

The Book of Isaiah: Patchwork of literary fragments versus predetermined literary structure? Part II

ABSTRACT

In Part I of this study three possibilities to describe or define the literary character of Isaiah were briefly reviewed. In the present study a combination of some aspects of these approaches will be engaged in a different way to understand the literary character of Isaiah. These aspects include the use of a particular single concept as unifying factor, parallelisms as identified by the second group as per major sections of the book as well as the so-called triadic pattern (in adapted form) identified by O’Connell (1994:236). This approach will hopefully highlight something of the book’s extensive and intricate literary shape. Since literary structuring is the main focus of the study, the subject will be dealt with in a somewhat technical manner.

1. EXTENSIVE PARALLELISM

Several scholars have indicated that the literary character of Isaiah is determined to a high degree by the patterns of parallelism and chiasmus (see Part I). Although the present study does not deal with Bible translation as such, note must be taken of the following viewpoint. According to Sterk (2007:92-94) it is expedient that parallelisms be taken into consideration when attempting Bible translation. In this connection he emphasizes the literary phenomenon of “all-inclusive” parallelism. He applies this view of the wider reach of literary devices to the usage of merismus in the text and stresses that “all-inclusive” parallelism is common in Isaiah (e.g. 1:3 [verse 2?], 1:7a; 5:11, 13; 13:13; 17:3; 18:6; 24:9; 33:13).

Thus the thrust of Sterk’s observations unintentionally support the identification of examples of parallelism which are of greater dimension in comparison with types previously identified. These include parallelisms as confirmed by Sterk, on a diminutive level, for example as part of or a complete text or passage, but they may also open the way to recognise cases of a larger scale, encompassing a chapter or section of a book.

Blenkinsopp (2002:67)² allows for the existence of the literary device of parallelism in Isaiah, but rejects the conclusion reached by some scholars that Isaiah 6:1-11/13 and 40:1-8 can be classified as such (Blenkinsopp 2002:50). However, the parallelism identified between chapters 7-12 and 36-37 confirms his suspicion that this is an important and quite deliberate structuring device in the book (2000:253). As far as the present study is concerned, the following layout qualifies as an example of larger parallelism. Blenkinsopp (2000:239) demonstrates this reality with the case of the two pregnancies:

Immanuel (7:14-16)	Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4)
The young woman	The prophethess
“The young woman is pregnant and about to give birth to a son”	“she became pregnant and bore a son”
“She will give him the name Immanuel”	“call him Maher-shalal-hash -baz”

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2 Cf. Blenkinsopp (2000:79, 231, 239, 253; 2002:50, 67; 2003:33, 35-36, 40, 60-61, 159, 244, 304).

“Before the child knows how to reject what is bad and choose what is ... good”	“before the child is able to say ‘my father’ or ‘my mother’...”
The king of Assyria (7:17)	“the king of Assyria” (8:4)

Other cases of more extensive parallelism can be traced in Isaiah chapter 40-55. According to Clifford (1992:497), for example, five encompassing parallels dominate the section entirely. These parallelisms in turn are dominated by polarising concepts, namely first and last things; Babylon and Zion; Yahweh and the gods; Israel and the nations; the Servant of the Lord and Israel.

Clifford (1992:497) argues that these five great polarities provide a sketch of Deutero-Isaiah’s message. The speeches provide further evidence of parallelism in that they are divided into two parts, with the second repeating the first with variations (e.g. Isaiah 41:1-20 is repeated in 41:21-42:9: the sequence of summons to trial 41:1, 5-7 = 21-22b; legal questioning of the nations/their gods 41:2-4 = 22c-24, as well as the divine verdict regarding the nations and Israel 41:8-20 = 42:1-9). Chapter 48 may be divided into verses 1-11 (38 cola) and 12-21 (37 cola). In the first part the Hebrew word “call” (*qr*) appears three times in cases of humans calling or naming themselves; in the second section it is used three times of Yahweh calling Israel. Chapter 49 is divided into verses 1-13 (55 cola) and 14-26 (52 cola): in the former part the Servant prepares for a new, second Exodus-Entry into Zion, while the latter deals with Lady Zion preparing for her children’s return. Isaiah 55:1-5 and 6-11 are parallel exhortations to put aside profane conduct and enter the sanctuary for life-giving divine sustenance.

