

Requested comment from
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Comments Regarding the Question of the Primacy of Hebrew or Greek for the Old Testament Scriptures

In introducing these comments, I must emphasize that neither the original question asker nor I are referring specifically to the text of the *Apostolic Bible*. The original question presupposed the apostles used the Septuagint as their Bible, and the question posed was actually in regard to “which Septuagint text?” While the actual question has prompted many scholarly books, I think best here to address the presupposition held by the question asker. I will provide some thoughts regarding the authority of the Septuagint text as contrasted to the Hebrew text of the Old Covenant in the thinking of the apostles as they were used by the Holy Spirit to pen the New Testament. I offer my expressed thoughts in the hope they will be helpful, regardless of the opinions of the reader.

Throughout the remainder of my comments I will tend to use the terms “Septuagint,” “LXX” and “Old Testament in Greek” pretty much interchangeably. While many would find good reason to differentiate some of these terms, for the most part people would accept LXX as a the Roman numeral abbreviation for Septuagint, and they would also consider the Septuagint to be the name of the Old Testament in Greek. Many will maintain that from a technical standpoint, the Septuagint / LXX designation refers often to the five books of Moses and the remainder of the Old Testament scriptures were translated subsequently by different hands over the course of ancient time. I will not press that distinction here, so I ask the reader to provide some leeway. Within the confines of this article we are talking about the concept of the *initial translating into Greek* of the ancient Hebrew scriptures. The assumption held is that this refers to the Hebrew canon. It is good to keep in mind that the full translation did not happen all at once, but we ought to consider this original process complete well before the time of Christ.

Regarding the Holy Scriptures, if you really want authority in matters like establishing the proper text, then that will have to come from Heaven, not earth. On earth, we either hold the conviction that God preserved His Word for us, or we do not. I hold that conviction. Meanwhile, it is evident there is much disagreement on earth regarding what that proper text is.

As already stated, the question prompting these comments is, “which Septuagint?” Some say they are convinced that the Septuagint was the Old Testament of the New Testament writers. Some even say the Septuagint displaces the Hebrew Old Testament. In counter to this I will make an assertion and I will try to present some reasoning to buttress my assertion. I trust you will understand people are free to hold different opinions on matters like this until God sends light. My assertion is that the LXX (to use a convenient term) is not really the Bible of the apostles, although from time to time the apostles do quote from it. When they quote from the LXX in the New Testament we may confidently deem those quotes as sufficiently endorsed by heaven that we can use those

quotes as having the sanction of heaven according to 2 Timothy 3:16. This by no means discounts or dismisses the inspired Hebrew scriptures where there would appear to be conflict. Instead, these quotes take on an authority of scripture in their own right given the historical understanding that the scriptures, taken as a whole, are infallible. These quotes, allusions (and independent translations, targums if you will, of the Hebrew text) that are included in the New Testament text are part of the biblical whole. The rest of the LXX is only one of many translated versions, replete with shortcomings. This is a common trait of all translations -- human productions that they are.

Consider:

2Ti 3:16-17 KJV All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: **17** That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Though the passage above speaks with great authority to the hearts of Bible believing Christians, I very strongly suspect that the vast majority of people who heed the passage actually consult the scriptures in translation, be it English, French, or whatever.

Consider what Paul the apostle said to Timothy:

2Ti 3:15 KJV And that **from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures**, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Since according to Acts 16:1-3, it was very well known that Timothy's father was a Greek, and because up until that time Timothy had remained uncircumcised, it seems very reasonable to assume that the scriptures he was familiar with were in translation also, just as is the case with most modern believers. If Timothy knew the scriptures in Hebrew, then I presume his mother and grandmother taught him this language; but I think it far more likely that they taught him from the scriptures in an available translation. Greek is the likely language of that translation.

