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## WHAT IS THE "SEPTUAGINT"?



# Bible Versions

## Your questions answered

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If you look in the preface of a modern Bible, you will probably find a reference to the *Septuagint*, or *LXX* for short. The translators of all modern Bibles, including the New King James, use the *Septuagint* along with other texts in translating the Bible. They claim that the *Septuagint* contains true readings not found in the preserved Hebrew text. Thus they give it great importance. But what *is* the *Septuagint*? Here's how the legend goes:

The *Septuagint* is claimed to have been translated between 285-246 BC during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Alexandria, Egypt. His librarian, supposedly Demetrius of Phalerum, persuaded Philadelphus to get a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Then the Scriptures (at least Genesis to Deuteronomy) were translated into the Greek language for the Alexandrian Jews. This part of the story comes from early church historian Eusebius (260-339 AD). Scholars then claim that Jesus and His apostles used this Greek Bible instead of the preserved Hebrew text.

### The Letter of Aristeas

The whole argument that the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek before the time of Christ rests upon a single document. All other historical evidence supporting the argument either quotes or references this single letter.

In this so-called *Letter of Aristeas*, the writer presents himself as a close confidant of king Philadelphus. He claims that he persuaded Eleazar, the high priest, to send with him 72

scholars from Jerusalem to Alexandria, Egypt. There they would translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, forming what we now call the *Septuagint*.

Jewish historian Josephus, Jewish mystic Philo (both first century AD) and others add to the story. Some say the 72 were shut in separate cells and "miraculously" wrote each of their versions word-for-word the same. They say that this proves "divine inspiration" of the entire *Septuagint*.

Thus, the *Septuagint* is claimed to exist at the time of Jesus and the apostles, and that they quoted from it instead of the preserved Hebrew text. This story has been passed around for centuries. But is it the truth? Was this *Septuagint* really written before the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus and His apostles? Did they quote it? Was it really inspired by God? And if the story is a fake, why make up the story? Is there another reason to get people to use (or believe in) the *Septuagint*?

### **The verifiable facts:**

- The writer of this letter, Aristeas, claims to have been a Greek court official during the time of Philadelphus' reign. He claims to have been sent by Demetrius to request the best scholars of Israel to bring a copy of the Hebrew scriptures to Alexandria to start the *Septuagint* translation project. He even goes so far as to give names of *Septuagint* scholars, yet many of the names he gives are from the Maccabean era, some 75 years too late. Many of them are Greek names, definitely not the names of Hebrew scholars. There are many other evidences that this letter is from a different time period, and is thus a fake. The writer is lying about his identity.
- The supposed "librarian," Demetrius of Phalerum (ca. 345-283) served in the court of Ptolemy Soter. Demetrius was *never* the librarian under Philadelphus.
- The letter quotes the king telling Demetrius and the translators, when they arrived, how wonderful it was that they came on the anniversary of his "naval victory over Antigonus" (*Aristeas* 7:14). But the only such recorded Egyptian naval victory occurred many years after Demetrius death, so the letter is a fraud!

The *Letter of Aristeas* is a hoax that doesn't even fit the time period in which it claims to have been written. And since the other ancient writers merely add to this story, it is clear that the story itself of a pre-Christian *Septuagint* is a fraud. Even critical textual scholars admit that the letter is a hoax. Yet they persist in quoting the *Letter of Aristeas* as proof of the existence

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of the *Septuagint* before Christ.

## New Testament evidence

Many scholars claim that Christ and his apostles used the Septuagint, preferring it above the preserved Hebrew text found in the temple and synagogues. But if the Greek Septuagint was the Bible Jesus used, he would not have said,

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18)

Why would Jesus not have said this? Because the jot is a Hebrew letter, and the tittle is a small mark to distinguish between Hebrew letters. If Jesus used the Greek *Septuagint*, His scriptures would not have contained the jot and tittle. He obviously used the *Hebrew* scriptures!

In addition, Jesus only mentioned the scripture text in two ways, (1) "The Law and the Prophets" and (2) "The Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms":

"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Luke 24:44

The Hebrews divide their Bible into three parts: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Jesus clearly referred to this. The *Septuagint* had no such division. In fact, it contains Apocryphal books interspersed throughout the Old Testament. The sequence is so hopelessly mixed up that Jesus could not possibly have been referring to it!

## Who is pushing the *Septuagint*?

So why do we still hear the story? Why do people give it a second thought? Are there other reasons why they still try to use the *Septuagint* to find "original readings" that were supposedly "lost from the Hebrew"?

### 1. Roman Catholics Need It

According to the Roman Catholic *Douay Bible*:



"...the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation from the original Hebrew, and which contained all the writings now found in the Douay version, as it is called, was the version used by the Saviour and his Apostles and by the Church from her infancy, and translated into Latin, known under the title of Latin Vulgate, and ever recognized as the true version of the written word of God" —*Preface*, 1914 edition.

So Roman Catholics desperately want the *Septuagint* to be genuine —even inspired! You see, the so-called *Septuagint* is where they got the Apocrypha (books that are not inspired and have no place in our Bibles). If the *Septuagint* goes, *then the Apocrypha goes with it!*

## 2. Ecumenical Textual Critics Need It

The supposed text of the *Septuagint* is found today only in certain manuscripts. The main ones are: Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph); Codex Vaticanus (B); and Codex Alexandrinus (A). That's right. The Alexandrian manuscripts are *the very texts* we call the *Septuagint!*

In his Introduction to *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (1851) Sir Lancelot Brenton describes how some critical scholars have attempted to call the *Septuagint* by its real name, the Alexandrian Text, but the name never stuck. Thus he admits that they are *one and the same*.

So we have textual critics who believe desperately in the 45 Alexandrian manuscripts (against more than 5,000 copies favoring the *Textus Receptus*). They use these to translate all modern New Testaments. But these Alexandrian manuscripts also include the *Septuagint* Old Testament (with the Apocrypha). They have fallen for a trap.

Catholics now argue the following: If you accept the Alexandrian text (which modern scholars use as the basis for all new translations) for your New Testament, then you also have to accept the rest of the Alexandrian text (*Septuagint*), which includes the Apocrypha. What we are seeing is the development of an ecumenical Bible, including the Apocrypha. Some versions have already gone this way. For many Protestants, all ^

roads are truly leading to Rome.

### 3. We Don't Need It.

But do we Christians need the Alexandrian manuscripts? Not at all! For the Old Testament we have the Preserved Words of God in the Hebrew Masoretic text. For the New Testament we have the 5,000-plus manuscripts in Greek, plus the many early translations spread abroad, to witness to the actual words of Christ and His apostles.

So the *Septuagint* story is a hoax. It was not written before Christ; so it was not used by Jesus or His apostles. It is the only set of manuscripts to include the Apocrypha mixed in with the books of the Bible, so as to justify the Roman Catholic inclusion of them in their Bibles. And it is just those same, perverted Alexandrian codices —the same ones that mess up the New Testament —dressed up in pretty packaging.

Let's stick to our preserved Bible, the King James Bible in English, and leave the Alexandrian perversions alone.

Intro to "Was There a BC Septuagint?"

