

The Septuagint and Hebrew Texts

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The purpose of this article is to compare the Septuagint text to the Masoretic Hebrew text, and to answer questions concerning their relative strengths and weaknesses. The abbreviation for the Septuagint is LXX, the Roman number for 70. The Hebrew text is abbreviated MT. Also to be considered are the words of Yeshua, recorded in Greek, and how they line up with either the LXX or MT.

Overall the Hebrew is more precise and more accurate than the LXX. That does not mean the LXX is never right. Sometimes the LXX reading is better. However, should never be assumed that the LXX is more authoritative than the Hebrew. Yet, on the other hand, if the LXX text is clearly a messianic prophecy, then in that case it may be considered to have some authoritative weight if the Hebrew contradicts it. This is due to the fact that it is known that Jewish scribes did what they could to the MT to undermine messianic prophecies, just as Christian translators do what they can do to undermine the validity of the Torah.

There are many Christians who think the LXX is more authoritative than the Hebrew. But most scholars who study both Hebrew and Greek texts do not think so, and for very good reasons. In the first place, the LXX is clearly a secondary source. It is a translation of a Hebrew text. The Hebrew text, on the other hand, is only a copy of the original Hebrew text. And to be sure, a lot more can go wrong in translating a text than in merely copying a text. Another consideration is that we do not truly have the original LXX, but a mishmash of versions compiled together by Origen of Alexandria.

A key problem with the LXX is its expanded chronology. An examination of the birth dates of Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah will show that according to the LXX Methuselah died 14 years after the flood. In the LXX Gen. 5:25 Lamech was born when Methuselah was 167: “ἐκατὸν καὶ ἐξήκοντα ἑπτὰ ἔτη.” Yet the MT Gen. 5:25 says that he was born when his father was 187, “שִׁבְעַ וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאָתַיִם”; that is a 20 year difference. Then we turn to the LXX Gen.

5:28 and find that Noah was born when Lamech was 188 years old, “ἑκατὸν ὀγδοήκοντα ὀκτὼ ἔτη,” but the MT Gen. 5:28 has 182 years, “שָׁנָה וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנִים וּשְׁתַּיִם.” Both the LXX Gen. 7:6 and MT Gen. 7:6 tell us that Noah was 600 years old when the flood came. Only eight people went into the ark (Gen. 6:18). Both the LXX Gen. 5:27 and MT Gen. 5:27 have Methuselah living 969 years.

If (by the LXX) Methuselah is 167 when Lamech is born, then he will be 167+188 when Noah is born. That equals 355. The flood happens 600 years after that. So 355+600 = 955. So, according to the LXX, Methuselah is 955 at the Flood. This means he has to live 14 years after the flood to make 969 years. But since only eight people went on the ark, this is impossible. The LXX contradicts itself.

Now if we run the numbers for the MT, we get 187+182 = 369. Add 600 years. 369 + 600 = 969. We see that Methuselah died right at the start of the flood, and this is confirmed by the meaning of his name, “dying it will be sent.”

The LXX differs in the following numbers for the age at the birth of the first child:

	MT		LXX	Difference
Adam	130	vs.	230	+100
Seth	105	vs.	205	+100
Enosh	90	vs.	190	+100
Kenan	70	vs.	170	+100
Mahalalel	65	vs.	165	+100
Enoch	65	vs.	165	+100
Methselah	187	vs.	167	-14
Lamech	182	vs.	188	+6
Arphaxad	35	vs.	135	+100
(Cainan)			130	+130
Salah	30	vs.	130	+100
Eber	34	vs.	134	+100
Peleg	30	vs.	130	+100
Reu	32	vs.	132	+100
Serug	30	vs.	130	+100
Nahor	29	vs.	79	+50

The LXX expands the chronology by 1300+ years! The LXX adds exactly 100 years to 12 birth dates. If the mistakes were unintentional we could not expect such a difference of 100 years to occur so regularly. The pattern indicates an intentional expansion of the chronology by systematically adding 100 years, twelve times.

