

SEEING GOD? A BRIEF COMPARISON BETWEEN MT AND LXX ON EXODUS 24:10-12

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Abstract

This article explores the theological tension surrounding the perception of God in Exodus, comparing the Masoretic Text (MT) with the Septuagint (LXX) translation. Exodus 24:10–12 suggests the possibility of seeing God, while Exodus 33:20 contradicts it, creating a dilemma for interpreters. The LXX translators aimed to mitigate this complexity rather than resolve it outright. Following Emmanuel Tov's methodology, the article provides translations of MT verses alongside their LXX counterparts, with comparative tables highlighting discrepancies and potential retroversions. The analysis aims to identify and assess deviations between the Hebrew and LXX texts, offering insights into interpretive strategies employed by ancient translators to harmonize conflicting passages. Ultimately, while not providing definitive solutions, this study sheds light on the interpretive choices made by the LXX translators and their implications for understanding the text's theological nuances.

Keywords: Exodus; Biblical analysis; Retroversions.

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VENDO DEUS? UMA BREVE COMPARAÇÃO ENTRE O MT E O LXX EM ÊXODO 24:10-12

Resumo

Este artigo explora a tensão teológica em torno da percepção de Deus em Êxodo, comparando o Texto Massorético (MT) com a tradução da Septuaginta (LXX). Êxodo 24:10–12 sugere a possibilidade de ver a Deus, enquanto Êxodo 33:20 contradiz isso, criando um dilema para os intérpretes. Os tradutores da LXX buscaram mitigar essa complexidade em vez de resolvê-la completamente. Seguindo a metodologia de Emmanuel Tov, o artigo fornece traduções dos versos do MT junto com suas contrapartes na LXX, com tabelas comparativas destacando discrepâncias e possíveis retroversões. A análise visa identificar e avaliar as divergências entre os textos hebraico e da LXX, oferecendo insights sobre as estratégias interpretativas empregadas pelos antigos tradutores para harmonizar passagens conflitantes. Em última análise, embora não forneça soluções definitivas, este estudo lança luz sobre as escolhas interpretativas feitas pelos tradutores da LXX e suas implicações para a compreensão das nuances teológicas do texto.

Keywords: Êxodo; Análise Bíblica; Texto Massorético; LXX; Retroversões.

¿VER A DIOS? BREVE COMPARACIÓN ENTRE MT Y LXX SOBRE ÉXODO 24:10-12

Resumen

Este artículo explora la tensión teológica en torno a la percepción de Dios en Éxodo, comparando el Texto Masorético (TM) con la traducción Septuaginta (LXX). Éxodo 24:10-12 sugiere la posibilidad de ver a Dios, mientras que Éxodo 33:20 lo contradice, creando un dilema para los intérpretes. Los traductores de los LXX trataron de mitigar esta complejidad en lugar de resolverla por completo. Siguiendo la metodología de Emmanuel Tov, el artículo ofrece traducciones de los versículos del MT junto a sus homólogos de los LXX, con tablas comparativas que destacan las discrepancias y las posibles retroversiones. El análisis pretende identificar y evaluar las divergencias entre los textos hebreos y los de los LXX, ofreciendo una visión de las estrategias interpretativas empleadas por los traductores antiguos para armonizar los pasajes conflictivos. En última instancia, aunque no aporta soluciones definitivas, este estudio arroja luz sobre las opciones interpretativas de los traductores de los LXX y sus implicaciones para la comprensión de los matices teológicos del texto.

Palabras clave: Éxodo; Análisis bíblico; Texto masorético; LXX; Retroversiones.



INTRODUCTION

The ideas of seeing God (Exodus 24:10–12) and being unable to see God (Exodus 33:20) seem to cause a theological problem or even a contradiction in the Masoretic Text. Apparently, the LXX translators understood this to be a complex issue, and the translation from Hebrew into the LXX seems to try to ease this tension. This brief article, rather than trying to solve this dilemma, intends to illustrate how the LXX translators worked to alleviate the problem. In order to accomplish the task, this essay briefly analyzes Exodus 24:10–12, mainly focusing on comparing the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint (LXX).

