A HARMONY OF ISAIAH IN THREE TRADITIONS

The Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls — Phase 2E of the MT/LXX/DSS Textual Harmony Project

Independent Scholarly Research

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Preface

This volume presents Phase 2E of the MT/LXX/DSS Textual Harmony Project, focusing on the book of Isaiah — the most extensively cited Old Testament book in the New Testament, the most completely preserved book among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the book whose LXX translation exhibits the most theologically interpretive character of any major prophetic book.

Isaiah occupies a unique position in the textual history of the Hebrew Bible for four reasons:

First, the **Great Isaiah Scroll** (1QIsa^a), discovered in Cave 1 at Qumran in 1947, is the oldest complete book of the Bible ever found — dated to approximately 125–100 B.C.E. and predating the oldest complete MT manuscripts by more than a millennium. Its 54 columns of text provide an unparalleled window into the Hebrew text of Isaiah in the Second Temple period.

Second, the **LXX of Isaiah** is among the most theologically interpretive translations in the entire Septuagint corpus. The LXX translator (or translators) worked with consistent theological purposes — rendering the Hebrew in ways that emphasize universalism, eschatology, and wisdom, and that in several passages produce readings directly applicable to early Christian Christological claims in ways the MT does not support.

Third, Isaiah is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament **more than any other Old Testament book** — approximately 66 direct citations and hundreds of allusions. Understanding which text tradition underlies each NT quotation is therefore critical for NT exegesis.

Fourth, Isaiah presents the **"virgin birth" textual problem** — Isaiah 7:14 — in which the difference between the MT's *'almâh* (young woman) and the LXX's *parthenos* (virgin) is the single most debated textual variant in the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

The Three Traditions for Isaiah

The Masoretic Text of Isaiah

The MT of Isaiah is preserved in the standard witnesses: - **Codex Leningradensis** (L, 1009 C.E.) — basis of BHS and BHQ - **Aleppo Codex** (A, c. 920 C.E.) — partially preserved for Isaiah

The BHQ Isaiah volume (edited by Arie van der Kooij and others; Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013) provides the most current critical apparatus.

The MT of Isaiah is widely regarded as one of the **better-preserved** books in the Hebrew Bible — in striking contrast to Samuel, which is poorly preserved. The MT and the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) agree on the vast majority of the text, with variants that are largely orthographic (spelling differences) or minor. This overall agreement between the MT and the DSS is itself significant: it demonstrates that the proto-MT tradition of Isaiah was already well-established in the second century B.C.E.

The Septuagint of Isaiah

The LXX of Isaiah was translated in Alexandria, most likely in the second century B.C.E. — approximately the same period as the Great Isaiah Scroll was copied. It is the work of a single, educated translator who approached his task with considerable interpretive freedom.

The character of the LXX Isaiah has been analyzed definitively by Ronald Troxel (*LXX-Isaiah as Translation and Interpretation*, Brill, 2008) and Arie van der Kooij (*The Oracle of Tyre: The Septuagint of Isaiah XXIII as Version and Vision*, Brill, 1998). The consensus: the LXX translator was not simply rendering the Hebrew word for word but was producing an *interpretation* — a translation with consistent theological aims, consistent renderings of key terms, and consistent interpretive moves that reflect the translator's own theological perspective and Hellenistic context.

The critical edition is the **Göttingen Septuagint**, *Isaias* (edited by Joseph Ziegler, 2nd ed., Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967). The NETS translation (by Arie van der Kooij and others, 2007) is the scholarly standard English rendering.

For this harmony, the **Brenton LXX** (1851, public domain) is used for extended passages.

The Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah

Two principal Isaiah manuscripts were found at Qumran:

Signum	Location	Content	Character
1QIsa^a (1Q1)	Cave 1	**Complete Isaiah** (all 66 chapters)	Generally agrees with MT; significant orthographic variants; some substantive variants
1QIsa^b (1Q2)	Cave 1	Isaiah 41–66 (fragmentary)	**Closer to MT** than 1QIsa^a
4QIsa^a (4Q55)	Cave 4	Isaiah 1; 2; 4–6; 7	MT-aligned
4QIsa^b (4Q56)	Cave 4	Isaiah 1; 10; 13–14; 22; 24; 26–27	MT-aligned
4QIsa^c (4Q57)	Cave 4	Isaiah 9; 29; 31; 33; 40–41	MT-aligned
4QIsa^d–r	Cave 4	Various chapters	Mostly MT-aligned

The critical edition is the **Biblical Qumran Scrolls** (BQS) series: *Isaiah I and II* (edited by Eugene Ulrich, DJD XXXII; Oxford University Press, 2010).

