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Social Distancing in the Septuagint as Ancient Medical Practice and Its Implications in the Gospel of Luke and Public Health

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Abstract

The Septuagint (LXX), as one of the ancient texts, is marked by many intriguing aspects that prompted the society of the time to adopt certain practices centred on protecting the well-being and functionality of their society. One such intrigue was the development of a medical procedure to help separate people from one another in the event of a disease outbreak. Using social-historical hermeneutics as a method of interpretation, it is observed that social distancing became a medical norm in the social, cultural, and economic contexts. The ancient Israelites, as shown in the LXX, had daily routines that did not hinder their ability to distance themselves from one another during disease outbreaks. Stipulations regarding distancing were known to everyone in their society. This article therefore examines how the concept of social distancing began in the LXX and why. It will also discuss the implications of understanding the Gospel of Luke, as Luke employs words similar to those found in the LXX. These lessons will be particularly relevant to present-day society, especially in public health.

Keywords: Social Distancing, Septuagint, LXX, pandemic, ancient medicine, Luke's Gospel, public health

Introduction

Humanity often faces many undesirable and unwarranted conditions. Many of these continue, sometimes leaving humanity without hope of survival. We are still suffering from a pandemic that has claimed many lives. Coronavirus, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), has ravaged humanity and left many people dead in many countries. According to the WHO, there are over 75 million reported cases and 1.6 million deaths from the coronavirus that has ravaged global health (2020). Infectious diseases have been a part of humanity for a long time. Such diseases have claimed many lives for many years since the existence of humanity.

Ancient texts such as the Septuagint (LXX) use different language to invite readers to consider how the ancient Israelites addressed issues related to infectious diseases. The use of the Septuagint is intentional, since it is a direct translation of the Masoretic Text (MT). The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek version of the Old Testament. The LXX is necessary instead of the MT because the LXX was available to Luke as a source text. Many of these diseases were thought to be punishments from God, especially when humanity crossed its boundaries. Contagious diseases

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were seen as ravaging not only the physical but also the spiritual (Feder, 2013). They viewed illness as invoking both personalistic and naturalistic tendencies (Hong, 2006). It, therefore, called for social separation between those who suffered infectious diseases and those freed from them. Then, people took concrete steps to control the outbreak of such a disease. The result was the separation of healthy people from those who were unhealthy. The LXX contains language of separation between the healthy and the harmful. Numerous texts support this claim. This article therefore investigates how the language of controlling infectious diseases developed and was used in the LXX. As a result, this article focuses on social distancing in the Septuagint (LXX) as one medical practice in ancient Israel and its implications for the Gospel of Luke and public health. The actions and words of the Lukan Jesus in the leper texts invite direct implications for the Lukan leper texts. The reason(s) for such language and ideology will be explored in this article.

Therefore, this study will use a social-history methodology. The first task of this article is to browse through the LXX to find out the texts that have a similar concept to the present practice of social distancing and to trace some usage of words or practices similar to the present global situation of social distancing. It will also examine how the ancient world used these terms to describe social distancing practices. Applying social history as a hermeneutical framework enables this article to see COVID-19 as the leprosy of the modern world. Among all the diseases in the LXX, only leprosy was one for which social distancing was practised to curb its spread. Therefore, when an illness that calls for social distancing is mentioned, leprosy comes to mind, as it was known in the ancient world as a disease that carried both social and cultic implications. The study of the LXX as an ancient text, utilising the phenomenon, can be described as encompassing a framework of interpretation, or, in this context, what we can refer to as social-historical (Scholz, 2022).

Using a social-historical framework to study social distancing within society and its practices, this article examines how humanity reacts to the spread of certain diseases today, providing a framework for interpreting the same situation in the ancient world of the LXX. A social-historical approach applies modern methods to the study of ancient texts, incorporating presuppositions from the present context (Etukumana, 2016). Based on this assertion, Luise Schottroff (1995) demonstrates that “it is already… in its reflection on the biblical tradition a clear perspective on practical life today”, and she further adds that such interpretation is mirrored in that it is based on the social context of the interpreter. This precedent will guide the study of the current pandemic.

