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HOW CAN THE ANCIENT GREEK TRANSLATIONS
OF THE SONG OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT
(ISAIAH 52.13-53.12) HELP US UNDERSTAND
THE MORE DIFFICULT PASSAGES?

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By

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Introduction

The student of Hebrew anxiously anticipates reading the great pericopes of God's word in the original language. However that initial joy may be tempered by the unanticipated difficulties that often accompany these marvelous words breathed by the Holy Spirit. In the modern mother tongue (English in my case) the words of Job, David, or Isaiah sound so obviously meaningful. Yet in Hebrew, especially in some of the most important verses of Scripture, we find that we must work very hard to find the meaning of the verse. Certainly there are large sections of Old Testament Scripture that are easy to understand. Others portions may owe their difficulty to the eloquent style of the human writer. We will, however, never escape the deep and sometimes enigmatic texts that hold some of the most important truths. We come to them again and again and wrestle the truth from them like pearls from a shell.

The ancient Greek Translations of The Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52.13-53.12 provide an interesting example of the way in which people of the past have struggled with difficult

texts. This particular study draws from the Septuagint (LXX) as well as the later Greek versions produced by Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. Following a brief review of these four important Greek translations, I will examine the important variations and offer my conclusions regarding the meaning of the Song and the task of translation.

The LXX Text of Isaiah

The exact date of the LXX is not known. However, the Pentateuch is thought to have been translated in Alexandria by the middle of the third century B.C.¹ The writer of the prologue to Sirach arrived in Egypt in the 38th year of Euergetes which would be 132 B.C. In this prologue he indicates that "the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the books" were already translated.² As far as the quality of translation is concerned, we must remember Jellicoe's statement: "The LXX presents 'translations' rather than 'a translation.'"³ Thus, the style varies from book to book being very literal in some places and in other places free. In certain places there is also evidence of a different Hebrew *Vorlage*.

In particular the Book of Isaiah has been of interest to students of the LXX because of its frequent use by NT writers. Most scholars (Ottley, Ziegler, Seeligmann, Thackeray, and

¹ The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible, s.v. "Septuagint."

² Henry Barclay Swete, An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, (New York: KTAV, 1968), 24.

³ Sidney Jellicoe, The Septuagint and Modern Study, (Ann Arbor: Eisenbrauns, 1978), 315.

Orlinsky) generally agree that there was only one translator.⁴ Thackeray characterizes the language of Isaiah as good *κοινή*.⁵ Wevers remarks that the translation is very free and is a "source book for Jewish exegesis."⁶ In some cases, as John Olley says, "it can be seen that [the translator] must have known the meaning of the words in a particular verse, but has altered the syntax or otherwise translated less literally in order to carry on the general tenor of the passage as he interprets it."⁷

As an example, Seligmann cites Isaiah 36-38 which is also preserved in 4 Kings 18-20. Seligmann highlights the difference in styles by comparing the two Greek translations in these sections. He notes that the translator of Isaiah has "a definite tendency to endow his work with a Greek style and turn of phrase." Here are a few examples:⁸

Hebrew	Isaiah (LXX)	4 Kings (LXX)
מיד המלאכים	παρὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων	ἐκ χειρὸς τῶν ἀγγέλων
עשו אתי ברכה	εἰ βούλεσθε εὐλογηθῆναι	ποιήσατε μετ' ἐμοῦ εὐλογίαν
צו לביתך	τάξαι περὶ τοῦ οἴκου σου	"Ἐντειλαι τῷ οἴκῳ σου

In each case you will notice that the 4 Kings translation tends to be more literal. This observation will certainly affect our look

⁴ John W. Olley, Righteousness in the Septuagint of Isaiah: A Contextual Study, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 9.

⁵ Thackeray, A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek, I, (Cambridge: University Press, 1909), 13.

⁶ IDB, s.v. "Septuagint."

⁷ Olley, Righteousness in The Septuagint, 9.

