

Septuagint Summary

The document provides an overview of the Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, including its origins, translation process, and historical significance within the Jewish and early Christian communities.

History and Origin of the Septuagint

The Septuagint, also known as the Greek Old Testament, is the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally attributed to seventy-two translators commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus. It was primarily created for the Jewish community in Alexandria during the 3rd century BC, with additional books translated in the 2nd century BC.

- The term "Septuagint" comes from the Latin phrase meaning "The Old Testament from the version of the Seventy Translators."
- The translation was initiated at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus for his library in Alexandria.
- The first five books (Pentateuch) were likely translated in the early to mid-3rd century BC.
- The remaining books were presumably translated in the 2nd century BC.
- The translation process involved various translators and styles, leading to inconsistencies in quality and approach.

Language and Style of the Septuagint

The Septuagint is written in Koine Greek, incorporating Semitic idioms and phrases, reflecting its Hebrew origins. The translation varies in style, with some books being more literal while others are more interpretative.

- The Septuagint contains Semiticisms, indicating its Hebrew roots.
- Some books, like Daniel and Proverbs, exhibit a stronger Greek influence.
- The translation may clarify Hebrew pronunciation, as it includes Greek vowels for proper nouns.
- The quality of translation varies significantly across different books.

Canonical Differences Between Septuagint and Hebrew Bible

The Septuagint includes a collection of texts that differ from the Hebrew Bible, containing additional books and variations in content. The canon of the Hebrew Bible was still evolving during the time of the Septuagint's translation.

- The Septuagint comprises four categories: law, history, poetry, and prophets, unlike the three-part structure of the Hebrew Bible (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim).
- It includes deuterocanonical books not found in the Hebrew Bible, such as Tobit, Judith, and the Wisdom of Solomon.
- The Septuagint's Book of Jeremiah is shorter than its counterpart in the Masoretic Text.
- The Septuagint has been rejected by Rabbinic Judaism due to differences and perceived mistranslations.

Jewish and Christian Use of the Septuagint

The Septuagint was widely used among early Christians as the primary Greek version of the Bible, while its acceptance among Jews declined over time due to differences with Hebrew texts. Early Christians valued the Septuagint for its accessibility and perceived Christological interpretations.

- Alexandrian Jews' acceptance of the Septuagint diminished around the 2nd century AD.
- Early Christians relied on the Septuagint as it was the only Greek version available.
- The Septuagint's association with Christianity led to its rejection by many Jews.
- The Eastern Orthodox Church continues to use the Septuagint as the basis for the Old Testament.

Final Form and Structure of the Septuagint

The Septuagint's structure differs from the Hebrew Bible, with some books grouped together and additional texts included. The order of books in the Septuagint reflects early Christian usage.

- All books in the Western Old Testament can be found in the Septuagint, though their order may differ.
- Some books are combined, such as the Books of Samuel and Kings, which are presented as a single work.
- The Septuagint includes additional scriptures not found in the Hebrew Bible, such as the Prayer of Manasseh and Psalm 151.
- The canonical acceptance of these additional books varies among Christian traditions.

Historical Context of the Septuagint

The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, was produced between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, with the Pentateuch dating to the early to mid-3rd century BC. Various recensions and revisions of the text have occurred over time, notably by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion.

- The Septuagint was written from the 3rd to the 1st centuries BC.
- The Pentateuch is dated to the early to mid-3rd century BC.
- Major revisions were made by Aquila (128 AD), Symmachus, and Theodotion.
- Origen's Hexapla included the Old Greek and other Greek versions in a critical apparatus.

Manuscript Evidence and Preservation

The oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint include fragments from the 2nd century BC and 1st century BC, with complete manuscripts dating to the 4th and 5th centuries AD. The Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus are among the oldest nearly complete manuscripts of the Old Testament.

- Oldest fragments date to the 2nd century BC (Leviticus, Deuteronomy).
- Complete manuscripts include the 4th-century Codex Vaticanus and 5th-century Codex Alexandrinus.
- The Codex Sinaiticus also partially survives with many Old Testament texts.

Textual Differences and Variants

The Septuagint exhibits differences from the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Vulgate, often due to different Hebrew sources, interpretative choices, idiomatic translations, and transmission changes. These differences can be categorized into four main types.

- Differences arise from various Hebrew sources for the MT and Septuagint.
- Interpretative differences stem from the same Hebrew text.
- Idiomatic translation issues lead to variations in meaning.
- Transmission changes include revisions and copying errors.

Comparison with Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) have prompted comparisons with the Septuagint, revealing five broad variants of texts, including Proto-Masoretic and Pre-Septuagint manuscripts. These comparisons highlight the diversity of biblical texts in antiquity.

- Five broad variants of DSS texts identified by Emanuel Tov.
- Proto-Masoretic texts account for about 60% of the Biblical scrolls.
- Pre-Septuagint manuscripts show distinctive affinities with the Greek Bible.

Print Editions and Modern Translations

Numerous print editions of the Septuagint have been published, with significant contributions from scholars like Alfred Rahlfs and the Göttingen Septuagint. Modern translations aim to provide accessible versions of the Septuagint for contemporary readers.

- The Complutensian Polyglot Bible is one of the earliest print editions.
- Alfred Rahlfs' edition published in 1935 is a critical version.
- The Göttingen Septuagint is an ongoing multi-volume critical edition.
- Recent translations include the Lexham English Septuagint and the Orthodox Study Bible.

Onomastic Terms and Translation Challenges

Translators of the Septuagint faced challenges in rendering Hebrew onomastic terms into Greek, often adopting exonymic labels that influenced later terminology. This has led to a lasting impact on the terminology used for Arameans and their lands.

- Greek translations often used "Syria" for Aram and "Syrians" for Arameans.
- This choice has influenced later Latin and English translations.
- Robert W. Rogers criticized the adoption of these terms in English versions.