Unlike Timothy, I presume the Apostle Peter was not nearly so capable in the Greek language. I think it likely that he was even Greek challenged. Silvanus penned the First Epistle of Peter. It is certainly not inconceivable to me that Peter would dictate in his Galilean dialect and expect Silvanus to express the thoughts in proper Greek syntax. The Galilean dialect Peter used was distinctive enough that it could be recognized as out of place in Jerusalem, for instance. Consider these evidences in scripture regarding Peter's deficiency in the more formal Aramaic spoken in Jerusalem:

Mat 26:73 KJV And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them; for **thy speech bewrayeth thee**.

Act 4:13 KJV Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **unlearned and ignorant men**, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

As further evidence from scripture that some of the apostles had difficulty maintaining close communication ties with believers who were more comfortable speaking Greek, consider the following:

Act 6:1 KJV And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

The period referred to in Acts 6:1 is before the open declaration of the gospel to the gentiles. The Grecians in this instance were Jewish believers who were more comfortable with the Greek language than with a Semitic language, be it Hebrew or one of the Aramaic dialects.¹

By Peter's own testimony he freely used the service of Sylvanus when he wrote his first epistle:

1Pe 5:12 KJV **By Sylvanus**, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, **I have written briefly**, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

I have read on more than one occasion that the Greek of the Second Epistle of Peter was of a much different character than that of the first. While some have used this difference in the character of the Greek as evidence that Peter did not write the second epistle bearing his name, it can hardly prove that, since by his own admission he did not write the first epistle by his own hand. We have no clear indication whether somebody else may have penned the second epistle at his dictation.

2Pe 3:1 KJV This second epistle, beloved, **I now write unto you**; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

From the scripture references above it is clear that Peter claims to be the writer of both epistles, but he acknowledges expressly that the first was written through the agency of another's penmanship. It is entirely possible Peter dictated both epistles in his native Galilean Aramaic dialect and different penmen did an on-the-fly translation of his thoughts into Greek for the intended audience, and for posterity. Still, maybe Peter had sufficient skills in Greek to actually pen his second epistle himself and he used Sylvanus' services for some other reason to pen the first epistle. It does seem very reasonable to think Peter expected his addressed audience could read Greek, though the scriptures themselves provide evidence that possibly Greek was not the most fluid language for this

¹ KJV "Grecian" Ἑλληνιστῶν

[Friberg] Ἑλληνιστῆς, οὗ, ὁ Hellenist, a Greek-speaking Jew in contrast to one speaking a Semitic language

KJV "Hebrews" Ἑβραίους

[Friberg] Ἑβραῖος, οὗ, ὁ (also Ἑβραῖος) Hebrew; (1) racially, one descended from Abraham ([PH 3.5](#)); (2) nationally, a Jew in contrast to a Gentile ([2C 11.22](#)); (3) linguistically, a native Palestinian Jew who spoke Hebrew (possibly Aramaic) as a mother tongue in contrast to a Greek-speaking Jew who was probably an immigrant to Palestine ([AC 6.1](#))

audience.² I do suggest that Greek would have been the most generally recognized language.

While some would protest that it is Peter's words *as he originally expressed them* that are inspired, the scriptures themselves do not quite say this. Regarding the scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16 actually says, "All **scripture** is given by inspiration of God..." We do well to keep in mind it is the scripture that is inspired, regardless of the means used to record it.³ The scripture itself is θεόπνευστος, "God-breathed." I consider translation of the scripture from one written language form to another written language a different matter than recording of the scripture initially, even if the initial recording of scripture involves translation. The transferal of the message of scripture from one written record to a record in another written language does not require nor does it necessarily infer prophetic unctio.

Now, returning back to Peter's audience in both his epistles, and their ability to access the scriptures, consider:

2Pe 3:15-16 KJV And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him **hath written unto you; 16** As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as **they do also the other scriptures**, unto their own destruction.

