

WHY ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS PREFER THE SEPTUAGINT

Fourth Edition

Preface

Some of our clergy felt that the series of articles included here should be published under one cover. The purpose of these articles was to explain to our faithful, in a simple and easily-understood manner, some of the differences that exist between the Old Testament (Masoretic) text used by most of today's Roman Catholics and Protestants and the Septuagint Old Testament used by Orthodox Christians since the time of Christ. All told, there are some 300 textual differences between the Masoretic and the Septuagint texts, some of them important and some of them insignificant. These articles will explain why Orthodox Christians prefer the Septuagint, despite some admittedly beautiful and eloquent passages found in the Masoretic text.

The articles by Metropolitan Ephraim were originally published on the internet in the Spring of 2009, and they appear here in a slightly edited and augmented form.

ONE
HONOUR THE PHYSICIAN

In the *Wisdom of Sirach*, it says:

“Honour the physician with the honour due unto him for the uses ye may have of him: for the Lord created him...The skill of the physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration. The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth, and he that is wise will not abhor them...And the Lord hath given men skill, that He might be honoured in His marvelous works. With such doth [the physician] heal men, and taketh away their pains. Of such doth the apothecary make a confection; and of his works there is no end; and from him is peace over all the earth”

(Wisdom of Sirach 38:1-8).

When I was a little boy of about seven or eight years of age back in California, one of my playmates [who was Protestant] asked me if I wanted to come over to his house that night for a Bible class. Since my mother often read me Bible stories, and I liked them, I was very much inclined to go to my friend’s house that evening. But first, I had to get Mom’s permission. Faster than it can be told, I ran home to get Mom’s okay. She listened as I recounted my buddy’s invitation, and she could see that I was obviously excited about it. Then she nodded her head in a negative way, and said, “No, I don’t think so. You see, son, they don’t use the same Bible we do.”

“Awww, nuts! Come on, Ma! It’ll be okay!” I persisted. “No, I don’t think it will be okay. I’ll buy you a book with some Bible stories,” she concluded, firmly holding her ground.

I stomped out the back door, sulking and thinking to myself, “She only said that they don’t have the same Bible we do because she doesn’t want me to go to the Bible class.”

But Mom was right.

She was a simple woman. She had not had much of an education, but she was sharp as a tack [she had to be: she had given birth to seven male rascals, and it was only by expending desperate and superhuman efforts that she was able to prevent two of them, especially, from disrupting the entire neighborhood. She used to tell me, “If you had been a jackass when you were young, you would have died from the beatings you got!”]

However, to return to the main thrust of our story.

She was right, of course, about the non-Orthodox having a different Bible. By the word "different," she could have meant two things: 1] the actual books in the non-Orthodox Scriptures are different from those that we have in our Scriptures [true]; or 2] the Protestants and Roman Catholics interpret the books of the Holy Scripture differently than we do [also true].

The quotation that was used at the beginning of this article is a case in point. *The Wisdom of Sirach* [or *Ecclesiasticus*] is not found in the Protestant Bible, and the Roman Catholics call it "deuterocanonical," [whatever that is]. The odd thing, however, is that, in our Saviour's time, the Jewish people honored these texts as "Holy Scripture." Proof of this are the many quotations from these holy books that can be found in the New Testament.

Furthermore, if the Protestants had not rejected so many books of the Holy Scriptures, there might well have never arisen among them such strange nineteenth century sects as the so-called Christian Scientists, who, as we know, reject the use of human medicine — often with disastrous results.

After all, as clear as a bell, the *Wisdom of Sirach* teaches us:

"Honour the physician with the honour due unto him for the uses ye may have of him: for the Lord created him...."

There are other valuable teachings in these holy books, as well. For example, there is one prophetic text that, in less than fifty words, sums up the entire purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God. In one sentence, in fact, it answers the question: why did God become man? This wonderful text is in the book, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and in the clearest possible terms it tells us:

While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine almighty Word leaped out of Heaven out of Thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war, into the midst of a land of destruction.

(*Wisdom of Solomon*, 18:14-15)

We do, indeed, have a very different Bible from our non-Orthodox Christian friends.

Thanks, Mom.

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TWO
THE NEUTRALIZATION OF THE NETHERWORLD

"Isn't that what Adolph Hitler did to Holland in World War II?"

This, indeed, is the sort of reaction you might expect to get if you were speaking to someone about the "neutralization of the Netherworld." He really wouldn't know what you were talking about. On the other hand, if you were to refer to it as the "Harrowing of Hell," people might or might not understand. Orthodox Christians know it as the "Descent into Hades." Most "Bible-believing" Americans nowadays, however — even those living in the so-called Bible Belt — would probably look at you quizzically if you were to mention it — despite the fact that it is cited in the Holy Scriptures (I Peter 3:18-20).

