

Translation of the text of Isaiah by the Greeks of Alexandria

(Otherwise known as the Septuagint and represented by the letters LXX)

Information relating to the problem

Probably by the middle of the 3rd Century BCE the text of Isaiah had been translated into Greek for the Greek speaking Jews of Alexandria. This translation, known as the Septuagint because the legend suggests that there were 72 scholars who produced a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in 72 days, became the standard text for Greek speaking Jews. Apart from the legend a comparison of the Hebrew and Greek is a topic that has excited scholars since the late 19th century. In 1880 Anton Scholz wrote a monograph *The Alexandrian translation of the book of Isaiah* and started a whirlwind of academic study. The latest as far as I know is Ronald L Troxel's *Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation* (JSJ Sup). From that you may gather that at times the Greek version of the book in places varies considerably from the Hebrew original and no one seems to be sure if that means

1. the version they were copying from was defective, or
2. the translator was not up to the job, or as Troxel maintains,
3. the Greek scholar was attempting to make the text meaningful to contemporary audiences by interpreting and not simply translating what the original said.

I mention this because if you ever read in one of the Gospels (usually St Matthew) "as was written by the prophet Isaiah..." you may notice, if you look up the original in Isaiah that the wording is different. That is simply because, most of the quotations in the Gospels are taken from the LXX version of the Old Testament rather than the Hebrew text.

How would you select a text of the Bible?

1. Must it be an accurate translation
2. Must the person publishing it be able to understand the original?
3. Supposing the person publishing it adds his or her own interpretation?