1QIsa^a is the most important single manuscript in the DSS biblical corpus. Its 54 columns have been fully digitized and published by the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library. The scroll exhibits:

1. **Orthographic freedom** — longer spellings (plene writing) of words that the MT spells more briefly. These spelling differences account for the majority of variants between 1QIsa^a and the MT.

2. **Minor verbal variants** — approximately 2,000 differences from the MT, the majority trivial; perhaps 200 that are significant; and a handful that are theologically important.

3. **Occasional agreement with the LXX against the MT** — the most significant category for textual criticism.

Part One: The Superscription and Early Chapters (Isaiah 1–6)

Isaiah 1:1 — The Superscription

MT (ASV): The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

LXX (Brenton): The vision which Esaias son of Amos saw, which he saw concerning Juda, and concerning Jerusalem, in the reign of Ozias, and Joatham, and Achaz, and Ezekias, who reigned over Judaea.

1QIsa^a: Agrees with MT in substance; orthographic variants only.

Variance Notes: - **[ORTH]** The LXX adds *"who reigned over Judaea"* at the end — a clarifying expansion absent from the MT. The MT's "kings of Judah" (*malkê Yĕhûdâh*) is sufficient; the LXX adds the participial clause to make the royal identification explicit. - The LXX's "Esaias" vs. MT's "Isaiah" is a simple Greek transliteration convention throughout.

Isaiah 2:2–4 — The Mountain of the Lord

MT (ASV): And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.

And he will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

LXX (Brenton): That in the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be glorious, and the house of God shall be on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall come to it. And many people shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will tell us his way, and we will walk in it: for out of Sion shall go forth a law, and the word of God out of Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles: and nation shall not take up sword against nation, neither shall they learn to war any more.

1QIsa^a: Largely agrees with MT; the passage is well preserved in the scroll.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"established on the top of the mountains"* (*nâkôn bĕrô'sh hehârîm*) — LXX: *"shall be glorious"* (*phaneron estai*). The Hebrew *nâkôn* means established/firm; the LXX reads *phaneron* (manifest/glorious) — a meaningfully different theological image. The MT emphasizes the mountain's foundational stability; the LXX emphasizes its visible glory. - **[VAR]** MT: *"the law"* (*tôrâh*) — LXX: *"a law"* (*nomos*). The MT's definite article (*hattôrâh*, the Torah) makes this a specific reference to God's law; the LXX's

indefinite *nomos* (a law) is slightly more general. - **[Note]** This same passage appears in Micah 4:1–3 (the parallel is nearly verbatim) — one of the clearest examples in the Hebrew prophets of shared tradition. Both Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 show this oracle; neither MT nor LXX of either book explains which prophet originated it.

Isaiah 6:1–13 — The Throne Vision and the Call of Isaiah

Isaiah 6 is the account of Isaiah's inaugural vision — the seraphim, the throne, the burning coal, and the commission to preach to a people who will not hear. It contains one of the most important NT citations of Isaiah.

MT (ASV) — 6:1–3: In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said,

Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

LXX (Brenton) — 6:1–3: And it came to pass in the year in which king Ozias died, that I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne, and the house was full of his glory. And seraphim stood round about him; each one had six wings; and with two they covered their face, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one cried to the other, and they said,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Sabaoth: the whole earth is full of his glory.

1QIsa^a: The vision account is well preserved; agrees substantially with MT.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"his train filled the temple"* (*ûshûlâyw mĕlê'îm 'et-hahêkâl*) — the glory fills the Temple; LXX: *"the house was full of his glory"* (*kai plērēs ho oikos tēs doxēs autou*). The MT's *shûlâyw* (his train/skirts — the hem of God's robe) becomes in the LXX simply "his glory" (*doxa autou*) filling the house. The LXX translator avoids the anthropomorphic image of God's garment hem and replaces it with the more abstract concept of divine glory. - **[VAR]** MT: *"Jehovah of hosts"* (*YHWH tsĕbâ'ôt*) — LXX: *"Lord of Sabaoth"* (*Kyrios Sabaōth*). The LXX transliterates the Hebrew *tsĕbâ'ôt* (hosts/armies) as *Sabaōth* rather than translating it — a distinctive practice that preserves the Hebrew word in Greek liturgy. This is the form quoted in Romans 9:29 (*"Lord of Sabaoth"*) and Revelation 4:8 (*"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty"*).

Isaiah 6:9–10 — The Hardening Passage

MT (ASV): And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed.

LXX (Brenton): And he said, Go and tell this people, Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and ye shall see indeed, but ye shall not perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with

their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

1QIsa^a: Agrees with MT in substance.

