

Did the NT writers “quote” the Septuagint?

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Introduction

The study of the Septuagint is a specialist study within Biblical Studies, more so than other areas of the discipline like, say, ‘Pauline Studies’.¹ The specialism requires fluency in Greek and Hebrew, knowledge of Linguistics and particularly translation theory, Textual Criticism, and Second Temple Judaism. Referencing the LXX in exegetical studies is something to be exercised with caution.

The consensus of NT scholars is that the apostles quoted the Septuagint. This generalisation is ubiquitous, **but** for any particular text, the judgments (especially in the research literature) are more tendentious. Scholars may disagree whether this or that text is ‘dependent’ on the Septuagint. Another observation is that scholars conduct their analysis in human terms and theological considerations to do with inspiration are absent. Further, analysis tends to be focused on the text, rather on the apostle and what it means to say that they ‘quoted’ the Septuagint. This essay addresses these deficiencies.

The case usually made is twofold: first, and primarily, the apostles had a loose collection of texts (Hebrew *and* Greek) and it would make sense to quote the Septuagint when writing to the Greek-speaking Diaspora because that audience read the LXX; secondly, there is correspondence between the Greek of the LXX and the NT text which shows quotation of the LXX. Our counter-argument will shift attention from audience to **author**, highlight any **lack of correspondence**, and suggest that in some cases distinctive corresponding theology in the LXX is the result of Christian scribes **harmonising the LXX** with the NT text. This argument is designed to support the hypothesis that the NT writers did not ‘quote’ the Jewish Greek Scriptures but they did use them and were influenced by its language.

Distinctions

There are many distinctions in terminology in Septuagint Research. If a recent ‘introduction’ to the Septuagint can comment, “The reader is cautioned, therefore, that there really is no such thing as the Septuagint”, and observe, “We have no evidence that any Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, or even of the Pentateuch, was called the “Septuagint” prior to the second century of this era”,² we should define our terms carefully. There is a danger of historical anachronism if we simply attribute quotation of ‘the Septuagint’ to the apostles.

We use the term ‘Jewish Scriptures’ to refer to the writings held to be Scripture by Jews in Jesus’ day regardless of language. The writings might have varied for the sects of Judaism as might have the language (witness the DSS). We use the term ‘Hebrew Scriptures’ to refer to the consonantal Masoretic text insofar as that represents the standard text of the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew in Jesus’ day. In recent decades, ‘Old Greek’ (OG) has become common to refer to the *original* translation of a book into Greek with ‘Septuagint’ a more general term for the Jewish Scriptures in Greek in the Second Temple era and later by the Christian Church.³

Accordingly, we take ‘the Septuagint’ to be a textual historian’s term of art for the Jewish Scriptures in Greek in the Second Temple period, a term taken from later centuries and applied earlier in full knowledge of the anachronism. Thus, the issue under debate is not terminological, but for greater accuracy, we will often use the phrase ‘Jewish Scriptures in Greek’ rather than ‘the Septuagint’. Correspondingly, we will not retroject the term ‘Masoretic’ back into the Second Temple period using the

¹ M. Hengel observes, Septuagintal study is “completely dominated in reality by specialists in LXX research...because it is so complicated” in *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 19.

² K. H. Jobes and M. Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 32, 89.

³ R. T. McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 7; Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 326-327.

idea of a ‘proto-MT’. This term comes with too much baggage for our purposes; we will simply talk of the ‘Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew’.

Multi-Lingualism

The contended evidence as to whether the apostles actually used the Septuagint (or not) lies in their writings. But their quotation of the Jewish Scriptures, their allusions and echoes, is such that there is **variation and agreement** from both the Hebrew *and* Greek of the Jewish Scriptures insofar as we have them in our critical editions. Thus, it isn’t a simple matter of observing correspondence in Greek between the NT and the OT in order to conclude that we have use of the Septuagint. The only course of action is to take a writer or a book or a text and consider this question in detail for the actual words, phrases and syntax.

There are some preliminary considerations before looking at texts. Galilee was a multi-lingual environment with Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew spoken. Given the affinity of Aramaic and Hebrew, it is not implausible to hypothesize that the writing disciples were to some extent tri-lingual (traditionally,⁴ Matthew, Peter, John, James, and Jude; John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20). Further, because of his Pharisaic education, it is not implausible that Paul of Tarsus was tri-lingual (Acts 21:40; 22:6; 26:14). Traditionally, Luke has been taken to be a Gentile (Col 4:11, 14) and of Asia Minor (Acts 16:10); this would favour his first language being Greek, but the literary Greek of Luke-Acts betrays Semitic influences that allows us to infer Luke was tri-lingual (Luke 23:38). The point here is that we are dealing with (a) at least five Galileans and their knowledge (or not) of the Septuagint; and (b) at least one Diasporan Jew and a Gentile.

S. Freyne observes that “the evidence from inscriptions and other indicators suggests that a pattern of *diglossia*, and possibly *triglossia* (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) operated” in Galilee.⁵ J. L. Reed observes,

There is no doubt that the urban elites in Sepphoris⁶ were more Hellenized than rural Galileans. Much of their life functioned in Greek and they were likely at ease in a bilingual atmosphere, whereas rural areas tended to be pronouncedly Aramaic.⁷

Galilee was a small area and the disciples were probably all rural—Greek and Aramaic bilingualism to some extent need not be doubted. However, the quality of some of the disciples’ Greek would have been limited compared to their Aramaic. We can see this later in the relative quality of, say, the Greek of Mark; but more generally, the evidence suggests that Greek would be more common for commerce and perhaps more widely known among the upper classes, while Aramaic was the language of the common man; inscriptional evidence suggests more Greek used in Lower Galilee than in Upper Galilee and in Judea.⁸ The point here is that disciples like Peter and John likely had relatively poor knowledge of Greek. This observation impacts what we might say of their exposure to (or use of) the Jewish Greek Scriptures—for them it would have been the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew. It also places a question mark over their later *expositional* use of the Septuagint, which we might reasonably say requires a good level of Greek. Of course, this point does not apply to Luke or Paul, but this only goes to show that the likelihood of whether the apostles used the Septuagint is not to be equally distributed among them.

