

"AS THOSE WHO ARE TAUGHT"

The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL

Edited by

Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND IN OTHER ANCIENT VERSIONS

Arie van der Kooij

INTRODUCTION

The ancient witnesses to the Hebrew Bible, that is, the biblical texts found at Qumran and elsewhere and the various ancient translations, are of crucial importance for textual criticism. However, the ancient versions—the Septuagint (LXX), Targumim, Peshitta, and Vulgate—also testify in various ways to the early reception history of the biblical books. Produced by scholars who were able to read the biblical texts in Hebrew, the ancient versions show how the translators interpreted the underlying Hebrew text. In this contribution I consider two types of early interpretation regarding the book of Isaiah. The first part, a study of the way in which the passage about the rich women in Isa 3:18–23 has been rendered in the LXX, offers an illustration of the aspect of acculturation, that is, adaptation to the culture of the time, in the Old Greek of Isaiah. The second part illustrates the reactualizing interpretation of ancient prophecies in early Judaism and early Christianity, through an examination of the way in which the motif of “the city and the cities” in Isa 24–27 has been understood in the LXX, in the Targum, and by Jerome in the Vulgate.¹

These three ancient versions belong to different periods: (1) the LXX of Isaiah is a Jewish translation of the Hellenistic era, dating to the second century B.C.E.; (2) *Targum Isaiah* is a Jewish translation of the Roman period, dating basically to the second century C.E., although elements in it may be of a later date, and (3) Jerome’s Vulgate translation of Isaiah is an early Christian version dating to the end of the fourth century C.E.

1. This part of the article is a revised version of my “The Cities of Isaiah 24–27 according to the Vulgate, Targum and Septuagint,” in *Studies in Isaiah 24–27* (ed. H. J. Bosman et al.; OTS 43; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 183–98. This paper was presented at the 2001 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature Formation of the Book of Isaiah Group. A preliminary version appears in *Society of Biblical Literature 2001 Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 40; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 220–39.

We do not know much about Isaiah's interpretation in early Judaism. The most important evidence for the era before 70 C.E. is the exegesis of Isaiah in documents from the Dead Sea region, particularly the pesharim from Qumran (see the contribution of G. J. Brooke in this volume). There is, however, one passage about Isaiah and his prophecies that deserves to be mentioned, the Wisdom of Ben Sira 48:22–25 (early second century B.C.E.). The author hails Isaiah as "the illustrious prophet, who saw the truth in visions" (v. 22). The words of this prophet, and thus of his book, are characterized as words about the future, about "hidden things that were yet to be fulfilled" (v. 25). This characterization is typical of its time, inasmuch as it reflects a mode of interpretation that views ancient prophecies as referring to events of the age in which the interpreter was living. Ben Sira does not offer an example of how a passage from Isaiah applies to persons or events of the time, but we do have evidence of this type of exegesis in the pesharim of Qumran and in the New Testament. And as has been argued by scholars, this practice also applies to LXX Isaiah.

As to the period of *Targum Isaiah*, we have some scattered evidence of interpretation of passages in Isaiah in traditions that may be dated to the Tannaitic period. In some cases, the interpretation involved is in line with the exegesis in the Targum. In other cases the attested rabbinic exegesis is different or may be in line with another important ancient version of Isaiah, namely, the Greek version of Symmachus, which was produced in rabbinic circles in Palestine (Galilee) at the end of the second century C.E.

We are much better informed about the history of Isaiah's interpretation in early Christianity (see David Cassel's contribution in this volume). The commentary of Eusebius of Caesarea, the earliest surviving full commentary on the book, was very important to Jerome and was used by him in a number of cases.² Eusebius and Jerome share a literal and historical type of interpretation of Isaiah—in Greek—with an exegetical focus on the rejection of Israel, the calling of the Gentiles, and the birth of the church. The two also have in common a christological interpretation of Isaiah. Let us now turn to the two topics mentioned above, which will illustrate Isaiah's interpretation in early Judaism and early Christianity.

ISAIAH 3:18–23 ACCORDING TO THE LXX

Isaiah 3:18–23 forms part of a prophecy of doom (3:16–4:1). It indicates that because of the pride and haughtiness of the daughters of Zion, all their beauty, particularly jewelry and fine clothes, will be removed from them.

2. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Der Jesajakommentar* (ed. J. Ziegler; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975).

As is often the case in LXX Isaiah, the Old Greek of our passage differs widely from the Hebrew texts, that is, the Masoretic Text and the Isaiah manuscripts from Qumran. As I have argued elsewhere, the appropriate way of dealing with such cases is to make a comparison between the Hebrew texts and the LXX and to study both texts in their own right before dealing with the issue of the parent text in Hebrew.³

	LXX	MT
3:18	And the Lord will take away the glory of their clothing and their ornaments, and the hairclaspers and the hairnets and the crescents	In that day the Lord will remove the beauty (תפארת); the anklets, the little suns (or head bands), and the crescents;
3:19	and the necklace and the ornaments of their face,	the eardrops, the bracelets and the veils;
3:20	and the set of glorious ornaments and the bracelets and the armlets and the wreathed work and the armlets for the right arm and the finger rings and the earrings,	the diadems, the step-chains, and the sashes, the vials of perfume and the charms;
3:21	and the purple trimmed garments and those mixed with purple,	the signet rings and the nose rings;
3:22	and the mantles to be worn in the house and the Spartan transparent dresses,	the festal robes, the over-tunics, the cloaks, and the purses;

3. Arie van der Kooij, *The Oracle of Tyre: The Septuagint of Isaiah XXIII as Version and Vision* (VTSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 8–19.