In 1Kings 16:28a, the LXX states, “And in the eleventh year of Ambri [Omri], Iosaphat [Jehoshaphat] son of Asa began to reign...” (NETS). But in 1Kings 22:41, it says, “And Iosaphat son of Asa reigned over Iouda [Judah]. In the fourth year of Achaab [Ahab], king of Israel, he became king” (NETS). So when did Jehoshaphat begin to reign? Was it when Omri died or four years later? The LXX here has a simple contradiction.

I continue with a quote from Floyd Nolen Jones:

Conclusive proof that the current Hebrew Text was in existence before the Greek is found at 1 Kings 16:28 where the Greek places an additional account of Jehoshaphat. that verse is the concluding statement concerning the reign of King Omri. The narrative relating to the next monarch should begin with verse 29. In both the Greek and the Hebrew, verse 29 is where the account of Ahab commences. But in order to permit the account of Ahab to begin there and yet have the account of Jehoshaphat precede that of Ahab, the Greek has attached the entire account of Jehoshaphat as an appendage to the account of Omri’s reign.

The account of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:41-50) takes up ten verses. If the Greek text had been in existence before the Hebrew Text, the account of Jehoshaphat would have been given at 1 Kings 16:29-38, and it would then have been followed by the account of Ahab. There would have been no second account of Jehoshaphat after the account of Ahab at 1 Kings 22:41.

Obviously, the Greek editor was endeavoring to follow the arrangement of chapters and verses found in the Hebrew. The Hebrew is perfectly consistent in the matter of sequence, with Ahab following Omri and Jehoshaphat following Ahab.

However, the Greek is conspicuously inconsistent. It depicts Jehoshaphat following Ahab at 1 Kings 22:41-50, but preceding him at 1 Kings 16:28.

The problem arose when the Greek editor could not understand how a reign of 12 years for Omri that began in the 31st year of Asa could terminate in the 38th year of Asa with Ahab's coming to the throne at that time.¹

Jones is referring to the difficult to interpret text 1 Kings 16:22, which reads as follows:

But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned. 23 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24 And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.

What the Greek editor did not understand was that Omri and Tibni shared a divided government for six years until Tibni died. Then Omri established a new capital at Samaria in the 31st year of Asa. When the text says he "began to reign" it means over all of the northern Kingdom and not just part of it. Truly, his rule with Tibni began in the 27th year of Asa after Zimri died. Thus, the 12 year figure for his reign includes the years which he ruled over part of Israel added to the years which he ruled over all of Israel.²

Jones continues:

But the data does not represent an error; rather it is merely a paradox, an *apparent* error. This apparent error in the Hebrew Scripture left him on the horns of a dilemma. So the Greek editor attempted to "correct" the "contradiction" by beginning the 12 years of Omri's dominion in the 31st year of Asa's reign (the year Omri became ruler over all Israel upon the death of

¹ F.N. Jones, *The Chronology Of The Old Testament*, pg. 12-13.

² The details are charted in *The Scroll Of Biblical Chronology And Prophecy*, at www.torahtimes.org.

his rival Tibni) not in the 27th year of Asa as 1 Kings 16:8-18 demands (the year Omri began to rule over only part of the kingdom of Israel).

As Asa ruled 41 years, the first part of Omri's dominion would, in such a case, parallel the last part of Asa's, and the final years of Omri would parallel the first years of Jehoshaphat. Under this contrivance, Jehoshaphat would come to the throne in the 11th year of Omri in accordance with the Greek version of 1 Kings 16:28, and Ahab would begin to reign in the 2nd year of Jehoshaphat in accordance with the Greek version of 1 Kings 16:29.

The foregoing unmistakably discloses that the Hebrew was the original account, not the Greek. Thus, the Greek arrangement reveals itself to be an late artificial contrivance brought into being in an attempt to correct something that was actually accurate but appeared wrong to the reviser.³

Jones goes on to say that "none of Josephus' variations is the same as any found in the Septuagint. We submit this indicates that: 1. Josephus did not consider the LXX reliable, or 2. The LXX did not exist in his day! Either is devastating to the position to which the LXX has somehow ascended in the minds of ~~most~~ [many] scholars."