The study of COVID-19 as a pandemic has provided first-hand experience in examining such a phenomenon in the ancient world, as stipulated in the LXX. As noted earlier, conceptually, can we say that COVID-19 requires strict measures for its control? This necessitates measures that will enable us to contain it. Ancient Israel treated leprosy similarly, with measures to contain it. The study further argues that the concept of leprosy in the LXX has a broader perspective, as it was regarded as impurity and defilement with both spiritual and physical connotations. Therefore, the affected person was separated from the healthy ones (Leviticus 13:46; Huremović, 2019:85). As a result, a review of the LXX, especially the Pentateuch, reveals stipulations regarding sickness and its control. Social-historical interpretation supports this study by applying the modern concept of social distance to similar situations in the ancient world, particularly in the Bible. Therefore, this article will further examine the LXX and the Gospel of Luke to identify texts that address leprosy and to determine how social distancing, or its cognates, was practised in the ancient world of the LXX and the Gospel of Luke. Some of the texts in the LXX that relate to the treatment of leprosy will be carefully examined, especially in the context of the synonyms that express social distancing in the LXX. In doing so, the article will investigate the reasons behind the creation of social distancing in the LXX and in a similar context in Luke. The article will draw on the LXX and the Gospel of Luke to examine how this practice has supported public health

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systems, past and present. The question is whether we can determine how contagious diseases were controlled in the LXX. How can such actions help Luke scholars understand Jesus' actions and words in the Gospel of Luke? What can modern humanity learn from the LXX in the case of an outbreak of disease(s)?

The sacred and the profane dichotomy in the LXX as the creation of social distancing

Modern scholarship widely regards social distancing as a relatively recent term in the human vocabulary, but the concept is not new. It has a long history, dating back to the ancient Old Testament text. Liz Mineo (2021) asserts that the three primary English dictionaries —Collins English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and the Oxford English Dictionary —added the term "social distancing" to their entries in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic. Damir Huremović (2019: 85) provides a succinct definition based on the context of Leviticus in the LXX. According to Leviticus 13:46, Huremović defines social distancing as "when isolation is not absolute, but rather measures are limited to reducing and minimising contact and exposure." He adds that it “refers to all measures used to reduce contact, including isolation and quarantine.” The language in the LXX conveys this idea through medical terms and concepts. A disease outbreak prompted Moses, the leader of the people, to implement measures including social isolation and quarantine. In the LXX, there tends to be a sharp contrast between the Holy and the unholy, as stipulated in Leviticus 10:10: διαστεῖλαι ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τῶν βεβήλων καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ἀκαθάρτων καὶ τῶν καθαρῶν “You must differentiate between the holy and the profane and the clean and the unclean”.

This contrast is clear only when viewed through the lens of distinguishing between the holy and the profane. This contrast can bring either blessings or curses to humanity. On one hand, blessings in the form of good harvests, progress, and victory in war (Lev 28:1-4); on the other hand, curses in the form of famine, diseases, and death (Lev 27:14-26; 28:15-68). Mircea Eliade (1959) draws scholars of religion and sacred texts to Exodus 3:5, where Moses is told to remove his shoes because he is standing on holy ground. This provides Eliade with a theoretical framework of a significant demarcation between the 'sacred place' and the 'other place'. This demarcation influenced Israel’s understanding of God. This dichotomy helped shape the religious and social life of the Jewish people. Thus, the concept of the sacred and the profane has an important role whenever the religion of the LXX is discussed.

E. W. Hengstenberg (2008) argues that the concept of the sacred and the profane in the LXX originated from the fall of humankind, separating the unholy from the holy, the human from the divine, and dirt from purity. Mircea Eliade sees an unhealthy or chaotic cosmological world aligned with profanity. Alternatively, what may be called the "other world" is highly engaged with the unholy; a domain that characterises a separation from the divine presence and its holy precinct (Eliade, 1959). As Hanna Liss (2006) puts it, “The status of impurity is the opposite of the status of purity” in the LXX.

This dualism necessitated specific actions for humans to elevate themselves to the level of the immortal (Scruton, 2011), as religious humanity aspires to live in the sacred cosmos (Eliade, 1959). This dichotomy appears to have shaped Israel's spiritual, social, and political expressions. Timothy M. Willis (2009) alleges that the concept later created boundaries between the holy and unholy, as well as between holy and unholy food. It was a common belief that if sacred things were allowed to be held by an unqualified person, it might result in the “sacrilegious and wiping away the aura" (Scruton, 2011). Scruton (2011) further summarises thus: “We cannot encompass our experience of good and evil, duty and fulfilment, if we do not describe our world as one in

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which the distinctions between pure and impure, the sacred and the profane, the pious and the impious are fundamental and motivating. Moreover, perhaps it is enough to show that this is so."

The tension created by the sacred-profane dichotomy was intended to remind humanity of the need for the holy. In ancient Israel, the system inculcated a sense of human emptiness and a constant need for the sacred, thereby creating a homogeneous aura of the holy presence. The presence of God among the people of Israel provided them with all the good things life could offer at that time (Etukumana, 2016). The absence of this homogeneous aura leads to disease and sickness. These diseases and ailments were addressed by approaching the sacred through various LXX processes, as stipulated by the Mosaic Law.

