

Reason 13: The Septuagint: The Greek Translation of the Old Testament



A typical discussion replayed repeatedly between skeptics and believers is the reliability of the Bible. The problem is that most people don't have knowledge of how the Bible came about. Therefore, they assume it has gone through multiple layers of translations before we received our copy. It is this lack of knowledge that will cause many to doubt the reliability of the Bible.

One easy way to answer this doubt is to ask the skeptic if they have ever heard of the **Septuagint**? The Septuagint or LXX (70) is the first translation of the Old Testament (Tanach) into Greek. The translation was commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC), the ruler of the Ptolemy Kingdom, in Alexandria Egypt. Ptolemy II Philadelphus loved books, a *bibliophile*, he wanted

to be able to read the Jewish Bible (Old Testament) in Greek, so he commissioned its translation. The 70 or 72 translators who translated the Old Testament became linked to their translation work known as the "70" or Septuagint.

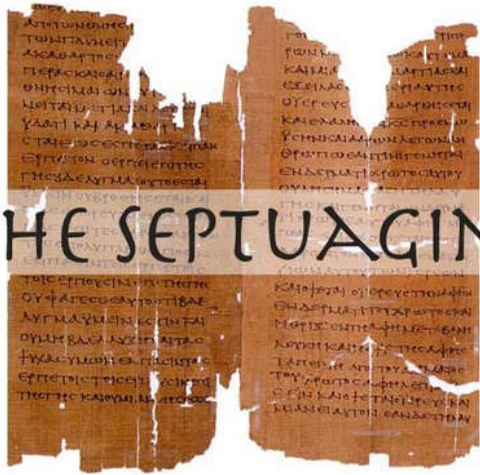
The main point to remember here is the Septuagint was the "Old Testament" used by the early church since it was already accepted by the Greek speaking Jewish community over 200-years before Jesus Christ was born.

Encyclopedia Britannica summarizes the main points in understanding the Septuagint.

(Abbreviation LXX), the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew, presumably made for the use of the Jewish community in Egypt when Greek was the lingua franca throughout the region. Analysis of the language has established that the Torah, or Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), was translated near the middle of the 3rd century BC and that the rest of the Old Testament was translated in the 2nd century BC.

The name Septuagint (from the Latin *Septuaginta*, "70") was derived later from the legend that there were 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, who worked in separate cells, translating the whole, and in the end all their versions were identical. In fact there are large differences in style and usage between the Septuagint's translation of the Torah and its translations of the later books in the Old Testament. A tradition that translators were sent to Alexandria by Eleazar, the chief priest at Jerusalem, at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC), a patron of literature, first appeared in the Letter of Aristeas, an unreliable source.

THE SEPTUAGINT



The language of much of the early Christian church was Greek, and it was in the Septuagint text that many early Christians located the prophecies they claimed were fulfilled by Christ. Jews considered this a misuse of Holy Scripture, and they stopped using the Septuagint. Its subsequent history lies within the Christian church.

In the 3rd century AD Origen attempted to clear up copyists' errors that had crept into the text of the Septuagint, which by then varied widely from copy to copy. Other scholars also consulted the Hebrew text to make the Septuagint text more accurate. But it was the Septuagint, not the original Hebrew that was the main basis for the Old Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, and part of the Arabic translations of the Old Testament. It has never ceased

to be the standard version of the Old Testament in the Greek Church, and from it Jerome began his translation of the Vulgate Old Testament.

Title	Approximate date of writing
Psalms	151-200 BC?
Ecclesiasticus	180 BC
Tobit	180 BC
The Prayer of Manasseh	150 BC
Judith	150 BC
1 Esdras	150 BC
Additions to Esther	100 BC
Song of the Three Young Men	100 BC
Susanna	50–100 BC
Bel and the Dragon	50–100 BC
1,2&3 Maccabees	50–100 BC
4 Maccabees	AD 40
The Wisdom of Solomon	AD 40
2 Esdras	AD 100
Baruch	AD 100

