

## CHAPTER FOUR

## ISAIAH 6:9-10 IN THE SEPTUAGINT

Many scholars recognize the original translation of Isaiah into Greek as occurring somewhere in the second century BCE.<sup>1</sup> What the modern reader has in front of her or him (such as the Rahlfs edition of the LXX) is *not* what the original translator (assuming there was a single original) first penned. Emmanuel Tov describes the four likely stages of the LXX prior to its stabilization.

1. The original translation.
2. A multitude of textual traditions resulting from the insertion of corrections (mainly towards the Hebrew) in all known individual scrolls in the pre-Christian period and to a lesser extent in the first century CE.
3. Textual stabilization in the first and second centuries CE, due to the perpetuation of some textual traditions and the discontinuation of others.
4. The creation of new textual groups and the corruption of existing one through the influence of the revisions of Origen and Lucian in the third and fourth centuries CE.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Minn.: Baker Academic, 2000), 148; Arie van der Kooij, "Isaiah in the Septuagint," in *Writing and Reading the Isaiah Scroll*, eds. Craig Broyles and Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 513.

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1981), 42.

Tov's progression is further developed with respect to the recensions.<sup>3</sup> The development is chronological including pre-Hexaplaric recensions known as "the Three" including Aquila, Symmachus, and καίγε-Theodotian. Following this is the Hexapla. This recension represents Origen's six-column edition of the Bible. One of the columns represented Origen's own recension.<sup>4</sup> The central post-Hexaplaric recension is known as the Lucianic recension. These recensions can also be divided into Christian and Jewish versions. "The Three" are commonly attributed as Jewish recensions while Origen's Hexapla and Lucian's work are likely Christian.<sup>5</sup>

The detail and complexity of the LXX's history has made the task of reconstructing the Greek text of any passage difficult at best. However, the task is still being undertaken and continually nuanced by those in the field. I will proceed with the hopes of looking atop the shoulders of those who have cleared the path.

### *Text<sup>6</sup> and Translation*

v. 1

It was in the year which King Uzziah died.

I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and exalted and his glory filled the place.

ἐγένετο τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ οὗ ἀπέθανεν  
Οζίας ὁ βασιλεύς  
εἶδον τὸν κύριον<sup>7</sup> καθήμενον ἐπὶ  
θρόνου  
ὑψηλοῦ καὶ ἐπηρμένου  
καὶ πλήρης ὁ οἶκος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ

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<sup>3</sup> I will employ the term recension as a technical term in agreement with Jobes and Silva who state that a recension indicates "a self-conscious, systematic, and clearly identifiable revision of an existing text." See *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 46n.1. Tov uses the term 'revision' which for the purposes of this paper can be understood as interchangeable.

<sup>4</sup> Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 51-53.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> The variants provided are taken from *Göttlisa* where the full critical apparatus can be found. Judgment has been made in omitting variants when deemed inconsequential for the purpose of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> *pm* add σαβαωθ.

v.2

Seraphim stood around him.

Each had six wings,  
 Yes, each had six wings!  
 With two they covered their face,  
 with two they covered their feet,  
 and with two they were flying.

καὶ σεραφιν εἰστήκεισαν κύκλῳ  
 αὐτοῦ  
 ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ  
 καὶ ἕξ πτέρυγες τῷ ἐνὶ  
 καὶ ταῖς μὲν δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τὸ  
 πρόσωπον<sup>8</sup>  
 καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν κατεκάλυπτον τοὺς  
 πόδας<sup>8</sup>  
 καὶ ταῖς δυσὶν ἐπέταντο

v.3

They called out, this one to that, and said,  
 “Holy, holy, holy LORD of Hosts  
 His glory fills all the earth.”

καὶ ἐκέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν  
 ἕτερον καὶ ἔλεγον  
 ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος σαβαωθ  
 πλήρης πᾶσα ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ

v.4

The lintel was up heaved from the sound  
 which they cried  
 And the place was filled with smoke.