Indeed, this is what happened on one occasion at our monastery in Boston. Perhaps thirty or so years ago, a Protestant minister and his wife were visiting the monastery and I was assigned to give them "the tour." We had seen the workshops, the refectory, the chapel and finally came to the area where the icons were on display, and I was telling the couple that the monastery was self-supporting. "One of the ways we support our monastery is by producing and selling these icons," I explained to them. They knew about the traditional use of the holy icons in the Orthodox Church, so they were somewhat familiar with what they were seeing. Since it was the Paschal season, the icon of the Descent into Hades was in a prominent place of honor on the analogion and, therefore, caught the eye of the minister's wife. "Oh, what is that icon?" she asked. "That depicts our Saviour's Descent into Hades," I responded.

"What's *that* all about?" she asked, incredulously.

Embarrassed by his wife's reaction, the minister glanced at me nervously, and then back at his wife, and said, "Why yes, dear. You know about *that*, of course. It's mentioned in one of the Epistles of Peter."

Ah! if looks could kill, the minister would have been charged with homicide! Talk about awkward moments.

It became obvious that the teaching about our Saviour's descent to Sheol, the place of the dead, is not a prominent feature in Protestant Sunday schools.

Yet, as we mentioned above, it is clearly cited in the New Testament:

For Christ also hath once suffered for our sins. He, the just, suffered for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. In the body, He was put to death; in the spirit, He was brought to life. And in the spirit He went and preached to the spirits that were imprisoned, who formerly had not obeyed....

(I Peter 3:18-20)

Furthermore, this event is also clearly prophesied in the Old Testament. In the Church's services, one prominent element is the "Polyeleos" of Matins. One portion of the Polyeleos is a selection of verses from the Psalms of the Prophet David appropriate for each major feast. For the Feast of Thomas Sunday, the Resurrection of Christ is *the* major event being celebrated, of course, and these are some of the Psalmic verses that we hear in the Polyeleos:

As for them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.
Fettered with beggary and iron.
They cried unto the Lord in their affliction.
And out of their distresses He saved them.
And He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death.
For He shattered the gates of brass.
And brake the bars of iron.
And He delivered them from their corruption.
And their bonds He brake asunder.
To hear the groaning of them that be in fetters.
To loose the sons of the slain.

"He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death." All these Old Testament verses refer to our Saviour, "the fierce Man of war" spoken of in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, who "leaped out of Heaven" into a "land of destruction" to redeem mankind and lead the captive souls in Hades "out of darkness and the shadow of death."

In the Book of Job, God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind and asks him:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? tell me now, if thou hast knowledge, who set the measures of it, if thou knowest? Or who stretched a line upon it?...Or did I order the morning light in thy time?...Or didst thou take clay of the earth, and form a living creature, and set it with the power of speech upon the earth?...*And do the gates of death open to thee for fear; and did the gate-keepers of Hades quake when they saw thee?*

(Job 38:4-16)

The text is vivid and striking.

But there is a problem here: this last portion of the quotation from the Book of Job is quite different in the Protestant text. In the Revised Standard Version, for example, it reads as follows: "Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?" Very different indeed, and not much of a "prophecy" of the actual event. One might say that, as a prophecy of our Saviour's descent into and destruction of Sheol, it has all the vigor and verve of an overcooked noodle.

In the article "Honour the Physician," I recounted how my mother would not allow me to attend my playmate's Protestant Bible class when I was a youngster in California. The reason she gave me for not allowing me to go was that "the Protestants had a different Bible" than we did. At the time, I thought she was just trying to find an excuse for not letting me go to the Bible class. But, as I wrote in that article, it turned out that she was right, and I came to understand this as I learned more about our Orthodox Christian faith. I wrote also in that article that there were two differences between our Holy Scriptures and the Scriptures that the Protestants use: 1) the books that we have in our Holy Scriptures are different, and 2) the interpretations that the Protestants give are different from the interpretations of the Church Fathers.

However, it turns out, there is also a *third* difference.

Even *within* the books that we share in common with the non- Orthodox, *the texts are different*, as we can see, for example, in the abovementioned quotation from the Book of Job. One of the major reasons for these differences is that the Orthodox Church uses the Septuagint text of the Old Testament [see below], which was also the text used by the holy Apostles in the time of our Saviour.

The subject of the Descent into Hades — the "neutralization of the Netherworld" — is of vital importance. The implications of that event in Christ's work of salvation has been sorely underestimated in the West; but that is a subject that will require yet another article. So, stay tuned.

The Septuagint Text — A Footnote —

What many people do not realize is that, as long as we can determine, there have been variants in the Scriptural texts as they have come down to us. Our readers will note that we have pointed out that the texts of the Old

Testament that the Protestants and Roman Catholics use today are *different* from the Septuagint text that the Orthodox Church has used since the time of our Saviour. Why?