⁴ It is beyond our scope to argue that Peter is the author of Mark and his epistles, or that John is the author of his traditional texts, or that Matthew, James and Jude are the respective authors of their texts. We will assume for this essay that the traditional authors are all apostles.

⁵ S. Freyne, *Galilee Jesus and the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 171-172. See A. Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), chap. 5.

⁶ Sepphoris, a major Greek city, was 5km from Nazareth.

⁷ J. L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 134. See also M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (2 vols; Repr; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 1:104-106.

⁸ L. H. Feldman, “Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism in the First Century” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (ed. H. Shanks; London: SPCK, 1993), 1-39 (19-23).

What of Hebrew? P. J. Tomson, noting that the characteristic Qumran documents are in Hebrew, as well as other popular literature like *Jubilees*, *The Apocalypse of Enoch* and *The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira*, and that Hebrew has been found in ordinary and government correspondence, observes that “multilingualism must be constantly kept in mind as the ancient Jewish and Jewish-Christian documents are interpreted”.⁹ Certainly, as any ‘Introduction’ to Aramaic will show,¹⁰ the similarities between Hebrew and Aramaic are such as to make the understanding of Hebrew easy for devout Aramaic-speaking Jews in Jesus’ day. Hebrew may well have been the first language for many, and for many the distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew might not have been any barrier for them.¹¹ The relative distribution of Hebrew and Aramaic is not our concern here; our point is the minimal one made by M. Hengel, who observes that Hebrew was “the sacred language of religious worship and of scribal discussion” in Judea and Galilee.¹² His point about **scribal discussion** is important but Tomson adjusts Hengel’s historical judgment when he notes that with the displacement of the Jews after AD70, Hebrew *eventually* became limited to prayers, scholarly discussions and the rabbinical literature.¹³ The two great centres of Rabbinic Judaism were to be Palestine and Babylon precisely because of the affinity of Hebrew and Aramaic.¹⁴

If we assume that the disciples were ordinary working individuals until their calling by Jesus, we can presume that they were multilingual to some extent and that any exposure to the Jewish Greek and Hebrew Scriptures would have been through Synagogue (Luke 4:17; Josephus, *Apion* 2.175; Philo *Mos.* 2.216).¹⁵ We may suppose that there were Greek speaking synagogues as well as Aramaic and Hebrew speaking ones in Galilee and we have no reason to deny that both Greek and Hebrew Scriptures were in use for their respective types of Synagogue. The disciples may have been exposed to both Scriptures but obviously we have no knowledge of their lives before they met Jesus: however, the probability is that insofar as the disciples were likely to have been rural labourers and tradesmen, their exposure to Scripture would have been in Hebrew with Aramaic and/or Hebrew commentary (following Neh 8:8). G. F. Moore comments,

In the Palestinian synagogues the lessons were read in Hebrew, and an interpreter standing beside the reader translated them into Aramaic.¹⁶

However, in addition, for the disciples, if ‘scribal discussion’ of Scripture was in Hebrew, we may infer that beginning with their following of Jesus the Rabbi (Mark 9:5; John 3:2), **he discussed the Scriptures**

⁹ P. J. Tomson, *If this be from heaven...’ Jesus and the New Testament Authors in their relationship to Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 41.

¹⁰ F. E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic* (2nd ed.; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), chap. 3.

¹¹ Scholars debate the relative balance of spoken Hebrew and Aramaic in Galilee, Samaria and Judea in terms of area and region (urban/rural), class distribution (upper/lower) and contextual setting (commerce, religious, home). The argument is focused on Hebrew and its distribution rather than Aramaic. Key studies arguing for a spoken use of Hebrew are M. H. Segal “Mišnaic Hebrew and Its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic” *JQR* 20/4 (1908): 647-737; H. Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1954); J. M. Grintz, “Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the Second Temple” *JBL* 79/1 (1960): 32-47. For a recent review and discussion of the status of this issue see L. T. Stuckenbruck, “‘Semitic Influence on Greek’: An Authentication Criterion in Jesus Research?” in *Jesus, Criteria and the Demise of Authenticity* (eds. C. Keith and A. Le Donne; London: T&T Clark, 2012), 73-94. Stuckenbruck interestingly comments that the current ‘Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research’ thinks that the main language of Jesus’ instructions was Hebrew (80, fn. 36).

¹² M. Hengel, *The ‘Hellenization’ of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 8, 9; see all of chap. 2, “The Linguistic Question and its Cultural Background”.

¹³ Tomson, *If this be from heaven...’*, 40.

¹⁴ S. J. D. Cohen, “Judaism to the Mishnah: 135-220 C.E.” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (ed. H. Shanks; London: SPCK, 1993), 195-213 (209-212).

¹⁵ For a description of the role of priests, Levites, as well as scribes and Pharisees in weekly (Sabbath) teaching see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 197-199; 170-172.

