

Salvation for Israel and the Nations: Disputing the Interpretation of Isaiah 25:6–8 as an Announcement of Doom

ABSTRACT: Is the vision of the eschatological banquet on Mount Zion in Isa 25:6–8 an announcement of doom for the nations? Recently, Michael P. Maier has argued that an intertextual interpretation results in understanding the banquet as their last meal. Underlying his reasoning is the fear that the traditional Christian understanding of the vision, as a universal salvation oracle, might lead to supersessionism, the substitution of Israel with the church. He, therefore, tries to give new credibility to a particular Jewish interpretive tradition dating back to the medieval exegetes Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and David Kimḥi. This tradition connects the vision of the eschatological banquet with texts concerning the cup of wrath, from which YHWH let his enemies drink. However, it seems to contradict the flow of the text to restrict its meaning to the rehabilitation of Israel as Maier argues. This article examines Maier's intertextual reasoning and argues that, on the basis of text and context, it remains valid to understand the vision of the eschatological banquet as a salvation oracle for both Israel and the nations.

keywords: Isa 25:6–8, eschatological banquet, universal salvation, Israel and the nations, supersessionism, intertextuality, cup of wrath, Jewish interpretation

Introduction

A few years ago, Michael P. Maier published an intriguing article in *Vetus Testamentum*, in which he advocates for an interpretation of Isa 25:6–8 as

an announcement of doom.¹ It seems to be a spinoff from his *Habilitations-schrift* on the motif of the pilgrimage of the nations in the book of Isaiah.² Maier tries to give new credibility to a Jewish tradition, which understood the eschatological banquet on Mount Zion unambiguously as an occasion of judgment on the nations. Salvation is only proclaimed to the people of Israel. An incipient judgment interpretation is present already in the Septuagint, which mentions a counsel against all nations (ἡ γὰρ βουλή αὐτῆ ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) and proclaims that death has swallowed up the nations (κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας) instead of being swallowed up itself.³ The Targum even states explicitly that the feast on Mount Zion “will be to them for shame, strokes from which they will not be rescued, strokes by which they come to an end.”⁴ Maier does not completely dismiss the traditional Christian understanding of the vision but strongly claims that the Hebrew text is best interpreted in line with the Jewish tradition, represented among others by the medieval exegetes Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and David Kimḥi.

The article of Maier does not deal with the historical background and possible dating of the vision of Isa 25:6–8. He is more interested in its tradition historical motifs and in its history of interpretation. Maier, therefore, discusses the text from a synchronical perspective, while his main arguments are derived from intertextuality.⁵ He admits that the Hebrew key words *משתה*, *משגמים*; *שמרים*; *לוט*; and *בלע המות*, *מסכה* in themselves are ambiguous. Based on the intertextual use of these words, however, he concludes that they should be understood in a negative sense, as André Caquot had already argued.⁶ Maier assumes that the eschatological banquet is related to the

1. Michael P. Maier, “Festbankett oder Henkersmahl? Die zwei Gesichter von Jes 25:6–8,” *VT* 64 (2014): 445–64.

2. Michael P. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, BZAW 474 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

3. Maier reinforces the connotation of judgment by translating the beginning of v. 6 LXX (καὶ ποιήσει κύριος σαβαωθ πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τοῦτο) by analogy with Deut 7:19: “Und der Herr Sebaoth wird auf diesem Berg an allen Völkerschaften handeln” (“And YHWH Sebaoth shall deal upon this mountain with all nations”) (“Festbankett oder Henkersmahl?” 446). See also Wilson de Angelo Cunha, *LXX Isaiah 24:1–26:6 as Interpretation and Translation: A Methodological Discussion*, SCS 62 (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 171–72, with reference to Isa 5:4.

4. Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes*, ArBib 11 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 49–50.

5. In his *Habilitations-schrift*, Maier advocates for a synchronically oriented intertextual interpretation, not as a substitute, but as a complement to the diachronic and authoritative historical-critical method (*Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, 60–73).

