

ISAIAH XXVII 7 AND INTERTEXTUAL DISCOURSE ABOUT 'STRIKING' IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

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Recent studies of Isaiah xxiv-xxvii have focused attention on what has been called the intertextual character of these chapters.¹ These four chapters, no doubt some of the latest in Isa i-xxxix, cite, allude to, echo and reuse texts and traditions from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. To be sure, the most important textual conversation partner is Isaiah, illuminating a late stage of an inner-Isaianic development of the book's message.

In addition to the intertextual nature of chapters xxiv-xxvii, the reader is also confronted with several enigmatic passages. Perhaps none is more enigmatic than Isa xxvii 7. The MT of this verse reads

הִכְמַכְתָּ מִכְּחֹ הַדָּחֹ אִם בְּחֶרֶג הַרְגִּיו הָרֶג

This short verse presents the reader with textual, syntactical and interpretive problems which are not easily resolved. In this study I propose the following: after briefly addressing the syntactical issues in xxvii 7, I will pursue the thesis that the verse is best read and interpreted intertextually. The argument will be made that the verse intentionally alludes to and evokes other passages in Isaiah that use similar language to develop similar themes. The intertextual nature of the verse offers an explanation for its otherwise enigmatic character.

¹ See, e.g., R. Scholl, *Die Elenden in Gottes Thronrat* (BZAW 274; Berlin, 2000); D. Polaski, *Authorizing an End* (Leiden, 2001); J. Todd Hibbard, "Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27: The Reuse of Earlier Texts and Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003); M. Sweeney, "Textual Citations in Isaiah 24-27: Toward an Understanding of the Redactions Function of Chapters 24-27 in the Book of Isaiah", *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 39-52; and idem, "New Gleanings from an Old Vineyard: Isaiah 27 Reconsidered", in C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring (ed.), *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee* (Atlanta, 1987), pp. 51-66; R. Clements, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah", *Interpretation* 36 (1982), p. 121.

Textual and syntactical issues

The verse poses a rhetorical question which, if we follow the pointing of the MT² may be translated, "Has he struck him like the striking of the one who struck him; or has he killed him like the killing of those who were killed by him?"³ Several issues need to be worked out before one can arrive at a clear meaning for this opaque sentence.⁴ The lack of a clearly defined subject and object(s) is the first matter to be resolved in order to understand this question.⁵ To put it simply, Who is doing what to whom? In addition, how should the masculine suffixes be explained in light of the feminine suffixes in xxvii 2-5 (and xxvii 8)? Nearly all scholars begin with the reasonable assumption that YHWH is the subject of the sentence, a position that is maintained here. There is more disagreement over the identification of objects and the focus of the comparison: does the sentence compare God's striking/killing of Israel to the striking/killing of Israel by its enemies⁶ or does it compare God's striking/killing of Israel to the striking/killing of Israel's enemies by God?⁷ One must concede that either is possible grammatically, so other criteria must be used to make a decision. In my view, the latter position makes the most sense con-

² To preserve the parallelism, J. Lindblom maintains that הַרְגָּו must be repointed הַרְגָּו, a suggestion supported by 1QIsa^a, LXX and the Syriac; see J. Lindblom, *Die Jesaja-Apokalyypse, Jes. 24-27* (Lund, 1938), p. 55. H. Leene disputes the idea that the parallelism mandates any change in pointing, however; see H. Leene, "Isaiah 27:7-9 as a Bridge between Vineyard and City", in H. J. Bowman, H. van Grol et al. (ed.), *Studies in Isaiah 24-27* (Leiden, 2000), p. 201. I am not convinced that the lines need to be grammatically parallel in any case. In the absence of other compelling reasons for emending the text, I follow the MT (cf. also J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* [AB 19; New York, 2000], p. 376).

³ Leene ("Isaiah 27:7-9 as a Bridge", pp. 201-02) offers two possible translations for the phrase, both of which are equally possible in his view: 1) Has YHWH struck Israel as Israel's striker has struck this people, or has Israel itself been killed as his killed ones (the killed Israelites) have been killed? or 2) Has YHWH struck Israel as YHWH has struck Israel's striker, or has Israel been killed as Israel's killers have been killed? In the end, he opts for the second of the two based on the wider context. This second reading is suggested also by IQIsa^a and the LXX.