¹⁶ G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (3 vols; Hendrickson, repr. 1997), 1:303; he cites the evidence of the Mishnah; see also 1:101, 288.

with them with reference to the Hebrew (Acts 26:14); and as we shall argue below, an authority attached to the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew that did not attach to the Greek.

Peter and John were uneducated and laymen and they surprised the council of rulers, elders and scribes, with their use of Scripture; but the leaders of the people perceived that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13) and this explained their competence. This comment of the narrator does not allow us to exclude any particular knowledge on the part of Peter and John; it does allow us to conclude that Jesus had taught his disciples how to interpret Scripture. The Scriptures that Jesus used in exposition would have been their model, particularly for conflict and discussion with those who were learned in Scripture. If, in Judea and Galilee, Hebrew was used for scribal discussion, then our best presumption is that Jesus taught his disciples in this way.¹⁷

A **Hebrew exemplar**¹⁸ is the most likely text for Jesus' view that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). An interesting incidental confirmation of this can be seen in how Jesus addresses such groups as the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes. He expects Jewish teachers to have *read* the Scriptures: 'Have you never read'; but the crowds are addressed with 'Ye have *heard* it said...'. The point here is that Jesus regards the role of a teacher as one which would have required a grounding in the *close reading* of Scripture not just hearing it read aloud at Synagogue. Close reading and discussion/debate over the text presupposes that society has a fairly fixed text; otherwise, Jesus would not have made the parenthetical remark about 'breaking' Scripture.

The purpose of this preliminary discussion is to establish the likely competency of the apostles in Greek on the basis of general considerations, given that we have none of their biographies. This is important because the main problem we will encounter in the 'distinctive' textual evidence, considering whether the apostles used the Septuagint, is **the direction of conformity**: does this or that text show the apostle used the Septuagint, or has the Septuagint been aligned with the NT text in the course of its copying by Christian scribes?¹⁹

Paul, Luke and James have the best literary Greek; we can reasonably suppose they had knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek. They are part of the literary co-text and part of the general influence on them as writers. Matthew, Peter, Jude and John have poorer literary Greek but it varies by writing. A. J. Tomasino comments that "the life of a Galilean peasant would not have been conducive to deep study and mastery of a difficult foreign tongue".²⁰ In terms of their writing Greek in later life, it is possible that they had help. According to Josephus, the Jews of his class did not value language learning (*Ant.* 20:263) and he himself employed Greek translators to assist him in his work (*Ap.* 1:50). His first edition of the *War of the Jews* was in Hebrew.

Papias records of Matthew, "So then, Matthew compiled the oracles in the Hebrew language; but everyone interpreted them as he was able" (*HE* 3.39.16).²¹ The presence of Aramaic and Hebrew behind the composition of the Gospels and Acts is also shown in the classic studies of Max Wilcox, *The Semitisms*

¹⁷ That Jesus' first language would have been Aramaic and/or Hebrew has often been stated; fluency in both makes the judgment as to which was his 'first' language somewhat redundant. For a recent study see C. Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LHJS 8/LNTS 413; London T & T Clark, 2011).

¹⁸ On the likelihood of a Jerusalem archive of exemplar texts see Hengel, *Judaism & Hellenism*, 1:101f; the practice follows 2 Kgs 22:8-13 and is confirmed by Josephus, *Ant.* 3.38; 4.303; 5.61; War 6.150, 162.

¹⁹ Silva and Jobes, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 97, note that almost all manuscripts of the Septuagint are from the fourth century or later, in codices that include the NT, and are by Christian scribes—they comment: "the question arises whether they edited the Old Testament readings in the light of Christian theology"—their own view is that this was minimal.

²⁰ A. J. Tomasino, *Judaism before Jesus* (Downers-Grove, Il.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 226.

²¹ For all the evidence relating to Matthew and Hebrew see J. R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

of Acts and Max Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*,²² even if such studies are hypothetical (being based on the later Aramaic of the Targums). Scholars have long discussed how the Gospel message moved from an Aramaic and Hebrew oral background to a written Greek record. This discussion is not our focus; our point is simply that the disciples were likely **not brought up with much exposure to the Jewish Greek Scriptures**.

Paul's Pharisaic training in Jerusalem is important for deciding the relative value he placed on the Jewish Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. Acts states that he was brought up at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel "and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5). S. Moyise comments, "If the tradition about Gamaliel is correct, he would have known the Hebrew scrolls in use in Jerusalem and perhaps the LXX scrolls from Tarsus".²³ Moyise goes on to ask, "So when Paul introduces a phrase or sentence with an introductory formula (IF) such as 'it is written', we have to ask ourselves which version of the Scriptures he has in mind".²⁴ Moyise' statement carries an assumption that Paul regards the Hebrew and Greek as equally 'Scripture'; this is unlikely—Paul would have recognised the distinction between the Hebrew original and the Greek translation. Paul's concept of 'Scripture' is that it is 'given by inspiration' (2 Tim 3:16) and, the legend of Aristeas notwithstanding (see below), it is unlikely Paul thought of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek as 'given' by God and therefore 'Scripture'. It is also unlikely that he thought of 'all' of the Greek translation of the Scriptures as "profitable for reproof, for doctrine, for instruction and training in righteousness". Certainly, Paul does not use any of the additional material we have in the Septuagint today. Moyise uses the concept of a 'version', but we have no evidence that Paul had such an idea—a 'translation' is not a 'version'. Even if we affirm that Paul used the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, say, in his Diasporan preaching, this historical supposition does not mean we can then say he thought of such writings as equally 'Scripture'.