In reference to the passage just cited, I suggest the only epistle other than Galatians that may have been addressed to this audience is the epistle to the Hebrews. It is instructive to consider who the audience is. Remember, Peter states in 2 Peter 3:1 that both his epistles were addressed to the same audience. Where was this audience geographically located?

1Pe 1:1 KJV Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, **Galatia**, Cappadocia, **Asia**, and **Bithynia**,

All the named locales in 1 Peter 1:1 are in what is now called Turkey. In the verse above I highlighted three locations about which we have information regarding the apostle Paul's history. We know that Paul's epistle to the Galatians was addressed primarily to a Gentile audience.

Gal 1:13-16 KJV For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: **14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation**, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. **15**

² Consider Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, which is in the general proximity of the area addressed by 1st and 2nd Peter: **Act 14:11 KJV** And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

³ An excellent book on the subject of the inspiration of *scripture* as over against the inspiration of the *writers* of scripture is *Theopneustia: the Plenary Inspiration of The Holy Scriptures*, by Louis Gaussen, D. D. (available in custom reprint from <http://members.aol.com/goodbooks7/Misc.htm>)

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace, **16** To reveal his Son in me, that **I might preach him among the heathen**; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Gal 2:7 KJV But contrariwise, when they saw that **the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me**, as *the gospel* of the circumcision was unto Peter;

Gal 5:2 KJV Behold, I Paul say unto you, that **if ye be circumcised**, Christ shall profit you nothing.

The verses displayed above indicate that the main audience of the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians was gentile believers rather than members of the Diaspora that Peter *specifically addresses* in both his epistles as related below. Interestingly, Peter's audience is mentioned as being in part in Galatia, in Asia and in Bithynia. The biblical record shows the Holy Spirit sovereignly limited Paul's exposure in this region.

Act 16:6-7 KJV Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and **the region of Galatia**, and were **forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia**, **7** After they were come to Mysia, **they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.**

Thus, Peter and Paul had audiences in common in Galatia. However, it is problematical from the Biblical record whether they had audiences in common in Asia and Bithynia, which were among the locations mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1. Aside from the apostle Paul's association with the *Jewish* born Aquila, I do not call to mind any reference that ties Paul to Pontus or Cappadocia.

Act 18:2 KJV And found a certain Jew named Aquila, **born in Pontus**, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had **commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:**) and came unto them.

We do, however find strong testimony in scripture that Jewish people lived in the locations itemized by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:1.

Act 2:9-10 KJV Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and **Cappadocia**, in **Pontus**, and **Asia**, **10** Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, **Jews and proselytes**,

We gather from the passages above that Paul certainly had contacts in the region Peter addressed in his two epistles, but that Paul's only epistle specifically addressed to the region was to the Galatians, and Paul's main audience in that epistle was comprised of Gentile believers rather than believers of the circumcision.

Since Peter, in his two epistles, is addressing believing "strangers" in the Diaspora (that is the Greek word used, "διασποράς"), his immediate audience is made up of believers with

a Hebrew heritage.⁴ We know also that Peter's audience was aware of other of Paul's writings, though Peter refers to a writing that was addressed *to them*. Assuming the epistle to the Hebrews was sent in a circuit, this would be the likely epistle Peter was referring to. I can think of no other epistle that would qualify of which we have a record.

Now the Epistle to the Hebrews was written in good Greek, possibly the most proper Greek of the New Testament. It is interesting that when the Old Testament scriptures are referred to in the epistle to the Hebrews, the LXX is generally if not always cited. But this would be expected if the audience addressed was assumed to have ready access to the scriptures in Greek and perhaps not so ready *or able* to access the scriptures in Hebrew. The Diaspora would fall into this category. The epistle to the Hebrews is interested in encouraging believers with a Hebrew heritage to stay faithful to the Messiah anticipated by that heritage. The Gospel they had believed identifies Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. The believers with a Hebrew heritage needed to be carefully reminded of that. They were being sorely tempted by their peers in the old faith to renounce this identification of Jesus as the promised Messiah. This was being required of them in order to rekindle the relationship with the Jewish people who rejected Him – *and now also rejected them*, His disciples. The price for re-union with unbelieving Judaism was open rejection of the very one who had purchased the disciples' salvation.

