
Septuagint

Septuagint – What is it? ¹

Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The Septuagint has its origin in Alexandria, Egypt and was translated between 300-200 BC. Widely used among Hellenistic Jews, this Greek translation was produced because many Jews spread throughout the empire were beginning to lose their Hebrew language. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek also gave many non-Jews a glimpse into Judaism. According to an ancient document called the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is believed that 70 to 72 Jewish scholars were commissioned during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus to carry out the task of translation. The term “Septuagint” means seventy in Latin, and the text is so named to the credit of these 70 scholars.

Septuagint – Influence on Christianity

The Septuagint was also a source of the Old Testament for early Christians during the first few centuries AD. Many early Christians spoke and read Greek, thus they relied on the Septuagint translation for most of their understanding of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers also relied heavily on the Septuagint, as a majority of Old Testament quotes cited in the New Testament are quoted directly from the Septuagint (others are quoted from the Hebrew texts). Greek church fathers are also known to have quoted from the Septuagint. Even today, the Eastern Orthodox Church relies on the Septuagint for its Old Testament teachings. Some modern Bible translations also use the Septuagint along side Hebrew manuscripts as their source text.

What Does the Septuagint Contain

The Septuagint contains the standard 39 books of the Old Testament canon, as well as certain apocryphal books. The term "Apocrypha" was coined by the fifth-century biblical scholar, Jerome, and generally refers to the set of ancient Jewish writings written during the period between the last book in the Jewish scriptures, Malachi, and the arrival of Jesus Christ. The apocryphal books

include Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), the Wisdom of Solomon, First and Second Maccabees, the two Books of Esdras, additions to the Book of Esther, additions to the Book of Daniel, and the Prayer of Manasseh.

The Apocryphal books were included in the Septuagint for historical and religious purposes, but are not recognized by Protestant Christians or Orthodox Jews as canonical (inspired by God). Most reformed teachers will point out that the New Testament writers never quoted from the Apocryphal books, and that the Apocrypha was never considered part of the canonical Jewish scripture. However, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches include the Apocrypha in their Bible (except for the books of Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh).

Septuagint - Is it a Reliable Translation?

Since the Septuagint is a translation, scholars speculate if it accurately reflects the Hebrew scriptures of the 2nd century BC. A close examination of the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text (the early Hebrew text of the Old Testament) show slight variations. Were these errors in translation, or are the Septuagint and Masoretic Text based on slightly different Hebrew manuscripts? The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has helped to shed light on this question. Discovered in the Qumran region near the Dead Sea beginning in 1947, these scrolls are dated to as early as 200 BC and contain parts of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. Comparisons of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint show that where there are differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, approximately 95% of those differences are shared between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text, while only 5% of those differences are shared between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. Does this mean that the Septuagint is unreliable and that our Old Testament is wrought with contradictory sources? No. It is imperative to note that these “variations” are extremely minor (i.e., grammatical errors, spelling differences or missing words) and do not affect the meaning of sentences and paragraphs. (An exception is the book of Jeremiah, in which the actual passages are arranged differently.) None of the differences, however, come close to affecting any area of

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teaching or doctrine. The majority of the Septuagint, Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls are remarkably similar and have dispelled unfounded theories that the Biblical text has been corrupted by time and conspiracy. Furthermore, these variations do not call into question the infallibility of God in preserving His word. Although the original documents are inerrant, translators and scribes are human beings and are thus prone to making slight errors in translation and copying (Hebrew scribal rules attest to how exacting scribes were). Even then, the Bible has redundancy built into its text, and anything significant is told more than once. If grammatical mistakes were introduced that makes a point unclear, it would be clarified in several other places in scripture.

Septuagint - Dramatic Evidence for the Credibility of Messianic Prophecy

The Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls establish a very dramatic piece of evidence for Christianity – that the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah unquestionably predated the time that Jesus Christ walked the earth. All theories of 1st Century AD conspiracies and prophecy

manipulation go out the door when we realize that prophetic scripture like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 were fixed in written form at least 100 years before Christ, and probably many more. Again, despite time, persecution, and the incredibly minor instances of scribal mistakes, the Septuagint is just another example of how the Biblical text has remained faithful in its message and theme. The Holy Bible is truly a divinely inspired and preserved letter from God that is deserving of our time and attention.

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)

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