiser writes, “It is much more coherent to say that the biblical writers believed in the existence of many אֱלֹהִים (that is, after all, how they use the term) but that the God of Israel was incomparable with respect to other אֱלֹהִים.” They exist, but they are not truly gods in the same manner that Yahweh is God. Deuteronomy 32:39 and Psalm 96:5 clearly articulate that the gods are not equal to Yahweh in any meaningful manner. Then there are several passages in the Old Testament, Leviticus 17:7, Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37, that assert that the gods of the other nations are demonic forces that humans make sacrifices and worship to in cultic ways. Therefore, this would explain why the gods are viewed as real spiritual beings that function in the world but are not equal with Yahweh.

Belief versus Practice

The greatest challenge in this area is deciding what Judaism taught as an official theology during its history and what the people actually practiced. For example, critics who assert that the Jews could not have been monotheistic prior to the Babylonian Exile do so in large part because both the archaeological finds and the Old Testament itself show that the Jewish people struggled to follow Yahweh and largely followed polytheism. As shown previously, MacDonald argues that because the majority of the Jewish people were practicing polytheists, then one cannot call Judaism a monotheistic religion. The question then arises over how does one understand a

682 Michael S. Heiser, “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?,” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1, no. 1 (2012): 8-9. Heiser argues that even if one always for a “divine council” that works alongside Yahweh that it still would not mean that Judaism held to other divine beings that were equal in manner and substance ontologically with Yahweh and that “The resulting allowance for plural אֱלֹהִים does not contradict denial statements in the Hebrew Bible.”

683 Paul also asserts this very concept in 1 Corinthians 10:20 and argues that pagan sacrifices were offered not to gods but instead to demons. Critics who date the Pentateuch very late would argue that this idea was not early and instead was only formed after Second Isaiah has already established Monotheism.
religious viewpoint, from the official theological stance or from the practice of a group within
the religion?

While it is always possible to find elements within a religious movement that deny major
tenents of the position, it does not mean that the religion itself does not hold to those beliefs. The
Old Testament is clear that many Jewish people rejected the teachings of Judaism and were in
rebellion against Yahweh. Another difficult distinction is distinguishing between ethnic Jews and
practicing Jews in the Old Testament. Judaism was not simply a religious identity but was also a national
identity. This is not without comparison. For example, many Americans call themselves “Christians”
because of their belief that they live in a “Christian nation” or their family’s religious hereitage but would
disagree with many of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Heiser rightfully argues that just
because one can find examples of Jews that were polytheistic or henotheistic does not automatically mean
that all Israelites, including the authors of the Old Testament, were polytheistic.684

The true debate is on whether the authoritative and recognized text of Judaism, the Tanakh,
taught a monotheistic religion or allowed for any form of polytheism. Walton asserts, “The Old
Testament tolerates no other gods; Yahweh stands alone.”685 Thus, while the Old Testament
describes Israelites who worshipped other gods, it never prescribes the worship of any other god.
Rather, Yahweh actively demonstrates that there is no other being in the universe that can
compare to His greatness. Thus, while the Israelites may not have always followed their religious
convictions, Judaism always emphasized the uniqueness and incomparability of Yahweh and
viewed Him as the sole God of the universe, while recognizing that other created spiritual forces
existed.


685 Walton, Old Testament Theology, 35.
Monotheism and the Book of Isaiah

A final issue in this discussion is why the book of Isaiah has such an emphasis on monotheism in comparison to other sections of the Old Testament. Mark Smith argues that Deutero-Isaiah created this monotheistic approach after the Babylonian Exile in order to both persuade and understand how to relate to Yahweh under Persian rule. Smith’s argument is threefold. First, a minority of monotheists used the Exile to persuade the nation that their view was correct, arguing that the Exile occurred because of idol worship. Smith writes, “Monotheistic statements attempted to persuade Judeans still unconvinced of this perspective. Perhaps these declarations represent the efforts of a minority of monotheists to persuade a majority of Judeans who held Yahweh as the head of a larger group of divinities or divine powers.” Thus, Smith argues that Deutero-Isaiah’s emphasis on monotheism is essentially a propaganda presentation by a group within Israel that was attempting to turn Judaism into strict monotheism, which eventually was successful after the Babylonian Exile.

Second, Smith argues Deutero-Isaiah, having just experienced Judah’s defeat, created a god more powerful than any other. He writes, “In a time when nothing seemed possibly good for the Judean elite held in captivity in Babylon, the rhetoric of Second Isaiah soars, evoking a god capable of all things.” According to this view, the destruction of the nation opened the door to Deutero-Isaiah changing the Jewish view of Yahweh from being “their (local) God” to “the only (universal) God”. He did this because it was no longer possible to argue that Yahweh was superior to the other nations gods from a militarily or political viewpoint. Therefore, he says

\[687\] Ibid, 179.
Deutero-Isaiah had to take it a step farther and argue that Israel’s God was greater than the other gods so it did not matter if they had been defeated in battle and conquered.

