

Fundamental Issues in the Study of *Tanakh*  
By Rav Amnon Bazak

**Shiur #5b: Authorship of the Books of the Prophets and Writings**

**B. The Book of *Yishayahu***

The Book of *Yishayahu* (Isaiah) is a central issue in the discussion of the authorship of the books of *Tanakh*. As noted in the previous *shiur*, the Talmud attributes the authorship of *Yishayahu* to Chizkiyahu and his colleagues – thereby hinting, already at that early stage, that Yishayahu himself was not the sole author of the work that bears his name. The basic claim that we will examine is that the second part of the Book, from chapter 40 onwards, was not written by Yishayahu (who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., long before the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E.), but rather by another prophet who lived long after the Destruction of the Temple, and who describes a reality very different from the one depicted in the first part. Let us review the main elements of this argument.

1. In the first part (chapters 1 to 39), Yishayahu addresses the nation who are ruled by the kings of Israel, but in the second part (chapter 40 onwards) he seems to be addressing the nation in exile, whilst the land and its cities lie in ruin and desolation. In several places in the second half there are verses that describe the Destruction of the Temple as a known, familiar fact, leading the prophet to cry out in supplication, asking God to have mercy on His people in exile:

"Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever; behold, see, we pray You – we are all Your people. Your holy cities have become a wilderness; Tzion is a wilderness, Jerusalem is a desolation. Our holy and beautiful Temple, where our fathers praised You, has been burned with fire, and all our pleasant things have been laid waste. Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O Lord? Will You hold Your peace and afflict us so severely?" ([Yishayahu 64:8-11](#))

"Look down from heaven and see, from the habitation of Your holiness and Your glory – where is Your zeal and Your might? Your acts of compassion and Your mercies are withheld from me... Why, O Lord, have You caused us to stray from Your ways, and hardened our hearts, for fear of You? For the sake of Your servants, bring back the tribes of Your inheritance. The people of Your holiness possessed it for only a short while; **our enemies have trodden down Your Sanctuary.**" (ibid. 63:15-18)

Many of the prophets mention the Destruction of the Temple, but they speak of it in the future tense, whilst in *Yishayahu* it is described in the past tense. Moreover, it is clear from the prophet's language that he is crying out over a reality that exists in the present.

Likewise, the exile of Israel is depicted as an established reality, even though nowhere in *Yishayahu* is there any prophecy that foretells exile.

"So says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring them all down as fugitives..." (43:14);

"Go forth out of Babylon, flee from the Kasdim; declare in a voice of song; tell this, spread it to the ends of the earth, say: The Lord has redeemed His servant, Yaakov." (48:20)

To this we must add that during Yishayahu's life no decree of destruction had yet been passed for Jerusalem, so he did not regard the future destruction as a certainty. Even in the eyes of the prophet Yirmiyahu, who lived after Yishayahu, destruction and exile were seen as events which it would still be possible to avert.

2. Koresh, the king of Persia who conquered the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C.E. and decreed that the exiles could return to their homeland (see Ezra ch.1), is mentioned twice in the second half of the Book, despite the fact that he lived approximately two centuries after Yishayahu:

"[He] who says of Koresh, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all that I desire, and saying to Jerusalem, You shall be rebuilt, and to the Temple, Your foundation shall be laid." (44:28)

"So says the Lord to His anointed one, to Koresh, whose right hand I have held, that I might subdue nations before him, and loosen the loins of kings, that I might open before him doors and gates which shall not be shut." (45:1)

It is not easy to understand why Yishayahu would mention, some two hundred years before the time of Koresh, the name of a future king as part of a prophecy.<sup>[1]</sup> In general, the prophets did not speak of matters that would take place so far in the future, and they do not speak in such specific detail as to include names of people not yet born.<sup>[2]</sup>

3. There are various expressions that appear numerous times in the second part of the Book, but are entirely absent from the first part. One example is "all flesh" (which appears only in 40:5, 6; 49:26; 66:16, 23, 24); another is "to heart" (*al lev*) (42:25; 46:8; 47:7; 57:1,11).<sup>[3]</sup> In terms of content, too, there are conspicuous differences between the two parts of the Book. One of the best known examples is the subject of "God's servant," which appears repeatedly as a central motif in the second part of the Book (see 41:8, 9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 49:3; 52:13; 53:11), but is altogether absent from the first part.<sup>[4]</sup>

4. The structure of *Sefer Yishayahu* likewise reflects quite clearly the division into two parts. The first section of Yishayahu's prophecies concludes with the prophecy of consolation in chapter 35, ending with the words,