As mentioned, crossing the boundary between the Holy and unholy often brought diseases. Julius Preuss (2004) delineates that crossing the sacred precinct by Israel was one of the accusations that God levelled against Israel. Israel's inadvertent idolatrous behaviour caused many of them to fall victim to sickness and ill-health.

Moral misconduct could also lead to sickness. The cases of Miriam (Num. 12:9-12), Gehazi (2 Ki. 5:27), and King Azariah (2 Ki. 15:1-5) are typical examples. These three individuals crossed the divine boundary and contracted the disease; only Miriam survived, but she faced the consequences of her actions. Despite Moses' intervention and intercession, Miriam still underwent all prescribed procedures and medical diagnoses before she was cleared as fit to interact with other human beings in society. From the cases of Miriam's separation in Numbers 12:9-12 and that of King Azariah's banishment from the throne and his people, it is postulated that the people of ancient Israel practised distancing that enabled them to checkmate and control diseases that could ravage human society. Thus, the modern healthcare system appears to derive its concept of social distancing from ancient people, particularly from the Mosaic Law (Jamela & Ndebele, 2026).

Social Distancing in LXX and Its Synonyms

The assertions of Mineo (2021) and Huremović (2019) of the nonexistence of the term social distancing before 2020 in the key English Dictionaries compound the difficulty of dealing with an ancient text like LXX. However, providing a succinct definition of a modern term in an ancient text requires applying certain hermeneutic principles. One such principle is the use of synonyms. Synonyms become inevitable when expressing modern ideas in ancient texts. Paul Ellingworth (2008:25), while acknowledging the importance of synonyms in biblical translation and interpretation, further elucidates that the interpreter may "have to use the vocabulary at their disposal" when dealing with synonyms in a given text. In dealing with social distancing in the LXX, words that can express the idea of social distancing in the LXX will be employed in this section. Such words or phrases appear in many texts of the LXX, such as Leviticus 13:46; 14:3; Numbers 5:2-4; 12:14-15, and also in the Gospel of Luke, especially the leper text. Leper texts in Luke's Gospel are those texts that indicate the presence of leprosy (Luke 5:11-16; 17:11-19)

The term "social distancing" is not attested in the LXX. As noted earlier, its cognates are enmeshed in the notion that Moses had already defined such measures, as they were implemented to control contagious diseases. As far back as the 1950s, William R. Vis (1950) acknowledged that Moses in the LXX had a succinct idea of preventing disease that modern medical science could not comprehend, even without its concept of the disease's causative agent. He further notes that ancient Israelites believed such contact could spread diseases such as bubonic plague and typhoid fever. The measure was intended to impede any attempt to spread

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disease through discharge, as Samuel E. Balentine (2002) observes that a primary focus of parts of Leviticus is the "bodily impurity" of humanity, especially genital discharge. Ancient Israel struggled to control this impurity using the available means (Feder, 2013).

However, scholars such as Milgrom and Glasby have debunked the notion that medical practice in the Mosaic era resembled modern medicine. The correct statement is that the Mosaic era did not employ modern terminology applicable to modern medicine. Secondly, the modus operandi of the Mosaic era centred on theocracy as an unchallenged system of governance. People were allowed to portray faith in God as the only means of healing, with God as the people's healer. Practices that curbed the spread of any contagious diseases were applied for the benefit of humanity during the time of Moses.

The saying is true here: necessity is the mother of invention. Outbreaks and disease prevention often call for human invention and intervention. Many concepts of human society did not start with the present generation. These concepts have been with us for a long time. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is replete with such constructs that enabled the ancient Israelites to combat the progressive invasion of various diseases (Barrett & Armelagos, 2013). The isolation process of the ancient Israelites was one of the first known medical methods for controlling disease, a practice familiar to people for many centuries before the emergence of modern medical methods.