6. André Caquot, “Remarques sur le ‘Banquet des nations’ en Esaïe 25, 6–8,” *RHPR* 69.2 (1989): 109–19.

motif of the cup of wrath, from which YHWH let his enemies drink. This is described quite extensively in Jer 25:15–29, while Maier especially appeals to Obad 16 and Zech 12:2.⁷ In his view, the tradition-historical background of Isa 25:6–8 must be sought not in the motif of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion but rather in the motif of the nations' attack on Zion (*Völkersturm*). He especially refers to Isa 14:24–27 as an important intertextual link and also appeals to the structure of Isa 24–27, because this collection concludes with only the Israelite exiles coming to God's holy mountain (27:12–13). Part of Maier's reasoning appears to be motivated by his fear that the traditional Christian understanding might lead to the substitution of Israel with the Church. He objects to the suggestion of Ulrich Berges and others that the nations also participate in the praise of YHWH as אֱלֹהֵינוּ (25:9), as if the banquet has made them the people of YHWH as well. According to Maier, Israel could then lose its unique place in salvation history.

Instead of discussing all Maier's intertextual arguments in detail, I will shortly address the methodological issue of using intertextuality to determine the scope of Isa 25:6–8. Thereafter, I will present several contextual arguments and, finally, deal with the theological issue of Maier's fear for an exegesis that might imply the substitution of Israel.⁸ This article will not discuss historical issues regarding the social setting and dating of the vision. However, it cannot go unmentioned that Christopher B. Hays recently challenged the academic consensus about its postexilic origins and its eschatological scope. He launched a new interesting theory that situates Isa 24–27 in its entirety in the context of the nationalistic aspirations of King Josiah.⁹ This hypothesis is worthy of thorough investigation, but this investigation is beyond the scope of the present study. Regardless of its original historical setting, by muting explicit references to recognizable political realities the vision of the banquet on Mount Zion has in any case been transmitted with an eschatological outlook.¹⁰

7. Cf. Isa 51:17; Jer 51:7; Ps 75:9.

8. The content of this article was presented at the 23rd Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament in Aberdeen, 4–9 August 2019.

9. Christopher B. Hays, *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27: Josiah's Festival Scroll for the Fall of Assyria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2019); Christopher B. Hays, "Make Peace with Me: The Josianic Origins of Isaiah 24–27," *Int* 73 (2019): 143–57.

10. Hays is critical of the use of the term *eschatological*, which he considers "a poor descriptor" (*The Origins of Isaiah 24–27*, 30). However, he also signals that further layers of redaction within Isa 24–27 have deemphasized the role of King Josiah because of his untimely death and the failure of his reign (p. 47). The editorial process of dehistoricizing made these chapters appear eschatological and apocalyptic (p. 48). "The social function of the victory banquet motif in Isa 24–27 was to summon the people of the

Context Precedes Intertext

Scholars widely agree that in biblical semantics the meaning of words is determined by their use. Neither the supposed etymology nor the complete range of meaning words might have elsewhere is decisive but only their actual use in specific texts and contexts.¹¹ The same methodological principle should be considered when using intertextual arguments in exegesis. Maier's reasoning is more suggestive than well-founded, as he seems to work with a rather broad definition of intertextuality. Admittedly, a contemporary reader can interpret any text in connection with any other text. However, for identifying a credible intertext that can be justified from the data in the text, not only some degree of thematic coherence is required but also a clear amount of shared vocabulary, while the textual relationship in itself should be meaningful as well as chronologically possible.¹² For Maier, chronological possibility is not a criterion for tracing an intertext, because, in the end, he gives a decisive role to the reader who constructs the meaning of a text as part of a reception community. Although Maier agrees that the reader remains dependent on the data in the text itself, he considers it sufficient to speak of an intertext if a text only shares the same theme.¹³ Therefore, he often fails to get beyond a minimum match of a single word or a quite-general association. To mention just a few examples: the occurrence of *משתה* and *יין* in a judgment setting does not make Isa 5:12 an intertext, because any thematic coherence with Isa 25:6–8 is lacking. Jeremiah 51:39 only shares *משתה* with Isa 25:6, but not even in the singular. And the combination of *יין* and *שמנים* in Amos 6:6 is indeed interesting, but thematic coherence with Isa 25:6–8 is again missing. Moreover, context must always take precedence over intertext. Initially, Maier seems to agree

