

## Text-Critical Issues Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint Text of the Book of Jeremiah

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the text-critical issues between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) versions of the Book of Jeremiah, focusing on orthographic variants, editorial changes, and transcription errors. The study begins with the Masoretic Text, detailing its historical development, transmission, and defining features. It then discusses significant textual variants within the MT tradition, such as spelling, grammar, and word order. The paper then turns to the Septuagint translation, analysing notable differences in wording, verse arrangement, and theological emphases. These differences provide insight into the LXX translators' interpretive choices and theological perspectives. The analysis reveals distinct theological emphases, scribal tendencies, and translational choices that shape the textual tradition of Jeremiah. The paper reviews scholarly debates on the reliability and significance of the MT and LXX traditions, highlighting diverse interpretive approaches and their implications for modern biblical scholarship. The paper concludes by summarising key findings and emphasising the significance of text-critical analysis in biblical studies.*

**Keywords:** Masoretic Text (MT), Septuagint (LXX), Textual Criticism, Jeremiah, Variations, Translation

### INTRODUCTION

Textual criticism is a vital discipline within biblical studies, aiming to reconstruct the most accurate version of ancient texts by comparing various manuscript traditions. The study of textual variants between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) has garnered significant attention among biblical scholars due to its implications for understanding the transmission history and interpretation of biblical texts (Gooding, 2020; Mihaila 2028, 30-60; Wasserstein and Wasserstein 2006, 259-260; Tov 2014, 459-460). The Book of Jeremiah's historical setting and rich theological substance make it an excellent case study for analysing these textual variants. Comprehending the distinctions between Jeremiah's MT and LXX translations offers a valuable understanding of the textual transmission process, the interpretation techniques employed by ancient translators, and the theological developments that have transpired throughout time. Furthermore, these textual variations provide critical new perspectives on the various cultural and theological environments that shaped the development of the Greek and Hebrew textual traditions.

Textual criticism plays a crucial role in biblical studies by providing scholars with the tools to reconstruct the original text of ancient biblical manuscripts. Given the vast number of extant biblical manuscripts and the inevitable errors and variations introduced during the transmission process, textual criticism helps scholars discern the most authentic readings of the biblical text. In the case of the Book of Jeremiah case, textual criticism allows scholars to compare the MT with the LXX, along with other ancient versions and textual witnesses, to identify variations, scribal errors, and intentional changes introduced by copyists or translators. Moreover, textual criticism enables scholars to trace the development of biblical texts over time, discern the influence of various textual traditions on each other, and understand the cultural and theological contexts that shaped the transmission of the biblical text. Thus, textual criticism is necessary to determine which version of the Bible is the most accurate, comprehend how it was transmitted, and evaluate its meaning in light of its original context.

Traditionally credited to the prophet Jeremiah, the Book of Jeremiah holds a significant position in the Hebrew and Christian Old Testaments. It is one of the longest books in the Bible, including stories of Jeremiah's life and service, poetry sections expressing regret and judgment, and prophetic oracles. Jeremiah's prophecies came

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true amid a turbulent time in the history of ancient Israel—the last few years of Judah’s Kingdom before the Babylonians destroyed it in 587 BCE. His message of prophecy dealt with idolatry, societal injustice, and Judah’s approaching divine wrath for their disobedience. The book is characterised by its blend of poetic imagery, vivid narratives, and profound theological reflections. It reflects Jeremiah’s struggles as a prophet, his unwavering commitment to delivering God’s message, and his deep empathy for the plight of his people. This paper deals with the text-critical issues between the MT and the LXX text of the Book of Jeremiah, the significance of these differences, and their implications for understanding this prophetic book.

## **THE MASORETIC TEXT (MT)**

The MT is the primary textual tradition within the Hebrew Bible that has roots in ancient Hebrew manuscripts that were copied and transmitted by successive generations of scribes and scholars. It is ubiquitous in modern times and can be found in multiple sources. Emmanuel Tov (2017, 7-8) states that all printed editions of the Hebrew Bible and modern translations present MT, except for some editions with different content. However, comparing these editions reveals minor differences due to differences in medieval Masoretic manuscripts or modern editors’ representation of these manuscripts. The MT is a meticulously compiled and codified traditional Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible, aiming to reproduce the original Hebrew text. It was initiated around the 6th century CE and completed in the 10th by scholars at Talmudic academies in Babylonia and Palestine. The goal was not to interpret the Scriptures but to transmit the authentic Word of God (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>). The MT was meticulously checked for various texts’ spellings, grammar, and discrepancies. Vowel signs were introduced to ensure correct pronunciation, and signs for stress and pause were added to facilitate public reading in synagogues. The Masoretes also noted the centre of each verse, word, and letter, allowing for future emendation detection. The rigorous care given to the MT is credited for the remarkable consistency in Hebrew texts. The Masoretic work enjoyed an absolute monopoly for 600 years, and experts are amazed at the fidelity of the earliest printed version to the earliest surviving codices (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>).

