

the septuagint version of the old testament with an english translation and with various readings and critical notes

The Septuagint version of the Old Testament is one of the most significant translations in the history of biblical literature. It serves as a crucial bridge between the Hebrew scriptures and the early Christian church, influencing biblical interpretation, theology, and the development of Western literature. The Septuagint, often abbreviated as LXX, derives its name from the Latin word for seventy, reflecting the tradition that seventy Jewish scholars worked on its translation in the 3rd century BCE in Alexandria, Egypt. This article delves into the Septuagint's origins, its English translations, various readings, and critical notes, providing a comprehensive overview for scholars and lay readers alike.

Origins and Historical Context of the Septuagint

The Septuagint emerged during a period when Greek culture and language were predominant in the eastern Mediterranean, especially following the conquests of Alexander the Great. The Jewish diaspora, particularly in Egypt, faced the challenge of maintaining their religious identity while living in a predominantly Greek-speaking society. Consequently, the need for a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures became apparent.

Commissioning of the Translation

According to the Letter of Aristeas, a document from the 2nd century BCE, Ptolemy II Philadelphus commissioned the translation for the Library of Alexandria. The account narrates that 72 Jewish elders were selected to produce a translation of the Torah, which later expanded to encompass the entire Hebrew Bible. This translation was significant for several reasons:

1. Accessibility: It made the scriptures accessible to Greek-speaking Jews and Gentiles.
2. Cultural Exchange: It served as a medium for cultural and religious exchange between Jews and Greeks.
3. Foundation for Early Christianity: The Septuagint was widely used by early Christians, influencing their understanding of the Old Testament.

Structure and Content of the Septuagint

The Septuagint includes most books found in the Hebrew Bible, though the arrangement and canon differ.

Books Included

The Septuagint typically comprises the following sections:

1. The Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
2. Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.
3. Wisdom Literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).
4. Prophetic Books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, the Twelve Minor Prophets.

It's important to note that the Septuagint also includes several deuterocanonical books, which are not found in the traditional Hebrew Bible but are included in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox canons.

English Translations of the Septuagint

Several English translations of the Septuagint have emerged over the years, catering to different audiences and purposes.

Notable Translations

1. LXX: The Septuagint with Apocrypha (Edited by Charles Thomson, 1808) - This translation is among the earliest attempts to render the LXX into English, including the deuterocanonical books.
2. The Septuagint: A New Translation for the 21st Century (translated by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, 2007) - This modern translation aims for accuracy and accessibility, providing extensive footnotes and critical notes.
3. The Orthodox Study Bible (2008) - This version includes the Septuagint as the Old Testament, tailored for Eastern Orthodox Christians, along with commentary and theological insights.

Each of these translations offers unique insights into the text, reflecting different theological perspectives and scholarly approaches.

Variations and Critical Notes in the Septuagint

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Septuagint is its textual variations compared to the Masoretic Text (MT), the authoritative Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible.

Notable Variations

1. Addition and Omission: The Septuagint sometimes includes additional verses or entire passages not found in the MT, such as in the books of Esther and Daniel.
2. Different Word Choices: Some Hebrew terms do not have direct Greek equivalents, leading to varying translations that can alter the meaning. For example, the Hebrew word "nephesh" (often translated as "soul") may be rendered differently in the LXX.
3. Theological Implications: Certain translations in the LXX reflect early Christian theology, emphasizing messianic prophecies and concepts that may differ from traditional Jewish interpretations.

Critical Notes on Translation Choices

1. Translation Philosophy: The Septuagint employs a dynamic equivalence approach, aiming for meaning rather than a word-for-word translation. This can lead to interpretive differences.
2. Contextualization: The translators often adapted phrases to resonate with a Hellenistic audience, which sometimes obscures the original Hebrew context.
3. Manuscript Variance: The LXX exists in several manuscript traditions, leading to discrepancies that scholars must navigate when analyzing the text.

The Importance of the Septuagint Today

The Septuagint holds substantial significance in contemporary biblical scholarship and theology.

Influence on Christian Thought

1. Scripture for Early Christians: The Septuagint was widely used by the Apostles, and many quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament derive from the LXX.
2. Ecumenical Dialogue: The LXX serves as a common ground for discussions between Jewish and Christian traditions, fostering an understanding of shared texts.
3. Scholarly Research: The Septuagint continues to be a vital resource for scholars studying the

development of biblical texts, theological concepts, and the history of interpretation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the **Septuagint version of the Old Testament** is a foundational text that has shaped the religious landscape for centuries. Its translations, variations, and critical notes provide invaluable insights into the evolution of the biblical narrative and its interpretation. As scholars continue to explore the depths of the Septuagint, its relevance remains undiminished in the realms of theology, history, and interfaith dialogue. Whether for academic study or personal enrichment, understanding the Septuagint is essential for anyone interested in the complexities of the Old Testament and its impact on both Judaism and Christianity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Septuagint and why is it significant in biblical studies?

The Septuagint is an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally said to have been commissioned by Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the 3rd century BCE. It is significant because it provides insights into the early Jewish understanding of the scriptures and has influenced Christian theology, especially as it was widely used in the early Church.

How does the Septuagint differ from the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament?

The Septuagint often differs from the Masoretic Text in terms of wording, order of books, and the inclusion or exclusion of certain passages. These differences reflect variations in textual traditions and can affect theological interpretations, making textual criticism essential in biblical scholarship.

What are some notable variations found in the Septuagint compared to the Hebrew texts?

Notable variations include the addition of certain psalms, changes in the genealogies, and alternative translations of key terms. For example, the Septuagint's rendering of Isaiah 7:14 uses 'virgin' while the Masoretic Text uses 'young woman,' leading to significant theological implications in Christian interpretations.

What role do critical notes play in the study of the Septuagint?

Critical notes in the study of the Septuagint provide context for textual variations, explain translation choices, and highlight manuscript differences. They are essential for scholars to understand the historical and cultural factors influencing the text, as well as for making informed interpretations.

Are there modern English translations of the Septuagint available?

Yes, several modern English translations of the Septuagint exist, such as the 'A New English Translation of the Septuagint' (NETS) and the 'Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English.' These translations aim to make the text accessible while maintaining fidelity to the original Greek.

What impact did the Septuagint have on the development of early Christian theology?

The Septuagint significantly influenced early Christian theology as many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are derived from it. Its interpretation of messianic prophecies and the concept of the Logos were foundational in shaping early Christian thought and doctrine.

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