

THE DIVINE COUNCIL:
TEMPORAL TRANSITION AND NEW PROPHECY
IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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This essay is a contribution to two separate but related problems in Isaiah research. The first is exegetical in nature and involves the correct interpretation of Isa 40:1-8. The second is also exegetical, but it involves the proper model for understanding the book of Isaiah as a whole.¹ Isa 40:1-8 is particularly important in this regard since it is widely considered to be the introduction to a new section of the book, termed by scholars "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-55). Given its pivotal position, does it provide clues for interpreting not just material to follow (Second and Third Isaiah), but also material preceding?² In order to answer this question we will begin with a fresh examination of Isa 40:1-8, from a form-critical standpoint sensitive to the language of the divine council in the OT. Then we will examine a dimension of the text more appropriately handled by redaction-critical analysis and inner-biblical exegesis, in order to understand the text's function in relationship to the larger book of Isaiah.

I

Isa 40:1-8 has proved resilient in the hands of interpreters ancient and modern.³ A continual stream of fresh interpretations has sought to clarify the

¹ There is a growing literature which looks at the book of Isaiah as a redactional whole. See my essays in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 13-22, 105-26. Also R. Clements, "The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.," *VT* 30 (1980) 421-36; idem, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah," *Int* 36 (1982) 117-29; idem, "Beyond Tradition-Criticism: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First-Isaiah's Themes," *JSOT* 31 (1985) 95-113. P. Ackroyd, "An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20 / Isaiah 38-39," *SJT* 27 (1974) 329-52. See now the recent monograph of Marvin A. Sweeney: *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988).

² R. Rendtorff raises similar questions about the entire Second Isaiah section as foundational for understanding the book as a whole ("Zur Komposition des Buches Jesajas," *VT* 34 [1984] 295-320).

³ Many treat the unit 40:1-8 in form-critical analysis; others prefer the wider unit 40:1-11. For our purposes, the distinction is not of major importance, and we prefer to leave the matter open

meaning of this difficult text. The opening verse presents the first problem:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God
 נַחֲמוּ נַחֲמוּ עַמִּי יֹאמֵר אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her
 דַּבְּרוּ עַל לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְקִרְאוּ אֵלֶיהָ

Plural imperatives (*naḥāmû; dabbērû; qir’û*) and plural possessive suffix (*’ēlōhêkem*) beg the question: Who is being addressed here, by whose God? The targums offer “O ye prophets” (*nebiyaya*) prefacing the verb (*’itnabi’u*). Proving that translations can move freely into the realm of exegesis, the LXX supplies the vocative “O priests” (*hieris*). A vocative—the collective *’ammî*, “O my people”—appears to be ruled out by the parallel Jerusalem, clearly the intended object and not the addressee of the speaking of v. 1b. The situation is not helped, however, by the fact that imperatives, frequently followed by a clear vocative, are found throughout chaps. 40–66 (41:1, 21, 22; 42:10, 18; 44:1, 23; 45:8, 20, 22; 46:8, 12; 47:1, 5, 8, 12; 48:1, 12, 16, 20; 49:1; 51:1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 17; 52:1, 2, 11; 54:1, 4; 55:1, 2, 3, 6; 56:1; 57:14; 58:1; 60:1, 4; 62:10; 66:10).⁴

An aspect of the quandary of interpretation is form-critical in nature, and distinctly modern. It is a challenge to assign genre and conjecture about provenance concerning individual pericopes in the main body of Isaiah 40–55, but in one regard Isa 40:1–8 has its own special problems. Since the late eighteenth century, scholars have argued for a distinct prophetic figure behind chaps. 40–55: an anonymous prophet in Babylon addressing exiles.⁵ The now widely accepted theory of an individual prophet (Second Isaiah) has certainly influenced form-critical decisions to assign this first pericope to the genre “call narrative,” apart from the merits of such a decision on formal

so as to involve all critical opinions. Ultimately, correct interpretation of Isa 40:1–8 demands clarity regarding 40:9–11 as well. For a sample discussion, see Klaus Kiesow, *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch* (OBO 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) 23–66.

⁴ The vocative “O my people” was proposed early by Jerome and recently by N. Snaith, “Isaiah 40–66: A Study of the Second Isaiah and Its Consequences,” in *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah* (ed. H. M. Orlinsky and N. H. Snaith; VTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 177.

⁵ The Babylonian provenance of Second Isaiah seems like one of the assured results of critical investigation, requiring little discussion in most modern treatments. Early proponents of Second Isaiah were not so sure, preferring Palestine, Syria, or Egypt for the correct setting for the poet/prophet. Among the most prominent: Bunsen, Ewald, Marti (Egypt); Duhm (Syria); Mowinckel and Torrey (Palestine). See more recently, Hans Barstad, “Lebte Deuterocesaja in Judäa?” *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 83 (1982) 77–86; “On the So-Called Babylonian Literary Influence in Second Isaiah,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 2 (1987) 90–110. The relationship between Isaiah 40–66, Lamentations, Zechariah 1–8, and numerous of the Psalms suggests for this writer that Judah is the most likely provenance.

grounds alone.⁶ In short, the genre designation “call narrative” is all but required by the theory of a new prophetic voice, Second Isaiah. It has seemed reasonable to assume that as one left sections of the book depicting Isaiah of Jerusalem (e.g., chaps. 36–39), one would encounter at the opening of chaps. 40–55 a call narrative introducing the new prophet. This is the theory defended by a majority of modern scholars, especially in Anglo-Saxon circles.⁷

To be sure, there are elements in 40:1–8 reminiscent of other call narratives in the OT.⁸ But how does the notion of Second Isaiah’s call square with the plural imperatives of 40:1 and other oddities in 40:1–8, like the unidentified voices of v. 3 and v. 6?⁹

In 1953 Frank Cross set forth a proposal that appeared satisfactorily to account for the peculiarities of the chapter.⁹ Cross argued that 40:1–8 represented the *Gattung* “divine directives to angelic heralds” — that is, the unit has in its background the symbolism of the council of Yahweh.¹⁰ The plural

⁶ K. Elliger, *Deuterocesaja 40,1–45,7* (BK XI/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978). Elliger speaks of the “Berufungserlebnis” of the Prophet Deuterocesaja (p. 29). C. Westermann is more subtle: “40:1–11 seem so much like a beginning, an overture, a prologue, as to suggest that they come from the prophet himself, and were intended by him as the introduction to his message” (*Isaiah 40–66* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 32; see also *Sprache und Struktur der Prophetie Deuterocesajas* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981] 82–84). S. Mowinkel spoke of a “Berufungsaudition” in “Die Komposition des deuterocesajanischen Buches,” *ZAW* 8 (1931) 88. See also H. Gressmann, “Die literarische Analyse Deuterocesajas,” *ZAW* 34 (1914) 254–97. He prefers “visionäres Erlebnis” (p. 266). Finally, see also the recent criticism of O. Loretz, “Die Gattung des Prologs zum Buche Deuterocesaja (40,1–11),” *ZAW* 96 (1984) 210–20.