There are three parts to this brief article. The first part provides translations of the MT verses and their corresponding parallels in the LXX. The second part presents comparative tables that include the Hebrew and LXX texts, some deviations and retroversions, and a reference column for comments. The third part attempts to identify and evaluate the deviations (both minuses and pluses) mentioned in the second part, and the article finishes with the conclusion.

I will follow the methodology for data analysis proposed by Emmanuel Tov in *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (TOV, 2015), which essentially consists of identifying variants, attempting to reconstruct the Hebrew text underlying the LXX (retroversion) whenever possible, and evaluating the Hebrew text underlying the LXX².

TRANSLATIONS

Exodus 24:10-12 (MT)

וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כִּמְעַשָּׂה לִבְנֵת הַסֹּפֵיר וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהַר	10
אֶל־אֶצִּילִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יְדוֹ וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ	11
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הִקְרָה וְהִי־שָׁם וְאֶתְנֶה לְךָ אֶת־לִחַת הָאָבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר	12
קִתְּבֹתִי לְהוֹרָתָם:	

² Some preliminary observations: First, this article does not aim to solve the textual variants involved in the transmission or composition of the Masoretic and LXX texts of Exodus 24:10-12. Second, although I acknowledge the importance of external evidence in contributing to this discussion, and I mention it in some footnotes, this is a germinal article delimited to the book of Exodus; therefore, it is open to further research. Third, the most important point is to invite theology students, especially at the undergraduate level, to reflect on the fertile field of studying the Septuagint, particularly in places where it is less explored.



Exodus 24:10-12 (My Translation from MT)

- 10 And they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet [was] like sapphire brickwork (or a work of a pavement of sapphire), and like the heavens themselves in purity (or clearness of heavens itself).
- 11 But against (or toward) the chiefs (or nobles) of the children of Israelites, He did not lay His hand, and they saw God, and they eat, and they drank.
- 12 And the Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and, and be there, and I will give (to) you the tablets of stone and the law and the commandments that I have written to teach (or instruct) them.”

Exodus 24:10-12 (LXX)

- 10 καὶ εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ· καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου καὶ ὡσπερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῆ καθαριότητι.
- 11 καὶ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ οὐ διεφώνησεν οὐδὲ εἷς· καὶ ὠφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἔπιον.
- 12 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἀνάβηθι πρὸς με εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ· καὶ δώσω σοι τὰ πυξία τὰ λίθινα, τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς, ἃς ἔγραψα νομοθετῆσαι αὐτοῖς.

Exodus 24:10-12 (My Translation from LXX)

- 10 And they saw the place there where the God of Israel stood, that which *was* under His feet like sapphire brickwork (a work of brick or pavement of sapphire), and like the appearance of the firmament of heavens in purity (or clearness).
- 11 But (or and) of the chosen of Israel, not even one was missing (or perished), and they appeared in the place of God, and they ate, and they drank.
- 12 And the Lord said to Moses: “Come up to Me into the mountain and be there and I will give to you the tablets of stone, the law, and the commandments that I wrote to instruct them.”