THE USE OF THE LXX IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What can we say about the good news writings quoting the Septuagint? Are these quotations evidence that the Septuagint has higher authority than the Hebrew? First, let us ask about modern writers quoting English translations. Modern writers regularly acknowledge that the source from which the translation was made is more authoritative than the translation itself. And many scholars quote translations that they know have slight inaccuracies on passages where the main idea or main point is correctly translated. By quoting them they are not saying those translations have no faults. They are merely using that which is easiest to use without subjecting their readers to the prerequisite of understanding all the correct minutiae before giving them the main point. So use of the LXX by NT writers

³ *ibid*, Jones, pg. 13.

may not mean wholesale endorsement of it as inerrant.

In many places the LXX is a paraphrase, more or less like our modern dynamic equivalent translation. In some cases it is a good dynamic translation. In other cases the LXX can be like the living bible and go off on its own ideas. The LXX was quoted among Greek speaking Jews because it was all that was available to them. Yet, among those who knew Hebrew, when necessary, the available translation was corrected.

A very useful study too in evaluating the LXX is *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey*, by Gleason L. Archer & G.C. Chirichigno. The Study classified the quotations in the NT into categories A-F. Here is a simplified explanation of how the different quotations break down:

A: “These quotations consist of reasonably or completely accurate renderings from the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text (MT) into the Greek of the Septuagint (LXX), and from there (apart from word order, which sometimes deviates slightly) into the New Testament passage in which the Old Testament text is cited.” The total under this classification is 268 citations.

B: “This category includes instances where the New Testament quotation quite closely adheres to the wording of the LXX, even where the LXX deviates somewhat (though not so seriously as to distort the real meaning of the Old Testament passage as given in the MT) from the received text in the Hebrew Bible.” The total for this category is 50 citations. In working with this tool and with many quotations that are not exact word for word, I would add that this category is what is called dynamic equivalent, or functional equivalent. That is the meaning of the MT = LXX = NT citation, even though different words may be used to express that meaning.

C: “These are the citations in which the New Testament adheres more closely to the MT than the LXX does, indicating that the apostolic author may have consulted His Hebrew Bible directly in the preparation of his own account or letter. In at least a few cases there may be an affinity for the Proto-Theodotion Greek translation, as some modern scholars have suggested. The existence of such a preapostolic translation may be inferred from the occurrence of some terms that were preserved in the second-century A.D. translation of Theodotion himself, as distinct from the LXX.” There are a total of 33 quotations in this category.

D: “These consist of passages in which the New Testament quotation adheres

quite closely to the LXX rendering, even when it deviates somewhat from the MT.” There are 22 citations in this category.

E: “This category of quotations consists of those that give the impression that unwarranted liberties were taken with the Old Testament text in the light of its context”; the study places 13 passages in this category. Most of these texts have clear solutions.

F: “In this class of quotations we have found many cases of close resemblance or complete identity between the Old Testament source and the New Testament application. But because they are not adduced by the New Testament writers as quotations from the authoritative Hebrew Scriptures, they pose no problem whatever in regard to the inerrancy of those Scriptures in the eyes of the New Testament writers.” There are 32 entries in this category.

The important thing to notice is classes C and D. Quotations agreeing more with the MT are 33. And quotations agreeing more with the LXX are 22. And this is out of a total number of 312. Thus:

A	MT = LXX = NT	86%	268
B	MT \approx LXX \approx NT	16%	50
C	MT = NT not LXX	11%	33
D	LXX = NT not MT	7%	22
E	apparent discrepancy	4%	13
F	non quotations	11 %	33

The percentages add up to more than 100 because some texts are put into two categories if there is doubt about which category the text should be in. What should be noticed at once is that the LXX proves itself over the MT only 22 times. But the MT proves itself 33 times against the LXX. This is a clear victory for the received Hebrew source. Though it clearly has to acknowledge some benefits of the LXX, which I will detail later.

WERE THERE 70 OR 75 PERSONS IN EGYPT?