2. BEYOND A BIFID STRUCTURE

O’Connell (1994:19-20) used a rhetorical-critical analysis to define the literary structure of Isaiah³ (see Part I). His thesis is twofold, namely that the formal structure of the book of Isaiah comprises seven⁴ asymmetrically concentric sections (O’Connell 1994:236), each of which represents a complex framework pattern of repetitions among its subunits. Regarding the second part of his thesis he pointed out that the rhetoric of the book is closest to that of the prophetic covenant disputation. As to this second claim, it may be inferred that the book best manifests its structural unity, thematic coherence and rhetorical emphasis when read as an exemplar of the prophetic covenant disputation genre.⁵ Again, the claim of his main thesis, which relates to the formal structure of the book of Isaiah, is that the book comprises an architectural scheme whereby corresponding blocks of prophetic material have been arranged into seven asymmetrically concentric sections. The patterns of repetition among these form-critical subunits, which always frame a central axis, may involve a two-, three-, or fourfold repetition that combines to make up complex framework configurations. The book of Isaiah, comprising the seven concentric sections that employ this framework pattern, is arranged, with transitional materials (i.e., 2:6ααβ, 22;

3 It is striking that the author generally speaking does not use traditional terminology (like parallelism and/or chiasmus/chiasmic patterns) in connection with the literary patterns pursued by him in the book of Isaiah. In stead he employs a set of terms to distinguish his own attempt from others in the same field of interest. These include among others: (a) tier(s), tier repetitions, tiered architecture (a block of texts), structural delineators, corresponding and developmental devices, and triadic/quadratic repetitions. He defines the overall structure dominating the book of Isaiah as “complex frameworking” (p. 23) but describes it in traditional terms, namely semantic parallelism (p. 29). This framework is expressed in terms of asymmetrical concentricity and continuity (cf. the title of his book).

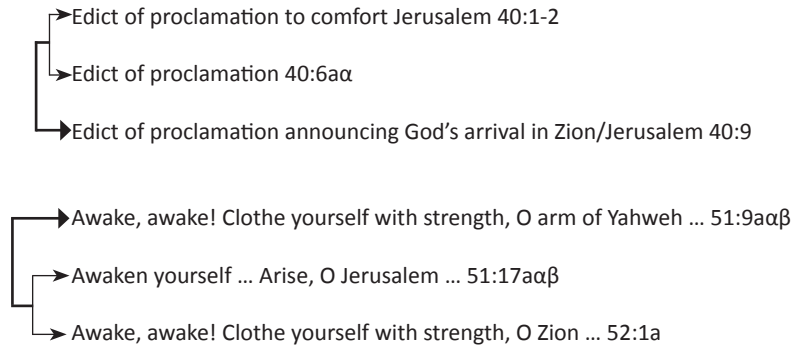
4 The conviction of some, namely that whole passages are arranged in parallel position in the book, is also the issue in the study of the New Testament Book of Revelation. Some are convinced that all manner of parallel arrangement dominates the book, and to mention only one example, that it consists of seven parallel parts. However, opinions on the matter differ widely (Du Preez 1979: 16-20).

5 Set in brief chiasmic patterns, e.g. Isa 61:1-11 (Gileadi 1994:242).

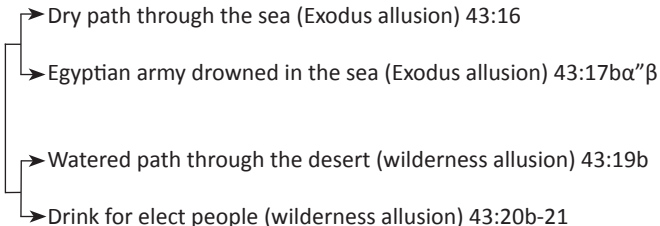
12:1-6), into a continuous development of the themes and elements that make up the book's rhetoric of prophetic covenant disputation (hence, the title of his study). The seven main sections of the book include: an exordium, which focuses on an appeal for covenant reconciliation (1:1-2:5), two structurally analogous accusatory threats of judgment (2:6aγ-21 denouncing cultic sins; 3:1-4:1 denouncing social crimes), two structurally analogous schemes for the punishment and restoration of Zion and the nations (4:2-11:16; 13:1-39:8), an exoneration of Yahweh (40:1-54:17) and a final ultimatum, which again appeals for covenant reconciliation (55:1-66:24). Perhaps as a means of lending coherence to the whole, the hierarchical branching pattern of 40:1-54:17 permutes the structural schemata of 2:6aγ-21 and 3:1-4:1. Likewise, the concentric pattern of 55:1-66:24 echoes the schemata of 4:2-11:16 and 13:1-39:8.