NT Usage: Isaiah 6:9–10 is the most frequently cited Isaiah passage in the NT, quoted or alluded to in all four Gospels and Acts: - Matthew 13:14–15 (extended quotation, following LXX) - Mark 4:12 (shorter allusion, following MT/Aramaic Targum) - Luke 8:10 (brief allusion) - John 12:40 (following neither MT nor LXX precisely) - Acts 28:26–27 (extended quotation, following LXX)

Variance Notes — Critical: - **[VAR — Major]** MT: *"Make the heart of this people fat… shut their eyes"* — **God commands Isaiah to cause the hardening**. God is the active agent of judicial blindness. LXX: *"For this people's heart has grown dull… their eyes they have closed"* — **the people have hardened themselves**. The people are the active agents of their own blindness. This is one of the most significant theological differences between the MT and LXX in the entire book: - The MT presents divine judicial hardening as God's direct command — a profound and disturbing claim about divine sovereignty in judgment - The LXX softens this into human self-hardening — the people have done this to themselves - **[NT follows LXX]** Matthew 13:14–15 and Acts 28:26–27 follow the LXX's form, which attributes the hardening to the people (*"their eyes they have closed"*). John 12:40 is unique: *"He hath blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart"* — following neither MT nor LXX but presenting a third form that attributes the hardening to God but using different vocabulary. John's form is closest to the MT's theology (divine agency) but with different vocabulary. - **[THEOL]** This variant has direct bearing on the NT's theology of Israel's rejection of Jesus. The LXX form (self-hardening) is pastorally gentler; the MT form (divine judgment) is more theologically severe. Paul's argument in Romans 9–11 about the "hardening in part" that has come upon Israel draws on the divine-agency theology closer to the MT, even though he quotes the LXX elsewhere.

Part Two: The Immanuel Sign — Isaiah 7:14

The Most Debated Textual Variant in Isaiah

Isaiah 7:14 is the single most debated verse in the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The issue is specific: the Hebrew word *'almâh* and its rendering in the LXX as *parthenos*.

MT (ASV) — Isaiah 7:14: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, **a young woman** (*hâ'almâh*) shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

LXX (Brenton) — Isaiah 7:14: Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, **a virgin** (*parthenos*) shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.

1QIsa^a: The scroll reads *h'lmh* — the same consonants as the MT's *hâ'almâh* (the young woman). The DSS provides no support for the LXX's *parthenos* (virgin) reading — it agrees with the MT's term.

NT Citation — Matthew 1:22–23: Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, **the virgin** (*hē parthenos*) shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us.

Matthew follows the **LXX** (*parthenos*, virgin) rather than the MT (*'almâh*, young woman).

The Linguistic Analysis

The Hebrew word *'almâh*:

The Hebrew word *'almâh* (עַלְמָה) appears **nine times** in the Hebrew Bible: - Genesis 24:43 (Rebekah at the well) - Exodus 2:8 (Miriam) - Psalm 68:25 (maidens playing timbrels) - Proverbs 30:19 (the way of a man with a maiden) - Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8 (the maidens who love the king) - Isaiah 7:14 (the disputed verse) - 1 Chronicles 15:20 (musical notation *'al 'alamoth*)

In every other occurrence, *'almâh* denotes a **young woman of marriageable age** — typically (though not universally) assumed to be unmarried, but the word does not carry the specific semantic content of "virgin" (*bĕtûlâh*). The Hebrew word for "virgin" in the specific sense of a woman who has not had sexual intercourse is **bĕtûlâh** (בְּתוּלָה) — a different word that Isaiah could have used but did not.

The Greek word *parthenos*:

The Greek *parthenos* (παρθένος) can mean: 1. A virgin — a woman who has not had sexual intercourse (its primary and specific meaning) 2. A young unmarried woman — a usage found in some Greek texts where virginity is assumed but not the focus

The LXX translator's choice of *parthenos* for *'almâh* is defensible in sense 2 but carries the specific connotation of sense 1 in its most natural Greek reading.

Three Scholarly Positions

Position 1 — The LXX is a mistranslation (or over-translation): Most critical OT scholars (including those with no theological stake in the matter — Wildberger, Blenkinsopp, Sweeney) hold that *'almâh* means "young woman" (unmarried, likely a virgin by assumption), not "virgin" in the specific sense. The LXX translator chose *parthenos* because he associated *'almâh* with unmarried status, but the specific semantic content of virginity is not in the Hebrew. The original sign in Isaiah 7 was addressed to the specific historical crisis of Ahaz's reign (the Syro-Ephraimite War, c. 734 B.C.E.) and referred to a contemporary birth — either Isaiah's own son (see 8:3) or a royal birth — as a timetable for the political crisis to be resolved.

