

ISAIAH I 1 AND II 1

by

JOHN GOLDINGAY

Pasadena

It is a commonplace of the study of Isaiah that the first verse of the book is an introduction to the whole book, or at least to chapters i-xxxix or to chapters i-xii.¹ While in an earlier form the verse might have had a narrower reference, the form that we have has been adapted to fulfil this broader function. II 1 in turn is an introduction to chapters ii-iv or ii-xii.

This note suggests that in fact i 1 exactly as we have it is a superscription simply to the first chapter of the book² and that ii 1 is a colophon to this chapter.

1. *Isaiah i 1*

The chief obstacle to the view that i 1 introduces the whole book, or at least a significant part of it, is that the verse describes what it introduces as a "vision" (*hāzôn*). This word regularly denotes a single purported revelation issuing from the experience of seeing something with the mind's eye which could not be seen by the physical eye. A. Jepsen especially emphasizes its verbal content (and its relating to a nocturnal experience),³ though this meaning is clearly not maintained throughout the Old Testament: more evident from the usage is the fact that the vision's content usually explicitly refers to events in the future (see e.g. Jer. xiv 14; xxiii 16; Ezek. vii 13; xii 22-27;

¹ This is argued most carefully by M.A. Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* [BZAW 171; Berlin/New York, 1988]), pp. 28-30; cf. O. Loretz, *Der Prolog des Jesaja-buches* (Altenberge, 1984), p. 43.

² Sweeney (n. 1) attributes this view to H. Wildberger, but mistakenly, I think: see the treatment of i 1 in *Jesaja: I. Teilband* (1972; 2nd ed., Neuchirchen, 1980), p. 6; ET *Isaiah 1-12* (Minneapolis, 1991), p. 6. J. Vermeylen lists it as one of the logical possibilities: see *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique: Tome i* (Paris, 1977), p. 4.

³ See his article on *hāzāh* in *TWAT*.

Mic. iii 6; Ps. lxxxix 20 [19]; Dan. viii 1-26; 1 Chr. xvii 15). The variants *hāzāh*, *hāzūt*, *hizzāyôn*, and *mahāzeh*, and Aramaic *hēzû*, are used similarly, to refer to a single vision. The verb *hāzāh* is used more broadly, but one cannot necessarily read these broader connotations into the use of the nouns (any more than is the case with the English words "see" and "seer").

The fact that the noun regularly refers to a single vision raises difficulties for a statement such as that of R.E. Clements that "the word has come to be used in a broad sense to cover not only visionary experiences, but prophetic revelations and messages of all kinds",⁴ which in the case of the book called Isaiah will need to include stories about the prophet as well as reports of visions. M.A. Sweeney's observation (p. 29) that "in addition to the collective or abstract meaning of *hāzôn*, it can also refer to an individual visionary event" gives a seriously distorted impression of the texts. It is the application of the word to an individual revelation that predominates. The question at issue is whether it can apply to a collection of revelatory texts.

BDB suggests the meaning "vision, as title for a book of prophecy", for the occurrences of *hāzôn* in the opening verses of Obadiah and Nahum as well as Isaiah, and for 2 Chr. xxxii 32. In the case of Obadiah, the book comprises simply a one-chapter vision, so that the usual meaning of the word suffices. In the case of Nahum, the entire book could also be read as one vision; as a whole it is shorter than the one vision in Daniel x-xii, and not so much longer than Isa. i. In any case the expression in Nahum is *sēper hāzôn*, perhaps "the book of the vision", perhaps "visionary book". In neither case, then, need the usage point to an author or editor's giving *hāzôn* anything other than its regular meaning. Nor could readers be expected to read it any other way. Nor does Obadiah or Nahum offer a parallel to the use of the simple expression "vision" to denote an extensive collection of material which might be understood as revelatory in a broad sense but is only partly visionary in character. On the other hand, these parallels could support the identification of Isa. i 1 as an introduction to Isa. 1 as a self-standing collection, which might then have become the first section in Isaiah as we know it.

⁴ *Isaiah 1-39* (London/Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 29. So also O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (London/Philadelphia, 1972; ET from *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kap. 1-12* [2nd ed., Göttingen, 1963]), p. 2; 2nd English ed. (London/Philadelphia, 1983; ET from 5th German ed. [Göttingen, 1981]), p. 3; J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX, 1985), p. 3.

In 2 Chr. xxxii 32 we are referred to "the vision of Isaiah ben Amoz the prophet in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel", for further information on the reign of King Hezekiah. "The book of the kings of Judah and Israel" suggests 2 Kings, and specifically 2 Kgs xviii-xx, on the assumption that this is the Chronicler's source. Reference to "the vision of Isaiah ben Amoz" recalls allusions to prophetic sources such as those in 2 Chr. ix 29, but no additional allusion to the book of the kings follows there. The actual phrase corresponds to Isa. i 1. The link between this and a "book of the kings of Judah and Israel" is thus an enigma, though presumably Chronicles follows Isaiah rather than vice versa. If it were the case that the Chronicler could naturally have understood the phrase as a description of Isaiah as a whole, or of substantial tracts of it, then he might possibly have used it to refer to the Isaianic chapters of 2 Kings, but it remains an abrupt way to do so.