Some history may be useful here. By royal decree, the Septuagint text was prepared in the third century before Christ in Alexandria Egypt by the best Jewish scholars of the day.* At the time, Alexandria was the greatest center of learning in the known world, and its library was famous for its completeness and the valuable manuscripts it contained. The Septuagint translation was an occasion of great celebration, and a special day was set aside to commemorate this event in the Jewish community, which, for the most part, no longer spoke Hebrew, especially in the diaspora. (In Palestine the Jews spoke only Aramaic.) Now, with the Septuagint translation, the rabbis could instruct their people again easily in a language most of them spoke (Greek), but, in addition, they could make their faith more readily accessible to the pagan world around them. Consequently, the Septuagint was held in great esteem, and in the time of our Saviour, it was in wide use in the Jewish community (as the many quotations from it in the New Testament testify). What is also noteworthy is that Philo, one of the greatest Jewish scholars of antiquity, was also one of the foremost apologists for the Jewish religion among the pagans. Through the many tracts he wrote (all of them based on the Septuagint text), he led many thousands of pagans to convert to the Jewish faith. Yet, Philo, a contemporary of our Saviour, could not speak Hebrew. He knew only Greek.

With the appearance of Christianity, however, things began to change. The many thousands of pagans who formerly had converted to Judaism now began turning to the Christian faith. In addition, thousands of Jews also converted to Christianity. Through the work of the holy Apostles, the *evangélion*, the "good news" of our Saviour and His triumph over mankind's last enemy — death — began spreading like wildfire throughout the Mediterranean world and beyond. Furthermore, the Apostles were armed with proofs: the Old Testament prophecies that foretold of our Saviour's coming. Thanks to the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, those prophecies were in a language almost everyone could understand.

*We say "by royal decree" because, initially, the Jews were opposed to having their sacred texts "defiled" by having them translated into a Gentile language. So, it required a decree by Ptolemy to have this work accomplished. According to ancient sources, the text used for the work of translation was supplied by the High Priest in Jerusalem.

In the meantime, the whole Jewish world was shaken with a terrible catastrophe — the fall and complete destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 by the Roman legions. This event, prophesied by our Saviour, caused utter consternation in the Jewish community, because, not only had the political center of the country vanished amidst inhuman atrocities and barbarity, but the Temple itself was gone! Literally, no stone was left upon a stone; the very center and heart of the Jewish faith had been ruthlessly cut out by the Romans, and even the Jewish priesthood was exterminated. The few shreds left of the city's population were banished and the Jews began a long exile.

In an attempt to restore some order out of this total devastation, around A. D. 90 or 100 a prestigious school of rabbis in the city of Jamnia (or Jabneh), which is some thirteen miles south of Jaffa, constituted a new Sanhedrin and discussed and determined the canon of the Old Testament. In view of the fact that the Septuagint was being used so extensively (and effectively) by the "new faith" (Christianity) in winning many thousands of converts from paganism *and* from the Jewish people themselves, it was resolved by the rabbinical school to *condemn* the Septuagint text and forbid its use among the Jews. The day which had been formerly been set aside as a day of celebration commemorating the translation of the Septuagint was now declared a day of mourning. Philo's valuable tracts in defense of the Jewish faith were renounced as well, since they were based on the Septuagint translation.

The Old Testament text used today by non-Orthodox Christians is the Masoretic text, which was prepared by Jewish scholars in the centuries *after* Christ. When they picked among the many variant texts to prepare their own version of the Old Testament, these Jewish scholars, as might be readily understood, had an already decided bias against any Scriptural variant that might lend itself to a *Christian* interpretation. As the centuries passed, those variant texts not used by the rabbis fell by the wayside, or were usually destroyed, and thus, about a millennium after Christ, these scholars finally arrived at what is now known as the Masoretic text.

With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in the middle of the twentieth century, however, the numerous ancient variants in the Hebrew sacred texts came to light again, and, in many cases, the Septuagint text proved to reflect the original Hebrew text better than the text that has come down to us in the later Masoretic version.

Also, many ancient Hebrew words cannot be understood or even pronounced any longer. They can be translated and understood only with the

help of the Septuagint. Thanks to the Dead Sea scrolls, the Septuagint text is now held in far greater esteem among non-Orthodox scholars than it was even a few years ago. The Septuagint text may have its own problems, but it represents an ancient and authentic Hebrew tradition. For centuries, it was beloved and celebrated by the Jewish people, and that is one of the reasons why it was, and still is, espoused and revered by the Christian Church.

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THREE

THE CASE OF THE MISSING PROPHET

We have written in a previous article (“The Neutralization of the Netherworld”) that the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament represents an ancient and authentic Hebrew tradition. Due to the fact that there were variances in the Hebrew texts, the textual tradition that the Septuagint translation presents often differs widely from the Masoretic Hebrew text of today.

But there are also some surprises.

In very ancient times, it seems some anonymous rabbis felt that they needed to take some liberties with the sacred texts, mostly — it appears — out of embarrassment. For example, in the Book of Judges, we are told that the children of Dan fell into idolatry (Judges 18:30-31). This is what the Septuagint says:

And the children of Dan set up the graven image for themselves; and Jonathan, the son of Gerson [Gershom], the son of Manasses, he and his son were priests to the tribe of Dan till the time of the carrying away of the nation [literally: the land]. And they set up for themselves the graven image which Michaias [Micah] made, all the days that the House of God was in Selom [Shiloh].