"And the ransomed of God shall return, and come to Tzion with song and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, while sorrow and sighing shall flee." ([Yishayahu 35:10](#))

Following this are four chapters (36-39) that focus on King Chizkiyahu: his war against Ashur, his illness, his relations with the prophet Yishayahu, and his failure in dealings with the king of Babylon. These chapters are, to a great extent, a repetition of chapters 18-20 of *Melakhim* II. A parallel phenomenon exists in *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, in which the actual prophecies end in chapter 51, while the final chapter – 52 – is a repetition of a chapter in *Melakhim* II (chapter 25). If the repetition of the chapter from *Sefer Melakhim* represents the conclusion of *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, it seems reasonable to suggest that the repetition of the chapters from *Sefer Melakhim* in *Sefer Yishayahu* represent the same phenomenon.

5. Finally, we note that while Yishayahu's name is mentioned 15 times in the first part of the Book – of which 6 appearances occur in the section of the actual prophecies (chapters 1-35) and 9 times in the appendix that parallels the chapters from *Melakhim* II (chapters 36-39). By contrast, in the second part of the Book his name is not mentioned at all.

It turns out that the first person to suggest the idea that the second part of *Sefer Yishayahu* was not actually written by Yishayahu, was R. Avraham ibn Ezra. In his commentary to the beginning of chapter 40, he writes:

"This unit was joined [to the preceding prophecies] because it is mentioned previously that all of the king's treasures, as well as his children, would be exiled to Babylon, and therefore this is followed by the consolations. And these first consolations from the second half of the Book, according to the opinion of Rabbi Moshe haKohen, concern the [building of the] Second Temple, while to my view it is all meant concerning our own exile, but within the Book there are matters of the Babylonian exile, as a memorial, for Koresh allowed the exiles back. However, the matters in the latter part of the Book concern the future, as I shall explain. And know that while *Chazal* said that *Sefer Shmuel* was written by Shmuel – this is only true until 'And Shmuel died' ([Shmuel I 25:1](#))... and proof of this is the verse, 'Kings shall see and arise, and princes shall prostrate themselves' ([Yishayahu49:7](#)) ...and he who is wise will understand."

Ibn Ezra formulates his words in a rather obscure fashion, as is his custom when it comes to sensitive subjects,<sup>[5]</sup> but his general meaning seems clear.<sup>[6]</sup> Ibn Ezra maintains that this unit was "joined" to the preceding chapters, and draws a distinction between the two sections of the Book in terms of content. He then immediately goes on to note that despite the fact that the *beraita* states, in a general way, that 'Shmuel wrote

his book,' this does not refer to the entire Book, but only up to the point where the text explicitly notes his death. It seems quite likely that Ibn Ezra mentions this here because he believes that *Sefer Yishayahu*, too, like *Sefer Shmuel*, was not written in its entirety by the prophet after whom the Book is named, but rather was completed by someone else.

To this we might add that *Chazal* themselves note explicitly that there are verses in *Sefer Yishayahu* that were not written by Yishayahu himself, but rather by a different prophet:

"Rabbi Simon said: There were two verses that were prophesied by Be'era,<sup>[7]</sup> but they were not sufficient to comprise a Book in their own right, so they were included in *Sefer Yishayahu*. And these are they: 'And when they say to you, Consult the mediums' ([Yishayahu 8:19](#)), and the following verse (8:20)." (*Vayikra Rabba* 6, 6, Margalioth edition, pp. 142-143)

Even if we are to accept that the second half of the Book is of later authorship we must still explain how it came to be joined to the first part. It must be noted that the unity of the Book of *Yishayahu* goes back to antiquity, and a clear allusion to the Book, including both parts, as a single work is found already in the Book of Ben Sira,<sup>[8]</sup> which offers the following comment on Yishayahu:

"He foretold the end with a mighty spirit, and comforted the mourners of Tzion. He told eternal hidden matters before they transpired." (Ben Sira 48, 33-34, Segal edition, p. 334)

These verses of Ben Sira clearly refer to the prophecies in the second part of the Book (see, for instance, 42:9; 61:2-3). Likewise, in the Septuagint translation of *Sefer Yishayahu*, dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E., the Book appears as a single unit. The "Complete Scroll of Yishayahu" discovered at Qumran, dating to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E., likewise shows no division between the two parts.<sup>[9]</sup>