The versions have "in the vision . . . and in the book of the kings . . .", suggesting that the Chronicler is referring both to Isaiah and to 2 Kings. *The New JPS Translation* follows. Given that we have no indication that the Chronicler could have understood the first phrase directly to denote the book as a whole or substantial sections of it, another interpretation is then possible. It became Jewish practice to use the opening phrase of some books as their title, so that the first book of the Bible is termed "In the beginning", the second "And these are the names". Similarly the Chronicler might have used the opening phrase of Isaiah, "the vision of Isaiah ben Amoz", to refer to the book, or to the section of it which also appears in 2 Kings, without any implication that this phrase indicated the book's contents as a whole, any more than does "These are the names".

H. Wildberger suggests that in 1 Sam. iii 1 and Hos. xii 11 [10] *ḥāzôn* is a collective.⁵ In 1 Sam. iii 1, parallel to the statement "and the word of Yhwh was rare" is the phrase "there was no vision spread abroad": the qal of this last verb *pāraṣ* is used similarly with *dābār* in 2 Chr. xxxi 5. There is no particular reason to take *ḥāzôn* collectively. In Hos. xii 11 [10] the use of the singular in the phrase *ḥāzôn hirbētī* ("I gave them many a vision") may be a consequence of the use of

⁵ *Jesaja: I. Teilband*, p. 6 (ET p. 6). Cf. G.W. Coats, "Prophetic superscriptions and the growth of a canon", in *Canon and Authority*. Ed. by G.W. Coats and B.O. Long (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 56-70 (see p. 64). Contrast A. Jepsen on *ḥāzāh* in *TWAT*, who seems to understand the word as ordinary singular in both passages.

the verb *rābab*, which introduces a singular noun in a similar way in Isa. i 15 (“you make many a prayer”) and xxiii 16 (“sing many a song”). In the context in Hosea xii, in v. 2 [1] the verb has already occurred governing two singular nouns. Both may be understood as collectives (“lying and violence he multiplies”), but rhetorically the use of this expression earlier may also have encouraged the formulation with the singular later in the chapter. The fact that the later verse repeats the word order, in which the noun comes first, increases the likelihood of this link. These other occurrences thus do not provide evidence that *hāzôn* could easily be used as a collective such as would apply to a substantial sequence of visions, still less a collection of material which could only be called a revelation in a looser, abstract sense. For such purposes, if the plural of *hāzôn* was not used (certainly we have no instances), an author had available usages such as the plural of *hizzāyôn* (e.g. Joel iii 1 [ii 28]) or *maḥāzeh* (e.g. Ezek. i 1).

There are thus no clear examples of the use of *hāzôn* to mean anything other than a single vision. What, then, might have led to the understanding of Isa. i 1 as referring to a collection of revelatory material? It is of course the case that some other prophetic books do begin with prefaces that offer guidance on how to read the whole, and some of these prefaces may have been adapted from introductions to individual oracles in the way hypothesized for Isa. i 1. Jer. i 1-3 is an instance. On the other hand, Ezek. i 1-3 comprises not an introduction to Ezekiel as a whole but an indication of the context of the opening vision in the book, and this points us to such an understanding of Isa. i 1. The word *hāzôn* well describes Isa. i. Visions may portend evil or may promise good; Isa. i incorporates both as we move from a focus on the one in the earlier part of the chapter to a focus on the second before we get to the end. The rest of this opening verse also well matches the particular nature of chapter i, as it does not the nature of chapters i-xii or i-xxxix or i-lxvi. Chapter i indeed concerns Judah and Jerusalem, whether that phrase suggests the entities from Isaiah’s own time or the Second Temple community. Its vision could plausibly have been understood to have come via Isaiah ben Amoz and to relate to the time of the four kings mentioned in the book in connection with his ministry, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; it has often been noted that chapter i summarizes much of Isaiah’s message as a whole and covers the whole time-frame of his ministry.⁶

⁶ See esp. G. Fohrer, “Jesaja 1 als Zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesajas”,

The phrase "during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" then modifies the words it follows, "concerning Judah and Jerusalem", and not the verb "he saw" which came earlier. The meaning is thus different from that at the opening of Micah, as is the form of expression. There the heading indeed refers to the whole book and the reference to the kings' reigns precedes the reference to Samaria and Jerusalem as its subject.