Heb 10:29 KJV Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Now that the world of Hebrew oriented religionists consisted of various languages is easily demonstrated by various New Testament passages. Consider:

⁴ Look at a portion of 1 Peter 1:1 below from the Interlinear text in Logos Libronix software.

1 Πέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκλεκτοῖς **παρεπιδήμοις** **διασπορᾶς**

Peter delegate of Jesus Christ to select transients of dispersion

Παρεπιδήμοις

[Thayer] **παρεπίδημος**

παρεπίδημος, παρεπιδημιον (see ἐπιδημέω), properly, "one who comes from a foreign country into a city or land to reside there by the side of the natives; hence, stranger; sojourning in a strange place, a foreigner"

διασπορᾶς

[Friberg] **διασπορά**, ἄς, ἡ strictly *scattering*, as of seed, *sowing*; hence (1) of persons *dispersion*; in the NT the portion of the Jews living outside Palestine *Dispersion* ([JN 7.35](#)); (2) of place, *regions where scattered people are living*; transliterated into English as *Diaspora* ([JA 1.1](#))

διασπορᾶς N-GF-S **διασπορά**

Act 1:19 KJV And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called **in their proper tongue**, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.⁵

Act 2:6-8 KJV Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak **in his own language**. **7** And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? **8** And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Act 6:1 KJV And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of **the Grecians against the Hebrews**, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

The Gospel did not just happen in a vacuum. The Gospel appeared at a carefully prepared time in human history.

Gal 4:4 KJV But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

God had providentially arranged events in the non-Hebrew world to so that the Gospel would hit the ground running at just the right time in human history. The *Pax Romana* was in place. The means of comparatively safe travel and commerce were also in place because of the transportation infrastructure and military prominence of Rome combined with the legal system and such advantages as free cities, etc. The widespread use of the Greek language was in place because of the military successes of Alexander a few centuries before. Historical difficulties over the period of several centuries in the Holy Land had caused many Jewish people to flee, taking their faith with them. Though these events and conditions happened in history, God was arranging the events strategically in preparation for the coming of Messiah and the planting and spreading of the Gospel after Jesus suffered and entered into His glory.

Not least among the special preparatory events of human history that fit well into the spread of the Gospel was the following: About three centuries before Christ the leader in the Ptolemaic division of Alexander's Greek realm decided that it was a very good idea to have a copy of the Hebrew scriptures made in Greek. The availability of the Hebrew scriptures in the new *lingua franca* presented several advantages. For instance, how better to understand the mindset and value-system of a major subject people group than to have a copy of their scriptures in accessible translation? A practical advantage to the Hebrew people of the Diaspora was that wherever the Jewish people settled in the known world where Greek was the language of commerce, they now had access to the scriptures, albeit in translation. Others who wanted to investigate the teachings of the Hebrew

⁵ [Friberg] Ἀκελδαμάχ, τό (also Ἀκελδαμάχ, Ἀκέλδαμα, Ἀκελδαμά, Ἀκελδαμάκ, Ἀκελδαμάχ, Ἀχελδαμάχ) indeclinable; *Akeldama*, transliterated from the Aramaic phrase meaning *Field of Blood*; formerly the potter's field, traditionally located near Jerusalem on the southern side of the Valley of Hinnom ([AC 1.19](#))

prophets also had access. With the passage of time many Jews in far-flung areas found it was far more convenient to access the scriptures in Greek. The historical experience in Babylon had taught them that it was important to become capable in the language of the realm. Because of this, it seems that the use of the Hebrew language had fallen off dramatically for everyday use.

