THE SEPTUAGINT AND JESUS'S THEOLOGICAL VOCABULARY

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The Septuagint (LXX), a collection of the first translations made of the HB, has been called "a fascinating treasure from the ancient past" and "a milestone in human culture."[1] These translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into *κοινή* Greek were produced in the last two or three centuries BCE and constitute "the largest and most ambitious translation project of the Greek and Roman world."[2] The LXX was "the Bible" of pre-Christian Judaism and the early Christian church. Yet, most students of Scripture today are unfamiliar with the Septuagint and its influence on modern translations. Modern scholars and teachers need to enlighten general audiences about its significance in the early church and shaping of the NT.

Scholars are aware of the Greek OT's influence on linguistic, biblical, and theological studies. It is the most extensive extant writing in the vernacular of the *κοινή* or Hellenistic language and, according to scholar Henry St. John Thackeray, "of primary importance for a study of later Greek."[3] Since it sometimes paraphrases the Hebrew texts, it often represents an

[1] Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 1.

[2] Stanley E. Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 342. The Septuagint "was the first translation anywhere in the world of any literary work of similar scope." John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 187.

[3] Henry St. John Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 1:16.

interpretation and thus constitutes "the earliest commentary on the Hebrew OT."[4] Moreover, because the Septuagint influences the language of the NT and is the primary source of quotations for NT writers, it also impacts biblical theology and Christian doctrine.[5] Henry Barclay Swete affirms that "[t]he careful student of the Gospels and of St Paul is met at every turn by words and phrases which cannot be fully understood without reference to their earlier use in the Greek Old Testament."[6] Indeed, the LXX is a uniquely valuable resource in studying both the OT and the NT.[7]

The blank page separating the OT and NT in most Bibles is filled with invisible ink describing a vast array of historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic developments, and the LXX plays a prominent part. To illustrate its influence on the NT, its continuing relevance for general audiences, and its unique value for serious students of Scripture, this paper selectively illustrates the Septuagint's influence on Jesus's vocabulary. He used words like ἀδελφός ("brother"), κύριος ("Lord"), ἐκκλησία ("church"), βαπτίζω ("baptize"), and διαθήκη ("covenant") that took on lasting theological significance among Jesus's disciples. Readers will best understand his ministry and doctrine when their understanding of these theological terms is informed by the terms' backgrounds in the LXX.

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[4] G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 108.

[5] W. Edward Glenny, "The Septuagint and Biblical Theology," *Them* 41.2 (2016): 265.

[6] Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), 404.

[7] "As time has passed and investigation has proceeded, the consensus of judgment is that the influence of the Septuagint upon the New Testament is so important as to be crucial in the field of interpretation." Everett F. Harrison, "The Influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament Vocabulary," *BSac* 113.449 (1956): 38.

WHAT IS "THE SEPTUAGINT"?

Today, the Bible is available in the world's major languages, but this has not always been the case. For instance, the Christian OT was only available in Hebrew until the third century BCE, when scholars generally agree that its translation began in Alexandria, Egypt. The legend describing translation of the Pentateuch by a group of Jewish scholars at Alexandria is based on the *Letter of Aristeas*. According to this letter, seventy-two Jewish scholars dispatched from Palestine translated the Law of Moses into Greek at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus for the Alexandrian library.[8]

The "Septuagint" designation derives from the size of this legendary group. There is no evidence that either the group or its immediate audiences referred to their work by this name. In fact, the available evidence suggests that Christians first applied the title centuries after the HB was entirely translated, and modern scholars do not always use the designation consistently.[9] Some scholars refer to the aggregate of ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures as "the Septuagint." Others use the term in referring to a definitive collection of translations encompassing the entire HB. Still others use it with respect to Greek translations of the Pentateuch only.

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[8] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 432–433.

[9] Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 25. "We have no evidence that any Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, or even of the Pentateuch, was called the Septuagint prior to the second century of this era." Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 17.

