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THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE GOSPELS: A LOOK AT THE INSTITUTION PASSAGES

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The Septuagint marks a milestone in ancient culture because it is the first translation of the Hebrew Bible or of any work of its size from antiquity.¹ The impact of the Septuagint on Jewish culture, the early Church, and wider Roman culture cannot be overstated. For the purpose of this paper, I propose that the Septuagint is vitally important to understanding some important theological points of the NT writers. The Septuagint represents a development in Jewish thought from the third century B.C.E to the first century C.E.² This span of time for Jewish thought is marked by a development of Hellenistic Judaism.³ Christianity arose and thrived amidst Hellenistic Judaism and one cannot fully grasp that period without the Septuagint.⁴ Jobes and Silva propose that “the Septuagint provides an essential, but often overlooked, theological link that would have been familiar to Christians of the first century, that are not so obvious in the Hebrew version.”⁵ When one realizes the theological impact the Septuagint had on first century Judaism as well as the writers of the NT then the importance of the Septuagint is evident. The scope of this paper will be to examine the impact of the Septuagint specifically on the Gospels of the NT and to accomplish this task I will present the following: an overview of the Septuagint, an investigation as to how the gospel writers employed the Septuagint, and an examination on how the Septuagint influenced NT theology of the Lord’s Supper institution passages.

An Overview of the Septuagint

¹ Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 19.

² Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 24.

To begin with, for one to understand how the writers of the Gospels used the Septuagint, one must define terms and develop a sense of what is meant by the word ‘Septuagint.’ The term ‘Septuagint’ gives a false impression of a homogenous unit that was translated in its entirety at one point in time.⁶ Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as the Septuagint.⁷ In the field of textual criticism, the term Septuagint refers specifically to the translation of the Pentateuch that took place sometime in the third century B.C.E.⁸ The other portions of the Hebrew Bible were translated over the next two centuries. Septuagint scholar Emanuel Tov elaborated on the term Septuagint when he stated, “The name “Septuaginta,” which now refers to all Jewish-Greek biblical books, at first applied only to the Pentateuch, but when the collection of Greek biblical books grew, it came to denote the whole corpus.”⁹ For this paper, I will use the term Septuagint to refer to the entire Greek translation of the OT.

The term ‘Septuagint’ stems from the legendary *Letter of Aristeas*.¹⁰ According to the author of the letter, the royal librarian of Alexandria requested the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem to send translators with Hebrew Torah scrolls to Alexandria.¹¹ The letter reports that the high priest sent seventy-two translators.¹² The translators worked for seventy-two days and

⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

produced the first translation of the Pentateuch¹³ Jobs and Silva, speaking of the Letter of Aristeas, state,

[The letter] describes, among other things, how the Jewish Torah was first translated from Hebrew into Greek for the great library of the Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.E) in Alexandria. Copies of this so-called letter survive in about two dozen medieval manuscripts, the earliest of which dates to the eleventh century. The length and character of the Letter of Aristeas and its apparently wide copying and circulation suggest that the document was not personal correspondence from one person to another, but was intended as an “open letter” to a wider audience.¹⁴

Scholars today believe this letter is not authentic but was written in the second century B.C.E. to defend Judaism in general and the Greek translation in particular.¹⁵ The Roman numeral LXX arose as an abbreviation because of the belief that seventy-two men translated the Septuagint.¹⁶

The LXX was a monumental work because it was the first attempt to put the Hebrew Scriptures into another language.¹⁷ Martin Hengel states,

The LXX is not only a unique linguistic monument without analogy in the Greek literature of antiquity (no other work of this scale was translated into Greek from a foreign language), but it was the first complete and pre-Christian “commentary” to the Old Testament. It was both the bible of primitive Christianity and the early church until well into the second century, and later it was the “Old Testament” of the Greek church.¹⁸

Peter Walters asserts that the LXX comes to us as the most comprehensive source for Hellenistic writings for the modern scholar.¹⁹ The importance of the LXX is observed in several dimensions. The LXX bridged the gap between Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking peoples and serviced a

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For the sake of simplicity, I will use LXX throughout the rest of this paper to refer to the Septuagint.

¹⁷ S.K. Soderlund, “Septuagint,” ISBE 4:400.

¹⁸ Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), xii.