The MT is a medieval text rooted in antiquity, reflecting an ancient tradition over a thousand years ago. It has served as the most commonly used form of the Hebrew-Aramaic Bible since its acceptance as authoritative by all Jewish communities in its consonantal form, probably in the 1st century CE. Tov (2017, 12) identifies that the medieval shape of MT contains elements such as the consonantal framework, vocalisation, para-textual elements, accentuation, and the apparatus of the Masorah. The entire MT with all elements described above was created in the early Middle Ages, starting with the ninth century, because elements such as vocalisation, accentuation (*te’amim*), and the apparatus of the Masorah were not written (Tov 2017, 12). Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, scholars were unaware that the MT existed in the same form in the last centuries BCE. This has now been established from the finds in the Judean Desert. Since the medieval MT consisted of several layers, some of which were created in the Middle Ages, the base layer, the consonantal text, compared with the Judean Desert texts. The most complete medieval Masoretic source closest to the Ben-Asher school of Masoretes, namely the codex Leningrad B 19<sup>A</sup> (codex L) from 1009, is used as a yardstick for comparison. The second source for comparison is the Aleppo codex from approximately 925, closer to the Ben Asher school but lacking the Torah (Tov 2017, 12-13).

Tov (2017, 15) further opines that MT is the central text of Judaism, and its scribes are better known than other scribes due to the numerous copies of the medieval MT and their frequent mention in rabbinic literature. These scribes are best known for their precision, number of mistakes, amount of scribal intervention, and approach to orthography. However, the extent of scribes’ changes to the copied texts is unclear. Proto-MT scribes differ in precision, number of mistakes, scribal intervention, and orthography approach, but there is no clear differentiation between them. The precision of MT scribes is often mentioned in rabbinic literature, with the Temple employing professional “correctors” to ensure accuracy in copying.

Tov (2017, 16) clarifies that proto-MT text was copied precisely and had orthography (spelling) inconsistencies. This inconsistency was transmitted to the next generations, as the generations before the proto-MT scribes created inconsistent text in spelling is evident in two areas: differences between the defective orthographic practice of the majority of biblical books and the fuller orthography of late books such as Chronicles, Ezra-

Nehemiah, Qohelet, and Esther, and internal differences within the various books. Tov (2017, 16-17) adds that the lack of unity in MT is shown by inconsistent spelling in words appearing in the same context or belonging to the same grammatical category and of unusual spellings. The Masoretic tradition preserved the minor scribal details through “special dots” (*puncta extra-ordinaria*), which were reinterpreted by the Masoretic tradition as doubtful letters (Tov 2017, 18). However, the MT is regarded as the most significant version currently in print and universally accepted as the authentic Hebrew Bible (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>). Before the Common Era, Traditional Judaism possessed a few alternative Hebrew Bible texts, which posed no challenge to MT’s hegemony.

## THE SEPTUAGINT (LXX) TEXT

The LXX translation represents a significant textual tradition within the broader context of ancient Jewish and Christian literature. To start with the question Emmanuel Tov (2010, 3) is very significant, “What is the Septuagint?” as well as his answer states that it “refers to such matters as the nature of the individual translation units, their place of origin, the relation between the translation units, the nature of Greek Scripture as a whole, and the possible development of the translation enterprise.” The LXX is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) produced in the Hellenistic period, primarily during the 3rd to 1st centuries BCE. The story of the LXX’s origin attributes its translation to seventy (or seventy-two) Jewish scholars (Williams, 2012) commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Hellenistic king of Egypt (Wright, 2015). According to tradition, these scholars translated the Pentateuch (Torah) only into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, to make it accessible to the Greek-speaking Jewish community. At the same time, anonymous editors and revisions worked on the rest of the Hebrew Bible for 300. Thus, labels such as “Pentateuch-only, Old Greek, Ur-Septuagint, Original Septuagint, Proto-Septuagint, Codex Alexandrinus (A) and Codex Vaticanus (B) LXXA, LXXB, LXXAB,” are intended to differentiate between the several translation phases (Peters 1992, 5:1093).

Its origins, steeped in situation and historical context, offer a fascinating glimpse into the multicultural milieu of the Hellenistic era. In the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquests in the 4th century BCE, Greek culture permeated the vast territories of the ancient Near East. This period of Hellenistic expansion ushered in an era of linguistic and cultural assimilation, as Greece became the *lingua franca* of commerce, governance, and intellectual discourse across the Mediterranean (Swete 1914, 8). Among the centres of Hellenistic civilisation, Alexandria, Egypt, emerged as a thriving hub of learning and cosmopolitanism under the rule of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Established by Ptolemy I Soter, one of Alexander’s generals, Alexandria boasted a diverse population and a renowned library and museum that attracted scholars, philosophers, and poets from various cultural backgrounds.

