

The Septuagint (LXX) Revisited

June 30, 2020

The Septuagint Revisited

Why consider this subject?

In November 2003, I presented a Bible Class titled:

‘Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament’.

New information has come to light (to me), and I would like to share this with you.

Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

What did we learn from quotation of the OT in the NT?

- 1) It confirms the authority and relevance of the OT for sound doctrine
- 2) It demonstrates the fulfillment of prophecy
- 3) It provides a basis for godly behavior

All of this reinforces our belief that the entirety of the scriptures are profitable for our preparation as disciples of Christ.

Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

We also found that:

- Jesus and the Apostles quoted from the Old Testament in their preaching and teaching;
- There are hundreds of direct quotations of the OT in the NT;
- Nearly 50% of these are found in Matthew, Romans, and Hebrews;
- Nearly 70% of quotations come from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah; and
- Some quotations match the Hebrew OT, **some match the Greek OT**, and some match neither the Hebrew or Greek OT.

Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

1) Quotation that matches the Hebrew OT but not the Greek OT:

Matthew 27:46 (quoting from Psalm 22:1)

NT	Hebrew OT	Greek OT
My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?	My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?	O God, my God, attend to me! Why hast thou forsaken me?

Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

2) Quotation that matches the Greek OT but not the Hebrew OT:

Matthew 15:8-9 (quoting from Isaiah 29:13)

NT	Hebrew OT	Greek OT
This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with me with their lips: but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.	This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me: and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men.	This people draw near to me with their mouth; and with their lips they honour me, but their heart is far from me: And in vain do they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men.

Quotation of the Old Testament in the New Testament

3) Quotation that matches neither the Hebrew OT or Greek OT:

Ephesians 4:8 (quoting from Psalm 68:18)

NT	Hebrew OT	Greek OT
When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.	Thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men.	Thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men.

THE
SEPTUAGINT VERSION

OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT,

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION;

AND WITH
VARIOUS READINGS AND CRITICAL NOTES.



Πολλὰ μὲν θνητοὶς Γλωτταί, μία δ' Ἀθανάτοισιν.

LONDON:
SAMUEL BAGSTER AND SONS,
15, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1879.

The Greek Old Testament (aka 'The Septuagint', or LXX)

- The Greek Old Testament is commonly known as 'The Septuagint'.
- It is widely accepted that The Septuagint was translated by 70 or 72 Jews from the entirety of the Hebrew Old Testament before the First Century AD. (For the record, I have repeated this tale more than once)
- Some maintain that it was the OT Bible used by Jesus and the Apostles.

The Letter of Aristeas (2nd Century BC)

The letter is the source of the legend of the translation of the first five books of the Hebrew OT into Greek in the 3rd Century BC during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Greek king of Egypt. The letter explains that the king wanted a copy of the Greek OT for the famous library in Alexandria, Egypt. Six Jewish scholars were chosen from each of the twelve tribes, totalling seventy-two translators. This number is the basis for the name 'Septuagint' also known as LXX, both of which mean 70.

This legend is repeated in the Babylonian Talmud in the following words:

“King Ptolemy once gathered 72 Elders. He placed them in 72 chambers, each of them in a separate one, without revealing to them why they were summoned. He entered each one's room and said: "Write for me the Torah of Moshe, your teacher". God put it in the heart of each one to translate identically as all the others did.”

Origen's Hexapla (3rd Century AD)

The multiplication of [Greek OT] versions doubtless proved to be a source of increasing confusion in the 3rd century. This situation the Alexandrian theologian Origen, working at Caesarea between 230 and 240 CE, sought to remedy. In his Hexapla ("Sixfold"), he presented in parallel vertical columns the Hebrew text, the same in Greek letters, and the [Greek] versions of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint, and Theodotion, in that order... The main interest of Origen lay in the fifth column, the Septuagint, which he edited on the basis of the Hebrew...

The original manuscript of the Hexapla is known to have been extant as late as about 600 CE. Today it survives only in fragments.

Origen's Hexapla (cont'd)

Origen was a very careful scholar, but he did not observe modern editorial conventions. His version of the LXX draws from several different manuscript families and embraces readings that bring the text closer to the Hebrew text of his day. Thus, this fifth LXX column, while establishing the first “standardized text” of the Christian Church, created problems for modern scholars who would seek to recover a pre-Christian version of the LXX.

Source: The Septuagint Online www.kalvesmaki.com

Oldest Extant Greek Manuscripts of the OT

Codex Vaticanus	4 th Century CE
Codex Sinaiticus	4 th Century CE
Codex Alexandrinus	5 th Century CE

Oldest Extant Hebrew Manuscripts of the OT

Aleppo Codex	9 th Century CE
Cairo Codex	9 th Century CE
Leningrad Codex	11 th Century CE
Dead Sea Scrolls	1st Century CE (or earlier)

“It is clear from the Hebrew texts found in the Judean Desert that the MT [Masoretic Text, i.e. the Hebrew OT], on which modern English translations of the Hebrew Bible are based, is indeed an ancient text that was already stable before the time of Jesus.”