Sources and Materials

It is not difficult to itemize how sources can be used by a writer: they may have access to scrolls (individual books would have been on scrolls); they may use their memory of a source; they may consult other's recollection of a source, *and so on*. Ownership of scrolls was confined to those with wealth as well as synagogues.²⁵ The apostles may have had access to scrolls because they owned some (2 Tim 4:13), or through wealthy individuals in the churches. Their memory of the Jewish Scriptures would have come from the Synagogue, hearing the lessons and talking (cf. Luke 4:16-30). In Lower Galilee, the disciples probably attended Aramaic or Hebrew speaking synagogues which would have used Hebrew scrolls with Aramaic *and* Hebrew commentary (cf. the sectarian DSS which are in Hebrew as an example of the insular use of Hebrew). In Tarsus, Paul's experience may have included exposure to the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, but his Pharisaic training in Jerusalem would have trained him in the art of scribal discussion in Hebrew (cf. his use of Hebrew before the Council—Acts 22). Jesus' engagement with the authorities over Scripture would likewise have referenced the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew using Hebrew and/or Aramaic.²⁶

We cannot presume access, say, to an Isaiah scroll at the time of writing a quotation (although the small village of Nazareth had one!), and then a moment's later access to a scroll of the Minor Prophets for a merged quote, say, of Isaiah and Joel. The question of whether the apostles used the Septuagint cannot presuppose such a convenient picture of a study, desk and pigeon-holes full of the scrolls of the individual books of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek. We know something of the writing circumstances of

²² Max Wilcox, *The Semitisms of Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Max Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). For an overview of criticizing research since Wilcox and Black, see L. T. Stuckenbruck, "An Approach to the New Testament through Aramaic Sources: the Recent Methodological Debate" *JPS* (1991): 3-29.

²³ S. Moyise, *Paul and Scripture* (London: SPCK, 2010), 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, 158-166.

²⁶ Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, 140-147.

some of Paul's letters (prison),²⁷ but not the other books, although tradition locates the writing of Revelation to some sort of confinement on Patmos.

Luke used source materials for his history (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1); for the other two Synoptics, scholars have developed theories about their underlying sources. Whether the theories are true or not, the implication for our question of whether the apostles used the Septuagint is complicated by them because they introduce the idea that scriptural material was embedded in a variety of sources (other than a scroll) and may have been simply *taken over* by the apostolic author rather than used. Thus, the source of such scriptural material might, in addition to memory, be lists of texts, pesher-like commentaries, Targum paraphrases, other historical accounts of Jesus and the birth of the church, interviews with witnesses, local ecclesial writing, *and so on*.

The more complex we see the reality of the writing environment of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the less clear it becomes that their scriptural usage is simply from a Septuagintal scroll. The scholarly analysis of the NT's use of the OT that a Bible student might encounter might be as simple as the generalised claim that 'the writer is here using the Septuagint'. More specialized monographs like that of Wilcox are likely to be more tendentious and consider the use of the Hebrew both in a proto-Masoretic tradition and alternative traditions; Septuagint and non-Septuagint traditions; as well as the Jewish Targums.

The consideration of different and competing sources for scriptural usage (and the attending scholarly dispute) arises because of differences between the NT text and what has come down to us of the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. There are two further dimensions to the problem that we need to highlight. The first is the kind of 'use' being made of a source. For example, scholars might talk of a 'Septuagintal style' in Luke-Acts which is a kind of 'influence' of the Jewish Greek Scriptures in Luke-Acts;²⁸ this may be unconscious or conscious on the part of Luke. If so, it is a kind of 'use' of the Jewish Greek Scriptures, but it is more general than, say, 'quotation'. The stronger idea of 'use' is quotation, with allusions and echoes being less strong in their kind of 'use'. Different judgments about the kind of 'use' are made by scholars for different texts in respect of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

The second dimension to the problem of sources (alluded to above) is the manuscript evidence for the text of the Jewish Greek Scriptures. How faithful are they to the original? Has their transmission by Christian scribes led to harmonisation? The textual transmission of the Septuagint is complex and scholars have neglected harmonisation with the NT as an explanation for the co-incidence of the Greek in distinctive texts. A good illustration of this would be the example in R. T. McLay's introductory book *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*; his first chapter which is a case-study of the use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:16-18 (pp.17-36) illustrates this point. His case-study is all about identifying the source for this quotation, but considerations to do with Christian 'harmonisation' are missing in his analysis.

There is also a question of definition and identity involved in this issue of the 'use' of the Septuagint. This arises from the fact that 'the Septuagint' is a translation whereas 'Scripture' is a concept to do with authorship—writing **given** by God. For example, Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, wrote in French and Latin; his writings have been translated into English. English speaking philosophy students quote 'Descartes' but *use* an edition of his work in English such as that of Anscombe and Geach. The Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew were deemed to be 'original' and 'of God'—to say that the apostles used the Septuagint does not allow us to infer that they thereby *quoted* the Septuagint—rather, they were quoting Scripture—unless they thought that the Greek Scriptures were 'of God'.

From our discussion, we can see that correspondence between the Greek of the Septuagint tradition and the NT could be due to a number of different (competing or complementary) factors:

- A direct confirming use by the apostle of a Greek scroll to hand—or such use by an amanuensis directed by the apostle.

²⁷ See J. A. T. Robinson, *Re-dating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), chap. 3.

²⁸ This is a simplification; Silva and Jobes, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 113, observe that "the line between syntax and style is not clearly drawn in most discussions".