The science of medicine and hygiene was crucial in ancient Israel. The Bible contains several medical rules and practices similar to modern medicine (Sun, 2013). Moses, one of the earliest leaders in ancient Israel, provided his people with medical ideas to control diseases and sickness during his time (Sun, 2013). The similarities between LXX knowledge of controlling diseases and modern medical practices may have prompted Jun-fang Sun (2013) to acknowledge that the Bible is a source of knowledge for modern medicine, from which most medical terms and practices derive their origin and concepts. The Bible is rich in ancient medical knowledge that parallels that of the Greek and Mesopotamian worlds (Thiessen, 2018). This means that medical language and knowledge were not absent from the biblical corpus, as claimed by Milgrom and his protégés, such as Michael Glasby. The people of Israel did not practice any profession in the modern sense, as was common in their time, due to the primitive nature of their era. However, one must understand the nature of their culture and the governance that was established during the early Israelite period. All professions were practised in ancient Israel, but the practitioner was within the ambience of theocracy. The idea that governed all professionals and practices was simple: ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος κατασκηνῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν υἱῶν Ισραηλ "for I the LORD dwell amid the people of Israel" (Num 35:34). The theocratic nature of Israel’s system of government subsumed every professional under the priesthood's jurisprudence.

The argument in this article is not to affirm whether the LXX has a medical idea, but to show that the LXX incorporated many ideas tailored to God. This bundle of ideas was decoded by interpreting the ritual purity code in the LXX. In contrast, priests were seen as representatives of God and performed their function within this bundle of ideas. Israel, as a theocratic nation, implied that every function in society was projected to God as the performer, while the priests were the aids to the process of such functions. Every profession was interwoven and manifested to the people through a ritual. Rituals became the primary means through which people could sense God's presence, meet their daily needs, and achieve spiritual fulfilment.

As a society, we are firmly ingrained in the principles of rituals to create a relationship between the sacred and the profane. The LXX depicts occasions where distancing was highly promoted within society to maintain purity. The first case in the medical history of the LXX that called for

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distancing and separation involved Miriam, Moses' elder sister, in Numbers 12:1-15. Miriam was struck with a disease, and based on the traditional understanding of such a disease, she had to separate from the people. Moses' intercession and God's answer about Miriam's health support what we might call today's quarantine. It was a common way to control disease. Looking from the perspective of ancient Israel, as stipulated in Numbers 12:13-15, indicates that because of the sickness, και ἀφωρίσθη Μαριαμ ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς "Miriam was shut up outside the camp" for seven days. Social-historical interpretation suggests that the idea of Miriam, the sister of Moses, being quarantined for seven days is a common understanding. This was to prevent the spread of the disease to other people in the Israelite camp. This helped protect public health. In other words, Miriam was separated and quarantined away from the people of Israel for seven days (Ashley, 2022). The seven days were enough to monitor the accuracy of her healing and the restoration processes before her integration with the people.

The phrase "shut up outside the camp" is translated from the main verb of the sentence, "καὶ ἀφωρίσθη Μαριαμ ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς." The Greek word ἀφορίζω in the sentence means "to separate" or "to set apart." The usage of ἀφορίζω in the context of Numbers 12 is purely on medical grounds. The same applies to 2 Kings 15:5 and 2 Chronicles 26:21. It is strictly medical terminology that the ancient people of Israel used to distinguish between a healthy and an unhealthy person. Such instructions were implemented to prevent the spread of infectious diseases to unaffected persons. It was a stringent way of controlling the spread of diseases in the ancient world. Based on this belief, Paul S. Sehdev (2002) alleges that the current practice of medical quarantine may have derived its concept and practices from the Bible. As the leader of the Israelites, Moses devised a means to checkmate and control disease outbreaks among them. Those who suffered from various contagious diseases were confined outside the camp. The Books of Leviticus and Numbers (5:2) are decorated with the phrase ἐξαποστειλάτωσαν ἐκ τῆς παρεμβολῆς "put out of the camp", which directly implies that the sick persons were excommunicated from the amphictyonic confederacy of Israel until specific actions that verified their well-being were carried out. Such a person was denied contact with humanity. This implies that the sick person was not able to communicate with God and humans because they were shut out of the camp. It was the measure ancient Israel took to reduce the spread of infectious diseases among the people. Contemporarily, it would not be wrong to acknowledge that the social distancing stipulated in this context is more pronounced than what we call social distancing. The use of the phrase 'shut up outside the camp' in the context of Numbers 12:15 invites the idea that it was used in an absolute sense to refer to social distancing that is more provocative than the present usage. The phrase highlights the importance ancient Israel placed on controlling diseases within their context. The LXX in this text depicts a more challenging measure of social distancing or quarantine than is currently used in modern medical practice. It was the prerogative of the priests to ensure that anyone found to be unclean due to an underlying illness, sickness, or defilement would remain isolated as long as such defilement or disease persisted (Leviticus 13:46).