In Acts 7:20, Stephen totals 75 persons, but in Gen. 46:27 and Deut 10:22 it says 70 persons. One has to count unnamed wives or

grandchildren of Joseph not yet born to arrive at the number 75. The LXX has 70 persons in Deut. 10:22. So it contradicts itself on this matter. Further, the number of names listed only add up to 70.

Now the LXX counts 5 more persons when it says “The sons of Joseph, born to him in Egypt, were nine in number” (LXX Gen. 46:27). But the MT says “two in number” (MT Gen. 46:27). The problem is that when Israel came to Egypt, Joseph only had two sons, and they were Ephraim and Manasseh. For there were only two sons to bless. For every one of the 70 people mentioned in the MT text there is a corresponding name. Also, the MT subtotals add us to 70. They are 33, 16, 14, and 7 persons respectively. Here is the passage from Gen. 46:8-27 :

8 Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, (¹Jacob and his sons), who went to Egypt: ²Reuben, Jacob’s first-born. **9** And the sons of Reuben: ³Hanoch and ⁴Pallu and ⁵Hezron and ⁶Carmi. **10** And the sons of ⁷Simeon: ⁸Jemuel and ⁹Jamin and ¹⁰Ohad and ¹¹Jachin and ¹²Zohar and ¹³Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. **11** And the sons of ¹⁴Levi: ¹⁵Gershon, ¹⁶Kohath, and ¹⁷Merari. **12** And the sons of ¹⁸Judah: Er and Onan and ¹⁹Shelah and ²⁰Perez and ²¹Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). And the sons of Perez were ²²Hezron and ²³Hamul. **13** And the sons of ²⁴Issachar: ²⁵Tola and ²⁶Puvvah and ²⁷Iob and ²⁸Shimron. **14** And the sons of ²⁹Zebulun: ³⁰Sered and ³¹Elon and ³²Jahleel. **15** These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter ³³Dinah—every soul of his sons and his daughters.

| Thirty-three.

16 And the sons of ¹Gad: ²Ziphion and ³Haggi, ⁴Shuni and ⁵Ezbon, ⁶Eri and ⁷Arodi and ⁸Areli. **17** And the sons of ⁹Asher: ¹⁰Imnah and ¹¹Ishvah and ¹²Ishvi and ¹³Beriah and their sister ¹⁴Serah. And the sons of Beriah: ¹⁵Heber and ¹⁶Malchiel. **18** These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban

gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore these to Jacob.

| Sixteen souls.

19 The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel: ¹Joseph and ²Benjamin. **20** Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born ³Manasseh and ⁴Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphora, priest of On, bore to him. **21** And the sons of Benjamin: ⁵Bela and ⁶Becher and ⁷Ashbel, ⁸Gera and ⁹Naaaman, ¹⁰Ehi and ¹¹Rosh, ¹²Muphim and ¹³Huphim and ¹⁴Ard. **22** These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob, every soul.

| fourteen.

23 And the sons of ¹Dan: ²Hushim. **24** And the sons of ³Naphtali: ⁴Jahzeel and ⁵Guni and ⁶Jezer and ⁷Shillem. **25** These are the sons of Billah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob—every soul.

| Seven.

26 All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, coming out of his thigh, not including the wives of Jacob’s sons, were sixty-six persons in all, **27** and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy.

Gen 46:15 *thirty-three*: For every person counted in the text, there is a corresponding name. No person is double counted. Wives are not counted. See vs. 26. The total of 33 indicates that Jacob himself is numbered in this subtotal to make up the 70 persons.

Gen 46:22 *fourteen*: the LXX alters this to 18, adding 4 sons of Joseph, however, in its zeal to correct the Hebrew text, the LXX miscounted. This number should have been 19 by its own counting to 75.

Gen 46:26 *who came ... coming out of his thigh*: This excludes Jacob himself, and those who were already in Egypt, three persons, Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus four persons are excluded from the total of 70 to make this subtotal of 66.