Beyond the *Letter of Aristeas*, the origin of the LXX "is enveloped in mystery."[10] Ancient writers typically receive the account as historically accurate, but modern scholars do not.[11] Kenneth Scott Latourette, for instance, calls it "undoubtedly spurious."[12] Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva explain that, "[m]ost scholars today believe that this 'letter' was written not at a time contemporaneous with the events it describes but in the second century BCE, to defend Judaism in general and the Greek version in particular, perhaps against a revision of it or a competing translation."[13] However, even if the letter embellishes specific details, it confirms the Greek Pentateuch's existence at least as early as the second century BCE.[14]

Scholars generally believe the rest of the Christian OT was translated and revised piecemeal for a couple of centuries after the work began at Alexandria.[15] The final product, then,

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[10] G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?: The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 55.

[11] "In antiquity both Jews and Christians accepted the legend as an historically accurate account of the Septuagint's origins." Benjamin G. Wright III, *The Letter of Aristeas* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 6. "[M]odern scholarship (since the sixteenth century) has disputed the account because of historical inaccuracies, internal contradictions, and exaggerations over time."Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 57. "Most scholars who have analyzed the letter have concluded that the author cannot have been the man he represented himself to be but was a Jew who wrote a fictitious account in order to enhance the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures by suggesting that a pagan king had recognized their significance and therefore arranged for their translation into Greek." Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 15.

[12] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Volume 1: To A.D. 1500*, revised. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 15.

[13] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 18. "Only the dating can be considered the historical kernel of this account." Hengel, *Septuagint as Christian Scripture*, 25.

[14] Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 49. "Although it may be difficult to establish the exact date when the LXX was completed, it nevertheless seems evident that all three parts of the Hebrew Scriptures were available in Greek by the end of the second century BCE." Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 58.

[15] "Modern research shows that the translations of the various books of the Hebrew Bible

was not a singular translation of the HB produced by a finite group working together from a shared set of criteria. Therefore, some reasonably maintain that "there is really no such thing as *the* Septuagint."[16] Like the Hebrew texts of the Christian OT and the Greek texts of the NT, numerous forms and variants of the Greek OT developed over time.[17] While acknowledging the eclectic quality of the collection, the term "Septuagint" is used here regarding the final, collected form of Greek translations of the HB produced in the last two or three centuries BCE.[18]

THE SEPTUAGINT AS THE JEWISH BIBLE

Whether or not Ptolemy II Philadelphus requested a Greek translation of the Pentateuch, it is unlikely that the commission of an Egyptian ruler was the sole impetus for translating the Christian OT. The HB was written in Hebrew with select contributions in Aramaic, making it accessible to most Jews either directly through reading or indirectly as portions were read aloud and taught publicly. Over time, though, as Palestine was subjugated by a succession of foreign powers and large groups of Jews were forcibly relocated, many Jews lost the ability to read and speak Hebrew (see, e.g., Acts 2:5–11).

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were made by different translators at different times and possibly at different places." Pieter J Lalleman, "Does the Septuagint Contain Inspired Revelation for Christians?," *EuroJTh* 30.1 (2021): 39. Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 290. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 15.

[16] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 14.

[17] Walton and Sandy, *Lost World of Scripture*, 189.

[18] "It has become customary, however, to extend the term *Septuagint* to refer to the complete Greek corpus of the Hebrew Scriptures (plus some additional books) as found in codices of the Greek Bible (e.g., Codex Vaticanus) and in modern printed editions (e.g., Rahlfs)." Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 16.

As Alexander the Great and his successors conquered the region and spread Hellenism, they dispersed the Jews and many others throughout the Greek Empire, and these emigrants assimilated Greek language and culture.[19] The Romans became the dominant power in the Mediterranean in the final centuries BCE and the first centuries CE, but Greek remained the *lingua franca*. Philo of Alexandria's writings demonstrate that Greek was used in secular and sacred Jewish literature outside Palestine in the first century CE.[20] The extent to which Palestinian Jews assimilated the language is reflected by among other things, Greek writing in BCE Palestinian ostracon, ossuaries near Jerusalem, and a Greek Herodian Temple inscription warning Gentiles against entering the temple.[21]

As more Jews communicated in Greek and fewer could read and write Hebrew, a Greek translation of the HB became a practical necessity.[22] Among other things, it was required for the Scriptures to be read aloud and used in the synagogues.[23] The LXX's reception confirms this practical demand. Just as native English speakers receive translations of the Hebrew OT and

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[19] "[I]t was impossible for Jews who for generations spent their lives and carried on their business in Greek towns to retain their Semitic speech." Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 8.