καὶ ἐπήρθη τὸ ὑπέρθυρον ἀπὸ τῆς  
 φωνῆς ἧς ἐκέκραγον  
 καὶ ὁ οἶκος ἐπλήσθη καπνοῦ

v.5

I said, “Woe is me! I am pierced  
 through.”  
 Because I am a man of unclean lips,

καὶ εἶπα ὦ τάλας ἐγὼ ὅτι  
 κατανένυγμα  
 ὅτι ἄνθρωπος ὢν καὶ ἀκάθαρτα  
 χεῖλη ἔχων  
 ἐν μέσῳ λαοῦ ἀκάθαρτα χεῖλη  
 ἔχοντος ἐγὼ οἰκῶ  
 καὶ τὸν βασιλέα κύριον σαβαωθ  
 εἶδον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου

I dwell among a people of unclean lips

And because my eyes have seen the king,  
 the LORD of Hosts.

v.6

Then one of the Seraphim was sent to me  
 and in his hand was a coal which he took  
 with tongs from the altar.

καὶ ἀπεστάλη πρὸς με ἐν τῶν  
 σεραφιν  
 καὶ ἐν τῇ χειρὶ<sup>9</sup> εἶχεν ἄνθρακα ὄν  
 τῇ λαβίδι ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ  
 θυσιαστηρίου

v.7

It touched my mouth  
 and he said, “See, this has now touched  
 your lips.

καὶ ἤψατο τοῦ στόματός μου  
 καὶ εἶπεν ἰδοὺ ἤψατο τοῦτο τῶν  
 χειλέων σου

<sup>8</sup> *pm* add αὐτων.

<sup>9</sup> *pm*, including the Origen and Lucian recension, add αὐτου. This is noted as an addition in conformity to Hebrew in Origen’s margin.

Your evil will be taken away and your sin will be cleansed.”

καὶ ἀφελεῖ τὰς ἀνομίας σου καὶ τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου περικαθαριεῖ

v.8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,

“Who shall I send?  
Who will go to this people?”

I said, “Here I am, send me.”

καὶ ἤκουσα τῆς φωνῆς κυρίου λέγοντος  
τίνα ἀποστείλω  
καὶ τίς πορεύσεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον  
καὶ εἶπα ἰδοὺ εἰμι ἐγὼ ἀπόστειλὸν με

v.9

And God said, “Go and say to this people,

‘You will listen carefully but not understand.

You will look closely but not perceive.’”

καὶ εἶπεν πορεύθητι<sup>10</sup> καὶ εἰπὸν τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ  
ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε<sup>11</sup> καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε  
καὶ βλέποντες βλέψετε<sup>12</sup> καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε<sup>13</sup>

v.10

For the heart of this people is fattened.

Their ears are plugged,

and their eyes are closed.

Lest

they see with their eyes,  
and with their ears hear,  
and with their heart understand,  
and return so that I would heal them.

ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου<sup>14</sup>  
καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν αὐτῶν<sup>15</sup> βαρέως ἤκουσαν  
τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν<sup>16</sup> ἐκάμμυσαν μήποτε  
ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς  
<sup>17</sup>καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν<sup>18</sup> ἀκούσωσιν<sup>17</sup>  
<sup>19</sup>καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν<sup>20 19</sup>  
καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν<sup>21</sup> καὶ ἰάσωμαι<sup>22</sup> αὐτούς

<sup>10</sup> S reads πορευου. *pm* add προς τον λαον τουτον.

<sup>11</sup> A and C read ακουσητε.

<sup>12</sup> S reads βλεψητε.

<sup>13</sup> S and V read ειδητε.

<sup>14</sup> 93, which is part of the Lucian recension, reads ημων.

<sup>15</sup> Omitted in S. See also Matt 13:15 and Acts 28:27.

<sup>16</sup> Omitted in V.

<sup>17-17</sup> Omitted in 88.

<sup>18</sup> 393 and Coptic manuscripts read αυτων.

<sup>19-19</sup> Omitted in 377, 407, and 534; *GöttIsa* cites as homoeoteleuton.

<sup>20</sup> 26 reads συνιωσιν

<sup>21</sup> S, Origen, and Lucian, read επιστρεψουσι(v). 301 and 534 read επιστραφωσυσι(v).

<sup>22</sup> V reads ιασωμαι.

v.11

Then I asked, “For how long Lord?”  
 God replied, “Until the cities are  
 desolated  
 without dwelling,  
 and houses are without people.  
 The land will be forsaken,  
 a desolation.”

