1 Introduction

Into the apparent divine silence of the exile, a poetic voice sounds: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God" (Isa 40:1). The chapters that follow are filled with voices. The prophetic poet, the Servant, and Zion all have something to say. But throughout, the dominant voice is that of Israel's God. This divine first-person speech conveyed by the prophetic text soothes as well as rages. It offers vivid images of coming restoration and of estranging wrath. At times the contrast between passages pulls the reader in opposite directions, producing an almost irreconcilable tension.[1] At other points, the words seem so overlapped with earlier passages that it is as though the text is doubling back upon itself.[2] These features are elements of Isaiah 40–66's poetic style. As poems, the texts of Isaiah 40–66 convey their message more through vivid word pictures, juxtapositions, and emotional encounters than through an argument about ideas.

This commentary will argue that Isaiah 40–66 proclaims its message above all else *poetically*. Shifts and disjunctions, distinctive voices, emotional turbulence, and piling up of metaphors are the primary means by which these chapters proclaim their prophetic message. A strategy that tries to make sense of these features by flattening them into a single storyline or a logically driven argument will reduce rather than enhance

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[1] For example, the audience are commanded both "Remember the former things" (46:9) and "Do not remember the former things" (43:18). See also Francis Landy, "Spectrality in the Prologue to Deutero-Isaiah," in *The Desert Will Bloom: Poetic Visions in Isaiah* (eds. A. Joseph Everson and Hyun Paul Kim; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 152. On "intractable problem" as drawn from literary theory, see Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), 67–69.

[2] For example, Zion's restoration in chapters 49 and 54 reuses and modifies words and images.

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our appreciation of the message the ancient prophetic text conveys.[3] Instead, what is needed is an approach that treats these poetic features as conveying and carrying the meaning of the text. Such an approach is what this commentary intends to offer.

KEY ASPECTS OF A POETIC APPROACH

A poetically informed approach allows our expectations about what a text might mean and how it might convey that meaning to be significantly influenced by the awareness that the text is poetic. It has been common in the history of interpretation for other factors to heavily influence our expectation about the meaning of Isaiah 40–66. One factor that often plays a significant role in determining what sort of meaning we might expect to find has been the knowledge that the text is prophetic. If one expects that Israel's prophets urge Israel to take particular action, then it is not difficult to associate them with orators.[4] Such an association leads one to expect that prophetic texts should be read for their argument and that the main interpretive goal is to determine what action the audience is being urged to adopt.[5] On the other hand, the notion that Israel's prophets spoke to historical audiences in specific historical circumstances can orient readers to the events that were occurring during the time in which they worked. Such details can also potently shape the expectations of readers and lead historical events to become a significant focus.[6] The historical events of the exile and return do, indeed, make an impact upon these poems and will be taken into account in what follows. However, knowing what historical

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[3]   On the general "readerly tendency ... to read for plot," see J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 42. Examples of plot-oriented readings include Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 349; and Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (Hermeneia; trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 19, on Isaiah 52:13–53:12; and John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (AB 20; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 15–17, on Isaiah 40.

[4]   Richard J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading* (New York: Paulist, 1984), 4, applies the label "orator" to Second Isaiah.

[5]   Examples include Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading* (1984), see especially pp. 4–5; and Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40–48* (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981), see especially pp. 26–27.

[6]   For example, K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (2001), 30, dates Second Isaiah later than the dominant position of scholarship (450–400 BCE) and offers a correspondingly distinct interpretation of the work's aims (pilgrimage to Jerusalem).

events these texts were spoken into does not exhaust the significance of what they proclaim in that setting. Therefore, while I do not deny that prophecy and history are each appropriate in their own way, I argue that prophetic poetry creates its own expectations.[7] These expectations are certainly not incompatible with historical audiences and are not irreconcilable with a public speaker. However, attention to poetic prophecy with specific attention to its poetic character does shape expectation in significant ways.

It will be important, then, to clarify what sort of expectations about meaning poetry creates in the reader. Throughout this commentary, I will take meaning to be "the projection of a possible and inhabitable world."[8] Interpretation explores and exposes that world to the mind of the reader. Interpretation offers that possible world as the context for the audience's response. Interpreting a poetic text involves paying particular attention to the poetic features of the text and considering them to carry and convey the text's meaning. It also means actively resisting assumptions about meaning that do not belong to the text's "world."