Cleansing as a Synonym for Social Distancing in LXX

"Cleaning" is another synonym that helps modern scholarship understand ancient medical practice in the LXX. The language of the LXX is emphatic in the use of words related to the terminology associated with its medical environment. The text strongly emphasises applying hygienic principles to contain the spread of any detected disease or infection. Dealing with the spread of diseases, the LXX uses κάθαρσις (catharsis) in Numbers 12:15. The word is derived from καθαίρω (to cleanse). The LXX uses it repeatedly in the context of ritual cleansing and hygiene. In Leviticus 12:4, the usage is associated with blood, particularly menstruation. The word

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is associated with purification and cleansing, which Jacob Milgrom (1991: 754-766) sees as what made the separation between the sacred and the profane in Israel. The essence of such cleansing was to halt the defilement of the holy by the unholy (Milgrom, 1991). To cleanse from guilt or defilement as a result of committing unholy acts, which may include eating of dead animals, touching of dead bodies, menstruation and contact with defiled blood, and what have you. Anyone found guilty of the above-mentioned unholy acts was required to undergo catharsis to be cleansed again. Upon its completion, this process qualified an unholy person to undergo catharsis for social contact and cultic association. In other words, it made the defiled whole.

The reason for cleansing is often categorised by theologians as cultic (Glasby, 2014). Cultic cleansing had much to do with the presence of the divine rather than the human. However, a critical investigation of the ancient text demonstrates otherwise. Modern scholarship sometimes dismisses the underlying reason for this cleansing process as inconsequential to ancient medical practices. The essence of using κάθαρσις as the keyword in the text during the time of Moses was not only to enrich the presence of the Holy but to protect the presence of the profane from being destroyed by any outbreak of disease. The ritual actions were designed to instil in people the need to be pure physically, spiritually, socially, and culturally. Michael Glasby (2014) seems to eat his words about leprosy by saying the hygienic treatment of such a disease was often followed by ritual purification. The use of "hygienic" by Glasby, who is well-versed in medical science and theology, has placed the Mosaic cleansing process within the framework of medical science.

Κάθαρσις was used in the LXX not only as a language of separation, but it was also used when one was undergoing the process of quarantine according to the Mosaic rule of medical practices. It can be understood as one of the treatment methods Moses formulated for the children of Israel to follow. Using this word allowed the people not to see Moses as a healer, but God as the healer of his people. The LXX renders it as ὕδατι ζῶντι (in the dative). It meant that purification was carried out in Israel. Israel used it as a means of purification of the people's profanity and made them clean to have affiliation with the sacred. The significance of living water in the process of catharsis has raised questions among scholars of the Bible. Hayah Katz (2012) examines the various methods Israel and its neighbouring nations used for water purification. One significant function of utilising the ὕδατι ζῶντι was to restore purity within the community (Katz, 2012). The ablution in the Israelites was a metaphor for a cultic ritual that signified God's presence among His people, using water as a cleansing agent to restore the people of Israel to Himself (Hildebrandt, 2019).

The argument here is not to ascertain the use of living water medically or ritually, but that living water played a crucial role in heightening the social distancing that ancient Israel practised. Without using living water as a means of purification, coming out from an isolation ground or quarantine centre would have been impossible for the household of Israel.

The reason for the language of Social Distancing in the LXX

As in the present medical situation, several reasons likely warranted Moses's prescription for maintaining social distancing in ancient Israel. These reasons are intertwined and spiralled around Israel's religious norms. Religion determined the people's activities; whatever followed was permitted by religion. Whether medical, social, economic, or cultic, priests acting on behalf of YHWH determined it.

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Reason for Religion and Social Distancing in LXX

Scholars such as Milgrom and Glasby appear not to perceive medical language and ideas in the Old Testament, as the Old Testament is burdened with many rituals that are not warranted in modern medical science. However, their context altered their thinking. In Africa, for instance, healing is often embedded in rituals (Marta Gruca, Tinde R. van Andel, and Henrik Balslev, 2014). Modern medicine is not free from rituals (Arnold et al., 2020). From all indications, modern medicine involves secular rituals. Howard Brody (2010) identifies that modern medicine is well-energised with rituals. According to him, rituals in contemporary medicine are found in all aspects, from prescription to the patient's healing. If modern medical practice emphasises rituals and actions, it suggests that the ancient Israelites were ritualised in all aspects of their medicine.

We previously acknowledged that Israel, as a nation, operated based on a bundle of ideas enshrined in religious rituals. The ritual actions were intended to make the people of Israel holy unto their God (Lev 11:45). The mandate of holiness for the household of Israel was the ultimate means by which the people could receive blessings and favour from God. Priests trained in various aspects of rituals carried out their functions as prescribed by the law. Michael Coogan (2008) asserts that the Old Testament priests were trained in medicine.