former Northern Kingdom to unite themselves to Judah in an enlarged Israel. Josiah's vision failed in this respect; the political narrative he championed never became reality. . . . however, later scribes appear to have wrestled with and partly salvaged its power" (p. 66).

11. Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

12. For a reflected understanding of intertextuality as an exegetical tool, see Todd J. Hibbard, *Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, FAT 2/16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1–20.

13. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, 65: "Um als Referenzsignal zu gelten, braucht es ein Syntagma aus zwei und mehr Lexemen, eine parallele formale Struktur oder (*sic!*) ein Thema, das die beiden Texte verbindet" ("To be considered a reference signal, a syntagma of two or more lexemes, a parallel formal structure or [*sic*] a theme connecting the two texts is needed"). Cf. his reflections on synchrony and intertextuality on pp. 60–71.

with this principle.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in practice, a quite-vague idea of intertextuality appears to guide his exegesis.

YHWH's Royal Victory Banquet

For contextual reasons, I disagree with Maier's assumption that the motif of the nations' attack on Zion constitutes the tradition-historical background of Isa 25:6–8. Nothing in the context refers to this particular tradition. The association first appears in the writings of the Jewish exegetes Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimḥi. At the same time, it must be admitted that the motif of the pilgrimage of the nations is not alluded to either. The vision of Isa 25:6–8 exhibits neither a centripetal movement to Zion nor an active role for the nations. The content does not exclude this tradition—it even shares some of its vocabulary with Isa 2:2–4¹⁵—but the immediate context is provided by the final pericope of ch. 24, which proclaims that YHWH will punish “the host of heaven in heaven, and on earth the kings of the earth” (24:21).¹⁶ These powers will be locked up in prison, awaiting their punishment, for YHWH Sebaoth will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and manifest his glory before his elders (24:21–23).

Exegetes, including Maier himself, widely agree on understanding the *weqatal* phrases of Isa 25:6–8 (ועשה . . . ובלע . . . ומחה) as a continuation of those of 24:21–23. . . . (והיה . . . ואספו . . . וסגרו . . . וחפרה . . . ובושה). The reference to *בהר הזה* and the repetition of *יהוה צבאות* reinforces the coherence. The banquet on Mount Zion is the visible manifestation of YHWH's kingship and, therefore, is a royal victory banquet.¹⁷ After the previous announcement of the locking up of all competitive powers, there is no reason

14. Maier, “Festbankett oder Henkersmahl?” 447: “Wie bei jedem Text hängt das richtige Verständnis von Jes 25:6–8 wesentlich vom Kontext ab” (“As with any text, the correct understanding of Isa 25:6–8 depends largely on the context”).

15. Cf. Bernard Wodecki, “The Religious Universalism of the Pericope Is 25:6–9,” in *Goldene Äpfel in silbernen Schalen*, ed. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 35–47; Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007), 350.

16. The connection is convincingly argued by Hans Wildberger, “Das Freudenmahl auf dem Zion: Erwägungen zu Jes 25, 6–8,” *TZ* 33 (1977): 373–83.

17. It is often compared to the feast King Ashurnasirpal II organized for 69,574 guests from all countries at the occasion of the inauguration of his palace in the new built capital Calah. See, e.g., Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 35. For the ideological intentions of royal and divine victory banquets in ancient Near East culture, see Hays, *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27*, 52–67.

to suppose the coming to Zion of still-hostile nations, to be surprised then by having entered a scene of judgment.