Seeing God? a brief comparison between mt and lxx on Exodus 24:10-12

MT	LXX
וַיִּרְאוּ ¹⁰ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה לַבְּנֵת הַסַּפִּיר וַיִּכְעַצְמוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר:	¹⁰ και εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ· καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου καὶ ὡσπερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῆ καθαριότητι.
וַיַּאֲצִילָהּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יְיָ יָדוֹ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:	¹¹ καὶ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ οὐ διεφώνησεν οὐδὲ εἶς· καὶ ὠφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἔπιον.
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַקְּרָה יְהוָה-שָׁמָּה וְאֶתְּנֶה לְךָ אֶת-לִחְתֵּי הָאֲבָן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרְתָם:	¹² καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἀνάβηθι πρὸς με εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ· καὶ δώσω σοι τὰ πύξια τὰ λίθινα, τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς, ἃς ἔγραψα νομοθετῆσαι αὐτοῖς.
¹⁰ And they saw the God of Israel, and under His feet [was] like sapphire brickwork, and like the heavens themselves in purity (or clearness of heavens itself).	¹⁰ And they saw the place there where the God of Israel stood, that which was under His feet like sapphire brickwork, and like the appearance of the firmament of heavens in purity.
¹¹ But against (or toward) the chiefs of the children of Israelites, He did not lay His hand, and they saw God, and they eat, and they drank.	¹¹ But of the chosen of Israel, not even one was missing (or perished), and they appeared in the place of God, and they ate, and they drank.
¹² And the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and, and be there, and I will give (to) you the tablets of stone and the law and the commandments that I have written to teach (instruct) them."	¹² And the Lord said to Moses: "Come up to Me into the mountain and be there, and I will give to you the tablets of stone, the law, and the commandments that I wrote to instruct them."

Table 1 – Comparison MT and LXX – Exodus 24:10-12³Font: Made by the author (2024)

³ No variant presence in verse 12



Retroversion

Exodus 24:10			
MT	LXX	Retroversion	Comments
ו/יראו	καὶ εἶδον		
את +-- את ה/מקום	τὸν τόπον	מקום	1
אשר +--	οὗ	אשר	2
עמד +--	εἰστήκει	עמד	3
שם +--	ἐκεῖ	שם	4
אלהי	ὁ θεός		
ישראל	τοῦ Ἰσραηλ		
ו/תחת	καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ		
רגל/יו	τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ		5
כ/מעשה	ὡσεὶ ἔργον		
לבנת	πλίνθου		
ה/ספיר	σαπφείρου		
–	καὶ ὡσπερ	ו/כ/מראה	6
–	{...καὶ ὡσπερ} εἶδος	ו/כ/מראה	7
ו/כ/עצם	καὶ ὡσπερ εἶδος	ו/כ/עצם	8
	στερεώματος	ו/כ/עצם	9
ה/שמים	τοῦ οὐρανοῦ		
ל/טהר	τῆ καθαριότητι		

Font: Made by the author (2024)

Exodus 24:11			
MT	LXX	Retroversion	Comments
ו/אל אצילי	καὶ τῶν ἐπιπέκτων		10
בני	--- ¹¹	טῶν υἱῶν	11
ישראל	τοῦ Ἰσραηλ		
לא	οὐ		
שלח יד/ו	διεφώνησεν οὐδὲ εἶς	שִׁלַח יָדָיו	12
ו/יחזו	καὶ ὠφθησαν		13
את = ב/מקום	ἐν τῷ τόπῳ	מקום	14
ה/אלהים	τοῦ θεοῦ		
ו/יאכלו	καὶ ἔφαγον		
ו/ישתו	καὶ ἔπιον		

Font: Made by the author (2024)

Exodus 24:12			
MT	LXX	Retroversion	Comments
ו/יאמר	καὶ εἶπεν		
יהוה	κύριος		
אל	πρὸς		
משה	μωσσήν		
עלה	ἀνάβηθι		
א/ל	πρὸς με		
ה/ה/ר/ה	εἰς τὸ ὄρος		
ו/היה	καὶ ἴσθι		
שם	ἐκεῖ		
ו/אתנה	καὶ δώσω		
ל/ך	σοι		
את לחת	τὰ ψυξία		



אבן/ה	τὰ λίθινα		
ה/ה/ו/תורה	τὸν νόμον		
ו/ה/מצוה	καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς		
אשר	ἄς		
כתבתי	ἔγραψα		
ל/הורת/ם	νομοθετήσαι αὐτοῖς		

Font: Made by the author (2024)

IDENTIFY AND EVALUATE THE DEVIATIONS

The mention of seeing God occurs naturally and does not appear to cause syntactic issues in Hebrew. The fact that they seem to go against the divine command in Exodus 33:20 is the issue found in the LXX.

