Dating Isaiah 40-66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?

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[An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Society in Kansas City, November, 1991.]

Christopher Seitz of Yale Divinity School has recently stated that the division of the book of Isaiah into two or three Isaiahs is “in many ways the greatest historical consensus of the modern period.”\(^1\) It is certainly true that most critical scholars have taken this to be axiomatic arguing that Isaiah 40–66 was composed in the exilic period or the post-exilic times. The major reasons offered in favor of the late dating for Isaiah 40–66 are: (1) The references to Judah as ruined and deserted with the temple destroyed (e.g., 44:26b; 58:12; 61:4; 63:18; 64:10f), (2) The difference of language and style between chapters 1–39 and 40–66, (3) The advanced theological ideas in chapters 40–66, and (4) The occurrence of the name Cyrus (Isa 44:28; 45:1).\(^2\)

Many conservatives, on the other hand, have rejected the division of Isaiah and argued for the eighth century provenance of Isaiah 40–66, during the lifetime of Isaiah the prophet. Arguments for the early date include: (1) The references to the widespread practice of idolatry (which was eradicated in the exilic and post-exilic period), (2) The apparent Palestinian setting of the geographical and topographical references (44:14; 41:19), (3) The unlikelihood that the esteemed author of chapters 40–66 would forever remain anonymous, and (4) New Testament passages that explicitly refer to texts from Isaiah 40–66 as coming from the prophet Isaiah.\(^3\)

But what can be gleaned from the study of linguistic evidence, especially the diachronic study of the Hebrew language which has proven itself to be trustworthy and objective in dating Biblical texts?

The diachronic study of language is based upon the finding, universally acknowledged among linguists today, that languages are subject to change over time. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to expect that the Hebrew language reflected in the Old Testament experienced change from its earliest appearance in the second millennium B.C.

The diachronic analysis of Biblical Hebrew was developed primarily through the work of Arno Kropat in his work on the syntax of Chronicles early in the twentieth century.\(^4\) Kropat carefully analyzed the language of the Books of Chronicles and compared his findings with the synoptic texts of Samuel/Kings. The language of the Chronicles exhibited changes that were consistent with other books of the post-exilic period specifically Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The methodology used in diachronic or historical analysis involves the execution of two linguistic principles: linguistic contrast, and linguistic distribution.\(^5\) Linguistic contrast is concerned with verifying the substitution or replacement of an earlier linguistic phenomenon by a later one, while linguistic distribution makes note of the diffusion of the linguistic development in literature known to be late. The simultaneous employment of these two principles is a sufficient control by which we can determine when linguistic change takes place. It is my purpose to examine Isaiah 40–66 in light of the conclusions of current diachronic research. Special attention will be given to the linguistic status of Isaiah 40–66 in contrast to the Hebrew of Ezekiel and later Biblical texts, texts which are generally accepted to have their provenance in the exilic and post-exilic periods respectively. This comparison will provide a further criterion in the debate of whether Isaiah 40–66 should be viewed as originating in the eighth century B.C. or from the time of the Babylonian exile or later in
the Persian period.

To illustrate how diachronic analysis works observe the occurrence and frequency of the two Hebrew words translated “kingdom,” מלְכָּת and כֹּלֶּמַת. The first indication that there may be a historical relationship between the terms may be observed from the Chronicler’s preference for כֹּלֶּמַת in texts where the parallel text of Samuel employed the term מִלְכָּת. Note the following examples:

2 Sam 5:12 וַיָּצֶא מִלְכָּת
1 Chron 14:2 כִּי-שָׁמְאָת לְמַעְלָה מִלְכָּת
2 Sam 7:12 וַיִּתֵּן הַמִּלְכָּת
1 Chron 17:11 וַיִּתֵּן הַמִּלְכָּת
2 Sam 7:16 וַיִּמְלַכְתּוּ עָדָה-עַל-לֵבָנָה
1 Chron 17:14 וַיֵּמְלַכְתּוּ עָדָה-עַל-לֵבָנָה

Later biblical writers and post-biblical writers clearly preferred כֹּלֶּמַת. Most notably in the book of Esther, in the nine references to “kingdom,” only כֹּלֶּמַת is used. This trend continues in the Dead Sea Scrolls where כֹּלֶּמַת occurs fourteen times while the earlier term מִלְכָּת occurs only once. In the writings of Mishnaic Hebrew, only כֹּלֶּמַת is used. The usage and distribution of the terms מִלְכָּת and כֹּלֶּמַת illustrate how diachronic analysis operates.

