

# Did Jesus Quote from the Septuagint?

Uniquely, the Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was written before the time of Christ around 285-250 B.C. But more commonly, the Septuagint refers not only to this Old Testament in Greek, but also a collection of Greek New Testament manuscripts that had been collected and arranged by a religious fossil (and apostate) named Origen. So together, the Old Testament in Greek – the Septuagint, proper – plus Origen’s version of the New Testament in Greek, form the basis of what we generally refer to as the Septuagint today.<sup>1</sup> This grouping is also referred to as the Alexandrian, Minority, or Critical Texts, with copies of it existing today in the form of Codices Sinaiticus Aleph, Vaticanus B, and Alexandrinus A, mainly.<sup>2</sup> Together, these form the textual basis for all modern versions of the Bible that are constantly being revised and updated by Nestle-Aland (NA<sup>28</sup>) and the United Bible Societies (UBS<sup>4</sup>). But did Jesus (and his disciples) quote from the Septuagint? It’s often stated that he did, and it’s often stated as if it’s known fact. But let’s have a closer look.

## ***Jots and tittles...***

**Mt. 5:17** Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. <sup>18</sup>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 teaches that not one jot or tittle will be lost from the Mosaic Law until ALL has been fulfilled. “All” hasn’t been fulfilled and so these jots and tittles must remain – else God lied, which he cannot do.<sup>3</sup> Jots are the Hebrew letter equivalents of the English dotting of the “i” or crossing of the “t.” Tittles are little “horns” on Hebrew letters used to help distinguish one letter from another. So if a jot or tittle hasn’t been lost – the smallest parts of Hebrew letters – then assuredly the words themselves haven’t been lost either, and Scripture affirms this.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Jesus had no originals (autographs) from which to read. All he had were copies that had been made from copies of copies, etc. The autographs had long since passed; and yet, Jesus said that not a single jot or tittle had been lost!

But as it pertains to this lesson, note that jots and tittles are unique to the Hebrew language and not the Greek. The Greek language doesn’t have them. And so Jesus wasn’t quoting from the Septuagint, he was quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures. This is our first proof that Jesus didn’t quote from the Septuagint.

## ***The Law, Prophets, and the Psalms (Writings); the Hebrew threefold division of Scripture***

**Lu. 24:44** 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.

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<sup>1</sup> It’s also called by its Roman numeral designation: LXX for “70.” The name given to it in honor of the 72 men who were originally reportedly to have been involved in translating it from Hebrew to Greek. (Why not LXXII?)

<sup>2</sup> A codex, or codices (pl.), is a manuscript written in book form, as opposed to having been written in a scroll.

<sup>3</sup> Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18

<sup>4</sup> From these and *many* others: Dt. 8:3; Ps. 12:6-7; 78:1-7; Pr. 22:20-21; Mt. 4:4; 24:35; Mk. 13:31 etc.

Luke 24:44 denotes the threefold division of the Old Testament used by the Jews: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Psalms (Writings: Ketivum). However, the order found in the Septuagint, **once you remove the books of the Apocrypha**, is the Law, the Psalms, and then the Prophets. So again, Jesus wasn't quoting from the Septuagint. Jesus is reciting the three main divisions of the Old Testament as found in the Hebrew Scriptures and *not* that of the Greek Septuagint. This is further endorsed in Verse 27 of the same chapter.

<sup>27</sup>And **beginning** at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in **all** the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus **began** with Moses ("The Law") and the Prophets and then progressed to the Psalms. This he did because the whole of Scripture is about him (Jn. 5:39 etc.). So again, this is our second proof that Jesus isn't quoting from the Septuagint; he's referring to the threefold division as found in the Hebrew Old Testament and not the Greek Septuagint. But there's more...

The Jews also have a shortened term for these three main divisions called the *Tanakh*.<sup>5</sup> It's name is derived by taking the first letter of each word used in naming each division: "T" from *Torah* (Law), "n" from *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and "k" from *Ketivum* (Psalms), which again reveals the three-fold division found in the Hebrew Scriptures and not the Septuagint. But again, there's more...

### ***From the blood of righteous Abel Unto the blood of Zacharias...***

In reproving the Pharisees, Jesus says:

**Mt. 23:35** That upon you [Pharisees] may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Abel was slain in Genesis 4:8 and Zacharias was slain in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22. This again refers to the Jewish canon of the Old Testament because it begins and ends with these two books whereas the Septuagint begins with Genesis and ends in Malachi. Thus our third proof that Jesus is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures and not the Greek Septuagint.

### ***Had the Hebrew language fallen from use in the New Testament?***

Not unlike English today, Greek was the language of commerce during Jesus' day. This being the case, it's only logical to assume that they would've needed a Greek translation of the Hebrew OT. This is logical, but not biblical. The pool at Bethesda was so named in Hebrew (Jn. 5:2); Jesus was brought before Pilate at the Hebrew *Gabbatha* and then taken to the Hebrew *Golgotha* (19:13, 17). When Jesus was hung on the cross, above his head was a sign written in Hebrew, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Lk. 23:38; Jn. 19:20). Paul frequently spoke in Hebrew (Acts 21:40; 22:2) as did God (Acts 26:14); so evidently the Hebrew language hadn't fallen from use as much as thought. Thus again, their conclusion is logical, but not biblical.