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| 3:23 | and the (garments) made of fine linen, and the hyacinth-colored blue ones and red ones, and the fine linen, interwoven with gold and purple, and light summer garments, flowing down. | the garments of gauze, the linens, the turbans, and the shawls. |
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Comparing MT and LXX, the following observations may be made. (1) Although roughly speaking both texts have in common a listing of ornaments followed by a listing of clothes, the listing in LXX is more strictly divided into two sections: (a) pieces of jewelry (vv. 18b–20), and (b) precious garments and dresses (vv. 21–23). (2) LXX contains a phrase, not attested in MT, that seems to function as the introduction to the passage as a whole: "the glory of their clothing and their ornaments" (v. 18a).⁴ (3) On the level of words many differences between MT and LXX are to be noted.

In his important study of LXX Isaiah, *Untersuchungen zur Septuaginta des Buches Isaias*, Joseph Ziegler has offered a detailed analysis of our passage.⁵ He discusses several Greek words in the light of papyri (e.g., ἐμπλόκιον, "wreathed work?" or "hair clasps?"; μηνίσκος, "crescents"; and δακτύλιος, "finger rings") and compares the passage as a whole with similar listings elsewhere in the Greek Bible (Exod 35:22–28; Num 31:50; Ezek 16:10–13; and Judg 10:4) and with listings in papyri as well. He argues that those listings may have influenced the translator in formulating his version of Isa 3:18–23. He further states that "the different lists of the Papyri, which include listings of temple inventories and particularly of a dowry (φερνὴ), make clear that the items listed in Isa 3:18–23 belong to the dowry of women, and that they are enumerated in the Septuagint using terms that would have been customary at that time in Alexandria."⁶

Ziegler's observations have put us on the right track, but I believe more can be said about the meaning of LXX Isa 3:18–23 in the light of the papyri. Although the listings in Exod 35:22 and other places in the LXX are helpful regarding particular terms, the papyri can help us to understand our passage as a whole. In a recent publication, Simona Russo has studied in detail the vocabulary of jewelry in papyri of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.⁷ She points out

4. See Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, ed., *The Hebrew University Bible: The Book of Isaiah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), ad loc.

5. Joseph Ziegler, *Untersuchungen zur Septuaginta des Buches Isaias* (ATA 12/3; Münster: Aschendorff, 1934), 203–11.

6. *Ibid.*, 211.

7. Simona Russo, *I gioielli nei papiri di età greco-romana* (Florence: Istituto Papirologico, 1999).

that the relevant terms mainly occur in marriage contracts and related texts. A close examination of these contracts reveals that the listings of women's belongings all consist of an enumeration, first, of precious objects/ornaments and, second, of garments. The fact that the listing in LXX Isa 3:18–23 has the same order strongly suggests that this passage has been formulated as a list of objects that made up a dowry, just as in the papyri.⁸

This is corroborated by another observation concerning the statement in 3:18a that reads "the glory of their clothing and their ornaments." This statement about "clothing" and "ornaments" is also known from papyri; it refers to the dowry of a woman. A nice parallel is found in P.Eleph. 1 (marriage contract, 310 B.C.E.), where one reads, "she brings with her to the marriage clothing and ornaments (ἐίματαῖσμον καὶ κόσμον)."⁹

Thus, LXX Isa 3:18–23 reflects a particular interpretation of the passage. It has been understood, and consequently formulated, as a passage about the belongings of women in Jerusalem, listing objects (ornaments and garments) that they had brought into their marriages. As to the introductory clause in verse 18a, it seems that the Hebrew word תפארת (usually translated "beauty" or "glory") has been taken here in the sense both of "beauty" and "ornament" and thus has been rendered by a double translation ("glory of their clothing and their ornaments") in order to make explicit that the listing that follows is to be understood as objects of a dowry.

In view of the content of the listing in our passage, it is fully clear that it is about the belongings of rich women (see, e.g., the purple garments). This idea is also present in the way verse 17 has been translated: there "the daughters of Zion" are called ἀρχούσας, "ruling" (cf. MT קדקד, "head"). The text is referring to women of the ruling, upper classes in Jerusalem, "the rich women" as they are called in LXX Isa 32:8. In short, the passage of LXX Isa 3:18–23 reflects a transformation of the text in the adaptation of the text to the culture of the translator's own time.

8. For inscriptional evidence, see, e.g., P.Mich II 121 r. II ii (A. E. R. Boak, ed., *Papyri from Tebtunis, Part I* [University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 28; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1933]); P.Mich. V 343 (E. M. Husselman, A. E. R. Boak, and W. F. Edgerton, eds., *Papyri from Tebtunis, Part II* [University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 29; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1944]); P.Ryl. II 125 and 154 (J. de M. Johnson, V. Martin, and A. S. Hunt, eds., *Documents of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods* (No. 62–456) [vol. 2 of *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915]).