⁷ For the consensus view in a popular format, see R. Clifford’s *Fair Spoken and Persuading* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 71–76; also J. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (AB 20; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 16–18; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 32. Those less optimistic about recovering an actual prophetic individual behind chaps. 40–55 are not as inclined to search for a call narrative. See, for example, the recent survey and remarks of J. Vincent, “Jesaja 40,1–8: Beruungsbericht des Propheten Deuterocesajas?” in *Studien zur literarischen Eigenart und zur Heimat von Jesaja, Kap. 40–55* (BET 5; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1977) 197–250. Vincent rejects a call narrative (and any form of prophetic individual) in favor of a dialogue between cultic officials, during a putative new year’s festival (“Liturgie des Neujahrsfestes”). “Alle drei Abschnitte liessen sich als Ritualisierung einer Vision im himmlischen Jahwerat (?) verstehen” (p. 251). His observations about problems with the traditional method (which speaks of oral speech from an individual prophet) are on target, though his own substitute model needs refinement. See my remarks below.

⁸ So N. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narrative,” *ZAW* 77 (1965) 297–323 (esp. 314–16).

⁹ F. M. Cross, “The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” *JNES* 12 (1953) 274–77. Cross acknowledges his debt to H. H. Rowley’s own study on the same topic: “The Council of Yahweh,” *JTS* 45 (1944) 151–57.

¹⁰ Cross, “Council,” 276. See also B. Duhm, who recognizes the voices as belonging to Yahweh’s host (*Das Buch Jesaja* [HAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892] 265). Loretz sees behind the unit (40:2a, 9–11) the “Gattung der Heroldsinstruktion” (“Prolog,” 220). Compare Kiesow, who rejects heavenly figures in favor of an anonymous circle of prophets (*Exodus-texte*, 54), following J. Eaton: “a prophet seems to be commissioning his fellow-prophets with

imperatives are directed to a plural audience of divine attendants, called at other points in the OT “holy ones” (*qēdōšim*), “seraphim,” angels/messengers (*mal’ākīm*), or divine beings (literally, “sons of the gods,” *bēnê ’ēlīm*). The voices in vv. 3 and 6 are voices of these same attendants, who respond to the command given by their God (so “your God” in v. 1) to speak comfort to Zion.¹¹ Anticipating a bit, Cross does not interpret vv. 6b–7 as the objection of “Second Isaiah,” thus keeping the genre closely tied to the divine council imagery.¹²

A similar phenomenon can be seen at other points in the OT. In 1 Kgs 22:20, Micaiah the prophet overhears in the heavenly colloquy an exchange between unidentified voices, “and one said one thing and another said another” (*wayyōmer zeh bēkōh wēzeh ’ōmēr bēkōh*). One specific voice, called simply *hārūah*, “the spirit” (20:21), then comes forward and speaks specifically. In the Psalms there is frequent reference to divine attendants and their verbal and nonverbal discourse with God. Both Job and Zechariah know of a figure within the heavenly assembly called *hasšātān* (see Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Zech 3:1–5). This “District Attorney” in the divine realm seems to have the function of spotting earthly infraction and reporting it to God.¹³ Though not so named, there seems to be a link here with “the spirit” figure of 1 Kings 22.

Finally, in Zech 1:7–17, we see another instance of the divine council in a prophetic text. The prophet Zechariah has a vision in which appear (1) a man on a horse, (2) symbolic horses that patrol the earth (cf. Job 1:7; 2:2), (3) an angel of the Lord, and (4) God.¹⁴ Words go from God—they are

the tidings they are to bear in Yahweh’s name” (“The Origin of the Book of Isaiah,” VT 9 [1959] 152). R. Wilson’s view is somewhat similar: “God is speaking only to a part of Israel, and it makes sense to assume that God is addressing the disciples of Second Isaiah” (“The Community of Second Isaiah,” in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah*, 54). The wider context of the divine council in the OT militates against such a reading, as will be shown.

¹¹ Wilson objects to Cross’s divine council on these grounds: “The idea that the group is the divine council, God’s advisory committee made up of lesser deities that do God’s will, is unlikely, since Second Isaiah devotes several oracles to arguing that these other deities are not deities at all and in any case are totally ineffective and unable to do anything in the cosmos” (“Community,” 54). It should be made clear that (1) Cross does not speak of “lesser deities” in the divine council in the manner implied by Wilson; (2) Second Isaiah’s polemic against other gods is a polemic against real deities (46:1), not lesser ones, for which real idols are constructed (44:1–20; 46:1–2); Second Isaiah, of course, considers these real deities ineffective (41:21–24) and therefore nonexistent (not lesser or greater), as Wilson rightly notes; (3) a distinction should be made between divine council language and imagery—fairly prevalent in the OT—and the equally prevalent attack on rival gods and the construction of idols in the OT. Both divine council language and the attack on rival deities can coexist within OT books (as they do in Isaiah, Kings, and the Psalter, for example).

¹² The genre is mixed with call narrative features, but Cross takes vv. 6–8 as an address to the prophet, from “an anonymous herald” (“Council,” 276).

¹³ See the fine discussion of M. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 9–11.

¹⁴ D. Petersen argues that the vision is of “a well-watered, flora-filled place near the divine

comforting words (*dēbārîm nihūmîm*) like the opening charge of Isa 40:1 (*naḥāmû*)—to angel, and from angel to prophet: “So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out!’” (*qērā*). Formal similarity with our unit, Isa 40:1–8, is also clear. (1) God speaks (vv. 1–2; Zech 1:13). (2) A voice responds (vv. 3–5). (3) A voice that once cried (*qôl qôrē*), now issues a charge to another to cry: “A voice says, ‘Cry!’” (*qērā*)” (v. 6; Zech 1:14–17).

The content differences between Isaiah 40 and Zechariah 1 are subtle. In Isaiah one heavenly voice faithfully takes up the charge to comfort (vv. 3–4), imitating the plural imperative (*pannû; yaššērû*) employed in v. 1 by God. In Zechariah, the angel asks a question “How long?” (*‘ad-mātay*), similar to the question of the prophet Isaiah at his commissioning (6:11). In Zechariah, the angel’s questioning serves to drive home God’s overriding response. God speaks in the first person, through the agency of the same objecting angel (Zech 1:14–17):

So the angel who talked with me said to me, “Cry out, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.”