Interestingly, alongside the differences in language and style noted above, the opposite phenomenon also exists: expressions – including some that are unique to *Sefer Yishayahu* – that appear in both parts of the Book. Some examples include "yomar Hashem" (the future form of "says the Lord" – [Yishayahu 1:11](#), 18; 33:10; and also 41:21; 66:9; the expression appears nowhere else in the Books of the Prophets);<sup>[10]</sup> "ram ve-nissa" ("high and elevated" – appearing only twice in all of *Tanakh*: [Yishayahu 6:1](#); 57:15); "orach mishpat" ("the path of judgment" – 26:8; 40:14); and others.<sup>[11]</sup> In view of this, we can assume that the prophet who wrote the prophecies in the second part of *Sefer Yishayahu* was well acquainted with the first part of the Book, and was influenced by it in terms of both content and style – although, as we have seen, he also developed his own style and introduced ideas that had not appeared in the first part. Due to Yishayahu's influence on the later prophet, the two collections were brought together to form a single unit.

Hence, the idea that *Sefer Yishayahu* is composed of the prophecies of more than one prophet arises from a simple reading of the second half of the Book. This in no way contradicts the view of *Chazal*, who attribute the redaction of the Book to Chizkiyahu and his colleagues, for – as we have seen is the case concerning many other books – the attribution of authorship may apply to most of the Book but not its entirety.

All of the above could have been easily agreed upon and accepted in our generation, with the widespread popular re-engagement with *Tanakh* study in general, and *Sefer Yishayahu* in particular. Yet the engagement of Bible Criticism with *Sefer Yishayahu* has deflected the discussion in a different direction.

Hundreds of years after Ibn Ezra's hinted allusion, the early Bible critics<sup>[12]</sup> arrived at the same conclusion – that the second part of the Book was not written by the prophet Yishayahu, but rather by someone they refer to as "Isaiah II" or "Deutero-Isaiah." Their main argument in support of this conclusion was that the second part describes a reality that did not exist in Yishayahu's time – the Destruction and Babylonian exile – and therefore whoever wrote it must have lived at a later time. Implicit in this argument is a denial of the concept of prophecy; it suggests that a prophet could not describe events that would happen in the future. This, of course, is a very different approach to the one presented above, which is based on analysis of the style and content of the text, while maintaining the assumption that a prophet of God can know the future. Prophecies concerning the future are often presented in this sort of language, depicting future events in general terms, but not in detail, as noted above. Thus, the argument of the Bible critics shifted the discussion from the question of whether the character of the prophecy, along with various specific elements as discussed above, leads us to conclude that it was a different prophet who wrote the second part of the Book, to the question of whether the prophet – any prophet – is capable of knowing the future. The approach of the Bible critics caused great agitation among the Torah scholars, who were quick to reject their hypothesis.

One of the great Torah scholars who addressed head-on the claim that there existed an "Isaiah II" was Shadal, Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865).<sup>[13]</sup> Despite his extensive academic scholarship, in his letters<sup>[14]</sup> and in his commentary on *Sefer Yishayahu* he rejects this view with great vehemence. The modern biblical commentator Rachel Margalit devotes an entire book to this subject – *Echad Haya Yishayahu*, in which she rejects the various arguments for to the later authorship of the Book.<sup>[15]</sup> In these works, as well as in works by other prominent Jewish scholars,<sup>[16]</sup> the controversy over the essence of prophecy features prominently:

"The idea of the division of the Book arises from a realist, historical approach that seeks the prophet within the background of his prophecies. This approach does not view prophecy as a vision of the future, but rather as an overview of reality as it is unfolding. According to this approach, the prophet stands at the very point where the events that he is prophesying about are unfolding. The prophet is a sort of conscientious, insightful politician who observes the reality around him,

knows what is going on politically, and senses what awaits just beyond the horizon. He might be described as a talented publicist who dares to guess what is going to happen next, based on accumulated information as to what is happening now. This view led the scholars to reject any prophecy that was not within the scope of the prophet's natural vision."<sup>[17]</sup>

Indeed, on this point there is a fundamental difference of opinion between the secular, critical view of *Tanakh*, and the religious view. If a person believes that the *Tanakh* possesses sanctity and that the prophet receives his messages from God through prophecy and Divine inspiration, then he will obviously regard as illegitimate the view that a prophet is simply an eloquent and insightful member of the general population with no real ability to discern the future. Such a position represents a denial of the whole concept of prophecy, regardless of one's position on the question of whether *Sefer Yishayahu* is a single work or two separate ones brought together. It was this, then, that caused the great controversy concerning "Isaiah II."