⁴ B. Duhm labeled this an "artificial" (*künstliche*) sentence (*Das Buch Jesaja* [Göttingen, 1892], p. 191).

⁵ This problem is dealt with extensively by Leene ("Isaiah 27:7-9 as a Bridge", pp. 208-11) under the rubric of actants. In order to alleviate this problem of who is doing what to whom, Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1-39*, p. 375) supplies definite subjects and objects for the questions. He translates, "Did God strike Israel like those that struck him? Or is Israel slain, as those that slew him lie slain?"

⁶ Leene, "Isaiah 27:7-9 as a Bridge", pp. 200-02.

⁷ M. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, 1996), p. 347.

textually. That is, comparing God's striking of Israel's enemies in light of the statement in xxvii 4 that YHWH will march out into battle against forces destructive to the vineyard (i.e., Israel) makes the best sense.⁸ This is an attempt to take account of the interpretive context of the vineyard song and its reinterpretation of Isa v in the interpretation of this very oblique statement. More will be said about this later, however, we provisionally note that the intertextual approach to this verse developed in the second part of this study supports this reading. This decision, then, leads to the following understanding of the verse: Did God strike Israel like he struck those who struck Israel? Or has he killed Israel like he killed those slain by him? In other words, the prophet asks whether Israel has suffered the same fate as those who formerly oppressed it, but who are now judged by YHWH. The implied answer is no:⁹ despite Israel's judgment by God, it has not been dealt the same degree of punishment as its own enemies.

Intertextual issues

Having come to some provisional understanding of the verse syntactically, it is now possible to explore the intertextual nexus that aids our understanding of the verse. The questions in this verse are built around two related semantic ideas: striking (נָכָה) and killing (הָרַג). On the first of these, upon closer investigation one discovers that within the book of Isaiah there exists a "discourse" about striking which appears at several important points.¹⁰ The term נָכָה and its various cognates are used primarily to depict—rather graphically—judgment against a nation or person. Moreover, not surprisingly, the term and the symbolism it suggests are connected with military disaster in the book. The subject doing the striking is sometimes God, sometimes Assyria, or some other national enemy. The object of such blows is most often Israel, although a small group of important texts depict

⁸ This also fits rather nicely with xxvii 1, which depicts YHWH's defeat of the forces of chaos. This text, like xxvii 7, uses הָרַג.

⁹ Pace W. Rudolph, *Jesaja 24-27* (BWANT 9; Stuttgart, 1933), p. 54; and P. Redditt, "Isaiah 24-27: A Form Critical Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1972), p. 383, both of whom contend that the implied answer is yes.

¹⁰ The verb נָכָה occurs in the Hiphil 18 times in Isaiah: v 25; ix 12; x 20, 24; xi 4, 15; xiv 6, 29; xxvii 7; xxx 31; xxxvii 36,38; xlix 10; l 6; lvii 17; lviii 4; lx 10; lxvi 3; and in the Hophal two times: i 5; liii 4). The cognate noun נִכְחָה is used five times (i 5; x 26; xiv 6; xxvii 7; xxx 26), mostly in tandem with the verb.

Assyria as the one on the receiving end. The texts which participate in this discourse all occur in so-called First and Third Isaiah. The texts fall into three categories: texts that depict YHWH striking Israel; texts that are connected with Assyria in some way; and restoration texts which recall God's striking of Israel in the past. Let us examine the details of this discourse.

Texts depicting YHWH's striking of Israel

The first set of texts all occur in the early chapters of the book: i 5, 6; v 25; and ix 12. Moreover, most of these are recognized as justifiably connected with Isaiah himself, although this does not mean that one or more of them has not been edited later in some way. The theme of YHWH's striking of Israel is introduced at the outset of the book as part of the introductory first chapter.

