The Sacred Text

Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures

Edited by

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1 THE septuagint AS scripture IN THE early church

Karen H. Jobes

The vast majority of Christians throughout history have read their Scripture in translation. This contrasts sharply with Islam and Orthodox Judaism, which both contend that their Scriptures cannot be translated accurately and therefore must be read in the respective language in which it was originally written. Christianity took a different path from its very beginning, when the divinely inspired writers of the New Testament (NT) did not hesitate to preserve the teachings of Jesus—not in his native tongue of Aramaic—but in Greek, the lingua franca of the Roman Empire. Christianity very early accepted the translation of Scripture when the Greek NT was translated into Syriac and Latin, with many other translations to follow from that time even down to our own.

The first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was made into the Greek language centuries before Jesus was born. By the time the NT writers began to pen their Gospels and epistles, more than one Greek version of it was likely at their disposal. And so the Bible adopted by the majority of Greek-speaking Christians in the Roman Empire, particularly outside of Palestine, was the Greek Old Testament (OT) next to the developing Greek NT.

The term “Septuagint” is often used to refer to the Greek version of the OT, just as we today might refer to the “English Bible” without distinguishing a particular translation (NIV, NRSV, NLT, etc.). But in the context of the ancient church, when there were several different Greek versions of the OT text circulating, Christian scribes used the term to indicate a specific Greek version that originated almost three centuries before Christ.
THE ANCIENT ORIGINS OF THE SEPTUAGINT

In the third century before Christ, during the reign of the Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.E.), the Pentateuch was first translated from Hebrew into Greek in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. By the time of Christ, all the remaining books of the Hebrew Bible had been translated into Greek, although it is not known when, where, or by whom. By extension of the term, the first translation of the books beyond the Pentateuch were also referred to as the Septuagint, though many scholars today prefer the term Old Greek (OG), reserving the term Septuagint (LXX) for the original translation of the Pentateuch.

At the time Christian scribes were at work centuries later, one tradition numbered the translators of the original Greek version at seventy. The English term “Septuagint” reflects scribal notes found in the manuscripts that read, “according to the Seventy,” where the Greek word for “seventy” was mediated through the equivalent Latin word septuaginta, often abbreviated using the Roman numeral LXX.

Revisions of the original translation or other independent translations into Greek also existed in the early church. By the second century of this era, Origen (ca. 185 to ca. 254) knew of three Greek versions in addition to the Septuagint, known as Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion (or collectively, as the Three).

THE GREEK OLD TESTAMENT ADOPTED BY NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

The continuity of God’s redemptive revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures with the Christian gospel began with Jesus himself. Perhaps this is best seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5, esp. v. 17), where Jesus announces that he is a fulfillment of all that the old covenant taught and commanded.

Moreover, in Luke 24:13–53, the crucified and risen Jesus points his downcast disciples to the Jewish Scriptures for an explanation of the tragedy that had befallen him. Referring to the three major sections of the Hebrew Bible, he explained that everything written about him “in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Therefore Jesus himself gave warrant for the early Christian church to adopt the Jewish Scriptures as its own.

When the NT writers began to write about Christ in the Greek language, they naturally made extensive use of the existing Greek versions of the OT. And so the Greek NT and the Greek OT naturally formed the Bible for the early Greek-speaking church. Thereafter for a millennium the Christian church read the Greek OT and translations made from it into Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac, and—until Jerome’s Latin Vulgate appeared—Old Latin. Even as late as the 9th century, a version of the OT in Greek was the textual base for the first Bible that appeared in Slavonic.¹

THE GREEK OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW

That the NT presents itself as a sequel to the Old is so readily apparent that it needs no defense. The heavy use of the Greek OT in the New through quotations, allusions, wording, themes, and imagery led one scholar to comment, “He who would read the New Testament must know Koine [Greek]; but who would understand the New Testament must know the LXX.”² However, no standard Greek version was adopted and the citations represent a number of different Greek versions known to the NT writers; some citations are taken verbatim from the Old Greek; some reflect a text revised toward the Hebrew at some point; a few cite Greek translations of the OT that are otherwise unknown.³