For this reason it seems particularly plausible that as the Gospel spread away from the initial Holy Land that the Bible most likely to be consulted was the Bible in Greek translation. After Paul and Silas left Thessalonica and came to Berea they went to the synagogue of the Jews.

Act 17:11-12 KJV These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures daily**, whether those things were so. **12** Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were **Greeks**, and of men, not a few.

Since Thessalonica and Berea are Greek cities it seems only reasonable that the scriptures that were consulted were in Greek translation. The ability of the more thoughtful people to investigate the claims of the Gospel against a copy of the scriptures was invaluable in causing many to come to a well-founded faith. Furthermore, it seems the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica were filled with envy because the Gospel was taking root among the Greeks, who in this case were Gentiles rather than just Hellenized Jews.

Thus, the unfolding of Gospel history demonstrated that the use of the scripture in translation was a wonderful tool in service to the Gospel. This only serves to demonstrate the apostles used a tool that God, through His providential care in history, had made available. God had long before confounded the languages in order to keep rebellious mankind from unifying in their rebellion against Him. Translation is a human means to partially offset that terrible setback to communication that occurred because of the sin of mankind. God did not give the scripture in translation, but he did give the scripture. He also gave the Gospel, and before His ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples:

Mat 28:19-20 KJV Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **20** Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you *always*, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

Among the apostles sent by Jesus was Paul, who said:

2Ti 2:15 KJV Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

I've already suggested that Timothy, to whom the epistle just referred to was immediately sent, already knew the scriptures, but probably in translated form. Paul's directive in 2 Timothy 2:15 certainly does not discourage the study of scriptures in the original languages, but it certainly does require the servant of the Lord to continually study the scriptures. A human produced translation makes this directive far easier to obey for those

of us who have no ready ability to access the scriptures in the God-breathed original languages. It is certain from scripture itself that disciples to the Lord will come from all languages. I do not recall any mention in the Great Commission about requiring these disciples to access the scriptures exclusively in the Biblical languages. Therefore, it follows that translation of the scriptures is necessitated so that the Gospel can be spread, and nations can be discipled.

Rev 5:9 KJV And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

When I read the scriptures, it is generally in English translation, and I still hold the strong conviction that I am reading inspired scripture. I do not suggest (like some are inclined to do) that I am reading an inspired translation. I am only accessing the inspired scripture in translated form, with the understanding that shades of meaning are sometimes enhanced and sometimes obscured because of the translation process. I count myself blessed that I can access the inspired scriptures at all.

Ancient translations like the Septuagint have great value in Bible study because they shed much light regarding ancient perceptions of certain passages of Biblical Hebrew that may have become harder to understand over the passage of great periods of time. For example, a person only need look at the first chapter of the Gospel of John to see that at that time in history the Jewish people took Daniel's prophetic timeline seriously. Now that the Hebrew people have rejected their Messiah, the approach to how they understand many prophetic passages has necessarily changed in order to justify their ongoing national unbelief. In instances such as this an ancient translation like the Septuagint can serve as a time-stamp to show what prophetic expectations were *before* the Gospel came to light and was rejected by unbelieving Israel.

Joh 1:11-12 KJV He came unto his own, and his own received him not. **12** But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name:

A famous instance where the Septuagint offers help in the proper understanding of the ancient Biblical Hebrew is at Isaiah 7:14. It is because Matthew's Greek gospel either translated from the Hebrew or else used the LXX as it quoted from Isaiah 7:14 that we know that the ancient Hebrew scribes understood the Hebrew word עַלְמָה [al^o mā^h] to mean "virgin." If modern exegetes want to translate the Hebrew word *almah* as "a young woman of marriageable age," that is a matter for the theological dictionaries to deal with. It is certainly clear that the Hebrew word עַלְמָה [al^o mā^h] *almah* is a different word than the usual Hebrew word בְּתוּלָה [bəṭūlā^h] *bethulah* used very widely in the OT where the term virgin is intended; so this distinction of words chosen by the Holy Spirit is significant. It cannot be missed, however, that Matthew either translated the Hebrew or else quoted from the LXX text in such a way as to leave no doubt of the meaning. There is no reason to doubt that the LXX text that was current in the first century A.D. had the reading παρθένοϛ *parthenos*, (Gr. Virgin). Significantly, after the Gospel had taken root