⁸ Seligmann, The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: A Discussion of Its Problems, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), 42. [Is. 37.14/4Kings 19.16; Is. 36.16/4Kings 18.31; Is. 38.1/4Kings 20.1]

at Isaiah 53. The translator may be "smoothing" out the Hebrew text or offering a new insight gained from his closer association with the original documents and knowledge of other Hebrew text(s).

The Greek Revisions

When the Christian church spread throughout the Greek speaking Roman Empire, it quickly adopted the LXX. C.F.D. Moule has described this as "one of the most remarkable take-over bids in history."⁹ However, this so-called "take over" did not occur without controversy. One crucial debate centered on the rendering of עלמה by παρθένος in Isaiah 7.14. The Jews contended that νεάνις would have been a better translation.¹⁰ Thus they began to react against the Christian use of the LXX and worked to integrate Jewish exegesis in the LXX.

Emmanuel Tov identifies three groups of revisions: Proto-Hexaplaric, the Hexapla, and Post-Hexaplaric.¹¹ The Hexapla is the six column edition of the Hebrew Bible and its Greek versions completed in the middle of the third century A.D. by Origen. The third and fourth columns of the Hexapla contain revisions by Aquila and Symmachus. Both of these translations agree frequently with a revision known as Kaige-Theodotion. This latter revision came to light with the discovery of a Greek scroll of the Minor Prophets at Nahal Hever in 1953. Its editor Barthelemy noticed

⁹ C.F.D. Moule as quoted by Jellicoe, The Septuagint, 75.

¹⁰ Swete, An Introduction, 30.

¹¹ Michael Stone, ed., Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 182.

that the Hebrew word **כּוּ** is always translated with **καίγε** ('at least').¹² It is called the kaige-Theodotion revision because in antiquity it was ascribed to Theodotion, who allegedly lived at the end of the second century. Barthelemy determined the terminus ad quem of this revision to be A.D. 50. However the revision could be dated even earlier. The kaige-Theodotion revision consistently translates Hebrew words with certain Greek words even when the meaning doesn't fit.¹³

Aquila's revision is based upon kaige-Theodotion. He prepared his revision around A.D. 125. Aquila followed the teaching of Rabbi Akiva which held that every letter of the Bible is meaningful. For this reason he even translated the direct object marker **אֵת** with **συν**. Aquila often relied on etymology and made an effort to avoid "Christian" translations of key terms. For example he translated **מְשִׁיחַ** (**χριστος**) with **ηλειμμενος**.¹⁴

Symmachus' biographical details are debated. Epiphanius says he was a Samaritan who had become a Jewish proselyte. Eusebius and Jerome thought he was an Ebionite. He was familiar with rabbinic literature. His revision is usually dated at the end of the second century A.D.¹⁵ Symmachus was very precise, and yet he often translated freely in an attempt to capture the sense of a word or verse. The **καίγε**-Theodotion revision and those of Aquila,

¹² Ibid, 182.

¹³ Ibid, 183

¹⁴ Ibid, 183-184.

¹⁵ Ibid, 184

and Symmachus are referred to both in ancient and modern sources as the "Three" (οἱ γ').¹⁶

The fifth column of the Hexapla contained what is commonly called the LXX. Origen carefully compared this translation to the Hebrew Bible noting omissions and additions. This column was published by Eusebius and Pamphilus.¹⁷

The revision of Lucian (d. A.D. 312) is the most important post-Hexaplaric revision. Scholars are divided regarding its origin and nature, and for this reason I will exclude it from the scope of this particular study.

Isaiah 52.13-53.12

Dr. Harry Orlinsky has described the fifty third chapter of Isaiah as "the most controversially treated of all chapters of the Hebrew Bible."¹⁸ The dominant Jewish interpretation contends that the Servant described here represents the nation of Israel in all her tribulations. Certainly for the Christian reader these verses are the "golden passion of the Old Testament evangelist" as Polycarp once wrote. "It looks as if they had been written beneath the cross upon Golgotha, and were illuminated by the heavenly brightness of the full *שב לימיני*" wrote Franz Delitzsch.¹⁹ It does not fall within the scope of this paper to delineate the

¹⁶ Ibid, 182

¹⁷ Ibid, 185

¹⁸ Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., The Fifty Third Chapter of Isaiah According To The Jewish Intepreters (New York: KTAV, 1969), 2.