While not every reader of the NT needs to become a Septuagint scholar, some general knowledge of the Greek OT and its relationship to the New will deepen one’s understanding of Scripture and do justice to the historical situation in which the NT developed. For instance, it can be perplexing to see an OT quotation in the English NT, flip back to the source of the quotation in the OT and find that the two don’t match! This happens where the NT

writer has quoted a verse from the Greek OT that differs from the corresponding Hebrew text from which our modern English Bibles have been translated. These differences range from paraphrases that do not alter the semantic meaning of the verse, to small phrases and minuses, to the inclusion of additional chapters in the Greek Esther and Daniel that are not found in the Hebrew version (and therefore are not found in modern Protestant English versions of those books either). For Judges, Esther, Daniel, and Tobit, Susanna, and Judith in the Apocrypha, there are two distinctly different Greek versions extant. And in the case of Jeremiah, the Greek version is much shorter than the Hebrew, and some of its content is arranged in a different order. Despite such differences, "a theology of the Septuagint in the sense of a comprehensive presentation of the religious and theological content of the Septuagint...would actually be for the most part identical with a theology of the Hebrew Old Testament."¹

The reasons for these differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts, and between different renditions of the Greek text are varied and complex.² In many cases, the differences between a Greek text and its corresponding Hebrew text may have been caused by a Hebrew text different from the extant MT from which the Greek was translated. Where that is the case, textual critics of the Hebrew Bible must decide which of the two Hebrew readings was original. The use of the Greek versions in textual criticism is an important field of modern scholarship, but except for the work of Origen (see discussion of the Hexapla below), the early church was more concerned with differences between various Greek versions and were generally not aware of the corresponding Hebrew, much less in explaining how differences arose.

Those church fathers aware of at least some of these differences disagreed on whether the Septuagint should be considered divinely inspired. The ancient hermeneutic of multiple senses of Scripture could accommodate differences between the Hebrew text and the LXX as a work of the Holy Spirit easier than hermeneutical practice can today. For instance, Augustine knew that according to the Hebrew text, Jonah announced to Nineveh forty days until the overthrow of the city, whereas the Septuagint translation says three days. Augustine believed that the prophet Jonah had actually said forty days, but that the Greek translators inspired by the Spirit of God changed it to three days, which had at the time the translation was made become a symbolic number representing the time of deliverance in Jewish tradition. Augustine suggested this anticipated the Christian gospel, writing, "The sensitive reader will recognize an allusion to Christ's resurrection on the third day."³ And since the NT writers drew their quotations from both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures alike, Augustine believed, "both sources should be employed as authoritative, since both are one, and both are inspired by God."⁴ Augustine considered only the LXX/OG version of the OT to be a special work superintended by God in preparation for the NT, and he rejected the later versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion as unsuitable for use in the church.

Unlike Augustine, Jerome did not believe the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions to be a new work of the Spirit. He believed that all Greek versions and translations made from them teemed with errors that made those versions unsuitable for use in the church.⁵ For this reason, he translated the OT from the Hebrew text for his Latin Vulgate. Furthermore, Jerome rejected the divine inspiration of the Greek translators, or for that matter, of any translator. He writes, "It is one thing to be a prophet, another to be a translator. The former through the Spirit, foretells things to come; the latter must use his learning and facility in speech to translate what he understands."⁶ Translations, from ancient times to our own, derive their significance and authority by being an accurate representation of the original. As Hanhart notes,

² See Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, Invitation to the Septuagint (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000) for a deeper discussion of these issues, especially chapters 6, 7, and 8.
⁴ Augustine, City of God 18.44.
⁵ Jerome, Preface to the Book of Hebrew Questions, in Letters and Select Works (NPNF² 6:486).
⁶ Jerome, Apologia adversus libros Ruffini 2.25 (NPNF² 3:516).
"As a translation of already canonized writings, the LXX translation itself has canonical significance both for Judaism and for the Christian church. It derives this significance, however, only from the strength of the canonical authority of its Hebrew original."¹⁰