Maier suggests that the banquet of Isa 25:6–8 is like the one YHWH prepares for Babylon to make them drunk and put them to perpetual sleep (Jer 51:39). The Isaiah text, however, says nothing about the intoxicating effect of the wine (cf. Zech 12:2). The nations are not even actively drinking the wine, as in Isa 25:6 LXX and in Obad 16. As far as judgment is concerned in the scene, this only regards death and, in the subsequent verses, Moab. Like the baker in the Joseph narrative, these were already kept in custody pending their punishment at YHWH's victory banquet. The fact that the banquet has been made for *all* the nations (לכל-העמים) does not exclude the simultaneous judgment of the evil ones, just as the Pharaoh at the occasion of his birthday made a feast for *all* his servants (לכל-עבדיו), while hanging the chief baker because of his offense (Gen 40:20).¹⁸ From this and other parallel texts that use the same syntactical construction including לכל- (cf. 1 Kgs 3:15; Esth 2:18), there is no need to connect the vision of Isa 25:6–8 with prophecies about the cup of wrath. In prophecies like Obad 16 and Zech 12:2 it is explicitly made clear that the hostile nations will disappear or be devoured.

Swallowing Up

The surprise of Isa 25:6–8 is that YHWH will not swallow up the nations themselves, but only the shroud and the sheet, which are spread over them. Death will be swallowed up too.¹⁹ It is quite possible that death has a political referent and is used here as a symbol for imperialist superpowers,²⁰ but, in any case, death cannot be equated with *all* the nations, which are mentioned even thrice. The latter especially represent those peoples that, just as

18. Cf. Paul Kang-Kul Cho and Janling Fu, “Death and Feasting in the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 25:6–8),” in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, ed. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim, AIL 17 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 141: “The feast is a marked and public event, a political mechanism where some are marked for inclusion and others for exclusion from the kingdom.” For the tradition–historical connection between feasting and judgment, see Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 166–95.

19. In LXX death is the subject: κατέτινεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας. The Hebrew text in itself is ambiguous (בלע המות לנצח), but the otherwise missing object as well as the coherence with the preceding verse (same verb form) suppose that YHWH remains the subject. By using passive verb forms Theodotion and Symmachus have avoided the possible misunderstanding.

20. Cf. Hays, *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27*, 81–86.

Israel, have suffered under ruthless nations and tyrants, as they are explicitly mentioned in the psalm of thanksgiving just preceding the vision (25:1–5).²¹ In this context, it is worth noting that YHWH is said to be a refuge not just for Israel but, in general, for the poor and needy (25:4). Calling YHWH a refuge and a shelter is in Israel's psalter closely connected to Zion. Though Isa 25:1–5 has often been considered a later interpolation that interrupts the coherence of 24:21–23 and 25:6–8,²² in the present context, it anticipates the participation in YHWH's victory banquet of all peoples that have suffered under imperialistic powers.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, banquet guests are always under the protection of their host.²³ According to Ps 23:5, YHWH prepares a table for David in the presence of his enemies, anoint his head with oil and make his cup overflowing. In a similar way, the eschatological banquet communicates that YHWH really is a refuge for those who enjoy the grace of participating,²⁴ “YHWH is the only ultimate source of security. But this security is for the poor and needy. Strong peoples and ruthless nations in their pride and arrogance are not candidates for the protection YHWH provides.”²⁵

It seems appropriate to link the shroud that covers all the nations especially with suffering under tyrants. To explain the meaning of the shroud, Maier appeals to Kimḥi and brings forward an intertextual rather than contextual argument. Referring to Isa 22:8 and 28:20, he argues that the shroud must be “a metaphor for military protection,” a symbolic reference to the military means used by nations to protect themselves and to attack others.²⁶ He further interprets death as a theological metaphor for all powers that resist YHWH's claims of kingship. By making a distinction between the nations themselves and their military potential, Maier suggests that, in the end, also

21. J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 322. Cf. Andrew T. Abernethy, “Feasts and Taboo Eating in Isaiah: Anthropology as a Stimulant for the Exegete's Imagination,” *CBQ* 80 (2018): 393–408: “Since the implied recipients of God's blessing in Isaiah 24–27 are those who are marginalized in the midst of oppressive powers, the eschatological feast looms on the horizon as a symbol of great hope, of a prospective memory” (p. 400). Beuken regards 25:3 as “einen sinnvollen Auftakt zum Gastmahl für alle Völker in V 6–8” (“a meaningful prelude to the banquet for all peoples in verses 6–8”; *Jesaja 13–27*, 346).