The similarity of themes between Zechariah 1–8 and Second Isaiah, here and at other points, has been noted by commentators.¹⁵

Another feature should be noted in Zechariah, since it involves a possible shift in our understanding of prophecy. The prophetic voice of Zechariah serves a different function in the genesis of the tradition and in its growth to literary form than what we see in typical preexilic prophecy (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah). As has been emphasized in critical studies since the nineteenth century, such prophetic activity originates in the oral speaking of a prophetic individual. Only subsequently is the oral speech put into literary form and given final shape, by later hands (prophetic disciples, redactors).¹⁶

In the book of Zechariah, a different process appears to be at work. The prophet is told to cry (1:14, 17), but the angel does the crying (1:15–16). God speaks through his angel, in a vision which is presented privately to the prophet (1:7). The divine message is heard not by Zechariah’s speaking to an alleged historical audience, as was the case in the preexilic model. Rather, the prophetic word is addressed in the first instance to readers, who encounter the prophet’s proclamation in textualized form. Zechariah never

dwelling” (*Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984] 143). Hence, although we are in the world of the prophet’s vision, that vision participates in the same broader environment of the heavenly realm.

¹⁵ See most recently Petersen’s treatment, *Zechariah 1–8*, 136–60.

¹⁶ The literature on this topic is vast, involving a shift from literary to form-critical analysis. One recalls H. Gunkel’s attack on H. G. A. Ewald. Though Gunkel’s own work was best seen in narrative literature (*Genesis* [HKAT I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901]), he also made important contributions to the study of prophets and prophetic texts. See, for example, in English “The Israelite Prophecy from the Time of Amos,” in *Twentieth Century Theology in the Making* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 48–75.

“speaks” at all, except to a readership who confronts the prophet, not as direct divine speaker (“Thus says the Lord”), but as one *spoken to* in the text.¹⁷ In sum, the model which explained peculiarities in the prophetic literature of the preexilic period by seeking its origin in oral speech and secondary redaction must be set aside at this juncture in Israel’s history, given new developments in prophecy and the prophetic literature. Now the prophet plays a role in the depiction of the literature, rather than giving rise to that literature as original oral speaker. It is the word of God, as such, that seeks a hearing, through whatever narrative features assist in this goal (vision; angelic voices; prophetic response; divine speech to prophet and other figures in the divine realm).¹⁸

II

Similar rhetorical features can be spotted in Isaiah 40, though they are handled differently. Before we can discuss their significance for the interpretation of Second Isaiah, a small but crucial text-critical problem must be addressed in v. 6. If one reads with the LXX (*kai eipa*), a prophetic figure seems to appear in the divine realm, much as in Zech 1:13.

A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said (*kai eipa*, וַאֲמַר) “What shall I cry?”

Qumran (וַאֲמַרָה) may support such a reading, though others have construed these consonants as a fem. sg. participle (“and she said”) because it is argued that a cohortative would be unusual in this context. The referent would be Zion, who is directly commissioned in vv. 9–11.¹⁹ It should be noted that

¹⁷ The beginning of this shift can be seen in the prose material of the book of Jeremiah. In the famous Temple Sermon, the prophet never speaks at all. Rather, God indicates the content of a sermon he is to deliver, but which we simply “overhear” through God’s instructions (Jer 7:2–15). It is a word which “came to Jeremiah from the Lord,” as the rubric states (7:1), and which we hear only as readers of the text, viz., through textuality. See my remarks in “Mose als Prophet: Redaktionsthemen und Gesamtstruktur des Jeremiabuchi” (forthcoming, *Biblische Zeitschrift*).

¹⁸ See the discussion of textuality and prophecy in a new mode in Ellen Davis’s Yale dissertation, “Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy” (1987), to appear soon in the Almond Press Prophecy and Literature Series.

¹⁹ So D. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBLDS 23; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977) 20. Petersen attributes the original proposal to Dean McBride. The suggestion is intriguing, but it is not clear what it means to have Zion charged to comfort Jerusalem (v. 1) and the cities of Judah (v. 9). An appositional “herald of good tidings, Zion” is also required in v. 9. The feminine participle form *mēbaššeret* is admittedly curious in this context and may suggest the appositional reading proposed by Petersen and others (Cross, Westermann). But in 52:7 a herald of good tidings (this time masculine form, *mēbaššēr*) is clearly understood to have a mission to Zion (*lēšiyōn*); also 41:27. And the plural feminine form (*mēbaššērôt*) occurs in Ps 68:12, where the feminine form is not taken as exceptional or exegetically significant. The existence of feminine participle forms without strict ontological force is seen most notably in the form *qōhelet* (preacher, convener),

there is no debate about the first-person question “What shall I cry?” but only about the opening *wē’āmar*, pointed as a *waw*-conjunctive *qal* third masc. sg., “and X said” (MT). The objection, whoever is raising it, is familiar from other prophetic call accounts (viz., Isa 6:5 and Jer 1:5) and runs through v. 7. With a majority of commentators, we read v. 8 as a rejoinder from the voice which gave the initial charge in v. 6:²⁰ He takes up the previous words of objection and rejoins: “The grass withers, the flower fades—but the word of our God (*’ēlōhênû*) will stand forever.” Reference to “our God” closes the first angelic strophe as well (40:3), thereby maintaining continuity in speaker within the context of the original dialogue (vv. 1–5). This rejoinder overrides the objection, and the text continues with a charge to the “messenger of good tidings” (40:9).

To summarize: God speaks to his divine court, from which various voices respond, in a manner similar to what is depicted in 1 Kings 22 (“and one said one thing, and another said another”). Plural imperatives are used, directed to a plural audience (vv. 1–2). A divine attendant takes up the commission and delivers his own charge, again in the plural (vv. 3–5). The rest of the heavenly entourage appears to be addressed. Then the heavenly voice addresses someone individually (v. 6a). The single imperative is employed: “Cry!” There is an objection (vv. 6b–7). The objection is overridden (v. 8). A new charge is delivered to the *mēbaššeret* (vv. 9–11).