The translator's adjustment of a passage produces a longer and less problematic reading. It probably is a case for what Tov (1992, p. 305) classifies as "the more difficult reading [...] the shorter reading is to be preferred." Thus, because it is the shorter and more challenging (theologically speaking) of the two, the MT reading is favored by internal criteria as being prior⁴.

Comments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14

In Exodus, τόπον (topos) occurs 10x and always translates the Hebrew מִקְוֵה (māqôm) Exodus 3:5, 8; 16:29; 17:7; 18:23; 20:24; 21:13; 23:20; 29:31; 33:21. One explanation for these insertions would be the idea that God could not be seen and the only visible thing was "the place where God was." Other instances in Exodus where LXX expansions preserve the "distance between God and humans" suggest a more plausible solution (TOV, 1981).

⁴ As an instance of external criteria where the MT is followed: Biblia Sacra Vulgata: iuxta Vulgatem Versionem, electronic 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969), Ex 24:10–11. "10 - et viderunt Deum Israhel sub pedibus eius quasi opus lapidis sapphirini et quasi caelum cum serenum est† 11 - nec super eos qui procul recesserant de filiis Israhel misit manum suam videruntque Deum et comederunt ac biberunt."

Translation: and they saw the God of Israel under his feet as the work of a sapphire stone, and as the heaven when clear nor did he send his hand upon those who had departed far from the children of Israel, and they saw God and ate and drank.

See also Aquila and Peshitta, which follow the MT. Other ancient witnesses, such as Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti I, and Onkelos, substitute "and they saw the glory of the Lord," suggesting that to them, the idea of "seeing God" seemed problematic, but they addressed it differently than the LXX. They render "...glory of God" instead of "...place of God" of the LXX.



Eric Wyckoff notes that the LXX expansions are made by inserting a single noun in the sentence. For instance, Exodus 4:2b: The MT reads וַיִּבְקַשׁ הַיְהוָה יְהוָה וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ (The Lord met him and sought to kill him). The LXX interprets it as συνήντησεν αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου καὶ ἐζήτηει αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι (An angel of the Lord met him and sought to kill him). Exodus 19:3a: וַיַּעֲלֵם מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הַיְהוָה (And Moses went up to God). The LXX: καὶ Μωυσεῆς ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ (And Moses went up to the mountain of God). Thus, inserting “place” into 24:10a, 11b would follow similar criteria (WYCKOFF, 2012).

The word מִקְוֵה (māqôm) occurs 10x times in Exodus. One of these occurrences is in 33:21, immediately after the prohibition in 33:20 about seeing God and living. God says to Moses, “Behold, there is a place near me” הִנֵּה מִקְוֵה אֵתִי. If the expansions aim to avoid contradicting 33:20, then the next verse provides a “do not look at God, but at the place near God, the place where God is.”⁵

Wyckoff observes that “the direct object marker אֶת (’ēṭ) in 24:10a, 11b could have been read like the preposition אֵת (’itti) in 33:21, meaning ‘near or with or beside.’ This rather forced reading would mean that Israel’s leaders obeyed the divine command in 33:20-21 to look not at God but at the place near God. They ‘saw (what was) near the God of Israel’ 24:10a. and ‘appeared beside God’ v. 11b.” (WYCKOFF, 2012).

The narrative discourse in this passage can be interpreted to support this since v. 10 describes only “what is under God’s feet,” that is, “the place where God is standing.” This was interpreted as implying that the group did not dare to raise their eyes and only saw what was near God (verse 10a) or beneath God's feet (verse 10b).

The sentence τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ echoes an awkward Greek, a syntactical Hebraism that is not typical of LXX Exodus and could be retroverted as המקום אשר עמד שם (WYCKOFF, 2012, p. 687). It may be taken “as evidence of an origin in the Vorlage.”⁶ (WYCKOFF, 2012, p. 687).