- Memory recall by the apostle of the relevant Greek text in the Jewish Scriptures with a view to using that text regardless of the corresponding Hebrew.
- Consultation of a Greek scroll to hand by the apostle for the purposes of translating the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Consultation with others who had knowledge of the translation into Greek of the Jewish Scriptures, again with a view to translating the Hebrew.
- The memory of the apostle or an aide that has been influenced by prior use of the Greek Scriptures, with a view to translating the Hebrew.
- Mixed Hebrew/Greek recall by the apostle of Scripture.
- Spirit-gifted recall of Hebrew Scripture coupled with spirit-gifted use of a foreign language.
- Scribes (Christian) harmonising Septuagintal manuscripts in line with the NT text (or vice-versa).
- Use of sources (in the gospels) which have scriptural material which the writer simply ‘takes over’.
- Use of natural common Greek to translate common Hebrew, i.e. Greek that would naturally have been chosen by any Greek translator of the Jewish Hebrew Scriptures.
- Use of Greek influenced by translation precedents established by Greek translators of the Jewish Hebrew Scriptures, e.g. in matters of Semitic idiom, syntax, loan words, and semantic borrowing.

The above list of possibilities offers natural and supernatural explanations of kinds of ‘use’. Generally, questions of inspiration do not figure in scholarly discussion on ‘the use of the Septuagint’ i.e. it looks at the NT writers rather than the Spirit in answering the question of what is the *source* for a use of the Jewish Scriptures. McLay states, “The procedure that has been outlined above addresses **all of the issues** [my emphasis] that have been raised in this volume with respect to determining the origin of a quotation due to the problems of the textual evidence, the methods of citation, and the role that TT can play in the analysis of the texts”.²⁹ From our point of view, McLay does not consider inspiration as a reason why there is agreement and variation in Scriptural usage. If all Scripture is given by inspiration, then the Spirit is essential to the causal explanation of the agreement and variation between the Old and New Testaments (see below).

Attitudes

We have evidence of a range of attitudes towards the Jewish Scriptures in Greek. This might not be surprising, but a consideration of attitude is important to this debate: did the apostles consider the Jewish Scriptures in Greek to carry equivalent authority to the Hebrew originals? The following evidence shows contemporary attitudes:

- 1) There was a distinction between the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew and translations in terms of **authority**:

For the same things uttered in Hebrew, and translated into another tongue, have not the same force in them: and not only these things, but the law itself, and the prophets, and the rest of the books, have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language. *Sirach Prolog* (KJV)

Jesus ben Sirach (ca. 2c. BCE) is here distinguishing commentary on Scripture as well as translations of Scripture and ascribing less ‘force’ to both commentary and translations.

- 2) There was a distinction between a narrow canon of books and other books. The Septuagint has a wider range of books from after the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Josephus’ apologetic work, *Against Apion*, is evidence of less authority being ascribed to the later Septuagintal books:

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from, and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little

²⁹ McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*, 135.

short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but has not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time... *Ag. Ap.* 38-41

While scholars disagree on how Josephus' 22 books match the 24 books of the traditional Hebrew Bible, our point is that the books included with the LXX that are later than Artaxerxes were considered of **inferior status**. This raises the question as to whether a distinction in authority also obtained with regard to the expansions and additions in the earlier books of the Septuagint (Genesis to Malachi), those held to be written prior to Artaxerxes.

3) A more positive view of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek can be seen in the *Letter to Aristeas* (ca. 2c. BCE). Jobs and Silva, following a standard scholarly view, speculate that the legend of how the Septuagint (Pentateuch) was translated with seventy two translators using Torah scrolls from Jerusalem (cf. 2 Macc 2:13ff) is an apologetic defending the translation against criticism.³⁰ The allusions in Aristeas' account are to the bestowal of the Spirit upon the seventy elders under Moses and this is a way of claiming divine inspiration for the translation. Philo agrees in thinking the translation was inspired (*Mos.* 2.37).³¹ Correspondingly, however, there must have been criticism of the translation of the Torah into Greek on the part of the Jerusalem hierarchy, acting as a catalyst.³²

These views, (1)-(3), are illustrations. The Christian sect does not have to take over the common views of its day, but Paul sets the standard of doctrine in his statement that "All Scripture is given by inspiration". If NT writers are writing Scripture, then it is equally given by inspiration. This has an implication for identifying *what* it is that is quoted, alluded to or echoed in the use of earlier Scripture. The doctrine implies that the Spirit would quote, allude to or echo *its own writing*. There is no language barrier for the Spirit; this is shown by the gift of tongues. The argument that an apostle would use a Greek translation because of a language barrier on the part of his audience has no relevance for the Spirit. In terms of the superintendence of the Spirit over matters of language, our biographical information for the apostles is that they were multi-lingual. This is precisely the quality required if the Spirit is to quote, allude to and echo **its own Hebrew and Aramaic writing** in Greek,³³ and for that Greek to have the authoritative status of 'Scripture' for the Roman Diaspora.

It can be overlooked that 'Scripture' just is the ordinary word for 'writing' (γραφή). What was written is therefore central to the concept of 'Scripture'. A doctrine that some writing cannot be broken (John 10:35) illustrates an attitude towards a body of writing that carries an implication about language. It is the language itself in which the quality of being unbreakable inheres (this doctrine is consistent with later rabbinical views); this is confirmed by Jesus' 'jot and tittle' saying (Matt 5:18). The reliance on words and phrases in the Hebrew original in apostolic exegesis continues this aspect of Jesus' teaching.