In this way, O'Connell moves beyond the attempts mentioned earlier and while not rejecting the bifid structure (cf. Brownlee 1952:16-21; 1964:247-259; 1986:xxxviii-xxxix, 1), he pointed out that the book may in fact be divided into seven subunits, albeit in a transverse way in relation to the bifid structure. His arrangement reveals a particular form of concentricity and represents a variation of the chiasmus pattern. This paradigm is based on the arrangement of more than three-score types of two structures of an interlocking three-figure mode, namely 2-1 – 1-2 and built around a keyword, as well as a four-figure arrangement of a 2 – 2 mode. The book of Isaiah seems to be dominated by this structure. O'Connell (1994:24-29; 236) recorded several of these patterns in the book of Isaiah. Examples of the two basic structures are as follows:

The triadic pattern: Yahweh speaking



The quadratic pattern: Yahweh's redemption through water:



Further, it seems possible that one of the patterns identified by O'Connell, namely the triadic structure, may, by utilising two interlocking triadic patterns, represent an overarching device

which dominates the book of Isaiah to a great extent, perhaps in terms of a low-keyed structuralist approach (Hayes & Holladay 1988:110-121) and approaching the book from a reader's point of view. However, this pattern takes up a transverse position in respect of his design. But the structure referred to is remarkable since it builds on the same arrangement(s) as identified by O'Connell (see below).

3. THE KINGSHIP AND COVENANT OF YAHWEH

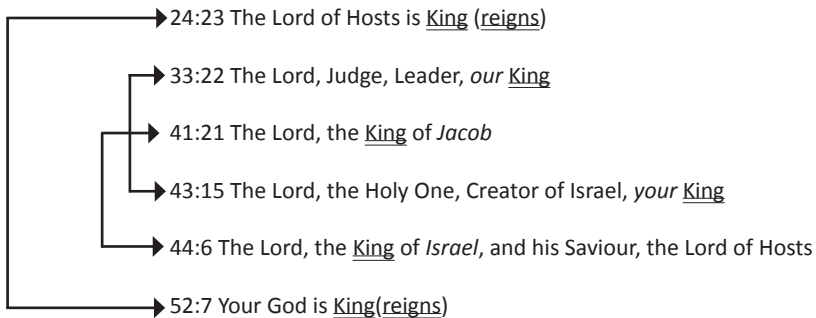
Without going into detail, one may say that O'Connell's linking of the structures observed by him to the rhetoric of a covenant disputation, is further enhanced by the fact that the kingship of God is intimately linked to the covenant concept in the sense that the relationship between these two concepts may be formulated in the way suggested by Kline (1968:36, 84, cf. 79): "Covenant administration is kingdom administration".

4. KING YAHWEH AND HIS THRONE IN ISAIAH

The notion of the kingship of God dominates the book of Isaiah (Muelenburg 1980:738) concerning both its literary structure and theological content. The following example will illustrate in part what this study hopes to establish. Applied to Isaiah, chiasmic patterns may serve at least one possible aim of the book, namely to enhance the expression of the kingship of Yahweh. The book uses royal terminology to characterise God's actions towards Israel and the nations. In this connection the Lord is often depicted as a king (Mettinger 1997:143-154). One way of depicting this kingship of God finds expression in the verb for royal rulership, namely *mālak* (24:23; 52:7), as well as the noun for king, *mēlek* (41:21; 43:15; 44:6 – Mettinger 1997:144). In combination, this verb and noun highlight Yahweh's rulership.

