The Tenth of Tebet. What is the Septuagint?

This coming Thursday, January 1st, we will observe the Tenth of Tebet, a fast day which remind us of three tragic events. The main event we recall on this day is the onset of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebukhadnezar, the King of Babylonia in 586 b.c.e.. But there were other two events that we also remember in this day: the rendition of the Tora into the Greek language (8th of Tebet), and the death of Ezra haSofer (9th of Tebet).

On the 8th of Tebet, approximately in the year 260 b.c.e., in Alexandria, Egypt, King Ptolemy ordered 72 Jewish scholars, six for each tribe, to translate the Tora (the five Books of Moshe or Pentateuch) to Greek. King Ptolemy sought to disprove the existence of an unified Jewish interpretation of the Tora and thus having an excuse to delegitimize the Jewish tradition and humiliate the Jews. To this effect, the Jewish scholars were placed in separate workrooms. Yet, miraculously they all translated every word of the Tora in the same exact way.

This translation of the Tora is known as the Septuagint (in latin, "seventy"). Although it was done by prominent Rabbis, the Septuagint is not considered a translation which follows necessarily rabbinical tradition (The official Jewish translation of the Tora is the Targum Onqelos , aka Targum Didan, done ca. 100 c.e.). As explained in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Megila 9) in many cases the authors of the Septuagint deliberately deviated from the traditional Jewish understanding of the Tora and adapted the Biblical text to the Greek mentality and sensitivities to please the king and avoid a situation of danger for the Jews. One example, instead of translating: "In the beginning God created", they wrote: "God created in the beginning". Why? Because for the Greek mentality the first word of this sentence would be considered its main subject. Had they translated "In the beginning God created" it would have been understood by the Greeks as if a god called "bereshit", ("In the beginning", i.e., a god who governs time, like the mythological "Cronus" or his son "Zeus") was the one who begot Eloqim □□□.

As a whole, the translation of the Tora to Greek was

considered by Jewish historiography as a dark event. Why? Because the Bible was now a book that everyone, gentiles included, expected to fully comprehend, even if they ignore completely the original language of the Tora: Hebrew. Furthermore, in the times of the Hashmona-im the Septuagint was extensively used by the assimilationist Jews to advance their agenda and seek to syncretize Greek and Jewish values.

Three centuries later, the Septuagint paved the way for the advancement of non-Jewish "Biblical" religions. Unlike pagan idolatry which was clearly antagonistic to the Tora, these new religions were supposedly based on a Jewish scripture. The Bible was now reinterpreted at will and used to justify non-Jewish ideas or beliefs "in the name of the Bible", all of which caused uncountable tragedies to the Jewish people for centuries or millenniums.
As Timothy McLay explains, "the Jewish Scriptures as they were known, read and interpreted in the Greek language, provided the basis for much, if not most, of the interpretive context of the New Testament."As we will see BH tomorrow, the 9th of Tebet we commemorate the passing of Ezra haSofer