Gen 46:27 *Seventy*: the subtotals from vs. 15, 18, 22, and 25 are $33 + 16 + 14 + 7 = 70$. No person that sojourned in Egypt in Jacob's

130th year was skipped over in the count except for the wives of his sons, his grandsons' wives, and Jacob's wives.

two...seventy: the Septuagint makes these numbers *nine* and *seventy-five*, adding five unknown persons. This is clearly an error. For the five extra persons have no names, yet it is evident that the list set out to include all the names except for the wives. Further, the LXX give a total of 70 in Deut. 10:22. The LXX subtotals are, *τριάκοντα τρεῖς* 33, *δέκα ἕξ* 16, *δέκα ὀκτώ* 18, *ἑπτὰ* 7, and add up to 74, falling one short of its own total, 75. There were no unknown persons, and no reason to exclude persons except the ones explicitly excluded. The LXX error is repeated in Acts 7:14, but here we may suppose that either the original Greek text of Stephan's speech was later assimilated to the errant LXX. Similarly in Luke 3:36-37 the LXX adds the name of Cainan.

Observe that the LXX is one person short in its subtotals, which are 33, 16, 18, and 7. This equals 74, and not the 75 persons stated by the LXX. Also, note that the LXX counts 9 sons of Joseph in vs. 27, which adds the five persons, but this is inconsistent with the the extra four persons from vs. 22. The LXX's own numbers, therefore, like in the case with Methuselah, contradict themselves.

This raises the issue of the alleged quotation from the Septuagint in Acts 7:14, where Stephen is supposed to have said that 75 persons dwelled in Egypt when Jacob came in his 130th year. It would seem that this matter would be quickly corrected by the Hebrew speaking Jews of his day, so it is more likely that the original speech had the number correct, and that the text was later assimilated to the errant LXX number of 75. Our present manuscripts are not so close to the first edition of Luke to preclude undetected scribal assimilation to the LXX. Many errors have been detected by ancient manuscript

discoveries. But before those discoveries the errors were undetected. We should not suppose that every error has therefore been detected. We may only suppose that the Almighty will reveal enough errors over time to restore Israel and redeem his people.

This brings this paper to the theology of providence. Those who defend the *received text* as absolutely preserved by divine providence tend to be people who defend the status quo and tradition. We are talking about *King James Only* people here, and its more ancient version, *Septuagint Only* people. This definition of divine preservation flies in the face of the facts themselves, and is fit only for blind cultists and heretics who wish to maintain a following based on their version of the truth. It is a theory that subscribes to the notion that one has the complete and total truth, and that there is nothing more to discover, or that one's doctrines are pure and spotless because the Almighty must have preserved doctrinal purity for one's own group, cult, or sect.

The Scripture presents divine providence differently. The Scripture presents time after time the story of mankind falling from knowing God to a position of not knowing him. It also presents Israel as falling from a position of knowing him to not knowing him. This happens again and again. And each time, ignorance and superstition would have reigned supreme if the Almighty had not stepped in and redeemed his people when they again began to seek him. However, one point is clear. Israel went into all of its exiles during the Judges, and then into its longest exile because of sin. During the exile knowledge of God retreated. Much was lost. Even the Torah itself was lost until God providentially restored it through king Josiah. The fundamentalist attitude therefore, that all truth is preserved to them, contrary to the facts of the past, is one of sheer arrogance and pride, which in turn is fed by their fear of discovering that they might be in the wrong on some fundamental point. And the sad thing is that they do not even realize that their position is simply commitment to an emotionally driven position that is contrary to the truth of matters.

The humble attitude is to give up one's fear, admit one could be wrong, and then ask the Almighty to reveal the needed truth. This dependence of God does not mean that He will reveal all truth all at

once to you, nor does it mean that you don't have work to do to discover it (after asking for his help). You will need to study, and use your head logically. Yahweh created man in his own image, and he expects us to use the gifts we have been given of discernment and discovery and reasoning.

Now we have seen that the Septuagint has struck out on every chronological matter where it differs from the Hebrew text. I now compare some of the cases where the Septuagint actually preserved a reading that was lost from the received Hebrew text, lest it be supposed that the LXX is of no value at all.