¹⁹ Polycarp as cited in F. Delitzsch, Isaiah, vol. 7 of Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 303.

interpretation of the personal Servant of the LORD who suffered vicariously for our sins. This is my understanding of the text, and I will proceed to study the nuances of the LXX translation based on this interpretational framework. The Suffering Servant is the image I believe Isaiah presents. This Servant has a unique relationship with the Lord. Whereas other servants such as Daniel served the Lord and endured persecution, none of them can be called "the righteous One." Daniel says, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgements" (Daniel 9.5).²⁰ My desire is to sharpen that image by studying the translation options presented by the Hebrew text and suggested by the ancient Greek translations.

Isaiah 52.13 δούλος or παῖς

The very opening verse of the song offers a subtle but interesting distinction in the LXX with the translation of עֶבֶד by παῖς instead of δούλος. Both Aquila and Symmachus chose δούλος. Perhaps our familiarity with Paul's description of Jesus in Philippians 2.7 could create the expectation of δούλος, however in Acts 3.13 Peter speaks of Jesus as God's τὸν παῖδα. The LXX usage of the two terms is quite even (παῖς παιδίον παιδάριον 340 xs/ δούλος δουλεία δουλεύων 327 xs).²¹ In Genesis - Judges παῖς refers to freer servants of the king, whereas δούλος refers to slavery proper. However beyond

²⁰ Young, Studies in Isaiah, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 129.

²¹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. παῖς.

the Hexateuch this distinction begins to fade.²² Both *παῖς* and *δούλος* are used of individuals and as collective references to Israel in the Book of Isaiah. Yet *παῖς* carries the connotation of *descendent* and of *youth*.²³

Isaiah 52.15 *θαυμάσονται / ῥαντίσει / ἀποβαλεῖ* Marvel, sprinkle, fling away

Behold, He will sprinkle many nations (*כִּי יִזֶה נוֹיִם רַבִּים*). Our difficulty in understanding this phrase is supported by the ancient Greek versions. They also struggled with it. Both Aquila and Theodotion opt for the literal translation *ῥαντίσει* "to sprinkle." The interpretation would follow that the Servant who appeared to be in need of purification actually becomes the one who purifies the nations with the sprinkling of his own blood.²⁴ However Delitzsch shows that this is not the way *נזה* is used. He suggests that it interjects a thought that doesn't flow well with the context. Instead he probes further into the meaning of this word and shows that it can also mean "to spirt." He then applies it in the sense that the people are enlived or electrified by the sudden change which the Servant undergoes.²⁵ J.D.W. Watts also suggests that *נזה* may be a hapax legomena from an identical root

²² Ibid, 674

²³ Liddell and Scott, *Greek - English Lexicon*, s.v. *παῖς*.

²⁴ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1972), 339.

²⁵ Delitzsch, 308.

related to Arabic naza which means "startle" or "cause to leap."²⁶ Both of these would correspond well with θαυμάσσονται of the LXX. Symmachus' ἀποβαλεῖ *He will fling away*. Perhaps he was trying to capture both the idea of purifying as well as the disturbance of the nations which is mentioned in the context of the verse.

Isaiah 53.4 ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν

In this fourth verse Isaiah says, *Surely He will bear our sicknesses*: אִכָּן לִינִי הוּא נֹשֵׂא. The LXX translates לִי with ἁμαρτίας. This is interesting because לִי never signifies *sins* in the Hebrew. Were they reading another text, or were they interpreting? Either way this translation strongly supports the vicarious nature of the suffering of the Servant. Matthew provides a literal Greek translation (8.17) with Αὐτός τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν ἔλαβεν. Peter also gives the same idea with ὅς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν (1 Peter 2.24). Seeligmann believes that Matthew is either quoting from another source, or he is referring back to the Hebrew text directly.²⁷ Certainly verse five *He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities*, influenced the Greek translators. It could be that both sins and the consequences of sin are meant.