The main question confronting the interpreter involves the speaker of vv. 6b–7. The text-critical divergence is a good indication that earlier tradents also wrestled with proper interpretation. The first-person reading of the LXX (and possibly Qumran)²¹ leads in two directions. We will discuss the first one in some detail. Most modern scholars see the prophet Second Isaiah

clearly a reference to Solomon the king “the son of David, King in Jerusalem” (Ecc1 1:1). In short, the reading “herald of good tidings to Zion” (appositional genitive) cannot be ruled out and may make better sense exegetically (so 41:27; 52:7). This would not preclude the possibility that the objecting feminine voice of 40:6 referred to the *mēbaššeret* alone, but I find this unlikely and it is not the proposal of Petersen. The merits of his proposal will be looked at again below.

²⁰ Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 41. Others (Duhm) have preferred seeing the prophet responding to his own despair. However, the “our God” of v. 8 picks up the phraseology of v. 3, speech of the divine attendant. The plural suffixes (also “says your God” in v. 1) refer to those within the heavenly court (God and his attendants).

²¹ The existence of so-called “false cohortatives” at Qumran is well attested, thus supporting a clear first-person “and I said” in both LXX and Qumran. See E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1 Q Isa^a)* (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 39, 326, 357. “The lengthened form of the imperfect 1st person is very common in the Scroll. . . . This is of course the cohortative form properly used to express endeavour, determination, or personal interest. In the Scroll, however, these forms are used where no such connotation could possibly have been intended—e.g. with the *waw* consecutive: וְיֹאמְרָה (p. 39). Also: Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 44. [Pointed out by my colleague Saul Olyan].

responding here, in a divine council scene which also serves as a call narrative.²² Such a mixed genre (call narrative/divine council scene) is also found in Isaiah 6, Zechariah 1, and 1 Kings 22.

But there are form-critical problems with such a reading. If Second Isaiah's objection is overridden in v. 8, why is there not a clearer statement of his acceptance of the divine charge? A comparison with Isaiah 6, Zechariah 1, and the Kings text is revealing. The prophet Isaiah clearly accepts the commission: "Then I said, Here am I, send me" (6:8). Then follows the content of the commission from God (6:9–10), and further exchange from the prophet back to God (6:11–13). The same formal pattern can be seen in 1 Kgs 22:21 ("Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying 'I will entice him'"), following what might be reasonably interpreted as an objection or at least a deliberation in the divine realm (22:20). Zechariah 1 is closer to our text, in that the prophet never explicitly accepts a commission, as in Isaiah 6 and 1 Kgs 22:21, but neither does he explicitly object, as in both Isa 6:5 and Isa 40:6 (cf. 1 Kgs 22:20). The content of Zechariah's charge is made known to the reader through the exchange between prophet and angel (Zech 1:13–17), similar to Isa 6:8–13. The implication is that Zechariah is fit for service. He never objects; he is charged in the heavenly council; and he receives his commission directly.

For those arguing for a prophetic call for Second Isaiah in Isa 40:1–8, the content of the commission would have to be located in the opening exchange of vv. 1–5, even though this is generally admitted to involve God and the heavenly entourage, strictly speaking. It is to the subsequent charge from the heavenly court to cry (v. 6a) that the prophet objects (vv. 6b–7). Verse 8 must then be taken as a rejoinder that overrides Second Isaiah's objection. So R. J. Clifford interprets it: "The prophet hears his own lament turned into a word of divine assurance in his colloquy with the heavenly being."²³ Yet it is the heavenly being who issues this statement of trust, not the prophet, and in that sense it is a rejoinder as well as an assurance, given the content of the prophet's prior objection. Can such a rejoinder bear the weight of a full commissioning and acceptance on the prophet's part? The careful form-critic Westermann must admit: "No intimation of a call could be briefer."²⁴ Why is there not more elaboration regarding the prophet's response following the objection (vv. 6–7), such as we find in Isaiah 6? There the prophet (1) is cleansed as a response to his objection, (2) called forth; (3) he responds, (4) and is given a charge to which he makes further response.

²² "Only once, and even then only for a moment, does he (Deutero-Isaiah) let himself be seen. This is in the prologue, in 40:6–7, which gives his call" (Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 6).

²³ Clifford, *Fair Spoken*, 75. It is not clear to this reader whether Clifford is interpreting v. 8 along the lines of Duhm or Westermann (see n. 20 above). That is, does the prophet essentially effect his own assurance (Duhm) or does the heavenly being speak these words to the prophet?

²⁴ Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 7.

There is also the matter of unclear transition from v. 8 to v. 9. The roughness of this movement is the chief reason for disagreement among form critics over the precise limits of the opening unit (viz., 40:1–8 or 40:1–11).

Clifford argues that v. 9 signals the prophet's charge to Zion: "The heavenly courtier has commissioned the prophet who in turn commissions Zion."²⁵ This is surely possible, but it is a departure from scenes of divine commissioning. The prophet has not been formally inaugurated following his objection, except by intimation (so Westermann) in the vague movement from v. 8 to v. 9. Is the rejoinder of v. 8 itself a sufficient inauguration? Or, as in Isaiah 6, Zechariah 1, and 1 Kings 22, does there need to be further, explicit exchange between prophet and God/attendants?

The chief advantage of the fem. sg. participle reading is the form-critical consistency it achieves.²⁶ Isa 40:1–11 can be taken as a coherent unit, with vv. 9–11 providing the (1) "reassurance" and (2) "commissioning" elements following the objection, which are missing in readings which seek to designate vv. 6b–7 as Second Isaiah's objection. Thus, Zion is charged within the heavenly council (vv. 1–6a); she objects (vv. 6b–7); her objection is rebutted (v. 8); and she is commissioned: "Get you up to a high mountain, herald of good tidings . . . lift up your voice with strength . . . lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold, your God reigns!'" The reassurance ('*al-tîrā*') and commission ('*ālî-lāk*') elements make for a complete call of Zion on the pattern of prophetic calls in the divine council. As its proponent D. Petersen recognizes, this reading is a significant variation from the critical view which interprets 40:1–11 as a call narrative for the unknown prophet "Second Isaiah" (Westermann, Clifford).

Unfortunately his reading, while form-critically satisfying, stands or falls with the Qumran variant ויאמר ("and she said"), since the MT's third masc. sg. form would destroy the link he seeks to establish between the objection of feminine Zion in vv. 6b–7 and her reassurance in vv. 9–10. Moreover, the fact that a first-person reading cannot be ruled out (Qumran in clear agreement with LXX), and indeed is likely, puts significant strain on an otherwise compelling interpretation.²⁷ Finally, why is the feminine messenger addressed with an appropriate feminine imperative in 40:9 "get you up" ('*ālî-lāk*'), but with the masculine imperative in v. 6a (*qērā*)? Again, this last matter points in the direction of seeing Qumran as employing a first sg. form, rather than a third fem. sg. participle form as argued by Petersen.

²⁵ Clifford, *Fair Spoken*, 76.