Position 2 — The LXX is a valid translation that Matthew uses typologically: Some critical scholars and many theological interpreters (Brown, Fitzmyer, Collins) argue that *'almâh* in the context of an extraordinary divine sign (*'ôt*, a sign) may carry connotations of an unusual conception, and that the LXX's *parthenos* is a legitimate interpretive rendering. Matthew's use is typological: the historical birth associated with Ahaz's time was a type or prefiguration of the ultimate Immanuel-birth in Jesus. The LXX's *parthenos* enabled the typological connection even if the historical original did not specifically prophesy a virgin birth.

Position 3 — The LXX reflects the intended meaning (traditional view): The traditional Christian reading holds that Isaiah specifically prophesied a virgin birth and that the LXX *parthenos* accurately renders the prophet's intent. The *'almâh* was chosen rather than *bĕtûlâh* because the prophet was describing not merely biological virginity but the condition of a specific woman whom God would cause to conceive in a miraculous way. This position is maintained by many in the evangelical and traditional Catholic exegetical traditions.

The 1QIsa^a Evidence

The Great Isaiah Scroll reads *h'lmh* — identical to the MT consonants, with the definite article: *the* young woman (or *the* 'almâh), not *a* young woman. This use of the definite article (*hê*) suggests the text had a specific young woman in mind — someone the recipients of the sign would recognize. This use of the definite article is present in both the MT and 1QIsa^a and is absent from the LXX (*parthenos* without the definite article in Matthew's quotation).

The 1QIsa^a evidence confirms the MT's *'almâh* and gives no support to the LXX's *parthenos*. Whatever the LXX translator was doing at Isaiah 7:14, he was not following a Hebrew Vorlage that had a different word — he was making an interpretive translation of the same Hebrew word the MT preserves.

Isaiah 7:14 — Broader Context

MT (ASV) — Isaiah 7:10–16 (the full sign oracle): And Jehovah spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah.

And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Butter and honey shall he eat, when he knoweth to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken.

Variance Notes — Contextual: - **[VAR]** MT: *"the young woman shall conceive"* (*hinnêh hâ'almâh hârâh*) — the Hebrew is ambiguous: *hârâh* can be a participle (*is pregnant*) or a perfect (*conceived*). If it is a participle, the woman is already pregnant and the sign is the name she will give the child. If it is a perfect (which is also possible), the prophecy anticipates a future

conception. The LXX's future *lēmpsetai* (*shall conceive*) follows the future interpretation. This ambiguity is in the Hebrew; the LXX has resolved it in the direction of futurity. - **[THEOL]** The contextual timetable in v.16 — *"before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken"* — places the fulfillment within the Syro-Ephraimite crisis of approximately 734 B.C.E. This temporal reference does not appear in Matthew's quotation. Matthew quotes only verse 14 in isolation, detaching it from its original political-historical context and applying it to the birth of Jesus.

Part Three: The Servant Songs — Isaiah 40–55

Overview of Second Isaiah (Deutero-Isaiah)

Chapters 40–55 of Isaiah — traditionally called "Second Isaiah" or "Deutero-Isaiah" in critical scholarship, on the grounds that they address the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.E.) rather than the Assyrian crisis (8th century B.C.E.) of chapters 1–39 — contain the most theologically rich material in the book and the most extensively cited Isaiah passages in the NT. The four **Servant Songs** (42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) are the centerpiece.

Isaiah 40:3 — "Prepare the Way of the Lord"

MT (ASV): The voice of one that crieth, **In the wilderness** prepare ye the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God.

LXX (Brenton): The voice of one crying **in the wilderness**, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God.

1QIsa^a: Agrees with MT.

NT Usage: - Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23 — all four Gospels apply this verse to John the Baptist

Variance Notes — Punctuation/Interpretation: - **[VAR — Punctuation]** The Hebrew can be read two ways depending on where the phrase *"in the wilderness"* is attached: - **MT punctuation** (Masoretic accents): *"A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord'"* — the voice cries, and the preparation is to happen *in the wilderness*. The construction of the highway is the event in the wilderness. - **LXX punctuation**: *"A voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'"* — the voice is *in the wilderness*, and the preparation is of "the way of the Lord" without geographic specification. - The LXX's punctuation is followed by **all four Gospels**: John the Baptist is the voice crying *in the wilderness* — the wilderness being where John preaches, not where the highway is to be built. This Christological application of the passage requires the LXX's punctuation, which locates the crying voice in the wilderness. - The MT's punctuation does not support the NT's application nearly as directly.

Isaiah 42:1–4 — The First Servant Song

MT (ASV): Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed will he not break, and a smoking flax will he not quench: he will bring forth justice in truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.

LXX (Brenton): Jacob is my servant, I will help him: Israel is my chosen, my soul has accepted him; I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

He shall not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor shall his voice be heard without. A bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench; but he shall bring forth judgment to truth. He shall shine out, and shall not be discouraged, until he have set judgment on the earth: and in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

1QIsa^a: Agrees substantially with MT; the servant is not explicitly identified.