22. See, e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 363; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 206.

23. Cho and Fu, “Death and Feasting,” 138.

24. Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 199.

25. Harold E. Hosch, “A Textlinguistic Analysis of Isaiah 25,” *HS* 47 (2006): 49–65 (quotation from p. 64).

26. Cf. Hays, *The Origins of Isaiah 24–27*, 84.

the nations can be included within the kingdom of YHWH. So, he creates a small opening for universal hope in order to bridge the hermeneutical abyss with the traditional Christian interpretation of the vision.

Also in this case, however, contextual reasoning should be given priority. When the same vision proclaims that YHWH will wipe away the tears of *all* faces, this cannot be restricted to Israel only. Curiously, Maier does not deal with the phrase. In his *Habilitationschrift*, however, he suggests that the tears were shed all over the earth because of the disgrace of Israel.²⁷ In my view, this is a rather sophisticated restriction, one that the text itself does not make.²⁸ On the contrary, the tears are on *all* faces and must be connected to the thrice-mentioned “*all* the nations” and the immediate following “*all* the earth.” Note in this regard the parallelism of מעל כל-הארץ and מעל כל-פנים. The elements with repetitive prefixed “*all*” should be interpreted in connection to each other. This means that the shroud of the nations is a symbol of their grief and mourning (cf. 2 Sam 15:30).²⁹ Both the shroud and the tears are covering the faces of all the nations.

Maier asks for what reason all the nations would be mourning, whereas the preceding hymn spoke about them as ruthless.³⁰ When, however, the nations are specifically those that have suffered under tyrant powers (Isa 25:3–5; cf. the tyrants mentioned in 13:11; 29:5, 20; 49:25), the reference is clear. In agreement with Caquot, Maier objects that the verb “to swallow up” for taking away the shroud suggests the execution of a judgment. This verb, nonetheless, may indicate the divine anger about the cause of the grieving of the nations (the tyranny of superpowers) as well as YHWH’s determination to put an end to it.³¹ It anticipates the subsequent statement on death being swallowed up by him.³²

Moab

The fact that the banquet is meant for all the nations, in a positive sense, does not preclude the simultaneous judgment on the evil ones. This is made clear by the explicit mention of Moab in Isa 25:10b–12. The vision of the

27. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, 234.

28. See also Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, 351. A similar restriction is introduced by the Babylonian Talmud, when it applies the disappearance of death to the Israelites in order to solve the tension with Isa 65:20. See Thomas Hieke, “‘Er verschlingt den Tod für immer’ (Jes 25,8a): Eine unerfüllte Verheissung im Alten und Neuen Testament,” *BZ* 50 (2006): 31–50.

29. Wildberger, “Das Freudenmahl auf dem Zion,” 379; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 359.

30. Maier, “Festbankett oder Henkersmahl?” 455.

31. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, 349.

32. Cho and Fu, “Death and Feasting,” 126.

banquet itself is confined to vv. 6–8. Immediately connected to it by the continued use of a *weqatal* phrase (וַאֲמַר), a psalm of thanksgiving is announced (25:9). It concludes in 25:10a with a כִּי phrase, which creates an inclusion with 25:6 by the repetition of בַּהֲרַר הַזֶּה.³³ Attached to the psalm, the judgment on Moab is proclaimed.