9. See P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 67.

THE CITY AND THE CITIES IN ISAIAH 24-27
ACCORDING TO THE LXX, TARGUM, AND VULGATE

The motif of the city functions as a major theme in the prophecies of Isa 24-27. It plays an important role in several passages, namely, 24:10-12; 25:1-6; 26:1-6; and 27:10. These places do not refer to one and the same city, however. The text of Isa 26:1 envisages a strong city in the land of Judah. It reads as follows: "In that day will be sung this song in the land of Judah, 'A strong city is ours; he (God) sets up salvation as walls and ramparts.'" Although the city is not named, it is obvious that here the city of Jerusalem is meant, whose name does occur in 24:23 and 27:13. This city is clearly seen as the city of salvation.

In contrast to 26:1, other texts in Isa 24-27 deal with a strong city that will be destroyed. So, for instance, Isa 25:2a: "For you have turned the city into a rubble heap, the fortified town into a ruin." It is a matter of dispute which city might be alluded to in passages like this one, and various options have been offered—Babylon, Nineveh, or the capital of Moab.¹⁰ One could also argue that the strong city to be destroyed was merely meant as a symbol, an ageless type that is open to actualization in different times. It is true that the city of 24:10-12; 25:2; 26:5; and 27:10 is not named, but this does not exclude the possibility that a concrete city was intended, which at the same time could have a symbolic meaning. One gets the impression that in these passages two cities are to be distinguished: (1) the one of 25:2 and 27:10 (compare also 24:10-12), which is called "the strong city"; and (2) the one of 26:5-6 (compare also 25:12), which is characterized as lying on high ("the lofty city he lays low," 26:5). The context of 25:12 suggests that the latter may be in Moab.

It is not my intention to discuss which cities might have been in the mind of the circle responsible for the composition of Isa 24-27 in Hebrew. What is clear enough is that these chapters are dominated by a contrast between, on the one hand, a strong city of salvation in the land of Judah (that is, Jerusalem) and, on the other hand, a strong and fortified city, or two cities, that will be destroyed. The purpose of this part of my contribution is to examine the motif of these cities in the early reception history of Isa 24-27. This will be done by discussing the interpretation of the most relevant passages as reflected in three of the ancient versions of the book of Isaiah, going backward in time from the latest to the earliest: the Vulgate, the *Targum to the Prophets*, and LXX Isaiah. I will concentrate on Isa 25:1-3 and 26:1-2, 5-6.

10. For a survey, see Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja* (BKAT 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 905-6.

VULGATE

The biblical scholar and theologian Jerome not only translated the book of Isaiah from Hebrew into Latin but also wrote a commentary on this book, "the most voluminous of all his commentaries, a vast sprawling work in eighteen books."¹¹ It is therefore reasonable to study the Vulgate version of Isaiah in connection with the commentary.

	Vulgate ¹²	MT
25:1	O Lord, you are my God, I will exalt you, and give glory to your name: for you have done wonderful things (<i>mirabilia</i>), your designs of old faithful, amen (<i>fideles amen</i>).	LORD, you are my God, I will glorify you, I will sing to your name, for you have done a wonderful thing (פלא), plans from long ago, faithful and sure (אמונה אמן).
25:2	For you have reduced (<i>posuisti</i>) the city to a heap, the strong city to ruin, the house of strangers, to be no city (<i>domum alienorum ut non sit civitas</i>), and to be no more built up for ever (<i>et in sempiternum non aedificetur</i>).	For you have turned the city into a rubble heap, the fortified town into a ruin, the palace of aliens a city no more (ארמון זרים מעיר); it will never be built (לעולם לא יבנה).
25:3	Therefore shall a strong people praise you, the city of mighty nations shall fear you.	Therefore strong people will glorify you, the city of ruthless nations will fear you.

11. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 299. For the commentary itself, see Jerome, *Commentariorum in Esaiam: Libri I-XI* (CCSL 73; S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera. pars I, opera exegetica 2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1963). The comments on Isa 25-26 begin on p. 325.

12. The editors have offered a modified version of the Douay-Rheims Bible translation for the benefit of the reader.

The rendering of verse 1b shows influence from the LXX—this applies to *mirabilia* ("wonderful things"; LXX: θαυμαστά) and amen ("so be it, O Lord"; LXX: γένοιτο κύριε).

In his commentary Jerome presents first the exegesis of the Jews. According to Jewish interpretation, Isa 25:1–5 contains words spoken by the faithful people. The city to be destroyed (v. 2) is Rome, whereas "the strong people" (v. 3) are the Jewish people—God will give them strength in times of distress and will deliver them from the persecution by the nations.

