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Frank W. Nelte

A REPLY TO THE ARTICLE BY WILLIAM F. DANKENBRING - 'THE SEPTUAGINT - IS IT A FRAUD OR FORGERY?'

Recently someone requested me to comment on an article written by Mr. William F. Dankenbring entitled "A New Look at the Origin of the Bible: The SEPTUAGINT -- Is It a Fraud or Forgery?". In this article Mr. Dankenbring tries to prove that the LXX is a serious translation with greater value than the Masoretic text of the Old Testament. In the process he takes exception with the article I had written about the LXX, in which I pointed out that from a doctrinal point of view the LXX is totally worthless.

So in this article I will examine "the evidence" that Mr. Dankenbring presented in favour of the LXX translation of the Old Testament.

Apart from quoting 1 Thessalonians 5:21 in his introductory comments, not a single Scripture features in the reasoning that Mr. Dankenbring presents in his article. The sources that he quotes in his article actually confirm the whole point I made in my article. Let's notice some of the quotations that Mr. Dankenbring presents:

QUOTATIONS PRESENTED IN SUPPORT OF THE LXX

On page 14, top, he quotes from page 165 of Mark R. Norton's book "Manuscripts of the Old Testament". It says:

"Aquila wrote an extremely literal translation ... This LITERAL APPROACH gained this version wide acceptance among Jews."

Implied is obviously that the LXX is NOT A LITERAL TRANSLATION! And that is the point I made. The LXX is NOT a literal translation of the Hebrew text. The King James Version, by contrast, also represents a LITERAL APPROACH, whereas the NIV, for example, is not so at all! Thus I don't accept the NIV as authoritative because it is so obviously INTERPRETIVE instead of being a literal translation.

Repeatedly Mr. Dankenbring ADMITS that the LXX differs from the Masoretic Text! And that is exactly the point I made in my article: it is not the text God chose to preserve.

On page 14, bottom, Mr. Dankenbring quotes page 972 of "The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible", which says:

"The LXX REPRESENTS A PRE-MASORETIC TEXT"

Again, that is my point! It is NOT the text that God selected for preservation!

Paul tells us very clearly that the O.T. was to be preserved BY THE JEWS, not by the Samaritans or by any strange religious sects in the Dead Sea Caves.

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit [is there] of circumcision? Much every way:

chiefly, because that UNTO THEM WERE COMMITTED THE ORACLES OF GOD. (Romans 3:1-2)

The same quotation on page 14 of Mr. Dankenbring's article states:

"The LXX ... DIFFERED IN VARIOUS WORDS OR PASSAGES from the HEBREW text then in vogue."

Jesus Christ made clear that the official text was the one the religious authorities at the time acknowledged ... the one that was "in vogue"! Notice:

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, [that] observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. (Matthew 23:2-3)

Thus Mr. Dankenbring's own quotation makes clear that he is supporting an unofficial translation! This is therefore in conflict with Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 23:2-3. So where the LXX "DIFFERED" from various words and passages of the Hebrew text, which text do the words of Jesus Christ support? Christ's words obviously support the HEBREW text.

Next, it should be noted that the LXX does NOT contain the tripartite division of the Old Testament. THIS IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT IDENTIFYING SIGN! The official copy of the O.T. was divided into THREE parts Those 3 divisions are:

- the Law
- the Prophets
- the Writings or the Psalms (the first book of this section)

Let's notice Jesus Christ's own definition of "the Scriptures":

And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in THE LAW of Moses, and [in] THE PROPHETS, and [in] THE PSALMS, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand THE SCRIPTURES, (Luke 24:44-45)

Thus: "The Scriptures" = "Law + Prophets + Psalms".

BUT THE LXX DOES NOT HAVE THESE SECTIONS! Instead the LXX divides the Old Testament into FOUR divisions, which are: Law, History, Poetry, and Prophecy, and in the process changes the order of the books of the Old Testament. In addition the LXX also contains additional Apocryphal books.

So this saying by Jesus Christ in Luke 24:44-45 makes very clear that CHRIST NEITHER USED NOR SANCTIONED THE LXX! Christ did NOT sanction any sections known as "History" or as "Poetry".

Now Luke 24:44-45 does not make sense to anyone reading the LXX, since it simply does not have these divisions! This INTERNAL EVIDENCE from the New Testament proves that the LXX was not used by Christ. To go on and actually claim DIVINE INSPIRATION for the LXX is a gross error.