¹⁹ Peter Walters, *The Text of the Septuagint: Its Corruptions and their Emendations*, Edited by D. W. Gooding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3.

growing number of Jewish people that no longer spoke Hebrew as their lingua franca.²⁰ The LXX also set a precedent for missionaries to translate the Scriptures into various languages and cultures.²¹

One of the challenges of examining the impact of the LXX on the Gospels is the theory that the LXX possibly had an expanded canon. One proposal is that the LXX had an expanded canon of the OT that reflected the Jewish community's use in Alexandria.²² The books in question are 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, the Prayer of Manasseh, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and additions to Esther and Daniel.²³ Even though the Christian community quoted and used the LXX, it is a stretch to assume the Christian community accepted all the extra books of the expanded LXX canon. Edmon Gallagher challenges the assumed view that the LXX had an early expanded canon based on the Hebrew original criterion for the LXX translators' original work.²⁴ It appears that there was a priority given in the Jewish community to works that were originally composed in Hebrew. The expanded canon of the LXX is based on the later manuscript evidence from Vaticanus (fourth century C.E.), Sinaiticus (fourth century C.E.), and Alexandrinus (fifth century C.E.).²⁵ In all probability, the Jews during the first and second centuries B.C.E believed the OT contained only the typical Hebrew canon,

²⁰ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 504–505.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 504.

²² Hugh Pyper, “Jewish Apocrypha,” OCCT 1: 31.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Edmon Louis Gallagher, “The Hebrew Criterion: Aspects of Hebrew in Patristic Biblical Theory” (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 2010), 103–109.

²⁵ Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 109.

as is evidenced in the testimony of Philo and Josephus.²⁶ Even though some of the later manuscripts of the LXX included an expanded canon, there is no conclusive evidence that the earlier versions of the LXX included the expanded canon.

The Use of the Septuagint in the Gospels

It makes perfect sense that the Gospel writers would pull from the LXX for their quotations and allusions to the OT. Gert Jacobus Steyn stated,

The LXX provided the NT writers (who wrote about three centuries after its first translations) with a kind of *praeparatio evangelica*, and were used by them as a vehicle which could help them in the creation of their documents to refer to these Scriptures. They could easily make use of the already translated terminology which was to be found in these documents.²⁷

The LXX made a ready source for the NT writers to employ because the LXX translators had already made some difficult choices in determining which Greek words to use for complex Hebrew ideas. The churches that the Gospels would be received into would have a familiarity with the LXX and its language. In the time of Jesus, there was widespread use of Greek by Jews living outside and inside Palestine.²⁸ Even in Jerusalem in the first century, there was concentrated knowledge of Greek that was passed down and taught.²⁹ Martin Hengel theorizes that as a student in Jerusalem, Paul may have worked with both the Hebrew and the Greek texts in accordance with the bilingual milieu in the Jewish capital.³⁰ It would be prudent for the NT writers to employ language and theological concepts that their audience understood. Everett

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Gert Jacobus Steyn, *Septuagint Quotations in the Context of Petrine and Pauline Speeches of the Acts Apostolorum* (The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), 2.

²⁸ G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015), 54.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hengel, *The Septuagint*, 108.

Ferguson even makes the case for the LXX stronger when he asserted the following, “Much of the grammar, vocabulary, and thought-world of the New Testament finds its best parallel and illustration in the Septuagint.”³¹ Scholars such as Moisés Silva and I. Howard Marshall have noted that Luke’s style is reminiscent of the LXX and it appears his semiticisms originate from the LXX as his source.³² Richard N. Longenecker observes that in the Gospels when Jesus quotes Scripture, the quotations typically follow the LXX reading.³³ Longenecker also asserts that even though Matthew’s direct quotations of the OT usually follow the Hebrew reading, the citations by Jesus are “strongly Septuagintal.”³⁴ Even though some scholars consider Matthew to be more Hebraic in tenor than many other NT books, it is astounding that of his eighty formal and allusive quotations of the OT, about thirty follow the LXX reading.³⁵

There are approximately six hundred passages in the gospels that can be traced back to the OT.³⁶ The majority of those quotations from the OT come from the LXX.³⁷ The following chart illustrates the pervasiveness of LXX quotations and allusions found in the gospels:

³¹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds to Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 410.

³² G. J. Steyn, “Intertextual Similarities Between the Septuagint Pretexts and Luke’s Gospel.” *Neotestamentica* 24:2: 233.