The historical account of the LXX’s origin has been based on theories. The first theory is based on the *Letter of Aristeas*, also known as Pseudo-Aristeas, as E.J. Bickerman describes it (2007, 107-133). R. J. H. Shutt (1985, 7-8) considers it the primary source for the origin of the LXX, likely written around 150-100 BC. It describes the circumstances surrounding the LXX’s origin and provides irrelevant information. The *Letter of Aristeas* narrates the translation of the Torah into Greek at the behest of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 BCE). According to tradition, Ptolemy II, seeking to enrich the library of Alexandria and promote cultural exchange, commissioned seventy-two Jewish scholars (six from each of the twelve tribes) to translate the sacred Hebrew scriptures into Greek to add to his collections as suggested by Demetrius, the chief librarian. Bickerman (2007, 169) asserts, “On the other hand, Ptolemy II was interested in books as he was in exotic animals. By hook or by crook, he gathered manuscripts. A multitude of volumes purporting to report the doctrines of Zoroaster was assembled in the Alexandrian library. Ptolemy II had every reason to add Moses’ work to his collection.” Ptolemy II dispatched two envoys, one of whom was Aristeas, to Jerusalem. The High Priest Eleazar sent seventy-two “Elders” from each tribe of Israel to Alexandria, along with a trustworthy copy of the Torah. The interpreters performed their task in 72 days, and the Greek version was read to and approved by Alexandrian Jews and the King (Beckerman 2007, 163-166). According to some versions of the story, the Jewish translators were said to have worked independently yet produced identical translations and completed their task within a miraculously short period—seventy-two days, encompassed not only the Pentateuch but eventually came to include the entire Hebrew Bible, including the prophetic books like Jeremiah. However, Swete (1914, 19) criticised Aristeas’

account of the LXX, arguing that it is unreliable due to historical inaccuracies “for many years had been a trusted adviser of the first Ptolemy; and it is not unlikely that the project of translating the Jewish Law was discussed between him and the royal founder of the Alexandrian library, and that the work was due to his suggestion, though his words did not bear fruit until after his death.”

Other theories of historical origin include the strong motivation of diaspora Jews to have the scriptures in their vernacular, with oral translation practice in the ANE being cited as proof. According to Dell’Acqua (2010, 323), the translation was driven by liturgical and instructional purposes, as well as the needs of the Jewish community. However, Collins (2000, 179) disputes this theory, stating that the Jews in Alexandria had lost their Hebrews, but the persistence of the Greeks won the day.

The shape of the original translation of the LXX is another debated issue. Kahle’s Revision Theory agrees that the translation of the Pentateuch originated in Alexandria but that the historicity of Aristeas was flawed. He posited that the work done in Alexandria was not a translation but a revision of a previous work (Jellicoe 1968, 59). Kahle believed that the primary goal of LXX studies was to find the original Greek versions that preceded the Christian “standard” LXX. However, his theory fails to answer why Aristeas did not simply write an apology for the earlier “standard edition” (Jellicoe 1968, 61).

Lagarde’s “Proto-Septuagint” or “Ur-Septuagint” set the course for all subsequent LXX scholarship, emphasising the importance of knowing each translator’s particular approach, holding free translation as superior to literal, and preferring evidence for a Hebrew original over the MT (Jobes and Silva 2000, 35-36). Even if his beliefs have been modified after his passing, most experts still operate under them (Jobes and Silva 2000, 36).

Despite the lack of consensus among scholars about the origin, LXX gained acceptance among Greek-speaking Jews, offering them access to their sacred scriptures in a language they understood. Its widespread use facilitated the dissemination of Jewish religious beliefs and practices throughout the Hellenistic world, contributing to the cultural and religious diversity of the era. The LXX also exerted a profound influence on the development of early Christianity. Many of the New Testament writers, composing their works in Greek, frequently cited or alluded to the LXX when referencing Old Testament passages, and this played a pivotal role in shaping Christian theology and scriptural interpretation. The LXX underwent further revision, recension, and transmission in subsequent centuries, resulting in multiple manuscript traditions and textual variants (Swete, 1914). Its rich textual history continues to captivate scholars and researchers, who study its linguistic features, textual variants, and theological implications within the broader context of ancient Judaism and Christianity.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LXX TRANSLATION**

The LXX translation showcases unique characteristics that distinguish it from its Hebrew counterpart. These features shed light on the technique of interpretive approaches and linguistic choices made by the translators. Beck (2000, 2) describes such technique “...as the pattern of conscious and subconscious decisions made by the translator when transferring a text from the parent language to the target language.” The translators often engaged in interpretive renderings, where they paraphrased or expanded upon the Hebrew text to elucidate its meaning or address perceived ambiguities, which Beck (2000, 2) sees as “story-tellers.” However, he submits that “No translation is free from interpretation...Thus the Septuagint is not only a translation, it is also a „commentary“ reflecting the interpretation of its time” (Beck 2000, 5). This interpretive approach aimed to make the text more accessible to Greek-speaking audiences and align it with contemporary linguistic and cultural norms. For example, in Jeremiah 1:11-13, where the prophet sees an almond tree (*shaged*) and a boiling pot (*sir*), the Septuagint translates “almond tree” as “a vigilant watch” and “boiling pot” as “a face turned towards the north.” These renderings provide interpretive glosses to clarify the vision’s symbolism for the Greek readers.

Similarly, in Jeremiah 6:10, where the Hebrew text reads, “Their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot listen,” the LXX expands upon the metaphor, rendering it as, “Their ear is uncircumcised, and they are unable to pay attention” (Brenton, 2011). However, one may see it as an elaboration that enhances the clarity of the metaphor

and reinforces the notion of spiritual deafness among the people. Such interpretive renderings reflect the LXX translators' exegetical concerns and their desire to convey the message in a manner accessible to their Greek-speaking audience.