Jerome then goes on to unfold the exegesis of "others," that is, of Christian scholars, which he considers to be better and more correct (*et melius et rectius*). According to that interpretation, it is the prophet himself who in verse 1 praises God the Father for the wonderful thing he did, namely, the passion of Jesus, Lord and Savior. The strong city to be destroyed is not Rome, as the Jews maintain, but Jerusalem. The argument is based on the expression *domus alienorum* ("house of strangers"): since 135 C.E. Jerusalem was inhabited by strangers, non-Jews. He further remarks in his commentary that it will never be rebuilt as a city. This statement is followed by a polemical note against the millenarist view among Christian theologians, expressed for instance by Irenaeus,¹³ that there will be a glorious future for Jerusalem in which Christ will reign together with his followers for a period of a thousand years. As to the question, who is "the strong people" (v. 3), Jerome says "the strong people" who will praise God, and "the city of the strong nations" who will fear him, is the church gathered from the nations (*hoc est Ecclesia de gentibus congregata*).

	Vulgate	MT
26:1	In that day shall this canticle be sung in the land of Judah: the city of our strength is the savior (<i>urbs fortitudinis nostrae salvator</i>), a wall and a bulwark (<i>murus et antemurale</i>) shall be set therein.	In that day will be sung this song in the land of Judah: A strong city is ours (עיר עוז לנו); he sets up salvation as walls and rampart (ישועה ישית חומור וחל).
26:2	Open the gates, and let the just nation (<i>gens iusta</i>), that keeps the truth, enter in.	Open the gates, and the just nation that keeps faith will enter in.

13. See Brian Daley, *Eschatologie: In der Schrift und Patristik* (Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte 4; Fribourg: Herder, 1986), 108.

The Latin version reflects a different understanding of this passage from the MT, as becomes clear from a comparison between the Vulgate and MT in verse 1. The clause *urbs fortitudinis nostrae salvator*, "the city of our strength is the savior," is interesting. First, the Hebrew *ישועה* ("salvation") has been rendered as *salvator* ("savior"). Second, this word has been taken as belonging to the preceding words, and not to the following, as is the case in MT. The rendering *salvator* for *ישועה* is revealing for the way this passage was understood by Jerome. As a matter of fact, this rendering is also found elsewhere in the Vulgate of Isaiah (e.g., 45:8; 51:5; 62:1, 11). It is the way Jerome introduced the savior, Jesus, into his translation of the Old Testament.¹⁴

The explanation of this phrase in his commentary is fully in line with his translation. Jerome argues that this city cannot be the city of Jerusalem on earth—again against the millenarist point of view. On the contrary, in line with the exegesis of Eusebius of Caesarea, it refers to Jerusalem in heaven, the heavenly city. And the land of Judah is meant as the region of that city. In favor of this view Jerome quotes texts from the Psalms in which the expression "the city of God" occurs (Pss 46:5 and 87:3), as did Eusebius before him. Jerome further agrees with Eusebius that it is the saints in heaven who will sing this song. However, he disagrees with him regarding the phrase *murus et antemurale* ("wall and bulwark"). While Eusebius said the wall of the heavenly city of God is Jesus, Jerome asserts that *murus* symbolizes "good works," and *antemurale*, "right faith."

Verse 2 is also taken as referring to the heavenly city. Jerome states that this verse contains the response given by God to the confession of the saints in verse 1: he will order his angels to open the gates of the city of the Lord (*urbs dominica*) for the faithful people (*gens iusta*).

Vulgate	MT
26:5 For he shall bring down them that dwell on high; the lofty city (<i>civitatem sublimem</i>) he shall lay low (<i>humiliabit</i>). He shall bring it down (<i>humiliabit</i>) even to the ground; he shall pull it down even to the dust.	For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height; the lofty city he lays low (<i>ישפילנה</i>). He lays it low (<i>ישפילנה</i>) to the ground, casts it to the dust.

14. For Isa 26:2, see also the commentary of Eusebius, where it is stated that the Hebrew word for "salvation" has the same letters as the name of Jesus in Hebrew.

26:6	The foot shall tread it down, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.	The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.
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In his commentary on this passage Jerome again mentions the Jewish interpretation of this text but rejects it, saying that "our" interpretation is the better one. The lofty city (*civitatem sublimem*) of verse 5 is not Rome, as the Jews assume, but Jerusalem. So Jerusalem will be destroyed and humiliated. It is nice and not without reason, he remarks, that the verbal form *humiliabit* ("bring it down"; מַשְׁפִּילָנָה) occurs twice (cf. MT). The first refers to the destruction of the city and the temple by the Babylonians, whereas the second occurrence alludes to the destruction by the Romans in the year 70 C.E.

It has become clear that the interpretation of passages about the city in Isa 25 and 26 by Jerome, hinted at in the wording of his translation and fully expressed in his commentary, is a distinctly Christian one. The city of Isa 25:2 and 26:5 is interpreted as Jerusalem on earth, and the city of 26:1, "the city of the savior," as Jerusalem in heaven. Two other views are definitely rejected: the millenarist view that was popular among Christians, and the Jewish interpretation, according to which the city of 25:2 and 26:5 is Rome.

TARGUM

As is well known, *Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* is characterized by explanatory and paraphrastic renderings in oracular passages. This feature is also present in the passages under discussion.¹⁵

	Targum	MT
25:1	O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonders, counsels which you promised to bring of old you have now brought and established.	LORD, you are my God, I will glorify you, I will sing to your name, for you have done a wonderful thing, plans from long ago, faithful and sure.