³³ Jobses and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 193.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Lawrence Briskin, “Septuagint Vocabulary in the Gospels and Acts.” *JBQ* 28.3: 190.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

<p>Mark 1:6 καὶ ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης ἐνδεδυμένος τρίχας καμήλου καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περὶ τὴν ὀσφὺν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐσθίων ἀκρίδας καὶ μέλι ἄγριον.</p>	<p>LXX 1 Kgs καὶ εἶπον πρὸς αὐτόν Ἴσχυρὸς καὶ ζώνην δερματίνην περιεζωσμένος τὴν ὀσφὺν αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶπεν Ἡλίου ὁ Θεοσβίτης οὗτός ἐστιν.</p>
<p>Matt 1:23 Ἴδου ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.</p>	<p>LXX Isa 7:14 διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον· ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ·</p>
<p>Matt 2:2 λέγοντες, Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ.</p>	<p>LXX Num 24:17 Δείξω αὐτῷ, καὶ οὐχὶ νῦν· μακαρίζω, καὶ οὐκ ἐγγίξει· ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακωβ, καὶ ἀναστήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ θραύσει τοὺς ἀρχηγούς Μωαβ καὶ προνομεύσει πάντας υἱοὺς Σηθ.</p>
<p>Matt 2:20 λέγων, Ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ, τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου.</p>	<p>LXX Exod 4:19 μετὰ δὲ τὰς ἡμέρας τὰς πολλὰς ἐκεῖνας ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Αἰγύπτου. εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἐν Μαδιαμ Βάδιζε ἄπελθε εἰς Αἴγυπτον· τεθνήκασιν γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντές σου τὴν ψυχὴν.</p>
<p>Matt 11:5 τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν καὶ χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν, λεπροὶ καθαρίζονται καὶ κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν, καὶ νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται καὶ πτωχοὶ</p>	<p>LXX Isa 61:1 Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ, οὗ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισέν με· εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με, ἰάσασθαι τοὺς</p>

εὐαγγελίζονται:	συντετριμμένους τῆ καρδία, κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,
Luke 4:18 Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ, οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκέν με κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει,	LXX Isaiah 61:1 Πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ, οὗ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με· εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκέν με, ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τῆ καρδία, κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν,

The direct quotations and allusions to the LXX in the gospels make it clear that the LXX was the preferred source for the gospel writers in quoting the OT.³⁸

The Septuagint's Influence on the Theology of the Institution Narrative

What impact did the Greek translation of the OT have on the writers of the NT? R.

Timothy McClay contends that the Greek Jewish Scriptures influenced the NT writers in such a way that their writings would be different as a result.³⁹ McClay states, “the content of the NT is substantially different than what it would have been if the Greek translation of the Hebrew books and other Greek Scriptures had not existed.”⁴⁰ McClay goes as far as to propose that the Greek Jewish Scriptures impacted the NT writers' theology.⁴¹ To make a case for the LXX augmenting

³⁸ For more examples of the impact of the LXX on the gospels see the following: Stephen C. Carlson, ““The Jenny and the Colt” in Matthew's Messianic Entry, Part 1: Matthew 21:5 as a Reading of Zechariah 9:9 in Light of Mark 11:1-10.” CBQ 81., Courtney J.P.Friesen, “Getting Samuel Sober: The ‘Plus’ of LXX 1 Samuel 1:11 and its Religious Afterlife in Philo and the Gospel of Luke.” JTS 67:2., Gleason L. Archer and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

³⁹ R. Timothy McClay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Kindle edition, 120, ch 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and influencing the NT's theology, one must first define what is meant by “theology.” McClay proposes that by saying “the theology of X,” we typically mean an individual’s understanding of God as is reflected in their belief and practice.⁴²

The obvious impact the LXX had on the NT is found in the quotations of the LXX and the Greek terms found in the NT from the LXX. For example, words such as ἄγγελος, διαθήκη, τὰ ἔθνη, δόξα, κύριος, and εὐαγγέλιον are all words that are used in the NT that are taken directly from the LXX.⁴³ These terms were already ‘vetted’ by the LXX translators, and the NT writers were able to lift them into their text. A fascinating question to consider is, “How did the LXX influence the theology of the NT?” McClay is once again helpful with this question. McClay points out that one can conclusively see the impact the LXX made on the NT's theology when they observe how the writers of the NT employed quotations from the LXX that better suited their theological point than a quotation from the proto-MT.⁴⁴ Examples of the intentionality of the NT authors using LXX material to make a theological point are the following: Acts 15:16–18 using Amos 9:11–12, Heb 1:6 using Deut 32:43, Matt 21:16 using Ps 8:2, and 1 Cor 2:16 using Isa 40:13.⁴⁵