In his dissertation, Miika Tucker (2020, 27-28) examined the Hermann-Josef Stipp, where he asserts that the translators were proficient in both Hebrew and Greek languages, allowing them to express Hebrew concepts and idioms consistent with Greek linguistic and cultural norms. They adapted Hebrew idiomatic expressions, poetic imagery, and theological concepts into idiomatic Greek through the principle of literalness and equivalence from one language to another. Also, linguistic features and stylistic conventions are typical of contemporary Greek literature, including narrative, poetry, and prophecy. It uses literary devices like similes, metaphors, parallelism, and rhetorical flourishes to convey messages clearly, making the prophetic message accessible to Greek-speaking audiences unfamiliar with Hebrew or Aramaic. This linguistic adaptation influenced the interpretation and reception of Jeremiah within Greek-speaking Jewish and Christian communities.

Unlike the MT, the LXX is characterised by various manuscript traditions, including textual variations, recensions, and additional material. These are in three basic categorisations: papyri, uncial codices, and minuscules or cursives (Tov 1981, 44). These manuscripts are preserved in various families with distinctive features and transmission histories. According to Caral L. Murphy (2007, 14), "Among the uncials, some well-known manuscripts are Codex Vaticanus (B), Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Bodleianus (I), Codex Marchalianus (Q), and Codex Washingtonianus (W). Finally, the minuscules are the more recent manuscripts, often representing older manuscripts' facsimiles." Additional material not found in the MT, such as expanded passages, supplementary verses, and entire sections, contributes to the translation's textual richness and theological diversity. Scholars engage in comparative analysis of LXX manuscripts to identify textual variants, trace manuscript relationships, and reconstruct the history of the LXX text.

## THE MASORETIC TEXT OF JEREMIAH

The process of textual transmission began before the emergence of the Masoretes, who were deeply committed to preserving the integrity and accuracy of the biblical text. Jeremiah, believed to have prophesied during the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, was transmitted through handwritten copies produced by professional scribes and amateur copyists within Jewish communities. These copies were circulated among synagogues, schools, and religious centres, contributing to the proliferation of textual variants and manuscript traditions. The formalisation and standardisation of the Hebrew text occurred during the period of the Masoretes, who flourished primarily in Tiberias, Palestine, between the 6th and 10th centuries CE (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>). The Masoretes developed a sophisticated system of textual annotations, vowel markings (niqqud), and cantillation marks (*te'amim*) to ensure the accurate pronunciation and chanting of the biblical text. These marks aided reading and recitation and served as mnemonic devices for memorising the text and preserving its oral transmission (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>).

The MT of Jeremiah as it is today reflects the culmination of centuries of textual transmission, editing, and standardisation within the Masoretic tradition. Despite the meticulous efforts of the Masoretes, the MT of Jeremiah exhibits textual variants, errors, and editorial interventions that have crept in during the transmission process. Critical aspects of transcription errors include misspellings, omissions, duplications, and other inaccuracies. Misspellings result from oversight, unfamiliarity with specific terms, or judgment errors. Omissions result from skipping text, *homoeoteleuton*, or scribes' attempts to streamline the text for readability. Duplications result from inadvertent repetition of material, confusion regarding text placement, or errors in the manuscript's layout (Tov 2012, 6-15). Other inaccuracies include misplacement of words or phrases, substitution of similar-looking characters, or misinterpretation of abbreviations or symbols (Tov 2012, 6-15). While most transcription errors are unintentional and arise from the inherent challenges of manuscript transmission, they still impact the accuracy and reliability of the MT of Jeremiah.

Nevertheless, Tov (2012, 86) asserts, "Some of the alterations reflect editorial techniques which are not usually in evidence at such a relatively late stage of the transmission of the biblical text, but are rather to be found in

the stage of the literary development of the biblical books.” Editorial changes are deliberate alterations or additions of explanatory glosses or clarifications intended to elucidate obscure or ambiguous passages made to the MT, like the Book of Jeremiah, by editors or redactors. Also, these changes involve modifications to the text’s wording, arrangement, or content, reflecting the editorial processes that shaped the transmission of Jeremiah’s prophetic oracles and narratives within the Hebrew textual tradition. Tov (2012, 89) justifies this by saying, “These additions reflect the editorial desire to stress that the command...”

## **THE MT AND LXX OF JEREMIAH AND TEXTUAL VARIATIONS**

The MT of the Torah lacks the frequent harmonising pluses of most other texts, such as the LXX, SP, and exegetical and liturgical texts. It is conservative, as other witnesses freely altered the earlier text. In some books, the LXX differs from MT not in small textual details but in groups of related features that reflect a different stage in the literary development of the book than MT, probably preceding MT. The analysis of MT reveals that it is a mixed bag containing units that reflect a conservative tradition and those that do not, units that seem to be later than the LXX (Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and units that are earlier than the Vorlage of the LXX (1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel) (Tov 2017, 18-19).