Moreover, legal systems were established to address the needs of the people of Israel. In contrast, J. J. Collins (2001) argues that the Old Testament does not mention physicians. Many Old Testament scholars disagree with this point (Glasby, 2014). Many scholars debate whether the priests served as physicians to the people of Israel. Ben Sira disputes the claim that there were no medical experts in the land of Israel by writing that they existed (Collins, 2001). Ben Sira's praise to physicians in 38:1-2 indicates the designated offices for medical experts during his time, when he writes: τίμα ἰατρὸν πρὸς τὰς χρείας αὐτοῦ τιμαῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔκτισεν κύριος παρὰ γὰρ ὑψίστου ἐστὶν ἴασις καὶ παρὰ βασιλέως λήμψεται δόμα "Honour a physician with the honour he deserves in consideration with his service, for he was created by God too. Healing comes from the Most High God, and it is like a gift from a king" The use of the statement παρὰ γὰρ ὑψίστου ἐστὶν ἴασις "healing comes from the Most High God" in Sir 38:2 by the author of Ben Sira projects the same belief as in Exodus 15:26, εγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ ἰώμενός σε "for I am the Lord your healer". Both authors acknowledge that God heals his people. Based on this assumption and belief, priests could perform various functions, including rituals that facilitated the people's physical and spiritual healing.

The rituals were not only a way for priests to offer sacrifices that sustained their livelihood, but also a means of dealing with impurity in the land. The ritual separated the holy from the unholy, creating a gap that could only be filled through ritual purification. This separation was also economical, as the ritual-infused food was reserved for the priests. Social distancing caused by impurity generated economic mobilisation for the priests, in that only ritual processes provided means through which unholy persons could be brought near to the Holy. These rituals gave the priests, who administered them, access to food and drink during their administration.

Through rituals, the priest could decode the distinction between clean and unclean within the amphictyonic nation of Israel. Social distancing was a naturally generated holiness code and a way of life God wanted from the people of Israel. The holiness code raised the people's consciousness to know and differentiate between what was required and what was not. The awareness of the intricacies of the purity code within the social strata of the people of Israel buttressed the idea of separation whenever such impurity was found. It was enshrined in the people's consciousness that Mary Douglas' (1966) "dirt" does not have an association with Rudolf

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Otto's (1936) "holy". People were conscious of this and ensured they did not cross these boundaries. The understanding of this separation naturally brought to the forefront the need for people to be cautious when interacting with one another. People understood defilement and the holy as a hiatus in ancient Israel. When people were segregated from one another, the tendency to isolate the sufferer from the rest of society was unbridled. Social demarcation was created. Bridging the gap created by social demarcation required a ritualisation process. These rituals cemented social, economic, and cultic relations within the nation of Israel.

Thus, social distancing alerted the people to their frailty and sense of unworthiness in Israel, and pointed them to ritual processes to revitalise their shattered relationship. The people could appreciate the need for rituals that would bring the quarantined person back into the community, reconnecting them with their relationship to God and humanity. As pointed out earlier, the ritual of social distancing helped build social, economic, and cultural relationships among the people of Israel. The implications of social distancing in the LXX were seen in Israel's social, economic, and cultural domains.

Health as a Reason for Social Distancing in the LXX

Another reason the people of Israel practised social distancing at this time was health-related. Gerhard F. Hasel (1983) points out that health in the Bible "embraces not only physical well-being, but also the spiritual, mental, and emotional qualities." Hasel (1983) further adds that health "is the wholeness and completeness of being in itself and about God, to fellow humans, and the world." Several aspects of the Old Testament emphasise and concern themselves with health in this holistic sense. As a result, the people were conscious of the spread of infectious diseases that could deter them from enjoying this understanding of health. They employed methods to prevent the spread of contagious diseases among the people.

One method used by ancient Israel, according to the LXX, was social distancing, isolation, or quarantine, as the case may be (Lev 13:46; Num 5:2). This ancient medical practice has endured for many centuries and remains an effective way to manage outbreaks and pandemics. The nation of Israel could curb all forms of disease without adequate medical equipment. Many people would have been affected if not for the measures taken to control the spread of such an infection. However, the people's assurance was in their God, who declared to them that he is the Lord their healer (Exo 15:26), but to be healthy, they must distance themselves from the sick.