This, essentially, is what the Masoretic says also. The only problem here is that Gerson [Gershom] was not the son of Manasses. He was the son of the Prophet Moses! How embarrassing! The grandson of Israel’s most

prominent prophet fell into idolatry! This is what author Charles D. Provan (*Christian News*, May 7, 2007) writes:

...The rabbis themselves wrote that they deliberately changed some passages [of the Old Testament]. Among the most definite [changes] is Judges 18:30 where the rabbis admit they changed the text from Moses to Manasseh in order to protect Moses!*

The teachers of Israel felt this fall on the part of the Prophet's grandson would cast reproach on the reputation of the great Moses, so they changed the name. The translators of the Septuagint inherited this variant in the text they were given, and so they faithfully rendered this ancient rabbinical redaction into Greek.

So, two cheers to the translators of the Septuagint for their fidelity to the text they received.

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FOUR

THE CASE OF THE MISSING PROPHECY

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, we read the following prophetic passage:

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, and take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.

(Matt. 2:12-15)

*For more on this, see cnmail@fidnet.com. The Biblical scholar Charles D. Provan has written many fine articles about the need to correct the contemporary Masoretic Old Testament text according to the texts of the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. He cites many passages where the Septuagint Old Testament is correct, whereas the Masoretic text is faulty or has been altered.

Many Protestants believe that this prophecy is found in the Old Testament book of the Prophet Hosea (chap. 11, verse 1). But this cannot be true. Why? If you read the Hosea passage in its entirety, you realize that this particular passage is speaking about God's *disobedient* son, the nation of Israel. This cannot be said of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There is only one Old Testament passage that clearly fulfills all the qualifications for being the prophecy that the Gospel of St. Matthew is referring to. That is Numbers 24:2-9, *in the Septuagint text*:

And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and sees Israel encamped by their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable and said: Balaam says to the sons of Beor, the man who sees truly says, He who hears the oracle of the Mighty One speaks, who saw a vision of God in sleep; his eyes were opened: How goodly are thy habitations, Jacob, and thy tents, Israel! As shady groves, and as gardens by a river, and as tents which God pitched, and as cedars by the waters. There shall come a man out of his seed, and he shall rule over many nations; and the kingdom of Gog shall be exalted, and his kingdom shall be increased. *God led him out of Egypt*; he has as it were the glory of a unicorn: he shall consume the nations of his enemies, and he shall drain their marrow, and with his darts he shall shoot through the enemy. He lay down, he rested as a lion, and as a young lion; who has stirred him up? They that bless thee are blessed, and they that curse thee are cursed.

Scholar Charles Provan writes, "...Though the sojourn [in Egypt] may be obtained in the Masoretic text, yet it is much easier to derive it from the Greek version. Indeed, that Numbers 24 is a Messianic prophecy is so obvious that it jumps off the page, as does the Egyptian sojourn of the Messiah."

And also:

"Notice also that one name [of our Saviour] in the New Testament is The Lion from the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). Though there are Messianic prophecies in which it is stated that Christ would come from the Tribe of Judah, I am aware of none which refer directly to Christ as a Lion, except the Numbers 24 prophecy of Balaam. This is obtainable from the Masoretic text, but is unavoidable in Greek."

Two and a half cheers for the Septuagint text!

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FIVE

THE CASE OF THE MISSING KINSMEN

As C. Provan points out, "There are differences....between the Septuagint Old Testament and the Old Testament of the Rabbinic Jews [the Masoretic text]. To make matters worse, many Christians now suppose that since the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible kept by the Rabbinic Jews is, in fact, the 'original Hebrew'. In fact, it is *not* the original Hebrew, and it is not too old either. You see, the rabbis had very particular orders concerning the copying of the Old Testament. Among their rules is the command that all old, used copies of the Old Testament are to be destroyed. Hence, the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dates to about 1100 A. D. The Greek Old Testament is very much older than that."

Some of the differences that we find between the Septuagint and Masoretic texts are the following:

In the Gospel of St. Luke, in the genealogy of Christ, in chapter three, verses 36 and 37, there are two Cainans mentioned. The Septuagint Greek Old Testament also mentions two Cainans in Genesis 10:24. The Hebrew Masoretic text, however, mentions only one.

When the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in the middle of the last century, the Hebrew text of some two thousand years ago was examined, and that text —like the text of the New Testament and the Septuagint — had two Cainans! What happened?

C. Provan tells us the following: "According to ancient Jewish literature, the second Cainan was involved in the reintroduction of astrology into the post-flood world. By eliminating the second Cainan [from the genealogies], Noah's great grandson is eliminated as a problem since he was esteemed a great sinner." That is how the second Cainan disappeared from the genealogy of the Masoretic text! Does this remind us of the Soviet method of air-brushing the "enemies of the people" from old photographs? Apparently, some rabbis who worked on the Masoretic text felt they had even more divine authority than God!