and was gaining ground at least three formal efforts were made to retranslate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. I refer to the translations of Aquila, of Symmachus and of Theodotion, all completed in the first half of the second century A.D. Certainly among the reasons for the *retranslations* was the desire to give Jewish oriented polemicists an alternative to the traditional LXX that was used so effectively by Christian apologists who did not know Hebrew. I presume one of the changes made in these newer translations was to unseat the very long-standing Greek term *parthenos* from Isaiah 7:14 so as to obscure the obvious reference to Jesus Christ as declared in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Although it seems likely that The Greek edition of Matthew does quote from the LXX, the phraseology is not a perfect match, so it could be possible that Matthew just translated the Hebrew of Isaiah 7:14 when he cites it at Matthew 1:23.

Consider, for instance that the LXX at Isaiah 7:14 and the Greek at Matthew 1:23 are not a perfect match, as already stated:

^{LXT} **Isaiah 7:14** διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ.⁶

^{SCR} **Matthew 1:23** Ἰδοὺ, ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὅ ἐστι μεθερμηνευόμενον, Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός.⁷

Reverent scholars have considered Eusebius's report from the 4th century A.D. in his *Ecclesiastical History*, that Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Hebrew. Generally they report that if Eusebius is correct, then Matthew produced the Greek copy of Matthew independently from the Hebrew copy. I gather from this that Matthew certainly had the ability to translate Isaiah 7:14 directly from the Hebrew, but he may just as well have opted to quote a version that was familiar to Greek readers. In any event, the context of the gospel of Matthew, chapter 1 leaves absolutely no doubt that a virgin birth is intended.

Consider:

Mat 1:18-20 KJV Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, **she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.** 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. 20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: **for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.**

⁶ καλέσεις verb indicative future active 2nd person singular from καλέω

⁷ καλέσουσι verb indicative future active 3rd person plural from καλέω

The only way the context above can be understood to mean anything else than a virgin birth would be if the reverent or objective reader understood that the angel of the Lord expected the Holy Spirit to conceive Jesus through a medium other than the supernatural and other than through lawful relations with her husband, and also *before* Joseph had any knowledge of what was going on. This, of course, would make Jesus an unlawfully conceived person, to use a euphemism. On the face of it an attentive Bible reader cannot avoid the understanding that Matthew's gospel leaves no room to understand anything other than that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that this was a virgin conception. It makes far more sense to assert that Matthew understood the Hebrew scriptures the same way as the Hebrew scribes who *originally* rendered the Hebrew at Isaiah 7:14 into Greek than it does to suggest that Matthew wrote the first chapter of his gospel from a faulty understanding borne of a poor translation.

In addition to Matthew's Gospel that specifically cites from an Old Testament passage that had previously been translated from Hebrew into Greek, Luke's Gospel also makes the understanding of anything other than a virgin birth impossible.

Luk 1:34-35 KJV Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, **seeing I know not a man?** **35** And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: **therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.**

It is absurd in the extreme to think that such a vital part of the Gospel message is built only upon an enthusiastic adherence to a faulty translation of the Hebrew at Isaiah 7:14. The same God who inspired the Hebrew scriptures of Isaiah also inspired the Greek scriptures of Matthew and Luke. This is clearly one instance where a very old translation (the LXX) sheds light on the ancient Hebrew! For a student of the Hebrew language to find the LXX deficient at this location would be extreme irony since the prophecy is fulfilled perfectly according to the Greek rendering. Who can reasonably infer the Hebrew prophecy was not also fulfilled?