NT Usage — Matthew 12:18–21: Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1–4 at length — the longest OT quotation in Matthew's Gospel — applying it to Jesus's healing ministry:

Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR — Major]** MT: unnamed servant — LXX: *"Jacob is my servant… Israel is my chosen."* The LXX explicitly identifies the servant as Jacob/Israel — a collective identification. Matthew's quotation does **not** follow the LXX here: Matthew's version has no Jacob/Israel identification, aligning instead with a reading closer to the MT or a pre-Matthean Greek text that omitted the identification. - **[VAR]** MT: *"he will bring forth justice"* (*mishpât*) — LXX: *"judgment to the Gentiles"* (*krisin tois ethnesin*). Both have the Gentiles (MT: *gôyim*; LXX: *ethnesin*) as the recipients of the servant's justice/judgment. The LXX makes explicit what the MT implies. - **[VAR]** MT: *"He will not fail nor be discouraged"* — LXX: *"He shall shine out, and shall not be discouraged."* The MT's *yikbeh* (be dimmed/discouraged) is rendered by the LXX as *"shall shine out"* (*analampsai*) — the opposite image. The MT says he will not be *extinguished*; the LXX says he will *shine*. These are not contradictory but they are substantially different images. - **[VAR]** MT: *"and the isles shall wait for his law"* — LXX/Matthew: *"and in his name shall the Gentiles hope."* Matthew follows a reading closer to the LXX here but with minor differences. The NT's universalist hope is explicitly stated; the MT is slightly more restrained in its expression.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 — The Fourth Servant Song

This is the most extensively discussed passage in the entire OT for NT interpretation. It is cited, alluded to, or paraphrased in virtually every major section of the NT — the Gospels (the Passion

narratives), Acts (Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch), Paul's letters, 1 Peter, and Revelation. It is the primary OT text used to interpret Jesus's death as vicarious and atoning.

Isaiah 52:13–15 — The Exaltation of the Servant

MT (ASV): Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand.

LXX (Brenton): Behold, my servant shall understand, and be exalted, and glorified exceedingly. As many shall be amazed at thee, so shall thy face be without glory from men, and thy glory shall not be honoured by the sons of men. Thus shall many nations wonder at him; and kings shall keep their mouths shut: for they to whom no report was brought concerning him, shall see; and they who have not heard, shall consider.

1QIsa^a: Generally agrees with MT; the scroll is legible at this passage.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"he shall sprinkle many nations"* (*yazzeh gôyîm rabbîm*) — LXX: *"many nations shall wonder at him"* (*thaumasontai autou ethne polla*). The Hebrew verb *nâzâh* means "to sprinkle" (as in priestly sprinkling of blood or water). This is the priestly-atoning image: the servant sprinkles the nations as the priest sprinkles sacrificial blood. The LXX has *"shall wonder at"* (*thaumasontai*) — an entirely different image: amazement rather than sprinkling. Whether the LXX translator read a different Hebrew word or deliberately avoided the priestly imagery is debated. The NT does not quote this verse specifically, but the priestly-atoning theology of the MT underlies the NT's interpretation of Jesus's death. - **[VAR]** MT: *"his visage was so marred more than any man"* — LXX: *"so shall thy face be without glory from men."* The MT's *mish'hat* (marring/disfigurement) is rendered by the LXX as *"without glory"* (*adoxēsei*) — an abstraction from the specific physical disfigurement of the MT.

Isaiah 53:1–12 — The Servant's Suffering and Exaltation

MT (ASV) — Selected verses: [v.1] Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed?

[v.3] He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.

[v.4] Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

[v.5] But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

[v.6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[v.7] He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

[v.10] Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand.

[v.11] Of the travail of his soul shall he see, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities.

[v.12] Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

LXX (Brenton) — Selected verses: [v.1] Lord, who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

[v.3] But his form was ignoble, and inferior to that of the children of men; he was a man in suffering, and acquainted with the bearing of sickness, for his face is turned from us: he was dishonoured, and not esteemed.

[v.4] He bears our sins, and is pained for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction.

[v.5] But he was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his bruises we were healed.

[v.6] All we as sheep have gone astray; every one has gone astray in his way; and the Lord gave him up for our sins.

[v.7] And he, because of his affliction, opens not his mouth: he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.

[v.10] The Lord also is pleased to purge him from his stroke. If ye can give an offering for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed:

[v.11] the Lord also is pleased to take away from the travail of his soul, to shew him light, and to form him with understanding; to justify the just one who serves many well; and he shall bear their sins.

[v.12] Therefore he shall inherit many, and he shall divide the spoils of the mighty; because his soul was delivered to death: and he was numbered among the transgressors; and he bore the sins of many, and was delivered because of their iniquities.