If we follow Jerome’s view, the question then arises of the use of an uninspired Greek translation of the OT in the inspired text of the NT. Where the NT quotes a verse from the LXX/OG that differs from the Hebrew, the wording of that particular quote in that particular context is inspired by virtue of the inspiration of the New Testament writer, but not because the translators of the Greek OT were inspired. However, the inclusion of a Greek OT quotation in the NT does not confer inspiration on the whole of the Greek translation (anymore than Paul’s quotation from the pagan poets Aratus, Epimenides, and Cleanthes in Acts 17:28 confers divine inspiration on the writings of those poets).

The influence of the Greek OT is pervasive throughout the entire NT. The three OT books cited most frequently in the New in descending order are Isaiah, Psalms, and Genesis, which is about tied with the frequency of citation of the Minor Prophets taken as a whole.¹¹ Scholars may offer different counts of the number of times the NT cites the Old because of differences and ambiguities in deciding what to count. Quotations are easiest to count, but even then one must decide how many words of the source must be present to count as quotation. Then there are allusions, motifs and images, and references to people, places, and events found in the OT. Hengel estimates that 60% of all direct quotations come from just three books: Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy.¹² Swete had previously counted that nearly half of the OT passages expressly

cited in the NT come from either the Psalms or Isaiah.¹³ The Psalms, Isaiah, Exodus, and Deuteronomy apparently enjoyed great popularity within Judaism at the time the NT was written, for they are also the books cited most in the Qumran writings (also known as the Dead Sea Scrolls).¹⁴

Just as Christian writers today cite predominantly from the NT, so also the writers in the early church. But given the frequency with which Isaiah, Psalms, and Genesis are cited in the NT, it is not surprising that the Psalms, Genesis, and Isaiah are consistently found as the most frequently cited OT books in the first five centuries of the Christian church.¹⁵ In the ante-Nicene fathers, Genesis is found most frequently cited, followed by Isaiah and the Psalms.¹⁶ (The ante-Nicene fathers being Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Polycarp, Papias, Serapion of Antioch, and Tertullian.) In Origen’s extant writings, the book of Exodus is cited even more frequently than Isaiah, as Origen turns to Christian exposition of the Ten Commandments and of the exodus event; and the Psalms take first ranking in Origen’s frequency of citation. This frequency of citation—Psalms, Genesis, Exodus—continues with the Antiochene fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Amphelochius of Iconium). Interestingly, the Song of Solomon ranks fifth in frequency of citation among the Antiochene fathers, even though it is cited only twice in the NT and only six times in the ante-Nicene fathers. It is the twelfth most cited book in Origen’s writing, attesting to its increasing popularity among Christian writers as it came to be read

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¹¹ This writer determined the three most frequently cited books by examining the "Loco Citati Vel Allegati" found as an appendix in the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 27th ed. That table includes both quotations and allusions, as defined by the editors.

¹² Hengel, Septuagint as Christian Scripture, 107.


¹⁴ Fernandez Marcon, Septuagint in Context, 324.

¹⁵ For a list of OT verses that strongly influenced the writings of the ancient church, see Swete, Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, 464–69.

¹⁶ The frequency of citation of the OT in the fathers was determined by examination of the Scripture index of volumes 1, 3, and 5 in Biblia Pa- tristica (Paris: CNRS, 1975, 1980, 2001 respectively). The early fathers referred to here would be those writers indexed in volume 1.
as an allegory of Christ’s love for the church—even in Antioch where the allegorical hermeneutic was generally frowned upon.17

Among the Egyptian desert fathers, the most frequently cited OT books are the Psalms, Genesis, and Isaiah, with Exodus and Ezekiel also being prominent.18 These materials from the desert fathers most likely originated in Coptic; therefore, the question of which version of the OT the desert fathers knew and the relationship of that text(s) to the Greek versions is complex.

