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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SEPTUAGINT
FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES: Pt. 2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SEPTUAGINT ON THE NEW TESTAMENT VOCABULARY

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A reader of the New Testament who approaches it by way of familiarity with the Old Testament is likely to recognize a certain similarity of structure and idiom, but he will not think of it as strange because his mind has been conditioned by the reading of the Old Testament. But if one were to come to the reading of the Greek New Testament without this background, having only an acquaintance with classical Greek, let us say, he would be impressed with certain features that would strike him as peculiar. In other words, he would discover that the New Testament, although written in a language to which he is accustomed, possesses constructions and meanings of words for which his knowledge of classical Greek provides him no preparation. These are especially marked in the quotations, but also characterize the composition of the various books to a greater or lesser degree. The technical term for these features is Semitism, a term broad enough to include both Hebraism and Aramaism (the general subject of Semitisms can be explored to good advantage in J. H. Moulton, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, II, 411-85).

SEMITISMS

Even Luke, the one New Testament writer who can be safely judged to have been a Gentile, shows Semitic influence. In his case it is chiefly due, no doubt, to the use of Semitic source materials. The first two chapters of his Gospel, for example, bear evidences of Semitic influence to a marked degree. One instance will suffice to establish the point--the use of *kai egeneto* in temporal clauses, a recognized Semi-

tism (1:23, 41, 59; 2:15) which reflects the *wayehi* ("and it came to pass") which is so common in narrative portions of the Old Testament.

Another example is the cognate accusative, in which a verb is followed by a noun of the same root used in an adverbial sense. So in Mark 4:41, we read that the disciples "feared a great fear," which means that they feared greatly. It would not occur to a native Greek to write this way, as the adverb would be an entirely natural and adequate means of expressing the same idea.

Much more important, however, than the influence of Semitic constructions upon the New Testament is the shaping of the concepts which it contains. Hebrew mentality and usage is impressed upon Greek terminology. In large part this influence is due to the Septuagint. In the making of this version the translators were faced with the necessity of giving their sacred writings a Greek dress. New meanings became imparted to familiar Greek words, reflecting the peculiar nature of the Hebrew revelation, which necessarily differed considerably from Greek religious thought.

In the first flush of the discovery that the language of the New Testament was basically the language of every-day life, as revealed by the nonliterary papyri, it was natural that Deissmann should underestimate the Semitic influence in the Greek of the New Testament. J. H. Moulton largely shared his point of view, but he became more cautious toward the end of his life, granting a larger degree of Semitic influence than he was prepared to admit at the beginning (*ibid*., p 413).

As time has passed and investigation has proceeded, the consensus of judgment is that the influence of the Septuagint upon the New Testament is so important as to be crucial in the field of interpretation. This was the conviction of Gerhard Kittel, the first editor of the *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, and it is reflected in the articles which have been contributed to this monumental work by a large coterie of German scholars. Each important word of the New Testament is traced from its classical Greek setting

through the Septuagint into the New Testament, with attention also to the papyri and the Hellenistic sources. Only a few of these articles have so far been translated into English.

It is unquestionably true that the use of the terms in the New Testament not only reflects Septuagint usage but goes beyond it in some instances. This is due to the climactic character of revelation in the person and work of Christ and in the church which He established. To trace the added features which the New Testament supplies over and above the contribution of the Septuagint is a task which can only with difficulty be disengaged from the process of discovering Septuagintal influence proper.

WORD STUDIES

The best way to gain some conception of the debt of the New Testament to the Septuagint is to select a few samples from the vocabulary of the New Testament and trace their use from classical Greek writers through the Septuagint into the New Testament, much in the manner of the Kittel volumes.

A good starting point is the word *adelphos*, which in classical usage means *blood brother*. This meaning is naturally retained in the Septuagint, but here the word also means neighbor and then further denotes *a member of the same nation* (see H. A. A. Kennedy, *Sources of New Testament* Greek, pp. 95-96, for illustrative passages). In the New Testament all of these meanings make their appearance, plus one which is new, for Christians find this term suitable as a description of themselves, no matter what their place of residence or nationality may be. Because believers form the family of the redeemed and constitute, so to speak, a new nation, a group with a distinctive character and cohesion all their own (1 Pet. 2:9-10), *adelphos* is deemed an appropriate term to set forth this new relationship within the Christian church.