1QIsa^a: The scroll is well-preserved at Isaiah 53. Several significant variants are present:

- **1QIsa^a at 53:11**: The scroll reads *"he shall see light"* (*yir'eh 'ôr*) — confirming the LXX's *"to shew him light"* (*deixai autō phōs*) against the standard MT (which lacks *'ôr*, "light"). This is the most important single variant in 1QIsa^a for text-critical purposes.

NT Usage — Isaiah 53 in the NT:

NT Citation	Isaiah 53 Verse	Notes
John 12:38	53:1	*"Lord, who hath believed our report?"* — LXX form
Romans 10:16	53:1	*"Lord, who hath believed our report?"* — LXX form
Matthew 8:17	53:4	*"He took our infirmities"* — follows MT against LXX
1 Peter 2:22	53:9	*"who did no sin"* — LXX
1 Peter 2:24	53:5	*"by whose stripes ye were healed"* — LXX
Luke 22:37	53:12	*"was numbered with transgressors"* — LXX
Acts 8:32–33	53:7–8	Extended quotation — LXX
Romans 4:25	53:12	*"delivered up because of our trespasses"* — LXX

Variance Notes — Isaiah 53:

- **[VAR — Major]** MT 53:4: *"Surely he hath borne our **griefs** (chŏlî, illnesses/diseases)"* — LXX: *"He bears our **sins** (hamartias)."* The MT's *chŏlî* means physical illness; the LXX translates it as *sins* (hamartias). Matthew 8:17 explicitly quotes the MT's disease meaning (*"He took our infirmities"*) and applies it to Jesus's healing of the sick. Paul and 1 Peter follow the LXX's sin-bearing meaning. The same Hebrew verse thus supports two different NT theologies — Jesus as healer (MT interpretation) and Jesus as sin-bearer (LXX interpretation).

- **[DSS — Important]** 1QIsa^a at 53:11: The MT reads *"Of the travail of his soul shall he see"* — without specifying what the servant will see. 1QIsa^a adds *'ôr* (light): *"he shall see **light** from the travail of his soul."* The LXX also has the light: *"to shew him light."* This DSS reading confirms that the LXX's *light* is not a translator's addition but reflects a genuine Hebrew textual variant. The verse with *"light"* reads: the servant will see light — resurrection imagery — from his suffering. The version without *"light"* (standard MT) is more ambiguous. The DSS here confirms the LXX's reading against the standard MT.

- **[VAR]** MT 53:10: *"when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin"* (*'âshâm*, the guilt offering) — LXX: *"If ye can give an offering for sin."* The MT's conditional (*'im*) introduces an extraordinary theological statement: if/when the servant's soul is made a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days. The LXX's reading is grammatically different and theologically softer — turning a bold statement about the servant's death as atonement into a more conditional construction. The NT's sacrificial interpretation of Jesus's death follows the MT's theology rather than the LXX's.

- **[VAR]** MT 53:12: *"he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"* — LXX: *"he bore the sins of many, and was delivered because of their iniquities."* The MT's *wayipgga' bapôshĕ'îm* (*"he made intercession for the transgressors"*) is a powerful priestly intercessory image. The LXX has *"was delivered because of their iniquities"*

(*paredothē*) — a different image (being handed over/delivered). Luke 22:37 quotes the MT's intercessory form; Romans 4:25 (*"delivered up because of our trespasses"*) echoes the LXX's *paredothē* tradition.

Part Four: Selected Passages from Isaiah 56–66 (Trito-Isaiah)

Isaiah 61:1–2 — "The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me"

MT (ASV): The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

LXX (Brenton): The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to declare the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompense; to comfort all that mourn.

1QIsa^a: Agrees substantially with MT.

NT Usage — Luke 4:18–19: At Nazareth, Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah and applies this passage to himself:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"the opening of the prison to them that are bound"* (*pĕqach-qôach la'ăsûrîm*) — LXX: *"recovery of sight to the blind"* (*tuphlos anablepsin*). These are completely different readings. The MT's *pĕqach-qôach* means "opening wide" (of the prison); it uses a word related to the root *pâqach* (to open eyes), but in the MT it modifies the prison, not the eyes. The LXX reads *"recovery of sight to the blind"* — interpreting *pâqach* in the eye-opening sense. - **Luke follows the LXX**: Luke 4:18 has *"recovering of sight to the blind"* — the LXX's reading, not the MT's. Luke also adds *"to set at liberty them that are bruised"* which is not in Isaiah 61 at all (it appears to come from Isaiah 58:6 — a composite quotation). - The difference matters theologically: in the MT, the servant proclaims freedom from captivity (political liberation); in the LXX and Luke, the servant also restores physical sight (healing ministry). - **[VAR]** MT: *"the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance"* — LXX: *"the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompense."* Luke 4:19 quotes only *"the acceptable year of the Lord"* — stopping before the "day of vengeance/recompense." This deliberate truncation is theologically significant: Jesus stops reading mid-sentence at the Nazareth sermon, proclaiming only the year of favor, not yet the day of judgment. This has been interpreted as a distinction between the era of grace (first coming) and the era of judgment (second coming).