15. Unless otherwise stated, the translation of the passages involved is that of Bruce Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (ArBib 11; Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1987).

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| 25:2 | For you have made open cities (קרוי פּצחין) heaps, a strong fortress a ruin; a temple of the Gentiles (בית דחלת עממא) will never be built in the city of Jerusalem! | For you have turned the city (מעיר) into a rubble heap, the fortified town into a ruin, the palace of aliens a city no more (ארמון זרים); it will never be built (מעיר לעולם לא יבנה). |
| 25:3 | Therefore a strong people will glorify before you, the city (קריית) ¹⁶ of mighty peoples will fear before you. | Therefore strong people will glorify you, the city of ruthless nations will fear you. |

Verse 2 constitutes an interesting translation. First, the Hebrew מעיר has been interpreted as "open cities" (קרוי פּצחין), which suggests that it was taken in the sense of "a place that is not a walled city." The singular in Hebrew has been explained here collectively ("cities"), but this does not apply to the following clause: "a strong fortress/city a ruin." For the question of which city might be alluded to in the Targum, see below.

The Targum of verse 2b presents a striking translation: "a temple of the Gentiles/peoples (בית דחלת עממא) will never be built in the city of Jerusalem" (cf. Hebrew: "The palace of aliens [ארמון זרים] is a city no more, it will never be built"). It has been argued by scholars that the Targum's rendering is best understood as referring to the plan of the Roman emperor Hadrian (ca. 130 C.E.) to build a temple for Jupiter Capitolinus in the city of Jerusalem.¹⁷ This was part of the intention of the emperor to build a new pagan city on the ruins of Jerusalem, which, among other things, gave rise to the second revolt (132–135 C.E.).¹⁸

The idea that the heathen temple will not be built is corroborated by the Aramaic version of verse 7, according to which "the face of the great one who is master over all the peoples, and the face of the king who rules over all the kingdoms will be annihilated on this mountain," that is, on Mount Zion. The Hebrew text of this verse is different: "Then he will swallow up, on this moun-

16. Singular instead of plural (*pace* Chilton).

17. See Arie van der Kooij, *Die alten Textzeugen des Jesajabuches* (OBO 35; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1981), 194; Chilton, *Isaiah Targum*, 49.

18. Cf. Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), 1:540; Peter Schäfer, *Der Bar Kokhba Aufstand: Studien zum zweiten jüdischen Krieg gegen Rom* (TSAJ 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 29–50; Ya'akov Meshorer, *The Coinage of Aelia Capitolina* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1989), 19.

tain, the face of the shroud that shrouds all peoples, the sheet that sheets all nations." One gets the impression that the Hebrew *לוט* has been associated with the root *שלט*, to rule. Be this as it may, the expression "the great one who rules over all the kingdoms" alludes to the Roman emperor. He will be destroyed on the holy mountain, and consequently, the heathen temple will not be built.

	Targum	MT
26:1	In that time they will sing this song in the land of the house of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will be set on its walls, and mercy (רחמין). ¹⁹	In that day will be sung this song in the land of Judah: A strong city is ours; he sets up salvation as walls and rampart (חל).
26:2	Open the gates, that the innocent people who kept the law with a perfect heart, may enter in.	Open the gates, and the just nation that keeps faith will enter in.
26:5	For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the strong city (קריא תקיפא). He will humble it, cast it to the ground, bring it to the dust.	For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height; the lofty city (קריה נשגבה) he lays low. He lays it low to the ground, casts it to the dust.
26:6	Feet will trample it, the feet of the righteous (רגלי צדיקיא), the steps of the poor, the needy of the people.	The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.

The rendering "mercy" (רחמין) for Hebrew *חל* ("bulwark") is a remarkable one. As the text stands, "salvation" and "mercy" will be the mark of the strong city in the land of Judah (for salvation on the walls, see also Isa 60:18). The targumist has here the city of Jerusalem in mind. The "just nation that keeps faith" (MT) of verse 2 that may enter the city has been interpreted, fully in line with the theology of the Targum, as "the innocent people who kept the law with a perfect heart."

19. Singular instead of plural (*pace* Chilton).

In verse 5 the Targum reads "the strong city" (קריא תקיפא) for MT "the lofty city" (קריה נשגבה), an interpretation based on "high" in the sense of "strong." The Aramaic version offers here an expression that is very similar to the one in 25:2 (כרך תקיף, "strong fortress"). The feet that will trample it (26:6; MT "the foot tramples it") has been made explicit as "the feet of the righteous" (רגלי צדיקיא), presumably in the light of the next verse, 26:7, which begins with (ורחת צדיקיא), "the way of the righteous."

To which city does the Targum refer in Isa 25:2 (open cities) and 26:5 (strong city)? It is clear that the city mentioned in both texts stands in contrast to the strong city of 26:1, the city of Jerusalem. In the light of a few texts elsewhere in the *Targum to the Prophets*, it is reasonable to assume that in our passage the contrast between Rome and Jerusalem is at stake. This is also in line with our observations about Isa 25:2b, 7. Other Targum passages testify to this contrast by explicitly adding references to Rome and Jerusalem, as in the following:

	Targum	MT
1 Sam 2:5a	So <u>Jerusalem</u> , which was like a barren woman, is to be filled with her exiled people. And <u>Rome</u> , which was filled with great numbers of people—her armies will cease to be; she will be desolate and destroyed.	Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
Isa 54:1	Sing, O <u>Jerusalem</u> who was as a barren woman who did not bear; shout in singing and exult, [you who were] as a woman who did not become pregnant. For the children of desolate <u>Jerusalem</u> will be more than the children of inhabited <u>Rome</u> , says the Lord.	Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married, says the LORD.

