

Our Church and the Septuagint  
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The Septuagint, or LXX, has always been of interest to students of the Bible and is having a time of renewed interest in the 21st Century. In simplest terms, the Septuagint is an ancient translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek.

To discuss the Septuagint is similar in many ways to discussing the Latin Vulgate. Both are ancient translations, both are deeply flawed, and both have value for the student of the Bible while in no way replacing or correcting the Masoretic Text or the Textus Receptus.

While there is some value in considering how the LXX translates certain OT passages, it is not essential for a Christian to be familiar with it the way he should be familiar with the MT and the TR. For instance, if one is reading in the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” it is much more essential to look at the original words which the Holy

Spirit breathed out, בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: then to consider the LXX translation’s ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, or the Vulgate’s “in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.” The English Bible, the Greek Septuagint, and the Latin Vulgate are all non-inspired translations of the originally inspired, perfectly preserved Hebrew OT.

The problem that is starting to present itself more frequently in the 21st Century is the tendency of Modern Versions (MV) of the English Bible to use the LXX to correct the MT in various places. I dealt with this in my analysis of the ESV,<sup>1</sup> wherein it was observed, “The ESV, in a more forward manner than other modern versions before it introduces extra-biblical authorities to the reader through the presence of “integral” footnotes, attempting to convince him that the OT text is not enough.”<sup>2</sup> In our survey of the ESV we gave numerous examples of how verse meanings are changed and verse lengths are sometimes doubled and even tripled because of the ESV utilizing the LXX to modify the translation from the Hebrew. Also, at our 2025 Tyndale Conference, Dr. Ryan Strouse demonstrated that the LXX is in many regards a poor translation of the Hebrew OT.<sup>3</sup>

All of this is said not to disparage the LXX as an ancient translation of the OT, but to point out to our church that the Septuagint, while being a useful tool to study the Bible, is at the same time deeply flawed and cannot be imagined to correct the inspired and preserved Word of God. The doctrines of inspiration and preservation do not apply to the LXX anymore than they apply to any translation of the Bible. We demonstrated that this is our church’s position in the

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<sup>1</sup> Joel R. Grassi, “A Critical Analysis of the English Standard Version of 2001,” Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 35-96.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Dr. Ryan Strouse, “Is Your Bible Changing? The Truth About Modern Textual Criticism.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfmfxLWQYvc&t=3s>

papers delivered at the 2024 Tyndale Conference, and which appear in the Journal of the Institute for Biblical Apologetics.<sup>4</sup> We thank God for any translation of the Bible insofar as they accurately reflect the underlying Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, as this is in accordance with the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to “teach all nations” and to go about “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”<sup>5</sup>

A recent and most valuable resource on the topic of the LXX is the Journal of the Reformation Bible Society Volume 1, subtitled, “The Reformation Text and the Septuagint.” For the average church member, this 200 page volume is an indispensable reference tool in understanding the value and the flaws of the LXX. The journal contains four lengthy, plenary papers, eight shorter topical papers, and three book reviews.

The opening paper by Russell T. Fuller is entitled, “The Septuagint: An Overview.” This chapter alone is of tremendous value to the student of God’s Word and provides a comprehensive reference work on the subject that answers scores of questions about the LXX. Fuller concludes, “I think that the Masoretic Text is the Old Testament for the Christian, not the Septuagint, as the Eastern Orthodox Church and others believe” (19), and, “God breathed out the Old Testament Scriptures in Hebrew, not Greek. Of course, the Septuagint was the Scriptures to many in the early church, just as English Bibles are the Scriptures to most English speakers today. The Septuagint, or any translation, is authoritative as it is consistent with the Hebrew Old Testament” (20).

The second paper by Jeffrey T. Riddle is on, “How Did the Earliest Church Use the Septuagint?” Riddle builds a robust biblical and theological case showing that the authors of NT and the Apostles did not in fact use the Septuagint, per se. While focusing on “the earliest post-incarnational church history” (26), he shows the utter absurdity of prioritizing the LXX above the Hebrew, and echoes the position of the Protestant orthodox, who “held that the Septuagint and other ancient versions might aid in the faithful translation and interpretation of the text of Scripture, but they rejected the notion that such versions might be used to correct or amend the Hebrew text itself” (29). Of utmost value is Riddle’s section on Four Challenges Regarding the NT and the LXX. First, Riddle notes that “there was no standard or uniform Septuagint at the time of the apostles” (35). This is an important point to make, so much so that we would do well to leave off from using the singular term “The Septuagint.” Secondly, Riddle points out that when a NT author quotes from a Greek translation of the OT or another ancient document, it is not a wholesale endorsement of that work. Thirdly, Riddle has an extensive section showing that “quotations of the Old Testament found in the New Testament do not uniformly follow the text of the ‘Septuagint’” (40). This third section has numerous helpful charts demonstrating that it is not accurate to make statements like “The Apostles quoted the Septuagint.” The final challenge is, in my opinion, the most important, and we quote it at length