Why do you seek further beatings (חֲכוֹ)?
 Why do you continue rebelling?
 The entire head is sick,
 and the whole heart is faint.
 From the sole of the foot even to the head—
 there is no soundness in him,
 bruises, sores
 and bleeding wounds (מַכַּה טָרִידָה);
 they have not been drained, bound up,
 or softened with oil. (i 5-6)

Although YHWH is not specifically cited as the one doing the beating in this text, the larger context makes clear that the "further beatings" is a way of speaking about the exercise of God's judgment on Israel (note the plurality addressed). Within the context of this chapter it is impossible to know precisely what motivates the divine anger. The standard prophetic topoi of rebellion, injustice, and syncretistic worship are all present. Nevertheless, the position of this text early in the first chapter signals the importance of this theme not just for this chapter, but also for the book. It articulates in a violent way the judgment emphasis which is so prominent in the first thirty-nine chapters. Given the judicial language of much of chapter one, נִכָּה expresses vividly the punishment to be inflicted on the guilty party, in this case Israel.

The second text to be considered comes in a stanza the placement

of which is disputed.¹¹ Nevertheless, the accent on YHWH's judgment against Israel, here specifically identified as "his people," is unmistakable.

Therefore the anger of YHWH was kindled against his people,
 And he stretched out his hand against them and struck them (וַיִּכּוֹת).
 The mountains quaked so that their corpses became
 like refuse in the streets.
 For all this his anger did not abate,
 and his hand remained outstretched. (v 25)

YHWH's anger toward Israel is depicted using both earthquake imagery and penal imagery. The use of the striking language in combination with the refrain about YHWH's continuing anger and outstretched hand, common to this text and many others from Isa ix, suggests that this language was considered useful for expressing a core part of the Isaianic message of judgment in capsule form. Moreover, the present placement of this verse in which it serves as a lead in to a prediction of Assyrian invasion, anticipates the texts that align striking with Assyria (to be discussed below).

Finally, closely connected to the use of the language in Isa v 25, one finds this text in Isa ix 12[13]:

The people did not turn to the one who struck them (וְהַמַּכֵּהוּ), or seek
 YHWH of Hosts.

Isa ix 7-20[8-21] is a series of short stanzas that develop the theme of YHWH's judgment against Israel, no doubt an interpretation of the Northern Kingdom's political misfortunes in the third quarter of the eighth century. The stanza of which the passage is a part, ix 12-16 [13-17], the second in the series, speaks of the people not turning toward YHWH who struck them (is it any wonder!), followed by the loss of civil and religious leadership (vv. 13-15 [14-16]). In this text, YHWH's striking may be a way of understanding the early Assyrian domination of Israel, although this is not made explicit.

To summarize, the second and third of the three texts considered above most likely reveal an interpretation of Assyrian military domination

¹¹ Many commentators regard this as a displaced stanza which was likely originally connected with ix 8-21 [7-20]; cf. most recently Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 217. Stanzas concluding with the same refrain include ix 11, 16, and 20. Whether this contention is accurate or not, it is irrelevant for the discussion at hand.

as evidence of YHWH's judgment against Israel, and later Judah. The verses following v 25, vv. 26-30, make this abundantly clear with their description of an invading army. One imagines these verses preserve an account based on the author's actual sight of this imposing force. The first text considered in this section, i 5-6, marks out this theme as one important in the early development of the Isaianic message of judgment against Jerusalem and Judah. It would not be incorrect, then, to note that at this stage we may already glimpse a theological theme being recycled and reused in a later context.

Assyria texts

Given what I noted in the preceding section, it will not be surprising that in several texts in Isaiah that specifically mention Assyrian aggression against Israel and Judah one finds the use of נָכַח and the development of this theme. What separates these texts from those mentioned above is the actual naming of Assyria in the discourse. Further, these texts can be broken down into three subject categories: Assyria strikes Israel, Assyria is struck by God, and a taunt about the Babylonian king, a text that may have originally pertained to an Assyrian king.