The Septuagint and Masoretic Text of Jeremiah have differences in the arrangement of chapters and verses, which impact the flow, structure, and interpretation of the prophetic message, which have been noticed as far back as the third and fourth centuries AD by the church fathers Origen and Jerome (Soderlund 1985, 1). Textual variations in the LXX range from minor spelling or word choice differences to significant sentence structure or theological emphasis discrepancies. These variations result from scribal errors, editorial revisions, or interpretive adjustments made by copyists and redactors over time. Recensions and revisions have led to the emergence of distinct textual traditions throughout the LXX’s history. Some LXX manuscripts reflect the influence of specific recensions or revisions, such as the Lucianic recension or the Hexaplaric tradition. These recensions often exhibit characteristic textual traits and editorial interventions that distinguish them from other LXX manuscripts.

Tov (1999, 363) argues that the LXX reflects a short Hebrew text of Jeremiah, and it is unlikely that the translator abridged his Hebrew *Vorlage*. This suggests at least two Hebrew versions of Jeremiah, one preserved by the LXX and another by the MT, which he views as the LXX’s first edition and the MT’s second expanded edition. However, A.R. Diamond (1990, 34) contends with such a position. He analyses Jeremiah’s confessions in the LXX and MT, arguing that labelling the LXX as “edition 1” and the MT as “edition 2” is inappropriate for all of Jeremiah. He believes the two-edition model, based on prose traditions, is unsuitable for poetic prophetic traditions, highlighting the need for more attention. According to Ron Lindo, citing Tiberius Rata (2008, 39-51), this hypothesis was first suggested by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, who argued that the Hebrew text behind the LXX was preserved by those who had fled to Egypt. The text behind the MT was an expanded version of the exact Hebrew text that reached Palestine. This theory has led many scholars to argue that one of the Hebrew versions is superior, as the shorter version is considered the more original. Two key differences exist between these two versions. First off, the book of Jeremiah is somewhat lengthier in the MT translation than in the LXX. Second, although both versions’ beginning and ending are the same, the content is arranged differently. Graf (1862, xliii), cited by Rata (2008, 39-51), discovered that the Greek translation is one-eighth shorter than the MT since around 2700 words present in the MT are absent in the LXX. Although the percentage of Emanuel Tov (1999, 363) differs a little, with a further explanation when he states that,

The LXX of Jeremiah often differs from MT of that book in major details. It is shorter than MT by one-seventh and it differs from MT in its arrangement of the material. Since the LXX’s translation technique in Jeremiah is relatively literal where the two texts overlap, it is unlikely that the translator would have abridged his Hebrew *Vorlage*. This implies that the brevity of the LXX reflects a short Hebrew text.

Although the two positions are acceptable, with a further preference for the position of Graf, Rata (2008, 40) adds, “Also, starting with chapter 25 verse 13, the LXX orders its chapters differently. The Oracles against Foreign Nations, found in chapters 46-51 of the MT, begin from Jeremiah 25:13 in the LXX.” The Septuagint often presents a different order of chapters and verses than the Masoretic Text, leading to differences in

numbering and sequence between the Greek and Hebrew traditions. Lindo compiled a summary order of the differences between the two versions (MT and LXX), which he claimed to have adopted from Michael B. Shepherd's book, *Daniel and the Context of the Hebrew Bible* (2009, 39):

**Table 1. The order of the differences between the two versions.**

LXX		MT	
Jeremiah's Call	(Jer 1)	Jeremiah's Call	(Jer 1)
Book of Jeremiah	(Jer 2:1-25:13)	Book of Jeremiah	(Jer 2:1-25:13)
Nations Corpus	(Jer 49:34-39; 46; 50-51; 47; 49:7-22, 1-6; 28-33; 23-27; 48)	Interlude	(Jer 25:14-29:32)
Interlude	(Jer 25:15-29:32)	Book of Comfort	(Jer 30-33)
Book of Comfort	(Jer 30-33)	Historical Realisation	(Jer 34-45)
Historical Realisation	(Jer 34-45)	Nations Corpus	(Jer 46-51)
Appendix	(Jer 52)	Appendix	(Jer 52)

Other examples include but are not limited to the following:

Jeremiah 1:1-3 (LXX) and 1:4-19 (MT): In the Septuagint, the opening verses of Jeremiah present a more concise introduction to the prophet's call and commission than the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint condenses the narrative, focusing primarily on Jeremiah's divine appointment as a prophet from his mother's womb. Conversely, the Masoretic Text provides a more detailed account of Jeremiah's call, including his encounter with God and the commissioning of his prophetic ministry.

Jeremiah 25:15-38 (LXX) and 25:15-33 (MT): In Jeremiah 25, the Septuagint presents a different arrangement of verses than the Masoretic Text. While both versions contain prophecies concerning the nations and the cup of God's wrath, the Septuagint includes additional verses (Jeremiah 25:34-38) not found in the Masoretic Text. These additional verses in the Septuagint expand upon the theme of judgment against the nations, providing further details and elaborations on the consequences of their sins. Including these verses alters the flow and structure of the chapter, potentially influencing interpretations of the scope and severity of God's judgment on the nations.

Jeremiah 36:1-32 (LXX) and 36:1-32 (MT): The Septuagint version of Jeremiah 36, which recounts the episode of Jeremiah's scroll, exhibits variations in the arrangement of verses compared to the Masoretic Text. At the same time, the overall narrative remains consistent between the two versions; differences in verse numbering and organisation are observed. These differences in the order of verses reflect scribal or editorial decisions made during the transmission of the text, leading to variations in the presentation of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and interactions with King Jehoiakim.