Isaiah 53.4 πόνῳ / ἀφημένον / μεμαστιγωμένον

²⁶ Watts, J.D.W., *Isaiah 34-66*, vol. 25 of Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 225.

²⁷ Seeligmann, 29.

This verse betrays an interpretation popular among the rabbis. Isaiah continues, *We considered Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted*, ואמחמו חשבמשו ננוע מכה אלהים ומענה. The key word in Hebrew is ננוע (qal passive participle) *to touch*, or *to beat*. The LXX translates with πόνω (noun dative singular) *work or toil* as well as *stress, trouble, suffering*. Jerome has the reading ἀφημένον (participle of ἄπτω) *to touch* for Aquila. This closely follows the Hebrew. Eusebius as the reading τετραυματισμένον for Aquila. But Symmachus is also similar with ἐν ἀφῆ ὄντα being 'in' or 'under' the touch. Each of these idioms can be construed with the sickness of leprosy. A similar Hebrew phrase is found in 2 Kings 15.5 ויהי מצרע יהוה אהתמלך καὶ ἤψατο κύριος τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ ἦν λελεπρωμένος and the LORD struck (touched) the king and he was a leper. Aquila also uses the word ἄπτω in Genesis 12 and 17 and Exodus 11 to refer to leprosy or infection. Young cites evidence that among the Jews there was a tradition that the Messiah would be a leper. However he suggests that it is going too far to insist on this interpretation.²⁸

Isaiah 53.8 τὴν γενεὰν αὐτοῦ τίς διηγήσεται

The Hebrew phrase ואהתדורו מי ישוחח and *His generation who will consider* has spawned a number of different translations. Young, for example, has, *From prison and from judgment he was taken, and among his generation, who takes thought that he was cut off from*

²⁸ Young, 346

*the land of the living. . .*²⁹ He renders the Hebrew **כִּי** to be a preposition *with* or *among*. All the ancient Greek translators understood the **כִּי** to be the sign of the accusative (even Aquila) with *τὴν γενεάν αὐτοῦ τίς διηγῆσεται*. But what does it mean *to declare his generation*? This might be an expansion of the thought expressed by **וַיִּשְׁקַח** *who will consider, give thought to*. In the Qal **וַיִּשְׁקַח** can also mean "to talk about." In this sense the Greek translators might be suggesting the further step of *confessing* or *believing* in the Servant. Aquila translates with *ἐξομιλήσει* *to live with, have intercourse with*.

Isaiah 53.8 *εἰς θάνατον / πλήγη αὐτοῖς / ἤψατο αὐτῶν*

Confusion continues in the latter part of this verse as the translators struggle with the Hebrew phrase **וּמִן עֲוֹנוֹתַי מָוֶתָהּ** *from (or for) the transgression of my people a plague was to him*. Aquila and Theodotian translate *ἀπὸ ἄθεσίας λαοῦ μου ἤψατο αὐτῶν* *because of the faithlessness of my people it touched them*. Symmachus: *διὰ τὴν ἀδικίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μου πλήγη αὐτοῖς* *because of the unrighteousness of my people (there was) a plague to them*. The LXX translates *ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνομιῶν τοῦ λαοῦ μου ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον* *because of the lawlessness of my people he was led to death*. It appears that the LXX translators might have been confused with the last Hebrew word in this phrase

²⁹ Young, 350

למו. The LXX may have taken it to be an abbreviation for *למות* to death.

Isaiah 53.9 *ὅτι ἀνομίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν*

The LXX offers some insight in verse nine. The Hebrew phrase is *על לא-חמס עשה* since no violence he did. The LXX suggests a causitive interpretation for *על* with *ὅτι* because. It also interprets *חמס* with *ἀνομία* lawlessness. Peter follows along this same vein with *ἀμαρτία* (1 Peter 2.22). In each instance the LXX and NT offer the correct interpretation, although they do omit the particular kind of lawlessness or sin suggested by the Hebrew text.