When one comes to the Institution Narrative of the Lord’s Supper, it becomes evident that the thought world of the LXX influences the NT writers. In examining the impact of the LXX on the Gospels and the Institution Narrative, I would like to focus on two related concepts, and they are sacrifice and covenant. Specifically, I would like to propose a connection between sacrifice, meals, and covenant formation. Does the LXX provide a theological framework that

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the Gospel writers drew from to connect the Lord's Supper with the idea of sacrifice, meal, sacrifice, and covenant formation? To investigate this possibility, I will present to the reader an examination of the institution accounts of the Lord's Supper from the Gospels and compare those accounts with data found in the LXX.

Blood and Covenant

All four accounts of Jesus' words over the cup of the Last Supper agree in claiming that Jesus takes a cup of wine and speaks words of interpretation over it in which he identifies "my blood" with the establishment of a "covenant."⁴⁶ In the accounts of Mark and Matthew, Jesus explicitly says that this "blood is being poured out for many," while Luke and 1 Cor connect the blood with the formation of a "new covenant."⁴⁷ What does it mean for Jesus to establish a new covenant in his blood? How would the first-century reader understand these words of Jesus in the context of the Jewish Scriptures and the Greek OT? What does Jesus mean by stating that his "blood is being poured out for the many?" These important questions must be addressed if one is to work toward an understanding of the Institution Narrative as it relates to the influence of the LXX.

The basic issue at play is the connection of Jesus' blood (αἷμα) to the establishment of a covenant (διαθήκη). Exodus 24 gives us a full picture of God, forming a covenant with His people through blood sacrifice and then celebrating that covenant through table fellowship. Many commentators point to the LXX of Exod 24 as a background to understanding Jesus' words concerning his blood and covenant.⁴⁸ Brant Pitre acknowledges that Exod 24 is the most

⁴⁶ Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 92.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 300.

explicit connection to the words of Jesus in the institution narrative, but it is not the only background passage.⁴⁹ The following is the main passage that many believe is in the background of Jesus' words:

Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. Moses alone, however, shall come near to the Lord, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. *Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar* (italics mine). Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" *So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words* (italics mine)." Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, *and they ate and drank* (italics mine). (Exodus 24:1–11 NASB).

The similarities in the account found in Exod 24 and the Lord's Supper institution passages are compelling. In the Markan-Matthean account of the Supper, Jesus's identification of the cup with "my blood of the covenant" (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης) parallel the words of Moses's "the blood of the covenant" (αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης) found the LXX of Exod 24:8.⁵⁰ The similarity between Mark's institution account and the LXX of Exod 24:8 is striking.⁵¹

Comparison of Mark 14:24 and the LXX of Exodus 24:8

⁴⁹ Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, 93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 94.; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 134.

⁵¹ G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 229.

Mark 14:24	Exodus 24:8
Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης	Ἴδου τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης

Notice that Mark explains the significance of Jesus’s blood by employing τοῦτό ἐστιν in place of Ἴδου.⁵² The original readers would have certainly understood Jesus’s words to connect to the covenant ceremony at Sinai and he is making it clear that he is the sacrifice.

Pouring Out and Sacrificial Language

Another similarity is found between the Institution Narrative and the language of the LXX in the image of Jesus’s blood being “poured out” as a sacrifice.⁵³ This image is similar to the blood of the peace offering being “thrown against” or “poured out” on the altar, as is reported in Exod 24:6.⁵⁴ In Luke 22:20, Jesus refers to his blood as being poured out (ἐκχυννόμενον) which echoes the concept of the Levitical priest pouring (ἐκχεεῖ) the blood of the animal being sacrificed for atonement (LXX Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34).⁵⁵ The image of Jesus’ blood being poured out and the blood being poured upon the altar at Sinai are pictures of sacrificial libations of blood.⁵⁶ All three of the Synoptics have Jesus speaking of his blood as being “poured out (ἐκχύννομαι),” and many interpreters see this language as referring specifically to sacrifice.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ R. T. France, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 570–571.