Then, there is Acts 7:14. There, the God-inspired St. Stephen the First Martyr, "filled with Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:54), tells us that all the members of

the Patriarch Jacob's family were seventy-five in number. The Septuagint text also says "seventy-five". But the Masoretic Hebrew text in Genesis 46:27 says "seventy." Who is correct? If we check the Dead Sea scrolls, we find that they confirm what the Septuagint and the New Testament say: "seventy-five"!

Three cheers for the Septuagint text!

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SIX **THE CASE OF THE MISSING VERSE**

Psalm 144 (Ps. 145 in the Masoretic text) is an "acrostic Psalm" in Hebrew, that is, each of its verses begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. But there is a problem in today's Hebrew Masoretic text. The verse that should begin with the Hebrew letter "N" is missing.

At the same time, people have noted that in the Greek version of the Book of Psalms (i.e. the Septuagint text), there is an "extra" verse where the missing letter "N" should be in the Hebrew text. By "reverse translating" this verse from the Greek back into Hebrew, the verse begins with the missing letter "N"!! Furthermore, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, the ancient Hebrew text of the Psalms had the verse exactly where the Septuagint had it.

In the Septuagint, the so-called "extra" verse is:

Faithful is the Lord in all His words, and holy in all His works
(Ps. 144:14)

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the so-called "missing" Hebrew verse says:

God is faithful in His words,
And gracious in all His deeds.

A twenty-one gun salute for the Septuagint!!

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SEVEN
THE CASE OF THE MISSING FEAST

The Jewish people love the feast of Hanukkah. It is their answer to Santa Claus and Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer.

But there is a little problem here. The Feast of Hanukkah is *nowhere to be found* in the present-day Hebrew Scriptures. *Oy!* Well, where can we find it? You guessed it: It is based on an oral tradition which, in turn, is based on an incident found *only in the Greek Septuagint text!!!* — the First Book of Maccabees (4:36-59).

Yes, the feast that is one of the most beloved for the Jewish people today is based on a text found *only* in the sacred Scriptures of the Orthodox Christians, the New Israel.

Happy Hanukkah to all!

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EIGHT
THE CASE OF THE MISSING VIRGIN

As we know, around Christmas time, popular magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* will go out of their way to publish articles that take potshots at Christianity. Inevitably, the magazines will find some liberal Protestant professor who is willing to attack anything that smacks of Christianity, and one of their favorite targets is the virgin birth.

This is what the Old testament says:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

(Esaias 7:14)

In Connection with this biblical text, I recall an incident that was described to me some years ago by a student attending theology classes at Harvard University. When the Old Testament professor – who claimed to be Christian – came to the above – mentioned scriptural text, he went to considerable length to demonstrate that the Hebrew text did not really say “virgin,” but “young woman.”* At this point, to his chagrin, a young Jewish

*See the article “What Does Almah Mean?” on our Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston website: <http://www.homb.org>.

woman stood up in the classroom and said to him, "I'm sorry, but you are very wrong. Many Jews believe that the Messiah is to be born of a virgin. Proof of this is that when Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek – the well-known Septuagint version – they used the Greek word *Parthénos*, which can only mean 'virgin,' not 'young woman.'" And with that, she sat down, while the professor hastily changed the subject.

Glory to God in the Highest for the Septuagint!

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NINE

A JEWISH HOLIDAY

As I have mentioned elsewhere, the Jewish people had a very great love for the Septuagint for centuries. Why? Because they had forgotten Hebrew and spoke only Greek or Aramaic. Consequently, the Septuagint translation was the only way they could understand their Holy Scriptures. The other advantage was that the Septuagint became the cause for thousands of pagans to convert to Judaism.

Philo, a contemporary of our Saviour, was one of Judaism's greatest apologists and defenders. Through the many tracts that he wrote, many converted to Judaism. Yet, as we know, Philo knew no Hebrew and based all his texts on the Septuagint.

But with the appearance of Christianity, all those pagan converts and thousands of the Jews themselves began to turn to and espouse the Christian Faith. In view of the fact that the Septuagint was so effective in the hands of the Apostles, this caused a sharp and desperate reaction among the leaders of the Jewish religion, and they renounced that Septuagint. What had formerly been a day of deliberation for them was turned into a day of mourning and grief. Even Philo's valuable tracts were all renounced.

Essentially, in their desperation, the teachers of Israel reverted to a text (the Hebrew Bible) which only they, the rabbis, could read and understand, *but which was incomprehensible to virtually all of their people.*

Yet, as writer Alexander Zvielli points out (*Jerusalem Post*, June, 2009, p. 37) both Philo (known more fully as Philo Judaicus of Alexandria, c. 20 B.

C.–A. D. 50) and Josephus Flavius (A. D. 38–A. D. 100) respected the Septuagint highly. In fact, the popularity of the Septuagint in the ancient Jewish community and the Hellenistic world is undeniable.

