
FAQ

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Septuagint (LXX)

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Why do you consult the Septuagint frequently?

The Septuagint (LXX) is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, dating at least two centuries before the First Coming of Yeshua. It was originally compiled for the Jewish community in Alexandria, and quickly became the authorized Scriptures of Diaspora Judaism. The Septuagint largely represents a Pharisaic style of theology, *halachah*, and messianic expectation, and clarifies many things in the Tanach where the Hebrew may be imprecise or vague. As should be expected, there are some distinct theological interjections into the text, as it is not a “word-for-word” translation of the Hebrew. The LXX would read more like today’s New International Version, when compared to the more literal New American Standard. The LXX gives us an excellent “bridge” of vocabulary words between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, enables us to see how Jews translated the Tanach Hebrew into Greek, and allows us to see how they used the Greek language.

In the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), there has been misunderstanding among some Christians when it comes to words that are often only examined in the context of the Greek New Testament, and perhaps even classical Greek philosophy. The Septuagint, as it is known today, was well-circulated throughout the Mediterranean, and was the canonical Scripture of the Greek-speaking Jewish synagogues of the Diaspora. The majority of quotations or allusions in the New Testament from the Old Testament come from the Septuagint. The author of Hebrews, for example, makes all of his unique arguments about Yeshua from the distinct renderings we see in the LXX. Keeping this in mind, we gain valuable insight in understanding the Greek vocabulary that is used in the New Testament, as the same would have been used in the Septuagint. Seeing these Greek words in the Septuagint, we can often see Hebraic concepts behind them via the Tanach, thus gaining a fuller theological picture of what a Biblical author may be trying to communicate.

The Apostles’ usage of the Septuagint in the Gospels and Epistles is a strong indication that they gave it a great deal of authority—otherwise they would not have used it. Unfortunately, much of today’s emerging Messianic movement does not consider the historical importance of the Septuagint, and the LXX gets frequently put aside in our exegesis. This will have to change in the coming years if we intend to have a better and more complete picture of the First Century world in which the Apostles lived. While our exegesis of the Tanach should come first from the Hebrew text, we should certainly give the Greek Septuagint strong consideration as it is its oldest textual witness, and was validated by the Apostles.

For a further examination on the importance of the Septuagint, consult the book *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* by R. Timothy McLay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

I understand that the Greek Septuagint is a valuable resource for understanding Second Temple Judaism and for reading the Apostolic Scriptures, and that there are some differences between the Septuagint and Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Tanach. Are there any English translations of the Septuagint which can help me in my studies?

Many people are unfamiliar with the Septuagint (LXX) because of a limitation of either being untrained in the Greek language, or not possessing enough Greek competence to be able to read directly from the Septuagint, be that in either printed or electronic form. Fortunately, there are various English translations of the Septuagint available for the layperson, each of which can be used as a “crutch” of sorts, when comparing similarities and differences with the Hebrew MT, or for quoting to larger audiences. While each of them has a different order for the books of the Tanach or OT, the following English versions of the Septuagint also notably include the books of the Apocrypha, an additional incentive to make use of these resources.

The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), is a bit dated from the mid-Nineteenth Century, but does include a side-by-side English translation with the Greek Septuagint source text. This translation of the Septuagint is notably rendered in Elizabethan period English. Because it is in the public domain, the LXE and LXA versions are also widely available in electronic format with many Bible software programs. The Apostle’s Bible by Paul W. Esposito (2004), is an updated, modern English version of Brenton.

A New English Translation of the Septuagint (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) is an academic edition of the Septuagint, which includes introductions to each text and a selection of footnotes. Many of the proper names are transliterated from the Greek into English (i.e., Daudid, Iesus). What is most important about the NETS is that this is a modern English version produced for those engaged in research and teaching. Anyone who wants to seriously engage with the Septuagint will need the NETS.

The Orthodox Study Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008) is an eclectic resource, produced for Eastern Orthodox Christians in the English-speaking world. Its edition of the Old Testament is widely a modern English update of Brenton’s Septuagint translation, widely informed from Eastern Orthodox theology. The introductions and annotations are intended for Eastern Orthodox Christians; it is a useful tertiary resource to use in accessing the Septuagint.