LXX Isaiah 24:1-26:6 as interpretation and translation : a methodological discussion

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Cover Page

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CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSIONS

The present work has analyzed LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 in two distinct but interrelated steps. Part 1 has compared the text under discussion with MT and has discussed several divergent readings found in the LXX. More narrowly, part 1 raised questions concerning the translator's lexical choices in several verses. Part 2, on the other hand, took LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 as a text in its own right. It is argued that the Greek version can be seen as a coherent text, a coherence that becomes clear through the translator's lexical choices, among other aspects (cf. e.g., the translator's use of conjunctions like in Isa 24:14). It has further argued that both "literal" and "free" renderings come together to form a coherent ideological text that in its final form differs greatly from MT. What follows is a summary of the main content(s) of LXX Isa 24:1-26:6.

Contrary to MT, the LXX betrays a heightened concern with the theme of "cities." In fact, this theme lends coherence to Isa 24:1-26:6. Whereas MT Isa 24:10, 12 refer to one specific city (cf. "the city of nothingness" and "in the city" respectively), LXX mentions "cities." Besides, it translates two different lexemes in MT (cf. עיר/קריה) with the same Greek word: πόλις. A similar approach is found in the LXX's handling of Isa 25:2. Whereas MT refers to "city," "town," and "citadel" (cf. עיר, קריה, and ארמון), the Greek has "cities," "fortified cities," and "the city of the ungodly" (cf. πόλεις, πόλεις ὀχυράς, and τῶν ἀσεβῶν πόλις). Moreover, while MT Isa 25:3 mentions "the city of violent nations," "the cities of wronged men" is found in the LXX. Interestingly, LXX Isa 25:4 brings up "every humble city" even though "city(ies)" is not mentioned in MT Isa 25:4. In its own context, the "humble cities" of Isa 25:4 parallel the "cities of wronged men" in Isa 25:3. Moving on further, while both MT and LXX Isa 26:1 speak of a "fortified city," in Isa 26:5 one finds another divergence. Whereas MT has "high city" (קריה נשׂגבה) the LXX cites "fortified cities" (πόλεις ὀχυράς). The translator's choice of πόλεις ὀχυράς was clearly motivated by his will to create a contrast between the "fortified city" of 26:1 and the "fortified cities" of 26:5. Furthermore, "fortified cities" appears also in Isa 25:2. Ultimately, the LXX communicates that message that, whereas God brings down "cities," "fortified cities," and the "city of the ungodly" (Isa 24:10, 12; 25:2; 26:5), he liberates the "cities of wronged men" and become a help

"to every humble city" (Isa 25:3-4), at the same as he established a "fortified city" (Isa 26:1). The theme of "cities," therefore, brings Isa 24:1-26:6 together.

Another thematic difference between the LXX and MT concerns at least four distinct groups found in the Greek version. In LXX Isa 24 (cf. chapter 5 above), the Lord's destruction of the οἰκουμένη "world" (Isa 24:1) means both judgment and salvation. It is judgment for the group of the "ungodly" (Isa 24:8 [MT: "jubilant"]). This group is associated with "breaking/rejecting the law" (Isa 24:5, 16) and "changing the ordinances" (Isa 24:5) and are the main reason for the "earth's" "lawless" behavior (Isa 24:5, 20). Other terms for this group are "the high ones of the earth" (Isa 24:4 [=MT]), the "nations" (Isa 24:13 [=MT]), the "rejecters of the law" (Isa 24:16 [MT: -]), and the "kings of the earth" (Isa 24:21 [=MT]). They are to be seen as a group that holds control over the οἰκουμένη (24:1) and as powerful and rich (Isa 24:8). Because of their "lawlessness," they are to receive judgment (Isa 24:13, 20-23). Their judgment means salvation for two distinct groups. First, there is the group referred to as "poor" (Isa 24:6 [=MT]), a group that figures prominently in LXX Isa 25 (cf. below). And, second, there is the group called the "remnant" (Isa 24:6, 14 [MT: -]). In view of the "ungodly's" destruction, those who remain after God's destruction of the "world" rejoice in God's salvation (Isa 24:14-15). The judgment of the "ungodly" is further seen as "hope," in the sense of salvation, for a "godly man" (Isa 24:16). This godly man is to be identified with the 'man of godliness' (Isa 11:2).