Zvielli writes: “Although some modern scholars claim that the *Letter of Aristeas* (which describes how the Septuagint was translated), is an imaginative composition written for the sole purpose of presenting the Jewish people, Jerusalem and Judea in a favorable light, *The Letter* presents us with a contemporary record and a valuable window into the past. It is written with the personal knowledge of an eye-witness, Aristeas, an officer at the court of the Egyptian emperor Ptolemy Philadelphus (285–247 B.C.), who addresses his brother Philocrates, and we are informed in the *Letter* that Ptolemy discovered that there were no translations of the Jewish Law in his world-famous library of Alexandria and, consequently, he demanded that Eleazar, the High Priest of Jerusalem, send him skilled translators to rectify the situation.

“Eleazar found this request ‘contrary to nature,’ and hesitated to comply, but since Judea was under Ptolemy’s rule, he had no choice.

“Accordingly, seventy-two (hence, ‘Septuagint’ – from the Latin for ‘seventy’) hand-picked Judean scribes left for Alexandria, where their translating skills in both Hebrew and Greek, as well as their general knowledge, was tested by the king himself. The sages answered many difficult questions, and took special care to explain to the king some Jewish customs, such as circumcision and the dietary laws, which were often ridiculed in pagan Hellenistic society.

“Ptolemy was highly satisfied with this knowledgeable team, and hosted it lavishly on the Island of Pharos, off the Alexandrian coast where the famous lighthouse stood. The Law was soon translated, precious gifts were exchanged, the translators returned home, and Ptolemy released all Jewish prisoners of war he held.

“In his *Life of Moses* (vii:41-2), Philo writes that an annual festival was still held at Pharos in his day to celebrate the translation of the Septuagint. He witnessed, a joyous festival, in which not only Jews, but a great number of ‘persons of other nations sailed across the bay to honor the place where the first light of interpretation shone forth, and to thank God for that ancient piece of beneficence... And after the prayers and the giving of thanks, some of them pitched their tents on the shore, and some of them lay down without any tents in the open air on the sand of the shore, and feasted with their relations and friends, thinking the shore at that time a more beautiful

abode than the furniture of the king's palace.'"

Two thousand, three hundred years after its appearance, the Septuagint is still the most unbiased record of God's revelation to His people. And that is why we, the new Israel, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostle Church, still cherish it.

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TEN

THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Metropolis of Boston often receives requests for a list of the canonical books of the Old Testament in their proper Orthodox Christian order. The text that follows has been prepared by Father Arsenius, monk, of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, MA.

If you are Orthodox you need more than a mere list of books. The translation of the books in question must be made from the authentic text of those books. The translations "made from the original Hebrew" which Protestant preachers are always waving about in the air and thumping, are, alas! not what they claim to be. When the last Jewish editors of the present Hebrew text finished revising it, (which was over 1000 years *after* Christ) they demanded that all copies of Hebrew scripture which varied from their own be completely destroyed on pain of death if the owner of any such copies failed to comply. This demand was carried out so faithfully from Toledo in Spain to Babylon in Mesopotamia (an enormous area, if you look at your map) that until the finding of the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls" only one earlier copy of the older Hebrew text had ever been recovered (the celebrated "Cairo Genizeh" copy.)

To put it simply: The original Hebrew of the sacred text no longer exists as a whole in any available form. Perhaps it is buried, one way or another, part here, part there, among the mass of fragmentary materials we call the Dead Sea Scrolls, or in other archaeological finds still to be made, but capable editors have not yet sorted out all this material. And capable editors are hard to find.

But all is not lost. God never leaves His people unprovided for. In the famous Greek translation made for the great Library of Alexandria by command of the king of Egypt about 290 B.C. (we call this translation the Septuagint for "the Seventy"--actually, 72 -- learned Jewish scholars who

did the work, they being specially chosen for their spiritual wisdom and for their linguistic skills by the High Priest at Jerusalem) we find the original text fully preserved and faithfully rendered into a language at once more exact and intelligible, as the ancient Jews themselves were delighted to recognize, than is the Ancient Hebrew. Indeed, God Himself prophesies, and therefore has Himself overseen the making of, the Septuagint translation. In the Book of the Prophet Sophonias (3.9), He explicitly says, "For then will I change for the peoples my language for their generations, that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve him under one yoke." The one yoke, of course, is Christ's (see Matt. 11.29.)

Look this up in your trusty King James or Revised Standard (or whatever) version (= Zephaniah 3.9). There, you will find something quite different. But then, *ALL* modern English versions have been made on the basis of the latest *Masoretic* revision of the Hebrew, a text which dates, as we have said, over 1000 years AFTER the Crucifixion of Our Divine Saviour..

But here is the list:

The Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses:

Genesis: the Birth of the World¹

Exodus: the Way out of Egypt¹

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy: a Recapitulation² of the Law

Jesus the son of Navê

Judges

Ruth

Of the Kingdoms, four books

[N.B. The title "Kings" should not be used by the Orthodox. It is a deliberately deceptive label, originally chosen by the Masoretes to further their own hidden agenda. By intermeddling the usurping rulers of "Israel" with the legitimate Kings of Juda and setting them both on the same level, the Masoretes hoped to confuse the reader as to the pedigree of the Messiah and the legitimacy of the kingdom of "Israel." For the Masoretes were determined that the ten tribes that made up the kingdom of "Israel"---

¹ Titles given in the Codex Alexandinus.