καὶ εἶπα ἕως πότε κύριε  
 καὶ εἶπεν ἕως ἂν ἐρημωθῶσιν πόλεις  
 παρὰ τὸ μὴ κατοικεῖσθαι  
 καὶ οἴκοι παρὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι  
 ἀνθρώπους  
 ἢ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται  
 ἔρημος

v.12

And after this God will send the people  
 away  
 And the forsaken will fill the earth

καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μακρυνεῖ ὁ θεὸς  
 τοὺς ἀνθρώπους  
 καὶ οἱ καταλειφθέντες  
 πληθυνθήσονται ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

v.13

And if there is still a tenth on it,  
 then once more it will be plundered  
 as terebinth or as oak  
 when it falls from its trunk.

καὶ ἔτι ἐπ’ αὐτῆς ἔστιν τὸ  
 ἐπιδέκατον  
 καὶ πάλιν ἔσται εἰς προνομὴν  
 ὡς τερέβινθος καὶ ὡς βάλανος  
 ὅταν ἐκπέσῃ ἀπὸ τῆς θήκης αὐτῆς<sup>23</sup>

Symmachus’ reading of verse 10<sup>24</sup>

For the heart of this people is fattened.  
 They have plugged their ears,  
 and closed their eyes.  
 Lest  
 they see with their eyes,  
 and hear with their ears,  
 and their heart understand,  
 and turn and be healed.

ἐλιπανθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία ὁ λαὸς οὗτος  
 τὰ ὠτα ἐβάρυνε  
 καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ἔμυσε  
 μήπως  
 ἴδῃ ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ  
 καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούῃ  
 καὶ ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ συνῇ  
 καὶ ἐπιστραφῇ καὶ ἰαθῇ

*Interpretive Issues in LXX Isaiah 6:9-10*

<sup>23</sup> *pm*, including Origen, Lucian, and the Catenen group, read  
 σπερμα ἁγιον το στηλωμα αυτης.

<sup>24</sup> See *GöttIsa*.

That the Greek version of Isaiah provides a relatively explicit theological translation finds wide scholarly acceptance.<sup>25</sup> However, despite the inability at times to find a high degree of formal equivalence between words from the MT and the LXX most scholars also agree that “the *Vorlage* of LXX Isaiah, though difficult to reconstruct, does not differ much from MT.”<sup>26</sup>

It is important then to deal first with any crucial decisions to be made with respect to the original Greek rendering of Isaiah 6:9-10 and its Hebrew *Vorlage*. Secondly, an examination of the translator’s work needs to account for whether there was any substantial shift in meaning from the MT. This discussion needs to bear in mind the entire chapter, as well as key characteristics of LXX Isaiah as a whole.

#### *The Greek Text of Isaiah 6:9-10*

A few manuscripts add πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον reading, “Go to this people” in verse 9, in accordance with the passage as quoted in Acts 28:26. However, in Acts 28:26 it reads “Go to this people and say . . .” while these manuscripts repeat this phrase and read “Go to this people and say to this people.”<sup>27</sup> A scribal error such as dittography may offer a solution as most Greek manuscripts record “Who will go for this people?” (πορεύσεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον) in verse 8 where the Hebrew reads “Who will go for us?” This may be explained by the scribe as reading לָנוּ, “to

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<sup>25</sup> Jobs and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 22; Arie van der Kooij, “Isaiah in the Septuagint,” 514.

<sup>26</sup> Van der Kooij, “Isaiah in the Septuagint,” 517; With respect to Isaiah 6 see Ivan Engell, *The Call of Isaiah* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1949), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Of these manuscripts only manuscript 534 replaces ‘this people’ with ‘them,’ αὐτοῖς.

the people” instead of לָנוּ, “for us.”<sup>28</sup> Another explanation is a potential harmonization towards the text as quoted in Acts 28:26.

Vaticanus and Sinaiticus read εἶδητε, “to know” instead of ἴδητε, “to perceive.” This is likely an alternative translation for the Hebrew יָדַע.<sup>29</sup>

Manuscript 93 offers an interesting variation in verse 10. Instead of reading “the heart of this people is fattened” it reads “our heart is fattened.” There is no other attestation of this variant and should likely be considered the creation of the translator or scribe. This may be an example of the tendency for the translator to produce an “actualizing” account of the Hebrew text.<sup>30</sup>

In verse 10 various manuscripts either add or omit the genitive personal pronoun attached to the people’s eyes, ears, and heart. There is no reason to assume a differing Hebrew text as none of the Greek translations follow a literal rendering of the Hebrew third person singular. If there was an intentional scribal decision then it may be explained as a clarification of the text by either adding αὐτῶν, “their” or withholding the third person singular pronoun. This is also seen in how the translator rendered the actions of the Seraphim in verse 2 as plurals instead of the singular in Hebrew.