The Masoretic Text of the Book of Jeremiah contains various orthographic variants, including spelling, grammar, and word order variations among manuscripts (Rata 2008, 39-51). Some of these can be traced back to the reasons Frank and his friends gave when they said the translation involves the work of more than one translator (as cited by Tov 1976, 1-4). Here are a few examples:

Jeremiah 6:10: MT: "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear?" LXX: "To whom shall I speak and give warning, and that they may hear?" Orthographic Variation: The LXX includes an additional "and" ( $\kappa\alpha\iota$ ) before "that they may hear," which is absent in the MT. Jeremiah 11:8: MT: "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear." LXX: "Yet they did not obey, nor did they incline their ear." Orthographic Variation: The LXX separates "obey" ( $\pi\epsilon\theta\alpha\rho\chi\eta\sigma\omega\sigma\iota\nu$ ) and "incline their ear" ( $\kappa\lambda\iota\nu\omega\sigma\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron\ \sigma\upsilon\check{\zeta}\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ ) with "nor did" ( $\sigma\upsilon\delta\delta\grave{\epsilon}$ ). Jeremiah 15:11: MT: "I will surely do this to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" LXX: "I will utterly consume you, and I will not relent; because you have done evil before me, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" Orthographic Variation: The LXX uses the phrase "I will utterly consume you" ( $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\iota\rho\acute{\epsilon}\omega\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\iota\rho\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\omega$ ) instead of "I will surely do this to you" found in the MT. Jeremiah 20:18: MT: "Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow?" LXX: "Why did I come out from the womb to see labor and sorrow?" Orthographic Variation: The LXX uses "labour" ( $\rho\acute{o}\pi\omicron\nu$ ) instead of "toil" found in the MT. Jeremiah 25:34: MT: "Wail, you shepherds, and cry out, and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come, and you shall fall like a choice vessel!" LXX: "Wail, you shepherds, and cry, and roar like lions, and cast yourselves on the ground, you rulers of the flock, for your days for slaughter and destruction have come, and you shall fall like a vessel desirable!" Orthographic Variation: The

LXX uses “cast yourselves on the ground” (ἐρροφθήσεσθε ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν) instead of “roll in ashes” found in the MT.

Jeremiah 31:31, the verse in question reads:

MT: "הַגָּה יָמִים בָּאֵיִם נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְכָרַתִּי אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה:"

Here, the word “נְאֻם” (ne’um), meaning “declaration” or “utterance,” is spelt with a waw (ו) before the aleph (א). This spelling is characteristic of the Masoretic tradition. In some other ancient manuscripts, this word is spelt without the waw:

LXX: "Ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται λέγει κύριος καὶ διαθήσομαι ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Ἰουδα διαθήκην καινήν."

In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the equivalent word “λέγει” (legei) appears, meaning “says” or “declares,” without the presence of the additional vav as seen in the MT. These variations are often influenced by scribal practices and regional dialects, reflecting the diverse contexts in which the text was copied and transmitted. Different spellings occur in manuscripts of Jeremiah, resulting from differences in pronunciation or orthographic conventions among scribes. Word order varies within sentences or clauses, from syntactic differences between textual traditions to scribal adjustments to improve clarity or emphasis. These variations subtly alter the flow or emphasis of a passage, influencing its interpretation.

Another one is called transcription errors, which are inadvertent mistakes made by scribes during the copying process of the MT of the Book of Jeremiah. These errors include misspellings, omissions, duplications, and other deviations from the original text. These errors are common in manuscripts and accumulate over successive copies, potentially impacting the accuracy and integrity of the text. One example of a transcription error in Jeremiah’s MT is in Jeremiah 8:22: Original verse (Jeremiah 8:22, NIV): *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?* Transcription error in some manuscripts: *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the daughter of my people?* In this example, the phrase “the wound of my people” (אֵין לְרַפְאָה לְמַכַּת עַמִּי) was mistakenly transcribed as “the daughter of my people” (לְבַת עַמִּי). Also, the MT includes the word “not” (לֹא) before “been turned to healing,” which is absent in the LXX. This error occurred due to a scribe misreading or mishearing the original text, resulting in a variant reading that alters the passage’s meaning.

Jeremiah 10:10: MT: “But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath, the earthquakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.” LXX: “But the Lord God is true; he is the living God and the King of the ages. At his wrath, the earthquakes and the nations will not be able to endure his anger.” Transcription Error: The MT reads, “the nations cannot endure,” while the LXX reads “, the nations will not be able to endure.”

Jeremiah 14:3: MT: “The nobles send their servants for water; they come to the cisterns; they find no water; they return with their vessels empty; they are ashamed and confounded and cover their heads.” LXX: “Their mighty men sent their little ones for water; they came to the pits and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads.” Transcription Error: The MT reads “the nobles” (הַאֲדָרִים), while the LXX reads “their mighty men” (οἱ δυνατοὶ αὐτῶν).