Assyria strikes Israel

The texts that use the language of Assyria striking Israel all belong to a relatively confined section of the book: x 20-27, a series of three editorial comments.¹² The coalescence of Isaian language and themes from elsewhere in the book, along with the recognizable and formulaic "on that day" introduction, marks these verses out as attempts to interpret events related to Assyria within the Isaian interpretive grid. Along these lines, then, it is not entirely surprising that the language of striking should reappear, given its earlier important use (cf. chapters i, v, ix). These texts in Isa x are noticeably different than the earlier texts in one important respect, however. The earlier passages announced YHWH's judgment against Israel and Judah but Isa x

¹² For the structure and redaction of these verses, see the different proposals of Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 205-10 and Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 256-58, among others. Common to nearly every analysis of these verses is the recognition that these passages are later interpretations of the events related to Assyrian aggression against Judah using earlier Isaian language and themes.

20-27 announce YHWH's restoration of Judah following the period of Assyrian hegemony. In announcing YHWH's salvific intervention on their behalf, these texts recall Assyria's past domination of Judah as a time in which Assyria has struck Judah.

On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer lean on the one who struck them (עַל מַכּוֹתָם), but will lean on YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (x 20)

Therefore thus says the Lord YHWH of Hosts: O my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians when they strike you with a rod (בַּשֹּׁבֵט יַכְכֶּה) and lift up their staff against you like the Egyptians did. (x 24)

The LORD of Hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian (בַּמַּכָּה מִדְיָן) at the rock of Oreb . . . (x 26)

If we follow the lead of M. Sweeney's analysis of these texts, it is possible to conclude that these texts stem from the period of Sargon's threat against Jerusalem which is reflected in ix 7-x 34.¹³ The passage would serve as a word of encouragement to those who feared that Assyrian aggression would completely wipe out Judah. These passages vividly recall Assyria's subjugation of Judah and Israel, no doubt an experience which was accurately recalled using the language of being beaten. Nevertheless, as these texts make clear, the tides can and do change, so that the one who formerly beat down, becomes the beaten down itself.

A text that is closely related to these in certain respects, although pertaining to the Assyrians and the Philistines, is found in xiv 29:

Do not rejoice, all you Philistines,
because the rod that struck you (מַכָּךְ) is broken,
For from the root of the snake will come forth an adder
and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent.

This text urges that the Philistines not celebrate the death of an anonymous Assyrian monarch (Tiglath-pileser III?) who had oppressed them, because additional devastation is to come. It is impossible to know with certainty which Mesopotamian king is in view, but precise identification is not necessary for the argument of this paper. Rather, it is sufficient to note that this text relates specifically to the period of

¹³ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 208.

Assyrian domination in the late eighth century (or less possibly, early seventh century).¹⁴ Unlike the collection of texts located in x 20-27, there is no note of restoration or salvation sounded here on behalf of the Philistines. Indeed, just the opposite is found. What is common to these two sections is that both this text and x 24 appear to reuse the trope introduced in x 5 which connects Assyria with the imagery of a rod used for punishing.

Assyria is struck by God

Related to this is what I have labeled a second collection of Assyria texts. The distinction between this set and those just considered is that in these Assyria is on the receiving end of the smiting, not Israel. The first of these is part of another section announcing salvation for Judah, xxx 27-33. The date of this section is, not surprisingly, disputed, but most commentators regard the section as a later expansion.¹⁵ The section offers a bewildering array of images, at least some of which are found earlier in the book. So, for example, xxx 28 speaks of YHWH's breath as an "overflowing stream," an image which recalls a similar statement in viii 7-8 where Assyria is the overflowing torrent which assails Judah. A second example of this kind of reuse of earlier Isaian themes and language occurs in the text bearing on our theme. Isa xxx 31 reads,

The Assyrian will be terror-stricken at the voice of YHWH, when he strikes with his rod (בַּשֶּׁבֶט יִכֶּה).

Here the now familiar combination of striking and rod are found once again, only this time it is YHWH striking Assyria with YHWH's rod.¹⁶ Assyria has come full circle in the book from being the rod of

¹⁴ As many exegetes have noted, it is impossible to be certain of the original setting for the oracle that is now found in Isa xiv 28-32. It is a message to Philistia that concludes with a statement about Zion's establishment as a place of refuge. The "rod that struck" Philistia in v. 29 is usually interpreted as a reference to an Assyrian monarch, primarily because of Philistia's contentious relationship with Assyria in the late eighth century. Most commentators have favored identifying the monarch in question with Tiglath-pileser III, although no consensus exists. See Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, pp. 92-4, for a full discussion.