Next, on page 13, top, Mr. Dankenbring admits:

"The Samaritan community ... CANONIZED THEIR OWN VERSION OF THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES."

That is an absolutely STAGGERING admission! Where on Earth did GOD give "the Samaritan community" the right to "CANONIZE" their own version? They were steeped in idolatry, if we believe Ezra and Nehemiah. They were racially BABYLONIANS in origin, remember? So where did God give "the BABYLONIANS" the right to canonize their own version of HIS Word? Look again at Romans 3:1-2, as quoted above! As far as accepting a "Samaritan canon" of the Scriptures is concerned, perhaps we should again look at what Jesus Christ had to say about the Samaritans and their understanding of the Scriptures?

In speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus Christ said:

YE WORSHIP YE KNOW NOT WHAT: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.
(John 4:22 AV)

Would God allow a people ,who didn't really have a clue as to what they were worshipping, to make their OWN canon of His Word? Clearly any canon authorized by the Samaritans must be rejected by God's people.

But let's now notice why Mr. Dankenbring has introduced the Samaritans into the discussion.

The quotation from page 163 of Norton's book that follows this statement on page 13 says:

"... the Samaritan Pentateuch had MUCH IN COMMON WITH THE SEPTUAGINT, SOME OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ...". (his own emphasis)

Is that a valid criterion? Two documents can have "MUCH IN COMMON" and still have thousands of places where they disagree! The King James Version, the NIV, the RSV, the Living Bible, Moffatt's Translation of the Bible, the Jehovah's Witnesses Translation of the Bible, the Septuagint Version of the Bible (Old Testament) and the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible all have, without contradiction, "MUCH IN COMMON"! Yet we can also find major differences between these versions. And having "much in common" doesn't mean that they all have GOD'S approval.

But this quotation Mr. Dankenbring has presented shows precisely the point I made: the LXX and SOME of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the version which the ethnically Babylonian Samaritans decided to canonize have "a great deal in common"! But "the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament" are glaringly omitted from this above list. WHY? Because the Hebrew Scriptures DIFFER from the LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Samaritan Pentateuch!

Including the New Testament in the above list is OBVIOUSLY a major bias by the author of that passage. The LXX, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls, while agreeing with a few of the quotations of Old Testament passages found in the New Testament, also DISAGREE with many other quotations found in the New Testament. For more details in this regard see also my earlier article about "The Septuagint (LXX) Version of the Bible", and specifically the section titled "Origen's Shenanigans" regarding Psalm 102:25 and Deuteronomy 32:43.

Next, on page 13 Mr. Dankenbring states:

"This text (a supposed OLDER but non-existent Hebrew text), like that of the Septuagint, seems to reflect an early Hebrew Old Testament text which WAS CONSIDERED AUTHORITATIVE (by who...???) in the centuries prior to and during the time of Christ -- yet BOTH OF THEM DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THE MASORETIC TEXT ..."

First of all, there is no special merit in being "older". It is a well-known fact that when a new copy of the official Hebrew Scriptures was produced, then, after thorough and meticulous checking, the old copy was destroyed, to prevent any misuse of the text. This custom was followed for many centuries. So obviously there are no really "old" Hebrew MSS of the Masoretic text extant ... they were regularly being replaced by new ones and the old ones were destroyed.

We need to study the time of Ezra and of Nehemiah. Because the Samaritans claimed to use the same sacred books, THEREFORE Ezra changed the alphabet from the cuneiform to the Babylonian square script, the alphabet which is still in use today. Ezra KNEW that the Samaritans at that time did not want to be reminded of their Babylonian origins, and that they would not accept this alphabet of their forefathers.

Notice Ezra chapter 4, especially from verse 2 onwards:

2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye [do]; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. 3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, YE HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH US TO BUILD an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. (Ezra 4:2-3)

The Bible, the Word of God, makes quite clear that God did NOT use either the Samaritans or the Greeks in Alexandria to preserve and "canonize" the Old Testament. Such claims are without any substance.

But now notice the following admissions in the quotations below this on page 13, also from Norton's book:

"It might be said that THE SEPTUAGINT IS NOT A SINGLE VERSION BUT A COLLECTION OF VERSIONS MADE BY VARIOUS AUTHORS, WHO DIFFERED GREATLY IN THEIR METHODS AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF HEBREW."