Isaiah 53.10

This is probably the most difficult verse of the entire song. There is some obvious confusion regarding the first phrase of this verse *ויהוה חפץ דכאור החלי* and the LORD was pleased to crush him (with) sickness. The LXX reads *καὶ κύριος βούλεται καθαρίσαι αὐτὸν τῆς πληγῆς* and the Lord desired to cleanse him of the plague. The idea of *cleansing* may derive from *דכא* in Aramaic, where it is equivalent to the Hebrew *זכה* to be clear or pure. Orlinsky continues: "It is no uncommon occurrence for LXX to interpret a Hebrew word in accordance with the signification borne by a word externally resembling it in the Aramaic dialect spoken at the time when the translation was made." Orlinsky and Seligmann provide some

interesting examples of this.³⁰ Aquila follows more literally with *καὶ κύριος ἐβουλήθη ἐπιτρίψαι αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀρρωστήμα* and *the Lord was pleased to crush* (ἐπιτρίβω) *him with sickness*. But Symmachus translates κύριος ἠθελήσεν ἀλοῆσαι αὐτόν ἐν τῷ τραυματίσμῳ *the Lord wished to smite* (ἀλοάω) *him in his wounding*. The LXX avoids the idea that יהוה exercised his punishment upon his own Servant. Both Aquila and Symmachus bring the translation closer to the Hebrew.

The next phrase creates great difficulty for the reader and translator. אַתָּה תִּשָּׂא אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ אֶת־תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ *If you place his soul as an offering*. Here the verb תִּשָּׂא is translated as the second person masculine. The verb תִּשָּׂא can also be translated as the third person feminine: *if his soul put a guilt-offering*. Thus Delitzsch translates *if His soul would pay a trespass-offering*.³¹ The translations vary:

If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, (NASB)
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, (NIV)
After He has sacrificed Himself for guilt, (Beck)
when he makes himself an offering for sin, (RSV)
Wenn er sein Leben zum Schuldopfer gegeben hat (Luther)
si posuerit pro peccato animam suam (Vulgate).

All these translations, except for the NIV, understand soul to be the subject of the verb תִּשָּׂא in one way or another. But this makes for a difficult translation! Should we be surprised? Here is the

³⁰ Orlinsky, The Fiftythird Chapter, 3. Seeligmann, The Septuagint Version, 50.

³¹ Delitzsch, Isaiah, 329.

vicarious satisfaction--a concept that is challenging for any human being to comprehend! What did the Greek translators do?

The LXX reads *ἐάν δώτε περὶ ἁμαρτίας* if *you* give (a sacrifice) concerning sins. Here the verb is translated as the second person. The subject is the second person singular *you*. Why the second person? Probably because the original LXX translator found this to be the smoothest wording. The other translators didn't try to work with the third person option. They also followed the LXX.

The word for *guilt-offering* is also left out. This *ἄσκα* originally means *an offense or trespass*. It then also includes the figure of the *trespass offering*. Why did the ancient Greek translators omit this important word? Perhaps it is meant to be understood. Perhaps they did not comprehend the implications of the text regarding the vicarious atonement. The New Testament leaves us no doubt with *δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν* (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Surely *λύτρον* *price of release, ransom* presupposes the *guilt-offering* mentioned here.

The Hebrew continues with *וְרָאָה זֶרַע יִרְאֶה יָמִים* *he will see seed he will increase days*. However the LXX reads *ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν ὄψεται σπέρμα μακρόβιον* *your soul shall see a long-lived seed*. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion all have *ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ*. The *ψυχὴ* used here in this phrase is taken from the previous phrase. It seems unusual that the translators would confuse this feminine subject with the masculine verb *וְרָאָה*.