Source: *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Jobes & Silva, 2nd Ed.

The Septuagint – A Reality Check

The term Septuagint, which is used in a confusing variety of ways, gives the inaccurate impression that this document is a homogeneous unit. Important distinctions sometimes need to be made, such as the contrast between the initial translation of the Pentateuch (the Septuagint proper), the earliest translation of other books (the Old Greek), and the modern printed volumes (e.g. Rahlfs).

Strictly speaking, there is really no such thing as THE Septuagint. This may seem like an odd statement in a book titled *Invitation to the Septuagint*, but unless readers appreciate the fluidity and ambiguity of the term, they will quickly become confused by the literature.

Source: *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Jobes & Silva, 2nd Ed., p. 13-14.

The Septuagint – A Reality Check (cont'd)

Because the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures has such a long and complicated history, most of which is unknown today, the term Septuagint is used to refer to several different things. In its most general sense, the term refers to any or all Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, just as one might now refer to the "English Bible", with no particular translation in mind.

Given these typical uses of the term Septuagint, one might understandably, though mistakenly, infer that the Greek translation found in a given ancient manuscript or modern edition is a homogeneous text produced in its entirety at one point in time. In fact, no such homogeneity exists in any collection of the Greek books of the OT. Each edition - whether an ancient, hand-copied manuscript such as Vaticanus or a modern, printed book such as Rahlfs edition - is an amalgam, with each section of the Bible having a long and separate textual history. Source: *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Jobes & Silva, 2nd Ed., p. 14-15.

The Septuagint – A Reality Check (cont'd)

The variety of the translators is proved by the unequal character of the version: some books show that the translators were by no means competent to the task, while others, on the contrary, exhibit on the whole a careful translation. The Pentateuch is considered to be the part the best executed, while the book of Isaiah appears to be the very worst.

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In consequence of the fact that the New Testament writers used on many occasions the Septuagint version, some have deduced a new argument for its authority,—a theory which we might have thought to be sufficiently disproved by the defects of the version, which evince that it is merely a human work.

Source: *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek & English*, Brenton.

Peter Williams, University of Cambridge (video)

Short clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3QPONoQARQ>

Long clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB5izBva3Xc>

The Septuagint – Missing Bits & Pieces

The term Septuagint could refer to any historical stage of the Greek translation of the Old Testament. A strict, purist use of Septuagint would allow the term to be used only of the earliest, (probably) unrecoverable translation of the Pentateuch made by the Jewish scholars around 282 BCE.

LXX Jeremiah is shorter than Hebrew Jeremiah by roughly one-eighth, and the order of its chapters is quite different.

LXX Job is about one-sixth smaller than Hebrew Job, and includes an ending not extant in the Hebrew.

Almost half of the verses in LXX Esther are not found in Hebrew Esther.

LXX Exodus and Hebrew Exodus differ in many places according to order of verses, and inclusion or exclusion of words and material.

Source: The Septuagint Online www.kalvesmaki.com

The Septuagint – Chicken & Egg Problem

Paul quotes this verse [Hosea 1:10] in Rom. 9:26 in the form LXX^A, and the passage is textually secure. In other words, Rom. 9:26 must be added to the list of witnesses in support of the first variant. But how much weight should be given to this Pauline evidence? Can we simply assume that the reading in question was already present in the text used by Paul? Or is it possible that this variant originated with Paul himself and that subsequent manuscripts of the LXX were affected by what he had done? We need to remember that the scribes who copied the surviving manuscripts of the LXX were by and large Christians who would have been familiar with the NT writings. When, in the process of producing a Greek OT manuscript, they came to a passage that was quoted in the NT, they sometimes adjusted the text, either inadvertently (because of their memory of the NT form) or purposely (because they assumed that the NT form was correct).

Source: *Invitation to the Septuagint*, Jobes & Silva, 2nd Ed., p. 209.

The Septuagint quoted in the NT

Hebrews 10:5 (quoting from Psalm 40:6)

5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, **Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me**

Psalm 40:6 (KJV based on Hebrew OT)

6 **Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened**

Psalm 40:6 (LXX Greek OT)

6 **Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not; but a body hast thou prepared me**

The Septuagint quoted in the NT

a body...] So the LXX.; paraphrasing, as it does elsewhere, in a difficult passage. The Hebrew is literally: “Ears hast thou digged unto (or, for) Me”; ears into which Thy word may sink deep. The rendering of the Seventy seems to imply that they understood the passage of Messiah, whose obedience was to be exhibited in the midst of intense bodily sufferings (Psa 22:14-15).