[20] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 7.

[21] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 9–13.

[22] "The translation of the Hebrew Bible into what became known as the Septuagint (LXX) was begun in Egypt during the third century B.C. out of recognition that most of the Jews living there were linguistically incapable of understanding, or meaningfully worshipping in, their religious language, Hebrew.… Some Diaspora Jews may have been able to worship in Hebrew or Aramaic, but the vast majority worshipped in Greek." Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature*, 342.

[23] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 55. "Since it is clear that Jewish worship usually involved reading Scripture, whether in public or private, it would have been a natural step to translate it into Greek." Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 52.

Greek NT into English as "the Bible," Jews received the Greek OT as the inspired word of God. According to Ivor J. Davidson, "[t]he Septuagint was regarded as especially inspired by God, and in Alexandria the local Jewish community celebrated an annual festival in memory of its production."[24] Ultimately, Greek translations were used throughout the Jewish diaspora rather than Hebrew texts.

The primary utility of the Greek OT for Jews was undoubtedly internal. Yet, by translating their Scriptures into Greek to make them more accessible to their fellow Jews, Jewish scholars made them directly available to the broader Greek-speaking world for the first time.[25] As G. Scott Gleaves explains, "[t]he LXX was probably the customary version used in the synagogues throughout Galilee and no doubt would have been the translation that the Gentile Godfearers would have understood."[26] Because Jesus was a Hebrew male in first-century Palestine, the Septuagint was his Bible—at least one of them.

THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE NT

Since Jesus and his disciples were Jewish and the OT Scriptures in modern Bibles are translated from Hebrew manuscripts, people today are likely to assume that Jesus and his disciples primarily used Hebrew manuscripts as well. Most readers probably do not realize that first-century Jews were likely multilingual and primarily read the Septuagint as their sacred

[24] Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine, A.D. 30-312*, vol. 1 of *The Baker History of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 46.

[25] Metzger, *Bible in Translation*, 18.

[26] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 142.

text.[27] Because of this heavy reliance on Greek translations, the LXX was "the most influential middleman or bridge between the Hebrew text of ancient Israel and the increasingly Greek-speaking early church."[28]

In addition to reading the Septuagint and using it in public religious services, evidence suggests that the people who produced the NT recognized Greek translations as sacred Scripture.[29] This reception inevitably impacted the texts they produced. Among other ways, the Greek OT's influence is evident in the NT's content, style, and vocabulary.[30] Indeed, "[t]he language of the NT has been shaped by that of the LXX."[31] The authors wrote in Greek—the common language of their time—and it was natural for them to use the LXX in their work.[32]

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[27] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 18.

[28] Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 140.

[29] Craig Blomberg and Jennifer M. Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 76.

[30] "The Septuagint's influence on early Christians can be seen in the number of Hebrew idioms and words found in the New Testament." Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 88–89. "Much of the grammar, vocabulary, and thought-world of the New Testament finds its best parallel and illustration in the Septuagint." Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 435–436.

[31] Claude Cox, "Some Things Biblical Scholars Should Know About the Septuagint," *ResQ* 56.2 (2014): 98.

[32] "The earliest Christian apostles were Jews who, wishing to show that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, appealed to the ancient Scriptures of Judaism.… [I]t was natural for them to quote from the existing Greek Bible, regardless of whether they themselves knew and used the Hebrew (or Aramaic) and whether they held the Greek as divinely inspired." Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 79. "Their deliberate choice to write in Greek was probably largely pragmatic: Greek was the language of the spreading church and it would have been impractical to communicate in Hebrew. In Antiquity relatively few people were literate and the recipients of (almost) all New Testament writings were living outside Israel, so Greek speakers." Pieter J

The Greek OT's influence on the early church is evinced by the prevalence of LXX quotations in the NT, which quotes from the Septuagint more frequently than the HB.[33] As Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., explains, "[t]hat the LXX was the principal Bible of the early church can hardly be refuted if one is to judge on the basis of the text form of the OT most frequently used throughout the entire NT in quotations."[34] For instance, Lev 19:18 is quoted seven times in the NT (see Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jam 2:8), and writers follow the Greek translation in each instance.