That is precisely the point I made in my article! In his own quotations here Mr. Dankenbring acknowledges the same thing! It is ABSURD to claim "divine inspiration" for such a slipshod collection, where some translators clearly only had a limited knowledge of Hebrew.

This same quotation on page 13 continues:

"The content of some books is SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT when comparing the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text. For example, the Septuagint's Jeremiah is MISSING SIGNIFICANT PORTIONS ... and the order of the text is SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT as well."

That is precisely the point I made in my article!

On page 12, middle, he quotes from page 275 of the "Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible", which says:

"Modern LXX criticism inevitably goes back to the prodigious work of Origen, THE FATHER OF LXX CRITICISM."

Agreed!

That's the point I was making! BECAUSE there were so many divergent MSS floating around, it was ORIGEN HIMSELF who had to decide which wording to select for inclusion in the LXX column of his Hexapla. He didn't have any divinely inspired, perfect LXX text available. He edited it and altered it as he saw fit! And that's why he inserted the word "LORD" into Psalm 102:25 and why he inserted the expression "let all the angels of God worship him" into Deuteronomy 32:43. That's how Origen was also able to translate 15 different Hebrew words in the Old Testament into the one Greek word "hupostasis".

The authoritative work "Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament" comments on the word HYPOSTASIS in the note on 2 Corinthians 9:4 and says:

"IN THE LXX IT (i.e. "hupostasis") REPRESENTS FIFTEEN DIFFERENT HEBREW WORDS!"

THE FACT ALSO IS: there is no copy of Origen's Hexapla extant today! We rely basically on Eusebius (he lived in the 320'ies A.D., or 70 years after Origen) for information. Any proof is tenuous at best.

The same quotation continues with this admission:

"Origen ACCORDINGLY determined to make A CRITICAL EDITION OF THE LXX."

EXACTLY!

Origen edited the text available to him as he saw fit! And what Origen decided to include in his LXX column, is today the official LXX version. Thus Mr. Dankenbring's own quotations support my statements!

Next, quoting from page 73 of "The Canon of Scripture" by F.F. Bruce, Mr. Dankenbring refers to the critical signs Origen made to show where the LXX OMITTED something and where it ADDED something not found in the Hebrew text!

This again shows that the LXX adds and omits things at random! Who do you think would agitate to achieve official recognition and acceptance for such a version? Would Satan perhaps support such a version of the Hebrew Scriptures?

Furthermore, this quotation once again shows that Origen became THE FINAL JUDGE as to what should appear in the LXX, after choosing from the divergent MSS available to him. We only have Origen's word for what was supposedly the official text of the LXX. There is no other proof for the supposed original text of the LXX.

On page 10 Mr. Dankenbring quotes page 604 of "Peloubet's Bible Dictionary", which says about the Letter of Aristeas:

"But it is now GENERALLY ADMITTED that the letter is SPURIOUS, and is probably THE FABRICATION of an ALEXANDRIAN JEW SHORTLY BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA."

That is precisely my point! That's what Peloubet admits! I presented the same information from the Encyclopedia Britannica.

It is ADMITTED that we are dealing with an Alexandrian Jew who FORGED A FRAUDULENT LETTER! When people "forge" something, then their motive is OBVIOUSLY to deceive people! And such people ALWAYS have an agenda!

So we are dealing with a letter written by a liar! What was this Jew's MOTIVE in writing such a fraudulent letter? The MOTIVE of this fraudulent letter is OBVIOUS: it was to bestow credibility and acceptance on the Greek versions of various books of the O.T. that were floating around among the hellenized Jews in Alexandria!

It is not a question of whether there were Greek versions of the Pentateuch around in the first century B.C.. What is in dispute is THE ORIGIN, QUALITY, ACCURACY, AND FAITHFULNESS of such translations!

Mr. Dankenbring also quotes A JEWISH HIGH PRIEST WHO LIVED IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT, Aristobulus by name. [It is from the writings of Eusebius that these references to Aristobulus are obtained.]

That is INCREDIBLE! A STAGGERING STATEMENT!

What on Earth would a JEWISH "High Priest" be doing, living in EGYPT?

Alexandria was the acknowledged seat of hellenism. The Jews there were EXTREMELY hellenized in their customs and culture! You simply didn't have any of God's HIGH PRIESTS living in Egypt! High Priests were supposed to be in Jerusalem; you know, like Popes who are supposed to be in Rome?! Whatever happened to Ezra's and Nehemiah's instructions to keep separate from the pagans around them?