As footnoted above, *GöttIsa* has adequately identified the omission of καὶ τῆ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν, “and understand with the heart” in various manuscripts as a case of homoeoteleuton.

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<sup>28</sup> Wilberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 250.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 191 n.6.

<sup>30</sup> Arie van der Kooij, “Isaiah in the Septuagint,” 513.

There are some minor variations in how ἐπιστρέψωσιν “to return” is rendered in various manuscripts. These variations offer nothing of substance in establishing the Greek text.

The reading given by Symmachus in verse 10 certainly deviates from the major readings of the LXX. First, Symmachus reads λιπαίνω in place of παχύνω. Both words can be broadly translated as “to fatten.” This choice points to the potential influence of Deuteronomy 28-32 on the translation of the passage. Deuteronomy 32:15 reads *both* λιπαίνω and παχύνω (in the passive as in LXX Isaiah 6:10) in describing the state of Israel. This potential influence will be further discussed below. Evans offers no explanation of this variance and apparently does not affiliate this reading with Symmachus, in contradiction to the critical apparatus in *GöttIsa.*<sup>31</sup> The remainder of the verse offers several lexical variances. However, it can be agreed with Evans that “the meaning is essentially the same. It is the people who have closed their eyes and ears.”<sup>32</sup>

With respect to the message conveyed within the Greek tradition of Isaiah, there are no substantial decisions which need to be made. Other than the isolated reading of “our hearts” in manuscript 93 there are no major disputes about what the LXX was presenting with respect to verses 9-10. In addition, no sound argument has been made that the translator of Isaiah was ever looking at a substantially different Hebrew *Vorlage*. This does not, however, prove that the translator used the exact text which we now have. Rather, no case for claiming a different source, likely that of the Masoretic tradition, has been maintained. The question remains whether this

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<sup>31</sup> Evans, *To See and Not Perceive*, 65.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



presentation offers a significantly different meaning that which was recorded in the MT.

*The Meaning of the Greek Isaiah 6:9-10 and the MT*

Though the Greek version of Isaiah likely stems from the Masoretic tradition many have observed that the translator appears to have allowed his social context to play a larger role in his translation than some other biblical books translated into Greek.<sup>33</sup> A common view accepts that any translation reflects the translator's worldview. However, this does not make any translation appropriate. Questions have been raised regarding the Greek translation of the Isaiah 6:9-10. These questions are worthy of further evaluation.

The first question involves the question of the LXX's use of the future in place of the Hebrew imperative. The result reads "You will listen closely" instead of "Listen closely." Evans claims that this translation sees that "the prophet is no longer *enjoining* the people to become obdurate, but is *predicting* that they will remain obdurate."<sup>34</sup> This results in removing "much of the sarcasm and judgmental tone."<sup>35</sup> However, this is not the only explanation. As Evans himself comments in a footnote, "the Greek futures could have imperative force."<sup>36</sup> I think Evans is too hasty in rejecting this possibility.<sup>37</sup> The context communicates that Isaiah's preaching will

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<sup>33</sup> Van der Kooij, "Isaiah in the Septuagint," 513. The theological and exegetical influence in LXX Isaiah also appears to be more prominent than in the transmission of Isaiah in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>; See Tov, "The Text of Isaiah at Qumran," 508.

<sup>34</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 191 n.12.

<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that the *New Living Translation* has also rendered the verb sequence in verse 9 as futures, no doubt with the imperatival aspect in mind. However, in departure with the LXX

happen in the future (i.e. they will not understand *after* he has preached his message). When the context of the imperative reads that the result will occur in the future the translator has used the Greek future to communicate the Hebrew imperative in other instances (Isa 2:3; 4:1). The translator also attempted to maintain the meaning of the Hebrew by accounting for the Hebrew infinitive absolutes added to the imperatives which affects the meaning of the action.<sup>38</sup> This translation in isolation can be viewed as adequately reflecting the Hebrew meaning into the Greek context.