The latter part of verse ten and the beginning of verse eleven are woven together by the ancient Greek translations. The Hebrew *וּפְפֹחַ יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלַח : מֵעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה* and *the desire of the LORD in his hand will have success. From the labor of his soul he will see...* In the LXX this becomes *καὶ βούλεται κύριος ἀφελεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ* *The Lord desires to take away from the labour of his soul.* Aquila and Theodotian both insert *ἐν χειρὶ* *by the hand* after *κύριος*. We might conclude that something has been muddled here in this last part of the song if it were not for the following observation.

Isaiah 53.11 *δείξαι αὐτῷ φῶς*

The Masoretic Text reads *מֵעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה* *From the distress of his soul he will see...* The LXX supplies the object *φῶς* to the verb *δείξαι* (*a'*, *s'* & *θ'* use *ὄψεται* again in v. 11): (10b-11a) *ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν ὄψεται σπέρμα μακρόβιον καὶ βούλεται κύριος ἀφελεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ δείξαι αὐτῷ φῶς.* This might appear to be an interpretive addition except that the Qumran manuscripts 1Qab and 4Qd also include the object *light*.³² This is the first example of a different Hebrew *Vorlage* in this particular section of Isaiah.

This brings us to a very important phrase that is essential for understanding the Song: *My righteous Servant will justify many.* In the LXX and the Greek translations the entire thought of verses ten and eleven is controlled by the first verb of verse

³² Jan De Waard, "Old Greek Translation Techniques and the Modern Translator," *Bible Translator* 41 (1990), 127-47.

ten, βούλεται: καὶ κύριος βούλεται καθαρῖσαι αὐτὸν τῆς πληγῆς · ἐὰν δώτε περὶ ἁμαρτίας, ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν ὄψεται σπέρμα μακρόβιον · καὶ βούλεται κύριος ἀφελεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ, δεῖξαι αὐτῷ φῶς καὶ πλάσαι τῇ συνέσει, δικαιοῦσαι δίκαιον εὐ δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς, καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν αὐτος ἀνοίσει. Trans. *And the Lord desired to purify him from his plague; if you give [an offering] for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed. The Lord also desired to take away from the labour of his soul, to show him light and form [him] with understanding, to justify the just who serves many well; and their sins he will bear.*

As I noted above, the Hebrew text leaves a strong break between verses ten and eleven. וּפְנֵי יְהוָה בִּידוֹ יִצְלַח : מַעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה *and the desire of the LORD in his hand will have success. From the labor of his soul...* In the Hebrew text the focus shifts in verse twelve from the desire of יְהוָה to the action of the Servant himself: מַעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׁבַּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יִצְדִּיק צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לְרַבִּים הוּא יִסְבֵּל Trans. *From the distress of His soul He will see. He will be filled with His knowledge. My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.* Why the Greek translators blended the thoughts of verses eleven and twelve together is difficult to determine. Again they could have been working with a different Vorlage. But the consequence is revealed dramatically in the translation of the key phrase יִצְדִּיק צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לְרַבִּים *My righteous Servant will justify many.* The Greek translations lose the significance of this phrase by saying that the Lord justifies the just. Seligmann points out that the key to understanding the

Greek translation here is the emphasis on φῶς. As noted above the word is added to the Greek text as well as the Qumran text. Thus the Hebrew text was translated with an emphasis on the "light" and "understanding" which the Servant received from God.³³ Such a translation is probably an indication of popular Alexandrian Jewish theology.

Conclusions

This study of the ancient Greek versions of Isaiah 52.13-53.12 has been a microcosm of Septuagint studies in general. It provides at least four important insights.

The study of the Septuagint offers to the Bible student and interpreter a better understanding of the Hebrew text. The LXX is capable of distorting the meaning of the Hebrew text for example by relying on the Aramaic equivalents which were in use at the time of the translation (as noted in verse ten). Yet the LXX is also capable of sharpening our understanding of the text by using a word which narrows the field of meaning suggested by the context. I think that the use of παῖς for עֶבֶר instead of δούλος in 52.13 is one such example. παῖς carries the idea of youth as well as a familial relationship. Any translation is capable of doing this because all translations function as interpretations of the text.