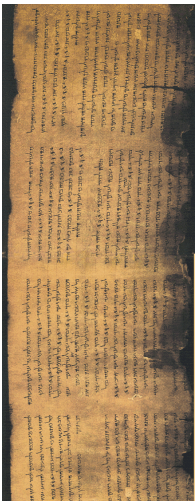
In addition to all the books of the Hebrew canon, the Septuagint under Christian auspices separated the Minor Prophets and some other books and added the extra books known to Protestants and Jews as apocryphal and to Roman Catholics as deuterocanonical. The Hebrew canon has three divisions: the Torah (Law), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings). The Septuagint has four: law, history, poetry, and prophets, with the books of the Apocrypha inserted where appropriate. This division has continued in the Western church in most modern Bible translations, except that in Protestant versions the Apocrypha are either omitted or grouped separately.¹

The Septuagint is the foundation of the English Bible's Old Testament configuration. The order of books in the English Bible starts with *Genesis* and ends with the book of *Malachi*. This follows the order of books in the Septuagint. The same books in the Jewish Tanach (Old Testament) are in the Protestant Bible, its only organized different, because it is based on the order found in the Septuagint. The first book in the Jewish Bible is Genesis and the last book is 2nd Chronicles.

Books and Chapters found in the Septuagint, but not in the Jewish Old Testament

The main difference between the Septuagint (Greek) and the Jewish Bible (Hebrew) is there are some additional books and chapters in the Septuagint collection. The Septuagint was viewed more as library or collection than as a single book. The main point to remember is the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, confirms and validates the integrity of original Jewish manuscripts, because it was translated 200-years before the birth of Christ. These additional chapters and books are known as the Apocrypha or *Deutero-Canonical* books (2nd Canon). They are recognized in the Catholic Church as inspired, but not by Jews or Protestants.

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 Edition, Article Septuagint



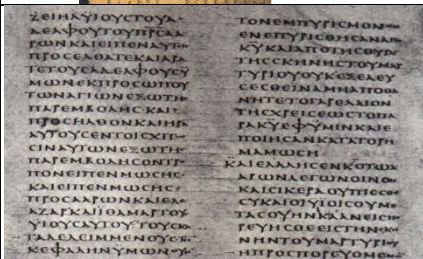
Dead Sea Scrolls

In March 1947 a young Arab boy discovered in the caves of Qumran near the Dead Sea jars containing several leather manuscripts dating to the time of Christ. The belonged to the Essenes. The Essenes were a Jewish sect that settled in the Judean desert near Qumran. Other manuscripts were found over the next 10 years. 2 copies of the book of Isaiah were found along with books and fragments from the whole Old Testament except for the book of Ester.

Prior to the discovery the oldest existing book of the Hebrew Old Testament dated to about 1000 AD. Carbon dating has placed them between 168 BC and 233 AD. Archaeology puts the dates at 150 BC to 100 AD.

Gleason Archer observed that the two copies of Isaiah proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. The scrolls gave an overwhelming confirmation of the Masoretic text. Some of the variants show parallels to the Greek text of the Septuagint (LXX).

The Dead Sea Scrolls are owned by the Nation of Israel



The Septuagint or the LXX

The LXX version is the first translation of the OT ever made. The translation was inaugurated by Ptolemy of Philadelphus (285-247 BC) Ptolemy was fond of books and wanted to add the Hebrew Pentateuch to his collection in Alexandria. The LXX was the bible of the early church. The order of OT books is derived from the LXX through the Vulgate by St. Jerome.

On the basis of the LXX Catholics advocate the "Larger" canon of the Jews in Alexandria. Protestants deny the existence of an independent canon in Alexandria in view of the "smaller" canon of the Jews in Palestine. The difference is 7 complete books and portions of 2 others. The books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1 & 2 Maccabees and additions to Daniel and Esther.

These portions are rejected by protestants. The oldest existing LXX manuscript is dated 350 A.D



Samaritan Pentateuch

With the split of the Samaritans from the Jews from the 8th century BC there arose a second Hebrew revision of the Pentateuch known as the Samaritan Pentateuch. It contains the five books of Moses and is written in Paleo-Hebrew script similar to the found on the Moabite Stone, Siloam inscription.

