An Analysis of Isaiah 40:1-11 (17)

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Isa 40:1-11 is a passage filled with ambiguity of language but containing a high degree of order in form. This article presents a poetic, structural analysis of the pericope, examining critical issues such as parallelism, double entendre, meter, word/syllable count, and so on. It also contains a discussion of the setting of the text, including the commonly held position that the passage is a call narrative in a heavenly council meeting. The passage is divided into four strophes, each one discussed separately.

Key Words: parallelism, poetry, double entendre, call narrative, theophany, Exodus theme, Isaiah, strophe, Isaiah 40

Chapter 40 of Isaiah contains a famous yet problematic passage incorporating a number of ambiguities and nuances. For years scholars have debated, not only the authorship of the section of Isaiah beginning with this passage, but also the setting of the author. Other debates are directed at the text itself. Who are the various speakers in the text, and whom are the speakers addressing? Is this passage a call narrative? What can be said about the double entendres and the parallelism of the text? Does the pericope include vv. 1-9, 1-11 or another combination? The purpose of this study is to analyze the structure of Isa 40:1-11 (17), including the poetic nature of the text, and to determine what answers the structure indicates concerning the above questions.

The following is my translation of Isa 40:1-17. Included with the text are strophe divisions and a proposed metrical structure.[1]

1. The language used in describing the structure of this passage (feet, bicolon, strophe, etc.) is taken from Marjo C. A. Korpel and Johannes C. de Moor, "Fundamentals of Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry," *UF* 18 (1986) 173-212.

THE TEXT

Strophe I

  1 "Comfort, comfort my people,"
        says your God.[2]   3+2
  2 "Speak upon the heart of Jerusalem
        and call to her,   3+2

        for her hard service is fulfilled,
        for her punishment is accepted,   3+3

        for she received from the hand of the Lord
            double for all her sins."   4+3

Strophe II

  3 A voice is calling,   2
    "In the wilderness
        Make clear the path of the Lord,   2+2

        make straight in the desert plain a highway
            for our God.   2+2

  4 Let every valley be lifted up,
        and every mountain and hill become low,   2+3
    and let the steep ground be level country
        and the impassable a plain."   3+2
  5 "And let the glory of the Lord be revealed,
        and let all flesh see together,   (3+3)[3]
    for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."   3+3+3

Strophe III

  6 A voice is saying, "Call out!"
        And he (I) said, "What shall I call out?"   3+3

        "All flesh is green grass
            and all its loveliness as a blossom of the field.   2+3
  7   Green grass withers,
            a blossom fades,   2+2
        for the breath of the Lord blows on it.   3+2

    2. The text is not laid out to match the meter notations.
    3. "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" is possibly an addition. This metrical
notation assumes the absence of the last phrase of v. 5.

Indeed the people are green grass."	3
8 "Green grass withers,	
a blossom fades,	2+2
but the words of our God stand forever."	2+2

Strophe IV

9 Go up yourself upon a lofty mountain,	
Zion, herald of glad tidings,	3+2
lift up your voice in power,	
Jerusalem, herald of glad tidings,	
lift up, fear not.	3+2+2
Say to the cities of Judah,	
"Behold your God!"	3+2
10 Behold, the Lord God will come in might	
and his arm is ruling for him.	3+2+2
Behold, his reward is with him,	
and his wage is before him.	3+2
11 Like a shepherd, he will tend his flock,	
with his arm he will gather.	3+2
He carries lambs in his bosom,	
he brings nursing ones to a place of rest.	3+2

Strophe V

12 Who measures water with his hollow hand,	
and measures out the heavens with the span,	3+3
and comprehends with the measure dry dust	
of the earth,	
and weighs mountains with a balance,	
and hills on scales?	4+3+2
13 Who measures out the spirit of the Lord,	
and a man of his counsel inform him?	3+3
14 With whom did he counsel,	
and made him understand,	
and taught him the path of judgment,	3+3
and taught him knowledge,	
and made known to him the way of understanding?	2+3