This all leads to the conclusion that the interpretation found in *Targum Isaiah* does concur, at least in its broad outlines, with the exegesis of the Jews as mentioned in the commentary of Jerome, namely, that Isa 25:2a and 26:5 are about the strong city of Rome, and Isa 26:1 about the earthly city of Jerusalem. A specific interpretation is found in Isa 25:2b, where it is said that "the temple of the Gentiles/peoples" as planned by the Roman emperor Hadrian "shall never be built in the city of Jerusalem." As a whole, the passages in the Targum are characterized by a strong contrast between Rome and Jerusalem.

SEPTUAGINT

Let us now turn to LXX Isaiah, dating to the second century B.C.E., which, as the most ancient version, testifies to the most ancient interpretation of the book. Just as with the Vulgate and the Targum, I will concentrate on the Old Greek of Isaiah both in comparison to the Hebrew text (MT [1QIsa^a concurs in all instances with MT]) and as a text in its own right.

LXX	MT
25:1 Lord my God, I will glorify you, I will sing to your name, for you have done wonderful things, the ancient (and) faithful counsel. So be it, O Lord.	LORD, you are my God, I will glorify you, I will sing to your name, for you have done a wonderful thing, plans from long ago, faithful and sure.
25:2 For you have made cities (πόλεις) a heap, strong cities (πόλεις ὀχυράς) so that their foundations (αὐτῶν τὰ θεμέλια) fall; the strong city of the wicked men (τῶν ἀσεβῶν πόλις) shall not be built forever.	For you have turned the city (עיר) into a rubble heap, the fortified town (קריה) into a ruin, the palace of aliens (ארמון זרים) a city no more (מעיר); it will never be built.
25:3 Therefore, the poor people (ὁ λαὸς ὁ πτωχός) shall bless you, and cities of injured men (πόλεις ἀνθρώπων ἀδικουμένων) shall bless you.	Therefore strong people (עם עז) will glorify you, the city of ruthless nations (קרית גוים עריצים) will fear you.

Instead of the singular found in the Hebrew, LXX offers plural forms in verse 2a: "cities" (πόλεις) and "strong cities" (πόλεις ὀχυράς). The singular in Hebrew has apparently been taken in a general sense. As a matter of fact, the plural "cities" turns out to be typical of Isa 24–26 in the LXX; it is also found in 24:12 and 26:5 (see below), and compare 24:10 ("each city"; MT lacks "each").

The second part of verse 2a reads "strong cities so that their foundation fall." This rendering reflects a syntactical reading of the text different from MT. "Their foundations" (αὐτῶν τὰ θεμέλια) is given as translation of Hebrew אַרְמוֹן ("palace"), which means that, contrary to MT, this word has been interpreted as belonging to the previous clause. The rendering "foundations" for אַרְמוֹן is also attested seven times in LXX Amos 1:4 and the verses that follow. The expression as such, the fall of the foundations, has a parallel in LXX Ezek 30:4: καὶ συμπεσεῖται τὰ θεμέλια αὐτῆς ("and her foundations shall fall"; MT וְנִהְרָסוּ יְסוּדוֹתֶיהָ, "and her foundations are torn down"). It conveys the idea of complete destruction.

In the LXX verse 2b reads "the city of the wicked (men) shall not be built forever." The phrase "the city of the wicked" (τῶν ἀσεβῶν πόλις) seems to represent a rendering of the Hebrew words זָרִים מַעִיר.²⁰ The rendering ἀσεβεῖς for זָרִים is also found in verse 5 of the same pericope: ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων ἀσεβῶν (MT זָרִים שָׂאוֹן). But compare also verse 4, where the Hebrew מִזִּדְּמִים has been interpreted as ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων πονηρῶν ("from wicked men"). This rendering ἀσεβῆς ("wicked") for Hebrew זָר, "stranger," is only attested in LXX Isaiah (see also 29:5) and nowhere else in the Septuagint. At other places in Isaiah, the Hebrew word involved has been translated as ἀλλότριος ("stranger," 1:7; 43:12) or ἀλλογενής ("foreigner," 61:5).

The expression "the city of the wicked" does not occur elsewhere in LXX Isaiah nor in other parts of the Greek Bible. One wonders whether it is to be taken in a general sense or as referring to a particular city. The setting of the events as prophesied in LXX Isa 24–26 is "the inhabited world" (ἡ οἰκουμένη), and the wicked are the ungodly persons, rich and powerful, on earth (24:8; 26:10). So the city of the wicked ones must be an important city dominating the world. In LXX Isaiah as a whole this city is best understood as the city of Babylon (chs. 13 and 47). The idea that the most powerful city will never be rebuilt (25:2b) is fully in line with LXX Isa 13:20, where it is said that after its fall Babylon will never be inhabited again. For the use of ἀσεβῆς, see also 13:11.