In some cases, reliance on the LXX rather than a Hebrew text is theologically significant.[35] For example, the quotation in Matt 1:23 of Isa 7:14 follows the Septuagint. It foretells of Immanuel being born to a "virgin" (παρθένος, *parthenos*) rather than, more generally, a "young woman of marriageable age" (עַלְמָה, *alma*), as the Hebrew says.[36] Paul's quotation of Isa 45:23 in Rom 14:11 is another example. In the HB, Isaiah indicates that God swears by himself and avers that every tongue shall swear allegiance to him. In the Septuagint, though, Isa 45:23 says that "every tongue shall swear by God," who is speaking in the text.[37] When Paul

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Lalleman, "Does the Septuagint Contain Inspired Revelation for Christians?," *EuroJTh* 30.1 (2021): 52–53.

[33] "The textual evidence reveals that the Scripture more often quoted by NT writers was the LXX translation, not the Hebrew text." Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 8.

[34] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 5.

[35] "But the Greek Old Testament matters greatly because sometimes New Testament authors make use of specific wording found in the Greek tradition passage that differs meaningfully from the known Hebrew wording." Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 147.

[36] Davidson, *The Birth of the Church*, 173.

[37] In the Septuagint, Isa 45:23b reads, "Ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ, καὶ ὀμεῖται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τὸν Θεόν." Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*

quotes the LXX in support of his contention that all people will stand before the judgement seat of Christ (Rom 14:10), the context in Isaiah suggests that Paul attributes divinity to Christ. This nuance is only evident, though, in the Greek NT.[38]

In addition to being the primary source of quotations in the NT, the Septuagint influences the writers' vocabulary.[39] According to Bruce M. Metzger, "many of the terms used and partly created by the Septuagint translators became part and parcel of the language of the New Testament."[40] Consequently, tracing the use of vital NT words back into the Septuagint helps demonstrate the its influence on the NT.[41] For instance, the word ἄγγελος (*angelos*) generally refers to a messenger in classical Greek, but it is used to translate the Hebrew word מַלְאָךְ (*mal'ak*) in the LXX, where it often refers to God's supernatural agents. The specialized use of ἄγγελος in the NT, then, "doubtlessly reflects the strong influence of the Septuagint."[42] In the same way, the Greek word ἔθνη came to mean "Gentiles" in the NT rather than "nations" generically.[43]

(Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 882.

[38] Blomberg and Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 76.

[39] "Given the New Testament authors' broad exposure to the Greek Old Testament, it is not surprising that they would often employ the narrower rangers of meaning for some words, making the Greek Old Testament a kind of 'urban dictionary' for the New Testament." Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 143.

[40] Metzger, *Bible in Translation*, 18.

[41] "The best way to gain some conception of the debt of the New Testament to the Septuagint is to select a few samples from the vocabulary of the New Testament and trace their use from classical Greek writers through the Septuagint into the New Testament…." Harrison, "Influence of the Septuagint," 39.

[42] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 220.

[43] R. Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand

The Greek OT remains relevant for modern Bible students, among other reasons, because of its continuing impact. Regarding its importance for the primitive church, Gleaves asserts, "Perhaps the most fascinating phenomenon concerning the LXX was the fact that a translation that was meant to serve as a Jewish witness to their faith and life was taken over by Christians of the first century CE."[44] Concerning its specific role in shaping the NT, Swete avers, "It is not too much to say that in its literary form and expression, the New Testament would have been a widely different book had it been written by authors who knew the Old Testament only in the original, or who knew it in a Greek version other than that of the LXX."[45] The Septuagint, then, is not a historical curiosity. Its profound influence on Christianity has endured since the inception of the Christian church.

A SELECTIVE LOOK AT JESUS'S VOCABULARY

The Greek OT's influence on the NT can be illustrated by Jesus's distinctive use of key terms during his ministry. Modern Bible students can better understand Jesus's life and teachings by studying how some of the words he used were employed in the LXX.[46] In fact, the meaning and context of words like "Lord," "church," "brother," "baptize," and "covenant" in the Septuagint provides insights that may be obscure or taken for granted by Bible readers who are

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 146.