Implications of Social Distancing in the Gospel of Luke and Public Health

This article will survey the Gospel of Luke to offer a glimpse of social distancing in the Gospel. The Lukan knowledge of medicine is undisputed, given the vast textual evidence to his credit within the New Testament (Col 4:14), and his use of medical language sets him apart among Lukan scholars as a trained physician (Marx, 1980; Weissenrieder, 2019). Many New Testament scholars also acknowledge his use of the LXX (Raurell, 1983; Steyn, 1990; Litke, 1993; Aryeh, 2024). Luke uses words that directly link his writing to the LXX in the leper texts, especially in Luke 5:11-16 and 17:11-19. He implicates the nature of the disease involved in the texts (Etukumana, 2020). Fitzmyer (1985) provides a succinct explanation, saying that the language of the text invites the idea of involvement with contagious disease. Hence, the Lukan use of words reflects their meaning in the LXX. For instance, the use of καθαρίσαι "to cleanse" in Luke 5:12 has direct implications for designated functions within the LXX (Lev 13-14). It was only the priests who had the power to perform this designated function of declaring the sick cleansed (Deut 21:5). The use of this word, καθαρίσαι "to cleanse", by the other evangelists Matthew (8:2) and Mark

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(1:40) shows the nature of the disease and the reason for such language (Etukumana, 2020). However, Myrick C. Shinall (2018) argues that the lepers in the Gospels received treatments contrary to those in the Hebrew Bible, as well as unmolested access to Jesus, based on the language of the text, especially in Luke 5:11 (Shinall, 2018). A careful reading of Luke's Gospel indicts the premise of Shinall for instance in Luke 17:11-19, Luke carefully emphasises on the action of the ten lepers using the phrase that was familiar to the people οἳ ἔστησαν πόρρωθεν (Lk. 17:12) "they stood at a distance (NIV), which Wolter (2017) acknowledges as stimulated by the command in Lev 13:46. In effect, the social distancing law enacted in the Leviticus still has its recourse in Luke and with indignity human treatment contra Shinall (2018) who defiantly sees the absence of normative implementation of Leviticus law in Luke.

Luke also uses many terms associated with the LXX to develop his ideology on social distancing in three ways. In the first place, Luke uses the same word that the LXX uses in defining the nature of diseases. Both the LXX and Luke use λέπρας "leprosy" to denote the skin disease, as in Leviticus 13-14. Luke's use of πλήρης λέπρας "full of leprosy" (Luke 5:12) is a direct mimic of Leviticus 13:12-13, where both the LXX and Luke accentuate the extent of the disease in the sufferer; such an individual was regarded as dead and socially excluded from the community (Wolter, 2016). Also, as earlier indicated, the use of καθαρίζω (Luke 5:12 and 17:14) signals the Lukan understanding of καθαρίσαι in the context of ritual cleansing and purity in Lev 14. The same applies to Luke's use of καθαρισμός, which is a direct citation from Leviticus 14:32. Finally, in Leviticus 13:2-5 and 14:2, the priest is required to declare someone clean or unclean. Luke directly affirms this legal system by advocating the issuance of a certificate to authenticate their cleansing (Luke 5:14 and 17:14). Therefore, a careful examination of the Lukan leper texts aligns with the LXX.

Jesus' responses to the requests in the Lukan leper texts are based on divine compassion and mercy. Corpus Hippocraticum prescribes virtue as a must for all doctors. This virtue, displayed by the Lukan Jesus, becomes a cardinal principle in the New Testament, yet it appears to be absent in the LXX. Whereas the priests feared the contagious disease, the Lukan Jesus moves forward to touch the man, the first leper, in 5:11-15 by saying, "I am willing. Be cleansed" (5:13 NJB). Annette Weissenrieder (2019) observes that Jesus's touch is a metaphor for healing in Luke's Gospel. As acknowledged earlier, ancient medicine recognised that priests were trained to discern right from wrong. Jesus' presence in Luke's Gospel functions as God, as in Exodus 15:26, and as priest-physician, as in Sira 3:8:1-2 in the LXX. One can infer that the presence of the Lukan Jesus invites collaborative efforts in modern medicine. Modern medicine encourages integrating diverse expertise and roles, particularly where spirituality intersects with medical science to facilitate healing (Carey et al., 2024). This collaboration consistently supports the provision of high-quality medical services. Modern healthcare providers (HCPs) have acknowledged the effectiveness of collaborative roles from various experts, including doctors, nurses, social workers, and priests, in providing healing (Best et al., 2024). By implication, no pastor can claim to act contrary to the moral guidelines of modern medical ethics, since medical science operates on ethical principles that support total health for patients (Carey et al., 2024).