In Isaiah 7:14, the LXX has “And **you** will call (καλέσεις) his name Emmanuel.” Matthew 1:23, “And **they** will call (καλέσουσιν).” The MT Isaiah 7:14, “And **she** will call וְקָרְאָהּ.” The LXX can be shown to agree with the Hebrew by merely switching the vowel points so that they read “And **you** calleth וְקָרְאָהּ.” The Dead Sea Scrolls \mathfrak{Q}^a (1QIs^a) contain the reading וְקָרְאָהּ which can be pointed two ways, “And **it/he** calleth וְקָרְאָהּ,” or “And **be'eth** called וְקָרְאָהּ.” BHS lists Codex Sinaiticus as agreeing with the 1QIs^a reading, “And **it/he** calleth (καλέσει).” BHS apparatus, “ $\mathfrak{Q}^a \mathfrak{S}^s$ וְקָרְאָהּ”.

The parsimonious explanation of this evidence is against the reading “she will call.” The DSS, LXX, and NT do not support it. The translation should be, “And **it** will call his name Emmanuel.” Who then does the ‘it’ refer to? The sign is given to the *house of David*, in verse 13: בֵּית דָּוִד. The house of David is the ‘it’ that is referred to, “And it (the house of David) will call his name Emmanuel.” But the house of David is also referred to with a plural you at the start of vs. 14, “he gives **to ye** a sign לָכֶם.” This means that Matthew is explaining when he writes, “they will call.” The prophetic text address the house of David directly with “ye”, and then switches to the third person in the last clause, “and it will call.” This is because Ahaz’s house is being addressed directly in the immediate context, but the house of David, “it will call” Messiah Emmanuel in the prophetic future.

Thus at least one reading of the LXX (albeit Sinaiticus) agrees with the older Hebrew: BHS apparatus, “ $\mathfrak{Q}^a \mathfrak{S}^s$ וְקָרְאָהּ (καλέσει) against the MT, and even the standard LXX is headed away from the

translation “she,” which has no support in the context of Matthew. Nothing is said about Miryam calling Yeshua, “Emmanuel.” This exercise on Isaiah 7:14 should give the reader an appreciation for the complexities involved. It confirms that the LXX is sometimes headed in the right direction, but its witness is not monolithic. It too has variants. Careful reasoning and parsimonious logic are required to sort out the complexities of the evidence.

Let us now consider another example, Matthew 13:15, “**be’eth fattened the heart of this people** (ἐπαχύνθη).” The verb is passive here in the quotation, which agrees with the LXX Isaiah 6:10, “**be’eth fattened** (ἐπαχύνθη).” But the MT Isaiah 6:10 has the hiphil form of the verb, “make fat **יַמְשִׁיחַ**.” What the text means is that their heart is insensitive or dull to hearing the truth. The LXX seems to point us to a vowel pointing such as: **יַמְשִׁיחַ** (huphal: ‘being made fat’). It is possible to read the text either way, as the vowel points were not put in until A.D. 1000 or so. The LXX passive agrees with the NT and suggests that the MT vowel points should also be passive. Often the LXX need only suggest better vowel points for the consonantal Hebrew text.

CONCLUSION

The Hebrew text has the highest authority, and then the Septuagint comes after it. We should be aware that textual studies are complex and require hard work. The Hebrew text should not be dismissed in favor of the LXX except on the basis of 1. compelling logical necessity, 2. good contextual evidence, and 3. preferably with the least alteration of the Hebrew text, and 4. with possible confirmation from the DSS other other ancient versions if possible.

Further, we have discovered that on questions of chronological deviations and genealogical enumerations that the LXX cannot be trusted. It is not only different, but it contradicts itself to the point that the translator of one chapter did not realize what he was saying in the other chapter. The LXX has one more embarrassing omission, which I will leave the reader with. It entirely omits the passage Jer. 33:17-22. It is rather obvious that the Church found this passage unacceptable because it supported the restoration of Israel and the Levitical Priesthood.