²⁶ Rightly noted by its proponent (Petersen, *Late Prophecy*, 20).

²⁷ See n. 21 above regarding long forms of the imperfect at Qumran. Qumran's divergence from the MT may be on grammatical or exegetical grounds (or both). Unvocalized *w'mr* could be construed as simple *waw* plus third masc. sg. perfect ("and he said"), or *waw* consecutive first common sg. ("and I said"), because the verb is 1-*aleph*. Qumran characteristically supplies "false cohortatives" in *waw* + imperfect consecution. For the exegetical logic of Qumran and the LXX, see below.

The first-person reading in the LXX (and Qumran) is capable of simple explanation as a secondary divergence from the reading on which the MT is based. The LXX/Qumran introduced the objection of v. 6 with the customary “but I said,” in order to bring it in line with other prophetic objections introduced with first-person *wā’ōmar* (Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6) and produce a consistency with the following first-person question: “But I said, ‘What shall I cry?’” In the modern critical climate, the unintended effect of this shift was to encourage an interpretation of 40:1–11 as the call narrative of the anonymous prophet in Babylon, “Second Isaiah,” who here objects to his call.

We mentioned above the possibility of a second interpretation of the objecting voice in v. 6. This interpretation has not been advanced in the modern period because of widespread commitment to the Second Isaiah hypothesis, quite apart from one’s narrower views regarding the correct reading of 40:1–11. A second interpretation is that the objecting voice of vv. 6b–7 belongs to Isaiah of Jerusalem, the prophetic voice of chaps. 1–39. A sharp divide at chaps. 39 and 40 has not made this an attractive view, since it flies in the face of critical understandings of the independence of Second from First Isaiah—especially when that independence is seen as a function of the literature’s necessary derivation from *discrete, historically unrelated prophetic figures*, that is, First and Second Isaiah. This second reading would be possible for critics who accept the sixth-century background of chaps. 40–66 but who do not, however, stress the rigid independence of these chapters from what precedes. Such a reading would see Isaiah’s place in 40:6b–7 as primarily of redactional—not historical—significance. But this reading also requires a different conceptual framework for the interpretation of Isaiah 40–55 within the larger Isaiah corpus, viz., one that allows for the possibility of complex, inner-exegetical relationships between critically separated sections of Isaiah.

III

Previous scholars have noted the formal similarity between Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 40. In the midst of his remarks about the divine council, Cross made the observation concerning 40:1–8: “The parallel to Isaiah 6:1–8 is remarkable.”²⁸ Kiesow also speaks of Isa 6:1–13 as “nächstliegenden Vergleichstext” to 40:1–11.²⁹ R. Melugin, in a 1976 study, states: “In both 1 Kings 22 and Isaiah 6 the prophet is transported by vision into the realm of the heavenly council. . . . Although Isaiah 40,1–8 is not a narrative like Isaiah 6, it is based upon the imagery of the commissioning of a prophet by means of a vision in the heavenly council.” Melugin goes on to argue that the “I” in 40:6 is

²⁸ Cross, “Council,” 276.

²⁹ Kiesow, *Exodustexte*, 66. Also Vincent, *Heimat*, 245–46; Habel, “Call Narrative,” 314; Loretz, “Prolog,” 220.

intentionally equivocal, representing both prophet (Second Isaiah) and people.³⁰

More recently, P. Ackroyd has called attention to the relationship between Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 40 along different lines. The latter he suggestively terms “a renewal of the Isaianic commission.”³¹ Unfortunately, Ackroyd does not stipulate whether the objecting voice is redactionally intended to represent Isaiah of Jerusalem or some other figure. But his remarks do imply a shift in how one conceptualizes the relationship between chaps. 40–55 and so-called First Isaiah. N. Habel had simply argued that there was a common form of commission lying behind both Isaiah 6 and 40, an opinion shared by most advocates of a Second Isaiah call narrative in 40:1–11.³² The model Ackroyd is pursuing envisions the relationship between these two texts differently, with far greater redactional purpose and inner-exegetical significance. Moreover, this significance has a specific force which cuts against the standard critical view of Second Isaiah’s independence from First Isaiah.

In the standard call narrative model, the objection of vv. 6b–7 is usually taken as a reflection of turmoil within the prophetic consciousness, given certain historical and psychological factors relevant for Second Isaiah. Westermann’s remarks are typical:

... (T)he exiles’ greatest temptation—and the prophet speaks as one of their number—was precisely to be resigned to thinking of themselves as caught up in the general transience of all things, to believing that nothing could be done to halt the extinction of their national existence, and to saying . . . all flesh is grass!³³

Vincent, on the other hand, rejects this view as derived from inappropriate psychologizing tendencies inherent in the biographical “prophetic individual” model for interpretation. But his alternative is not particularly illuminating. He interprets the language of despondency as typical of the new year festival into which he places these chapters, with its “kontrastierenden Gegenüberstellung der Grössen Null und Unendlich.”³⁴ If one rejects the provenance-restricted approach of Vincent, and the biographical/psychological approach of Westermann and a majority of scholars, are there other possibilities for interpreting 40:1–11 and the objection of vv. 6b–7? One answer may be found in a further comparison of Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 6.

In Isaiah 6 the scene of the heavenly court is explicit, rather than implicit or presupposed (as in Isaiah 40).³⁵ The attendants are clearly

³⁰ R. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* (BZAW 141; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976) 86, 84.

³¹ P. Ackroyd, “Isaiah 36–39: Structure and Function,” in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala* (Festschrift J. P. M. van der Ploeg; AOAT 211; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982) 6.

³² Habel, “Call Narrative,” 314–16; Melugin, *Formation*, 83.

³³ Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 41.

³⁴ Vincent, *Heimat*, 248.

³⁵ The literature on this foundational passage is vast. For a sampling, see George Adam Smith,

identified as “seraphim.” Their physical nature is described (v. 2). In language similar to Isa 40:1–11, they are identified as speakers one to another (*wēqārā’ zeh ’el-zeh wē’āmar*, cf. 1 Kgs 22:20). Moreover, reference to God’s glory in the whole earth (6:3) finds a parallel at 40:5: “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” With language we have discussed in 40:6, the prophet Isaiah responds in objection, introduced by *wā’ōmar* (6:5). But here the objection involves his penetration into the realm of the holy, dangerous because of his unclean state (“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips”). Upon being cleansed, the prophet takes up the commission without pause, although it involves a vast judgment (vv. 9–10). God’s reference to himself together with the divine court is also in striking parallel to the use in Isaiah 40 of plural imperatives and possessive suffixes: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’” (6:8).³⁶

The linguistic links between Isaiah 6 and 40 are clear. Both participate in a broader environment of language of the heavenly court. But to find two “call narratives” utilizing the language of the divine council within a single prophetic book is logical only if one is prepared to accept the view that an individual prophet should be sought behind Isaiah 40–55, on analogy with First Isaiah. If one views Isa 40:1–11 as exegetically composed on the basis of, and literarily coordinated with, Isa 6:1–13, another interpretation is possible.

