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BOOK REVIEW

Karen H. Jobes, ed. *Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016. 351 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-825-44342-8. \$39.99.

It is reasonable to assume that many individuals, upon gaining at least a moderate degree of proficiency in New Testament Greek, become interested in learning to read the Greek Old Testament, that is, the Septuagint (LXX), which, historically speaking, is not only “an important linguistic and theological bridge between the Testaments” but remains also, in its own right, “an important literary work in the history of religious texts” (7).

Despite such earnestness, however, two obstacles often need to be addressed in order to achieve the level of competence necessary to read the Greek of the LXX. First, irrespective of the grammar(s), textbook(s), and/or workbook(s) that may have been used in learning to read the Greek New Testament (GNT), the vocabulary of the LXX is quite vast and extends far beyond the words learned for reading the GNT. Moreover, certain words that occur in the GNT have a different sense of meaning in the LXX, possibly due to changes in usage over the lapse of time between the production of each collection of texts, or because of the influence of classical Greek style on the LXX. Second, although the syntax of the LXX is largely the same as the syntax that is found in the GNT, there are many places where the underlying Hebrew syntax has so influenced the syntax of the translation that the resulting Greek is “strange at best and occasionally quite difficult to comprehend” (7).

Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader, edited by Karen Jobes, was designed specifically to help students overcome these obstacles. The volume includes a total of 660 verses from different books of the LXX, namely, Genesis,

Exodus, Deuteronomy, Ruth, Esther, Psalms, Hosea, Jonah, Malachi, and Isaiah, which are compiled primarily by Jobes's students. Each chapter is prefaced by a one- to two-page introduction to the Greek version of a particular book, followed by a selective, brief bibliography pertinent to that specific portion of Scripture. Certain aspects of each book's translation style are often noted in the introduction. The main part of each chapter is comprised of a verse-by-verse presentation of the Rahlfs–Hanhart critical edition of the Greek text with certain notes on vocabulary, syntax, and important historical referents. Certain aspects of each book's translation style are often noted in the introduction. Lastly, each chapter concludes with the translation of the passage from Pietersma and Benjamin's *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007), and a chart, if applicable, that indicates the text's usage in the New Testament. The New Testament citations "were largely determined by consulting Appendix III. Loci Citati Vel Allegati in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece*" (10). The readings are arranged according to the canonical order of the LXX.

It is worth noting that this volume generally assumes a working knowledge of all the vocabulary covered in Bruce Metzger's *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* (1998), and that the translations of words given in the notes are of the inflected forms of the words or phrases as they appear in the given text. Another important point involves the versification of the Greek selections. *Discovering the Septuagint* follows the Rahlfs–Hanhart numbering, which differs in places from the *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS) versification that follows the numbering of the Göttingen edition—both of which deviate, at times, from the versification of English Bibles, particularly in the Psalms. Readers should be aware of this potential source of confusion. Also, proper nouns, even though they are transliterated in NETS, are given their conventional English equivalent the first time they appear in any given reading selection.

Aside from the preface, a short guide on how to use the book, and a succinct introduction to the LXX and its importance, the

volume also includes a listing of the grammatical abbreviations that are used in the notes, helpful abbreviations of recommended reference works, a concise glossary of technical terms, and an index of New Testament LXX citations listed in canonical order. It should be noted, however, that some of the examples are not strictly quotations. For example, Jonah 2:1 is presented as being cited in Matt 12:40, but this is an allusion to the story of Jonah rather than a formal quotation.

The book, therefore, would have benefited from providing a more extensive glossary of terms that distinguished between types of LXX citations in the New Testament (e.g., quotation, allusion, paraphrase, etc.). In addition, the quotation section could also have been improved by including the Greek text of the LXX and the GNT side-by-side and commenting on the variants and dissimilarities. Regrettably, there is also not an author index. The choice of texts within the select bibliography is, at times, exceedingly curious. For instance, concerning Genesis, of the (only!) three sources mentioned, one of them is the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (2013) by Walton, yet none of the fine commentaries by Wenham (WBC, 1987–94), Hamilton (NICOT, 1990–95), or Matthews (NAC, 2009), including Walton’s other volumes that also relate to the subject, among others, are mentioned. Furthermore, with respect to the prophets, in the section on Hosea, despite the abundant, and otherwise fabulous array of sources referenced, there is no mention of the esteemed commentary by Dearman (NICOT, 2010). In Jonah’s bibliography, Sasson’s fine commentary (AB, 1995) does not appear, nor does Stuart’s (WBC, 1997). For Isaiah, neither Smith’s (NAC, 2009) nor Oswalt’s (NICOT, 1986–98) appear. This is not to mention the conspicuous absence of Cline’s *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (1994–), Muroaoka’s *Greek–Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (2010), Porter’s *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (1992), among his other works, Morrish’s *Concordance of the Septuagint* (1976), the entire *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1974–) and *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (1996) sets, and the *United Bible Societies Greek*

New Testament 5th edition (2014) among the recommended reference works. Indisputably, any reader would benefit from leveraging these works, and, as such, it would certainly have behooved the editor to have referenced and/or made note of them.

Also, although Jobes states that the texts were chosen to “give readers a taste of different genres, an experience of distinctive Septuagintal elements, and a sampling of texts later used by writers of the New Testament,” (9) the absence of any books from the so-called “histories,” that is, the former prophets and the wisdom literature, is deemed by this reviewer to be most unfortunate, and it somewhat mars the utility of the volume as it does not engage with the LXX corpus as a whole.

Perhaps the biggest shortcoming of the book, however, is the complete lack of engagement with the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), or especially the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) where applicable, such as Ruth and Esther. There are numerous occasions where the text of the LXX differs from the MT in significant ways, but because the volume is a guided reader for the LXX and not a commentary on the variants and dissimilarities that exist between the MT and LXX, the reader is left in the dark and remains altogether unaware of these not insignificant matters. Would not a few examples have helped to illustrate these matters and brought a well-roundedness to the discussion?

A few other minor points concerning the volume’s user-friendliness involve the fact that the text is not laid out in workbook-like style. Thus, there is a severe lack of space for students to do their translations, make notes, etc., unlike Bateman’s *Handbook for Intermediate Greek* or Decker’s *Koine Greek Reader* (2007), also published by Kregel, which are ample in the provisions they make in this regard, and include even more additional helps and resources than Jobes, such as a review of basic grammar and syntax.

Such criticisms notwithstanding, this volume is unquestionably an excellent aid to those who have had at least three semesters of Koine Greek to begin to read with increased skill and fluidity the Greek Jewish Scriptures, particularly as they are found in the Rahlfs–Hanhart critical edition of the LXX.

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Its primary readers will be graduate students, but independent study is possible for the serious pastor and others.

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