² Not, as those with but little Greek often suppose, "a second (or esoteric law".)

though these tribes had cut themselves off completely from Juda and were become zealous idolaters¹ — should nevertheless be regarded as a congregation of true-blue, loyal, sterling Jews. According to the testimony of the Prophets as given in the Septuagint, the Lord God of Israel deems otherwise.]

Paralipómena, two books

[N.B. The ancient (and until the Protestant Reformation, only) name of these books, "Paralipómena,"² means "Matters kept in reverent silence, Sacred mysteries not to be divulged to the profane." The books themselves, rich in *theôría*, are largely dismissed by modern Protestants, who refer to them as "Chronicles," and rarely read them. The vaguely indefinite name "Chronicles" has no place in Biblical tradition: it was given to these books by the German reformer Luther, is used only by Protestants and those of like mind, and ought not to be employed by the Orthodox. According to Luther, these books are the "lost" books--*e.g.*, "the book of Jasher" (see Joshua 10.13, &c.)-- referred to here and there in the Masoretic text. They clearly are nothing of the sort, as anyone with half a brain can see, nor is the term "chronicle" at all applicable to them (consult any good dictionary).]

The Twelve Prophets
 Osêe [pronounced O-see-eh]
 Amos
 Michæas
 Joel
 Abdias
 Jonas
 Nahum
 Abbacum
 Sophonias
 Aggæas
 Zacharias
 Malachias

The Four Prophets
 Esaias
 Jeremias
 Baruch
 Lamentations
 The Epistle of Jeremy
 Ezechiel
 Daniel
 Esther
 Tobit
 Judith
 Of Esdras the Priest, two books
 Of the Maccabees, four books

¹ "What have we to do with the house of David?" was their favorite rallying-cry.

² The form "Paralipoménôn" found in the Vulgate reflects the Greek genitive plural (*biblíôn paralipoménôn*); we use the form of the nominative case.

The Psalter (plus the additional early psalm of David, not numbered with the 150)

Job

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

The Song of Songs

The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach

The Psalms of Solomon

[FINIS]

ELEVEN

GOD'S LANGUAGE

We have written about the differences between today's Masoretic text of the Old Testament and the ancient Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Actually, since the Septuagint translation was finished about 290 years *before* Christ, and the contemporary Hebrew Masoretic text was only completed a millennium *after* Christ, the Septuagint version is almost 1,300 years older than the current Masoretic edition!

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the middle of the last century, sometimes favor the Septuagint text and sometimes the Masoretic text. As far as the Septuagint is concerned, it is important to remember that it was done by scholars of the Jewish faith almost 300 years before Christ. So it cannot possibly be argued that it has a pro-Christian bias. In the case of the Masoretic text, however, it was done in the centuries *after* Christ, so there are always suspicions about an anti-Christian bias in the choice of the variant Hebrew texts that were picked in order to create the Masoretic edition. These suspicions are especially strong when passages in the Septuagint which lend themselves readily to a Christian interpretation are substantially different, or even disappear entirely, in the Masoretic text.

But, the truth be told, and to be fair, there are passages in the Masoretic text that really are very beautiful and more eloquent than the Septuagint version. And, the fact of the matter is that the Septuagint is, after all, a translation of the Hebrew text. As we know, every translation from one language into another is, in reality, an interpretation. Every

language has words whose full range of nuances and implications cannot possibly be translated accurately into another language.

This is especially true when we are talking about God's language. What language does God speak? Well, it would be helpful for us to know, first of all, that God speaks in a *very* ancient language. This language is known by the name "Uncreated Divine Grace." This language does not translate well into our Semitic or Indo-European languages, or, for that fact, into any manmade language. Many fine men and women have thrown up their hands in despair trying to translate God's language (and yet, oddly, children sometimes have no problem at all understanding it). Furthermore, nobody can duplicate the sounds of God's language; it seems to have no vowels or consonants that human beings can articulate.

In the article, "Rationalism and Fundamentalism," we quoted what some Saints of the Church had to say about conveying God's language into ours.

In his work, *The Hexaemeron*, St. Basil the Great says the following:

It must be well understood that when we speak of the voice, of the word, of the command of God, this divine language does not mean to us a sound which escapes from the organs of speech, a collision of air struck by the tongue; it is a simple sign of the will of God, and, if we give it the form of an order, *it is only the better to impress the souls whom we instruct.*

(*Hexaemeron* II: 7)

St. Gregory of Nyssa, on his part, has this to say:

...human speech finds it impossible to express the reality which transcends all thought and all concept; and he who obstinately tries to express it in words, unconsciously offends God.