A methodological problem should be acknowledged at this juncture. How does one determine the date of levels of tradition in First Isaiah and their redactional relationship vis-à-vis Second Isaiah chapters, which most see as uniformly reflecting the same basic diachronic location (sixth century)? The question becomes important given the type of redactional activity we wish to argue is at work in the book of Isaiah.

It lies beyond the scope of our study to address this problem fully. However, the observations we wish to make regarding inner-exegetical efforts within the book of Isaiah will be of a more general nature, so the larger topic of precise redactional dating can be set aside without undue strain on the thesis here proposed. Moreover, plotting the direction of literary influence is not always an either/or matter, since the possibility of mutual enrichment and cross fertilization between Second Isaiah and First Isaiah sections cannot be ruled out. The dating problem is somewhat relativized as one comes to recognize the existence of complex reciprocal relationships among the various subsections of Isaiah. In many cases, one can see efforts at redactional

“Isaiah’s Call and Consecration,” in *The Book of Isaiah* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927) 1. 56–88; R. Knierim, “The Vocation of Isaiah,” *VT* 18 (1968) 47–68; I. Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz; Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1949); O. H. Steck, “Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 6,” *BZ* 16 (1972) 188–206; A. Schoors, “Isaiah, The Minister of Royal Anointment?” in *Instruction and Interpretation*, *OTS* 20 (1977) 85–107.

³⁶ Noted by Rowley, “Council of Yahweh,” 154; Cross, “Council,” 275.

coordination in First Isaiah that are directed exclusively toward chaps. 40–55.³⁷ By the same token, efforts at coordination also run in the opposite direction, as themes and language found in chaps. 40–66 are generated in clear response to First Isaiah traditions.³⁸ This means that sorting out questions of diachronic development from a redactional perspective remains a significant undertaking, involving precision and text-by-text analysis. But in many instances the broad consensus concerning major diachronic levels within Isaiah should suffice for the kind of analysis we wish to pursue here.

The reason for the lack of explicit clarification of the heavenly court scene and the obscure voices in 40:1–11 is that the backdrop of Isaiah 6 has been presupposed, from an editorial perspective, for the reader of this key passage. Following the redactionally pivotal chap. 39,³⁹ we reenter the divine council where Isaiah was first commissioned. Viewed in this light, the objection of vv. 6b–7 takes on specific import. This is not prophetic despondency or a piece of sententious wisdom,⁴⁰ but a précis of one important dimension of Isaiah's proclamation, viewed from the perspective of a sixth-century interpreter. The précis has been generated as an exegetical reflection on certain broad themes found throughout chaps. 1–39. But it is also specifically related to several key texts. Not surprisingly, one of these is Isa 6:1–13.

In the commissioning scene in chap. 6, Isaiah questioned how long ('*ad mātay*) he would be called to make the heart of the people fat. This was his reaction to the commission from God in 6:9–10. God's response was:

Until cities lie waste without inhabitant
and houses without men
And the land is utterly desolate
and the Lord removes men far away
and the forsaken places are many
in the midst of the land. (6:11b–12)

This response confirmed the time span for Isaiah's work as prophet of judgment. Here is an instance where it cannot be ruled out that this clarification has been redactionally supplied to work in coordination with themes of judgment spanning First and Second Isaiah. This is Clements's opinion regarding vv. 12–13.⁴¹

³⁷ See especially Clements, "The Prophecies of Isaiah"; R. Rendtorff, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesajas."

³⁸ On the "Former/Latter Things" motif, see D. Jones, "The Traditio of the Oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem," *ZAW* 67 (1955) 226–45; B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 328–30; more broadly, R. Clements, "Beyond Tradition History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First-Isaiah's Themes," *JSTOT* 31 (1985) 95–113; D. Meade, "Authorship, Revelation and Canon in the Prophetic Tradition," in *Pseudonymity and Canon* (WUNT 39; Mohr-Siebeck, 1986) 15–41.

³⁹ See P. Ackroyd, "An Interpretation of Babylonian Exile," *SJT* 27 (1974) 329–52.

⁴⁰ McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 18.

⁴¹ Clements, "The Prophecies of Isaiah," 426.

With this text in view, it is possible to see the objection of Isa 40:6b–7 in more specific terms. The likening of the people’s constancy/strength (*ḥasdô*)⁴² to the “flower of the field” (*šiš ḥassādeh*) in v. 6b, and the reference to the “fading flower” (*nābēl šiš*) in v. 7 are not just exclamations of despondency from a prophet in Babylon. Rather, these terms crop up within chaps. 1–39 as descriptions of Israel’s impending or present situation of judgment. In the pericope 28:1–4, we find expressions that match those in 40:7–8: the prophet reflects on Israel and “the fading flower (*šiš nōbēl*) of its glorious beauty” (28:1).

Like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters, the lord will cast to
the earth with violence.

The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden
under foot and the fading flower (*šišat nōbēl*) of its
glorious beauty . . .

Will be like a first-ripe fig before the summer; when a man sees it,
he eats it up as soon as it is in his hand (28:2b–4).

From a redactional perspective, references to the “flower of the field” and the “fading flower” at 40:6–7 are coordinated with language typical of the judgment proclamation Isaiah was commissioned to deliver in Isa 6:9–13 and which finds expression at 28:1–4.

Moreover, the verses immediately preceding chap. 40 speak of the culmination of God’s word to Isaiah from the call narrative (39:5–8).⁴³ Nothing was to be left (6:11 – so 39:6). Men were to be carried off (6:12 – so 39:7). This will not take place during Hezekiah’s lifetime (39:8), but in the “days to come” (39:6). The answer to Isaiah’s “How long?” (6:11) is to find its concrete fulfillment in these events. It is therefore not unusual that in Isaiah’s response to Hezekiah’s prayer (37:22–29), the vision of judgment that God has planned of old (37:26) is described thus:

. . . fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins,
while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and
confounded,
and have become like plants of the field (*‘ēšēb sādēh*)
and like the tender grass, like grass on the housetops (*ḥāšîr
gaggôt*)

What God had planned to do “from days of old” (37:26) he postpones in

⁴² In view of its usage in contexts of fidelity to mutual relationships, the force of the expression *ḥasdô* indicates the opposite of the ephemeral. McKenzie’s “constancy” is therefore adopted here (*Second Isaiah*, 16). See also L. J. Kruyper, “The Meaning of *ḥasdô* in Isa. 40.6,” *VT* 13 (1963) 489–92.