In terms of the question-title of this paper then, our answer is that **the Spirit does not quote the Septuagint**; it quotes its own writing which was in Hebrew and Aramaic. It did this in Greek and multi-lingual individuals were involved. Knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek and in Hebrew, humanly speaking, will have varied among the NT writers. But the promise of the Spirit was that things would be taught and brought to remembrance (John 14:26). The coincidence here is that for devout Jews the reference body of Scriptures was in Hebrew; precision in exposition and scribal dialogue required such a

³⁰ Jobs and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 34.

³¹ Note, however, Philo's use of Josh 1:5, which agrees with Heb 13:5 in its Greek, but corresponds to the MT rather than the Septuagint.

³² Hengel, *Judaism & Hellenism*, 1:213.

³³ This is the pattern for the Bible student—to relate the NT Greek to the OT Hebrew; the Septuagint may be historically interesting and give some context in early Jewish interpretation, but it is exegetically irrelevant for intertextual interpretation.

reference point. Jesus and Paul agree in this doctrine of Scripture and they set the standard for the Christian Ecclesia.

Examples

The thesis that the Spirit does not quote the Jewish Greek Scriptures is **theological**. It translates into the text-historical hypothesis that the NT writers do not ‘quote’ the Jewish Greek Scriptures—instead, they *use* them and are *influenced* by their language. The discussion of this hypothesis does not revolve around the common, natural, and ordinary Greek shared between the NT and the Greek OT, but rather the distinctive words and phrases in the NT that are in the Greek OT but without literal counterparts in the Hebrew Bible. We will take examples to illustrate the arguments.

(1) **Kyrios**. Is the use of *Kyrios* in NT quotations evidence of the apostle’s quotation of the Greek Jewish Scriptures? J. A. Fitzmyer, in an essay originally published in 1975, stated:

Moreover it seems clear that the widespread use of *kyrios* in the so-called LXX manuscripts dating from Christian times is to be attributed to the habits of Christian scribes. Indeed, the widespread use may well have been influenced by the use of *kyrios* for Yahweh in the NT itself...As far as I know, there is no earlier dated manuscript [than A.D. ±200] of the so-called LXX which uses *kyrios* for *Yahweh*.³⁴ (Fitzmyer’s italics)

There aren’t actually many manuscripts to discuss, but G. Howard, after a review of the evidence of OG manuscripts, has stated:

From these findings we can now say with almost absolute certainty that the divine name, יהוה, was not rendered by κύριος in the pre-Christian Greek Bible, as so often has been thought.³⁵

However, A. Pietersma has counter-argued for the originality of *Kyrios* in the OG Pentateuch by discussing four key early Greek texts, questioning whether their lack of *Kyrios* is good evidence for Howard’s view.³⁶ Pietersma comments,

What we have tried to do thus far in our survey is to emphasize that of the four early texts that have been cited in support of an original tetragram, one gives no evidence at all, a second is non-Septuagintal, and a third contains hebraizing revisions (including at least one instance of the tetragram). Only one text, 4QLXXLevb, would seem to have good credentials as a typical exemplar of the LXX.³⁷

This doesn’t signal a shift in scholarly opinion due to new evidence of which Fitzmyer could not have been aware; (his essay was subsequently then included in his 1979 collection.) What we have here is ongoing conflicting scholarly analysis and assessment rather than recent, updating or correcting work by Pietersma and Cox of Fitzmyer—their targets are much older. They themselves cite other contemporary scholars, besides Fitzmyer, with whom they disagree.³⁸

In a private communication, J. W. Adey, a research student at Cambridge in 2007, commented to me,

³⁴ J. A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Atlanta: JBL Monograph Series No. 25; Scholars Press, 1979), 121; see also his n. 44 & n.51, 138-9.

³⁵ G. Howard, “The Tetragram and the New Testament” *JBL* 96/1 (1977): 63-83 (65).

³⁶ Albert Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original Septuagint” in *De Septuaginta* (eds. Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox; Mississauga, ON: Benben, 1984), 85-101. See also John William Wevers, “The Rendering of the Tetragram in the Psalter and Pentateuch: A comparative Study,” in *The Old Greek Psalter and Pentateuch: Studies in Honor of Albert Pietersma* (eds. Robert J. V. Hiebert, Claude E. Cox, and Peter J. Gentry; JSOTSup 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 21-35.

³⁷ Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram”, 92.

³⁸ That a form of the tetragram was original to the LXX has been argued for since Origen and Jerome (a fact noted by Pietersma and Cox, p. 85).

I recall here that in a Cambridge seminar in 2007 on “The Greek Bible: Transmission and Reception”³⁹ Emanuel Tov (Jerusalem) publicly stated that the Greek representations of the Divine name, like the aforementioned ΙΑΩ or paleo-Hebrew (pre-exilic Hebrew script) forms of ‘Yhwh’/יהוה, reflected the Old Greek or original version. Therefore, Tov made it clear that he did not agree with John William Wevers’ published position (following his Toronto colleague Albert Pietersma), since he endeavours to maintain that *kyrios* (of later mss. or codices) was original.⁴⁰

What Adey is noting is that scholars in the field, as eminent as Tov, reject Pietersma’s analysis. Hence, in his standard textbook (2012 edition) Tov asserts that the one uncontested text “probably reflects the original, pre-Christian rendering of the Tetragrammaton preceding κύριος of [the Septuagint]”.⁴¹

Putting aside the issue of whether the texts under discussion are ‘sufficiently close’ to the LXX to be grouped under that label, they are evidence of copies of the pre-Christian Jewish Greek Scriptures **not using κύριος**. Hence, Pietersma has acknowledged that,

...it might possibly still be debated whether perhaps the Palestinian copies with which the NT authors were familiar read some form of the tetragram.⁴²

Pietersma’s concession that Palestinian Jewish Greek Scriptures may not have used κύριος is telling for our hypothesis that NT writers use but do not quote the Greek Jewish Scriptures given that we are discussing five Palestinian writers.