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<sup>5</sup> "Tanakh" means "that which is read."

***But is there any Biblical evidence that the Jews ever wanted to produce a translation in any language other than their own?***

Those responsible for preserving the written text of God's Word was the Levitical priesthood and none other.<sup>6</sup> This is logical because they were the Bible teachers of their day. And as a Bible teacher, your primary teaching tool is the Bible, and so they had to have had one. And of all the accusations that Jesus made against the religious leaders of his day, never once did he correct them for having corrupted the written text itself; in fact, he taught the opposite (Mt. 5:18-19). They were fanatical about the Law and so their devotion to preserving it would've been the same (Jn. 5:39). And since God spoke to them in Hebrew and his words were recorded in Hebrew, then there was no reason for them to translate the OT into any other language. Translating the Bible into different language is a NT concept and not an Old.

In addition, the Septuagint is said to have been written by a group of 72 Jewish scholars who met in Alexandria, Egypt: **6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel**. But since the copying and preservation of God's Word was the sole responsibility of the Levitical priesthood, then the Septuagint would have been rejected by the Jews of Jesus' day because at least 66 of them weren't from the tribe of Levi! Knowing this, Jesus would've shunned it as well. This is our fourth proof that Jesus is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures and not the Greek Septuagint.

***Inclusion of the books of the Apocrypha***

Unbeknownst to many, the Septuagint includes the books of the Apocrypha *as part of its canon*. So if it can be proven that Jesus read from the Septuagint, then people would be forced to accept these books and their doctrines. But herein is their hypocrisy revealed. Supporters of the Septuagint and its subsequent modern versions have long enjoyed faulting the translators of the KJB for having initially placed the Apocrypha *between* the Testaments (a far cry different than *including* them *as part of your canon*). But in their zealotry to find fault with the KJB, they seem to overlook or conveniently "forget" that their beloved Septuagint retains these books *as part of its canon*, if they ever knew at all. But to answer the accusation, the translators of the KJB only placed them *between* the Testaments for historical purposes and not for their doctrinal or theological value, and so they were never considered as part of the canon of the KJB. Their inclusion between the Testaments was later dropped.

Furthermore, the Jews have never considered these book to be a part of the OT canon. Scripture also teaches that it was to the Jews, and only the Jews, to whom the Scriptures were given (Rom. 3:1-2). And since the authors of the Apocrypha are largely if not completely unknown, then they must be rejected because Jewish authorship cannot be established. This is yet another proof that that Jesus didn't quote from the Septuagint.

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<sup>6</sup> Dt. 17:18; 31:24-26; Mal. 2:7-8. There was one exception, however, the king was to write a copy when ascending to the throne (Dt. 17:18-20).

## **Conclusion**

**Mt. 5:19** Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Concluding, this study began with a reference to Matthew 5:17-18 which revealed that Jesus didn't come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. This was followed by a promise that not "one jot or one tittle" would pass until all had been fulfilled, which was also an endorsement upon the Hebrew Masoretic Texts and the perfect preservation of Scripture and not the Septuagint with its many "versions." This is followed by Verse 19 (above) which is a warning to those who'd teach anything to the contrary. But if Jesus didn't quote from the Septuagint, then why are we being told that he did? Here's why.

In addition to the added books of the Apocrypha, what we identify as the Septuagint today *also* includes **Origen's version** of the New Testament which (primarily) exists today in the form of Codices Sinaiticus Aleph, Vaticanus B, and Alexandrinus A.<sup>7</sup> These are the same manuscripts from which Rome developed its doctrines and later produced its Latin Vulgate. It's also the same set of manuscripts from which *all* modern versions of the Bible are based, even though they're marketed as being "Protestant" Bibles.

So the reason that we're being told that Jesus (and his disciples) quoted from the Septuagint is because it's an attempt by Rome to place God's people back under their dominion. In the past, they put people to death for owning much less reading and interpreting the Bible for themselves. Today, they prevent God's people from owning his Word by offering corrupted versions. Islam isn't the primary religious enemy of biblical Christianity, Roman Catholicism is because they're the ones trying to undermine the written text of God's Word with the confusion they've created through their many "versions."<sup>8</sup> But unfortunately, the mantra that "Jesus quoted from the Septuagint" has been repeated so many times that people have come to accept it as truth without giving it a second thought. But the biblical evidence is clear. Jesus nor his disciples ever quoted from the Septuagint, and that's assuming it ever existed in the first place.<sup>9</sup> Selah.

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<sup>7</sup> The proof of this can be seen in any "Christian" bookstore where a particular version is sold to Protestants without the Apocrypha while the same version is sold to Catholics with the Apocrypha included. This is why the KJB reads so differently from the modern versions: it's because it's based upon a completely different set of manuscripts viz. the Hebrew Masoretic Texts and the Greek Textus Receptus.

<sup>8</sup> To produce a new "version," translators simply mix and match these manuscripts and then give it a new name, such as the NIV, NAS, or ESV – even though they all come from the same sources.

<sup>9</sup> *The Letter of Aristeas* is the primary proof of its existence; but the letter itself is highly questionable. The Septuagint, then, is likely the product of the apostate Origen that was part of his *Hexapla* written c. 250 A.D.