As it stands, then, with no need to excise material added to give the verse broader reference, Isa. i 1 introduces chapter i of the book. If chapter i was designed to introduce what follows, v. 1 nevertheless is the opening of this introduction, not directly an introduction to further chapters. Insofar as chapter i does introduce what follows, it also parallels Ezekiel, where i 1-3 introduces chapters i-iii and they introduce what follows.

2. *Isaiah ii 1*

Chapter ii of Isaiah opens, "the word which Isaiah ben Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem". Like i 1, ii 1 has commonly been taken to introduce a sequence of chapters, extending perhaps to iv 6 or xi 16. Like the term "vision", the term "word" (*dābār*) normally refers to a specific message. As is not the case with "vision", however, a collective use of "word" is well-established. It would suit my argument to agree with Sweeney (p. 30) that *haddābār* cannot easily refer to a collection of material, though *dēbar-yhwh* does so refer in Hos. i 1, Joel i 1, Mic. i 1 (where the verb *ḥāzāh* also appears, as in Isa. ii 1), and Zeph. i 1. On the other hand, in Ezek. i 3, Hag. i 1, and Zech. i 1 it refers simply to the individual prophecy which follows.

The question arises whether "the word" indeed has the collective meaning here. It is not obvious why a sequence of chapters beginning at this point should have an introduction. The inclusion of a new introduction at xiii 1 is intelligible, as the subject of the oracles there changes; that is not so at ii 1. If ii 1 were the original beginning of a collection, it may seem surprising that this opening was allowed to stand when chapter i was prefaced to it. But the hypothesis that a collection began with chapter ii is only a hypothesis to explain this

ZAW 74 (1962), pp. 251-68 = *Studien zur alttestamentlichen Prophetie (1949-1965)* (BZAW 99; Berlin, 1967), pp. 148-66; and see Wildberger, *Isaiah: I. Teilband*, pp. 73-74 (ET pp. 78-80).

oddity, and a consideration against it is that arguably ii 2-4 is an odd beginning to such a hypothetical collection of Isaiah's prophecies.⁷

R.B.Y. Scott suggested that ii 1 introduces only ii 2-4, comprising a pre-critical critical assertion that the oracle comes from Isaiah and not from Micah.⁸ This may seem fanciful, but it does point to possible alternatives to the title's functioning as an introduction to a sequence of chapters. My suggestion is that it does not relate to what follows at all. It is actually a colophon or conclusion to chapter i.

Occasionally oracles or books indeed finish with a phrase such as "oracle of Yhwh" (see e.g. Hag. ii 23; Zech. xi 12); compare also the colophon to Dan. vii 28 which pairs with the introduction in vii 1, and the introduction and colophon to Habakkuk iii. The collection of Jeremiah's words is closed with the phrase "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. li 64). Within the latter part of Isaiah, xlvi 22, lvii 21, and lxvi 24 constitute colophons to major sections. Given that colophons rather than superscriptions were the norm in the middle east, H.M.I. Gevanyahu argues that most biblical superscriptions were originally colophons which were transferred to the beginning of texts.⁹ And given that the Old Testament has no standard form for a colophon, in principle the notion that *dābār* should be used in this connection is plausible.

Isa. ii 1 is indeed most intelligible as a tailpiece to chapter i, pairing with i 1. Its formulation is parallel, with "word" replacing "vision". The dual designation of chapter i as vision and as word compares with 1 Chr. xvii 3-15 (cf. also 1 Sam. iii 1; Jer. xxiii 16; Ezek. xii 27, 28). The term "vision" drew attention to the supernaturally-revelatory content of what Isaiah is to be portrayed as saying about the future. The term "word" draws attention to its verbal form, issuing from the fact that Yhwh has been portrayed as speaking like a judge (i 2, 10,

⁷ Pace H.G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah* (Oxford/New York, 1994), p. 154.

⁸ "The literary structure of Isaiah's oracles", in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (T.H. Robinson Festschrift, ed. H.H. Rowley; Edinburgh/New York, 1950), pp. 175-86 (see p. 177); cf. Scott, "The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39: Introduction and exegesis", in *The Interpreter's Bible* (ed. G.A. Buttrick and others; Nashville, 1956), Vol. 5, pp. 149-381 (see p. 180); also P.R. Ackroyd, "A note on Isaiah 2 i", *ZAW* 75 (1963), pp. 320-21; cf. Ackroyd, "Isaiah i-xii", *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (VT Sup 29; Leiden, 1978), pp. 16-48 = Ackroyd, *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (London, 1987), pp. 79-104.

⁹ See "Biblical colophons", in *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974* (VT Sup 27; Leiden, 1975), pp. 42-59.

18, 20), and to the certainty of its effectively implementing what it announces.

I 1 and ii 1 thus form a framework round Isa. i, which itself indeed functions as an introduction to the book, or at least to (some form of) chapters i-xxxix.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.