P. Skehan⁴³ places the manuscript evidence relating to the Jewish Greek Scriptures into four stages according to date, with only the last post-Christian stage showing the introduction of *Kyrios*. Pietersma inverts this scheme by arguing that stage four reflects the original LXX and stages one to three are archaizing or a hebraizing of the Greek original. He has two arguments, the first of which is useful. He notes that the Alexandrian philosopher, Philo, must have read *Kyrios* in his biblical text.⁴⁴ This prompts the point that talking about God and non-sacred writing about God in Greek used both *theos* and *Kyrios*. The use of *Kyrios* in quotations from the Jewish Scriptures could be the language of the day when talking and writing in Greek. The thesis that the Septuagint is the source of quotations in the NT is obviously not supported by this view of the matter.

Pietersma’s second argument that *Kyrios* is original to the LXX is a technical one centred on translational consistency. He asserts that the way stage four Septuagint manuscripts have rendered the difference between ליהוה and יהוה, with and without a Greek article, from earlier (even the earliest) Septuagint manuscripts, shows that surrogates for the Tetragrammaton cannot have been involved in those manuscripts—as they lack the preposition ל. Tov’s uncontested manuscript goes against Pietersma’s second argument, and we should add two further considerations. First, what resources does a scribe have to hand in copying a Greek scroll? Does he have not only the main document being copied, but other Greek and Hebrew sources for comparison? Pietersma’s argument rests on the assumption that a later scribe is working from one Greek source (*vorlage*) that he is copying. The second problem with Pietersma’s argument is that it doesn’t offer a criterion for distinguishing the translational consistency of

³⁹ A Seminar of the Art & Humanities Research Council Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism Project (13th February, 2007, University of Cambridge). Prof. Emanuel Tov (Jerusalem), one of the speakers, spoke on: “The Greek texts from the Judean Desert and the early history of the Septuagint”.

⁴⁰ For example, see J. W. Wever’s “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint”, in *Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, 38 (2005): note on pp. 22-23.

⁴¹ E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd Ed; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 132.

⁴² A. Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original LXX” in *De Septuaginta* (Eds. A. Pietersma and C. Cox; Mississauga, Ontario: Benben Publications, 1984), 85-101 (87).

⁴³ P. Skehan, “The Divine Name at Qumran, in the Masada Scroll and in the Septuagint” *BIOCS* 13 (1980): 14-44 (31-34); M. Rösel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch” *JSOT* 31/4 (2007): 411-428 (414-419).

⁴⁴ Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original LXX”, 93.

the original translator as opposed to that of the later copyist or emending scribe; furthermore, where scholars observe more than one scribal hand in a manuscript, these are likely to be working together to produce a completed copy.

The argument that the apostles used the Septuagint because their use of *Kyrios* for the Tetragrammaton must come from the LXX fails for lack of pre-Christian manuscript evidence, despite Pietersma's attempt to invert the evidence. Christian scribes could well be responsible for modernizing the Septuagint for the Diaspora. Of course, this does not mean that the apostles did not 'use' the Septuagint; it is just that *this* argument fails.

(2) **John 8:58.** It has been argued that John's 'I AM' "was influenced by the LXX translation of Exod 3:14". 'Influence' might be a kind of 'use' of the Septuagint, but it is clearly not a *quoting* use. This has been supported by an appeal to the Greek speaking Diaspora audience of John but this audience has been disputed. J. A. T. Robinson's study, *Re-dating the New Testament*, places the writing of John before AD70 and cites its Palestinian characteristics in partial support.⁴⁵ The point here is that the theology of John has its origin in the teaching of Jesus and the recording of traditions about Jesus in the early days of the apostles (Acts 6:2, 4; 8:14, 25).

John is recording the words of Jesus. What we can say about John and the Septuagint is different to what we might say about Jesus and the Septuagint. Given that Jesus is speaking to scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem, it is likely that he is speaking in Hebrew here and referencing the Jewish Scriptures in Hebrew, because this is what John 8 is recording—scribal discussion. The *use* of the Septuagint can be excluded, and even its influence in this setting seems implausible.

The Septuagint of Exod 3:14 is ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν ('I am the Being'); there is a predicate and the assertion is well-formed; the closing assertion is ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς ('The being has sent me unto you'). Jesus does not use a predicate in saying 'Before Abraham was, I am'; further, the 'I am' of Exodus is just an ordinary first person use of the verb 'to be' with the significant existential phrase 'the Being'. Jesus' speech has no point of contact with '...the Being' and his first person use of the verb 'to be' is unusual in not having a predicate. Instead, Jesus' language (as translated) has its point of contact with the Hebrew and its unusual repeated use of the verb 'to be': 'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh ('I will be who I will be') and 'I will be ('ehyeh) has sent me to you'. The targumic evidence is supportive of this as it does not translate the Hebrew along the lines of the Septuagint but reproduces the Hebrew *in toto*.⁴⁶ Jesus' theology is that he is a present-tense manifestation of God's future-tense declaration. This theology is not part of the Septuagint's existential translation and any Christians using the Greek Jewish Scriptures would be alerted by Jesus' different predicate-less 'I am...' to this fact. The theology of God-manifestation is not there in the Greek of Exod 3:14 because it has removed the '...who...' of the Hebrew. Jesus is using this and there is no reason to think John is not recording his teacher's speech faithfully.