[44] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 59.

[45] Swete, *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 404.

[46] "[S]tudying a key word in a New Testament passage should always entail, if possible, exploring its use in the Greek Old Testament." Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 146.

more familiar with the subsequent development of the terms in the Pauline epistles and writings of the Church Fathers.[47]

Κύριος ("Lord")

Κύριος is one of the most common words in the Greek NT. It generally refers to a ruler or person having authority. However, Gospel writers sometimes use κύριος (*kyrios*, lord) as a distinct designation for God (see, e.g., Matt 1:20, 22, 24; 4:7, 10; 11:25; 21:42; 22:37; Mark 12:29–30; Luke 1:9). In fact, they consistently substitute this Greek term where the HB uses יְהוָה, the tetragrammaton.[48] This occurs, for example, in Matt 3:3 and Mark 1:3 where the writers quote Isa 40:3 ("prepare the way of the Lord" [ESV]). This specialized use of κύριος is never explained in the NT, but the Septuagint sets the precedent for using the term as a specific designation for deity. There, κύριος is "the standard way to render the name of God in Greek."[49]

Jesus uses forms κύριος throughout the Gospels in the generic sense of "sir" or "master" when referring to authority figures (see, e.g., Matt 6:24; 10:24–25; 18:25–27, 31–32, 34). On some occasions, though, he uses the term as an obvious designation for God. For example, Mark 12:29–30 reports the following response when he is asked to identify the most important command in the Mosaic Law: "Jesus answered, 'The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The

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[47] "The distinctive religious meaning of many New Testament words (e.g., *ekklesia, baptisma, presbyteros, psallo, cheirotonia)* is to be found not from etymology or classical usage but from the adaptations already made by Greek-speaking Jews, as known from the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha." Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 435–436.

[48] See, e.g., Matt 3:3 and Mark 1:3 quoting Isa 40:3.

[49] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 332. "Κύριος is often used in the NT of Yahweh/God." Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:329.

Lord [κύριος] our God, the Lord [κύριος] is one. And you shall love the Lord [κύριον] your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" [ESV]. In this quotation of Deut 6:4–5, Jesus follows the Septuagint in using κύριος where the HB uses the tetragrammaton.

Awareness that the LXX, Gospel writers, and Jesus consistently use κύριος in referring to God gives a heightened significance to the title's frequent application to Jesus in the NT and, specifically, in the Gospels. For instance, when John says he is preparing the way of "the Lord," he potentially applies Isa 40:3 to Jesus, implicitly equating him with God (John 1:23). The apostle Thomas explicitly equates the two (John 20:28). Jobes and Silva are correct in their assertion that the repeated references to Jesus as κύριος are "[p]erhaps the most striking case of the adoption and adaptation of theological language from the Greek Jewish Scriptures in the NT."[50]

Ἐκκλησία ("Church")

The word "church," the most common term associated with communities of Christians today, is used in sometimes subtly distinct ways. A "church" might refer to a local group that meets together for worship; larger associations of local groups that share doctrinal and theological commitments; or the entire, diverse collective of Jesus's disciples throughout the world. It might even refer to the buildings where a group of worshippers assemble. Awareness of the way "church" is used in the LXX can help modern readers develop a better understanding of what it means to be the church.

[50] Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 220.

The term is common today, in part, because it is prominent in the NT, where it occurs more than 100 times as an English translation of ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, church). Paul, for example, uses forms of ἐκκλησία more often than other NT writers and routinely calls communities of Jesus's disciples "churches" (see, e.g., Acts 20:28; Rom 16:1, 5, 23; 1 Cor 4:14; 14:4–5; 15:9; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Interestingly, despite his repeated use of the designation, the apostle does not explain it. Apparently, he anticipates that his Christian audiences readily understand its meaning and application.

