The transmission, translation, and preservation of the Scriptures have been the object of much study over the centuries, particularly in the last century. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other written texts discovered in archaeological surveys has brought epigraphy and related fields into mainstream scholarship. One of the more significant benefits for biblical studies has been how these findings have also renewed interest in the Septuagint. However, scholarly interest in the Septuagint has quite often moved beyond introductory concerns, leaving many interested in the topic unable to engage in the debate because of an inability to learn the necessary foundational issues related to Septuagint scholarship. In response to this problem, Karen Jobes, Professor of New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Wheaton College, and Moises Silva, former professor at Westmont College, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, have co-authored *Invitation to the Septuagint* in order to provide “a relatively brief and inviting introduction for the student who has no prior knowledge of the Septuagint” (9).

**Summary**

Jobes and Silva divide this work into three principle parts. Part One is designed to introduce the reader to basic facts and concepts necessary to engage Septuagint studies (27). Part Two then assumes at least the beginner’s knowledge of part one and aims to move the reader to an “intermediate level of proficiency in the use of the Greek Bible” (10). Part Three then moves on to review the current state of Septuagint scholarship, with the hope that some students may find further study worthwhile (10).
Part One includes four chapters that serve to provide the reader with the introductory knowledge necessary to continue in the discussion. In discussing the origin of the Septuagint and other Greek versions in chapter one, Jobes and Silva make clear that it is somewhat misleading to speak of the Septuagint, as it was produced over a long period of time in a variety of places by different translators (30). Besides the Septuagint (that is, the Old Greek or LXX), the chapter also introduces the reader to Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, which the authors later explain as translations “more or less in competition with the Septuagint” (47). Chapter two then moves on to the transmission of the LXX through a discussion of Origen’s Hexapla, the Lucianic recension, other Greek manuscripts (uncials and minuscules), secondary versions such as Syriac and Coptic, and finally ancient citations. Chapter three moves from the medieval to modern times, a shift that the authors identify as taking place with the invention of the printing press (69). Not only did the printing press allow for rapid reproduction of texts, but this period also saw an increase of critical editions. Though many scholars aspired to produce a critical text of the Septuagint, the authors credit Paul de Lagarde and Alfred Rahlfs (a student who completed his project), with the first definitive critical edition (74-75). Another important issue is the inclusion of deuto-canonical or apocryphal books in the Septuagint. Chapter four concludes Part One with a discussion on the Septuagint as a translation. In this chapter, Jobes and Silva describe the various linguistic, conceptual, and theological challenges of translating a text from one language to another, particularly since they are of different language groups (one NW Semitic and the other Indo-European, 91).

Part Two begins with the role of the Septuagint in biblical studies. The authors state that the goal of this chapter is “to facilitate reading ‘Septuagintal Greek’ by highlighting its distinctive features and clarifying its character” (103). They discuss loan words and loan
translation, as well as syntactical features and translation techniques. The next three chapters all deal with textual criticism. Chapter six focuses on several text critical questions, one of which is the way Septuagint text criticism is both similar to and different from New Testament text criticism. Both deal with the transmission of Greek documents, have similarities in character and style, were adopted by Greek-speaking Christians as their Bible, and some of the most significant manuscripts of the Septuagint are in codices that also contain the New Testament (125).

Nevertheless, the Septuagint is mostly translation literature, Christians were not around during many of the changes to the text, and many copies of the Septuagint, even during Christian times, were copied independently, so there is no necessary parallel with the New Testament (126).

Chapter seven then addresses the role of the Septuagint in text criticism, relating the LXX to the Masoretic Text, using some examples to explain cases where one or the other should be understood as the preferred reading. Chapter eight then addresses the significant contributions made by the Qumran texts to the discussion. Chapter nine explores alternatively the New Testament as a source for text criticism of the LXX and the LXX as a source for the study of the New Testament. Chapter ten, the final chapter in Part Two, looks at several texts and gives a line by line analysis of the text critical issues involved and how one should balance the LXX and MT readings. One clear warning throughout is that one should not put too much emphasis on an LXX reading if the translator is clearly struggling with the text himself (213).

Part Three is meant to be a survey of the current state of Septuagint studies. The authors begin this section in chapter eleven with biographical sketches of key scholars in Septuagint studies. Among the many scholars involved, several make regular appearances in the discussion and footnotes of earlier chapters. Most frequently the authors have made use of Lagarde, Rahlfs, and Henry Barclay Swete. Chapter twelve then discusses current attempts to use the LXX in
linguistic research, and chapter thirteen considers the quest for the original Greek text and the recensional history of the Greek translation, paying particular attention to Lucian’s edition and the *Kaige* recension. The final chapter considers current studies that are exploring ways in which the LXX may reveal theological developments in the Hellenistic Era. The two main areas of discussion are messianism and eschatology. Though many push for the usefulness of the LXX in this task, the authors are skeptical about the possibility of results. They argue that “the particular character of the LXX may minimize its usefulness as a window into Jewish thought at that time” (302).