⁴³ For a treatment of chaps. 36–39, see the contributions of P. Ackroyd cited in nn. 1, 31; see also K. A. D. Smelik, “Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy: The Purpose of Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii,” *OTS* 24 (1986) 70–93.

Hezekiah's day "for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David" (37:35). The description of judgment postponed matches that of the objection of 40:7-8.

The voice of 40:6b-7 acknowledges that the plan of old has come to pass, not in 701 but in 587: "all flesh is grass, and all its constancy like the flower of the field"—for the breath of the Lord has blown upon it. The Assyrian has been replaced by the Babylonian instrument of judgment (so 23:13), and the voice speaks of the destruction experienced in 587—a return to the chaos depicted in chaps. 24-27.⁴⁴ The world has become the wilderness (40:3) spoken of long ago (13:5), about which the Babylonian had boasted (14:17); for this he will be punished (14:3-21)—like the arrogant Assyrian before him (14:24-27)—at the hands of Persians (13:17-22), the "birds of prey" (18:6) who do God's bidding. This complex temporal scheme in the Oracles of Nations, redactionally filled out in light of subsequent events, is compactly referred to in Isaiah 40-48 as "the former and latter things," known only by the God of Israel and those to whom he chooses to reveal them (41:21-29). The "new things" are about to take place, including above all the calling of Cyrus, "the bird of prey from the east" (46:11). God has declared it first to Zion (41:27) and has given to Jerusalem a "herald of good tidings" (*mēbaššēr*). The prologue of 40:1-11 signals that the old age is passing away and a new day is dawning. The objecting voice is the last gasp from "the former day," although others like him must be addressed and strengthened in chaps. 40-55. It is time for the herald of good tidings to replace the voices of past guilt and former judgment.

IV

We are in a position to return to the form-critical problem regarding Isa 40:1-11 and reach some conclusions. The scene is, as Cross first argued, a divine commissioning in the heavenly council. The unit is not, however, a "call narrative" of the anonymous prophet Second Isaiah. The objecting voice of vv. 6b-7 speaks as though he were Isaiah himself. A first-person reading, "but I said," may have functioned in Qumran/LXX in support of such an interpretation, though this is impossible to determine.

The same formal considerations that weigh against Second Isaiah "call narrative" interpretations also weigh against an Isaiah of Jerusalem interpretation, with one major caveat. The formal elements "reassurance" and

⁴⁴ On the clear relationship between 587 and the description of judgment in 24-27, see Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27* (JSOTSup 61; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988). On 13:1-16 as an oracle not against Babylon, but concerning Babylon as destructive agent, see R. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 132-36. Babylon is then judged by the "Persians" in 13:17-22.

⁴⁵ Note the masculine form and the clear statement that the herald's mission is *to Zion* (see 40:9-11).

“charge” would not be required if the voice were construed as belonging to Isaiah of Jerusalem. These elements could be missing because Isaiah’s is a voice of the past (the former things), and not one of the present (the new things); therefore, a reassurance and charge would be misplaced. But precisely on these grounds Isaiah cannot be the voice of vv. 6b–7, even fictively depicted. For Isa 40:1–11 stands at a *conscious* historical distance from events of Isaiah’s days—a fact argued for from the dawn of modern critical analysis, but only for the interpreter working with the proper historical-critical tools, from an enlightened perspective *outside* of the text itself.

Here we touch on an irony in recent treatments of Isaiah as a redactional unity. The recent canonical observation of a key redactional theme in Second Isaiah regarding the former/latter things undercuts both the “traditional view” of single Isaianic authorship and the “traditional critical view,” against which it is directed.⁴⁶ Since chaps. 40–48, in which the theme appears, look at the former things as things of the past, so too the prophet Isaiah is a “voice of the past.” Put in another way, if one takes seriously recent redactional arguments for unity and coherence, the sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah do not become a single vision of an eighth-century prophet. Rather, the redactional perspective is one of former vision (1–39) and its fulfillment (40–48), which in turn gives rise to “new things” (49–66). We are clearly instructed in 1:1 that Isaiah’s vision emerged in the days of four eighth-century kings, from Uzziah to Hezekiah. Since the latter’s death is referred to in chap. 39, and is taken as a matter of theological and temporal significance, the reader should also be aware that the historical Isaiah will pass from the scene. Isaiah’s full vision of judgment has been postponed solely by the obedience of Hezekiah and the grace of God (37:14–20, 35). This is clearly illustrated in chap. 38, where the original word of the Lord from Isaiah (38:1) is altered by the prayer of Hezekiah (38:2–3), giving rise to a new word (38:5) which postpones Hezekiah’s death, and the “death” of the city (38:6). The word of judgment therefore concerns “days to come” (39:6). There will be “peace and security” (39:8) in the days of both Hezekiah and Isaiah, as the final words of chap. 39 indicate.

Second Isaiah chaps. 40–55, however, look back on the judgment as an accomplished fact. The vision of First Isaiah is fulfilled in the events of 587, which Isaiah saw in the days of Hezekiah. But the perspective of Isaiah 40–66 sees these events in the past: they are “former things.” In sum, arguments for

⁴⁶ Childs has argued persuasively that the “Former Things” in Second Isaiah refer not to obscure matters in the historical consciousness of the Babylonian prophet, but rather to the preaching of Isaiah, as this is redactionally presented in chaps. 1–39. Compare the strict referential reading of C. R. North, “The ‘Former Things’ and the ‘New Things’ in Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (Festschrift T. H. Robinson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950) 111–26.

redactional coherence and unity in the full book of Isaiah are not arguments for single authorship by the prophet Isaiah, even in a post-critical guise.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the objection of vv. 6b–7 has been constructed as a reflection on Isaiah’s vision of judgment fulfilled. To whom does the voice belong? The voice belongs to an anonymous member of the heavenly council: “And one said, ‘What shall I cry?’” The third masc. sg. qal perfect of the MT points to any individual member of the heavenly council.⁴⁸ The remark is a reflection on 587 events made from the perspective of one member of the divine council.⁴⁹ Ackroyd is finally correct that 40:1–11 is a “renewal of the Isaianic commission,” not because Isaiah is recommissioned, but because God speaks again from the divine council as he had done formerly in Isaiah’s day. The book of Isaiah is not expanded on the basis of the prophetic individual Isaiah (the “traditional view”), but solely on the basis of the enduring word of God, which has broken down (“the flower fades when the spirit of the Lord blows upon it”) and will now rise up (“but the word of our God endures forever”). Use of the divine council perspective at this critical juncture in the movement of the book of Isaiah has permitted a flexibility in temporal point of view. In 40:1–11, periods of time centuries removed are brought together before a single divine horizon. The Former Things meet the New Things.