15 Behold, nations are like a drop from a bucket,
   and like dust on scales they are accounted.   4+3

   Behold, he lifts up coasts like fine dust.   4

16 And Lebanon is not enough to burn,
   and its wild animals not enough for
        a burnt offering.   4+4

17 All the nations are as nothing in front of him,
   from nothing and formlessness they are accounted
   to him.   3+3

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Parallelism heightens perception in poetry and is at work abundantly in this prophetic passage.[4] Parallelism, in at least the first three strophes, is developed not only with grammar but also in ambiguity and double entendre. The writer uses clarity and ambiguity to emphasize the message. The contrast of clarity and ambiguity can be seen in the identity of the speakers and recipients in the text. Only the Lord at the beginning of v. 1 and Jerusalem/Zion in v. 9 are identified; the others are ambiguous. Double entendres are used to add richness to the images and bring to mind the covenantal relationship between the Lord and his people. All of these types of parallelism channel the force of the message.[5] Parallelism will be discussed in detail as each strophe is examined.

The meter of the passage is given to the right side of the text above. The measurements are by no means set in stone or consistent with each other, but the structure is largely composed of bicola with a predominately 3+2 meter. Variances in this structure will be discussed later. Several tricola exist in the text, but discussion of these will be delayed until the strophe discussion.

The first three strophes of the text are argued to be a call narrative, although some scholars include the fourth strophe as a segment of the call narrative. McKenzie sees Isa 40:1-11 as a unit. Verses 9-11 contain the message that the voice bade the prophet to announce in the previous verses.[6] On the other hand, Watts makes a unity of vv. 1-9. He breaks down the passage into four speeches: 1-2, 3-5, 6-7 (+8), and 9.[7] Watts connects vv. 10-11 with vv. 12ff.[8] Melugin argues

4. Stephen A Geller, "A Poetic Analysis of Isaiah 40:1-2," *HTR* 77 (1984) 413.
5. Ibid., 414.
6. John McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (AB 20; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968) 15-16.
7. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC 25; Dallas: Word, 1987) 76-78.
8. Ibid., 84-85.

TABLE 1. Call Narratives

Person: *Location:*	*Moses* *Exodus 3*	*Jeremiah* *Jeremiah 1*	*Ezekiel* *Ezekiel 1-3*	*Isaiah* *Isaiah 6*	*2d Isaiah* *Isaiah 40*
Divine Confrontation	1-4a	4	1:1-28	1-2	None
Introductory Word	4b-9	5a	1:29-2:2	3-7	1-2
Commission	10	5b	2:3-5	8-10	3-6a
Objection	11	6	2:6-8 (implied)	11a	6-7
Reassurance	12a	7-8	6-7	11-13	8-11
Sign	12b	9-10	2:8-3:11	None	None

The numbers are verse numbers and correspond to the chapters in the location line except where indicated with a colon. The information in this chart was taken from Norman Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965) 298-316. Habel also included similar information on the call of Gideon. Habel compares the call of the prophets with the calls of Moses and Gideon. He says the call of the prophets listed above reflect the call traditions of Moses and Gideon, thus making a connection with Israel's past. This connection with the past gives the prophets authority and makes the prophets more than messengers. Habel also examines Genesis 24, a text describing the commission of a servant by Abraham. The passage reflects an archaic practice of the commissioning of an ambassador into service for a master (pp. 320-23). A detailed discussion of call narratives is not the intention of this paper. For a discussion and a full comparison of the call narratives, see Habel's article listed above.

that Isa 40:1-11 is the prologue of chaps. 40-55 while the last part of chap. 55 is the epilogue.[9] Melugin sees Isa 40:1-11 as reflecting a prologue; however, he argues that vv. 1-8 comprise the unit of the commission itself while vv. 9-11 contain an imitation of instructions given to a messenger. His idea is partially based upon the reflection of the heavenly council in the language of these verses.[10] He compares the heavenly council in the call narrative of Isa 40:1-8 with the heavenly council in the call narrative found in Isaiah chap. 6. His assumptions are that both are call narratives containing a heavenly council. Isaiah 40 linguistically lends itself to be a call narrative. The call is given in imperatives in vv. 1-2, 9: "comfort, comfort," "speak," "call," "go up," "lift up," "lift up," "fear not," and "say." The subject and the object of these imperatives will be discussed later.

9. Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* (New York: de Gruyter, 1976) 81.
10. Ibid., 82-83. Melugin also argues that vv. 1-8 are an outline of Isaiah 41-48. The theme of these chapters, according to Melugin, is the New Exodus. He says this theme is absent in 49:14ff. Melugin says 40:9-11 corresponds with 49:14ff. (p. 85). I choose not to argue his position in this paper.