Part Five: The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) — Key Variants

Orthographic and Grammatical Variants

The majority of 1QIsa^a's approximately 2,000 differences from the MT are **orthographic** — differences in spelling that do not affect meaning. Examples:

- 1QIsa^a regularly uses **plene** (full) spelling where the MT uses defective spelling: e.g., MT *mlek* (king) vs. 1QIsa^a *mlwk*; MT *bn* (son) vs. 1QIsa^a *bwn*
- These differences confirm that the scroll's scribes were working in a Second Temple Hebrew context with evolving orthographic conventions, not with different semantic content

Substantive Variants in 1QIsa^a

Chapter:Verse	MT Reading	1QIsa^a Reading	LXX	Significance
1:15	"your hands are full of blood"	"your hands are full of bloodshed"	"full of blood"	Minor expansion
7:14	*hâ'almâh* (the young woman)	*h'lmh* (same consonants)	*parthenos* (virgin)	Major NT variant
33:2	"our arm every morning"	"his arm every morning" (3rd person)	3rd person	Pronoun variant
40:7	"the people is grass" + second clause	Lacks the second clause "surely the people is grass"	LXX lacks the repetition	MT repetition; 1Q lacks it
49:17	"thy sons shall make haste"	"thy builders shall make haste" (*bônayik* not *bânayik*)	"thy builders"	**LXX and 1QIsa^a agree against MT**
53:11	"he shall see" (of soul's travail)	"he shall see **light**" (*yir'eh 'ôr*)	"to shew him **light**"	**DSS and LXX agree against MT**

Isaiah 49:17 — Thy Sons or Thy Builders?

MT (ASV): Thy **sons** (*bânayik*) shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth from thee.

1QIsa^a: Thy **builders** (*bônayik*) shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth from thee.

LXX (Brenton): And thou shalt be quickly built by those of whom thou wast made desolate.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** The Hebrew consonants *bânayik* (thy sons) and *bônayik* (thy builders) differ only in the vowel of the first syllable — a distinction not visible in unpointed Hebrew text. The MT vocalization *bânayik* (sons) is the standard pointing; 1QIsa^a reads *bônayik* (builders), confirmed by the LXX's *"built"* (*oikodomēthēsē*). The DSS and LXX agree against the MT: Zion will be rebuilt by its builders, not peopled by its sons. Both images are contextually appropriate to the restoration context of Isaiah 49; the MT's "sons" is perhaps the more expected image; the DSS/LXX's "builders" is more specific.

Appendix A: Summary of Major Isaiah Divergences

Passage	MT Reading	LXX Reading	1QIsa^a	NT Follows	Type	Significance
Isa 6:9–10	God commands hardening (imperative)	People have hardened themselves (perfect)	Agrees with MT	Matt 13/Acts 28: LXX; John 12:40: MT theology	[VAR/ THEOL]	Who causes the blindness?
Isa 7:14	*'almâh* (young woman)	*parthenos* (virgin)	*h'lmh* = agrees with MT	Matt 1:23: LXX	[VAR — most debated]	Virgin birth textual basis
Isa 40:3	Prepare way *in the wilderness* (geographic)	Voice crying *in the wilderness* (locating the voice)	Agrees with MT	All four Gospels: LXX punctuation	[VAR — punctuation]	John the Baptist's location
Isa 42:1	Unnamed servant	**Jacob/ Israel** is my servant	No identification	Matt 12:18: neither (no Jacob)	[VAR]	Who is the servant?
Isa 49:17	"thy **sons**" (*bânayik*)	"thy **builders**"	**1QIsa^a: builders**	—	[VAR — DSS/LXX agree]	Consonantal ambiguity
Isa 52:15	Servant "shall **sprinkle**" nations	Nations "shall **wonder at**" him	Agrees with MT	—	[VAR/ THEOL]	Priestly vs. wonder image

Passage	MT Reading	LXX Reading	1QIsa^a	NT Follows	Type	Significance
Isa 53:4	He bore our **griefs** (*diseases*)	He bore our **sins**	Agrees with MT	Matt 8:17: MT; 1 Pet 2:24: LXX	[VAR/ THEOL]	Healing vs. sin-bearing
Isa 53:11	"he shall see" (no object)	"to show him **light**"	**1QIsa^a: "he shall see light"**	—	[VAR — DSS/LXX agree]	Resurrection imagery
Isa 53:12	"made **intercession** for transgressors"	"delivered because of their iniquities"	Agrees with MT	Luke 22:37: MT; Rom 4:25: LXX echo	[VAR/ THEOL]	Intercession vs. delivery
Isa 61:1	"opening of prison to bound"	"**recovery of sight** to blind"	Agrees with MT	Luke 4:18: **LXX**	[VAR]	Healing vs. liberation