(*Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, Homily 7)

And, again, he writes:

Lifted out of himself by the Spirit, (the Prophet David) glimpsed in that blessed ecstasy God's infinity and incomprehensible beauty. He saw as much as a mere mortal can see, leaving the covering of the flesh, and by thought alone entering into the divine vision of that immaterial and spiritual realm. And though yearning to say something which would do justice to his vision, he can only cry out (in words that all can echo after him): *I said in mine ecstasy, every man is a liar* (Psalm 115:2). And this I take to mean that anyone who attempts to

portray that ineffable Light in language *is truly a liar* — not because of any abhorrence of the truth, but merely because of the infirmity of his explanation.

(From the *Homily on Virginity*)

What does all this have to do with the Septuagint and the Masoretic texts? Simply this: as feeble attempts to translate God's language into our man-made languages, *both* versions fall short. Each one has its own strong points, and its weak points, but neither one can adequately convey the revelation of God's ineffable grace into our earth-bound languages. As for the differences between the Greek and Hebrew texts — except for the fact that there was some open tampering with the Old Testament texts in the Masoretic (for more information on this, go to cnmail@fidnet.com) — both versions, with certain qualifications, might often simply represent different textual traditions of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Having in mind what the Saints of the Church have said about the limitations of our human languages in dealing with divine revelation (see above), it is no surprise that Orthodox Christians do not get bent out of shape, as Roman Catholic or Protestant textual critics seem to do, about textual differences and variations in the Holy Scriptures.

However, the reason why Orthodox Christians *prefer* the Septuagint is simply because it represents an ancient, authentic and *unbiased* text of the Old Testament, translated and embraced by the Jewish people themselves for almost 400 years. Since we hold ourselves to be the New Israel, we feel pretty strongly about upholding this tradition of the God of our Fathers. Amen. So be it.

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ADDENDUM

TAMPED TEXTS

Or

Rabbinical Razzle-Dazzle
Regarding Religious Writings

An article in the *International Jerusalem Post* (May 22-28,2009) reinforces what we have written in the pamphlet *Why Orthodox Christians Prefer the Septuagint*. And what is that? That, after the destruction of the

Temple in Jerusalem in A. D. 70 by the Roman legions, and after the extermination of the Jewish priesthood by the same forces, a radical change took place in Judaism. In fact, it was a revolutionary change, a “sea change” in the Jewish religion.

According to author Rachael Elior, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, after the destruction of the Temple the rabbis were involved “in nothing less than a reinvention of Judaism.”

The rabbis, first of all, became “engaged in a culling of all the Hebrew religious texts composed until that time. The works they would choose from this [sacred] library would constitute the Jewish canon [the books of the Hebrew Old Testament], which henceforth would be the only texts deemed to have divine authority,” writes Elior.

This was in the time after Christ, when Christianity was gaining thousands of converts from paganism and Judaism. And what was one of the most effective tools for gaining these converts? The Greek translation of the Old Testament — the Septuagint, which had been translated by Jewish scholars some 300 years before Christ.

This is the text the rabbis now emphatically rejected, as we know. “But what of the works excluded from the [new Jewish] canon?” asks Elior. “Many were of comparable literary and religious quality to those chosen [to be retained in the new Jewish canon]... To many of the Jews of the first millennium BCE, all the texts had been equally holy.”

“Yet,” she writes, “the excluded works — close to a dozen major works — were not just abandoned, but excised as if they were a malignant growth.” “Left to die, some of the expelled texts were rescued and adopted by another religion. Newborn Christianity, which regarded itself as a successor of Judaism, incorporated these texts into its own corpus of holy works along with the Old Testament, as the Hebrew Bible came to be called,” writes Elior.

In the Talmudic tractate *Shabbat* (136), a passage says that if it were not for a rabbi named Hanania, even the prophetic Book of Ezekiel would have been suppressed by the other rabbis at that time. Why? Because its teachings contradicted the rabbinical interpretations of the Torah!*

Mercilessly, Professor Elior continues: “Half a century ago, another lost library... surfaced on the shores of the Dead Sea, this one having been liter-

*Torah – the first five books of the Old Testament

ally lost for 1,900 years after being hidden in the caves of Qumran. Many of these Dead Sea Scrolls would have been suppressed for the same reasons that the previously known [religious texts] were suppressed.”

She concludes her article as follows: “Following the destruction of the Temple, the priestly order was shattered and the rabbis were free to reconfigure the playing field. They not only discarded [the previously acknowledged religious] texts, but probably amended some passages in the books they would include in the Bible...”

In the pamphlet, *Why Orthodox Christians Prefer the Septuagint*, we showed many instances of where that “probably” became not only probable, but fact.

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Do You Want to Help Bring Orthodox Christianity to our Country?

Then look up the following material on our website: <http://www.homb.org>

1. Rationalism and Fundamentalism — The Two Banes of Western Theology
2. Why Orthodox Christians Prefer the Septuagint
3. Articles of Faith

Or, obtain published copies of this material by writing to, or contacting:

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