

Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon*, trans. Mark E. Biddle. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004 [previously published in 2002 by T & T Clark]. xvi + 153 pp. \$24.99, paper.

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The renowned Tübingen scholar Martin Hengel asks the question, “how did it come about that the collection of Jewish writings in the Greek language, significantly larger than the scope of the Hebrew Bible, become, under the designation ‘the Seventy’, the authoritative ‘Holy Scriptures’ of the Old Testament in the Christian church?” (22).

The assumption behind this question—that the early church accepted the LXX along with its apocryphal documents—is what Hengel sets out to prove in chapter 2, “The LXX as a Collection of Writings Claimed by Christians.” In this discussion Hengel investigates the way that the “translation legend” arising from the *Letter of Aristeas* was apparently embellished by Philo and then the early Christian apologists. While the *Letter of Aristeas* recounts the way that 72 elders from Israel translated the law of Moses in 72 days, Philo indicates that the translation was inspired and suggests that the translators, working as individuals, all arrived independently at the same translation (25–26). In Justin’s attempts to persuade his Jewish contemporaries, Hengel argues that he expanded the work of the seventy to the whole of the OT—not just the Pentateuch (27). Hengel then shows how Irenaeus used the notion that the seventy translators had individually arrived independently at the same translation to argue for the inspiration of the LXX (38–39). Having pointed to similar statements in Clement and Tertullian, Hengel suggests that Origen and Jerome are exceptions in making recourse to the Hebrew canon, a decision that excludes the apocrypha and looks to the Hebrew as the inspired text (41). Augustine attempted to regard both the Greek and the Hebrew OT as inspired, but eventually “Jerome’s new Latin translation found acceptance in the church” (53).

Chapter 3 is a consideration of “The Later Consolidation of the Christian ‘Septuagint Canon’.” Here Hengel discusses the books included in “the three great codices of the fourth and fifth centuries: Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus,” noting that “All exceeded the scope of the Hebrew Bible by including Judith, Tobit, Sirach and Wisdom, as well as the expanded books of Daniel, Esther and Psalm 151” (57). He then treats the earliest lists of canonical books. It is unclear to me why Hengel suggests that Melito of Sardis (c. AD170) is the first to use the term “Old Testament” when Paul used the same Greek phrase in 2 Cor 3:14. The “‘second class’ character of the writings not contained in the Hebrew canon” (66) is then discussed, as are the apocryphal documents that were rejected altogether (70–74).

Hengel comes to “The Origin of the Jewish LXX” in chapter 4. In this chapter he treats the initial translation of the Torah, followed by a discussion of what is known about how the rest of the OT came to be translated into Greek. Hengel’s handling of the historical evidence is fascinating, characterized by his usual erudition. The chapter includes a section on the writings included in the LXX which are not found in the Hebrew canon, followed by a section on what Hengel thinks the Prologue of Jesus ben Sirach, Philo, and Josephus tell us about the extent of the OT canon.

Hengel's fifth and concluding chapter is on "The Origin of the 'Christian Septuagint' and Its Additional Writings" (105). Here the focus is first on the way that the NT refers to the OT, and then on how early Christians regarded books that were outside the Hebrew canon.

Having indicated throughout the book that he sees little evidence for the closure of the OT canon, Hengel concludes with a shocking question. He writes, "As a New Testament scholar and Christian theologian, I would like to pose a question in view of the problem emerging here. Does the church still need a clearly demarcated, strictly closed Old Testament canon, since the New Testament is, after all, the 'conclusion', the goal and the fulfillment of the Old?" (125–26). The slim volume then concludes on page 127, followed by some 20 pages of handy indexes.

Perhaps because of the brevity of the book, it is prefaced by a 17 page "Introduction" written by Robert Hanhart. The inclusion of this essay on the "Problems in the History of the LXX Text from Its Beginnings to Origen" is a testimony to Hengel's intellectual generosity, for as Hanhart relates, Hengel first suggested that he write the piece because "you see many things differently" (1). Indeed. Before Hengel presents his argument, Hanhart argues in the introduction against a central prong of Hengel's thesis, namely, the claim that the OT canon was not closed. Against this Hanhart writes, "We can see that Hellenistic Judaism had a relatively well defined canon of 'Holy Scripture' already in the second century BC" (2). Hanhart discusses much of the same evidence Hengel will treat later in the volume (and some Hengel does not treat) from the perspective that these are indications that the OT canon was recognizably closed, which lays bare the fact that Hengel's conclusion that the OT canon was not closed—and might not need to be (!)—is not the only legitimate conclusion afforded by the evidence.

This is not a book for beginners. At points Latin and Greek texts are not translated, more significantly, a considerable familiarity with the broader scholarly discussion is assumed. Further, Hengel's choice to build his argument into the order of the material—beginning with the church fathers rather than moving chronologically from the formation of the LXX to its appropriation by the church—adds somewhat to the demand on the reader. Scholars and Ph.D. students, however, will benefit from this thorough interaction with the OT in Greek, second temple Judaism, and the early church into the fathers. Hengel's facility with this massive body of material is astounding. Those seeking an introduction to the LXX would do well to first consult a volume such as Jobes and Silva's *Invitation to the Septuagint*.

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