One of the most significant things that is largely absent from Isaiah 40–66's "world" is a narrative or discursive structure. That is, these poems do not present either a "story" or an "argument." Rather they are best conceived of as offering an experience or an encounter. These poems are a series of nonnarrative poems arranged into a larger whole. Their world is illuminated by careful attention to the features that they share with other nonnarrative poems, especially lyric poems.[9] For this reason, the type of interpretation undertaken in this commentary might be helpfully described as a lyrically informed poetic approach.

Individual texts exhibit particular preferences for poetic features, and any approach to interpretation should be adapted to the needs of the text in question. However, it is possible to enumerate a few general features of

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[7] See further Katie M. Heffelfinger, "Persuasion, Poetry and Biblical Prophets," *PIBA* 43–44 (2021): 38–53.

[8] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 92.

[9] For further defense and explanation of this claim, see K. M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large* (2011), 36–81.

what I mean by a lyrically informed poetic approach to Isaiah 40–66. These will be employed throughout the commentary.

1. A lyrically informed poetic approach to Isaiah 40–66 will draw attention to the experience and encounter produced by the text. Jonathan Culler's description of lyric as seemingly the "utterance of a voice" applies quite potently to Isaiah 40–66, where the overwhelming dominance of the divine speaking voice, especially in 40–55, is a primary unifying factor in an otherwise fractious series of poems.[10] Throughout, this commentary will aim to expose the encounter the text produces for its reader and particularly to highlight the tone of the speaking voice and the emotions it both elicits and describes.

2. The tension mentioned in the opening paragraph of this introduction is a tension at the heart of Isaiah 40–66. A poetically informed reading will not attempt to harmonize between wrath and comfort or between paradoxical and juxtaposed commands and imageries. Rather, the apparently irreconcilable tensions within the text and expressed by its speaking voices are vital to the way these poems create a possible world for their readers. Their mode of poetic persuasion depends upon sharp shifts between opposing emotions and possibilities. By setting these sharply into relief through contrast, the poetry produces urgency and orients its audience toward the attitudes and actions it urges them to inhabit. So, a poetic approach to these chapters will involve highlighting the tensions and contradictions and illustrating the ways that meaning is produced by juxtaposing them.

3. A lyrically informed poetic approach to Isaiah 40–66 will involve unpacking the meaningful significance of the poems' literary artistry. It is important to bear in mind that poetic texts of all types, and especially those that employ features common to lyric poems, exploit the richness and ambiguity of language. Poetry revels in allusion, sound play, metaphor, and double entendre. For the poet, openness and uncertainty about words and images are not problems to be overcome but possibilities to be exploited. Poetry produces its impact on the reader at least in part by exulting in the uncertainty and mutability of

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[10] Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 75.

language.[11] The words, sounds, and rhythms of poetry unfold the world of the poem. It is not that these "ornaments" can be translated into a meaning that exists separately from them. Rather, the poetic voice utters rhythms, sound, and syllables that "systematically infect and affect thought."[12] A lyrically informed poetic approach will not merely observe poetic features such as wordplay, sound play, juxtaposition, parataxis (see Glossary of Poetic Terminology), metaphor, and repetition. Rather, it will consider these the primary modes of poetic meaning-making and will treat them as the way the poetry expresses its message. As Roy F. Melugin insightfully pointed out, "In poetry the forms and images are at least as important as the thought. By means of these the poet calls into being certain feelings and attitudes and associations which are not, strictly speaking 'thoughts.'"[13]

Isaiah 40–66 is not a seamless and harmonious text. It does not move by a sequence of logical argumentation toward an obviously urged action. Successful receipt of the message of these prophecies will involve experience and encounter. It will result in a transformation of attitudes and emotions. It cannot be replaced by a distillation of the cognitive content of the message. Rather, these chapters open up possible worlds into which the audience is invited.

IMPORTANT CONTEXTS FOR READING ISAIAH 40–66

While this commentary is intentionally focusing on the poetic techniques that Isaiah 40–66 uses to make meaning, context is not unimportant to its work. The intended historical audience of these chapters plays an important role in shaping the message that the prophetic poets offer to them. Their expectations, attitudes, and historical circumstances all make an imprint on these poems. That is, these prophetic poems are not spoken into a void. In order to interpret them, we need to consider the historical context in which their audiences lived. In addition, we should consider the

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[11]   See further Katie M. Heffelfinger, "Truth and Hidden Things: Reading Isaiah 45:9–25 as Scripture," in *A New Song. Biblical Hebrew Poetry as Jewish and Christian Scripture* (eds. Stephen D. Campbell, Richard G. Rohlfing Jr., and Richard S. Briggs; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023), 159–160.
[12]   J. Culler, *Literary Theory* (1997), 80.
[13]   Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 78.

biblical context that these poems were spoken into since the prophetic poets responsible for these chapters were very fond of quoting from and alluding to other biblical texts.