A second line of investigation leads us to consider the word *truth* (for useful epitomes, see G. Kittel, *Die Religiousgeschichte and das Urchristentum,* especially pp. 86-88;

G. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, pp. 65-75). In Homer *aletheia* denotes veracity as opposed to falsehood. Later classical times witness an enlargement of usage, since it comes to express what is real or factual as opposed to appearance or opinion. That which is true corresponds with the nature of things. In this sense the truth is eternal and divine, for the Greek recognized no distinction between the natural and the supernatural. These values are continued in the Septuagint use of *aletheia*, but because of the circumstance that it was often used to translate *'emeth*, a Hebrew word for truth which stresses the elements of reliability and trustworthiness, a new content becomes added. Often the word is used to describe God and also His Word. On these one may rest with confidence, for they will not fail. So, whereas the classical *aletheia* largely serves as an intellectual term, the same word in its Septuagint setting has often a decidedly moral connotation, especially when used with reference to the divine.

New Testament writers draw from both st:reams of meaning, so that the exegete must be constantly on the alert to detect, if he can, whether *aletheia* means reality or trustworthiness. John and Paul make largest use of the term. The Greek sense seems clearly present in passages like Romans 1:25, whereas a comparison of Romans 3:3 and 3:4 shows with equal clearness that here the Hebraic background is powerfully operative. Paul is especially fond of linking the word *truth* with the gospel. Here the two strains may be said to unite, for the gospel message corresponds to reality (that is, it is ultimate truth, much in the same way that the writer to the Hebrews argues the finality of the Christian dispensation with the aid of the related word *alethinos*, as John does likewise), and for that very reason is reliable, but even more so because the gospel originates with God and possesses His own guarantee.

For John the acme of the concept lies in its application to Jesus Christ. To be set free by the truth and to be set free by the Son are two ways of saying the same thing (John 8:32, 36). Dodd observes that whereas the Jewish conception

was to the effect that the divine truth (*'emeth*) was expressed in the Torah, John places it in the person of Christ (see the discussion in Kittel, *op. cit*., pp. 88-90). Paul comes close to doing the same thing (Eph. 4:21). The New Testament, then, has arrived at a synthesis of the two approaches to truth, and this synthesis is thoroughly defensible in the court of reason, for only that which possesses reality is worthy of confidence. But the daring step taken here is in the identification of truth in all its finality with the man Christ Jesus.

Another term with an interesting semantic history is *kosmos*. We can only summarize here. The classical meaning is *order, adornment, beauty*. This basic concept appears also in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. An easy application of this notion finds the word employed in the Greek philosophers for *the universe*. Here the Greek thinkers found system and order. But in turning to the Septuagint we do not find *kosmos* used in this sense. Where we might expect to find it, in Genesis 1:1, we find instead a duality--"the heavens and the earth." To be sure, *kosmos* is employed in connection with the creation story (Gen. 2:1), but only in the sense of "host" or of "order." The latter meaning is very attractive because it fits better the application to the earth. While *host* is a fitting term to apply to the vast array of heavenly bodies, the term *order* is also appropriate, and it certainly accords well with the thought that the creation had stocked the earth with things of beauty designed to fill a well-ordered place in an integrated existence.

As Kittel observes, however, the essential thing in the Old Testament is not so much the element of order as the fact of creation by God. The unity of order lies not in the *kosmos* but in the Creator. At any rate, the point which is very clear and must be stressed is that the Greek concept of universe is lacking in the Septuagint.

In the books of Maccabees, we begin to find *kosmos* used of this world over which God stands as Creator and Sovereign (2 Macc. 7:9, 23; 4 Macc. 5:25). Here the word does not describe the universe, but the lower half, so to speak, this world. We read of birth as a "coming into the world" (4

Macc. 16:18).

But because this world is a place of man's abode and activity, and because he is a sinful creature, the way is prepared for that peculiar usage of *kosmos* found in the New Testament, wherein that which by its original Greek significance should express order is now found to be riddled by rebellion and chaos and evil. The kingdoms of this world are under Satan's dominion, and the men of this world are alienated from the life of God. Yet the one element of hope in this disordered cosmos is the reconciling mission of the Son of God which results in restoration, the re-establishment of order.

One or two sidelights clamor for attention before leaving this word. The versatility of the Apostle Paul is shown by the fact that in addressing a Greek audience at Athens he allows himself to use *kosmos* in a way which would appeal to his audience, namely, as inclusive of heaven and earth, even though this concept was not a part of his Hebraic inheritance (Acts 17:14). The Revised Standard Version has Paul referring to "the elemental spirits of the universe" on several occasions (Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8, 20). It is not our purpose to deal with the expression "elemental spirits," though this rendering is subject to serious question. Rather, we are content here to point out that the translation "universe" violates the trend which the word *kosmos* has taken in its Biblical setting, as our brief study has shown. It is doubtful that Paul would be conceding anything to Greek thought in letters addressed to Christians. The situation is quite different from that in Acts 17. While it is true that *kosmos* and the term "elements" are found conjoined in a pre-Christian setting in Wisdom 7:17, "world" has an earthly connotation and "elements" refers to physical ingredients (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10 12) rather than to an order of spiritual intelligences (see W. J. Deane, *The Book of Wisdom,* p. 148).

