

THE OLD TESTAMENT ACCORDING TO THE SEVENTY

*An English translation of the Greek Septuagint adapted
from the King James Bible*

**ORTHODOX ENGLAND
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The Old Testament According to the Seventy
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This English version of the Septuagint is based upon the text of the Authorized Version of the Bible (the King James Version) and the Apocrypha, the rights of which are vested in the Crown, and whose permission to make use of them is gratefully acknowledged.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Codex Alexandrinus
CS	Codex Sinaiticus
CV	Codex Vaticanus
MT	Masoretic Hebrew Text
PG	Migne, J P, Patrologia Graeca, 165 vols; 1857-8
PL	Migne, J P, Patrologia Latina, 221 vols; 1844-55

PREFACE

Translation is a difficult art. On the one hand, we have to be faithful to the original; on the other hand, we have to be faithful to the genius of the language and culture into which we are translating. We may know of translations that are either too loose or else too literal. It is a difficult balance to strike, especially when translating the Holy Scriptures. In the field of Biblical translation into English, we have the example of Coverdale, who produced a most beautiful literary translation, but one that is simply not always faithful to the original. On the other hand, we have a multitude of modern Biblical translations, which may be clear, but lack poetry and are also spiritually and culturally pedestrian.

For most, it is the King James translation that remains by and large the definitive translation of the English Bible, simply because it strikes the right balance between faithfulness to the original and faithfulness to the genius of English. It did after all come into being at a time when English literary culture was at a high point, the time of Shakespeare. Thus, the often sublime words and intonations of the King James Bible have entered very deeply into everyday English speech and writing, patterning our cultural consciousness. This has remained the case, even in our own de-Christianized times. It is this example that has constantly inspired Orthodox English liturgical translation in the last two generations.

If the New Testament were to be translated from the original Greek into English by Orthodox Christians today, the resulting translation would vary little from the King James New Testament text, except perhaps in the Epistles and a few other places. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the Old Testament, because the scholars gathered by King James used as their starting point the Hebrew Masoretic text, not the inspired Greek Septuagint text, which is a thousand years older and corresponds to the quotations made from it by Our Lord in the Gospels over two hundred times.

In 1992 I wrote down some comments about a then recently published translation of the Psalter of the Septuagint. With all its virtues, I felt that it suffered from over-literalism, even to the extent of following Greek word order. Put simply, I felt that there was a lack of understanding of the cultural value of the turns of phrase and expressions used in the King James Version. My comments were read sympathetically, and in 1993 the present translator, Michael Asser, made contact with me. In response, I suggested that we both sit down and translate the Six Psalms as used in Orthodox Matins. He translated from the Greek, using the King James stylistically. I translated from the Church Slavonic, with the Greek next to me, also using the King James stylistically. When we compared our versions, quite astoundingly, in a way almost resembling the Seventy who made the Septuagint translation, we found that our versions were identical, except for two words. One variation was due to a mistake on my part. The other was a word that could be translated in two different ways, but with the same meaning and no difference stylistically. I yielded completely to his version. Since then we have printed his translation of the Six Psalms and use it at every Matins.

Since those early days over twenty years ago, Mr. Asser has translated not only the whole Psalter but also the whole of the Septuagint Old Testament. I checked through his translation word by word, in some parts, on more than one occasion. Apart from the very rare misprint, I never found anything that could be construed as incorrect or stylistically unacceptable. For several years now, his verified translations of the Psalter and indeed the whole Septuagint Old Testament have been available on the www.orthodoxengland.org.uk website, simply for want of a publisher who would faithfully print them. If someday it becomes possible to publish this translation as a printed book, it will be most welcome, a Godsend indeed. Meantime, the text has been very thoroughly revised; and it is that which is presented here.

I would like to emphasize that the present translation is a liturgical translation, in that it uses *the received text* of the Old Testament, as used by the Church of Greece. In other words, this translation is not designed for theoretical,

academic study, but for practical use in the Orthodox monastery and parish, as well as for prayerful private reading. This is why it uses the liturgical language, with all its poetry, inspiration and constant call to prayer. We sincerely hope that this translation will be seen as a contribution to English-language Orthodox culture and that it will indeed inspire many to prayer and repentance.

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Feast of the Archangel Michael and the other Bodiless Hosts

INTRODUCTION

This English version of the Greek Old Testament, the work of an English Orthodox layman, is offered for the service of the Orthodox Church. The Septuagint differs very considerably from the Masoretic Hebrew Bible on which most English translations of the Old Testament are based. The formularies and services of the Orthodox Church are certainly the most theologically complex and profound of all Christian church services, and they are a virtual mosaic of scripture quotation from the Septuagint or of the Church Fathers paraphrasing and commenting on Septuagint texts. It follows, then, that Orthodox Christians should use and know the Septuagint, either in the original Greek or in their own language.