The study of the Septuagint also helps us understand rabbinical exegesis of the Old Testament. This follows logically from the interpretational quality of all translations. In the case

³³ Seeligmann, 108.

of the Suffering Servant, the Greek translators handling of the word **לַעֲרֵב** shows the rabbinic idea that the Messiah would be a leper. The LXX especially provides insight into the understanding of the OT prior to the time of the New Testament. Earlier in the paper I pointed out that most scholars agree that the LXX Isaiah comes from the hand of one translator. What does this say about the second century B.C. view of the unity of Isaiah? In many cases it is possible to detect a difference between the rabbinic understanding of the OT before Christ as opposed the rabbinic understanding of the OT after Christ. In this particular section the LXX does not appear to favor a "collective" interpretation of the Suffering Servant. Nor does it exclude but in fact supports the understanding that the Suffering Servant suffered vicariously for sin. Recall the translation of **לִי** sickness with *ἀμαρτία* in 53.4. Within the limited range of sources for early rabbinic theology, the LXX provides a rich storehouse of information.

Dr. Jan de Waard impresses upon us that "It is impossible to undertake translation of the Old Testament today. . . without taking account of the Septuagint and its various daughter translations."³⁴ Translation is an immense task. Particularly in the difficult sections of the Bible it is helpful to study the efforts of others, especially the ancients. They also struggled with literal and free translating techniques. In Isaiah 53.10-11 the Greek versions smooth out the text to make it flow. The literalists (which I tend to be) can object to this method since it may distort the meaning. On the other hand even the literalist

³⁴ De Waard, 312.

must realize that a translation is meant to be read and understood quickly. Otherwise we might as well read the original. Staffan Olofsson points out that the literal and free translation styles are used together by the same translator, even in the same passage. This points to the tension that all translators have and from which the ancient Greek translators were not exempt.³⁵

Far and above the most important reason for the study of the LXX is the benefit it provides for our understanding of the New Testament. The τόν παῖδα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν of Acts 3.13 comes to life when considered in conjunction with Isaiah 52.13 ἰδοὺ σουνήσει ὁ παῖς μου. When Matthew quotes Isaiah Αὐτὸς τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν ἔλαβεν καὶ τὰς νόσους ἐβάστασεν the casual reader would completely miss the spiritual implications connected to this passage by the rabbis when they translated with ἁμαρτία instead of ἀσθενεία. The LXX provides the Hebraic overtones which are often intended by the Greek words of the NT writers. In this sense the LXX is one of the greatest gifts of God because it provides the linguistic framework for the revealing of God's will in the NT. We should not be surprised that the Church Fathers held the LXX in such high esteem.

Finally I will try to respond to the question which was posed in the title for this paper: "How can the ancient Greek translations of the Song of the Suffering Servant help us understand the more difficult passages?" To say that the LXX is the key to understanding these difficult passages is going too far. I found that the ancient Greek translators struggled with

³⁵ Staffan Olofsson, The LXX Version: A Guide to the Translation Technique of the Septuagint (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1990), 12-13.

the Hebrew texts just as I have-- often without dramatic beneficial results. What I did find, however, is that the LXX and particularly the later Greek versions provide the modern student with important translation options. Very often a difficult text can only be presented according to its possible translations. Finally the translator is forced to chose an option and to make it readable. But it is an art to do so without damaging the meaning of the text. The Greek versions again offer different approaches. I found it most interesting that though we are divided by two millennia the present task of translating and interpreting the ancient texts has not changed. I have grown in my appreciation of their scholarship. Additionally my engagement in this task of understanding the mind of God through the Hebrew Bible along with the Greek translators causes me to realize even more the Spirit-given miracle of the NT. Amidst all this struggle for understanding and enlightenment comes the Man with the words of eternal life. It is no wonder that the people who sat at Jesus' feet *were astonished at His teaching* (Matthew 7.28). Now it is our task to take this revelation of Christ sharpened by the ancient linguistic tools and present Him boldly and faithfully to the world. God bless us to this end.

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