Another word with a fascinating history is *doxa*, which in the New Testament is most frequently rendered *glory*. By reason of the fact that the root *dokeo* means *to think* and *to seem*, the noun followed the same double pattern. As the result of thought-activity, it came to mean *opinion*. A vari-

ation of this, the opinion in which one is held by others, yields the meaning *reputation*. Ordinarily this occurs in a favorable setting, hence carries the idea of fame, honor, glory; if the sense is adverse, an adjective readily gives it the flavor of notoriety. Branching out from the other meaning of the verb, *doxa* comes to signify *appearance* or *fancy*. This summarizes broadly the classical usage. With the decline of Greek civilization and the growing habit of looking backward with veneration to the views of the leading philosophers, our word tends to appear in a somewhat technical sense, descriptive of a given philosophical point of view or tenet. This usage is reflected in the term *doxographer*.

In the Septuagint the meaning *opinion* is dropped, and this applies likewise to the New Testament. *Reputation* and related ideas continue to be associated with *doxa*, however, thus providing a link with the classical background. Some twenty-five Hebrew words are translated by it, some of these having only remote connection with established meanings of the word. Most often, *doxa* appears as the translation of *kabhodh*, which derives from a root meaning *to be heavy*. This term fits readily into a metaphorical setting in the sense of importance, wealth, power, etc. Since one of the meanings of this Hebrew word is *reputation* (or *honor*, or *prestige*) and another is *praise*, one can understand how *doxa* was chosen to render it, since these meanings are congenial to the Greek word. But *kabhodh* has certain meanings originally unknown to *doxa*, such as *majesty, splendor, riches, beauty, might*, and even *person* or *self*. A highly specialized use of the word is its employment in the Old Testament to denote the glory of God, the outward, visible manifestation of brilliant light which appropriately expressed the excellence of His spirit-nature. This revelational use of the word comes out in connection with the pillar of cloud and fire, in the visions of Ezekiel, and elsewhere.

The problem facing us here is to explain, if possible, the appearance of a whole bevy of new concepts in the use of *doxa* which are not found in the classical setting. The explanation put forward tentatively by Deissmann that the concept

of light belonged to *doxa* in popular Greek usage, but for some reason did not appear in the literature, is highly dubious. It lacks evidence. The same thing is true of Reitzenstein's attempt to trace the light-element back to Iranian sources by way of Egypt.

Rather, the problem should be approached from within the Septuagint itself. As we have noted, a continuum in the use of the word from older times is the meaning *reputation.* It was not too difficult to extend the use of *doxa* from that point to include the concept of majesty, which belonged natively to *kabhodh* but not to *doxa*. Once this extension was accomplished, it was not felt too strange to go a step further and make the word do service for outward display of majesty the revelation glory of the true God. Then all the other meanings which adhered to *kabhodh* became transferred to *doxa*, such as *riches, might, person*, etc. So before we are through, we are face to face with one of the most startling semantic changes known to us. New wine is being poured into the old wineskin.

It remains to note, however briefly, the debt of the New Testament to the Septuagint in perpetuating the new emphases given to *doxa*. In several passages Paul links the term *riches*: with glory in away which suggests the Old Testament association (Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:18; 3:16; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:27). Not less striking is the employment of *doxa* to suggest power especially in relation to the theme of resurrection (Rom. 6:4; John 11:40). In John 2:11 something of this usage seems to be present also. In Luke 9:32 the transfiguration glory of Christ recalls the light-revelation passages of the Old Covenant. At his conversion Saul of Tarsus glimpsed the glory of the risen, ascended Lord (Acts 22:11).

The highest point is reached when the word is used not exclusively of the visible manifestation of God but of the intrinsic excellence and worth of the Lord. John links the *doxa* of Christ with inward realities, even grace and truth (John 1:14). Paul sees the Christian being conformed to the image of Christ's moral glory by the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

We find it rather natural to associate the person and manifestation of the Lord God with light, though we may find it hard to analyze the significance of the association. Perhaps in addition to moral perfection ("God is light and in Him is no darkness at all") we should grant with Karl Barth (*Die Kirkliche Dogmatik*, third edition, II, 722, 733, 735) that the glory of God is another way of stating the beauty of God. God as infinite and eternal is overpowering to our finite minds. But as light, He is a Person of beauty in whose fellowship the saints will find endless delight.

In conclusion, it should be stated that not all the important terms of the Septuagint manifest serious alteration in meaning, but from these few examples it will be obvious that the student of Scripture cannot afford to be indifferent to the Semitic influence which has flowed into the Greek of the New Testament by way of the Septuagint, and must learn to examine New Testament concepts in the light both of their Greek and Hebrew provenance.

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