So far as I am concerned there is no responsible way to suggest the translation has more authority than the original. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." Translations are the work of diligent men (and women) of differing skills and temperament. Temperament, especially as it applies to the task of Bible translation, does have an effect for good or ill.

Consider:

Mar 12:24 KJV And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, **because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?**

The Sadducees, whom Jesus was addressing, had an improper grasp of the scriptures that had been given by inspiration. They considered the Law of Moses important, and they discounted or dismissed the rest. Thus Jesus aptly said, "ye know not the scriptures...." One way to be in ignorance is through having a deficiency of knowledge, but another

way to be in ignorance is to hold contempt for right thinking regarding the facts at hand. The danger of wrong-headedness in the area of Bible-translation approach and discipline is real. What disciple would consciously want to access the scriptures in faulty translation – a translation compromised by somebody or some group who “know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?” Mistakes in translation borne of human frailty are inevitable, but they are not as damaging as mistakes in translation borne of an improperly reverent mindset.

God can use the translation of the scriptures, and when this happens, the word of God is magnified. The most cogent reason for Christians to accept the authority of certain LXX readings is that they are used in the New Testament canon.

Translations are human efforts, some more noble than others. Some translations exhibit great care to detail, and some translations also exhibit too great attention to modern thought at the expense of accurately communicating the historical and unchanging message that was given by inspiration of God. The scriptures *themselves* are inspired while human translations make the scriptures accessible to a greater or lesser degree to people who have no ability in the Biblical languages. It is the scriptures that are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction.... If we deny the correctness of the scripture as it appears in the Gospel of Matthew, then we may as well abandon the claims of the Gospel. It is easy enough to conceive that the unbelieving Hebrews subsequently *changed their understanding* of what the Hebrew word *almah* means because of willful and *judicial* unbelief. This is easier to conceive than it is to consider some other reason why the unbelieving Jews were so anxious to *retranslate* the scriptures and anathematize the original LXX translation only after it had been in place for at least 265 years. (The Torah, according to tradition, was translated into Greek approximately 285 B.C., with the other portions of scripture being translated later. However, there is testimony in one of the apocryphal books to the effect that by 135 B.C. the entire Hebrew canon of scripture had been in Greek translation for some time.) We do have pre-Christian testimony to this effect, some of which I will place below.

Consider:

The Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Foreward

[...] Such a one was my grandfather, Jesus, who, having devoted himself for a long time to the diligent study of **the Law, the Prophets, and the rest of the books** of our ancestors, and having developed a thorough familiarity with them, was moved to write something himself in the nature of instruction and wisdom, in order that those who love wisdom might, by acquainting themselves with what he too had written, make even greater progress in living in conformity with the Divine Law.

You therefore are now invited to read it in a spirit of attentive good will, with indulgence for any apparent failure on our part, despite earnest efforts, in the interpretation of particular passages. For words spoken originally in Hebrew are not as effective when they are translated into another language. That is true not only of this book but of **the Law itself, the Prophets and the rest of the books**, which differ no little when they are read in the original.

I arrived in Egypt in the thirty-eight year of the reign of King

Euergetes, and while there, **I found a reproduction of our valuable teaching.**¹
I therefore considered myself in duty bound to devote some diligence and industry to the translation of this book. [...].

¹ Reproduction ... teaching: may refer to the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Hebrew wisdom writings predating Sirach.