⁵ Tov says, “Theological exegesis may relate to the description of God and His acts, the Messiah, Zion, the exile, as well as various ideas, such as that of repentance. Such exegesis may be expressed through theologically motivated choices of translation equivalents, in changes in words and verses (either slight or great) or in expansions or omissions of ideas considered offensive.” Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 127–28. See also John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 30 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 384–85.

⁶ Wyckoff suggests that a similar Hebrew phraseology is found in Gen 19:27



A final observation at this point is the presence of the neuter plural form of the relative pronoun τὰ (ta) in Greek, with no corresponding element in Hebrew, such as אֵת אֲשֶׁר ('t 'šr), which LXX Exodus renders using the relative pronoun in 16:5 and 33:19. As a result, Moses and the others see "that which was under (or beneath) His feet" (LXX) as opposed to "under (or beneath) God's feet" (MT). This tiny nuance eliminates any possibility that a portion of God was seen. Thus, it functions to make God's place and not God the visual reference in these verses. In this case, it would be another instance of theological exegesis in the LXX (WYCKOFF, 2012, p. 688).

Comments 6-7

The word εἶδος (eidos) means "the shape and structure of something, as it appears to someone's form," and it seems to be used here to describe the form or the appearance of what they were seeing. In Exodus 24:17, which is a continuation of the narrative, the same word is used to describe "the appearance of the glory of the Lord," and there, the Hebrew word מְרִאָה (mar'ê) is used as a translation of εἶδος (eidos). So, the divergence between the Greek and the Hebrew may indicate either an accidental scribal error or a variant of the Hebrew text. As the word מְרִאָה (mar'ê) was used in the very same context, the retroversion seems evident here.

Comments 8-9

The word עֲצָמָם ('ešem) (v. 10) literally means "bone," which reflects a particular usage in the MT. It conveys a reflexive force emphasizing the noun that follows, meaning "the heavens themselves."⁷ (JOÛON e MURAOKA, 2006). The LXX conveys this term as εἶδος στερεώματος (eidos stereōmatos) (v. 10), meaning "the appearance of the firmament."

The verse describes what the "sapphire brickwork under His (God's) feet" looks like. The word εἶδος (eidos) means "the shape and structure of something, as it appears to someone's form," and its usage is not inappropriate to describe what they saw.

⁷ "The simple personal pronoun used emphatically can be equivalent to self.", 511. HALOT, s.v. "עֲצָמָם," 2:869.



Usually, the word στερέωμα (stereōma) covers a broader range of Hebrew glosses⁸, indicating that the interpreter had an unclear understanding of עָשֶׂם (‘ešem) when it carries a reflexive meaning⁹.

Because τῇ καθαριότητι (tē kathariotēti) would be a dative of respect, i.e., “with respect to purity,” John Wevers believes it reflects an intentional effort to make it clear to the reader that the word used refers to “sky” rather than “heaven.”¹⁰ (DOZEMAN, 2009, p. 597). Even though the dative has a more extensive range of possibilities¹¹ (MURAOKA, 2016), Wever’s observation is valid, as is his suggestion that it may reflect linguistic or contextual exegesis (WEVERS, 1990, p. 385), according to Tov’s classification.

Comments 10

The word אֲשִׁיל (‘āšîl) is unusual in the MT, and only in v.11 does it take the meaning of “chief” or “noble.” (WEVERS, 1990, p. 385). The other occurrences of this word appear in Isaiah 41:19, as “corner, side,” Jeremiah 38:12 and Ezekiel 13:18, as “joint,” and Ezekiel 41:8, where it is taken to mean a technical architectural term, “to the joining.” The LXX renders it as ἐπίλεκτος (epilektos), “chosen,” (LUST, EYNIKEL E HAUSPIE, 2003) which denotes a semantic shift, but it still carries the meaning of the elite or nobles of Israel. Thus, it characterizes a linguistic exegesis.