Since 1892, the year Bernhard Duhm published his influential work, commentaries on these chapters seem obliged to take a position on how many separate historical periods the canonical book of Isaiah addresses.[14] The suggestion that Isaiah could well be divided into at least two historical sections is older than Duhm's work but this date is considered a watershed moment in the history of Isaiah scholarship, and one that introduced the possibility of a third section.[15] A historical division between chapters 39 and 40 is largely uncontroversial.[16] At this point, the figure of the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem disappears, as does his historical context of the eighth century and the narratives about him. Babylon, which had been a looming but not yet realized threat in Isaiah 39, is already the oppressor at whose hand Israel has suffered by chapter 40.[17]

Chapters 56–66, however, have been much more heavily debated. These chapters do seem, on balance, to be somewhat later than Isaiah 40–55, but not significantly so. As Brooks Schramm observes, "the majority view dates Isaiah 56–66 to the early restoration period."[18] He warns, however, "Given the almost total lack of historical references in Isaiah 56–66, a good

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[14] See Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 11–13, on Duhm's indebtedness to earlier thinking.

[15] See the helpful summary of the history of this discussion in H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah: Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 366–371; as well as Ewe Becker, "The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah* (ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 39–40.

[16] James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66: Introduction, and Exegesis," in *Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, and Jeremiah* (IB; ed. George Arthur Buttrick; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 382, calls this division "widely accepted." See the helpful discussion of H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah: Book of" (2012), 370.

[17] The word "Babylon" does not appear in chapter 40. However, it is explicitly referenced in 43:14; 47:1; 48:14; and 48:20 and the destruction by the Babylonians and ensuing exile of Jerusalem's inhabitants is the most obvious referent of the language of Jerusalem having "served her term" and that "her penalty is paid" (40:2).

[18] Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (JSOTSup 193; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 21.

measure of restraint is in order" while assigning a tentative date of 538–400.[19] There is something of a change in the circumstances of the addressees and a shift in the style of the prophetic proclamation marked by both continuity and discontinuity. The prophetic poetry largely continues, using many of the same techniques and favorite images that Isaiah 40–55 employed, though with new features and tendencies.[20] The prophetic poetic style of this section exhibits some distinctive features of its own (see further A Closer Look: "Third Isaiah" as an "Under-Rated" Poet). One contextual difference is that in these latter chapters, the exiles seem to have returned to Judah. Some "gathering" of the LORD's people has already happened (56:8) and there are references to the house of the LORD (56:5, 7), which would seem to imply that there is an expectation that the temple is to be rebuilt.

So, discussion of the historical audience means paying attention to at least two historical contexts. First, Isaiah 40–55 seems primarily to address Judeans who are living in exile in Babylon. It commands them to "Go out from Babylon" (48:20) and displays particular interest at various points in Babylon's imminent fall as well as familiarity with its practices.[21] Frequent allusion to Lamentations, which is most probably a text from the community who remained behind in Jerusalem,[22] need not necessarily overturn the arguments in favor of a likely exilic audience for Isaiah 40–55. It seems that there was contact between the exiles and those who remained behind, and the reuse and reapplication of texts is entirely possible between these

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[19] B. Schramm, *Opponents of Third Isaiah* (1995), 52.
[20] See the helpful overview of similar literary techniques in Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 187–192.
[21] See further discussion in K. M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large* (2011), 91–92. A contrasting opinion is available in Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55* (VTSup 139; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2, who argues for a "Judahite provenance" for Isaiah 40–55. While it seems likely that the exiles are a primary audience of these chapters for the reasons detailed above, they may not be the exclusive audience. The poems could potentially resonate with other communities of Judeans in the time period including those remaining in Judah. See the discussion in John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40–55* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 1:33, and their helpful note of caution that "the traditional critical view that the poet worked in Babylon is probably right."
[22] See, e.g., F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 4.

communities.[23] A second context is that of Isaiah 56–66. The exiles have returned to Judah and the audience are undergoing the difficult period of rebuilding. Isaiah 40–55 and 56–66 do not have entirely distinct audiences but overlapping ones whose background includes a significant historical shift.