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andrew Knight, ed., and Joel R. Grassi, contributor, Journal of the Institute for Biblical Apologetics, Vol. 1., No. 1, Winter 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matthew 28:18-20.

here: “The New Testament authors, under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, often wrote inspired content based on their own Spirit-driven interpretation and application of the Old Testament. They did so in pursuit of their own theological ends, as directed by the Holy Spirit. Such inspired content should be accepted on its own terms within the New Testament context, without unnecessary attempts to reconstruct any supposed sources they might have drawn upon, or efforts to alter or edit the formal content of the traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament, from which they did draw” (48). This highly significant point is in harmony with two articles written by Thomas M. Strouse, “Scholarly Myths Perpetuated on Rejecting the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament,” and “Christ’s Use of Targums.”<sup>6</sup> The big takeaway from this point by Riddle and Strouse is that there is no biblical reason to think that NT authors / Apostles would quote from the Septuagint when they were under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The third plenary article is by David H. Kronendonk on “The Reformation Perspective on the Septuagint,” and he surveys notable personalities from the Reformation era including Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Vermigli, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and many more. Kronendonk concludes, “we see an overall agreement that the Hebrew text is the authoritative text” (68). The final plenary article is by Christian M. McShaffrey concerning “Does the Septuagint Matter?” This is an excellent overview of the philosophical issues motivating various groups’ appeal to the LXX. McShaffrey concludes, “We grant that there were also plenty of versions available in the days of Jesus, but he had only one in mind when he said, “Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). It is only the Hebrew Text that contains the jots and titles - which alone possess the inspired attribute of *authoritas verborum* - so his promise applies most directly, and perfectly, to no version (however so ancient)” (83).

The six short articles cover an array of helpful subjects related to the Septuagint including, “Robert Baillie's Defense of the Hebrew Masoretic Text” by Matthew Vogan, “Andrew Willet and the Use of the Septuagint in His *Hexapla*” by Peter Van Kleeck Sr., “On Bois, Burgon, and the Best Use of the Septuagint” by David Pittman, “The Supposed Missing 1 Verse in Psalm 145” by Larry Brigden, “A Protestant Response to the Eastern Orthodox Old Testament” by Brett Mahlen, “Reformed Epistemology and Augustine’s Belief in the Septuagint” by Peter Van Kleeck Jr., “Did the Apostles Favor the Septuagint?” by Paul J. Barth, and “An Analysis of the Septuagint and Old Testament Translations” by Jonathan D. Arnold. Each article provides the reader with valuable information and critical thinking regarding the LXX. Of particular note is Brigden’s piece on Psalm 145, wherein he demonstrates that although Psalm 145 is an acrostic, it is in fact a broken acrostic as many other Psalms and OT passages, and that we need not assume that God originally gave the 1 verse but it was lost in the Hebrew only to be restored by the translators of the LXX. Passages like this often get exploited by adherents to the Critical Text mindset, purporting to know what God intended but failed to accomplish apart from

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary Journal, Vol. 1, No.1, Spring 2005, and Vol. 3. No. 1, Spring 2007 respectively. Both of these articles are accessible at the website of Bible Baptist Theological Seminary - <https://www.bbc-cromwell.org/articles.shtml>.

the intercession of text critics. The Bible is filled with apparent discrepancies and contradictions that have been placed there on purpose by the all wise Author of holy writ.

Finally, the journal concludes with three book reviews of recent works on the LXX. These balanced reviews provide additional reference material for the Bible student interested in the topic of the Septuagint, and the entire journal serves as a compendium of works that may be cited for research on this topic.

The following conclusions must be drawn from this overview: 1) The LXX is a translation of the OT, and therefore has to be assessed as such, 2) John the Baptist, Christ, the Apostles, and the authors of the NT did not utilize the LXX over the Hebrew Bible, 3) Christ directly refers to the Hebrew Bible in passages such as Matthew 5:18 and Luke 24:44, and the Apostles refer to the Hebrew Bible in passages such as Acts 15:21 and Romans 3:2, 4) as an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, the LXX is a valuable reference work for the student of the Bible, 5) however, the LXX is deeply flawed in many ways and contains many additions, subtractions, and modifications of the Word of God in violation of Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:6, and Revelation 22:18-19, 6) it is inconceivable and unbiblical to use the LXX to correct the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text of the Bible was given by inspiration of God and was kept by preservation of God. We are thankful that the preserved text of the Bible has been made available to the nations through translations, but no translation, whether an excellent one like the KJV or a poor one like the LXX, can be used to correct the originally inspired words of God, and 7) it would be a good exercise for all of us students of God's Word to produce our own Greek translations of the Hebrew OT. This would cause us to become more knowledgeable of both original languages, and would help us think biblically about how the two testaments relate. The LXX is not the final authority, and anyone who desires to do so could produce, with humble dependance upon the Lord, an accurate translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek, and of the Greek NT into Hebrew.