Jeremiah 32:5: MT: “And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the Lord. Though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?” LXX: “And he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall be until I visit him, declares the Lord. If you contend with the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?” Transcription Error: The MT reads “though you fight,” while the LXX reads “if you contend.”

Jeremiah 36:2: MT: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today.” LXX: “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and against all the nations,



from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today.” Transcription Error: The MT omits the word “against” before “all the nations,” which is present in the LXX.

Moreover, the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Book of Jeremiah contain textual variants that reflect the theological emphases or agendas of scribes or redactors. For example, In Jeremiah 10:6, the Masoretic Text reads: “*Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.*” This verse shows the uniqueness and greatness of God’s name. However, in some versions of the Septuagint (LXX), there is an addition to this verse: “*Forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee.*”

These variants involve intentional alterations emphasising specific theological concepts, such as divine justice, covenant fidelity, or messianic expectations. These tendencies align with theological perspectives prevalent in particular communities or periods, but they can potentially deviate from the author’s original intent. Critical aspects of theological tendencies in Jeremiah include the emphasis on divine justice, the promotion of covenant fidelity, the introduction of messianic expectations, and theological particularisms associated with specific religious communities or theological traditions. These variants include amplifications of passages depicting God’s judgment upon sinners or expansions of prophetic warnings regarding the consequences of disobedience. Theological particularisms are also present in some textual variants, promoting sectarian beliefs, theological doctrines, or liturgical practices unique to particular groups.

## TEXT-CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES

Textual criticism is crucial in understanding the differences and similarities between the MT and the LXX of Jeremiah. Textual criticism is a scholarly discipline that reconstructs a document’s original wording and content, as texts are susceptible to alteration, corruption, and transmission errors over time. According to Lindon (<https://www.academia.edu/25842683/>), “Scholars have generally approached the two versions of Jeremiah from three main perspectives: 1) the LXX being superior to the MT, 2) the MT being superior to the LXX, or 3) both being valid versions of the book with textual corruptions that must be tested on a case by case basis.” One of the testing apparatuses in biblical studies is textual criticism, which Emmanuel Tov (2014, 1) better summarises as:

Textual criticism deals with the origin and nature of all forms of a text, in our case the biblical text. This involves a discussion of its putative original form(s) and an analysis of the various representatives of the changing biblical text. The analysis includes a discussion of the relation between these texts, and attempts are made to describe the external conditions of the copying and the procedure of textual transmission.

Tov believes that biblical text has been transmitted through various ancient and medieval sources, including manuscripts, leather and papyrus scrolls, and other fragments. These sources, known as “textual witnesses,” provide insights into the biblical text. However, they differ significantly from each other. All sources, including their differences, must be studied to fully engage in biblical studies, as no single source contains the “biblical text.” The comparison and analysis of these differences are central to textual criticism (Tov 2014, 2).

Elsewhere, Emmanuel Tov, cited by Tiberius Rata (2008, 40), states, “The notable divergences which separate the LXX from the MT bring about important consequences in the field of textual criticism as well as in that of literary criticism.” This involves identifying alterations and corruptions, comparing manuscript witnesses, discerning the earliest attainable form, applying criteria for evaluation, and synthesising evidence to reconstruct the most reliable text. Two main aspects of textual criticism are identifying alterations and corruptions, comparing manuscript witnesses, and discerning the earliest attainable form. This is because “Most of the texts—ancient and modern—which have been transmitted from one generation to the next have been corrupted in one way or another” (Tov 2014, 8). Tov further asserts that in ancient texts, however, such as the Hebrew Bible, these corruptions are found more frequently because of the demanding physical conditions of the copying and the length of the transmission process, usually extending until the period of printing in recent centuries (8). The number of factors which could have created corruption is significant: the transition from the “early” Hebrew to Assyrian (“square”) script, unclear handwriting, unevenness in the surface of the material (leather or papyrus) on which the text was written (217-220), graphically similar letters which were often

confused (243-251), the lack of vocalisation (41-42, 255) and unclear boundaries between words in early texts (252-253). By analysing manuscript evidence and textual variants, critics aim to reconstruct the original form, free from later corruptions or interpolations. Criteria for evaluation include internal considerations like linguistic features, scribal tendencies, textual coherence, and contextual consistency. In contrast, external factors like age, provenance, reliability, and textual tradition encompass manuscript witnesses' age, provenance, reliability, and textual tradition.

Linguistic features within manuscript witnesses, such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and idiomatic expressions, are scrutinised to determine patterns of textual transmission and scribal activity. Scribal tendencies and editorial practices are also evaluated, offering insights into the scribe's approach to copying and editing the text (Tov 2014, 107, 124-125). Textual traditions are identified within the manuscript and grouped into distinct textual traditions. The reconstruction of textual history is conducted by synthesising evidence from the analysis of manuscript witnesses, tracing transmission pathways, scribal interventions, and editorial developments that have shaped the textual tradition over time. Synoptic comparisons of parallel passages within Jeremiah and related biblical texts help identify textual dependencies, interpolations, and harmonisations that will contribute to a deeper understanding of Jeremiah's textual integrity and interpretive history.