Source: *The Speaker's Commentary - Hebrews*, Kay.

The Septuagint – Chicken & Egg Problem

The view I argue for, which some commentators have raised but typically do not pursue, apart from a recent notable example I report on later (Jobes and Silva, 2000), is that Christian scribes inserted 'body' into the Psalm text of a Greek OT translation that now survives under the name 'Septuagint' (probably coined in the Second Century CE.) This case and other systematically presented examples that I hope to publish in the future, will cumulatively provide a case for recognising Christian harmonising/scribal editing of the LXX in the light of the NT on a scale greater than is normally allowed. This in turn will require some modification of the (often generalised) view of NT dependence on (what is said to be) the LXX.

Source: *Is Hebrews 'body' language from the Septuagint?*, bro. John Adey.

The Septuagint – Chicken & Egg Problem

To-date, no text or Greek Psalms whole or part (and with ‘body’ and not ‘ears’) has turned up datable to before the NT era. So when commentators say ‘body’ is found in the LXX, readers are receiving assumptions passed on uncritically, or without qualification, to their readers. What would be more helpful to say, at the very least, is that ‘body’ occurs in that form of Greek translation traditionally called ‘the LXX’, as represented in the Christian codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus, dated no earlier than 4th – 5th centuries CE.

Source: Is Hebrews ‘body’ language from the Septuagint?, bro. John Adey.

The Septuagint – Chicken & Egg Problem

After all, 'body' in a Greek translation of the Biblical text features in fourth century CE 'Christian' LXX compilations worked-over by editors, including particularly the Alexandrian theologian Origen (ca. 185-255 CE). By contrast, Greek versions produced by Aquila (ca. 130 CE), Symmachus (ca. 170 CE) and Theodotion (end of second century CE) have 'ears' in their Psalms text, translating the Hebrew text literally.

Source: *Is Hebrews 'body' language from the Septuagint?*, bro. John Adey.

When the NT differs from the OT

In this article I argue that the NT alone is responsible for changing the form of the OT it re-uses, so there is no point in challenging the textual integrity of MT [Masoretic Text, or Hebrew OT], or seeking alternative sources which may correspond word-for-word with 'variant' NT quotations. The NT's modified re-use of a fragment of the OT will complement the earlier usage, bringing to the surface an underlying (Divinely foreknown) presupposition, or an associated aspect of meaning. Whilst I present 'complementary difference' as a phenomenon applicable to quotations, I also take it to be characteristic of Scripture as a whole.

Source: *Complementary Difference*, bro. John Adey.

When the NT differs from the OT

A 'parallel quotation' is where the NT makes repeated use, twice or more, of the same fragment of the OT...However, what is of interest here is a single OT quotation can be differently worded, or treated, within its several NT presentations.

Parallel quotations support the view that variation in quotation should be accepted as the way Divine revelation works. Such a view can be related to Gospel parallels. Having more than one Gospel and with variations between the Gospels' accounts of the same moment, can be construed (e.g., not as a "Synoptic problem" but) as a mode of presentation with complementary facets of that circumstance. Sometimes they may seem difficult to understand, or to piece together, nevertheless, their different elements combine to expound the moment, or to complete (God's view of) the picture.

Source: *Complementary Difference*, bro. John Adey.

When the NT differs from the OT

Psalms 68:18 (Hebrew OT and Greek OT)

18 Thou hast ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast **received gifts for men.**

Ephesians 4:8 (quoting from Psalm 68:18)

8 When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and **gave gifts unto men.**



Gifts received
for men



Gifts given
to men

When the NT differs from the OT

Ephesians 4:11-12

11 And **he gave** some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 **For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:**

Echo: Numbers 8:14, 18-19

14 Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites **shall be mine**...18 **I have taken** all of the Levites...19 And **I have given** the Levites **as a gift** to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, **to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation.**



Levites received
for men



Levites given
to men

The Septuagint Revisited

What have we learned?

- 1) There is no evidence that what is now called The Septuagint existed in the same form before the time of Christ
- 2) What is now referred to as The Septuagint is a patchwork quilt of different parts of the OT translated by different people, at different times, with varying degrees of quality
- 3) At best, The Septuagint that exists today can be said to have its origin in edited versions from no earlier than the 4th & 5th Centuries AD
- 4) When the NT uses different wording than the OT, these may be Divinely inspired differences that complement the OT
- 5) The reliability of the Hebrew OT (and our English OT, which is based on the Hebrew OT) has been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Septuagint (LXX) Revisited

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