The use of the Jewish Scriptures in the Gospel of John has been the object of considerable study over the past forty years. While this study has focused primarily on the explicit quotations, at times attention has also been directed to what are properly called ‘references’ to Scripture within the gospel. Typically there are four questions put to these texts: (1) what document of the Bible is being cited; (2) which version of the text is being used, the Hebrew or the LXX; (3) what accounts for any divergences from the exact form of the biblical text; (4) is there a significance in the particular formula used to introduce the quotation?

While some citations are taken verbatim from the LXX, at times there appears to be no precise parallel either in the LXX or in the Hebrew. When the correspondence with either version is not exact, opinions on the source of the quotation have, not surprisingly, varied, as have the explanations for the variation. Overall, it can be

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1 This brief study is offered to David E. Aune in deep appreciation for his collegiality on the faculty of Loyola University Chicago and for his many contributions to New Testament scholarship.

2 The two major studies are those of E. D. Freed, Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John (NovTSup 11; Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1965) and M. J. J. Menken, Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996). But see also G. Reim, Studien zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund des Johannesevangeliums (SNTSMS 22; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1974) and B. Schuchard, Scripture Within Scripture (SBLDS 133; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992). Other significant bibliography can be found in Menken’s book and will not be reproduced here.

3 There are sixteen texts where there is a quotation of Scripture and an indication that it is to be related to an incident or words connected with Jesus (1:23; 2:17; 6:31, 45; 7:38; 10:34; 12:13, 15, 38, 40; 13:18; 15:25; 19:24, 36, 37). In addition there are five texts which make “reference” to the fulfillment of Scripture without the appearance of a specific citation being given (7:42; 8:17; 12:34; 17:12; 19:28). Menken would include in his list of citations instances which in his view are the author’s “own free phrasing.” Thus Menken would consider only 17:12 and 19:23 to be “references.” However Menken does not study those texts where there is “free phrasing” since it would not be possible, he feels, to determine which specific form of the text is being “cited.”
said, I think, that there is considerable agreement that John made primary use of the LXX for his quotations (although they are hardly all verbatim) but there is also general recognition that at times the author clearly made use of the Hebrew.¹

One of the primary differences between the various studies has been in the explanations why the Johannine text varies from the Hebrew and the LXX. The most common explanation has been that John was quoting freely from memory. It has also been suggested that in some cases the author may have had access to a text not available to us. Others have suggested that at least some of the changes were deliberate modifications for theological purposes. Hoskyns is an early example of this last approach. The most recent and most thorough example is Maarten Menken, who proposes that the changes were deliberate and were a result of Johannine editing and that the way the changes were effected was one that was in keeping with first century exegetical techniques.

Of additional concern are the formulas used to introduce these quotations.⁵ While there is substantial variety in the wording of these formulas, some appear more frequently than others. Specifically some scholars have argued that one formula, which occurs in some variation of the form ‘in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled,’ seems to appear only in the Passion material and in material closely associated with it. Some have proposed that this suggests a special source for the Passion.

1. A Peculiar Text

With this brief description of the overall topic as a context, this study seeks to focus on one particular text: John 17:12. Although commentators (in the literal sense of the word, i.e. those who have written commentaries on the entire gospel) are inevitably forced to make

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¹ Menken makes reference to this agreement (Quotations 206). He states his own conviction in this regard in his Conclusions (Quotations 205). Three texts agree verbatim with the LXX (10:34; 12:38; 19:24). Of the other citations, four appear to be based on the Hebrew rather than the LXX. (12:38; 12:40; 13:18; 19:37). The others reflect the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew although they are not in verbatim agreement with either.