The Greek Isaiah as Christian Scripture

Including allusions, there are more than five hundred citations of Isaiah in the NT drawn from every chapter except chs. 15, 18, and 20. Isaiah was clearly a most important book for the NT writers and consequently for the fathers of the church. And no passage was more frequently cited than the Suffering Servant passage of Isa 52:13—53:12 (hereafter referred to as simply Isa 53). Isaiah 53 is directly quoted, most often in its ancient Greek translation, in six NT passages written by the apostles Matthew, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter. Given the differences among these men and the diverse audiences to whom each wrote, it seems clear that Isa 53 was widely known and deeply rooted in the earliest proclamation of the Christian gospel. Luke’s account of the arrest suggests that the origin of the identification of Jesus as Isaiah’s Suffering Servant began with Jesus himself.19 On the last evening of his earthly life, Jesus quoted Isa 53:12 saying, “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’” (Luke 22:37). He then concludes, “I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment” (italics added). The identification of Jesus as Isaiah’s Suffering Servant is also attested in Acts 8:32, 33 which quotes Isa 53:7–8.

Since the end of the nineteenth century it has been argued that the suffering of the servant in Isa 53 cannot be about atonement because the Hebrew passage contains none of the language found in passages about sacrificial atonement performed by Israel’s cult elsewhere in the OT.20 However, the Greek translation of Isa 53 seems to amplify the theme of atonement, suggesting that long before the coming of Jesus those Jewish translators did see atonement language in the passage. Where the Hebrew text of Isa 53:4 reads, “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering” the Old Greek reads, “This one bears our sins and suffers pain for us” (NETS, emphasis added).21 Furthermore, in Isa 53:11–12 the Greek translates the Hebrew verbs with the same Greek verb, anapherein ("bear"), and their corresponding direct objects with the noun hamartia ("sin"), yielding “he will bear their iniquities” (53:11) and “he bore the sin of many” (53:12). The collocation of this particular Greek verb and noun is found in only three other places in the canonical books of the Greek OT, all which refer to atonement (Lev 9:10, 16:25, and 2 Chr 29:21).

This amplification of the idea of atonement in the Greek translation of Isa 53 is one example of how the Greek translation of the Scriptures was in places more congenial to the purposes of the NT writers than was the corresponding Hebrew text. Deissmann once commented that Hellenistic Judaism had with the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures ploughed the furrows for the gospel seed in the Western world.22 F. F. Bruce added

that it was the Christian preacher quoting the Septuagint who sowed that seed of the gospel.

The identification of Jesus as the Suffering Servant led to three other applications of the Isa 53 passage in the NT: (1) to explain that because of the example of Jesus’ unjust suffering, it is better for Christians to suffer than to sin (1 Pet 2:22–24 quoting Isa 53:4–6, 9); (2) to show that Jesus’ healing ministry had been prophesied as part of the messianic role (Matt 8:17 quoting Isa 53:4); and (3) to explain that the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the vast majority of first-century Palestinian Jews was prophesied (John 12:38 and Rom 10:16 both quoting Isa 53:1). All of these quotations of Isa 53 are from the Greek OT text with the possible exception of Matthew, which does however cite the Greek Isaiah elsewhere (e.g. 1:23, see below).

In addition to quotations and allusions, often the language of passages from the Greek OT is adopted to draw important biblical theological connections. The Greek Isa 52:13 speaks of the Suffering Servant being “exalted,” using the Greek verb (ὑψωθήκεν) that is then echoed in John 3:14; 8:28; and 12:32, 34. The Greek verb has two meanings, either to lift something physically, or to lift up in the sense of to exalt someone. John’s Gospel takes advantage of the two senses of that verb to create a word play that both echoes Isa 52:13, alluding to Jesus as the Suffering Servant, and explains that the “lifting up” of Jesus on the cross is the exaltation of God’s Suffering Servant. The apostle Paul does something similar in Phil 2:10 with the phrase “every knee shall bow” taken from the Greek Isa 45:23.