Another important translation choice comes in the LXX's use of the Greek passive to convey the Hebrew hiphil imperative "make fat." This sentence also includes γὰρ, not formally represented in the Hebrew and adds a causal or explanatory<sup>39</sup> element, "they will not understand *because/for* the hearts. . ." With these two alterations the LXX reads "*For* the hearts of this people *are* fattened." There are no serious textual difficulties in the Greek recensions which leaves good reason to believe that this is the reading intended by the Greek translator.<sup>40</sup>

The following hiphil imperatives ("plug up" and "smear shut") in verse 10 are translated as active aorists. This section of the translation then reads as a *description* of the "fat-hearted" people rather than further instruction of that which the prophet is to accomplish.

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verse 10 is translated with a full English imperative, "Harden the hearts . . ." Even here the translators have moved away from the literal "make heavy" and interpreted the command in terms of hardening.

<sup>38</sup> *GKC*, § 113.

<sup>39</sup> *ATR*, 1190-1.

<sup>40</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 62-3; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 250. Keep in mind that Greek translators were inconsistent in their rendering of hiphil verbs; see Emmanuel Tov, "The Causative Aspects of the *Hiphil*," in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, ed. Emmanuel Tov (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195-202. However, there were certainly alternatives available to the Greek translator to communicate the imperative force of the sentence. Seeligmann observes times when the Greek translator did not wish to preserve the causative force of the hiphil and instead "uses . . . passive forms of the verb, thereby completely altering the construction and meaning." I. L. Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah: A Discussion of Its Problems* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1948), 55.

In light of these translational choices the conjunction μήποτε, “lest” becomes difficult to understand. This conjunction acts as a perfectly reasonable translation of the Hebrew ׀ִ (Gen 3:22; 19:17; Ex 1:10; 5:3) though it is the only occurrence in LXX Isaiah. The most common translation reads the negative μη (Isa 36:18; 48:5; 48:7). μήποτε, in this context, can still be understood as denoting purpose (i.e. something is done *in order that* something else might *not* happen).<sup>41</sup> Changed from the Hebrew, which reads Isaiah as acting so that the people might be hardened, the LXX reads that the *action* (hardness) *of the people* creates the condition *lest* they might not see, hear, and understand.<sup>42</sup>

These translation choices result in a passage which appears to diverge from the intended meaning recorded in the MT. Has the meaning in fact changed? If so, what does LXX Isaiah 6:9-10 mean? Is this meaning an irresponsible handling of the author’s intention?

### *LXX Isaiah and the Transmission of Meaning*

Isaiah 6:9-10 as received in the MT give us an image of a prophet commanded to harden the hearts of the people so that they would not return to God and that he could in turn execute judgment upon them. LXX Isaiah reads in a manner which appears to alter this picture. However, before passing judgment on the Greek translator it is important first to examine the broader pericope in which it is found as well as the genre of LXX Isaiah in relation to the MT. This, so that “if a pericope or chapter of LXX Is which differs much from MT Is turns out to be a coherent and

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<sup>41</sup> BAGD, 519.

<sup>42</sup> Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 63.

meaningful text on its own, one may assume that the differences are the result of a deliberate translation-process.”<sup>43</sup> This process is in keeping with Vanhoozer’s thinking which looks beyond basic word variants and asks whether this new combination (translation) creates a different illocutionary force with a different intended effect. The necessary next step becomes asking if there is any other content in chapter 6 which supports or refutes an altered illocution of verses 9-10.

Two important factors should be kept in mind when addressing chapter 6 as a whole in the LXX. One is the community’s concept of God. The second is the community’s self-concept. First, the translator employed δόξα, “glory” instead of וְשׂוּלֵי, “his robe.” Though there is “no consistent anti-anthropomorphic patten in the Greek Bible,” Isaiah itself appears to employ δόξα to counter elements of anthropomorphisms.<sup>44</sup> The Greek translator also does not have the Seraphim “standing over” God, as in the Hebrew. Rather they are standing “around him.” Wildberger sees this as “an intentional alteration, since it would not set well with the translator that the seraphim should be standing *over* their divine Lord.”<sup>45</sup>

Indirectly the LXX portrays God as the subject who sends the Seraphim in verse 6, “the Seraph *was sent*.” This contrasts the Hebrew which allows the Seraph to be the subject of the verb “he flew.” This links the source of the forthcoming forgiving action in the initiation of God.

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<sup>43</sup> Arie van der Kooij, “The Septuagint of Isaiah: Translation and Interpretation,” in *The Book of Isaiah*, ed. Jacques Vermeylen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 128.