I will now apply the diachronic method in discussing four examples. In this study it will become apparent that the evidence from diachronic analysis overwhelmingly supports a pre-exilic date for Isaiah 40–66. First, an example from orthography from the spelling of the personal name “David.”

1. דִּוָד > דִּיוָד

It has long been recognized that one characteristic feature of the orthography of the Chronicler, in contrast to the orthography of Samuel/Kings, is the Chronicler’s insistence in writing דִּיוָד with the plene spelling. The plene spelling is completely absent from Samuel, and occurs in Kings only on three occasions (1 Kgs 3:14; 11:4, 36). Thus of the 671 cases of the occurrence of the name “David” in Samuel/Kings, only three are written plene while the remainder are defective. By contrast, in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, the name “David” occurs 271 times, all of which have the plene spelling. Just a few illustrations are sufficient to indicate the dia chronic nature of this orthographic shift:

2 Sam 7:26 וַיִּשָּׁבַךְ דִּיוָד יָהָה בְּנֵיהוּ לְפְנֵי
1 Chron 17:24 וַיִּתֵּן דִּיוָד בְּנֵיהוּ לְפְנֵי
1 Kgs 7:51 דִּיוָד אֲבֵי נֵחָוָה אַתָּם קָדְם
2 Chron 5:1 אָנָה שָׁמְאָה אַתָּם דִּיוָד אֲבֵי

The same trend of late Biblical Hebrew toward the plene spelling of the personal name דִּיוָד is evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls. This tendency can best be demonstrated by looking at occurrences of דִּיוָד in the biblical
manuscripts of Samuel and Isaiah from Qumran which are always plene, against the corresponding passages in Isaiah and Samuel from the MT which are always defective:

\text{Isa 29:1} \quad דוד

\text{1Qlsa\textsuperscript{a} 29:1} \quad דוד

\text{Isa 55:3} \quad הלא

\text{1Qlsa\textsuperscript{a} 55:3} \quad הלא

\text{2 Sam 3:1} \quad עוד

\text{4QSam\textsuperscript{a} 3:1} \quad עוד

In the Book of Ezekiel, while the name \( \text{דוד} \) occurs only four times, it is significant that one of these spellings is plene, identical to the pattern in the post-exilic works (34:23). Ezek 34:23 provides an early attestation to this trend, and we may conclude that this tendency to write the name of \( \text{דוד} \) as plene was beginning to increase in frequency in the exilic period. Ezekiel thus might appear to occupy an intermediate or transitional status in the \( \text{דוד} \sim \text{דוד} \) shift. This is what David Noel Freedman concluded in his article on the name “David”:

The viewpoint propounded here is that the books of the Hebrew Bible which contain the name of David reflect, in the predominant spelling of each book, the period during which they were compiled and formally published. Thus the books containing the three letter spelling should be assigned to the First Temple period, the books with the four letter spelling to the Second Temple period, and those with mixed spelling to the transitional period between the two others.

In Isaiah 40–66, the name “David” occurs only one time, in Isaiah 55:3 where we find the defective spelling which is more harmonious with the pre-exilic period.

Though not too much should be made from an isolated example, if Freedman is correct so-called Second Isaiah fits well with the pre-exilic literature as reflected in Isaiah 1–39, not in the period of the exile or the post-exilic period. We will now turn to further evidence involving a morphological shift of the Hiphil stem of \( \text{וקומ} \)

\( \text{II. \quad \text{וקומ} \sim \text{ים}} \)

A linguistic phenomenon which began apparently shortly after the destruction of the first temple was the increased use of the Piel stem. This phenomenon was accompanied by an incremental tendency to consonantize the middle radical of hollow verbs. This shift can be illustrated by the use of the root \( \text{וקומ} \) which occurs in the Hiphil stem in Early Biblical Hebrew but began to be replaced by the Piel stem in later biblical texts:

\text{2 Kgs 23:24} \quad \text{למען יקים את ידバー, יתנוה הכותבים על ידפקר}

\text{Esth 9:32} \quad \text{ונאמר אסם אнием,ritis קלה וocaust בר}

Post biblical writers continue to favor the Piel:
The Piel stem of הָרַע is especially prominent in the Aramaic Targum where it was expanded to translate several different Hebrew verbs. With specific regard to the הָרַע < חֲרָב shift, note the following passages with their translations:

**Gen 26:3**

The piel of הָרַע does not occur at all in Isaiah 40–66. This evidence supports the position that the language of Isaiah 40–66 is pre-exilic. We next turn to the results of diachronic research in the area of vocabulary where there is evidence of different words being preferred in different chronological periods.
The tendency to use גובש for “expressing anger” continued in post-biblical literature, particularly in Rabbinic literature. Observe how the same concept expressed in classical Hebrew occurs in post-biblical Hebrew with the verb גובש:

1 Sam 20:30

Similarly, in Sipre Num. 86, 15 and b. Ber. 32a, the same concept is expressed.

Particularly significant is the following diachronic contrast:

Exod 16:20

וֹכַהוֹ בַּעֲמָה

Mek. Besh. IV

וֹכַהוֹ בַּעֲמָה

Already, in the exilic period as demonstrated by the Book of Ezekiel, we see this shift taking place.

The book of Ezekiel represents the earliest attestation of the replacement of the earlier semantic parallels with the Qal of גובש.

In Isaiah 40–66 there are nine occasions when the conceptual idea of expressing anger is evoked. On seven occasions the verb פַצָק is used, while in the other two, we find the verb הָרָח.

Isaiah 40–66, therefore, demonstrates Hebrew language representative of an earlier linguistic stratum.

In Early Biblical Hebrew, the idea of gathering or collecting was expressed by two verbs רַסָּא חַבָּק In later Biblical Hebrew this idea is expressed by the verb גובש in the Qal and Piel stems. Support for the lateness of גובש in Biblical Hebrew is reinforced by the observation that גובש does not occur in early biblical texts. Note the contrast of usage in these biblical texts:

Gen 29:22

1 Chron 22:22
Note particularly how these early Biblical Hebrew verbs are replaced קבצ in parallel expressions in later texts as well as by its cognate in the Aramaic Targum:\textsuperscript{35}

2 Sam 12:29

יורש רוד אטרכל-特斯

2 Sam 2:30

ייקב אטרכל-特斯

Esth 4:16

כּנָס אטרכל-תחוזים

Lev 25:3

אָסַפְס אטרכל-特斯

m. B. Bat. 3:1:

cנס את בואתך

Exod 3:16\textsuperscript{36}

אָסַפְס אטרכל-特斯

Tg. Onq.

אָזָיִל ותכנוש יתمص לפי

1 Kgs 18:19\textsuperscript{37}

כָּוָה לוֹ, אטרכל-特斯

Tg. Neb.

כָּוָה לוֹ, פי יך ירשא י

It can be easily observed from the illustrations cited above, that early Biblical Hebrew פסא and late Biblical Hebrew and post-biblical קבצ are parallel semantically. Note the use of the terms in Isaiah as well as in Ezekiel where we observe the use of קבצ already employed in the exilic period:\textsuperscript{38}

Isa 56:8

מקח דחי, ילבל עבד אֵלֶךָו, ולבךו

Ezek 22:21

אֹכְבַּתי, אַתָּתְךָו

Ezek 39:28

אֶכְבַּתיו ילב-אֵדְעָותָו

Ezekiel again displays lexicographical affinities with late Biblical Hebrew by the use of the later Hebrew lexeme קבצ. This verb, used in place of the earlier, corresponding verbs in pre-exilic Biblical Hebrew, continued to be preferred by the writers of post-biblical Hebrew. The verb increased in usage in Mishnaic Hebrew as the term occurs in place of פסא according to Abba Bendavid.\textsuperscript{39}

Isaiah 40–66 employs the early Biblical Hebrew expression on 22 occasions, eight times the verb פסא with קבצ occurring fourteen times.\textsuperscript{40} The later synonym קבצ used in Ezekiel is completely absent from Isaiah 40–66.