To support his views, Mr. Dankenbring quotes Philo, Josephus and Justin Martyr. None of these men carry any particular authority! For the record, Philo is the most likely author of the forged letter of Aristeas. Then, to give this forgery further credibility, Philo also quoted from this letter he himself had in all likelihood forged. The fact that Josephus and Justin Martyr also make references to this forged letter doesn't change the fact that it is a forged letter with a totally fictitious story.

Furthermore, if they quote some fictitious story about 72 scholars supposedly translating the Pentateuch, because they were taken in by some fraudulent forged letter, what guarantee is there that their other quotations are any more accurate? No guarantees at all!

Next, on the top of page 9 Mr. Dankenbring quotes Justin Martyr about the PILGRIMAGES that people made to the little cubicles where "the 70" (or 72?) had supposedly worked.

Do we understand that PILGRIMAGES are a HALLMARK OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH? And Justin Martyr himself made pilgrimages, like other good Catholics of the time. Do you know how many HUNDREDS of places that church has for "pilgrimages"? That in itself is one more sign as to which church originated these pilgrimages and encouraged them.

On page 7 Mr. Dankenbring quotes Josephus as talking about the "6 scholars out of every tribe".

Here is the exact quotation, taken directly from Josephus' writings, from Section 168:

"39) If then it please you, O king, you may write to the high priest of the Jews, TO SEND SIX OF THE ELDERS OUT OF EVERY TRIBE, and those such as are most skilful of the laws, that by their means we may learn the clear and agreeing sense of these books, and may obtain an accurate interpretation of their contents, and so may have such a collection of these as may be suitable to your desire." (my emphasis)

Now in the context leading up to this quotation Josephus claims that the man "Aristeas" ALSO asked the Egyptian king to at the same time free over 100,000 Jewish slaves throughout his country. And supposedly the king agreed to this request. So, if we are to believe Josephus, then the king at the drop of a hat (or to be more precise: because he wanted a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures for his library) was willing to: free over 100,000 Jewish slaves, which supposedly cost the king over 460 talents of gold from his treasury, donate another 50 talents of gold to send to Jerusalem for use in the Temple, donate "an immense quantity of precious stones" to also send to Jerusalem, and donate another 100 talents in money to be used for temple sacrifices ... all just because he wanted a few Hebrew books translated into Greek for his library collection.

Anyone who bothers to read the five pages before this quotation in Josephus' writings, and the five pages following this quotation, will immediately realize that Josephus was making up most of what he says in this context!! Historians have for a long time known that Josephus' statements are highly unreliable! He just made up so much of what he wrote ... like claiming that Solomon reigned 80 years, etc.. And here Josephus did nothing more than embellish the story about the fictitious "Aristeas". The details Josephus provides are totally unbelievable.

As far as this supposed LXX translation is concerned, the fact is:

BY 300 B.C. THERE SIMPLY WERE NO 12 TRIBES IN THE AREA OF PALESTINE! THE NATIONS HAD DIVIDED OVER 600 YEARS EARLIER. THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL NEVER RETURNED TO PALESTINE AFTER THE ASSYRIAN CAPTIVITY IN THE 700's B.C.!

The story of 6 scholars from each of the 12 tribes is ABSURD! The internal evidence of the Bible makes this clear. By the way, over the years Josephus has been a popular source of quotations in God's Church. However, amongst historians he has no credibility at all! It is not difficult to show that throughout his writings he did his best to embellish the history of the Jews, and in the process he FREQUENTLY misrepresented the facts. This can be demonstrated by comparing Josephus with the text of the Bible itself.

Next, on the top of page 6 Mr. Dankenbring quotes page 971 of "The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible", which says about the letter of Aristeas:

"This letter is generally regarded by modern scholars as SPURIOUS. The same story as told by Aristeas is REPEATED WITH SLIGHT VARIATIONS BY JOSEPHUS."

Again Mr. Dankenbring himself exposes the unreliability of Josephus. Anyone who tries to tell us that around 300 B.C. a High Priest in Jerusalem sent "6 SCHOLARS FROM EACH OF THE 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL" to Egypt, simply doesn't know what he is talking about.

Next, on page 6 Mr. Dankenbring quotes page 13 of "Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek" by H.B. Swete, who refers to "THE FRAGMENT OF ARISTOBULUS" that tells the same story.