Comments 11

The discrepancy between “Israelites” Ἰσραηλ (Israēl) and “sons of Israel” בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (b^enē yīsrā’ēl) may represent an unintentional omission of the word “sons” (בְּנֵי) on the part of the translator, or even an attempt to harmonize with three occurrences of “Israel” in the same

⁸ עָשֶׂם—beaten metal plate, or bow; firmament, firm vault of heaven (13): Gen 1:6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20; Ps 18:2; 150:1; Eze 1:22, 23, 25; 10:1; עָשֶׂם—rock; cliffs; Sela (place) (2): Ps 17:3; 70:3; עָשֶׂם—layer of dust; dust cloud; clouds (1): Dt 33:26; אֵיִם—fat (1): Ps 72:4; פְּתָח—breach; gap (1): Eze 13:5. The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

⁹ See for instance, LXX Exodus 12:17, 41, 51; 24:10. In other places, when it translates “bone,” it reveals no problems.

¹⁰ The remarks made by Thomas Dozeman are enticing: “Verses 9–11 begin the process of addressing the need for a sanctuary by introducing the image of the heavenly temple as the model for an earthly sanctuary to contain the holiness of God.”

¹¹ Although Wallace works in the New Testament grammar, his instances shed light on the LXX. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 137–75.



chapter, in v. 4, 11, 17. The stylistic argument seems unlikely because the same expression appears in verses 5 and 17, where the LXX reads τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ (tōn huiōn Israēl) “the sons of Israel.” This minus in the Greek text may represent an accidental omission by the translator.

Comments 12

The MT reads, יְטַלֵּחַ (šālāḥ yāḏô) “He did not lay His hand,” and the LXX renders οὐ διεφώνησεν οὐδὲ εἷς (ou diephōnēsen oude heis) “not even one was missing (or perished).” The MT understands God as the embedded subject of the verb יְטַלֵּחַ (šālāḥ), who “against the chiefs of the Israelites He did not send His hand,” while LXX avoids it.

Wevers says that the sentence יְטַלֵּחַ (šālāḥ yāḏô) is not found anywhere else in MT Exodus, and in Genesis 22:12, it is translated literally¹² (WEVERS, 1990, p. 385). The verb διαφωνέω (diaphōneō) appears in Numbers 31:49; Joshua 23:14; 1 Samuel 30:19; 1 Kings 8:56; [Judith 10:13;] and Ezekiel 37:11, and it conveys a variety of meanings in the MT¹³. It would suggest a variant Vorlage. However, Wevers makes the observation that the LXX accurately understood the Hebrew expression, but “avoids making God the subject of any fatal activity by a paraphrase,” οὐ διεφώνησεν οὐδὲ εἷς (ou diephōnēsen oude heis) “of the chosen of Israel, not one perished.” (WEVERS, 1990, p. 385).

Comments 13

Many interpreters struggle with the idea that “they saw the God.”¹⁴ Maimonides says that the passage must be understood as intellectual perception, but in no way as a real perceiving with the eye (CHILDS, 2004, p. 506). John I. Durham states, “The description of what they saw concentrates not on the appearance of God but on the appearance of what lay at his feet.” (DURHMAN, 1987, p. 344). Brevard S. Childs comments, “The passage is not without its parallels. The closest appears in Isaiah’s vision (6:1), which also speaks of ‘seeing’ Yahweh. But in the case of both passages, when the actual description is given, it appears to be far removed from an actual

¹² MT Gen 22:12 - לֹא יְטַלֵּחַ (qal imperf 2 sing jussive) // LXX Gen 22:12 - ἐπιβάλλης τὴν χεῖρά σου ἐπὶ (2 sing aor act subj)

¹³ The verb διαφωνέω renders the following Hebrew verbs; פקד (Num 31:49); נפל (Josh 23:14, 1 Kgs 8:56); עדר (1 Sam 30:19); דר (Ezek 37:11).