Appendix B: Isaiah in the New Testament — A Full Accounting

Isaiah is quoted or clearly alluded to more than any other OT book in the NT. The following table covers the major direct citations:

NT Reference	Isaiah	MT Reading	LXX/DSS	NT Follows	Significance
Matt 1:23	7:14	*'almâh* (young woman)	*parthenos* (virgin)	**LXX**	Virgin birth prophecy
Matt 3:3	40:3	Way prepared *in wilderness*	Voice *in wilderness*	**LXX punctuation**	John the Baptist
Matt 8:17	53:4	*"borne our diseases"*	*"borne our sins"*	**MT**	Healing ministry
Matt 12:18–21	42:1–4	Unnamed servant	Jacob/Israel servant	**Neither** (no Jacob)	Jesus as servant
Matt 13:14–15	6:9–10	Imperative hardening	Perfect self-hardening	**LXX**	Parable explanation
Luke 4:18–19	61:1–2	*"opening of prison"*	*"recovery of sight"*	**LXX**	Nazareth sermon

NT Reference	Isaiah	MT Reading	LXX/DSS	NT Follows	Significance
John 1:23	40:3	Geographic wilderness	Voice in wilderness	**LXX punctuation**	Baptist's self-description
John 12:38	53:1	*"Who believed our report?"*	Same	LXX	Unbelief of Israel
John 12:40	6:10	God blinds	People blind themselves	**MT theology** (but neither exactly)	Rejection of Jesus
Acts 8:32–33	53:7–8	*"as a sheep to slaughter"*	Same (LXX)	**LXX**	Ethiopian eunuch
Acts 28:26–27	6:9–10	Imperative hardening	Perfect self-hardening	**LXX**	Paul's final word to Rome
Rom 9:29	1:9	*"Lord of hosts"*	*"Lord of Sabaoth"*	**LXX** (*Sabaoth* transliterated)	Remnant of Israel
Rom 10:16	53:1	*"Who believed?"*	Same	LXX	Israel's unbelief
Rom 10:20–21	65:1–2	*"I was found of them…"*	Same	LXX	Gentiles and Israel
1 Pet 2:22	53:9	*"no violence in his mouth"*	*"no deceit in his mouth"*	**LXX** (*"deceit"* not *"violence"*)	Sinlessness of Christ
1 Pet 2:24	53:5	*"by his stripes we are healed"*	Same	LXX	Atonement

Appendix C: The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) — A Summary

Physical description: 54 columns of text on 17 sewn sheets of parchment. The scroll measures approximately 7.3 meters (24 feet) in length and 30 cm (12 inches) in height. It is the largest and best-preserved of all the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Date: Paleographically dated to approximately 125–100 B.C.E. by Frank Moore Cross. Some scholars (Menahem Mansoor, Peter Flint) have proposed dates as early as 200 B.C.E.

Scribal characteristics: Written by at least two scribes (the break occurs between columns 27 and 28, between Isaiah 33 and 34). The scribes used corrections, erasures, and marginal notes extensively — evidence of careful but not mechanically precise copying.

Theological character: 1QIsa^a is not a sectarian document — it shows no evidence of specifically Essene/Qumran theological editing. It is a general-purpose copy of Isaiah that

happened to be placed in the cave at Qumran, perhaps as part of the community library. Its text type is neither consistently proto-MT nor consistently LXX-aligned but represents an independent Hebrew transmission tradition.

Significance: The scroll demonstrated two things simultaneously: (1) the remarkable stability of the MT tradition — over a millennium, the text of Isaiah had been transmitted with extraordinary fidelity; and (2) the existence of Hebrew variants that confirmed some LXX readings previously dismissed as translator errors or inventions.

Appendix D: Essential Scholarship for Isaiah

Primary Text Editions

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- Ziegler, J., ed. *Isaias*. Septuaginta XIV. 2nd ed. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967. [LXX — Göttingen]
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Commentaries

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- Parry, D.W., and E. Qimron. *The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a): A New Edition*. Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 32. Brill, 1999.

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- Brown, R.E. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. Updated ed. Anchor Bible Reference Library. Doubleday, 1993. Pp. 143–153. [The fullest treatment]

- Collins, J.J. "The Sign of Immanuel." In *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*. Eerdmans, 1999.

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- Roberts, J.J.M. "Isaiah and His Children." In *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*. Eisenbrauns, 1985.

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