If Maier would be right with his interpretation of Isa 25:6–8, the separate mention of the judgment on Moab would be superfluous. Remarkable, however, is the ambiguous use of תַּחְתִּיר in the announcement that Moab will be trodden down (25:10b). The reference can be to YHWH, whose hand has just been mentioned (25:10a).³⁴ This, however, would have been more clear if his feet were mentioned explicitly. Maier himself prefers to understand תַּחְתִּיר as referring to the feet of Mount Zion. In line with Hans Wildberger,³⁵ most translations more neutrally have “in his place,” or “in their place” when using the plural (e.g., the NRSV). In any case, Moab is not supposed to be present on Mount Zion and to participate in the banquet. The judgment on Moab can be understood adequately as executed simultaneously with the banquet for all the nations, without disturbing the positive meaning of the latter.

The Disgrace of Israel

On the basis of syntax, Maier argues that the climactic goal of the banquet is in the *yiqtol* phrase at the end of v. 8, which announces that the disgrace of Israel will be removed from all the earth (וְהִרְפַּת עִמּוֹ יִסִּיר). Remarkably, Wildberger had considered the possibility that this phrase constitutes an addition in order to correct the impression that the distinctive position of Israel had disappeared from the scene.³⁶ I agree with Maier on his syntactical observation, though without restricting the basic meaning of the vision to the rehabilitation of Israel. The literary structure indicates that the announcement that YHWH will swallow up death is “the thematic and structural keystone of the pericope.”³⁷ It stands out as a short unicolon constituting exactly the middle of five actions that YHWH is going to perform:

33. According to Maier, it remains unclear if Isa 25:10a is a positive or negative statement (“Festbankett oder Henkersmahl?” 450). The inner connection between the Zion tradition and the motif of “rest” (see 28:12 and Ps 132), however, suggests a positive meaning (cf. 4:5–6; 51:16). Otherwise, the preposition *על* would probably have been used (cf. 30:22).

34. E.g., Hosch, “A Textlinguistic Analysis of Isaiah 25,” 62 n. 32.

35. Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27*, BKAT 10/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 537.

36. Wildberger, “Das Freudenmahl auf dem Zion,” 381.

37. Cho and Fu, “Death and Feasting,” 126.

(v. 6) . . . ועשה יהוה צבאות

(v. 7) . . . ובלע בהר הזה

(v. 8a α) בלע המות לנצח

(v. 8a β) . . . ומחה אדני יהוה

(v. 8b) . . . חרפת עמו יסיר

The actions are made up of two series that both start with making the divine subject explicit. The unicolon about death is the climactic clause of the first series, marked by *qatal* in first position.³⁸ Thus, the literary structure points to the core message of the pericope. The consolation of Israel, that its disgrace will be removed, should, therefore, not be played off against the hopeful message for the nations, that YHWH will swallow up death. They must be correlated to each other.

In the OT, the disgrace of Israel has something to do with the nations. Maier defines it as Israel's dispersion among and subjugation to foreign peoples (cf. Lam 5:1), but the disgrace of Israel, more specified, is the *effect* of these circumstances: people laughing at Israel's misery and mocking their God (see, e.g., Ps 79:10; Joel 2:17, 19). However, when יהוה צבאות manifests the glory of his kingship on Zion by punishing the host of heaven and the kings of the earth (Isa 24:21–23), the breeding ground for this mockery is washed away. With the imprisonment and final judgment of imperialistic powers, which have caused tears on every face, as a consequence also the disgrace of Israel will come to an end, taken away from all the earth by YHWH himself. When even death is swallowed up, referring to tyrant nations or to be understood as the untimely and violent death caused by them,³⁹ Israel regains its rightful place as people of YHWH among the nations.

The OT often specifically mentions neighboring countries as being inclined to laugh at Israel's misery (Pss 44:14–17; 79:4, 12; 89:42, 51–52; Ezek

38. BHS suggests to change *qatal* in *yiqtol*, but it seems better to retain the *lectio difficilior*: “He will have swallowed up death forever!” See Hieke, “Er verschlingt den Tod für immer,” 36.