The chronologically earliest uses of ἐκκλησία in the NT are ascribed to Jesus. He uses it thrice in Matthew's Gospel—once in Matt 16:18 and twice in Matt 18:17.[51] These are the first, and perhaps most important, indications of the term's significance for his communities. In Matt 16:18, he tells Peter, "I will build my church [ἐκκλησίαν]." This is commonly understood as a reference to the entire universe of disciples who will come to Jesus following his resurrection and ascension. In Matt 18:17, he tells the apostles to bring an erring brother to the church [ἐκκλησίᾳ] and to reject him if he refuses to listen to the church [ἐκκλησίας]. There, Jesus seemingly refers to a discrete group of followers in a specific geographic area that is capable of resolving an internal controversy.

Like Paul, Jesus never explains what he means by "church." It is important to remember, though, that Jesus uses the term in speaking to fellow Jews who are very familiar with the LXX. The English word "church" does not occur in the major modern translations of the OT, but the underlying Greek word is used in the Septuagint. This makes it likely—if not inevitable—that Jesus's understanding of ἐκκλησία is mediated through the Greek OT, where it commonly

[51] Benjamin L. Merkle persuasively argues that the references to ἐκκλησία attributed to Jesus in Matt 16:18 and 18:17 should be considered authentic. Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Meaning of ᾽Εκκλησία in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17," *BSac* 167.667 (2010): 284–91.

translates the Hebrew קָהָל (*qāhāl*, to assemble) in referring to assemblies of the people of Israel (see, e.g., Ex 35:1; Lev 8:3–4; Num 1:18; 8:9; Deut 4:10; 31:12; Josh 22:12).[52]

When Jesus uses the word "church," then, he leverages a Greek word that is pregnant with theological meaning for Jews because of its use in the Greek OT, and he applies it to his new messianic community.[53] The references in the Septuagint suggest that, when Jesus says he will build his ἐκκλησία in Matt 16:18, he is referring to something more than a "called out" group of people. He promises to shape a new "people of God" who will be identified in and through their relationship with him.[54]

When Israel is called out of Egypt, the people become distinct from others because of their special relationship with God, and they are expected to live in a way that glorifies God and reflects his holiness in the world (Ex 19:3–8; Lev 20:7–8; 26:1–46). In Matt 16:18, Jesus announces his intention to call a new distinctive group to glorify God and reflect his holiness. Paul later identifies this new community "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). He commonly refers to it as the "church(es) of God" (see, e.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5) and, less frequently, the "church(es) of Christ" (Rom 16:16).

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[52] "The LXX uses ἐκκλησία only for קהל, which typically denotes ad hoc meetings of the whole people of Israel or, occasionally, the people themselves." Richard Last, "Ekklēsia Outside the Septuagint and the Dēmos: The Titles of Greco-Roman Associations and Christ-Followers' Groups," *JBL* 137.4 (2018): 963.

[53] Merkle, "The Meaning of ʾΕκκλησία," 291. "Granted that Jesus intended his followers to continue after his death as a coherent group, there is no reason why he should not have used the word occasionally. If he was the Messiah he would be linked with a community following his teachings. This would be the more likely in that the word was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the people of God, whether assembled or not." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 424–25.

[54] McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint*, 164.

Ἀδελφός ("Brother")

Christians commonly refer to one another as "brothers" (and "sisters") in Christ. The precedent for this pattern is clear in the NT (see, e.g., 2 Thess 1:3; 2 Pet 3:15; 1 John 3:13–17; 3 John 1:5). For instance, John's Gospel describes members of the Christian community as "the brothers" (John 21:23). Paul, in particular, develops the family imagery in his epistles by referring to Christians as children of God (see, e.g., Rom 8:14, Phil 2:15) and fellow Christians as "brothers" (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal 6:1; Eph 6:10; Col 1:1; 2 Thess 3:6). The label is so pervasive and persistent historically that "brother" has become the "universal, standard name for Christians."[55]

While Jesus's disciples may have popularized the fraternal label in the Christian community, the Greek word ἀδελφός (*adelphos*, "brother") was a common and ordinary term. In classical Greek, it simply designates a physical relative. In the LXX, it often translates the Hebrew אָח (*āḥ*, "brother") and retains the denotation of physical relationship (see, e.g., Gen 4:2, 8–11; 10:25; 29:10; 1 Sam 26:6). However, it sometimes means "neighbor" or "fellow countryman" in Israel (see, e.g., Deut 3:18, 20; 10:9).[56] Forms of ἀδελφός occur more than 300 times in the NT, and they often refer to the male offspring of common parents (see, e.g., Matt 1:2, 11; 4:21; 12:46; Mark 3:31–32; 6:17; 12:19–20; Luke 14:26). However, the nuance of membership in a broader association reflected in the Septuagint is adopted and applied by NT writers in describing relationships between members of Jesus's church.