The theme of judgment for the "ungodly" and of salvation for the "poor" continues in LXX Isa 25 (cf. chapter 6 above). The "ungodly" are portrayed there as the oppressors, being referred to with terms such as "the evil/ungodly men" (cf. Isa 25:4-5 [MT: "heavy rain," "aliens"]) and the "nations" (Isa 25:6-7). They are associated with a powerful city, the "city of the ungodly" (Isa 25:2 [MT: "the citadel of aliens"]). This city and other "fortified cities" are described as collapsing, picking up the theme of the "wall's" collapse introduced in Isa 24:23 (MT: "sun"). The destruction of the "city of the ungodly" (Isa 25:2) means "salvation" for the oppressed. This group is further denoted as "the poor people" (Isa 25:3 [MT: "the strong people"], "the wronged men" (Isa 25:3-4 ["violent people"/"violent"]), "those who are despondent on account of poverty"

(Isa 25:4 [MT: "the poor"]), "faint-hearted men" (Isa 25:5 [MT: "like the rain against the wall"]) and the "people" (Isa 25:8 [MT: "his people"]). LXX Isa's emphasis on the "poor people" picks up the theme of the "poor" introduced in Isa 24:6. The oppressed is associated with "cities" and "every humble city" (Isa 25:3, 4 [MT: "refuge"]). Their liberation functions as a sign for the salvation of another group, namely, the "we" (Isa 25:5 [MT: unclear]). This group is under oppression in "Zion" (cf. Isa 25:5 [MT: "waterless land"]) resonating with the theme of Zion in Isa 24:23 (LXX=MT). They rejoice in "our salvation" (Isa 25:9 [MT: "his salvation"]) and put their hope in God (Isa 25:9 [=MT]). The theme of "hope" appeared already in Isa 24:16 and it will figure again in Isa 26:4. The fall of the "natural wall" of Moabitis (cf. Isa 25:10-12) also signals to a "rest" that God will give to the "we" group.

The theme of judgment/salvation continues in LXX Isa 26:1-6 (cf. chapter 7 above). The collapse of "fortified cities" (Isa 26:5 [MT: "high city"]; cp with Isa 24:10, 12; 25:2) contrasts with the "fortified city" (Isa 26:1 [MT: "fortified city"]) that functions as "our salvation" (Isa 26:1; different syntactical reading from MT). The "our" in "our salvation" indicates that Isa 26:1 speaks of the liberated "we" group in Zion. They welcome a "people that keeps righteousness, truth, and peace" (Isa 26:2-3) into the "fortified city." The "people" of Isa 26:2-3 should be identified with the "godly" (Isa 26:7), whose leader is the 'man of godliness' (Isa 11:2; 24:16). Like the "we" group, they are also characterized as "hoping" in the Lord (Isa 26:4 [MT: "trust"]). Because they are a "godly people," they are further related with the "remnant" of Isa 24:14, a group that is also associated with the "godly one" (Isa 24:16). In contradistinction to MT, LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 proclaim judgment for the "ungodly" and salvation for the "poor," the "godly ones," and the "we" group under oppression in Zion.