39. Interestingly, Kimhi already suggested that the disappearance of death refers to “violent death and envisages a world without war and crime.” See John F. Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018), 150. Cf. John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2: *Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 729 n. 151; cf. p. 826.

5:14). Philistia, Moab, and Ammon are sometimes even mentioned by name for doing this (e.g., Jer 48:27; Ezek 16:57; 25:8; Zeph 2:8–10; cf. Isa 16:6). Therefore, it should not come as much of a surprise that a judgment oracle concerning Moab has been attached to Isa 25:6–8. It represents all the nations that have been gloating over Israel's fate. The treading down of Moab, in fact, makes concrete the removal of the disgrace of Israel.

Beyond Supersessionism

With regard to Israel, I fully share Maier's concern that its distinctive position must not be obliterated. Christian exegetes should always be aware of potential supersessionist implications of their interpretation of OT prophecy. In this respect, עַמּוֹ in 25:8 should not be applied to the nations or to the church, as Jerome and Eusebius have suggested, and more recently also Steingrimmson.⁴⁰ However, I do not think that Israel is substituted with the church when the eschatological banquet appears to be beneficial for the nations. The victory banquet on Mount Zion implies that YHWH manifests the glory of his kingship not just for his elders (24:23; cf. Exod 24:9–11) but for all the nations that participate in his banquet. Together with Israel, they are relieved from the shroud and tears that cover their faces, and even from death itself.

Maier specifically objects to the suggestion of Berges that also the nations participate in the praise of YHWH as אֱלֹהֵינוּ (25:9),⁴¹ for the previous reference to עַמּוֹ indicates the subject of the thanksgiving. I agree with this contextual argument. Moreover, “the idiom of faithful Israel” is used.⁴² However, the difference with the beginning of the confessional hymn in

40. Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 151; Sigurdur Örn Steingrimmson, *Gottesmahl und Lebensspende: Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung von Jesaja 24, 21–23, 25, 6–10a*, *Arbeits zur Text und Sprache im Alten Testament* 43 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1994), 32, 40, 50; Sigurdur Örn Steingrimmson, *Im Lichte des Herrn: Literaturwissenschaftliche Beobachtungen zur Redaktion von Jes 2, 2–25, 10a**, *Arbeits zur Text und Sprache im Alten Testament* 85 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2008), 125 n. 602, 137. His interpretation is rejected by Wim Beuken, “The Prophet Leads the Readers into Praise: Isaiah 25:1–10 in Connection with Isaiah 24:14–23 Seen against the Background of Isaiah 12,” in *Studies in Isaiah 24–27*, ed. Hendrik Jan Bosman and Harm van Grol, OTS 43 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 121–56 (esp. p. 143 n. 90).

41. Ulrich Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt*, Herder Biblische Studien 16 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1998), 189. Cf. Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, 351; Hosch, “A Textlinguistic Analysis of Isaiah 25,” 60; Wodecki, “The Religious Universalism of the Pericope Is 25:6–9,” 43.

42. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 105.

Isa 25:1 is remarkable. The singular יהוה אלהי אתה can be understood as the voice of the prophet but might just as well refer to the people of Israel represented by its elders.⁴³ The plural אלהינו follows immediately after the vision of the banquet, and Isa 25:9 is even intended to be part of it (cf. the *inclusio* בהר הזה in 25:6, 10a). This at least suggests that also the nations once will address YHWH as their God.

This does not imply, however, as Maier fears, that the honorary title “people of YHWH” is taken away from Israel. The nations can be included in Israel’s prerogatives without substituting them. The expectation of a participation of the nations, time and again, comes to the fore in the book of Isaiah.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the particularity of Israel is maintained.⁴⁵ When a few chapters earlier YHWH even calls Egypt “my people” and Assyria “work of my hands,” Israel is still called “my heritage” (19:25). In a similar way, Israel is not substituted when also the nations that participate in YHWH’s victory banquet address him as אלהינו.