In addition, while this commentary is not focused on historical authorship claims and intentionally reads the text as it finally stands (see A Closer Look: The Final Form and the Former Things), it is important to note the scholarly consensus that the final form of chapters 40–66 is the result of a long process, which seems likely to have involved multiple authorial hands.[24] Chapters 56–66, in particular, are frequently regarded as composed of poems drawn together from different authors.[25] Thus, the audience of the final form of the book is somewhat distinct from the audience of each of the larger units.[26] However, it seems that one of the features of the final form of Isaiah is that it preserves the distinctive earlier voices of the book and relates them together without flattening them (see A Closer Look: The Final Form and the Former Things and A Closer Look: "Third Isaiah" as "Under-Rated" Poet). For this reason, this commentary will journey through the poems with attention to the audience(s) they appear to present within each larger unit's own world. That means that for Isaiah 40–55 the primary attention is to an audience of exiles and for Isaiah 56–66 the community facing the challenges of return.

Historical Context and Isaiah 40–55

Scholars have claimed that the Judean exiles prospered in Babylon and that one of the difficulties for the prophetic poet of Isaiah 40–55 was to convince the exiles to depart a relatively comfortable life in Babylon.[27] However,

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[23] See, e.g., Carol A. Newsom, "Response to Norman K. Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40–55,'" *Semeia* 59 (1992): 75; and K. M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large* (2011), 93.

[24] See the introductory discussion in H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah: Book of" (2012), 366–371.

[25] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–56* (AB 19B; London: Doubleday, 2003), 54–60, provides an overview of scholarly discussion.

[26] See the helpful discussion of a Second Temple period audience in Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55* (2006), 1:35.

[27] See, for example, the description in R. J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken* (1984), 13.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher has convincingly argued that there are good reasons to doubt that the exiles' experience was a largely positive one. His reasons include the testimony of the exiles themselves in their literature, which periodically uses the language of slavery to describe their condition, and the reports the Neo-Babylonians make of their own treatment of displaced peoples.[28]

It would be hazardous indeed to attempt a full reconstruction of the objective facts of the exiles' experience in Babylon. We lack sufficient evidence for this historical period to carry out such a task without a great deal of uncertainty and speculation.[29] However, the important reality that makes an impact on how we understand the prophetic poet's message to this population is their own perspective on their exile as represented in this text. That perspective comes through clearly in the cited speech of the audience and in the allusions the prophetic poet makes to other biblical texts that seem to represent the audience's perspective.

Personified figures who represent the audience of Isaiah 40–55 speak only three times in the whole of these fifteen chapters. One of these, the "we" speech of Isaiah 53 is less an indicator of their attitude toward their exile than an example of what attitude the prophet urges them to adopt.[30] The other two, however, are remarkably similar to one another, and the way they appear in the text makes it clear they are the perspective of the audience that the prophetic poet aims to transform. Each time (40:27; 49:14) a figure closely associated with the audience (Jacob, Zion) has their former speech cited directly and refuted. In each case, the charge is that they have been abandoned or neglected by the LORD. In each case, the poetry forcefully and emphatically denies this claim.

These embedded quotations of the audience's speech are the most significant indicators of their own perspective. They combine with and express the concerns voiced in the book of Lamentations, as will be discussed below. They are an audience who are uneasy about their

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[28] See Daniel L. Smith Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 65–68. On the use of the term "displacement," see J. Ahn, "Exile," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville; Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 198.

[29] See, e.g., J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (2002), 101; and the discussion in K. M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large* (2011), 85–86.

[30] This passage will be discussed in greater detail in the commentary on it.

relationship with their God. Their trust in the LORD has been undermined by their experience of exile. They fear that the LORD has abandoned, forgotten, or neglected them. This is the emotional world that the prophetic poet seeks to transform in Isaiah 40–55. The raging and consoling of the divine voice, its overwhelming and constant presence, and its majestic tone together produce an emotionally charged encounter that directly answers the audience's spoken fears about the LORD's absence, rejection, and apparent untrustworthiness. The contrast between righteous indignation and consolation in the divine speaking voice produces a tension that creates urgency for the audience to accept the divine offer of comfort and restoration. The poetry wrestles through competing perspectives and emotions swirling around the reconciliation between the exiles and God in whom they had placed their trust. It urges the audience to accept the offered reconciliation and does so by juxtaposing the threat that looms if they reject such comfort with vivid depictions of the promised restoration.