<sup>44</sup> Jobs and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 95. See also Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, trans. Thomas Trapp (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 248-49.

<sup>45</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 249. See also Ivan Engell, *The Call of Isaiah* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1949), 13.

In verse 12 where the Hebrew reads, “[and] the LORD sends the people away and devastation is great in the midst of the land” the LXX diverges. Engell has translated this sentence, “But thereafter God *will become forbearing* towards men, and *those who are left* will be numerous on the earth.”<sup>46</sup> If this translation can be accepted then God’s act of forgiveness replaces much of the judgmental tone conveyed in the MT. However, there are some objections to this translation that should be raised.

First, μακρυνεῖ does not need to be translated as “will become forbearing.” This verb still carries with it the sense of “sending away.” That sense can be found in the Greek translation of Isaiah 49:19 and Jeremiah 34:10 [MT 27:10].<sup>47</sup> Second, how should καταλειφθέντες be translated? A common use comes as a reference to a “remnant” in Isaiah (10:20, 21; 11:11, 16; 24:14; 28:5). The basic sense in the passive denotes “being left.” Engell translates it as “those who are left,” believing that “the remnant” has been read into the text.<sup>48</sup> However, twice in Isaiah the term could be understood as “forsaken” (Isa 54:6; 62:4). These passages still refer to the remnant of Israel but the sense functions as that of *being left alone* (deserted/abandoned). In Isaiah 62:4 καταλείπω translates כּוּע as is the case in 6:12. Isaiah 62:4a reads

No longer will they call you Deserted (כּוּע; LXX καταλείπω),  
or name your land Desolate (הַמְמָה; LXX ἔρημος).

הַמְמָה (LXX ἔρημος) is also a term used to describe the affects of God’s judgment in Isaiah 6, found at the end of verse 11. This leads to the conclusion that the translator

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<sup>46</sup> Engell, *The Call of Isaiah*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> See also Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 251.

<sup>48</sup> Engell, *The Call of Isaiah*, 14.

could have been intending to accurately translate עֲזָרָה with the knowledge that “the remnant” at that time *still* essentially referred to “the forsaken.” This explanation leads to a much more subtle example of the Greek translator’s theological understanding of God’s provision for the remnant. The translator’s rendering “in the midst of the land” as “will fill the earth” demonstrates support for this influence. The Greek translation parallels this line with God’s glory in verse 3 “filling the earth” and it may demonstrate the post-exilic theological view of God’s provision/presence wherever God sends *this* people.

After surveying these examples it becomes evident that the translator’s theological understanding has informed his translation, which should not surprise us. Does the image which emerges affect our understanding of LXX Isaiah 6:9-10? It could be argued that LXX Isaiah’s rendering of chapter 6 pictures God as removed from situations perceived to somehow diminish his role in brutal and severe judgment of the people. The notion of God *performing* the hardening on the people was theologically unacceptable. In response the translator rendered the hearts of the people *as already hardened* and prepared for judgment. And this was integrated with a heightened sense of God’s grace for the exiles.<sup>49</sup>

This reading also makes sense with the potential influence of Deuteronomy 28-32. In these chapters God’s curses are laid out which include God inflicting the people with “madness, blindness, and confusion of mind [heart]” (Dt 28:28); God will also give the people “an anxious mind [heart], eyes weary with longing, and a despairing mind [soul]” (Dt 28:65). Later Moses tells the people that “to this day the

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<sup>49</sup> Evans supports the case that LXX Isaiah had difficulty with *God* hardening the people by including other similar verses in Isaiah which the Greek translator also altered. See Evans, *To See and not Perceive*, 65-6.

LORD has not given you a *mind* [heart] *that understands* or *eyes that see* or *ears that hear*” (Dt 29:4). When taught to sing a song of remembrance Moses records that “Jeshurun *grew fat* . . . he abandoned the God who made him” (Dt 32:15). The same Greek word and form which translated “grew fat” (Qal converted imperfect) in this passage is the same one that translated “make heavy” (Hiphil imperative) in Isaiah 6:10.<sup>50</sup> This potential influence on Isaiah’s translator would maintain God’s execution of judgment but *would place the responsibility squarely on the people* and not relate it to the intention of God as worked out in the prophet Isaiah.<sup>51</sup>