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[55] Richardson, *Theological Word Book*, 79.

[56] Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:29.

In describing Christians as "brothers," the NT writers follow a precedent set by Jesus before the church began. The following exchange is illustrative:

> While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Matt 12:47–50 ESV).

Before his death, Jesus encourages Peter to strengthen his "brothers" (Luke 22:32). Before his ascension, he refers to the apostles as his "brothers" (John 20:17). Jesus uses ἀδελφός to describe his disciples' relationships to one another as a consequence of their mutual participation in the spiritual community of God's people he forms. Christians are, in a sense, neighbors and fellow members in God's "holy nation" (1 Pet 2:9–10).

Βαπτίζω ("Baptize")

Baptism is almost universally considered essential in Christian churches because most Christians believe Jesus personally instituted it.[57] According to some scholars, "Baptism has been one common denominator in almost every Christian denomination through Christian history."[58] However, the mode of baptism varies. For instance, some churches sprinkle water on people while others pour water on them and still others immerse them in water. The LXX, "the Bible" in first-century Palestine, is a natural supplement to the Gospel accounts in understanding what Jesus taught and practiced regarding the mode of baptism.

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[57] Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Girdlestone's Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 153. Ian A. McFarland et al., eds., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 52.

[58] John Mark Hicks and Greg Taylor, *Down in the River to Pray: Revisioning Baptism as God's Transforming Work*, revised (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2010), 20.

In English Bibles, the term "baptize" is introduced without warning in the Gospels because it does not appear in translations of the OT. In the Synoptics, John "the baptizer" promptly appears and begins "baptizing" Jews, including Jesus, in the Jordan River (see Matt 3:6, 13–16; Mark 1:5, 9; Luke 3:7, 12, 21). The Gospel of John notes that Jesus and his disciples subsequently "baptized" many people as well (John 3:22; 4:1–2). Yet, there is no discussion of the practice's origin and there is little description of what precisely is involved.

The Greek verb rendered "baptize" in English translations is βαπτίζω (*baptizō*, to dip). John, Jesus, their disciples, and those to whom they preached would have been familiar with the word because it appears in the Septuagint three times. In Isa 21:4, it is used in figuratively, where the prophet indicates that he is terrified with fear.[59] On the other occasions, it is used literally. In Judith 12:7, for instance, the word βαπτίζω is used to indicate that Judith "washed" or "bathed" herself nightly at, or in, the spring of water near the camp of Holofernes.

The cleansing of Naaman in 2 Kings is the most theologically important occurrence of βαπτίζω in the LXX.[60] There, the prophet Elisha instructs Naaman to go and "wash" (from λούω, to wash) in the Jordan River seven times to cure his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10). Naaman ultimately went and "dipped" (from βαπτίζω) himself in the Jordan River seven times (2 Kgs 5:14). The Greek aorist verb ἐβαπτίσατο translates a form of the Hebrew verb טָבַל (*ṭāḇal*), which means "to dip" and is used, for example, with regard to dipping one's feet into water (Josh 3:15), dipping a piece of bread into vinegar (Ruth 2:14), and dipping a cloth into water (2 Kgs 8:15). In 2 Kgs 5, then, Naaman immerses or plunges himself in the river to wash and cleanse himself of leprosy.

[59] Girdlestone, *Girdlestone's Synonyms*, 154.

[60] Girdlestone, *Girdlestone's Synonyms*, 154.