Concluding Remarks

The Septuagint seems to be the first witness for interpreting 25:6–8 as an announcement of doom. Maier, however, is convinced that death does not swallow up the nations but that YHWH will swallow up death. Nevertheless, he concludes that the Greek translator has not changed or falsified the Hebrew text but has taken away the shroud that the original author had laid over his judgment oracle. In my view, this is a huge overstatement, for the Greek translation of Isaiah clearly reflects “a nationalistic bent,” emphasizing the glory of Israel, while at the same time downplaying universalistic tendencies (cf., e.g., 19:23–25).⁴⁶ Its negative interpretation of the banquet,

43. *Voice of the prophet*: Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, 343. Clements thinks of “any righteous Jew” (*Isaiah 1–39*, 206); *people of Israel*: Childs, *Isaiah*, 184.

44. Christopher T. Begg, “The Peoples and the Worship of Yahweh in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of John T. Willis*, ed. M. P. Graham, R. R. Mars and S. L. McKenzie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 33–55.

45. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom*, 39, 194. Cf. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:436.

46. *Emphasizing nationalism*: David A. Baer, “‘It’s All about Us!’: Nationalistic Exegesis in the Greek Isaiah (Chapters 1–12),” in *As Those Who Are Taught”: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL*, ed. Claire Mathews McGinnis and Patricia K. Tull, SymS 27 (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 29–47. See also his *When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66*, JSOTSup 318 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 199–230.

therefore, seems to be biased and can hardly be considered the intended meaning of the Hebrew text.⁴⁷

The tradition of the Targum is interesting, but the Targum often interprets the Hebrew text freely.⁴⁸ Also, the Jewish medieval exegetes can be quite speculative in associating and combining texts from different books and contexts. Linking the vision of Isa 25:6–8 with the prophecy on Gog and Magog (Ezek 39:17–20) is just one example of this tendency. Maier himself signals that Kimḥi, for example, fills in from Ezek 39:2 and Zech 12:2 all details that he misses in Isa 25:6–8.⁴⁹ In his *Habilitationschrift*, Maier suggests that the fact that the Hebrew Masorah notes that, apart from Isa 25:6, only Deut 31:4 has the clause *ועשה יהוה* maybe has strengthened the Jewish exegetes in bringing forward their judgment interpretation, because the latter text is about God's destruction of the nations of Canaan.⁵⁰ This does not make their interpretations less subjective. The same holds true for Maier's remark that in the Middle Ages Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimḥi experienced difficulties with their Christian and Muslim neighbors. This surely helps to understand why they could not imagine participating in an eschatological banquet together with all the nations but also reveals the tendentious character of their interpretation.

Admittedly, Christian readings have often been equally tendentious, especially when they had to serve a supersessionist theology. On this point, I understand Maier's concern and fully agree with his plea for an exegesis that respects the unique position of Israel in salvation history. This, however, does not make it necessary to give new credibility to a judgment interpretation of the vision of the eschatological banquet. In any case, intertextuality may not take precedence over careful contextual reasoning. On the basis of the Hebrew text and context, it remains valid to understand Isa 25:6–8 as a salvation oracle for both Israel and the nations.

Downplaying universalism: Cf. Arie van der Kooij, "The Old Greek of Isaiah 19:16–25: Translation and Interpretation," in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem 1986*, ed. Claude E. Cox, SCS 23 (Atlanta: SBL, 1987), 127–66.

47. Cho and Fu argue that LXX has received a hidden meaning of the ambiguous Hebrew text, but that this reading, in fact, constitutes an intended misreading of the text ("Death and Feasting," 120–25).

48. Cf. W. D. Barker, "The Condemned Rulers in Targum Isaiah's Eschatological Banquet," in *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon*, ed. G. Khan and D. Lipton, VTSup 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 315–24; Sawyer, *Isaiah through the Centuries*, 151.

49. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, 239. Cf. Barker, "The Condemned Rulers," 323.

50. Maier, *Völkerwallfahrt im Jesajabuch*, 238.