20. It has been suggested that LXX here reflects the Hebrew word זָרִים (see Ziegler, *Untersuchungen*, 82; *BHS*), but this is not likely for a number of reasons (1QIsa* supports the reading of MT, and the Greek word involved is never an equivalent of Hebrew זָר).

The next verse, 25:3, shows remarkable differences from the Hebrew. LXX reads, "Therefore, the poor people (ὁ λαὸς ὁ πτωχός) shall bless you, and cities of injured men (πόλεις ἀνθρώπων ἀδικουμένων) shall bless you," where MT has, "For the strong people (עַם עוֹז) shall glorify you, the city of ruthless nations (קִרְיַת גּוֹיִם עֲרִיצִים) shall fear you." LXX is about "poor people" and "cities of injured men," whereas the wording of MT, "strong people" and "city of ruthless nations," offers quite a different picture. One of the reasons may have been to bring the verse in line with the beginning of verse 4, which reads, according to LXX, "For you have become a helper to every humble city" (MT: "For you have been a stronghold for the poor").

As has been argued by scholars, LXX Isa 25:1-5 represent a very free translation, reflecting the ideas of its author more than the contents of the underlying Hebrew text.²¹ The passage as a whole evokes the picture of poor people who suffered injustice from "wicked" and "bad" persons. It therefore makes good sense that the poor people will bless God, because he was their helper, and the city of the wicked men who did them wrong will never be rebuilt.

	LXX	MT
26:1	On that day they shall sing this song in the land of Judah: Behold, a strong city (Ἰδοὺ πόλις ὀχυρά); and he shall set our salvation (its) wall and outer wall.	In that day will be sung this song in the land of Judah: A strong city is ours (עִיר עוֹז לָנוּ); he sets up salvation as walls and rampart (חָל).
26:2	Open the gates, let the people that keeps righteousness and keeps truth enter.	Open the gates, and the just nation that keeps faith will enter in.
26:5	who (ὅς) did humble and bring down them that dwell on high; strong cities (πόλεις ὀχυράς) you shall throw down, and bring down to the ground;	For (כִּי) he has brought low the inhabitants of the height (יֹשְׁבֵי מְרוֹם); the lofty city (קִרְיַת נִשְׁגָּבָה) he lays low (יִשְׁפִּילָנָה). He lays it low (יִשְׁפִּילָנָה) to the ground, casts it to the dust.

21. See Isaac L. Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 112; J. M. Coste, "Le texte grec d'Isaïe XXV 1-5," *RB* 61 (1954): 36-66.

26:6	and the feet of the gentle and humble shall tread upon them (i.e., cities).	The foot tramples it, the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy.
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In verse 1b, the first words of the song are "Behold, a strong city" (Ἰδοὺ πόλις ὄχυρά), where MT reads, "A strong city is ours (lit., a strong city is to us)" (עיר עז לנו). LXX adds the word "behold," and it reflects a different syntactical reading of the Hebrew text regarding the form לנו ("to us"); in MT it belongs to the previous clause ("a strong city to us"), but the translator has taken it with what follows, hence "our salvation." It is interesting to note that LXX offers an interpretation in line with LXX Isa 33:20a: "Behold, Zion, the city of our salvation! (Ἰδοὺ Σιών ἡ πόλις τὸ σωτήριον ἡμῶν) Your eyes shall see Jerusalem, the rich city."²² A group of righteous people (33:15) is addressed here, and they will see Jerusalem, the city of their salvation. This related passage throws light on the addition ("behold") and the expression "our salvation" in 26:1. The first words of the song, "Behold, a strong city," may well be understood as being sung by a group that is approaching Jerusalem. Verse 2 then may refer to the moment of entering the city by this group of righteous people.

LXX 26:5 differs in some respects from the Hebrew. The Greek text has a clause introduced by "who" (ὅς), instead of כִּי ("for"), creating in this way a direct link with the previous verse (v. 4). Furthermore, the phrase "strong cities" (πόλεις ὄχυράς) figures in LXX as the object of the verbs in verse 5b, whereas in MT the expression "towering city" functions as an apposition to "the inhabitants of the height" (יֹשְׁבֵי מְרוֹם) in verse 5a.

As has been observed above, verse 5 is one of the places where the plural rendering "cities" is found in LXX. LXX offers the adjective "strong" (ὄχυρός) here for MT's "towering, high" (נִשְׁגָּבָה). Like the Targum, LXX presents a rendering in harmony with 25:2.

Summarizing our discussion of the passages in LXX Isaiah, the following picture regarding the cities emerges: Isa 25:2a and 26:5 are about the fall and destruction of "strong cities" (plural), while the Greek of 25:2b seems to refer to a particular city, the city of Babylon. And 26:1-2 testifies to the hope and expectation that righteous people will return to the "strong city," to Jerusalem, "the city of our salvation."