Following this rejoinder in the heavenly council, the word of God goes forth directly, commissioning the herald of good tidings. If one was to speak of a “call narrative,” it would have to refer to the content of 40:9–11, which contains the crucial elements of charge and reassurance. But this would oversimplify matters considerably. For the *mēbaššeret* does not become the prophetic messenger who is the presumed speaker of all that follows, on analogy with the function of call narratives in preexilic prophetic literature. The herald becomes one of many directly addressed by God in Second Isaiah, including most especially the servant (chaps. 40–48) and Zion herself (chaps. 49–54). There is no first-person speech of prophet to be differentiated from direct speech of God until 48:16b. The first full-length speech of

⁴⁷ The Talmud reference frequently appealed to for “traditional views” of authorship (“Moses wrote the Pentateuch”) attributes the writing of Isaiah to “the assembly of Hezekiah” (*b. B. Bat.* 15a).

⁴⁸ Ackroyd even translates the following first-person question impersonally, “What should one say?” (“Structure and Function,” 6). Meade makes a good observation regarding the anonymity of “Second Isaiah” that touches on our interpretation of 40:1–11: “. . . could the suppression of the ‘prophet’s’ identity be due to an awareness of his part in a larger Isaiah tradition? If this were so, the ‘call narrative’ of 40:1–11 would serve the dual purpose of authorizing the message while making it clear that it was not independent of the larger whole” (“Authorship,” 35). Meade rightly recognizes the necessity of taking the broader Isaiah book into consideration when interpreting a passage from any individual section.

⁴⁹ Does this objecting individual foreshadow the more directly prosecutorial *sātān* of Job and Zechariah? Is he like the individualized “spirit” of 1 Kings 22?

a prophetic figure follows not surprisingly in 49:1–6, one of the so-called Servant Songs.⁵⁰

Although it lies beyond the scope of this study, we would argue that in many respects chaps. 40–48, in their entirety, never put aside the concerns of a traditional “call narrative.” Throughout these chapters, the question is, “Who will accept the call God has issued in 40:1–11?” Will Israel be the servant God commissions her to be (41:8; 42:1; 43:1; 44:1, 2; 45:4; 48:20)? Not until 48:16 does an individual step forward, employing in 49:1–6 the language of the call narrative. The individual is called by God “servant Israel” (49:3).⁵¹ This time the objection (49:4) is directly addressed by God, the prophet is reassured and recommissioned (vv. 5–6), and he speaks directly with the messenger formula (49:7). It is as if the original “call” of 40:1–11 has finally been accepted. In 50:4–9 the same individual speaks of God’s support and strengthening, as one who has clearly accepted God’s call to be servant.

It is the contention of this study that Second Isaiah witnesses to a major shift in prophetic literature. In chaps. 40–48 God speaks directly from the divine council without need of prophetic agency. Now the prophet is a figure addressed, in a manner we spoke of earlier with regard to Zechariah, along with other figures (Jacob/Israel, herald, Zion).⁵² Correct interpretation of the opening pericope is crucial for understanding the logic of the material that follows. Our study has shown that the traditional call narrative has been modified here in favor of a commissioning from the divine council. But acceptance of the commission is itself a major theme and question running throughout chaps. 40–48, and explains much of the rhetorical questioning that goes on there.

Because the prophet exists as an independent figure, addressed by the literature in chaps. 40–48, we would argue that the search for the “authors” of chaps. 40–66 must move away from the oral speech model popular with preexilic prophecy. We do not have oral speech from prophet subsequently put in written form by disciples. Instead, we have written “oracles” which themselves raise the question of ongoing prophetic activity. There is not sufficient space to speculate about the authors of this form of “prophecy.” But it would not be surprising to find that the scribal prophecy of Isaiah 40–66, if we might call it that, has a literary style and a sociological location not far removed from that which is assumed for the Psalms (with which Second Isaiah is frequently compared) and the book of Lamentations. The technique at work in Zechariah also suggests similar background and provenance. This study of Isa 40:1–11 and the divine council will, it is hoped, raise new questions about the propriety of current positions regarding the anonymous

⁵⁰ On the structural significance of the Servant motif in Second Isaiah, see P. Wilcox and D. Paton-Williams, “The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah,” *JOT* 42 (1988) 79–102.

⁵¹ See the fine study of 49:1–6 by Wilcox and Paton-Williams (“Servant Songs,” 88–93).

⁵² See the brief comments of Petersen (*Late Israelite Prophecy*, 19–23).

Babylonian prophet "Deutero-Isaiah" and stimulate alternative proposals.

Finally, the notion that chaps. 40–48 raise a question about prophetic agency, which is then addressed in the literature itself, is one that could function quite well within the standard approach to Second Isaiah, whereby chaps. 40–55 are seen as independent of what precedes, and to be interpreted as such. Our study points to a different method of approach. We have argued that problems raised in the interpretation of 40:1–11 were partly due to the refusal to read 40:1–11 as an integral part of the wider book of Isaiah, especially in light of Isa 6:1–13.⁵³ Once one acknowledges the possibility of reciprocal redactional relationships among sections of Isaiah, a whole new range of interpretive possibilities emerge.

But the sky is not the limit. Controls must be refined in order to develop a responsible hermeneutic for interpreting Isaiah 1–66 as a whole book. Our study suggests that the question of prophetic agency is possible as a legitimate interpretation of 40:1–11 and chaps. 40–48 when one recognizes the exegetical context of the full shape of the book of Isaiah, which is itself an aid in the interpretation of individual passages. The question does not just surface in a hypothetical sixth-century setting in Babylon, or in the consciousness of an anonymous prophet; rather, it surfaces in a prophetic book where the prophet Isaiah is depicted as passing away from the scene in chap. 39. Failure to take the canonical form of the material seriously, in favor of strict referential readings, will inevitably mean confusion over the interpretation of isolated passages, read as such. In the pursuit of a satisfactory interpretation of Isa 40:1–11, our study has, it is hoped, raised questions about the propriety of reading the book of Isaiah as three independent collections.⁵⁴

⁵³ See the remarks of David Meade in n. 48 above.

⁵⁴ A version of this paper was read at the January 1989 meeting of the Oriental Club of New Haven.