The references to John and Jesus "baptizing" disciples are literal like the reference to Naaman dipping himself in the Jordan River. While preaching a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), then, they invite hearers to be dipped in water and cleansed spiritually. Prior to his ascension, Jesus charges his apostles to baptize people among the nations as part of the disciple-making process. In light of the Septuagint's use of βαπτίζω, this commission is best understood as a call to immerse would-be disciples in water as one "dips" one's feet into water, one's bread into vinegar, or one's cloth into water.

Διαθήκη ("Covenant")

The word "covenant," from διαθήκη (*diathēkē*), is "arguably the most important biblical term characterizing God's relationship with Israel and God's relationship, through Jesus Christ, with Jews and Gentiles alike."[61] The term occurs four times in the Gospels. On one occasion, John's father, Zechariah, praises God for remembering his covenant with Israel (Luke 1:72). The other instances are Synoptic accounts of Jesus observing the Passover the night before his crucifixion (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

While observing the Passover with his apostles before his death, Jesus institutes "the Lord's Supper." First, he breaks the unleavened bread and directs them to share in it. While doing so, he states that the bread represents his body (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23–24). Jesus then gives thanks for the cup and directs the apostles to drink from it. As he does so, he states that the cup represents his blood of the "covenant" poured out for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:27–28; Mark 14:23–24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). This imagery is

[61] McFarland et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary*, 119.

reminiscent of—if not intentionally evoking—Moses's inauguration of Israel's covenant with God in the wilderness with the sprinkling of blood (Ex 24:8).

Following the institution of the Lord's Supper, the contrast between the "new covenant" and the "old covenant" between God and Israel becomes an essential concept among Jesus's followers (see, e.g., 2 Cor 3:5–6, 14; Gal 4:24–26; Heb 7:22; 8:6–7). For instance, Paul refers back to Jesus's statements in reminding the Corinthians about the significance of their participation in the memorial in their assemblies (1 Cor 11:25), and the Epistle to the Hebrews links Jesus's blood and the eternal covenant with God several times (Heb 9:20; 10:29; 12:24).

These theological uses of διαθήκη are a consequence of the word's prior use in the LXX. In secular Greek, the word refers to a last will and testament.[62] In the Septuagint, however, it is consistently used to translate the Hebrew בְּרִית (*bərît*, covenant) in referring to God's covenants with, among others, Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9–17), Abraham (Gen 15:18; 17:2–21; Ex 2:24), and the children of Israel (Ex 19:5; 24:7–8). While the classical range of the Greek word does not include a divine arrangement between God and human beings, it acquires this meaning for Jews because of its prevalence in the Greek OT.[63] In the NT, this is predominant meaning.[64]

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[62] Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:299.

[63] McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint*, 146.

[64] Galatians 3:15 and Heb 9:16–17 are rare exceptions. "Any attempt to understand the use of διαθήκη in the NT on the basis of nonbiblical rather than Septuagint Greek will get us nowhere.… When we are told (Luke 22:20) that at the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον ("this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" [NIV]), it is impossible to dissociate the Hebrew concept expressed by בְּרִית from the death of the one who is establishing this new covenant." Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 222–23.

CONCLUSION

Since the Septuagint is a uniquely valuable resource in their work, biblical, theological, and linguistic scholars know of its importance. Yet, because modern translations rely on Masoretic Hebrew texts in translating the Christian OT, most general audiences have a little or no appreciation for its significance. This article suggests that, given the LXX's influence on the NT and the Christian church, Bible students need greater exposure to this ancient and culture-shaping translation. Its influence on Jesus's vocabulary and the nuances apparent in his theological vocabulary, alone, are sufficient justification.

Christians typically study the OT because it describes the beginning of God's dealings with the human family and provides the requisite background to much of what unfolds in the NT. They will profit from knowing that the Septuagint is "[t]he most obvious document lying behind" the NT.[65] Of course, this does not mean that translations of the LXX should replace modern translations of the HB. However, scholarship and teaching, particularly scholarship and teaching intended edify Christian audiences, should account for and explain the Septuagint's influence.[66]

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[65] Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?*, 156.

[66] "[S]tudying a keyword in the New Testament passage should always entail, if possible, exploring its use in the Greek Old Testament." Lanier and Ross, *The Septuagint*, 146.

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