Finally, the relationship between the themes of "city(ies)" and the "ungodly/godly" needs to be addressed. The clearest example of the relation between "city" and "ungodly" is Isa 25:2: "the city of the ungodly." However, the "cities" of Isa 24:10, 12 are also to be connected with the "ungodly" of Isa 24:8. Both are portrayed as receiving judgment. While the "ungodly's" "arrogance and wealth" cease, so are their "cities" destroyed. The "cities" of Isa 25:2 may also be related to the "city of the ungodly." It is possible that they are minor "cities" that

together composed the "ungodly's" empire, represented by its main city, "the city of the ungodly." If so, the "fortified cities" of Isa 26:5 are to be related with the "ungodly" of Isa 25:2 becase the latter also mentions "fortified cities." As such, LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 link the fall of "city(ies)" (Isa 24:10, 12; 25:2; 26:5) with the judgment of the "ungodly" (Isa 24:8; 25:2). In contrast, the "fortified city" of Isa 26:1 is connected with a "godly people" (cf. Isa 26:2-3). Finally, the "cities of wronged men" and "every humble city" of Isa 25:3-4 is related to a group of people that will be liberated from the oppression of the "ungodly."

The coherence of LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 points to a "higher level" interpretation of the Hebrew. This "higher level" reading can be characterized as a very particular way of interpreting Isa 24:1-26:6 as the comments above show. Such a reading could only have been the result of a distinctive reading of Isa that preceded the process of translation. It does not mean that the translator already knew which word he was going to use for which Hebrew term. Rather, it means that the translator had particular themes in mind that came across his lexical choices. If the translator already had an interpretation in mind before he started translating Isa, it stands to reason to say a few words on the most fitting methodology for a study of LXX Isa.

A WORD ON METHODOLOGY

The present research has revealed that LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 should be seen as a coherent text. The final shape of the Greek translation of those verses points to a "higher level" interpretation behind the process of translating Hebrew Isa 24:1-26:6. The realization of this issue has an important implication for a methodological approach to LXX Isa. Part 1 of the present work has shown that many a scholar have explained several divergences between MT and LXX as due to a different *Vorlage*, mistakes, errors in the transmission of the LXX, etc. Most approaches to LXX Isa stop on the level of comparing MT and LXX on a word for word level, hardly paying attention to the LXX as a text in its own right. Seen from the word for word level, many divergences look like mistakes or due to a different source-text. However, the present work advocates that a more fitting approach to LXX Isa is to take it as a text in its own right before one can offer explanations for differences in the LXX.

To cite here only a few cases discussed in the introduction, Scholz argued that the readings "they were ashamed" (Isa 24:9; MT: "in song") and "poor people" (Isa 25:3; MT: "strong people") point to a different *Vorlage* from MT (cf. discussion in the introduction). Besides lacking textual support, such a claim was pronounced without further inquiring whether those readings make sense in their respective literary contexts. The present work has demonstrated that both cohere with other aspects of Isa 24:1-26:6. The reading in Isa 24:9 expresses the shame of the "ungodly" (24:8) after their arrogance and wealth passed way. Likewise, "poor people" (Isa 25:3) is linked to the theme of the oppressed in Isa 24:6; 25:3-5a. As such, the divergent readings in Isa 24:9; 25:3 find their cause in a particular way of interpreting the Hebrew (cf. comments to Isa 24:9; 25:3 above) rather than pointing to a different source-text from MT.

Likewise, Ottley claimed that the reading "the wall will fall" in Isa 24:23 (MT: "the sun will be ashamed) was a mistake (see discussion under introduction above). However, an analysis of the Greek text as a product has revealed that the reading in the LXX coheres well with the theme of the fall of "cities/strong cities/the city of the ungodly" (cf. Isa 24:10, 12; 25:2; 26:5). Rather than being a mistake, it originated with an unique way of reading the Hebrew.

The study of LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 as a product has indicated that several divergences are the result of the translator's unique interpretation of his *Vorlage*. This implies that explanations for the divergences in the Greek must be carried out only after the Greek as a text in its own right has been carefully analyzed. The question must be whether the Greek has any coherence in terms of its contents. If it does, then it is unlikely that its variant reading was fortuitous.