If this man Aristobulus was a High Priest, he CERTAINLY should have known better than to claim that a previous High Priest sent "6 scholars from each of the 12 tribes". Aristobulus was a hellenized Jew, living in Alexandria, Egypt and his supposed endorsement of this fictitious story shows that, if this appeal to Aristobulus is accurate, he too cannot be trusted to be impartially truthful and accurate in his statements. And since he lived in Egypt, he really could not have been "a High Priest of the true God", since God's High Priests were supposed to be in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, on page 6, Mr. Dankenbring again quotes H.B. Swete, who admits that the "letter of Aristeas" itself is ...

"TO A LARGE EXTENT LEGENDARY!"

That is my point all the way through the article I wrote.

Then at the top of page 4 Mr. Dankenbring states:

"Modern scholars TEND TO DISCOUNT THIS LEGEND, as preserved in a 'Letter of Aristeas'. Nevertheless, whether the letter itself is part fact, PART LEGEND, IS NOT THE REAL ISSUE."
(my emphasis)

WHAT AN ADMISSION!

The forged letter of Aristeas is THE ONLY PROOF for a supposed LXX translation. And Mr. Dankenbring isn't really interested in whether or not this "only proof" is true or not. The fact is that modern scholars KNOW that the letter of Aristeas is a forgery! And people who create forgeries have an agenda to deceive!

Mr. Dankenbring is not interested in whether or not the story is "PART FACT AND PART LIES!" He has already decided to accept the story, no matter how much it is proved to be a bunch of lies, CREATED WITH THE EXPRESS MOTIVE OF DECEIVING PEOPLE ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THE GREEK TRANSLATIONS OF SOME BOOKS OF THE O.T..

At the bottom of page 4 Mr. Dankenbring quotes Philo. Philo was a prominent Jewish writer, living in Alexandria at the precise time that Peloubet's Bible Dictionary says the letter of Aristeas was forged. The writings of Philo himself PROVE that he believed in mysticism and in an ALLEGORICAL interpretation of the Old Testament. His own writings PROVE that Philo wanted to synthesize the Hellenistic and the Hebrew traditions.

THIS FACT ALL BY ITSELF GIVES PHILO A VERY STRONG MOTIVE FOR FORGING "ARISTEAS".

At the bottom of page 4 Mr. Dankenbring gives Philo's account of the yearly pilgrimages to the supposed site of the LXX translation. Whether Philo was ... "one of the most important Jewish authors of the Second Temple period" or not, has nothing to do with the correctness of his writings!

We should also note that Mr. Dankenbring presents absolutely NOTHING to justify the use of "LATE

Greek" words, which were NOT USED at the time the LXX is claimed to have been produced, appearing in the text of the LXX. In my article I presented a number of examples of specific words in this category to illustrate this point.

THEY DISPROVE the claim that the LXX was produced around 280 B.C.!

The information I presented in my article from the ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA is as authoritative as any quotation that Dankenbring has presented. As I have shown, A LARGE NUMBER OF Mr. DANKENBRING'S OWN QUOTATIONS do in fact SUPPORT the very things that I have said in my article.

As a final point:

In the same issue of "Prophecy Flash" Mr. Dankenbring has a 1-page advertisement entitled "IN SEARCH OF THE 'LOST TEN TRIBES' OF ISRAEL". In this advertisement he offers a book for sale which is titled "THE TRIBES, The Israelite Origins of Western Peoples", and which is written by Yair Davidy. In the write-up for this book, Dankenbring makes the following statement:

"In this incredible volume, the Lost Tribes of Israel WHICH WERE TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY BY THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE 2,700 YEARS AGO, NOW HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED ...".

Here Dankenbring ADMITS that there were NO 12 TRIBES IN PALESTINE AROUND 300 B.C.! Is this not clear?

One moment Mr. Dankenbring claims that 6 scholars from each of the 12 tribes made a translation of the Pentateuch in the 3rd century B.C. ... and on the next page he advertises a book that proves that 10 of the 12 tribes had left the area of Palestine in the 7th century B.C.. So, for \$16 plus postage, and for a limited time only, he will send you the proof that the LXX COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MADE BY 72 SCHOLARS REPRESENTING ALL 12 TRIBES!

Well, that should suffice as an answer to Mr. Dankenbring's article in response to my article about the LXX version of the O.T.. And by the way ... I certainly agree whole-heartedly with the statement Mr. Dankenbring makes in the introduction of his article that "... I would normally not spend any time with refuting this kind of writing subterfuge".

Frank W. Nelte