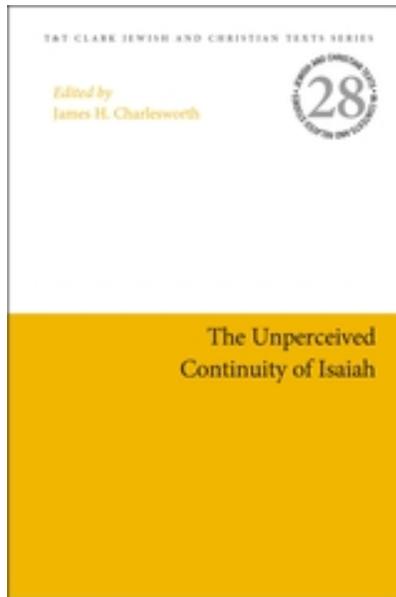


RBL 07/2020



James H. Charlesworth, ed.

The Unperceived Continuity of Isaiah

Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies 28

London: T&T Clark, 2019. Pp. xiv + 236, Hardcover, \$114.00, ISBN 9780567684240.

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This collection of studies going back to a conference held in 2015 in Jerusalem aims to show that there is a clear continuity of the Isaianic tradition beyond the era of the eighth-century prophet. In comparison to other books of the Old Testament, Isaiah has been one of exceptional influence throughout the centuries. The ten essays included here underline this statement from various perspectives, dealing with the reception history of Isaiah in different periods. Below I present a short overview of its content with several remarks appended to each study.

Following a short introduction outlining the reasons behind the organization of the conference and the setup of the current volume, James H. Charlesworth argues in a general introductory study that the continuity of the Isaianic tradition is often “unperceived” (1). Charlesworth maintains that an examination of any one of the sections of Isaiah “should be studied in terms of the whole the Isaianic corpus and not in isolation” (4, a statement apparently inspired by M. A. Sweeney). Charlesworth argues for the existence of a “school of thinkers who were shaped by 1–39 in Babylon and 1–55 later in Jerusalem” (4), but the process may have begun with the prophet Isaiah himself, who “edited and changed his earliest oracles” (5). The essay walks through a list of Isaianic texts cited *in extenso*, with sporadic comments, also providing some examples regarding the afterlife of the Isaianic tradition in Qumran, the Septuagint, the apocryphal literature, and the New Testament. While the language of this introductory essay is indeed accessible to “the average intelligent reader” (the intended audience, according to xiii), one has the impression that the

uniqueness of the project is somewhat overstated. The idea that the prophecies of Isaiah of the eighth century played an exceptional role for subsequent generations has been discussed extensively in the past few decades both in general terms, as well as for specific time periods, although some of those studies remain here unnoticed.¹ The use of secondary literature in the introduction to such a vast area is understandably selective. Nonetheless, a harmonization of the bibliography would have been beneficial especially in view of the envisioned readers (e.g., Isaiah is reported to have *lived* between 738–701/686 BCE on page 5 but on page 7 is assumed to have been *called* in 742).

The subsequent essays deal with the basic concept of Isaianic influence in a chronological order. In an informative study, Dan’el Kahn discusses the idea of continuity within Isa 1–39. In contrast to a trend aiming to treat this corpus as a homogeneous work of late origin, Kahn shows that many prophecies within First Isaiah derive from later periods, the composition being the result of a “continuous and constant ‘Fortschreibung’” (36). In his view, “the lack of *major* editing and historically datable additions dating to the postexilic period (neither Persian nor Hellenistic) points to finalizing of the bulk of First Isaiah just a couple of decades before the earliest datable prophecies in Deutero-Isaiah” (36). He attempts to locate the historical background of many prophecies within the eighth–sixth centuries BCE, between 735 (e.g., Isa 6, the call of Isaiah) and 550 (e.g., Isa 13, before the defeat of Astyages by Cyrus). This collection was “constantly reworked, reedited and supplemented with sayings referring to current events in the political arena during the entire seventh century until the destruction of the temple, ... and were supplemented even during the Babylonian exile up to a decade before the activity of Deutero-Isaiah.” (70). In contrast to this, later redactional activity (e.g., Isa 24–27; 34–35; 38:11–20) do not show any sign of clear allusions to historical events (69). Although historical references are indeed implied by many of the prophecies, one must admit that the data in this regard are complex. Kahn is aware of this while musing over the dilemma of authentic (and eventually unrealised) prediction or postevent prophecy, although he shows predilection for the second option (see 41 [Isa 19:4], 48 [37:24–25], 52–53 [10:24–25], 58 [20:3–4]). Occasionally the updating of earlier prophecies is argued to have been performed meticulously, as in case of Isa 19:16–25, where each “on that day” section appears to be a new update related to a new historical event (i.e., 701, 671, 671–667, 671–652, and after 625 [56–57, 64]). From the point of view of scribal transmission, this compositional hypothesis of *constant* updating leaves unanswered questions. Although not stated in this study, such hypothesis would presuppose some kind of centralised authority watching over a single (?) scroll of Isaiah. Kahn has no answer who were responsible for the updating and where this edited version was kept

1. See, e.g., Hermann, Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977); Hugh G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Ulrich F. Berges, *Isaiah: The Prophet and his Book* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

(70). Moreover, Kahn seemingly implies a methodological consistency in the editing process as well. Note, for example his comment on Isa 19:24–25: “since all the oracles in this chapter seem to reflect specific historical situations, it would be surprising if these verses had no real historical background” (64). Such presupposition would have required further legitimation. A final question that would obviously arise from historically oriented research into First Isaiah that is not addressed in this study is the apparent incongruence between the historically interested editor(s) and the current chronological disorder within the book itself.