Isa 40:1-11 is a call narrative, but whether or not Isaiah 40 is in a heavenly council setting is questionable. Habel has given the different aspects of several call narratives, shown in table 1. The calls of Moses and Jeremiah are not set in the presence of the heavenly council. The call of Moses mentions the presence of God and a messenger, while in the call of Jeremiah only God is present. The calls of Ezekiel and Proto-Isaiah have a variety of heavenly beings actively present, thus a heavenly council. Notice that the divine confrontation is missing for the Deutero-Isaiah call narrative. Also missing is any dialogue within the council, namely between God and the heavenly beings. Rather, the council meeting, if such can be said to have existed in this passage, has taken place before the utterances of v. 1. Instead, chap. 40 opens with a messenger delivering the imperative statements of the first strophe. This messenger could have been part of a heavenly council, since the messenger seems to be a divine being, but council connections are not necessary for this passage.[11] With this thought I will begin a structural analysis of each strophe, beginning with the first strophe.

Strophe I

Strophe I is comprised of vv. 1-2 and contains four bicola. The first two bicola are 3+2 in meter while the last two bicola are 3+3 and 4+3, respectively. The syllable/word count for Strophe I is 57/21. The speaker, the recipient, and the setting are ambiguous.

As noted above, Strophe I begins with a string of plural imperatives (three *Piel* and one *Qal*). The commands are given to comfort, to speak, and to call out. The Lord is the subject, but who is the Lord addressing? Is God speaking to members of the heavenly council or to the prophets or to a third party? The targum suggests the prophets are the recipient of the commands, while the Septuagint adds "priests" as those being addressed.[12] Seitz suggests that the Lord is addressing divine attendants, who are to speak comfort to Zion.[13] Cross suggests the Lord is addressing his heavenly council. Further, he suggests that members of the council are the ones active in vv. 3–4.[14] Freedman connects the subject of the imperatives in vv. 1-2 with v. 9. He says

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11. The point here is to question the presence of a divine council at the onset of v. 1 rather than to argue against the total concept of a divine council in Isaiah 40. Any discussion in the council seems to have taken place prior to v. 1.

12. Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 109 (1990) 230.

13. Seitz, 232.

14. Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 (1953) 276.

the people of Jerusalem are commanded to be a messenger to the cit-
ies of Judah, with the prophet relaying the message to Jerusalem.[15]
However, Freedman goes further to say that all flesh, that is, the rest
of humankind is to carry out the commands of the imperatives of v. 1.[16]
Watts says that Israel is the one called to comfort Jerusalem, with
Israel being understood as the exiles. He also suggests that Israel is
called to worship in Jerusalem's temple.[17]

Ambiguity is abundant in vv. 1-2. The ambiguity of the speaker
is paralleled with the ambiguity of the receiver. However, enough
clarity is present so that the heart of the matter can be understood.
The Lord is the source of the message with "my people" being the re-
cipient. The message is the return of the Lord to a forgiven people.
Further, ambiguity is found in Jerusalem's hard service and punish-
ment. Is the punishment the exile, is it the destruction of the cities of
Judah, or is it both? Again, clarity is sufficient to let the recipient
know that the punishment and hard service is over.

Another form of parallelism is in past comforting statements from
the Lord to His people. The words אֱלֹהֵיכֶם and עַמִּי bring to mind the
formula "You will be my people and I will be your God." The formula
is used many times in the nation's history.[18] Further, the text of vv. 1-2
is not only a call to comfort but also is given in a seductive language.
Not only is the Lord calling comfort for his people, he is wooing his
people back to him. Verses 1-2 echo with overtones of a lover's plead-
ing. The call is to speak to Jerusalem, but the language is a seductive
pleading that carries a warm emotional tone.[19] "Speak to the heart,"
"call to her" are love-lavished words accompanied with three כִּי
phrases, which plead the case for why such a task should be com-
pleted. The 3+2 bicola are followed by two longer bicola, the first one
3+3 and the second 4+3. The longer cola seem to speed up the rhythm
of the measure, which adds to the urgency of the plea and completes
the strophe.

Parallelism with the double entendre begins in v. 2. The word
צְבָאָהּ can mean either "her hard service" in the sense of punishment
or "her warfare."[20] Both meanings are appropriate in this text. The
Lord is bringing about peace and has forgiven his people. He will put
an end to their suffering from the Babylonian destruction of Judah

15. David N. Freedman, "The Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," *Perspectives on Lan-guage and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 172.