The Orthodox Church has a definitive printed Greek text of the New Testament in the edition published in 1904 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. It has no such definitive edition of the Septuagint. Throughout most of the age of printing the Great Church of Constantinople was in captivity to the Turks, and printing projects could not be undertaken within the Ottoman Empire. Alfred Rahlfs' well-known critical edition of the Septuagint was published by the Wurttemberg Bible Society of Stuttgart in 1935. Since then, the Göttingen Academy of Humanities and Sciences has produced a fully critical edition of the Septuagint. These two organizations are outside the Orthodox Church, and the editions they have produced are eclectic texts; that is, they represent an amalgam of textual choices made by their editors from readings as they are embodied in the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Septuagint. For the Orthodox Church, however, the most authoritative readings of the Old Testament texts are those that are to be found in its liturgical books and in the writings of the Church Fathers. The Biblical lectionaries in particular preserve a separate textual witness to the Septuagint of great antiquity. There can be no definitive Church Septuagint until an eclectic edition is published that takes full account of the readings in these two sources. In the meantime, however, the Church of Greece's *Apostoliki Diakonia* and the *Zoe* Brotherhood have published texts of the Septuagint which, though very similar to Rahlfs' edition, have been adjusted to some extent to accommodate traditional Orthodox readings of the Septuagint. The *Apostoliki Diakonia* Greek text may be consulted on that organization's website, as well as those of *Myriobiblos* and *Elpenor*. Despite its limitations, it is this text that has been taken as the starting point for this English version of the Septuagint, because it is an Orthodox text, and because it is readily accessible. The Prayer of Manasseh, which does not appear in printed Greek editions of the Septuagint, and the Slavonic books of Esdras in the order in which they appear in the Elizabeth Bible, have been included as an appendix.

In seeking to be faithful both to the Septuagint and to English culture, the Old Testament of the King James Bible has been taken as a base text and emended where it differs from the Septuagint. The aim has been as far as possible to make a translation such as King James' translators might have made had they been working from the Greek Septuagint instead of the Masoretic Hebrew text. So the *Ἀναγινωσκόμενα* ("Worthy to be read"), which are known in the West as the Deuterocanonical Books or Apocrypha, are reproduced from the King James Version, with minor revisions to bring them closer to the printed Greek text. No attempt has been made to modernise the text of the King James Version in any significant way, except to remove unnecessary obstacles to understanding and to lighten the punctuation. The format of *Apostoliki Diakonia's* edition has been followed for the order of books and verse, paragraph and chapter division.

Throughout the Septuagint *Kyrios* regularly appears without the definite article as a proper name, the equivalent of the Divine Name, the *Tetragrammaton*. In those places where the personal name of God is evidently being invoked it has been rendered without the definite article, as LORD. Otherwise, it has been translated in the traditional manner as 'The LORD.' Although there is everything to be said for retaining the Greek (and Slavonic) form of proper names, in order to make clear the typology discerned by the Church Fathers in the Septuagint, they have here been

rendered in the form they take in the King James Bible, because this is most familiar to English-speaking Christians.

In producing this English version of the Septuagint all of the previous English translations have been consulted, from that of the American scholar and Secretary to the Continental Congress of the USA, Charles Thomson, in the revision of C A Muses³, to the very latest, by the Oxford Jesuit Fr. Nicholas King⁴. Among them, Sir Lancelot C L Brenton's translation of 1851⁵ was very helpful because Brenton obviously kept a close eye on the King James Version.

For many Orthodox, a decision in the 21st Century to use the King James Version of the Old Testament as an English template instead of a modern text may seem surprising, perhaps even perverse. But this translator has followed the example of Mother Mary and the then Archimandrite, now Metropolitan, Kallistos of Diokleia, who took for their model the language of the King James Bible when they translated *The Festal Menaion*⁶ and *The Lenten Triodion*⁷ from the Greek. In their words: 'As we see it, the language of the Authorized (i.e. King James) Version is best adapted to convey the spirit of the original liturgical Greek. We do not dispute the necessity for more modern translations of scripture, and their great value - in certain contexts: but for our present purpose it was the Authorized Version that provided what we most required. For three centuries and more the Authorized Version, and along with it the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, have provided the words with which the English-speaking peoples throughout the world have addressed God; and these two books have become a part not only of our literary but of our spiritual inheritance.' Quite so: even today the King James Bible is one of the world's best selling books, widely loved by millions. Many English-speaking Orthodox still cherish and use traditional liturgical language in their services; and the widespread success of Mother Mary and Metropolitan Kallistos' translations of *The Festal Menaion* and *The Lenten Triodion*, and the publication in 2007 of their *Supplement*⁸ to the latter, only confirm the truth of what they wrote in 1969.

This translation is the work of one individual. It has been very closely scrutinized in the interests of accuracy, but some errors are bound to have passed unnoticed in a work of this size and complexity. The translator will be glad to be notified of them, so that they may be corrected in any future edition.

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¹*Η Παλαια Διαθηκη κατα τους Εβδομηκοντα; Εκδοσις Αποστολικης Διακονιας της Εκκλησιας της Ελλάδος; Αθηναι 1997*

²*Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX Interpretes. Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935*

³*Charles Thomson; rev. C A Muses: The Septuagint Bible: the oldest text of the Old Testament. Colorado, Falcon's Wing Press 1954*

⁴*Fr. Nicholas King: The Old Testament, a new cutting-edge translation of the Septuagint; 4 vols. Stowmarket, Kevin Mayhew 2010-.*

⁵*Lancelot C L Brenton: The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English. London, Samuel Bagster and Sons 1851; repr. Hendrikson 1986*

⁶*Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware: The Festal Menaion, translated from the original Greek. London, Faber and Faber 1969*

⁷*Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware: The Lenten Triodion, translated from the original Greek. London, Faber and Faber 1978.*

⁸*Mother Mary and Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia: The Lenten Triodion, supplementary texts. South Canaan, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press 2007.*