While Isa 53 may be the most quoted passage in the NT, the Greek Isa 7:14 has caused the most controversy throughout the church’s history. Matthew 1:23 quotes the prophecy of Isa 7:14 in its Greek form, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” with the claim that the birth of Jesus fulfills it. The controversy centers on whether this prophecy was understood to predict a miraculous

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The Greek Psalms as Christian Scripture

The popularity of the Psalms in the ante-Nicene church extends back to their use in the NT where they are extensively quoted second only to Isaiah. They are also the most frequently cited OT book in Origen’s writings and in the sayings of the desert fathers. Within the extant writings of four Antiochenes—Diodore, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrus—the importance of the Psalms is surpassed only by the Gospels in the piety and liturgy of the church at Antioch. 26 This is not surprising, for the Gospels draw frequently on the Psalms, with their prophetic hope of a messianic son of David, to explain the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. For this purpose, Ps 110:1 is the most frequently quoted OT verse in the NT. Psalm 118 (especially vv. 22–26), and Ps 22 were also of particular interest to the NT writers.

Matthew 22:44, and the parallels in Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:42, present Ps 110:1 (109:1 LXX) 27 as central to Jesus’ teaching that he is the Messiah and a son of David, and furthermore, that the Messiah is more than a merely human descendent of David. There are three persons involved in the opening phrase of Ps 110:1, Yahweh (the LORD), the “lord” Yahweh addresses, and the author of the Psalm represented by the pronoun “my,” whom Jesus identifies as David. While the verse may seem confusing in English because the same word “lord” is used of two referents (as also in the Greeks), the use of two different words in the Hebrew, yhwh and adoni, amplifies the point. In quoting this Psalm, Jesus implies that he is David’s Lord. Peter quotes Ps 110:1 in Acts 2:34–35 and draws the conclusion that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Psalm 110 presents this Lord of David as both a conquering king (vv. 1–3) and a priest in the order of Melchizedek (v. 4).

26 Hill, Reading the Old Testament in Antioch, 86.
27 The versification of the Psalms is different in English translations than in the Greek versions. The Old Greek Psalms treat Ps 9 and 10 as one poem, and divide Ps 147 into two. Moreover, it includes the superscriptions as part of verse 1, which the English does not. Therefore, it can be tricky finding corresponding verses between the English and Greek versions. See Jobes and Silva, Invitation to the Septuagint, 329–31, for a convenient table of versification differences.

Therefore, in Matt 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42, Jesus’ explicit identification of himself as that Lord spoken of by David in Ps 110:1 also reveals Jesus’ self-understanding as being both the Messianic king and the priest of a new covenant. In Mark’s Gospel, this identification of Jesus from Ps 110:1 is brought together with his identification as Isaiah’s Suffering Servant (as well as Daniel’s messianic Son of Man). 28

The Lord goes on to say in Ps 110:1, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The verse is widely cited by ancient Christian writers for various purposes. Justin cites this verse as a prophecy of Christ’s ascension (First Apology, XLV), as well as an argument for the two advents of Christ (Dialogue with Trypho, XXXII). He also cites it to explain the delay of theconsummation (First Apology, XLV). First Clement 36 cites it in an exhortation for the Corinthians to persevere in righteousness in light of certain victory. Basil includes it in his discussion of the subordination of the Son to the Father (On the Spirit, V.15). Gregory Nazianzen, Archbishop of Constantinople, explains that the “until” is inclusive, not exclusive, to defend Christ’s eternal reign against the argument of heretics (Fourth Theological Oration, IV).