The chronologically ordered studies follow with a very short paper by Shalom M. Paul on Deutero-Isaiah that argues for direct or indirect connections with First-Isaiah (among others, but also with Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Psalms, Lamentations). He maintains that Deutero-Isaiah not only reused but also reinterpreted many earlier traditions. A good example of this is the transfer of Davidic loyalty to the people in Isa 55:3–4 (73). Not discussed is how this view on the democratized royal tradition relates to the installation of Cyrus as the actual anointed one of YHWH. Readers are often redirected for further details to the author’s more detailed commentary on Deutero-Isaiah.

The essay on Trito-Isaiah, authored by Jeffrey R. Chadwick, with its “traditionalist” view that Isa 56–66 derives from the very same First Isaiah, is undoubtedly the most perplexing one in this volume, as it seems to counter the basic idea outlined in the introduction, that “this continuity is ‘unperceived’ by all who think ‘the book of Isaiah’ is a unity and that all sixty-six chapters were written by one person” (1). Chadwick assumes that the different tone of Isa 55–66 can be explained within a post-701 setting (78–79), as well as with a peculiar view on biblical prophecy, outlined by him as follows: “Isaiah³ [= Isa 56–66] wrote as much for the so-called latter days as he did for his own time; he wrote as much to us, far in his future, as he did to the troubled Judah of his present” (82).

Emanuel Tov authored “Exegesis and Theology in the Transmission of Isaiah,” focusing thereby on Qumran, the Septuagint, and the Targum. He assumes that “the textual transmission started upon the completion of the literary composition, that is, after it had been written and had undergone a process of editing” (94). The large number of manuscripts in Qumran testifies to the popularity of Isaiah both in Qumran and beyond (as not all texts were produced in that location). Yet in contrast to the books of Exodus, Joshua, Samuel, or Jeremiah, the textual witnesses of Isaiah do not diverge significantly from each other, leading Tov to conclude that all versions derive from the same single Isaiah text (99). The MT is the best-preserved witness to this early Isaianic text, with a presumed textual deviation of up to 2 percent from the hypothetical original (that is approximately the same volume of divergences as that between the codices of Leningrad and Aleppo). Closest to the MT (proto-MT group) are the Targum, Vulgate, Peshitta, Theodotion, Aquila, and Symmachus. A larger number of variations (ca. 10 percent) appears in 1QIsa^b (MT-like group). Still further removed are the LXX and 1QIsa^a (as well as 4QIsa^c). Elements of exegesis appear in the early traditions of the LXX and 1QIsa^a but are missing from the MT (98). Tov questions that any of the

ancient versions would provide evidence to a different textual tradition (101). Even cases where deviant readings coincide within the different traditions (e.g., the presence of אור in Isa 53:11 in 1QIsa^a, 1QIsa^b, 4QIsa^d, as well as the LXX) over against the MT are doubted to provide a variant earlier than the one attested in the MT (102). Tov admits that “it is often difficult to know whether the change is intentionally carrying theological implications” (105). The LXX contains many contemporizing readings, identifications of names with current entities (115), but Tov concurs with those denying a messianic exegesis here (121, unlike in 1QIsa^a). He does not address the issue whether any hermeneutical connection could be made between the contemporizing reading of the LXX and the contemporizing exegesis of (among others) the Qumran community, as reflected in the pesharim literature.

The study of Dale C. Allison Jr. deals with the “debt of John the Baptist and Jesus to the book of Isaiah” (128). Following a careful examination of the evidence, he maintains that the close connection between John the Baptist and Isaiah cannot be assigned merely to early Christian hermeneutical traditions, as often assumed. In a detailed analysis of the core ideas of the sermon of John in Matt 3:7–10 / Luke 3:9–10, he concludes that this reflects a reading of Isa 51:1–2 reaching beyond early Christian traditions, showing close connections with pre-Tannaitic Judaism (135) and even Qumran (136). The role of the desert in the eschatological vision of John (also known from Qumran) and perhaps even the baptismal ritual itself point to the pre-Christian origin of the concepts preserved in the gospels (139). With respect to the connection between Jesus and Isaiah, Allison is well aware of the difficulties related to questions of historicity. Nonetheless, given the documented importance of the book of Isaiah in Judaism at the time of Jesus, as well as the close connections between Jesus and John the Baptist, he concludes that “scepticism should not be excessive” when addressing the issue of relationship between Jesus and the book of Isaiah (141). By means of insightful examples, he shows that Jesus’s so-called realized eschatology derives in fact from the theological vision of Deutero-Isaiah himself (142–43). Even the core concept of the preaching of Jesus, the kingdom of God, can be traced back to Isa 52:7 (perhaps via the Targumic reading: “the kingdom of your God is revealed”), which in turn is related to a central text of Jesus’s self-identification in Isa 61:1–3 (144). Allison counters the view of those who consider that citing the scripture in relation to one’s social role would be limited to the followers and could not be ascribed to Jesus himself (145–50). Allison’s range of evidence in this regard may be supplemented by recalling the role that the book of Isaiah played for the Qumran community not merely in the sense of an eschatological handbook but also as a creator of *communal* identity, which is not far from how Isaiah shaped the *individual* self-understanding of John the Baptist, Jesus, or Paul.