**Critical Evaluation**

Jobes and Silva have assumed a difficult task in attempting to write an understandable and accessible introduction to the Septuagint to students with no prior background in the subject, yet they are successful in this endeavor. The organization of the work, in which the basic facts and issues are dealt with together in the first four chapters, make this work accessible to nearly any reader with an introductory knowledge of the biblical text and historical context. Moreover, they are able to accomplish this survey in Part One without requiring the knowledge of biblical languages, which is quite a difficult task given that the subject matter is entirely devoted to the Old Testament’s translation from one biblical language to another. However, lest the knowledgeable reader be dissuaded from reading the book, Part Two provides numerous examples comparing the Hebrew MT and the Greek LXX, as well as discussing the nuances of text critical problems. Part Three likewise gives a survey of the current state of Septuagint studies, both with respect to the scholars involved and the areas of interest, and thus serves as a helpful gateway for intermediate students to continue on in the field of research and study.
One of the significant strengths of the work is the care which the authors take in defining terms. One such example is the term Septuagint. This should come as no surprise since the authors identify the dangers posed by the common equivocal use of the word Septuagint (32), which has caused problems in communication between author and reader (or speaker and hearer). With respect to their definition, they note how Septuagint at various times means the modern version of the LXX, specific recensions or editions throughout history, or any Greek translation of the Old Testament. Moreover, they are then careful throughout the work to establish which meaning they intend when they use the word. Thus, early in the work, Septuagint is often followed by the parenthetical addition of “or Old Greek” (e.g. 55), and later in the work it is clearly referring to modern printed editions of the LXX. Related to the authors’ strength in clarity of the meaning of the words is the addition of a glossary in Appendix C. As the book, at the least Part One, is aimed at students with little to no knowledge of the subject, it would be extremely difficult to learn all of the new terms simply by reading the chapter. Yet with the addition of a glossary in Appendix C, it serves three helpful purposes. First, it helps clarify in definition form a term that may simply be used contextually in the text. That is, if a reader does not quite understand a term as it is used in the text, the glossary can help clarify. Second, as readers move through the book, he or she does not have to hunt for a term that appears in Part Two that the reader forgot from Part One. For example, the Kaige-recension is mentioned briefly in Part One and then shows up in Part Two with little introduction. Rather than having to hunt down where the reader found this term, the authors provide a glossary that provides a helpful definition. In this case, the authors are especially thorough in that they footnote the earlier discussion (see page 172, footnote 13, that refers the reader back to chapter one, pages 41-42).
The third helpful feature of the glossary is as a reference tool to return to when reading other literature on the subject.

Numerous other strengths regarding the organization, depth, and clarify of the book could be presented, but many of these are apparent with a cursory glance or sample reading of the book and thus do not warrant extended discussion here. Though the book as a whole is helpful, there are a couple weaknesses. The more significant weakness lies in the overarching concept of the book. The authors repeatedly state that before one can use the Septuagint for text critical or other studies, it must be read on its own terms (119). However, it is unclear what the authors intend by this statement. In the immediate context of this specific statement on page 119, the authors note that the Greek text itself must be established (120). Does this mean that reading the LXX on its own terms means doing text critical study of the Greek text first? That seems to be the hint with its usage here. However, the statement about reading the LXX on its own terms would seem most naturally to imply reading it on its own terms, that is, answering questions such as “What does the LXX say?” and “What does it mean?”. If this is the understanding, then it is confusing why the authors would wait until the final chapter to explore the theological implications of the LXX, and even that chapter is dependent upon the theology derived from the LXX’s variation from the MT; thus, it is not truly on its own terms. Clarifying this issue would go a long way towards helping beginning students understand the first step in Septuagint studies.

Another weakness is in the specific application of method in one instance. The authors use Deuteronomy 31:1 as an example of when the LXX is a preferred reading over the MT. They argue that the LXX would point to a translation of Deuteronomy 31:1 as יְבֵדָל מִשְׁמַא לֵךְ יָדָר rather than the existing MT text of יְבֵדָל מִשְׁמַא לֵךְ יָדָר, which they see as plausible on account of a similar use in 32:45 (155). They suggest that this is convincing internal evidence. Also, the
external evidence, on account of 1QDeut 13.ii.4, points to the LXX translation (155-156). This evidence seems convincing enough to push the LXX reading ahead of the MT reading as the most original. However, in order for this to be the case, לְדַּבֵּר must become לְדַבִּר. Though possible, in order to make a text critical shift from the MT to the LXX, there should be sufficient evidence to overturn the MT reading. This would include being able to explain all of the changes to the text. However, the authors merely assert that the former change with respect to לְדַּבֵּר and לַדַּבֶּר “led to the further change of לְדַּבֵּר to לְדַּבִּר” (156). They give no evidence for this change, and thus their otherwise convincing argument is left to rest upon an unsupported assertion of a further change. In order to demonstrate convincingly this shift, they ought to have given further evidence for the reasons why such a change from לְדַּבֵּר to לְדַּבִּר might occur.

**Conclusion**

Among available introductions to the Septuagint, this volume is, and will likely continue to be, the most accessible and helpful for introductory studies. Moreover, the depth of Parts Two and Three make this a valuable textbook for seminary courses on the Septuagint because it offers both introductory and more detailed analysis of the discipline. While some minor changes could be made to improve the scope, namely a true analysis of the LXX on its own terms, this work accomplishes the aims it set out to achieve and is well worth reading for any student interested in the Septuagint, text criticism, or biblical studies in general.