Author Frank Cross believes the Samaritan Pentateuch branched off in the Pre- Masoretic text in the 2nd century BC.

There are differences from the Masoretic text are trivial and orthographic. Some of the differences were introduced by Samaritans with the interest in preserving their status. Such as the location of the Arc. The oldest existing manuscript is dated to the 11th century AD.




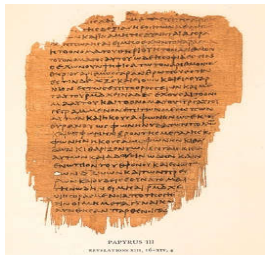



Aleppo Codex

The Aleppo Codex dates from the Masoretic period (500-1000 AD) of Old Testament copying. During this period there was a deep reverence of the Scriptures, complete review of established rules and a systematic renovation of transmission techniques

Aleppo was written by Shelomo ben Baya'a but according to a colophon it was pointed (vowel marks were added) by Moses ben Asher (930 A.D.) It is a model codex based on the Masoretic text. It was not permitted to be copied for a long time and was reported to be destroyed. Aleppo Codex was smuggled from Syria to Israel. It has now been photographed and will be the basis of the New Hebrew Bible to be published by Hebrew University. It is a sound authority for the Ben Asher text.

NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

HISTORY

	<p>The John Rylands Fragment John 18:31-33 (117-138 AD)</p> <p>The earliest known copy of any portion of the New Testament is from a papyrus codex (2.5 by 3.5 inches). It dates from the first half of the second century A.D. 117-138. (P.52)The papyrus is written on both sides and contains portions of five verses from the gospel of John (18:31-33, 37-38). Because this fragment was found in Egypt a distance from the place of composition (Asia Minor) it demonstrates the chain of transmission. The fragment belongs to the John Rylands Library at Manchester, England</p>
	<p>Chester Beatty Papyri (250 AD)</p> <p>This important papyri consists of three codices and contains most of the New Testament. (P.45, P.46, P.47). The first codex (P.45) has 30 leaves (pages) of papyrus codex. 2 from Matthew, 2 from John, 6 from Mark, 7 from Luke and 13 from Acts. Originally there were 220 pages measuring 8x10 inches each. (P.46)The second codex has 86 leaves 11x6.5 inches. 104 pages of Paul's epistles. P.47 is made of 10 leaves from Revelation measuring 9.5 by 5.5 inches.</p>
	<p>Bodmer Papyri (200 AD)</p> <p>Dating from 200 A.D. or earlier the Bodmer collection of Papyri (P.66,P.72,P.75) contains 104 leaves. P.66 Contains the Gospel of John 1:1-6:11, 6:35-14:26, 14-21. P.72 has the earliest know copy of Jude, I Peter, and 2 Peter also contains other Canonical and apocryphal books. P.72 measures 6 x 5.75 inches. P.75 is 102 pages measuring 10.25 by 5.33 inches. Contains most of Luke and John dated between 175 and 225 AD. Earliest know copy of Luke. Very similar to the <i>Codex Vaticanus</i>.</p>
	<p>CODEX SINATICUS (340 AD)</p> <p>Considered to the most important witness to the Greek text of the New Testament dated in the 4th century. Sinaiticus was found at St. Catherine's monastery at Mt. Sinai by Von Tischendorf (1815-1874). It was acquired for the Czar of Russia. Sinaiticus contains over 1/2 of the Old Testament (LXX) and all of the new except for Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.. Also contains the Old Testament Apocrypha. Sinaiticus is written on 364.5 pages measuring 13.5 by 14 inches. The material is good vellum made from antelope skins. Purchased by the British government for \$500,000 in 1933.</p>
	<p>Codex Vaticanus (325-350 AD)</p> <p>Vaticanus was written in the middle of the 4th century and was not known to textual scholars till 1475 when it was catalogued in the Vatican Library. For the next 400 years scholars were prohibited from studying it. Its includes most of the LXX version of the Old Testament and most of the New. It contains 759 leaves measuring 10 by 10.5 inches. Codex Vaticanus is owned by the Roman Catholic Church and is housed in the Vatican Library, Vatican City.</p>