16. Ibid., 185.

17. John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Themes: Isaiah* (Dallas: Word, 1989) 85-87.

18. See Exod 6:7; Lev 26:2; Deut 26:17-18; etc. Geller, "Poetic Analysis," 415.

19. Ibid., 417.

20. Ibid.

and the exile. The theme of the text moves quickly from judgment to salvation.

Parallelism with the past also can be seen in כְּפְלַ יִם. Gitay sees "double" as an exaggeration to collide with the emotions of the reader.[21] However, the fact that Jerusalem had received double is not an injustice but rather a thief 's payment.[22] Receiving double means Jerusalem's debt is paid in full; she is forgiven. The covenant relationship from the past can be renewed and is being renewed by the Lord. God sees Israel from Israel's point of view—that is, as suffering rather than being punished.[23] With this view, the passage takes on a parallelism with the Exodus. In a sense, the Lord is preparing a new Exodus for his people. This parallelism is expounded in Strophe II.

Strophe II

Strophe II is comprised of vv. 3-5 and contains a two-foot colon, followed by four bicola, and ends with a balanced tricolon. The strophe has been divided by some scholars into two parts: vv. 3-4 and v. 5.[24] This possible division will be discussed below. The syllable/word count for Strophe II is 76/33 with v. 5 and 55/22 without v. 5.[25] Ambiguity is found in the identity of the voice calling, the recipient of the message, and the setting.

Strophe II begins with an unknown voice calling out a message. Again, who is the voice and to whom is it calling? Freedman suggests that the voice is the voice of the prophet himself. The prophet is being careful not to identify himself.[26] He says the prophet is speaking and acting as a pivotal link between heavenly and earthly messengers at this point.[27] Seitz says the voice is a heavenly voice that takes up the charge to comfort given in v. 1 by the Lord.[28] Cross, however, sees the conference of the heavenly council continuing in Strophe II. Supernatural beings are proclaiming to the hills, mountains, and valleys, according to Cross, to prepare a highway for Yahweh and his people.[29] Whatever the case, the highway in the wilderness is parallel with the Exodus from Egypt. But this time the Exodus will be differ-

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21. Yehoshua Gitay, *Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 40-48: A Study of the Art of Prophetic Persuasion* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1980) 129.
22. See Exod 22:3--4.
23. Geller, "Poetic Analysis," 419.
24. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 169.
25. Verse 5 possibly composes a strophe in itself.
26. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 185.
27. Ibid., 182.
28. Seitz, "Divine Council," 233.
29. Cross, "Council of Yahweh," 276.

ent. The way will be made straight so that there will be no wandering around in the wilderness.

The writer uses several word and phrase parallels in Strophe II. The first parallel phrases are two 2+2 bicola.

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        A      B         C
Make clear the path of the Lord,
        A              D              B              C
Make straight in the desert plain a highway for our God.
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The writer parallels the first phrase above with the second phrase. The second phrase emphasizes the first and adds to the first by giving the location of the highway—in the desert plain (D). This addition is necessary to connect the thought of the old Exodus with the new Exodus. Notice that the Lord God is emphasized in these two bicola. God is the one traveling through the wilderness, presumably with his people, just as in the old Exodus. Subsequently, Ackroyd sees the trek on the highway across the wilderness as a more glorious Exodus than the first.[30]

Not all scholars agree with the new Exodus concept. Gitay argues that no idea of an Exodus exists in this passage. He thinks the wilderness highway concept follows an idea found in Babylonian hymns. According to the hymns, the preparation in the wilderness is for the god's parade.[31] Also the divine parade/highway theme appears in Isa 35:8-10, a passage that echoes the result of the command found in Isa 40:3. In light of Isa 35:8-10, McKenzie says, "In ancient monarchies roads were cleared for the passage of the king."[32]

The second set of phrases is not as nicely parallel as the first set. As they are, the first bicolon is 2+3 in meter while the second bicolon is a 3+2 in meter. However, the word parallels still exist.