As an intermediate step to what follows later on, the diagram below demonstrates how chiasmic patterns serve in part the theological intention of the book, in this case to underscore the idea of Yahweh's kingship:

Hinge > 6:1,5 The King, the Lord of Hosts



One may conclude from this diagram that the substantive "king" (6:1, 5) represents a hinge for what follows. More to the point, the verb "reigns" appears at the beginning and end of the group of passages indicated (24:23 and 52:7), framing this part of the prophecy (a ring composition). Between the latter two references the noun "king" appears four times. These four references

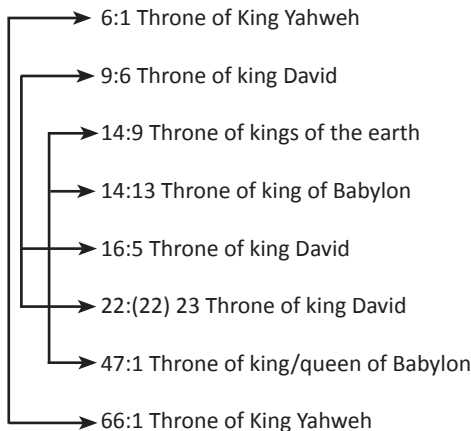
form part of a chiasmus of its own, since 33:22 and 43:15 refer to “our King” respectively “your King”, whereas 41:21 and 44:6 refer to the “King of *Jacob*” and “King of *Israel*” respectively. This pattern straddles passages indiscriminately and covers a substantial part of the book. Thus a case of greater parallelism established with the aid of single concepts.

5. THE THRONE OF GOD AS DETERMINING FACTOR

The possibility hinted at above relates to another structure based on a related idea, namely the concept of the “throne” of Yahweh. This concept plays a major role in the particular literary structure pursued here, but in a different way. Apart from other means, God’s kingship is metonymically expressed by the concept of the “throne” (*ks*) in Isaiah. The present concern is thus restricted to cases where the word “throne” appears in connection with God’s kingship, but also the kingship of humans. This means that God’s throne is presented as having a certain relationship with other thrones. In Isaiah this applies to the throne of David and the thrones of the nations/Babylon. The relationship may be one of support of those thrones or in opposition to them.

According to Isaiah the throne of God is situated in the temple (6:1) and in heaven (66:1). The thrones of David and the kings of Babylon/the nations are not specifically located somewhere, but are referred to in die following texts: 9:6; 16:5; 22:22-23 (throne of David); 14:9; 14:13; 47:1 (thrones of the nations/Babylon).

Like the prophet Micha (I Kings 22:19), Isaiah caught a glimpse of King Yahweh on his throne (Isaiah 6:1). However, neither Isaiah 6:1 nor 66:1 presents the kingship of Yahweh in terms of the word “king”. The author uses only the concept of the “throne” (*ks*) to describe God’s royal rule in these texts. The same applies to the other references. Only the throne concept acts as referent in relation to the structure. However, the main idea is that taken together, all the references to the thrones as indicated above represent two interlocking triadic patterns, while the two texts concerning God and his royal rule (6:1 and 66:1) frame the two interlocking triadic patterns. The diagram indicates the centrality of the throne concept and thus the kingship of God and other rulers as presented in the book:



6. CONCLUSION

The literary technique of parallelism came to a head with the observation by some that the book of Isaiah comprises (a) gigantic parallelism(s) which divide(s) the book into two equal parts, each of which comprises seven sections. At the same time, the bifid structure presents its material in a mirror-like style. In partial agreement with this possibility, O'Connell showed that the book is structured on the basis of so-called triadic and quadratic patterns. However, it seems clear from the present study that the literary technique of chiasmus in combination with a single concept (*ks'*) plays a major role by stitching the whole or greater part of the book together to form one literary unit.⁶ The structures identified differ from that of O'Connell in one way. There is no central axis around which the two triadic structures revolve. In stead the latter patterns are framed by the concept of God's throne.

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6 A variant of this model which displays references related to kingship (good or bad) may be constructed on the basis of the concept of the royal throne including other concepts related to kingship. These concepts include the "throne" (*ks'* Isa. 8x: 6:1, 9:6, 14:9, 14:13, 16:5, 22:(22)23,47:1; 66:1), in combination with "stay", "dwell" (*škn* 4x: 8:18, 33:5, 57:15[2x]), "be seated", "sit" (*jšb* 6x: 16:5, 37:16, 40:22, 47:1, 47:8[2x]), "high and lifted up" (*rm wns'* 3x: 6:1, 52:13, 57:15) (Kruger 2008:519-521).

KEY WORDS

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Parallelism
Chiasmus
Triadic and quadratic patterns
Bifid structure
Rhetoric
Kingship

TREFWOORDE

Literêre strukture
Parallelisme
Chiasmus
Drievoudige en viervoudige patrone
Tweevoudige struktuur
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