(3) **Matt 1:23.** The Expositors' Commentary observes that the 'later' Jewish translations of Symmachus, Theodotion and Aquila use νεανίς and not παρθένος in Isa 7:14, but it does not explain why the Christian παρθένος is 'earlier'. It assumes that it is original to the LXX/OG; but equally, if the Jewish translations of the 2c. CE favoured Jewish doctrine and replaced παρθένος with νεανίς, so too Christian scribes could have been favouring Christian doctrine and replaced νεανίς with παρθένος. As far as the information in the Expositor's Commentary goes, the Jewish translators could be continuing the LXX/OG tradition against a Christian harmonisation.

The Hebrew in Isa 7:14 is עלמה and it is rendered elsewhere in the LXX by παρθένος (Gen 24:43), νεανίς (Exod 2:8; Ps 68:26; Song 1:3; 6:8) and νεότης (Prov 30:19). The Hebrew means 'young woman';⁴⁷ where virginity is required, the story of Rebekah shows that בתולה is used alongside עלמה (Gen 24:16, 43). The database of texts is small but the Septuagintal pattern favours νεανίς in any scholarly dispute over the original word in Isa 7:14. The database of texts for בתולה is much larger and this word is generally

⁴⁵ Robinson, *Re-Dating the New Testament*, 254-284.

⁴⁶ Grossfeld, ed., *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus*, 8.

⁴⁷ See R. G. Bratcher, "A Study of Isaiah 7:14" *The Bible Translator* 9/3 (1958): 97-126.

translated in the Septuagint with παρθένος, i.e. ‘virgin’.⁴⁸ So, in any dispute, the case for νεῆνις is stronger when we factor the Septuagintal pattern for בתולה into account. With regard to the Jewish Scriptures in Greek available to Matthew (but note he may not have been a *reader* of the Scriptures in Greek, see above), Isa 7:14 is more likely to have had νεῆνις.⁴⁹

The original application of the prophecy in Ahaz’ day (Isa 8:1, 4) does not require a virgin birth but a young woman giving birth. It is difficult to see why the Jewish LXX translator would have chosen παρθένος. Of the 65 occurrences of παρθένος in the LXX, 45 translate בתולה which itself occurs 52 times. The only exception, aside from Isa 7:14, is Gen 24:43, and this is explained by Gen 24:16 and is an inexact translation.

Given the theological prominence of Isa 7:14 as a Christian prophecy, it is more likely that the use of παρθένος here is a Christian harmonisation; the original OG is more likely to have been νεῆνις, (unless the Jewish translator was rather prescient and expected the Messiah to virgin-born). What Matthew has done under inspiration is interpret the Hebrew “Behold, the young woman *will be* with child, and bearing a son, even call his name ‘Immanuel’” as a prophetic type of the virgin birth. What drives this inspired perception of a ‘virginal’ birth is not the virginal-state of the young woman in Ahaz’ court but the conjunction in the prophecy of ‘the young woman *will be* with child’ and how ‘God with us’ is to be fulfilled.

We have discussed three examples (1)-(3). There are others and each has to be considered on a case by case basis and a cumulative position can then be established as to whether an apostolic author is using or quoting the Septuagint.

Conclusion

Our departing question from this essay would be: Is it likely that distinctive Christian theology is coming from anonymous Jewish translators of the third and second century BCE? It is not enough to see corresponding Greek between the LXX and the NT; we need to tell a theological story about the LXX translation to reinforce any claim on its part to originality. The examples we have discussed are not original to the Septuagint but to the apostle’s use and variation of the Hebrew.

However, if we put aside the unique and distinctive, we also need to say that the common and the banal of the Greek translation of the Hebrew is part of the literary co-text of the NT writers, part of their culture. An influence for the Septuagint in cultural terms cannot be excluded from our understanding of Second Temple Judaism, and this has consequences for how we appreciate aspects of the Greek in the NT, including quotations, allusions and echoes of the original Hebrew Scriptures.

What is the usefulness of the Septuagint for a Bible student? It is useful for understanding Jewish interpretation in the Second Temple period; it is useful for understanding Greek, for ideas of translation; and it is helpful as a tool for identifying possible correspondences between the NT and the Hebrew/Aramaic Scriptures. However, as regards intertextual exegesis, what counts is the alignment that a Bible student makes with the MT (still regarded as our best representation of the original Hebrew). The agreement and variation between earlier Scripture and later NT usage is not adequately explained by reference to the Septuagint as the cause.⁵⁰ Where the NT varies the Hebrew/Aramaic OT, we need an explanation *internal* to the priorities of just these texts—this is the Spirit’s domain.

⁴⁸ Bratcher, “A Study of Isaiah 7:14”, 112, “in the LXX the word means ‘virgin’ and should be given that meaning, unless the context proves otherwise”.

⁴⁹ *Contra* J. Massingberd Ford, “The Meaning of ‘Virgin’” *NTS* 12/3 (1966): 293-299 (299).

⁵⁰ See J. W. Adey, “Complementary Difference: Why New Testament quotations often differ from their Old Testament source” *CeJBI* 5/1 (2011): 10-27.