However, the substantial arguments that we have cited against seeing *Yishayahu* as a single work are valid and compelling, completely independently of discussions to do with the prophet's status and abilities. As we have seen, they are based on the content of the prophecy itself,<sup>[18]</sup> and on simple, clear proofs from the style and structure of the text, as well as the conspicuous absence of any mention of Yishayahu himself from chapter 40 onwards. There is no doubt that these considerations were borne in mind by Ibn Ezra, too, when he wrote his commentary to chapter 40 of *Sefer Yishayahu*. In any event, we can discuss the matter without trespassing into the territory of fundamental Jewish beliefs.<sup>[19]</sup> The positing of the existence of two separate prophets is certainly compatible with a religious world-view that is willing to address the text itself.<sup>[20]</sup>

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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<sup>[1]</sup> Admittedly, there is one such instance in *Tanakh* – in the prophecy of the man of God who tells Yerav'am son of Nevat that a king is destined to arise from the house of David, who will profane the altar that Yerav'am has established in Beit El: "And he said, Altar, altar, so says the Lord: Behold, a child will be born to the house of David, Yoshiyahu by name, and he shall slay the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and they shall burn bones of men upon you" (*Melakhim* I 13:2). Here too, the prophet seems to be speaking of Yoshiyahu by name about three hundred years before this king will be born and the prophecy fulfilled – as described in *Melakhim* II 23:15-16. However, this does not seem to represent any proof in our case, for it is reasonable to suppose that the words, "Yoshiyahu by name," were not uttered in the original prophecy, but rather were added later on by the redactor of the Book (Yirmiyahu, according to the *beraita* cited in the previous *shiur*) who was writing later, with a perspective that included having witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecy. If we

understand the words "Yoshiyahu by name" as being part of the original prophecy, then Yoshiyahu's repentance in the wake of the discovery of the Sefer Torah was actually planned and foretold by God in advance. Why, then, would the text testify, "And there had never before been a king like him who returned to God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all of the Torah of Moshe; nor did any like him arise afterwards" (*Melakhim* II 23:25)? Conceivably, the prophecy was meant to have been fulfilled much earlier, but the inability of the kings of Yehuda to completely eradicate the practice of idolatry postponed its fulfillment to the days of Yoshiyahu.

[2] My rabbi and teacher, Rav Yaakov Medan, in his article "*Mavo le-Ma'amaro shel C. Chefetz al Malkhut Paras u-Maday*," *Megadim* 14, 5751, p. 64, likewise rules out the possibility of the prophecy about Koresh presenting specific details about a person not yet born. He proposes a different solution to the problem, arguing that Yishayahu was not speaking of Koresh, king of Persia, whom we know as the king who declared the Jews of Babylon free to return to the Land of Israel, but rather of his grandfather, who lived in the period of Yishayahu. However, the suggestion that there were two different kings named Koresh is itself revolutionary, and beyond this, in the prophet's appellation of Koresh as "God's anointed" it seems most unlikely that he would be referring to some king about whom we know nothing, rather than to the king whose promise to facilitate the rebuilding of the Temple concludes the *Tanakh*.

[3] For a partial list of such expressions, see M. Z. Segal, *Mavo ha-Mikra*, Jerusalem 5737, p. 323.

[4] The expression "My servant" (*avdi*) does appear twice in the first part, but in these instances it refers to a specific person – first Yishayahu himself (20:3), and then Eliyakim ben Chilkiyahu (22:20) – rather than as a general thematic motif of "God's servant."

[5] As we saw previously, concerning the "secret of the twelve."

[6] Concerning the meaning of his words see, *inter alia*, R.N. Krochmal, *Moreh Nevukhei ha-Zeman*, Lemberg 1851, p. 114; M. Friedlander, *Perush Rabbi Avraham ben Ezra al Yishayahu*, London 1873, pp. 170-171.

[7] The midrash refers here to Be'eri, father of Hoshe'a, who was also a prophet – as the midrash goes on to explain. In some versions the midrash does indeed read "Be'eri," but this version points to an identification of Hoshea's father as Be'era, prince of the tribe of Reuven (*Divrei ha-Yamim* I 5:6). See Margalioth ad loc., n. 6.

[8] The Book of Ben Sira was written at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. See M.Z. Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira ha-Shalem*, Jerusalem 5713, pp. 3-6.

[9] See Y. Yadin, *Ha-Megillot ha-Genuzot mi-Midbar Yehuda*, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 5718, p. 101.

[10] It appears not as a rhetorical expression but as a regular future-tense verb in [Yirmiyahu 42:20](#). We might add that *Sefer Yishayahu* features other similar expressions which are likewise unique to this Book: "*yomar Elo-heikhem*" (40:1); "*yomar kadosh*" (40:25); "*yomar melekh Yaakov*" (41:21).