In addition to Ps 110, Ps 118 is also employed in the synoptic Gospels to explain Jesus’ identity. Verses 22–26 are used to identify Jesus as the Messiah who would come into Jerusalem but astonishingly be rejected by those he came to deliver. Matt 21:9 (parallel Luke 13:35) quotes Ps 118:25, 26 (Ps 117:25, 26 LXX) when describing Jesus’ last entrance into Jerusalem on what the church has since commemorated as Palm Sunday.

Further in Matthew’s Gospel, verse 21:42 presents Jesus quoting Ps 118:22, “the stone the builders rejected,” apparently in reference to himself (paralleled in Mark 12:10–11 and Luke 20:17). In all three instances, the quotation follows immediately after the parable of the wicked tenants in the vineyard, which is itself an allusion to Isa 5:1–2. Jesus alludes to his destiny on the cross as a result of his rejection in Jerusalem through a Hebrew wordplay between the murdered “son” (ben) of the parable and the rejected “stone” (eben),

a wordplay which cannot be preserved either in Greek or in English. The rejected stone, however, becomes both the foundational stone in a new building project, the eschatological temple, as well as an instrument of destruction. These two points are picked up in 1 Pet 2:4–8 which pictures Christians as stones coming to the Living Stone and where the warning against rejecting Christ is extended to all people, whether Jew or Gentile.

This image of the stone is found also in Isa 8:14–15; 28:16, and Dan 2:34, and was understood as messianic well before its use in the NT. By citing the stone imagery in Ps 118:22 in reference to himself, Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah, predicts his rejection and execution, and announces the destruction of all who reject him.

The Septuagint’s value as Christian Scripture is affirmed even beyond the books that cited it. Archaeological finds show that ancient Christian churches were adorned with engravings of vases from the Greek OT, and most often from the Psalms. The most frequently found inscription is Ps 118:20 (117:20 LXX), “This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter,” engraved above the door lintel on either the western or southern side of many churches in Syria, but also as far west as Corfu, and including Palestine, Arabia, Sinai and Asia Minor.

Psalm 22 (21 LXX) contains a vivid description that is similar to Jesus’ crucifixion as recorded in all four Gospels. Again it was Jesus who invoked Ps 22:1 from the cross crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Several other elements of Ps 22:1–21 are found in the Gospel descriptions of the crucifixion, such as the gambling for clothing (Ps 22:18; 21:19 LXX). Psalm 22:22–31 continues with thanksgiving and praise of God for his deliverance, corresponding to the Resurrection, the ultimate deliverance, and the joyful proclamation “to a people yet unborn: He has done it!” (Ps 22:31).

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Although the LXX/OG was the preferred version of the early Christian church, there are moments in its text that are not well suited to application to Christ. For instance, the Old Greek of Ps 22:2 (Ps 21:2 LXX) refers to moral transgressions, which would not be apt when understood as a prophecy about Jesus Christ. The LXX/OG translation (transgressions) may be due to a misreading of the underlying Hebrew text (gūnēs), because the Three translate more aptly with γνασθείς of my teeth (Aquila), my loud cry (Theodotion), my lament (Symmachus). The early Christian commentators on Ps 22:2 preferred the reading of one of the Three even though the LXX/OG generally enjoyed a prestige that eclipsed other Greek translations known in antiquity.

The Psalms also were a focal point of the controversies between the early church and the synagogue. Justin Martyr knew of a Greek version of Ps 96:10 (95:10 LXX) that included the additional words “from a tree” after the phrase “The Lord reigns” (“tree” referring to the cross). These words are not found in the LXX/OG version of the psalm, and so he accused the Jewish scribes of removing it from that widely used Greek version to obscure a prophecy about Jesus.