FURTHER RESEARCH

LXX Isa's translation process

The present dissertation has occasionally explained how the translator arrived at a particular reading. A systematic treatment, however, is still needed. Further research should focus on the question as to how the analysis of LXX Isa 24:1-26:6 in its own right shed light into

the process of the translation. Scholars have offered at least three main explanations for the LXX's departure from the H: a different *Vorlage* (cf. Scholz and Troxel, although the latter to a much lesser degree), mechanical error in the process of the translation (Ottley), the translator's ideology (Seeligmann, das Neves, Koenig, and van der Kooij), and, recently, stylistics (van der Vorm-Croughs). This dissertation has argued that an important question is whether the presence or lack of coherence can help in clarifying how the translator arrived at a particular reading. Against the "too-often" claims that the translator made a mistake, this dissertation has argued at certain points that an analysis of the LXX Isa 24:1-26:6's final product point rather to a particular interpretation of the Hebrew. A more systematic treatment is left for future research.

LXX Isa's Hermeneutics and Historical Background

Recent studies (cf. e.g., Troxel; see introductory chapter) on the LXX of Isa have started to question the thesis that the translator actualized some prophecies in Hebrew Isa in the light of his own historical circumstances. A weakness of those studies lies in their atomistic approach to LXX Isa, focusing on words or phrases without paying careful consideration to the translation's final product. It is left for future research to discuss whether LXX Isa reflects a "fulfillment-interpretation" hermeneutics. This dissertation is a plea that such a discussion be carried out only after a passage in LXX Isa - and a passage in the light of others in the same book - has been carefully studied to see if it has any coherence of its own. If it does, it stands to reason to ask whether that particular coherent message has a link with the translator's historical background.[1]

In relation to Isa 24:1-26:6, a few points need to be researched further. The first one is whether οἰκουμένη "denotes the historical background of the smaller and larger Hellenistic states" as Seeligmann argued.[2] Second, in connection with οἰκουμένη, there needs to be future studies to assess whether the "cities" (Isa 24:10, 12; 25:2, 4; 26:1, 5) also

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[1] cf. Boyd-Taylor, review of A. Aejmelaeus, 126: "The translator and his text ought to be situated (to the extent possible) in a specific social and cultural environment."

[2] cf. Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version*, 81.

have a link with the translator's time. For instance, could the "city of the ungodly" (Babylon) (Isa 25:2) and the collapsing "cities" (Isa 24:10, 12; 25:3) be seen as a cipher for the Seleucid empire? More research on their identity throughout the book is needed. Third, the translation's reference to the region of Moabitis' fall is intriguing. It would be important to see whether that reference has any grounds in the translator's time. And, fourth, the identity of the different "groups" (cf. summary above) needs to be explored further in other Isaianic passages. Who are the "we" group under oppression in Zion (Isa 25:5)? Who is the "godly people" allowed to enter Jerusalem (Isa 26:2-3)? These questions, and others, beg for future research on the historical background of the translation.

The Identity of the Translator

It has been argued that the translator of Isa was a competent scribe, who was well acquainted with the book of Isa (cf. review of van der Kooij in the introductory chapter above). The present dissertation has by and large offered further support for that view. It has demonstrated that the translator had an encompassing knowledge of Hebrew Isa 24:1-26:6 but also a particular interpretation in mind before he translated it either as a whole or in parts. As such, more research is needed on other chapters of Isa to either confirm or disprove viewing the translator as a scribe.

Im sum, in general, the translator's interpretation tends to be at odds with modern interpretations of MT. Consequently, some accuse the translator of being at fault. However, it is important to realize that the translator had a very particular mode of reading his source-text. As one scholar well put it:

> One should, however, keep in mind that with all types of exegesis the translators had one prevailing intention, namely, to transmit the message of the Bible to their readers, and even if, according to our understanding, the translators seem to be a long way from the simple meaning of the Bible, they were, nevertheless, reflecting what the translators considered to be the basic message of the Bible.[3]

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[3] cf. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 125.