In the ten lepers' narrative, which is Luke's Sondergut, Luke further discusses a situation in which ten lepers encounter the Lukan Jesus for healing. The healing enables them to be accepted back into the community (Etukumana, 2024). The use of the phrase οἳ ἔστησαν πόρρωθεν "they stood at a far distance" (Luke 17:12) is based on the prescription of the Mosaic Law that the leper must be separated from the healthy (Lev 13:46; Numbers 5:2; Wolter, 2017). The essence was maintaining the public health of the Israeli community.

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Reading Luke's Gospel, especially the leper texts within the context of social distancing in the LXX, using social-historical hermeneutics encourages continuing the LXX's ways of controlling disease, as envisaged in the Gospel. Luke's language, both explicit and implicit, reveals the continuity of the old disease-controlled system established from the time of Moses. Luke's emphasis on the contagious nature of the disease in his time is glaring in his writing:

1. Diseases such as leprosy have a high frequency of contamination, which is their ability to contaminate social, cultural, and cultic spaces (Etukumana, 2020). Therefore, this contamination must be controlled through the prescribed cleansing method. Such cleansing must be done in a designated place by the designated priest, who acts as a medical expert supervising the process. The Lukan Jesus is aware of this law. He advises that his patients must obtain a certificate attesting that they are free from contagious diseases to avoid burdening the community's public health system (5:14; 17:14).

2. The language of Luke in the leper texts shows that he was careful in depicting the law by using πόρρωθεν "at a distance" to indicate compliance with the law by the lepers. The same notion is found in 5:11, although Luke's interest is not in the law, but rather in the language. Luke's language depicts the young man as a wanderer in an isolated village. The use of μηδενὶ εἰπεῖν, "do not tell anyone," means that the leper was alone, which indicates that he was isolated from society for the safety of the community. His contact with society poses a threat to public safety and health. The man was separated from the people in his community. Therefore, one can infer that only Jesus and his disciples witnessed the healing process.

3. Again, Luke uses phrases in his text to show the certification or proof that the bearer is free from sickness before he can interact with other human beings freely. The Mosaic Law prescribed a death sentence for anyone who interacted with human society without proof of cleansing (Lev 13-14). Luke carefully acknowledges Moses's command, indicating that Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses, including the law of social distancing in the LXX. This aims to improve the public safety and health of the Lukan community. Jesus touching the leper in Luke 5:13 does not show that every priest or pastor can imitate Jesus and act contrary to the public health experts' rules and regulations. Jesus's actions in Luke portray him not only as a priest but also as a physician (Weissenrieder, 2019).

Conclusion

This article examined how the Old Testament Greek translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint (LXX), addresses disease using social-historical hermeneutics as the method of exploration. Through this methodology, it was realised that present-day COVID-19 is similar to how ancient Israel treated leprosy. In curbing the spread of leprosy, the ancient people in the LXX introduced an idea similar to present-day social distancing. Social distancing played a crucial role in preventing the spread of infectious diseases and in controlling and managing them. The dichotomy between the holy and the unholy created a sense of separation, which was evident in almost all spheres of Israel. This dichotomy paved the way for social distancing to avoid contamination that could endanger public health and people's safety.

Through the use of synonyms, it was realised that the people of Israel used social distancing to control contamination. This required coining many terms to help people understand the severity of contamination in Israel. Words and phrases such as "shut up outside the camp" and "cleansing"

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became necessary in Israel. Using such terms and phrases helped people stay careful and better manage infectious diseases, which should support sufferers' healing. While the Lord healed people, the priests were indispensable in caring for the people's physical and spiritual well-being. However, priests must monitor social distancing to benefit the entire community.

The COVID-19 outbreak in the twenty-first century has given modern humanity some insight into the LXX and enabled us to acknowledge the efforts of ancient people in combating contagious and contaminated diseases in their lifetime. However, while modern diseases are serious, leprosy in ancient Israel had more complications for the people, as it dealt with both spiritual and physical contamination, and this makes it different from the contagiousness of modern diseases. Ancient people suffered contamination from leprosy, which required ritual cleansing and purification, while modern disease control requires medical treatment for healing.

Luke's Gospel does not neglect the place of social distancing in his writing. He is aware of the implications of disease contamination and writes to convey this to his audience regarding the danger to the public health system. Understanding the LXX text sheds light on Luke's Gospel, enabling Lukan scholars to trace the origin of Luke's language on contagious diseases and their treatment in the LXX, as well as their implications for ancient public health. The article also reminds biblical scholars and public health caregivers that both the Old Testament (LXX) and the Gospel of Luke were earlier documents that used social distancing in the form of isolation and quarantine to curb pandemics and support public health systems in their time.

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