¹⁴ NRSV, ESV, NET, and NIV follow the MT and translate “they saw the God.”



portrayal of God's appearance." (CHILDS, 2004, p. 506). The problem may have arisen in the LXX translation, as Karen Jobs and Moisés Silva point out: "In the Septuagint, there is a tendency to remove the notion of seeing God, e.g., Exod 24:10-11." (JOBES e SILVA, 2015, p. 100).

The MT reads $\text{וַיֵּדּוּ אֶת־הַאֱלֹהִים}$ (*wayyeh^ezû 'et-hā'elōhim*) translated as "they saw or beheld God." The LXX reads καὶ ὤφθησαν (*ōphthēsan*) (aorist passive) "they appeared," which indicates only that the ancient translator interpreted וַיֵּדּוּ (*wayyeh^ezû*) as a niph'al (WEVERS, 1990, p. 386). Wevers states that the root of חזן (*hzh*) is unattested in the niph'al in the entire MT (WEVERS, 1990, p. 386). Wyckoff says that "the normal way of expressing 'appear' in MT Exodus is the niph'al of נ / ראה (*ni / r'h*), which the LXX also usually translates with the passive form of ὀράω (*horaō*) 'to see.'" (WYCKOFF, 2012, p. 683). Tov says it is not uncommon for the LXX to render active Hebrew verbs into passive and vice versa (TOV, 2012, p. 160-161). Therefore, it would be a case for a theological exegesis.

Even in the MT, some of ראה (*r'h*) was originally intended as qal (to see) but later vocalized as niph'al (נִרְאָה - to appear) to attenuate the idea of humans seeing God (WYCKOFF, 2012, p. 683). Hence, the idea of seeing God would be totally rejected. But it also avoids any possible contradiction with Torah commands by harmonizing 24:11b with the literary context of Exodus. For instance, earlier in Exodus 19:21, God told Moses that he must warn the people not to try to look ראה (*r'h*) at God, "otherwise many of them will perish."

In Exodus 33:18-20, Moses asks God to show him His glory, and then God says: "You cannot see my face. For no one shall see Me and live" ($\text{לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי}$). It appears that the LXX reading was trying to solve a theological exegesis.

So, the presence of the niph'al of חזן (*hzh*) seems to be an editorial choice, or it may reflect a scribal error/tradition. Tov suggests that it is probably an example of "variants" or "pseudovariants." Thus, it may reflect readings or interpretations of the Vorlage that existed in the translator's mind rather than in written form (TOV, 2012, p. 162-171). In this case, the translator was faithful to his interpretation of the MT.

CONCLUSION

A brief analysis of Exodus 24:10–12 reveals that the majority of the deviations in the minuses and pluses can be explained as either contextual or theological exegesis, in which the



concept of seeing God has been eliminated in the LXX in order to avoid contradiction with the Masoretic Text, and bring these verses into harmony with their context.

The Masoretic Text of Exodus 24:10a says that “they saw the God of Israel,” and 24:11b states that “they beheld God” during a meaningful encounter where “they ate and drank,” which solemnly confirms the Sinaitic Covenant. The translators of the LXX seem to have seen an inconsistency in this context, because the idea of “seeing God” apparently contradicts Exodus 33:20, “For man shall not see me and live.” So, to provide a solution, the LXX’s text appears to have been adjusted. The clearly stated divine presence in the MT is perceived only indirectly in the LXX. The LXX adds “place” in both Exodus 24:10a and 11b to describe “God’s place” rather than God’s appearance.

In doing so, the LXX seems to harmonize the apparent ambiguity or contraction of Exodus 24:10-11 with the context of Exodus 33:20. Still, by accommodating apparent contradictions, the LXX might divert readers to other theological issues and motifs unrelated to the Hebrew original¹⁵, but this is a problem for further investigation.

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¹⁵ For a discussion on the theological implications, see Wyckoff, “When Does Translation Become Exegesis,” 690–93.



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