¹⁵ See, e.g., O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39* (OTL; Philadelphia, 1974), p. 305; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 423-24; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 396.

¹⁶ It is not entirely clear who yields the rod in this text, YHWH or Assyria. I have

YHWH's anger (x 5) to being struck itself with YHWH's rod. Although it is impossible to date this text with precision, this message does suggest a time when Judah held out hope of extricating themselves from Assyrian domination, i.e., during the reigns of Hezekiah or Josiah. Like the texts in x 20-27, the basic message of the section in which this text is found is one of hope for Judah.

The final passage that may be plausibly placed in this category of texts, xxxvii 36-38, emanates from the section of the book of Isaiah that recalls Sennacherib's unsuccessful assault on Jerusalem, Isa xxxvi-xxxvii. Two different events—separated by 20 years—are reported in these verses, but within the context of Isaiah, both are related to the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army and the subsequent fate of Sennacherib. As has been demonstrated by several scholars, this passage is meant to portray YHWH's superiority over Sennacherib.¹⁷ The passage functions as something of an ironic conclusion to the events of 701, given the Rabshekah's taunts early in the episode about the impotence of YHWH to deliver Jerusalem from Assyrian aggression. Isa xxxvii 36-38 reads,

The angel of YHWH went forth and struck down (וַיַּכֶּה) 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. When morning dawned, indeed, all of them were dead bodies. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria, got up and went home and he lived in Nineveh. As it happened, when he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, his sons Adramelech and Sarezer struck him down (הִכּוּהוּ) with the sword. They then fled to the land of Ararat and Esarhaddon, his son, reigned in place of him.

At first glance this passage may appear to be quite different than the others we have been considering in that it is a rather straightforward narrative, not a future-oriented hope. Moreover, this text is not unique to Isaiah. It is unnecessary in this study to review in detail the issues surrounding the parallel accounts in Isa xxxvi-xxxix and 2 Kings xviii 13-xx 19. We may simply be permitted the observation that material in Isa xxxvi-xxxix was likely not composed originally to occupy that position.¹⁸ The importance of that for the present study is in recognizing

read the text, following NRSV et al., as stating that YHWH is smiting Assyria. On the other hand, it is possible to read the last part of the verse as stating that Assyria yields the rod (e.g., JPS, Kaiser). The difference, for purposes of this study, is not essential. If one were to conclude that the more likely reading is the latter, it would simply align this text more closely with those texts considered in the previous section.

¹⁷ Cf. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 470-71.

¹⁸ The literature on this point is vast and need not be comprehensively surveyed

that the development of the striking theme in xxxvii 36, 38 is probably not due to Isaian tradents. If the theses of a Josianic edition of Kings and a Josianic edition of Isaiah are correct (and at least the latter is a big if), it is tempting to surmise that this text crept into the book of Isaiah at that moment. The question of whether it is merely fortuitous that this theme is found in material brought into Isaiah for other reasons or whether this may have been part of the reason this material was included cannot be answered with certainty. One supposes that, in this case, fortune may have outflanked intention.¹⁹

Whatever the origin of these texts and the intention (or lack thereof) of their author, they now exist as part of the book of Isaiah, necessitating that the correspondences with other similar texts be taken seriously. In the present case, these verses develop the theme of YHWH striking Assyria by portraying this not as a future hope, but as a present or past reality. At least in some provisional way, the expectations expressed in texts such as x 20-27 are realized in this text. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that the realization of this hope in connection with other Isaian texts is predominantly literary and theological not historical and actual.

Isaiah xiv 6—An Assyrian king masquerading as a Babylonian?

In a similar way, Isa xiv 6, part of a *masnal*, or taunt (xiv 4b-21) also recalls YHWH's action against a king who had previously struck peoples out of anger and hubris.