Third, Smith argues that Israel no longer had any political boundaries or institutions after the Babylonian Exile, so they had to place all of their trust in their God, thereby magnifying His power and abilities. He writes,

Yahweh is not only politically exalted as Israel is politically demoted, Yahweh becomes more than the god above all other gods; the existence of other gods is denied and two images central to Second Isaiah presentation of Yahweh, the warrior-king and creator, are melded and scored in the text to counter the perceived reality of other deities…Yahweh as cosmic creator and warrior in Second Isaiah addresses the issue of loss of land and king. Yahweh is not just the god of Israel (both as land and people) but of all lands and nations. 688

According to this view, without a king to give the people hope or a national identity to depend upon, Deutero-Isaiah was able to enter this political and spiritual vacuum and give Yahweh extra power, even over the gods of the other nations. Therefore, Smith’s three arguments all conclude that Deutero-Isaiah’s emphasis on monotheism is a direct result of the nation’s defeat and the Babylonian Exile.

Conservative authors who identity an 8th century Isaiah as the author of the second half of the book have presented a different view on why there is such an emphasis. First, Edward Meadors argues that the prophets regularly were concerned with the nation’s fall into idolatry and therefore what Isaiah is doing is trying to persuade the nation that they do must not worship idols because their own God is significantly greater than any man made god. 689 This explains why Isaiah uses satire to attack the very nature of idols to show the people that they are in fact

worshipping gods created in their own image with their own resources instead of worshipping the true God. This is not a new concept to Isaiah 40-48 but goes back to the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal and even the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai. Yahweh consistently throughout the Old Testament was trying to convince people that He alone was God and they should stop worshipping false and impotent idols/gods.

Second, Christopher Wright argues that Isaiah has a focus on monotheism because He was both preparing the nation to be defeated by Babylon, which in the Ancient Near East would have implied that the Babylonian gods were superior to Yahweh. Therefore, he sought to restore their confidence in Yahweh by showing His sovereignty as both the Creator and His ability to control the future. He writes, “But it is the prophecies in the book of Isaiah, given to renew the faith of the exiles, that make the most of this sovereignty of Yahweh as Creator—precisely because the exiles needed to regain their confidence in the universality of Yahweh. Far from being defeated, far from being confined to either his own people or his own land, he was still Lord of the whole cosmos as much as he had ever been.”

Thus, Isaiah does not have to be responding after the Exile or creating a new theological idea, but can instead be presenting evidence in advance. Even though the nation would go through its most trying time with the Babylonian Exile, Yahweh was still in power, knew about their future struggles and yet would still be with them after the return from the exile. Another evidence is that Isaiah told the people in advance that Yahweh was in control of Assyria and

690 Richard Lints makes a similar argument when he states, “Time and again Isaiah reminds Israel that the Lord has created them and has redeemed them. Idolatry is the strange turning of this reality on its head, by suggesting the very objects of one’s making are the means by which one can gain significance and security.” Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, ed. D.A. Carson, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 97.

Babylon and that He was using them to discipline (judge) Israel and Judah because of their violation of the Mosaic Covenant, particularly their violation of the first commandment. This showed Yahweh’s sovereignty in the situation (greater than the nations as well as their gods) and that the events of destruction and exile were under His power and had a purpose. Also, when these events took place, their fulfillment was evidence of Yahweh’s power to predict, something the empty man-made gods could not do. This seems to be the true reason why there is such an emphasis on monotheism in Isaiah 40-48.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this appendix has evaluated the origin of the concept of monotheism in Judaism, the various theories on the forms of monotheism and then the reason for Isaiah’s focus on monotheism. Monotheism had long been established before the book of Isaiah was composed and Isaiah was continuing to present Yahweh as the one true God because of the nation’s idolatry, which led to the Babylonian Exile. While the Old Testament recognizes the existence of other spiritual beings, they are never viewed as equal to Yahweh. Finally, Isaiah wrote with an emphasis on monotheism to prepare the nation for its experience with the Babylonian Exile and to prepare them to correctly appraise the reason for their defeat; that defeat did not mean the Babylonian gods were superior to Yahweh because Yahweh allowed them to take Judah because of Judah’s sin. Therefore, this also demonstrated that Yahweh had empowered Cyrus to judge Babylon and therefore He was in control, not the nations. Finally, this was to convince the people that they should not put their trust in false Babylonian idols but in the one true God.
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