Such disputes over the accuracy of the Greek Scriptures motivated Origen to list in parallel columns the Hebrew text phrase by phrase, and as many Greek versions of it as he knew about, carefully marking what was missing from or added to the Greek in comparison to the Hebrew. Origen was not doing textual criticism as modern scholarship defines it, for he was not attempting to reconstruct the original text of either the Hebrew Scriptures or the Greek. By the time of Origen, the Hebrew text had developed into a more standardized form since the time the original Greek translations had been made. Moreover, Jewish scribes revised their Greek text, sometimes to conform more closely to whatever Hebrew text was known at that time and location. Origen’s concern was that the churches of his day use a Greek OT that accurately reflected the
Hebrew Scriptures Origen had at hand. From this document, known as the Hexapla, he produced a corrected "Septuagint" version of the OT for use by the church.

In the case of Ps 96:10, the Jewish scribes were vindicated, for the phrase "from the tree" was found not to be in the Hebrew either. Clearly it was a Christian gloss to the Greek text used by Justin. Because of such bitter disputes, as well as the stabilization of a standard Hebrew text, the LXX/OG was eventually abandoned by the synagogue, which turned to other Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures produced by Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. It was, therefore, Christian scribes who preserved the oldest Greek translation of the OT for the church. Despite the incident over Ps 96:10, the scrutiny of modern scholarship has affirmed that Christian scribes did not generally impose distinctively Christian theology on the Greek OT text as it was copied.

The different Greek textual traditions used by church and synagogue were recognized by the Christian Roman Emperor Justinian, who decreed on February 8, 553, that all those who read the Scriptures in Greek should use the "Septuagint" but that the synagogue may also use Aquila's version if preferred.

The Greek Genesis as Christian Scripture

Allusions to the first three chapters of Genesis, which present the creation story—and especially the creation of man and woman in the image of God—permeate the NT and the writings of the church fathers. This foundational text had a long interpretive history in Judaism that the Incarnation of Christ did not fundamentally disturb. The Christian understanding of the opening chapters of Genesis retains much of Jewish creation theology with the distinctive difference of insisting that the pre-Incarnate Christ was the agent of creation (John 1:3; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:2).

In the church fathers, Gen 1:26 ("Let us make humankind according to our image") and 3:22 ("Then God said, 'See, Adam has become like one of us...'"), with the plural pronouns in reference to God, became part of the defense for the Christian doctrine of the Trinitarian God, particularly in opposition to Jewish interpretation that the plural refers either to God and the angels or to God and a hypostasis of Wisdom, based on a reading of Prov 8:22ff. Justin Martyr re-interpreted what was a literary personification of Wisdom to be a hypostasis of the pre-incarnate Christ (Dialog. 61.1), an understanding that persists today in Sophia Christology.\(^{56}\) (Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom.)

In the christological controversies settled by the fourth century councils, the debate was not between the differences between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek, but between the various Greek versions. Because of the early identification of Christ with Wisdom personified, the passage in the Greek Prov 8 about Wisdom's role in creation and the creation of Wisdom itself became an exegetical crux in the Arian heresy, which claimed that Christ was not co-eternal with God the Father but had been God's first creation. The Old Greek translation of Prov 8:22 ("The Lord created [eidein] me as the beginning of his ways") reflected a certain way of reading the Hebrew text that seemed to support the Arians, if the identification of Christ with Wisdom was assumed.\(^{57}\) Those whose views became the orthodox Christian position preferred the reading found in Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, "The Lord possessed [estein] me..." The development of Sophia Christology is perhaps where use of the Greek OT and the apocryphal books (e.g.

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Wisdom of Solomon) has most distinctively influenced Christian thought, even down to our own day.

The Greek Minor Prophets as Christian Scripture

The twelve Greek Minor Prophets taken as one book run a close second to Genesis in terms of frequency of citation in the NT. While many of the quotations from the Greek OT agree closely with the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT), many do not. For instance, the use of the Greek Amos 9:11, 12 at the first church council in Jerusalem in 49 C.E., as recorded in Acts 15:16–17, is an interesting example. The Hebrew MT text reads, “so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations” compared to the Old Greek, “so that the remnant of humankind and all the nations may seek [me].” Septuagint scholars are divided whether the Old Greek results from a misreading of the Hebrew or from a deliberate interpretation of the Hebrew or a combination of both. Although it may be impossible to determine with certainty how the Old Greek reading came to be different from the MT, that difference made the Greek reading more fitting to the debate at the Jerusalem Council, which was about whether those Gentile peoples who stood outside the covenant nation of Israel could receive the spiritual blessings of Christ without submitting to circumcision. The use of the Greek OT by the church councils continued throughout the first five centuries.