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            C        D
Let every valley be lifted up,
                    A                    B
    and every mountain and hill become low,
                    A              B
    and let the steep ground be level country
            C        D
and the impassable a plain.
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Oesterly argues that C and D should come second in the first bicola, thus making the meter of the first bicolon 3+2. If this change

30. Peter R. Ackroyd, *Israel under Babylon and Persia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 109.

31. Gitay, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 133-34.

32. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 16.

were made, then the two bicola would be in good parallel form: AB/
CD and AB/CD. The verse becomes more symmetrical within itself
and within the rest of the Isa 40:1-11.[33] As v. 4 stands in BHS, a
chiastic structure exists with the first phrase parallel with the last
phrase and the inner phrases parallel with each other. Counting syl-
lables does not help to determine the order of v. 4. Moving from the
first phrase to the last phrase, the verse as presented has a syllable
count as follows: 5, 8, 9, and 7. Consequently, a rearrangement of
phrases produces no symmetrical syllable count.

Verse 5 presents several structural problems. The verse is com-
posed of a balanced tricolon (3+3+3). This is the first tricolon in the
text and the only one until v. 9. Although tricola are not foreign to
Hebrew text, the tricolon composing v. 5 seems out of place in a text
composed of bicola. Oesterly suggests the last foot of the colon, "for
the mouth of the Lord has spoken," is an addition. His basis is that the
last foot spoils the rhythm of the text.[34] Nevertheless, the Masoretic
Text (MT) makes no suggestions concerning a textual addition. Other
than rhythm, no basis exists to delete the last foot of v. 5.

Verse 5 has no word parallels within itself. The foot כָל־בָּשָׂר is
paralleled in v. 6. Verse 5 does not parallel vv. 3-4 except that v. 5 is a
continuation of the voice calling out in vv. 3– 4. With the minimal con-
nection of v. 5 with the surrounding verses, one can argue that v. 5
composes a strophe. Freedman proposes that v. 5 is the central divider
of Isa 40:1-11. To Freedman, v. 5 is the culminating verse of the
poem.[35] Verse 5 acts as the divider of the passage, focusing the atten-
tion of the reader. He suggests that v. 5 is actually the conclusion of
the passage placed in the middle for emphasis.[36] The latter proposal
will be discussed below.

Strophe III

Strophe III is comprised of vv. 6-8 and contains four bicola, followed
by a three-foot colon, and ending with two balanced bicola. The syl-
lable/word count for the Strophe III is 66/33. Ambiguity continues
in the identity of the speakers and the setting.

BHS contains three significant notes concerning Strophe III. First,
וְאָמַר in v. 6 is rendered ואומרה in 1QIsaᵃ and is proposed as וָאֹמַר by the
Septuagint and by the Vulgate. The third masculine singular form of
this word in the text meaning "and he said" is rendered "and I said"
according to the Septuagint and Vulgate emendations and "and she

33. W. O. E. Oesterly, *Ancient Hebrew Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1938) 114.
34. Ibid., 114.
35. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 171.
36. Ibid., 191-92.

said" according to the Qumran rendering. If the Qumran third feminine singular form is followed, then Zion is the probable speaker, objecting to her call.[37] However, if we follow the emendations of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, then the speaker of at least vv. 6b-7 is the prophet. If the emendations are not followed, then the speaker is an unknown heavenly being. Freedman follows the MT rendering, saying the third masculine singular form is more difficult, thus probably the original.[38] If the prophet is speaking, then the negative reply is an objection to the divine call, which bids the prophet to call out. Habel includes this objection as part of the calling of the Deutero-Isaianic prophet.[39] Melugin says the objection is parallel with the objection in the Isaiah 6 call narrative. However, who the "I" is remains as another ambiguity of this text. The "I" could be the prophet or the collective voice of the people.[40]

Second, the Septuagint does not contain v. 7. Possibly v. 7 is an explanation of the statement in v. 6b. However, v. 7 seems to be necessary to set the stage for v. 8.

Third, BHS notes that the phrase אָכֵן חָצִיר הָעָם probably is an addition to the text. Because the phrase forms a three-foot colon standing alone in a predominately bicolon passage, the idea that the phrase is an addition is probable. Also the syllable and word count does not balance as well with the other strophes with this phrase added. Without the phrase, the syllable/word count drops from 66/33 to 60/30, numbers closer to the numbers of the other strophes. McKenzie states that the last phrase of v. 7 is an addition by a glossator to answer what he calls a wisdom riddle offered in vv. 6b-7.[41]

Word parallelism is obvious in vv. 7-8. The imagery of grass and a blossom continues from v. 6 in ABC/ABC' form:

      A   B
   Green grass withers, a blossom fades,
              C
      for the breath of the Lord blows on it.
      Indeed the people are green grass.
      A   B
   Green grass withers, a blossom fades,
              C'
      but the words of our God stands forever.