⁵⁴ Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, 94.

⁵⁵ David E. Garland and Clinton E. Arnold, *Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), 857.

⁵⁶ Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, 94.

⁵⁷ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 958.

One quotation from Sirach may provide insight into the thought-world in which the NT was written. Sirach 50:15, in talking about the temple rites of the priests, states, “he held out his hand for the cup (σπονδείου) and poured (ἐξέχεεν) a drink offering of the blood of the grape (αἵματος σταφυλῆς); he poured it out at the foot of the altar, a pleasing odor to the Most High, the king of all (NRSV).” Sirach connects the concept of drink offering with the blood of the grape poured out from a cup. Jesus speaks of his blood being poured out in connection with the cup. This parallel between Sirach and the words of Jesus are arresting. Could Sirach provide some of the framework that Jesus was working from as Jesus connected the fruit of the vine in the cup with some form of sacrificial?

Another possible connection between Lord’s Supper narrative and the LXX is found in the statement of Jesus that his blood is being “poured out for the many” (ὑπὲρ πολλῶν in Mark 14:24 and περὶ πολλῶν in Matt 26:28). The blood being “poured out for many” could refer to Isa 53. The words of Jesus possibly evoke the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Isaiah 53:12 states, “because he *poured* out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he *bore the sin of many*, and makes intercession for the transgressors (ESV).” In comparison, Matthew in Matt 26:28 states, “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (περὶ πολλῶν) for the forgiveness of sins (ἁμαρτιῶν) (ESV).” Robert H. Gundry points out that Matthew’s use of περὶ with ἁμαρτιῶν connect Matthew with cultic sacrificial contexts found in the LXX.⁵⁸ The Suffering Servant of Isaiah pours out his life as a cultic sacrifice, making himself an offering. Jesus’s reference to his blood being poured out for the many (πολλῶν) echoes Isaiah’s vision of the Servant bearing the sins of the many (πολλῶν). It is possible that the

⁵⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 528.

language Jesus uses at the Last Supper is connected to the thoughts conveyed in Isa 52:10,12 in which Jesus views his sacrifice and the Supper through the lens of the sacrifice of the Servant.

Sacrifice Reframed with the Term θυσία

To understand the thought world of the NT writers and how they viewed sacrifice and communal meals, one can look to the LXX for help. The ones translating the Hebrew concepts of sacrifice to Greek were faced with a challenge. The translators had to choose which Greek words to use to help the reader understand the Hebrew Bible's conception of sacrifice. The translators took a radical step in picking a term that translated the idea of sacrifice. The term chosen to do the heavy lifting of translating multiple ideas from Hebrew was θυσία. θυσία carried some freight in the ancient Greco-Roman world and had table meal connotations. One of the best test cases for how the LXX translated the complex idea of sacrifice in Hebrew is Mal 1:10. Malachi 1:10 states, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an *offering* from your hand (ESV)." First, the LXX of Mal 1:10 uses the Greek root θυσία concerning the offering that will not be accepted. The unaccepted offering is contrasted to the pure offering (θυσία) that will be offered by the Gentiles in Mal 1:11. Andrew McGowan makes the point that the Septuagint uses the term θυσία to translate both the Hebrew terms *zebah* and *minhah* and in so doing collapses the idea of the bloody animal sacrifice with the grain or cereal offering.⁵⁹ McGowan proposes that the LXX's combining of these two Hebrew terms in its understanding of sacrifice and its translation method opens the door for interpreters using the

⁵⁹ Andrew McGowan, "Eucharist and Sacrifice: Cultic Tradition and Transformation in Early Christian Ritual Meals" in *Meals and Religious Identity in Early Christianity* eds., Matthias Klinghardt and Hal Taussig, (Tübingen: Francke, 2012), 195–6.

LXX to conceive of sacrifice as a communal meal.⁶⁰ The extension of the meaning of *θυσία* in both these directions (*zēbah* and *minhah*) is significant for this current study. By collapsing these two concepts of sacrifice into one overarching idea, it makes it possible to see a sacrificial communal meal as one that is meatless. When one considers how prevalent sacrifice (*θυσία*) brought about sustenance in the ancient world through communal meals, it is not a stretch to see how this term in Malachi could take on the connotation of a sacrificial meal. With the LXX's use of *θυσία*, it is also possible to see a meatless Eucharist as a type of sacrificial fellowship meal.