The question of context should also receive attention, including the movement from chapter 5 to 6. Chapter 5 pictures God bearing down upon the people. The People have apparently already asked “to see” so that they might “know” (5:19). However, God discerns their intentions as ones who call evil good and good evil (5:20); ones who deny justice (5:23b); ones who have rejected the Law of the LORD (5:24b). This the chapter ends with the reader braced for the wrath of God. It would be understandable for the translator to read this passage as referring to those whose heart is already fattened. However, what then of Isaiah’s role and message? Andrew Key correctly asserts that in the MT tradition “the oracle itself is the means through which God’s plan is to be carried out. . . . The words are to be delivered in such a manner that the people cannot repent.”<sup>52</sup> Does the message as read in the LXX attempt a different perlocutionary effect than read in the MT? The Greek translator certainly emphasized the role of the people’s guilt as well as God’s provision of

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<sup>50</sup> Engell, *The Call of Isaiah*, 11 n.2.

<sup>51</sup> The tradition of Deuteronomy 28-32 was understood in connection to the obduracy found in Isaiah; see Paul’s conflated quote in Romans 11:8.

<sup>52</sup> Andrew Key, “The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9-13,” *JBL* 86 (1967): 203; See also Landy, “Strategies of Concentration and Defusion in Isaiah 6,” *BibInt* 7 (1999): 70.

salvation for the future. However, the role of God in the hardening of the people remains absent.

*LXX Isaiah: Translator or Preacher?*

A basic criterion for Vanhoozer's model of ethical interpretation states that an interpreter attempts to create the same force (illocution) as was intended by the author.<sup>53</sup> Has the translator of Isaiah achieved this? LXX Isaiah appears to have softened God's role in hardening the people while elevating his role as the people's saviour. The translation choices are understandable given the influence of Deuteronomy and indeed most of Isaiah itself which incriminates the people for their actions (a small sample of this leading up to chapter 6 include Isa 1:4, 15b-17, 19-20; 3:13-14; 5:7b, 13). Chapter 5 also contributes to LXX Isaiah's interpretation by climaxing in a furious image of God's wrath preparing to execute judgment on a guilty people. However, does this completely justify the translator's reading of 6:9-10? I believe it does not. This would not be an acceptable rendering for a modern translation. In looking to the God who *gave* the people eyes, ears, and heart to understand (Dt 29:4), the translator neglected to give room for the manner which God may be intimately involved in taking these attributes away. Perhaps the Greek translator wondered if God *ever* actually gave the people the "senses" to obey?

A question which must be asked is whether the *genre* of the Septuagint is significantly different than the Hebrew original so as to justify this reading. Was the

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<sup>53</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 391.



Greek translation of Isaiah a homiletic paraphrase or interpretation in subordination to the Hebrew original? I. F. Seeligmann writes that “it became a custom to add, to the reading of one or more Hebrew sentences, a paraphrase in the Greek language, interwoven with homiletic elaborations and commentary relating to religious practice.”<sup>54</sup> However, it appears that the New Testament writers and certainly the Early Church considered the Septuagint authoritative if not inspired.<sup>55</sup> The introduction to Sirach also speaks to the earnestness with which translation was approached. Inviting the reader to his text the narrator writes,

You are invited therefore to read it with goodwill and attention, and to be indulgent in cases where, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to have rendered some phrases imperfectly. For what was originally expressed in Hebrew does not have exactly the same sense when translated into another language. Not only this book, but even the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books differ not a little when read in the original (*Sir, Prologue*).

If this may reflect a broader mindset it would demonstrate a seriousness and humility with which the translator approached the text. A responsible answer to the genre of LXX Isaiah must wait for another project. A modest conclusion follows that LXX Isaiah’s reading of verse 9 and 10 as constituting a responsible formal/dynamic translation can be challenged. However, we would be irresponsible to discard its value as a strong early reading and contextual interpretation (especially pointing us to its clear affinity to the end of Deuteronomy).

The Greek translator toned down the harshness of the Hebrew text. Exactly why he did this must remain speculative. However, weighty biblical testimony of the people’s responsibility for judgment and the difficult harmonization of a gracious

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<sup>54</sup> I. L. Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> See Augustine, *City of God*, xviii.43.

God cleansing Isaiah and caring for the exiles with one who would not only judge, but harden a people until judgment is complete give good reason for influencing the translator's choice. LXX Isaiah's translation of Isaiah 6:9-10 provides an excellent illustration of the difficulty in ethically engaging with a text and allowing it to have its own voice *over and above* that which we bring to it.