The middle phrase seems out of place, even if one tries to parallel the phrase with a phrase in v. 6. The structure is XYZ/XY. One would

37. See Seitz, "Divine Council," 237.
38. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 181.
39. See table 1 above.
40. Melugin, *Formation*, 84.
41. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 18.

expect the structure to be reversed to XY/XYZ, a structure similar to
the structure of v. 3.

        X   Y
All flesh is green grass
                         Z
and its loveliness as a blossom of the field.
        X
Indeed the people are green grass.

Parallelism in the form of double entendre plays an important
role in v. 6. חַסְדּוֹ can mean "loveliness" as in aesthetic beauty, but the
word carries the connotation of "loyalty" and "steadfastness." Also
חֶסֶד is a covenant word. Covenant loyalty is insinuated with the use
of the word.[42] Just as a flower is lovely one day and withered the
next, so is all flesh in its loyalty to the Lord. Trying to qualify this
thought may be the reason why the last colon was added to the verse.

The word רוּחַ is a double entendre in v. 7. The word can be trans-
lated as breath or wind. The breath of the Lord is a figurative phrase
of judgment, familiar in the OT. The breath of the Lord is also asso-
ciated with the desert wind, which causes the grass to wither.[43] In
this passage, the breath and word of the Lord are paralleled with v. 2
in that the theme of judgment is followed by the theme of salvation.

Another double entendre is דבר found in v. 8. The meaning of in
is not only "word" but also "deed." The two meanings cannot be
separated in this text. The Lord gives enduring reality not only in
what he says but also in what he does.[44]

The strophe has a contrast between the green grass and blossom
on the one hand and the breath of the Lord on the other. In other
words, a contrast is made between the mundane and human frail-
ness, and the steadfastness and permanence of the word of the Lord:
flesh:God, grass/blossom:forever. Further, the withering blossom and
grass are both exclamations of despondency and language of judg-
ment.[45] The contrasts in these verses enhance the role of the prophet
and the significance of the message.[46]

Strophe IV

Strophe IV is comprised of vv. 9-11. Strophe IV contains five alter-
nating bicola and tricola in vv. 9-10, which are followed by two

42. Stephen A. Geller, "Were the Prophets Poets?" *Proof* 3 (1983) 216.
43. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah,* 18.
44. Ibid.
45. Seitz, "Divine Council," 242.
46. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 182.

bicola in v. 11. The syllable/word count for the Strophe IV is 110/43. Ambiguity continues in the identity of the speaker, but the recipient gains clarity.

The syllable/word count for Strophe IV is high, about double the count of the preceding strophes. Watts proposes a division of units between vv. 9 and 10.[47] If Watts is correct in his division, then v. 9 alone would compose a strophe. If v. 9 is a strophe, then the syllable/word count for v. 9 drops to 51/20, while the syllable/word count for vv. 10-11 becomes 59/23. These counts are closer to the syllable/word count of the preceding strophes. However, the cola structure of vv. 9-10 is symmetrically balanced (3+2, 3+2+2, 3+2, 3+2+2, 3+2), which suggests that vv. 9-10 are part of the same unit; therefore, the syllable/word count in this case may be a false strophe division indicator.

The linguistic structure of vv. 9-10 resembles that of vv. 1-2. Verse 9 has four feminine singular imperatives (compared to four masculine plural imperatives in v. 1). Verse 9, like v. 1, is a message of comfort with a command to act. Verses 9-10 also contain three הִנֵּה phrases, which are balanced with the three כִּי phrases in v. 2.[48] With such congruence, Gitay regards vv. 9-11 an epilogue and vv. 1-2 a prologue introducing the topic.[49] More discussion about the connectedness of the unit as a whole will follow below.

The recipient of the message in vv. 9-11 is Jerusalem/Zion, but the speaker remains ambiguous. McKenzie believes that the voice is the voice of the prophet.[50] Another view perceives that vv. 9-11 are a message to Zion delivered by the voice of one from the heavenly council. However, this argument depends heavily upon the supposition that the Qumran rendering of the phrase "and she said," which responds to the voice in v. 6, is correct.[51] In any case, Jerusalem/Zion is given a command to speak to the cities of Judah.