YHWH has broken the rod of evildoers,
the staff of rulers,
that struck (מכה) peoples in rage
with unceasing blows,
that ruled the nations in anger
with unrelenting persecution. (xiv 5-6)

here. With few notable exceptions, the position noted above has achieved something of a consensus.

¹⁹ Sweeney considers the possibility that, although these chapters were not composed for a setting in Isaiah, their author may have been familiar with the Isaiah tradition in whatever form it then existed. This may account for some of the linguistic similarity between the two texts. Cf. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 476-85.

The difficulty in connecting this text with others in this Assyrian layer is that no Assyrian monarch is named in the poem. The introductory rubric to this taunt song applies it to the death of a Babylonian king (cf. v. 22), but none is specified. As many students of Isaiah have noted, the content of the song itself cannot be connected unproblematically with any Near Eastern king of the first millennium.²⁰ Sweeney, among others, suggests Sargon II as the likely candidate who may have inspired the composition of the song regardless of the target of its later use. In support of this, it could be noted from the perspective of this study that earlier texts using the language of striking in the book of Isaiah also appear to be related to Sargon (e.g., Isa xiv 29). Even if it is necessary to conclude that interpreting the text must be restricted to its current form and position, the difference for our present theme is negligible. The salient point is that once again we are confronted with a text in which YHWH executes judgment against one who has malevolently treated others.

To summarize, the texts considered in this section have been grouped together principally because they are all, or nearly all, explicitly connected with or mention Assyria. Beyond that, it is important to note that two basic sub-groupings of texts can be isolated. First, there are three texts in Isa x 20-26 that focus on Assyria's striking of Israel, clearly a reference to military and political domination. Another text that is similar in certain respects is found in xiv 29, part of a small but clear unit which recalls Assyria's similar treatment of the Philistine territory. A second set of texts, xxx 31 and xxxvii 36-38, turn the imagery of striking around so that Assyria is now struck by God. The first of these looks forward to that time as a future moment, while the second occurs in the summary of Sennacherib's military and personal demise. Finally, loosely connected with these texts is the notice in the *mashal* of Isa xiv, canonically associated with an anonymous king of Babylon, that YHWH has defeated the one who struck down the peoples. Whether or not each of these texts can be dated to the eighth or seventh century, that is, the period of Assyria's dominance, they recall that time as pivotal historically and theologically.

²⁰ Cf. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 232-33; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 286-87.

Restoration texts that recall God's striking of Israel

The third category of texts to be considered as part of this inner-Isaianic exploration of the themes of xxvii 7 includes three texts (besides xxvii 7) that speak of Israel's restoration. What unites these texts to our theme is that each recalls YHWH's earlier judgment against Israel as a time in which God struck (נָכַח) the nation or inflicted blows (מַכּוֹחַ) on it, again clearly references to military and political disaster. Most critical readers would agree that these passages stem from later periods of the book's growth. Moreover, this category is the only one that includes texts outside of the first thirty-nine chapters of the book.

The first text comes at the end of a passage which may have been included as a late editorial and exegetical expansion, xxx 23-26.²¹ The specific verse in question for our study reads

And the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun,
and the light of the sun will seven times brighter,
like the light of seven days
on the day YHWH binds up the injury of his people
and heals the injury of his blow (מַכּוֹחַ). xxx 26

The inclusion of the theme of striking, here combined with an ecological effect of YHWH's actions, likely recalls an earlier time of disaster (i.e., Babylonian destruction). More importantly, however, YHWH's restorative healing reverses the ill effects of his earlier discipline.

The two remaining texts that this section includes come from passages announcing restoration and hope in Third Isaiah.

Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry;
I struck them (אָכַח) and hid; I was angry. (lvii 17a)

Foreigners shall build up your walls,
and their kings shall serve you.
For in my wrath I struck you (הִכִּיתִיךָ),
but in my favor I have shown you mercy. (lx 10)

Both of these texts speak of YHWH striking Israel in the past, here to be associated with the Babylonian destruction and exile. The first of the two adds in the second half of the verse that the people continued in their failings, suggesting that striking in this verse is a way of talking about several different episodes in Israel's history (cf. Ezek

²¹ For an attempt to read this text in the way just depicted, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 419-22.

xvi, xx, xxiii). The verse also picks up the theme of God's anger, used already in v 25 (considered above) as well as God's hiding from Israel, also used elsewhere in the book (cf. liv 8).