[11] For more expression appearing in both parts of the Book, see M.Z. Segal (above, n. 3), and below.

[12] This hypothesis was first suggested in 1775 by Johann Dã¶derlein in his Latin commentary on *Sefer Yishayahu*. It was later publicized by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, in 1883, and has since become universally accepted by all biblical scholars.

[13] Rabbi Luzzatto was head of the rabbinical school of Padua, Italy.

[14] Published in *Kerem Chemed* 7, Prague 5603, pp. 225-242. Concerning Shadal's position on this subject see S. Vargon, "Emdato shel Shadal be-She'elat Achduto shel Sefer Yishayahu," *Mechkarei Morashtenu* I, pp. 7-27. Vargon acknowledges that Shadal polemicizes against those who deny that prophets can foretell the future. He also notes that Shadal did not view in the same light all arguments against unified authorship of *Yishayahu*; he recognized that *Chazal*, who arrived at the same conclusion on the basis of different premises, expressed a legitimate view. See *ibid.* p. 25 and n. 64.

[15] R. Margaliot, *Echad Haya Yishayahu*, Jerusalem 5714. Most of the book is devoted to a review of the linguistic style that is common to both parts of *Sefer Yishayahu*, as set forth above. However, as we have seen, there are also stylistic differences, and the similarities in style could be evidence of the influence of Yishayahu's prophecies on those of the prophet who composed the second part, rather than evidence of Yishayahu having written all of it – as intimated by M.Z. Segal, pp. 323-324: "In general, there is a great discrepancy between the two parts in the stylistic qualities of the language. In the second part the language is lyrical, magnanimous and flowing, full of softness, gentleness, pathos and enthusiasm, while the prophecies of Yishayahu, in the first part of the Book, are conveyed in elevated, intensive and dense language. Hence, the argument from language does not support the traditional view that the second part, too, was written by Yishayahu son of Amotz, since the linguistic differences contradict this view."

[16] For other works rejecting the division of *Sefer Yishayahu*, see R. Margaliot (above, n. 14), p. 17; Y. Yaakobson, *Chazon ha-Mikra* II, Tel Aviv 5717, p. 47.

[17] R. Margaliot, p. 20.

[18] Concerning the nature of the prophecy, even Margaliot acknowledges: "Certainly, referring to someone by name two hundred years before he is to be born, is not a regular vision encountered in the Books of the Prophets... We cannot pretend to know the power and depths of prophecy; whether a prophet can prophesy only concerning the near future, or also concerning more distant events; whether only in obscure metaphors, or also explicitly." Once again, though, our discussion does not concern the question of whether or not the prophet could know Koresh's name, but rather whether there is any point in the prophet knowing, and stating, the name of a person to be born in the future, when this name in no way adds to or detracts from what he is saying.

[19] As Rabbi Y. Cherlow points out in his *Yir'eh la-Levav*, Tel Aviv 2007, p. 246, n. 52.

[20] Indeed, in our times the question is discussed without the passionate emotion that surrounded it in previous generations. The following are some of the sources that address the issue: Z. Okashi, "Emunat ha-Mada – Yishayahu ha-Sheni ke-Mashal," *Derekh Efrata* 7, 5758, pp. 99-105, argues that from a scientific point of view there is no absolute truth concerning the authorship of the second part of *Sefer Yishayahu*, but he too believes that both positions are legitimate in terms of a religious world-view. A. HaKohen, "Ha-Omnam Echad Haya Yishayahu?" *Derekh Efrata* 10, 5760, pp. 79-88, voices a strong protest against the silence of the Religious-Zionist world concerning the legitimacy of the view that *Sefer Yishayahu* comprises the writings of two prophets. Y. Rosenson, "Yichudo, Achduto u-Murkavuto shel Sefer Yishayahu – me-Hashkofot Chazal al Yishayahu," *Derekh Aggada* 3, 5760, pp. 179-202, treats the question at length, inter alia from the perspective of *midrashei Chazal*. A review of

further sources may be found in N. Ararat's article, "*Divrei ha-Navi Menachem – Hatza'a le-Limmud ha-Yechidot ha-Nevuiyot bi-Yishayahu 40-66*," *Sha'anan* 11, 5766, p. 9, n. 1, and pp. 53-55. Many years ago, the British Chief Rabbi, Joseph Hertz, reached a conclusion similar to the one above: "This question can be considered dispassionately. It touches no dogma, or any religious principle in Judaism; and, moreover, does not materially affect the understanding of the prophecies, or of the human conditions of the Jewish people that they have in view" (*Hertz Chumash*, London: Soncino, 1938, p. 942).