Regardless of the identity of the speaker, vv. 9-11 are a form of a speech that not only gives one instructions but also tells one what to say. If the prophet is the recipient of the speech, then he has the task of relaying the message. The imperatives remove the pleading nature of vv. 1-8 (especially vv. 1-2) that call for a recipient to intervene. The imperatives command Jerusalem/Zion to act. The "who" of the matter has been decided, and the "what" of the message is being given. This twist leads scholars who hold Isa 40:1ff. to be a call narrative to believe that vv. 9-11 were originally a separate entity from

47. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 78.
48. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 173.
49. Gitay, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 128.
50. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah,* 17.
51. See Seitz, "Divine Council," 237.

vv. 1-8 and are not part of the prophet's call.[52] However, if the initial call is to Jerusalem, then the unity continues to v. 11.

The structure of v. 9, as mentioned above, is similar to the structure of vv. 1-2. Verse 9 is thoughtfully constructed with each colon building upon the one before while maintaining some degree of parallelism.

A Go up yourself upon a lofty mountain,
B   Zion, herald of glad tidings,

A Lift up your voice in power,
B   Jerusalem, herald of glad tidings,

A   Lift up, fear not.

        Say to the cities of Judah,
                "Behold your God!"

The structure of the beginning of v. 9 is A:B:A:B:A, that is, a command given, a recipient named, a command given, a recipient named, a command given. The second part of v. 9 gives the final command along with the message.

The cities of Judah are the final recipients of the message, just as the Lord is the origin of the message. All other participants are variously ambiguous. Freedman suggests that the final recipients, the cities of Judah, are the "people" of v. 1. He includes Jerusalem as being one of the cities of Judah. Freedman makes this correlation by connecting the third feminine singular pronominal suffix "to her" of v. 1 with the feminine nouns of v. 9.[53]

Verses 10-11 are theophonies. Verse 10 portrays the Lord as a conqueror, while v. 11 portrays the Lord as a shepherd. The structure of v. 10 is A:B:B:B. The structure begins with a phrase of intent, followed by three phrases suggesting purpose. However, the writer uses two הִנֵּה clauses to balance the structure to A:B:A:B. Hence, the structure is as follows:

A   Behold, the Lord God will come in might
B   and his arm is ruling for him.

B(A) Behold, his reward is with him,
B   and his wage is before him.

Notice that the Lord God and his arm are parallel in the first colon, while his reward and his wage are parallel in the second colon.

52. Melugin, *Formation*, 84-85.
53. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 173.

The Exodus theme echoes in v. 10 and is again paralleled, in thought, with the new Exodus. The Lord coming in might with his outstretched arm is imagery from the Exodus.[54]

The structure of v. 11 is similar to v. 10. The structure is A:B:B:B. The first phrase is a general phrase (the shepherd tends), while the following three phrases modify the first phrase (the shepherd gathers, carries, and brings).[55]

A   Like a shepherd, he will tend his flock,
B   with his arm he will gather.

B   He carries lambs in his bosom,
B   nursing ones he brings to a place of rest.

BHS places the word טְלָאִים at the beginning of the third colon, a format reflected in my translation. But BHS notes that a possible rendering is "he will gather lambs in his bosom." This rendering upsets the balance and leaves the last colon with two verbs rather than one.

Strophe V

For the sake of demonstrating the connectedness of vv. 1-11 and the disconnectedness of vv. 12ff., I have included a structural analysis of the next strophe. Strophe V is comprised of vv. 12-47 and contains a metrical variety of bicola along with two tricola. None of the bicola have a 3+2 meter, a meter common to vv. 1-11. The syllable/word count for Strophe IV is 145/59. These counts are high compared to the counts of Strophes I-IV. Ambiguity discontinues in these verses and is replaced by interrogatives concerning the Lord.[56] The language becomes harsh and direct, unlike the wooing and pleading nature of vv. 1-11. The nations (all flesh) now come under judgment rather than seeing God's glory revealed.