Early extra-biblical testimony provides further light to this study by attaching the concept of *θυσία* to the Lord's Supper. One of the earliest Christian documents to describe the Lord's Supper in sacrificial terms is the Didache. The Didache also called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," gives ethical injunctions, instructions on baptism, teaching on how to celebrate the communal thanksgiving meal or eucharist, and guidelines on how to deal with itinerant teachers, apostles and prophets.⁶¹ Some scholars argue for a date of the Didache beginning around 70 B.C.E while others such as Bart Ehrman argue for a date around 100 B.C.E.⁶² With such an early date range, the Didache gives us a picture into the interpretive thought world of Christians in the late first century. This is important for the question, "did the LXX provide a matrix of thought that allowed one to combine the idea of *θυσία* (sacrifice) with the Lord's Supper?" Did the LXX expand the concept of *θυσία* to include communal meals? The following quote from the Didache provides insight when it states,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 196.

⁶¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume 1* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 406.

⁶² Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48.

“On the Lord’s day, when you gather together, break bread and give thanks [Or: celebrate the eucharist] after you have confessed your unlawful deeds, that your sacrifice (θυσία) may be pure. Let no one quarrelling with his neighbor join you until they are reconciled, that your sacrifice (θυσία) may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice (θυσία) mentioned by the Lord: “In every place and time, bring me a pure sacrifice (θυσίαν). For I am the great King, says the Lord, and my name is considered marvelous among the Gentiles.”⁶³

In this quote, one can see conclusively that an early interpreter of the NT data concerning the Lord’s Supper can describe the Supper using the term θυσία. Interestingly, the Didache attaches the passage found in Mal 1:10–11 with the Lord’s Supper. That adds another layer of intrigue to this study due to the fact the Didache uses the term θυσία to connect Malachi to the Lord’s Supper. When the LXX collapsed the ideas of *zebah* and *minhah* into one term θυσία, it opened the door for the idea of a meatless sacrifice. Combining these categories makes it possible for a document like the Didache to apply sacrificial language to a ritual table meal such as the Lord’s Supper.

A Synthesis of the Data

From the many points of reference between the Institution Narrative and the LXX, it is obvious that the LXX influenced the language and theology of the Supper. First, the similarity in language and thought between the Institution Narrative and the LXX of Exod 24 shows a connection between what occurred at the Last Supper and the blood, covenant, meal matrix of Exod 24. Also, Jesus uses sacrificial language for his blood in Luke 22:20 being poured out (ἐκχυννόμενον) by echoing the concept of the Levitical priest pouring (ἐκχεῖ) the blood of the animal being sacrificed for atonement. The “pouring out” of the blood of Jesus resonates with the “pouring out” of the animal’s blood at the Day of Atonement. Sirach also provides further

⁶³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Volume 1*, 439.

theological scaffolding for viewing the “blood of the grape” and the “cup” in terms of sacrificial libations.

Furthermore, the blood poured out for the “many” for the forgiveness of sins shows connections to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and his sacrificial death for the many. Lastly, the LXX uses the term *θυσία* to synthesize two different categories of Hebrew sacrifice. The LXX combines the ideas of *zebah* and *minhah* to provide a framework for viewing sacrifice in terms of communal meals that are meatless. This development by the LXX has big implications for the Lord’s Supper and shows how early interpreters could apply sacrificial language to a meatless communal meal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the LXX provided a Greek-speaking world a ready-made reservoir of Greek terms and concepts that the NT writers could pull from to convey the idea that Jesus is the culmination and *telos* of the Hebrew Bible. Much of the heavy lifting of developing categories and language in Greek from Hebraic thought was accomplished by the LXX. In this paper, I endeavored to show how the LXX provided a bulk of the OT references found in the NT and shaped the theology of the NT. For further research, it would be interesting to examine how the multitude of cultic/sacrificial echoes and allusions from the LXX in the Institution Narrative could shape our theology of the Supper. Is it legitimate to speak of the Lord’s Supper in sacrificial categories? If so, what kinds of sacrificial categories should be employed? Could the early development of the sacrificial language of the Church Fathers stem from these echoes and allusions? Further investigation into these questions raised would be a fruitful endeavor for the academy and the church.

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