While Allison addressed the relationship between the book of Isaiah, on the one hand, and John the Baptist and Jesus, on the other, from a historical point of view, James H. Charlesworth discusses the relationship between Isaiah and the authors of the gospels, as well as apostle Paul. He shows that “Paul’s thought was shaped by the book of Isaiah” (157), which often means the Greek version of Isaiah. An example could be here Rom 9:27, where the variant “a remnant will be *saved*” derives

from the Greek, not the Hebrew text (155). With respect to the earliest gospel, Mark, six citations are listed and discussed. Among the references, Isa 6:9–11 is mentioned in relation to a pericope central to the gospel, Mark 4:12. However, one misses here the recognition of the key importance of this Isaianic text for the Gospel of Mark as a whole, that is, beyond the concrete location where these verses are cited. This significance is probably lost because of a particular exegetical view on Mark 4:33. Charlesworth argues that there is a tension between Mark 4:12, assuming that parables are intentionally cryptic language, and 4:33, which in his view apparently presupposes something different. However, this hypothesis rests on a specific rendering of 4:33, “so that all were able to hear/understand him” (thus Charlesworth on 163), which is by far not the most convincing reading of the Greek phrase *kathōs ēdynanto akouein*. This latter can also be translated as “in so far as/so long as they were able to listen,” meaning something like Jesus spoke to the crowd endlessly in parables, in contrast to his inner circle. This idea of cryptic speech to outsiders is deeply rooted in the vision of Isa 6:9–11 (and other passages in First Isaiah) regarding prophecy as a secretive genre, accessible only to a limited circle (cf. Isa 8:16). The essay also discusses the use of Isaiah in Matthew, Luke, and John, occasionally with helpful syncretizing comments. Charlesworth notes, for example, that the use of Isaiah in Matthew and Luke is more prominent than in Mark, and, unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not use scripture to prove that particular events were predicted in Jesus’s life (161). One may add here that, beyond the first quote in Mark 1:2–3, Mark cites Isaiah exclusively in negative, critical contexts, quite unlike Matthew and Luke. As to the text types used, Charlesworth concludes that some citations derive from the variants known to us and some do not correspond to any known text type. He assumes that, like the authors of the pesharim, the authors of the New Testament may have deliberately altered the text on occasions (180). Early Judaism’s (including the gospel authors’) addiction to Isaiah and the theology of their times was so strong that in Charlesworth view “some of the aspects of Jesus’ life were mined from prophecy and not from secular history” (180).

The list of studies is rounded off with a presentation of the citations and allusions to Isaiah in Jewish and Christian liturgies by Mirosław S. Wróbel (although Christian here means Roman Catholic). Wróbel sums up the rich Isaianic references within different liturgical contexts, with abundant citations that would testify to the influence of Isaiah beyond the first century CE. As a side note, it is striking to see that the overwhelming majority of these Isaianic references imply promises of salvation, and later tradition preserves barely preserved any memory of the critical tone of Isaianic prophecy. In that it may be argued that “Isaianic” in reality means adherence to a tradition according to the mediation of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah.

The reader of this volume might have wondered why the book of Isaiah in particular came to be so exceptionally influential throughout the centuries, a question left unanswered in the previous studies of this volume. Fortunately, a short but helpful appendix by Albert I. Baumgarten aims to clarify exactly this important question. Baumgarten provides two major arguments. The first is related to the genre of the book, “prophecy,” as it came to be understood in the late postexilic

period. He argues that the rise of what he calls “prophetic Judaism” accounts for the significance of the prophetic literature and prophetic hermeneutics in general (207). To be sure, the newly emerging view on prophecy differs from the original concept in that this latter turns prophecy into mostly predictive literature. But why Isaiah the prophet? Baumgarten argues that the rather unique structure of this book, including the events of two hundred years that according to later interpreters had been foretold by an inspired visionary in the eighth century, explains the extraordinary attention that this book has received in subsequent centuries (211). Deutero-Isaiah, or the editor who combined the two compositions, was certainly unaware of the ramifications that his editorial decision would have not only on later interpreters of Isaiah but ultimately on prophecy as a literary genre by itself.

The book closes with an index of references to biblical and extrabiblical literature, as well as an index of authors.