Historical Context and Isaiah 56–66

The historical details of the audience's circumstances in Isaiah 56–66 are similarly murky.[31] It appears that some have returned to Jerusalem (56:8; 62:10), and an influx of worshippers and other returnees is anticipated (56:8; 60:4–13; 62:10; 66:20). In places, the city seems yet to be rebuilt (e.g., 62:1, 7; 64:10–12). For these reasons, this commentary agrees with the many scholars who tentatively date these chapters to an early period in the return.[32]

The poetic technique of citation and refutation of audience speech continues in these chapters, and here a variety of perspectives and issues emerge. The "potential" speech of foreigner and eunuch highlight concerns over inclusion within the worshipping community (56:3). The cited speech of those who appear to represent the leaders of the returned community undermines their authority by presenting them as pursuing drunkenness and their own gain (56:12). The same themes appear in the next cited speech in these chapters in which the people voice a complaint that their

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[31]   See Jacob Stromberg, *Isaiah After Exile: The Author of Third Isaiah as Reader and Redactor of the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7, who writes that "a fully satisfying reconstruction of the social-historical situation . . . remains elusive."
[32]   See B. Schramm, *Opponents of Third Isaiah* (1995), 51–52.

fasting is disregarded by the LORD (58:3). The refutation is that their fast days are self-serving and therefore unacceptable to the LORD. In a similar way to the "we" speech of Isaiah 53, which placed "confessional" words on the audience's lips, Isaiah 59:9–15 are poetic lines spoken by the "we" of the text that express the reality of the transgression and injustice that are thematic in these chapters. Thus, each of these "citations" of audience speech, in its own way, points to a context in which those who have returned face the struggle of being a restored people in a restored land. They struggle to act justly toward one another. They struggle to distribute power and they struggle to determine who is to be included in the community of those restored. Into these struggles of restoration, the prophet speaks. While Isaiah 40–55 employed its poetically persuasive means to move its entire exilic audience toward a reconciling encounter with the LORD, Isaiah 56–66 differentiates between groups within its audience apparently urging them into the group characterized by faithfulness to the LORD (see A Closer Look: "Third Isaiah" as "Under-Rated Poet").

ISAIAH 40–66 AND OTHER BIBLICAL VOICES

The prophetic poetic voice of these chapters is not a voice that emerges from out of nowhere. Instead, the poetic voice echoes, modifies, and answers back to a range of other biblical voices. This important poetic technique of allusion relates the message of these poems to previous tradition and the audience's own experiences but also highlights the distinctive message of the new poem by juxtaposing the new expression with the remembered one in the audience's mind.[33]

One important literary context for Isaiah 40–66 is the context given to it by the final form of the book of Isaiah in the Hebrew canon (see A Closer Look: The Final Form and the Former Things). That is, the book itself prompts us to read Isaiah 40–66 as intimately related to Isaiah 1–39.[34]

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[33]   B. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture* (1998), 158.
[34]   Brevard S. Childs has been particularly influential in this regard. See, e.g., his comments on reading the whole of Isaiah in Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 3, 443–444; See also B. Schramm, *Opponents of Third Isaiah* (1995), 43, 79–80; Katie M. Heffelfinger, "Isaiah 40–55," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah* (ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer; New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 116 and A Closer Look: The Final Form and the Former Things.

And, indeed, there are common themes, vocabulary, and motifs that run through the whole of the material, and there are echoes of earlier material in the exilic and postexilic portions of the book. Perhaps most importantly, the consistent themes of the LORD's exalted status, judgment of wrongdoing, and orientation toward future deliverance run from the beginning to the end of Isaiah as a whole.[35]

While Isaiah 1–39 certainly provides important canonical and theological context for Isaiah 40–66, I would argue that the most significant biblical voice in shaping the message of many of these poems is the book of Lamentations. I am not alone in connecting these chapters with Lamentations. I have been convinced of Lamentations' relevance by the insightful studies of Tod Linafelt and of Patricia Tull.[36] Chapters 40–55, with their opening announcement of comfort, directly answer the demand Lamentations makes that the LORD should act as Zion's comforter.[37] Throughout these poems, the divine voice claims the role of comforter, declaring it emphatically. The pervasive, overwhelming, and unifying divine voice breaks the long silence that ran through Lamentations and continues beyond it as the book "is left opening out into the emptiness of God's nonresponse."[38] Thus, the apparent divine silence of exile, which I mentioned in the opening lines of this introduction, is an idea that comes particularly from Lamentations, and it is a silence that Second Isaiah seems intentionally shaped to answer.[39]

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[35] See also K. M. Heffelfinger, "Isaiah 40–55" (2020) 119–120.