All three of these texts use the theme of God's striking, in conjunction with others, to denote the past as a time of divine anger and punishment which has now run its course and gives way to restoration. In this, important restoration themes are brought together with judgment themes in the book. The result is a continuity in the way the book depicts judgment, even while speaking about restoration.

The place of xxvii 7

Turning now to the text which is the subject of this article, xxvii 7, we can ask, How does this text relate to the complex of texts which we have examined? Given the important use of נִכָּח in this verse and in those discussed above, at a minimum it is possible to postulate that this text contributes to the discourse about striking in the book. Additionally, like several of those considered above, xxvii 7 conveys a message of hope to its readers. Moreover, the enigmatic character of the question posed by the verse suggests that it intentionally alludes to these other texts. This would explain, for instance, the oblique manner the verse uses to speak about the recipient of God's blow who also turns out to be the one who struck Israel. When this is put into conversation with the other texts in Isaiah that use this language, one sees that Assyria, and to a lesser extent Babylon, serves as the paradigmatic example of the entity in question. That is, several of the texts surveyed above portray Assyria both as one who strikes Israel but who also is struck by God. Isa xxvii 7 invites the reader to make this connection while retaining explicit anonymity for the aggressor it mentions. To consider another feature of the phrase in xxvii 7a, recall that a different anonymous entity is portrayed as one struck by both God and someone else. As I argued in the beginning, this is likely Israel. Support for this position is found in the recognition that several of the other texts surveyed above portray Israel as struck by both YHWH and Assyria. Isa xxvii 7a seems to allude to both features of this נִכָּח discourse in the question posed by the verse.

If the preceding argument is accepted, one must conclude that in xxvii 7 one is confronted with a rather late textual addition to the book. Although it is not necessary to conclude that the text postdates those mentioned above that are found in so-called Third Isaiah (although

it may be), this reading does require one to recognize that it postdates those texts considered above that are found in the first thirty-nine chapters of the book. Given that most students of the book concede that Isa xxiv-xxvii are one of the latest portions of the book generally, this is not difficult to accept.²²

Perhaps a more interesting question is, Why was this verse included here? Though the question may require no justification, it is worth noting that the verse's seeming lack of connection with the surrounding material does suggest that it is pertinent.²³ Without examining the contents of Isa xxvii in detail, let us remember that the chapter offers evidence for viewing it a composite entity. It is possible to isolate xxvii 1, xxvii 2-5, xxvii 6 and xxvii 7—just to take us through the verse under consideration—as independent textual units. The last three appear to be related in exegetically important ways. That is, following Blenkinsopp and others, xxvii 6 and 7 may be read as independent and exegetically motivated comments on the renewed vineyard poem in vv. 2-5.²⁴ Recall that this poem about a vineyard is itself intertextually related to the earlier so-called vineyard song in Isa vv. 1-7.²⁵ Briefly, the text in Isa v uses the imagery of the vineyard as part of the message of destruction announced in that chapter. Isa xxvii 2-5 reverses the message about the vineyard (and, therefore, Israel) announced in the earlier passage. Further, it is my contention that xxvii 7 further clarifies this reversal. The positive vision of the vineyard “on that day” (v. 2) is possible because YHWH has not completely destroyed it, i.e., Israel.²⁶ Though destruction has befallen the vineyard, it has not been total and final. The questions posed by xxvii 7 are designed to remind the reader that this is the case.

Recognizing the connection with the surrounding literary context also helps explain the second half of xxvii 7. This part of the verse asks a question which is similar to the first part, although the key verb, *הָיָה*, is different. Unlike the first half of the verse which is built around

²² It is not necessary to enter the notoriously difficult debate about the dating of these chapters. The literature on the question is vast. Most scholars accept a late postexilic date for these chapters, although even within that range, the dates offered vary widely. For a summary, see H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27* (Continental Commentary; Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 460-67.

²³ On the difficulties surrounding the verse's fit within the context, see Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, pp. 226-27.

²⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 374.

²⁵ Nearly all commentators on Isa xxvii affirm this point.

²⁶ A similar message is found in xxviii 23-29.

נִכְה, a term which is important in the book of Isaiah, the second half of the verse is not part of an inner-Isaianic discourse about killing (הָרַג). No such discourse or thematic development exists. What the choice of this term does accomplish is the integration of xxvii 7 into the larger context. The language and theme of killing are found in successive verses in the immediate preceding context: xxvi 21 and xxvii 1. As has been argued elsewhere, xxvii 1 can be read as a mythological restatement of the divine punishment announced in xxvi 20-21,²⁷ with the result that xxvi 20-xxvii 1 develop the same message of judgment on YHWH's enemies using different idioms. The importance of this for our topic is the recognition that xxvii 7b can be read as an allusion to these preceding verses. The point of the allusion would be to drive home the message that YHWH has not "killed" Israel, i.e., exercised complete and final judgment on Israel, in the same way as these verses conceive of that judgment against YHWH's (and Israel's) foes. Through this inner-Isaianic allusion, the message of hope is driven home for the readers. YHWH will (has) kill(ed) the "dragon in the sea" but not Israel.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has attempted to demonstrate the essential intertextual character of the otherwise enigmatic verse, Isa xxvii 7. The basic contention has been that the verse is most understandable when it is read in light of the wider nexus of texts that share with it the similar language and ideas. The first half of the verse alludes to and contributes to a discourse about striking in the book of Isaiah. This discourse is recognizable through the use of נִכְה, but, as has been demonstrated, is based on more than just this narrow linguistic evidence. The book uses this language to explore the theme of YHWH's judgment and restoration, and to articulate an understanding of Assyria's involvement with Israel. The second half of the verse is more narrowly concerned with integrating the verse into the surrounding literary context, but also functions as a comment on the preceding statements about killing.

²⁷ On this point, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 371-72, and, most recently, Hibbard, "Intertextuality in Isaiah 24-27", p. 179. The justification for this reading is primarily the similar language used by the two verses to describe the punishment, פָּקַד and הָרַג.

One last point may be permitted. In a recent study by H. G. M. Williamson, he has highlighted the important role of both a synchronic and diachronic reading of texts in Isaiah.²⁸ The study offers a reading of Isaian which argues for the validity and necessity of both approaches to the text. In some sense, this has been part of my goal for this study. That is, I have sought to demonstrate that a synchronic reading of texts in Isaiah on the theme(s) found in xxvii 7 results in what I have labeled, at least in the case of נִכְדָּה, an inner-Isaianic discourse. This is discernible only through reading the final form of the book as it now exists. On the other hand, I have also sought to demonstrate, if only provisionally, something of the diachronic development of that discourse. While dating texts in Isaiah, particularly those in chapters i-xxxix, is notoriously difficult and troublesome, I have nevertheless waded into the waters and offered what I see as at least a valid and fruitful way of talking about that development. In the end, then, it is my hope that one of the corollaries of this study has been to demonstrate another way that both synchronic and diachronic studies of the book of Isaiah are mutually illuminating.

Abstract

Isaiah xxvii 7 is widely regarded as one of the most obscure verses in Isaiah xxiv-xxvii, one of the latest additions to the book. After briefly dealing with the verse's syntactical issues, this article seeks to address the question of the verse's meaning using an intertextual approach. I argue that the first half of the verse evokes other texts in Isaiah about "striking" (נִכְדָּה), a theme introduced in the first chapter (i 5-6) and developed through Isaiah. Understood as part of an inner-Isaianic textual development, the verse makes the point that Israel has not been struck like the one who struck it (Assyria). The second half of xxvii 7, which uses the idea of "killing" (הָרַג), makes a more immediate intertextual connection with xxvi 21. The article concludes by noting that viewed against this intertextual backdrop, the verse offers a further elaboration of xxvii 2-5(6) which depict YHWH's vineyard.

²⁸ H. G. M. Williamson, "Synchronic and Diachronic in Isaian Perspective," in J. C. de Moor (ed.), *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 211-26.

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