Such examples could be multiplied. F. F. Bruce noted places “in which the Septuagint translators used a form of words which (without their being able to foresee it, naturally) lent itself to the purposes of the New Testament writers better than the Hebrew text would have done” (e.g. Matt 1:23 quoting Is 7:14, and Acts 15:15–18 quoting Amos 9:11ff.).

THE CANON OF THE GREEK OLD TESTAMENT

Is it true that the canon of the Septuagint included more books than the Protestant canon today? It has sometimes been claimed that the Apocrypha (deutero-canonical books) was an inseparable part of the Scripture of early Christianity. The fact that the modern Rabbinic (Hanhart) edition of the Septuagint includes all the apocryphal books reinforces that claim. The physical binding of “the Bible” between covers has concretized the concept of canon in ways that make it difficult to appreciate the varied status of books that happened to get bound together as the ancient format changed from scrolls to codex. The invention of the printing press further set the contents and order of the Bible as we know it. Today, the content between the covers of the Bible is the canon, and that idea is often carried into the discussion of ancient codices, producing mistaken inferences.

Until the fifth century, none of the ancient manuscripts of the Greek OT included all of the apocryphal books, even though many manuscripts do include one or more of those books. Furthermore, the earliest canon lists include a shorter list of books than found in the ancient manuscripts. In other words, even though all of the OT books recognized by the Protestant canon today were part of the established canon of the earliest Christians, other books esteemed by various churches were included within the covers of the Bibles produced for use in those churches. Perhaps the situation is analogous to modern editions of the English Bible that contain relevant articles on geography, canon, historical background, etc., that are certainly not considered part of the biblical canon even though bound together with the biblical books.

A second reason sometimes offered for support of the idea that the canon of the Greek Bible in the ancient church was broader is the claim that the NT quotes from some of the apocryphal books. For instance, some claim that Mark 10:19 quotes Sir 4:1. But it is just as likely to be a reference to Mal 3:8 as it is rendered, not in the Old Greek, but in the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

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39 Bruce, Canon, 53.


41 Septuaginta (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

42 Hengel, Septuagint as Christian Scripture, 57–60.
On the topic of the Septuagint canon, David deSilva concludes:

The “Septuagint” codices...are fourth- and fifth-century Christian works, fail to agree on the extent of the extra books, and seem to have been compiled more with convenience of reference in mind than as the standards of canonical versus non-canonical books...As “church books,” they may have sought to contain what was useful rather than what was strictly canonical.\(^{13}\)

Therefore, to appreciate the Septuagint’s rightful place in our Christian heritage does not imply that we must necessarily accept a broader canon than that allowed by Protestant tradition.

**The Greek Old Testament Today**

The pervasive use of the Greek OT in the earliest Christian writings attests to its historical importance in the development of Christianity. Moreover, inscriptions of biblical texts engraved on buildings and amulets and quotations preserved in the papyri and ostraca attest to the widespread use of the Greek OT by the early church around the Mediterranean world.\(^{14}\) The influence of the Greek OT, especially the Greek Psalter, can also be found in hymns and prayers of the early church. Today, the Eastern Orthodox churches and, to some extent the Roman Catholic Church, still know and esteem the Septuagint. The prominent historical role of the Greek OT needs to be appreciated as an important part of Christian heritage today, and most especially by Protestants.

This does not mean, however, that Bibles for Protestant use in modern languages should translate the OT from the Greek version, as some are calling for.\(^{15}\) Many Protestants today, if not most,...

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