Textual critics use various methods to evaluate textual variants between the MT and Jeremiah's LXX. These methods include internal criteria, external criteria, contextual considerations, textual history, and synoptic comparison. Internal criteria involve analysing manuscripts' spelling, grammar, style, and linguistic features, which indicate scribal errors, editorial revisions, or intentional changes during transmission. Emmanuel Tov (2015, 28) "suggest that also the archetype of MT displays some internal discrepancies created by juxtaposing scrolls of a different nature. These discrepancies come to light in the textual idiosyncrasies of the book of Samuel, the special nature of the Elohistic Psalter, and the special nature of Jeremiah 27–29." External criteria, such as the age, provenance, and reliability of manuscript witnesses, play a crucial role in evaluating textual variants. In the view of Tov (2015, 132) "trust in this translator may be established by way of an analysis of the translation character and by external support for the reconstructed Hebrew source of the LXX."

Older manuscripts closer to the date of composition are generally considered more reliable, and manuscripts from different geographic regions exhibit distinct textual traditions. Contextual considerations involve considering the immediate and broader literary context of textual variants within Jeremiah and the Hebrew Bible. Variants that align with thematic coherence, narrative consistency, and theological integrity are more likely to be original readings. Understanding the transmission history and scribal practices of the MT and LXX provides insights into the origin and nature of textual variants. Synoptic comparison of parallel passages in other biblical books offers additional perspectives on textual variants, helping to identify textual harmonisations, interpolations, and scribal tendencies across different textual traditions.

## **SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF TEXTUAL VARIANTS**

Textual variants in the Book of Jeremiah significantly influence biblical interpretation, revealing the text's message, theological themes, historical context, and literary structure. These variants reveal the fluidity and diversity of Jeremiah's textual tradition, allowing scholars to discern patterns of transmission, scribal practices, and editorial interventions. They also offer insights into Jeremiah's prophetic oracles, narrative episodes, alternative perspectives, thematic developments, and character motivations. This dynamic approach to textual analysis encourages engagement with the narrative and literary artistry of Jeremiah's composition. Variants in theological reflections and thematic motifs within Jeremiah deepen the appreciation of its theological richness. Scholars uncover diverse theological perspectives and interpretive traditions by studying variant readings related to concepts such as covenant, judgment, redemption, and eschatology (Wells 1984, 420).

Textual variants in Jeremiah's writings often reflect theological emphases, such as God's attributes, human responsibility, and divine judgment. They offer diverse interpretations of God's mercy, justice, and sovereignty. Historical context is also crucial, providing insights into ancient Israel's history, culture, and religious practices. Textual variants also influence literary conventions and rhetorical strategies in Jeremiah's composition, affecting narrative coherence, rhetorical flow, and thematic development. These variants offer insights into the literary

artistry and compositional techniques the prophet and his editors employ. Engaging critically with Jeremiah's prophetic oracles, narrative episodes, and theological reflections is essential for a deeper appreciation of its relevance for contemporary readers (Talmon 1975, 381). The presence of textual variants highlights the theological diversity and interpretive dialogue inherent in Jeremiah's reception history, reflecting diverse interpretive traditions, theological perspectives, and ideological concerns.

Textual variants in the Book of Jeremiah are crucial for biblical interpretation and exegesis, influencing scholarly debates, exegetical analyses, and theological reflections. They assess the reliability of textual traditions, reconstruct transmission history, and discern original readings. Comparing variant readings across textual traditions provides insights into alternative interpretations, theological themes, and exegetical possibilities. Textual variants aid in reconstructing the transmission history of the prophetic book, tracing the development of variant readings over time and discerning scribal practices, editorial interventions, and interpretive dynamics shaping its reception. Variants have interpretive implications for covenant, exile, restoration, and eschatology themes. They contribute to hermeneutical reflections on biblical inspiration, authority, and textual transmission. They highlight the dynamic interplay between textual stability and fluidity, prompting considerations of interpretive plurality, theological diversity, and ongoing interpretive dialogue between past and present readers.

## CONCLUSION

The study of textual variants between the MT and the LXX of the Book of Jeremiah has provided valuable insights into this prophetic text's transmission, interpretation, and significance within the Hebrew Bible. The MT reflects the traditional Hebrew textual tradition preserved by Jewish scribes, while the LXX represents an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew text. Textual variants offer insights into Jeremiah's textual tradition's fluidity and diversity, providing an understanding of its prophetic oracles, narrative episodes, and theological reflections. These variants have theological, historical, and literary implications, theological emphases, historical contexts, and literary conventions inherent in different textual traditions. They are relevant for biblical interpretation and exegesis, shaping scholarly debates, exegetical analyses, and theological reflections on critical themes within Jeremiah, such as covenant, exile, restoration, and eschatology. The study of textual variants in Jeremiah underscores the dynamic nature of biblical transmission and reception, challenging scholars to engage critically with the difficulties of textual tradition and interpretive diversity. It prompts methodological reflections on textual criticism methodologies, manuscript studies, and comparative analysis to understand Jeremiah's composition, transmission, and reception. The exploration of textual variants in Jeremiah enhances the relevance and accessibility of the prophetic text for contemporary readers, inviting critical engagement, theological reflection, and interpretive dialogue within faith communities and religious traditions.

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*Text-Critical Issues Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint Text of the Book of Jeremiah*

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