

RBL 02/2003

Baer, David A.

When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66

Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 318
Hebrew Bible and Its Versions 1

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. Pp. 304. Cloth. \$80.50.
ISBN 1841271802.

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This study is based on a doctoral thesis produced by the author during his stay in Cambridge as a postgraduate student of Professor Robert Gordon. It “explores matters of translation technique and theology as these are to be glimpsed in the Greek translation of the Hebrew biblical book of Isaiah” (11). Its purpose is to examine the homiletical and theological concerns that may have motivated the author of LXX Isaiah. Special attention is given to Isa 56–66. It is argued, in line with scholars such as J. Ziegler, I. L. Seeligmann, and others, that types of exegesis in this part of the Septuagint are most likely to be found at places where the Greek does not constitute a straightforward translation. The passages selected for this study are examined in a detailed way as far as the grammatical and syntactical constructions as well as patterns of lexical choice are concerned.

Chapter 1 offers a survey of previous work on LXX Isaiah and gives a succinct description of the method to be applied in the following chapters. The translator is pictured as a preacher with a homiletical purpose.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on passages that reflect “homiletical ploys.” Passages that attest a move toward an “imperativising” direction—cases where LXX offers an imperative where the Masoretic Text (MT) does not—are discussed first (ch. 2). It is argued that such a rhetorical intensification heightens the dramatic effect and points to a homiletical intention. Chapter 3 deals with cases in which LXX has references to the first and second person instead of third-person references in MT (“personalization”).

Chapters 4 and 5 contain a discussion of passages that may reflect a tendency to tone down or otherwise ameliorate statements about God or about other delicate matters. Of particular interest are places where the translator seems to be reluctant to pass on

anthropomorphic or anthropopathic statements about God, especially those that limit his perception or that bring him down from heaven.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss a number of places that are seen as pointing to a kind of Jewish nationalism and Diaspora perspective that is at odds with the Hebrew book's generosity toward the nations. For example, chapter 7 analyzes specific renderings in Isaiah LXX (e.g., σεβομένοι in 66:14 with the sense of "Gentile God-fearers"), concluding that they reflect the idea that the Gentiles are granted a subordinate status in the great eschatological pilgrimage to Zion.

Chapter 8 offers a summary and conclusions.

The work is clearly written and represents a significant and welcome contribution to the study of LXX Isaiah, arguing convincingly that many elements in this version testify to a particular interpretation. Chapters 3 and 4 in particular open up new perspectives, since the elements of what is called "imperativisation" and "personalisation" have not been brought to the fore in previous studies.

LXX Isaiah represents a version that, in comparison to MT and Isaiah texts from Qumran, abounds in peculiar and self-willed renderings both of words and whole sentences. In view of the many complexities and difficulties involved, Baer's treatment of the many details is well considered and cautious. However, as to his method of analysis, it would be preferable in several cases to pay more attention to the immediate context in LXX Isaiah, the more so since, as I believe, the translator was aiming at coherence on the discourse level in Greek. A contextual analysis might change our ideas in evaluating, and labeling, differences between LXX and MT.

The work takes due account of previously published work on the subject, although in a few cases one misses a reference to a publication in the field. For example, in the case of LXX Isa 25:2, 5 (204–6), no use is made of the contribution by J. M. Coste in *Revue Biblique* 61 (1954): 36–66.