I have chosen not to go into detail on Strophe V. For this paper, Strophe V serves to demonstrate the unity of Strophes I-IV by contrast with its structure and grammar. As used in this paper, Strophe V serves to congeal the unity of Strophes I-IV into a canticle. Strophe V actually composes the first strophe of the canticle of Isaiah 40:12-31 and is not part of the 1-11 unity.

54. Ibid., 178. Also see Exod 7:4-5, 19; 8:5-6, 17; 9:15; 10:12, 21; 14:21, 27; etc.
55. In my translation, I have balanced the verse into an A:B:A:B structure by placing the subject and verb before the prepositional phrase in the third phrase of the verse; however, the Hebrew rendering places all four verbs after the prepositional phrase or object.
56. For more information concerning the interrogatives of this strophe and the remainder of the second canticle, see Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 65-67.

The Canticle as a Whole

The canticle consists of Strophes I-IV. Strophe V is not part of the first canticle of Isaiah 40; therefore, Strophe V is not part of this discussion. As deliberated above, several of the strophe divisions are not agreed upon by all scholars. Verses 3-5 can compose one strophe, or vv. 3- 4 can be divided from v. 5 to form two strophes. Likewise, vv. 9-11 can compose one strophe, or v. 9 can be separated from v. 10-11 to compose two strophes.

Freedman understands Isa 40:1-11 to be divided into four parts with a central divider. Freedman bases his divisions upon content and form and upon the symmetrical and chiastic arrangement of the names of God.[57] The arrangement is as follows:

Part I vv. 1-2

v. 1 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

v. 2 יהוה

Part II vv. 3-4

v. 3 יהוה

v. 3 אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Central Divider vv. 5-6a

v. 5 יהוה

v. 5 יהוה

Part III vv. 6b-8

v. 7 יהוה

v. 8 אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Part IV vv. 9-11

v. 9 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

V. 10 אֲדֹנָי יהוה

The chiasm occurs in parts I and II and then in parts [II and IV. A chiasm also exists between both sides of the central divider. Freedman argues that such an arrangement focuses the attention on the central divider, thus making the central divider the most important statement.[58]

Freedman further proposes that the sequence of events in Isa 40:1-11 is not sequentially rendered.[59] His suggested order of events is:

Part III   vv. 6-8
Part II   vv. 3- 4
Part I   vv. 1-2
Part IV   vv. 9-11
Finale   v.5

57. Freedman, "Structure of Isaiah 40:1-11," 169-71.
58. Ibid., 170-71.
59. Ibid., 192.

He bases his argument upon the similarities of the voices in parts II and III, and upon the similarities of the imperatives and vocabulary in parts I and IV. Also he observes that a series of actions has taken place before the action of v. 1. Freedman says these actions are found in parts III and II chronologically.[60] He does not propose that a re-arrangement be made of the poem's text for scriptural purposes, but rather, he proposes that the arrangement was nonsequential, rendered for dramatic and literary qualities.[61]

Seitz understands the unity (canticle) differently. He divides the passage as follows:

vv. 1-2	God speaks to the divine court.
vv. 3-5	Divine attendant takes up commission.
v. 6a	Heavenly voice addresses an individual.
vv. 6b-7	Objection is made.
v. 8	Objection is overridden.
vv. 9-11	New charge is delivered.

Unlike Freedman, Seitz observes the passage as being in sequential order and makes his divisions based upon the movements of the participants in the passage.[62]

CONCLUSION

I see the overall structure of Isa 40:1-11 as a canticle composed of four strophes, as laid out in this paper. The only exception is possibly v. 9. The content, context, word and syllable count suggest that v. 9 alone could constitute a strophe. I have no problem separating v. 9 out as an individual strophe.

The overall structure of Isa 40:1-11 seems to be well organized. The movement of the message is quick, moving through a chain of commands originating with the Lord and ending with cities of Judah. Parallelism is used to its fullest by paralleling words, phrases, ambiguity (contrasted with clarity), past events (the Exodus), and known phenomena (the desert wind). The use of double entendre enriches the text, along with the use of emotional language. Word and syllable count along with similar meter and structure unify these verses into a coherent yet ambiguous pericope. The loss of ambiguity, and change in word and syllable count, change in tone of the language from pleading to harsh indicate that vv. 12ff. are not part of the opening scene of Isaiah 40 but rather are the beginning of the next pericope.

60. Ibid., 175.
61. Ibid., 189-92.
62. Seitz, "Divine Council," 235.