The above text is copied verbatim from the *Saint Joseph's New Catholic Edition* of the Bible. It reflects the words of the translator into Greek, who was the grandson of the author of Ecclesiasticus, Jesus ben Sirach. A footnote places the date of this foreword at 132 B.C. Although the foreword is not versified, the Roman Church deems this text should be integrated into to the text of Ecclesiasticus. Notice the clause above referring to the Law, the Prophets and the rest of the books. The translator mentions this term twice, and then he restates the idea later by referring to finding “a reproduction of our valuable teaching.” This “valuable teaching” refers to a translation of the Law, the Prophets, and the “other books” rather than to the *Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach* [Ecclesiasticus, not to be confused with the biblical book of Ecclesiastes]. The translator into Greek announced the perceived need to translate his grandfather’s work upon learning that a reproduction of the Law, the Prophets and the Other Books *had already been made*.⁸ Even now the Hebrews divide their scripture into the **Law –Thorah**, the **Prophets –Neviim**, and the **writings –Kethuvim**, conveniently contracted in modern times into the term TaNaK.

At the moment I am not interested how many of the apocryphal works were available in the LXX at the time the translator of *The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach* [Ecclesiasticus] wrote his foreward. What interests me is that we have ancient written evidence right here in the Foreword of Ecclesiasticus that the entire Hebrew canon was translated into Greek before the translator of Sirach arrived in Egypt. Thus ancient written records demonstrate that from 135 B.C. at the very latest until the time of Aquila, in approximately A.D. 130, the Hebrews accepted the text of the LXX. That’s a period of 265 years in which the

⁸ The text reproduced in the extensive quote referred to is taken verbatim from the *St. Joseph Bible: New Catholic Edition*. This includes the explanatory footnote found on the same page as the extensive quote.

After typing his comments in the body text the current writer was filled with chagrin when he checked out the meaning of the phrase “a reproduction of our valuable teaching” in other English sources, including Brenton’s translation of the Septuagint with Apocrypha, the *New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*, and the Bishop Challoner’s revised translation of the *Douay-Rheims* version, translated from the Latin. I also consulted the very free (in my opinion) translation found in the *Revised English Bible*, which ought not to be confused with the RV of the late 19th Century. I later checked my reproduction of the 1611 edition of the KJV, and it too varied from the reading I found in the *St. Joseph Bible*.

All these other versions render the English so differently from each other and from that of the English of *The St. Joseph New Catholic Edition* that I must now deem that clause obscure. The variance of all these versions among themselves leaves me doubting of the clarity of the language used by the original writer of the Foreword to the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach*. Whatever the author meant by the clause rendered in English by “a reproduction of our valuable teaching” in *The St. Joseph New Catholic Edition*, this writer thinks adequate information is provided elsewhere in the foreword to indicate the entire Hebrew canon had already been rendered into Greek well before the translator of Ecclesiasticus arrived in Egypt. While I am certainly not the first person to make this observation, I cannot immediately call to mind which reference source I once consulted that was perhaps more thorough in providing documentation for the claim that the OT canon was in Greek before the time *The Wisdom of Sirach* was translated. Both *The Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* and *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* come to mind.

Greek rendering of Isaiah 7:14 went unchanged and apparently unchallenged. Why weren't the Jewish readers of the Greek translation anxious to make this supposedly needed correction before? Why would they be content with a "bad translation" at this location for nearly three centuries? Why would the ancient Hebrew scribes translating into Greek render the passage that way in the first place if it was so sloppy and far from the mark?

Let's accept the primacy of the Hebrew record of scripture and give thanks for ancient translations of that same Hebrew scripture record that serve as helps in understanding passages that are obscure to modern translators from Hebrew. That coupled with exploring all ascertainable ancient Hebrew variants solves very many problems in modern translation.

The current writer does not think it profitable to postulate whether the later Hebrew scribes changed the Hebrew text at Isaiah 7:14 in a polemical effort. It would, however, be interesting to see how the Dead Sea Scrolls read at this location. I find it very hard to believe this research has not already been done. Though the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to have been produced by sectarians who may have been non-objective and agenda driven as they produced them, the scrolls also seem to have been produced before Christian times. I presume that whatever the sectarian motives that guided the Qumran scribes, an anti-Christian polemic was not one of them. I believe the original translation of the LXX at Isaiah 7:14 got it right.