[36] Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (SBLDS 161; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). See also Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40–55: An Eagletonian Reading," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 43–57; and C. A. Newsom, "Response to Norman K. Gottwald" (1992): 73–78.

[37] Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (OTL: Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 48; see also K. M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large* (2011), 98–100.

[38] T. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations* (2000), 60. Linafelt, and others, note that God never speaks in Lamentations. As Tod Linafelt "Surviving Lamentations," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17 (1995): 51, says "The voice of YHWH never sounds in the book of Lamentations."

[39] See T. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations* (2000), 74; and Katie M. Heffelfinger, "'I Am He, Your Comforter': Second Isaiah's Pervasive Divine Voice as Intertextual 'Answer' to Lamentations' Divine Silence," in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually* (eds. Heath A. Thomas and Brittany N. Melton; LIBOTS 714; London: T&T Clark, 2021). See also M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66* (2016), 31, who claims that "Lamentations . . . may well have posed the questions that chs. 40–55 and 56–66 are designed to answer."

But it is not just the speech of the divine voice that points to Lamentations. Both Lady Zion and the Servant as personified figures echo the motifs of Daughter Zion and "the man" of Lamentations.[40] The Isaian poetic prophet takes up these metaphors and builds upon them in developing the poetic message of raging comfort to the exiles (see further A Closer Look: Lady Zion and the Suffering Servant, the Rhetorical Power of Juxtaposition).

First Isaiah and Lamentations are the most significant of Isaiah 40–66's biblical source texts for this commentary's work, but they are by no means the only ones. This prophetic poetry draws richly on the traditions of the past and redeploys them in distinctive ways. Throughout this commentary, I will draw attention to this poetic technique as it both explains and illuminates the prophetic poetry's message.

MEANING(S) AND ISAIAH 40–66

Read poetically, these passages offer a possible world where the audience are invited into a transformative encounter with a series of voices, most prominently the LORD's. These encounters work imagistically and affectively to reorient the audience and to redirect their allegiances. In the exilic context, the poems work together through the juxtaposition of speaking tones in the LORD's voice and by contrasting two compelling personifications. Lady Zion embodies the audience's suffering while the Servant embraces obedience and transformation. The juxtaposed encounters with these personifications draw the audience away from attachment to their complaint into embrace of the reconciliation and relationship being offered by the divine voice (see A Closer Look: Lady Zion and the Suffering Servant, the Rhetorical Power of Juxtaposition).

In the postexilic texts, juxtaposition evokes a possible world of clashing faithful and rebellious responses.[41] Here the prophetic poetry forges resonance and appeal, drawing its audience into identity with the servants, an identity that embraces the "way" of the LORD as opposed to their own. Contrasting fear and repulsion reinforce this aim, driving the audience

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[40]   See P. Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things* (1997), 211–219; and A Closer Look: The Servant and His Songs.
[41]   See also M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66* (2016), 21.

away from the behaviors and attitudes depicted as their own way.[42] By merging Zion, her children, and the Servant's shared appeal into the servants, Isaiah 56–66 reengages the divine-human relationship for the returnees in a new context (see A Closer Look: From Servant to Servants).

The final poems of the book of Isaiah draw together the themes of the book as a whole. Any accounting for the message should take account of the way Isaiah 56–66 gathers together motifs from Isaiah 1–39 along with Isaiah 40–55 to produce a vision of ultimate restoration that is the final movement along a trajectory of warning, punishment and reconciliation[43] (see further A Closer Look: "Third Isaiah" as "Under-Rated Poet" and A Closer Look: The Final Form and the Former Things). In this way, the accumulated impact of Isaiah's emotional encounters offers a possible world that cannot ultimately be reduced to a claim but is best captured in a poetic vision that holds together mercy and justice, wrath and reconciliation, divine initiative and human faithfulness (see A Closer Look: "Third Isaiah" as "Under-Rated Poet").

This short summary of the messages of Isaiah 40–66 is no substitute for the encounters that the poems themselves offer. Their work ultimately persuades by reshaping the imagination, by realigning hope, and by recalibrating the heart (see Bridging the Horizons: On Loving Poetry and Poetry's Loves). Exposing the possible worlds offered by the emotion, experience, and encounter of each poem is the task of the commentary that follows.

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[42]   See also M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66* (2016), 21, on the rhetorical impact of "differentiation between the fates of the righteous and the wicked."
[43]   Cf. M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–55* (2016), 17, and especially 24–25 on the relationship of "the interplay between judgment and restoration" to the history of the eighth to fourth centuries.