V. Conclusion

The few examples I have presented are in no way unique but are consistent with other features which likewise point in this same direction (see

Appendix). But it should be emphasized that where diachronic comparison can be made, based on the present state of diachronic research, Ezekiel, from the exilic period as well as post-exilic Hebrew literature always indicates later linguistic features than those we find in Isaiah 40–66. Thus, if critical scholars continue
to insist that Isaiah should be dated in the exilic or post-exilic period, they must do so in the face of contrary evidence from diachronic analysis.

**V. Appendix**

EBH in Isaiah 40–66 mversus LBH in Ezekiel

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These are passages which Anderson and Forbes suggest were subject to editorial activity. *Spelling in the Hebrew Bible*, 5.

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See also, 2 Sam 6:16 = 1 Chron 15:29; 1 Kgs 12:19 = 2 Chron 10:19.

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For these and other examples, see Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll* (*IQIsa*) (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 99. See also 2 Sam 5:13 = 4QSam a 5:13; 2 Sam 8:17 = 4QSam a 8:7; and 2 Sam 12:15 = 4QSam a 12:15. For these readings see Emmanuel Tov, “Determining the Relationship between the Qumran Scrolls and the LXX: Some Methodological Problems,” in *The Hebrew and Greek Texts of Samuel*, ed. Emmanuel Tov (Jerusalem: Academan, 1980) 55; and Eugene Charles Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978) 45, 83, 138, 143. For additional plene spellings of †רי in 4QSam a, see Ulrich, ibid., 45, 56, 82, 86, 88, 196, 197.

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Freeman, “Spelling of the Name ‘David’,” 99.

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Observe how this late Midrash uses the Piel of הָעָלָה in this phrase identically to Ezek 13:6, and thus in contrast to the Hiphil stem of the earlier 1 Kgs 2:4. The late phrase is also found in the Mishnah in m. Ḥag 2:4; m. Yebam. 4:13; 8:4; m. Neg. 9:3; 11. 17. For the voluminous number of passages in the Mishnah and the Midrashim which use the Piel of הָעָלָה, see Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebræitatis*, VII (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959) 5910-15.
This shift may also be observed in T. Onq. Num 30:15.


Other examples of the early Biblical Hebrew usage include Gen 41:10; Lev 10:16; Num 11:33; 16:22; Deut 6:15. See also, Eccl 5:16; 7:9.

The verb occurs in the Qal in Ps 112:10. The date of this Psalm is open to question. This one possible exception, however, does not lessen the force of the basic premise that סֹק in the Qal is a feature of late Biblical Hebrew. See Hurvitz, *A Study in Post-Exilic Hebrew*, 174 n. 303; and idem, *Linguistic Study*, 115. Bendavid, *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew* 1:361.

For example, see Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim* (New York: Shalom, 1967) 1, 656. The verb in the Qal is absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira. These documents, however, do attest the occurrence of the common early Biblical Hebrew idiom סֹק וֹאַכְלָן does occur in the story of Ahikar, line 189. See A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* B.C. (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1913) 218. Furthermore, the Hiphil stem is extant at Qumran in 4Q504, 26.7. For transcription, see *DJD* VII, 166. Among the numerous other examples from Rabbinic literature include m. *Abot* 5.11; *Deut Rab*. 97b; b. *Ber*. 7a; and b. *Sanh*. 103a.


*Linguistic Study*, 116.

Isa 47:6; 54:9; 57:17; 64:4; 57:16, 17; 64:8.

Isa 41:11; 45:24. The noun פָּאָה is missing in these texts, however.

The verb occurs one time in the Hithpael conjugation, in Isa 28:20. This reference is, however, not relevant to this discussion as the verb not only differs morphologically, belonging to a different stem, but is semantically obscure as well. See Hurvitz, *Linguistic Study*, 124 n. 201. Acknowledged to be late by *BDB*, 488; *KB*, 443; and Driver, *Introduction*, 475.

The occurrence of the term פְּסֵא in the phrase פְּסֵא וַתִּרְי in the pre-exilic Gezar Inscription is apparently harmonious with what occurred in early Biblical Hebrew. See *KAI* I, 182.1, 34.

The Aramaic Targum also translates לֶבַע with שַׁנְכִּי in Gen 41:35, 48; Deut 13:17; 30:3, 4, etc.