There is, however, one further point to be discussed. Both the Vulgate version (with Jerome's commentary) and the Targum seem not only to represent a

22. MT reads: "Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation."

translation of the Hebrew text but also to reflect an interpretation of Isaiah as prediction of future times. *Targum Isaiah* clearly shows traces of an actualizing reading of the ancient prophecies, based on the idea that those prophecies were to be read and interpreted as oracles about events in the time of the translator. As has been argued by scholars, this understanding of prophecy is also typical of the Septuagint version of Isaiah.²³ This need not surprise us, because it is consistent with the ideas of the Hellenistic era. Ancient prophecies were considered predictions about the present and the near future. Notable examples are to be found in Dan 9 and in the *pescharim* of Qumran.

What does this mean for our passages in LXX Isa 25 and 26? The Old Greek of Isaiah contains indications that prophecies about Assyria and Babylon were understood as referring to the Seleucid Empire.²⁴ It is therefore plausible to assume that the phrase "the strong cities" in LXX 25:2a and 26:5, denoting a worldwide power, actually alluded to the power and might of the Seleucids, the more so since in LXX Isa 24–26 "the inhabited world" (ἡ οἰκουμένη) is the setting of the coming events. Cities, strong cities all over the world, were typical of an empire like that of the Ptolemies or of the Seleucids.²⁵ And the city of Babylon, the city referred to in LXX Isa 25:2b, was also associated in the second century B.C.E. with the Seleucid Empire. The elegy of the king of Babylon in Isa 14 has been interpreted in the LXX as an oracle predicting the death of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV.²⁶

VULGATE, TARGUM, AND LXX

Synoptically, the three versions of Isaiah display the following picture as witnesses of an early interpretation of the passages about cities in Isa 25 and 26:

23. See Seeligmann, *Septuagint Version*; Joaquim C. M. das Neves, *A Teologia da Tradução Grega dos Setenta no Livro de Isaías (Cap. 24 de Isaías)* (Lisbon: Catholic University of Portugal, 1973); van der Kooij, *Textzeugen*; Jean Koenig, *L'héréméutique analogique du judaïsme antique d'après les témoins textuels d'Israël* (VTSup 33; Leiden: Brill, 1982); van der Kooij, *Oracle of Tyre*.

24. See, e.g., van der Kooij, *Textzeugen*, 34–38 (on LXX Isa 10:5–14.)

25. See texts such as 1 Macc 1:2, 19. See also Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 23–25.

26. On LXX Isa 14, see Seeligmann, *Septuagint Version*, 84; and van der Kooij, *Textzeugen*, 39–43.

	Vulgate	Targum	LXX	MT
25:2a	"the strong city": Jerusalem on earth	"open cities"; "strong city": Rome	"strong cities": Seleucid Empire	"city"
25:2b	"house of aliens"	"no pagan temple in Jerusalem"	"city of the wicked": Babylon	"palace of aliens"
26:1-2	<i>salvator</i> : Jerusalem in heaven	"city of salvation": Jerusalem	"city of salvation": Jerusalem	"strong city": Jerusalem
26:5	"the lofty city": Jerusalem on earth	"strong city": Rome	"strong cities": Seleucid Empire	"lofty city": a Moabite town?

The three translations illustrate how the passages about the "city" in Isa 25-26 have been interpreted in different ages, in different communities, and from different theological perspectives. Each of the translations, however, testifies to the same hermeneutical stance, namely, reading the prophecies as predicting events in the recent past, the present, and the near future of the translators and their communities. The differences between the three involve the meaning of words and matters of grammar, particularly the syntactical understanding of the parent text. At least some of these differences serve actualizing interpretations of the ancient prophecies, such as the rendering *salvator* ("savior") in Vulgate Isa 26:1, the expression "a temple of the peoples (Gentiles)" in *Tg. Isa.* 25:2, and the preference for the plural "strong cities" in LXX Isa 24-26. There is a marked difference between the Vulgate (and commentary), on the one hand, and Targum and LXX, on the other, regarding the interpretation of the city in Isa 26:1. In line with Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome polemically stated that this city could not be considered the city of Jerusalem on earth,²⁷ as was held by the Jews (Targum and LXX) as well as by Christians who adhered to a millenarist view.

27. *Quae est ista urbs? Quae in monte sita latere non potest* ("What is that city? The city seated on a mountain cannot be hidden") (*Comm.*, ad loc.).

CONCLUSION

As may be clear from the above, the ancient versions of the book of Isaiah represent interesting witnesses to its early history of interpretation, both in the sense of acculturation, as with Isa 3's lists of women's belongings, and of reactualizing a given passage as prophecy. The dynamic process of reading biblical texts by Jewish and Christian communities in view of their own time, situation, and interests has been part of the translation history of these texts from the beginning.

In many instances, the nuances and differences involved may seem minor, but in some cases the implied interpretation marks a major theological shift, at least from our perspective, as is the case with Isa 26:1-2: unlike the Jewish interpretation seen in LXX and Targum, the Christian view as represented by Jerome is that "the city of salvation" is to be seen as Jerusalem in heaven, not on earth. In this and other cases the ancient versions reflect not only the religious ideas and convictions of particular groups, both in Judaism and Christianity, but also the way that these ideas were linked up, for the sake of legitimation, with a given biblical passage in Isaiah.

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