

Introduction

The Bible of the Early Church

The Bible of the Early Church was the Septuagint, the Koine Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, begun in Alexandria, Egypt, toward the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus around the year 280 B.C. Later, of course, the Bible of the Early Church also came to include the writings of the New Testament. When the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament, more often than not they are quoting from the Septuagint rather than from the Masoretic Text. Sometimes the quotations rely specifically on the wording of the Septuagint text as opposed to the Masoretic text. For example, in Matthew 21:16, when the scribes and Pharisees are indignant over the fact that the children are saying, “Hosanna to the son of David,” Jesus responds and says, “Yea: did you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?” Jesus’ response relies upon the Septuagint rendering of Psalm 8. The Masoretic text reads, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast established strength.” Yet none of the scribes or Pharisees accuse Jesus of misquoting the Scriptures! Both Jesus and the apostles clearly accepted the Septuagint as inspired Scripture, as did the Jews of their time.

The Greek speaking church continued (and continues today) to use the Septuagint as their

Old Testament text. The Latin speaking church, however, was influenced by Jerome's Vulgate translation, which was based on the Masoretic Text rather than the Septuagint. Jerome decided in favor of the Masoretic Text even though writers in the Ante-Nicene church such as Justin Martyr claimed that the Masoretic Text was corrupt and that it obscured many of the prophecies regarding the coming of the Christ. Nevertheless, from the time the Bible was first translated into English, translators have followed Jerome's path, translating from the Masoretic text rather than from the Greek text of the Septuagint.

The Septuagint in English

For over one hundred and fifty years Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton's translation of the Septuagint has been the standard translation in English. Brenton, however, was not the first to translate the Septuagint into English. That honor belong to Charles Thomson, who published his translation of the Old Testament books of the Septuagint in 1808. Brenton never read Thomson's translation (although an associate of Brenton's compared his translation to Thomson's and offered Brenton many suggestions as a result). Brenton first published his translation of the Old Testament books in 1844. To this Brenton added his translation of the Apocrypha in 1851, which was largely an adaptation of the Authorized Version. Thus, in the Apocrypha, we hear not Brenton's voice so much as the voice of the King James translators. Beginning around 1870, Brenton's English translation was published in a

diglot edition along with his source text, Valpy's 1819 edition of Codex Vaticanus. Thus, Brenton's source is not a critical text but a diplomatic text based primarily on one manuscript. At times Brenton's translation leaves much to be desired with respect to consistency in punctuation and rendering of terms. However, such inconsistencies rarely affect the overall sense, and Brenton more than makes up for his inconsistencies with the classical beauty of his translation, which surpasses all other English translations of the Septuagint.

Revisions to the Text

In like manner to the King James Version, Brenton harnesses the full force of the English language to provide an accurate and literal translation of the biblical text. Modern translations are inclined to render the biblical text in an idiomatic fashion to make it more accessible to the modern reader, yet they do so at the cost of obscuring the underlying source text, continually perplexing the reader as to whether or not the translation faithfully renders what is actually written in the underlying Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. While Brenton's translation may stretch the modern reader in many ways, it also reminds the reader that Scripture was not written in English from the perspective of modern-day western culture. Consequently, the present edition of Brenton's translation makes only minor revisions to the text to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks for the modern reader. First, the spelling has been brought into

conformity with modern American spelling. For example, *shew* has been rendered as *show*, and *enquire* as *inquire*. Similarly, highly archaic verb forms such as *begat* and *spake* have been rendered *begot* and *spoke* respectively. Second, the names of people and geographic locations have been updated to their commonly accepted form. For example, *Noe* has been updated to *Noah*, and *Edem* to *Eden*. Third, the hyphenation of words has been brought into conformity with currently accepted standards. Nineteenth century works make much greater use of the hyphen than what is commonly accepted today, which can be a bit distracting for the modern reader. Fourth, combinations of punctuation such as a comma followed by a dash or a comma followed by an opening parenthesis have been reduced to a dash or an opening parenthesis respectively. Fifth, poetic formatting has been introduced for poetic portions of Scripture. These five different types of revisions take little away from the original work of Brenton and will go largely unnoticed by the reader, which is as intended.

Regarding Punctuation and Grammar

The reader will do well to take note of how nineteenth century standards of punctuation differ from modern standards. Nineteenth century texts appear to the modern reader to be highly, if not overly, punctuated. The reader will notice a greater use of commas, semicolons, and colons. Nineteenth century writers understood the comma, semicolon, colon, and period

to represent pauses of increasing length. In a similar vein, these four punctuation marks were understood to indicate a decreasing degree of connection between the constituent parts. For example, a comma was placed between parts of sentence that were understood to be highly connected, while a semicolon was used to indicate less of a connection, and a colon even less of a connection. While modern usage generally (but not always) reserves a semicolon for connecting syntactically independent clauses, nineteenth century usage often used semicolons where modern readers would expect a comma, such as before conjunctions like *and*, *but*, and *for*. Colons were often used to indicate that the following segment was an additional remark or illustration appended to what was otherwise a complete sentence. In places where nineteenth century writers would use colons, modern writers might use periods or semicolons (or sometimes even commas). The difference in punctuation is most noticeable before lists of names (as in a genealogy). Where the modern reader would expect to see a colon before such lists, nineteenth century standards of punctuation found semicolons and even commas to be acceptable. Another important feature to note regarding nineteenth century punctuation is that question marks and exclamation points are often followed by lower case letters. This occurs when the degree of connection with the following text is equivalent to the degree of connection indicated by a comma, semicolon, or

colon.

The reader will also do well to take note of some grammatical features employed by Brenton. The first feature is the use of the historical present. The historical present is the use of the present tense in narrating past events to heighten the dramatic effect. Such usage draws the reader into the past event as though experiencing it in the present, which serves to highlight key moments in the narrative. The second feature is the use of the subjunctive. Greek makes much greater use of the subjunctive than does modern English. Because Brenton's translation is very literal, it seeks to employ the subjunctive whenever the Greek does. Modern English speakers rarely use the subjunctive in *if* statements, using expressions such as, "if it is God's will," rather than "if it *be* God's will." But Koine Greek uses the subjunctive much more frequently, and Brenton follows suit. The third feature is the rendering of the perfect tense. In modern English the perfect tense is rendered with the modal verb *have*, such as "I have come." However, Brenton uses the modal verb *be*, such as "I am come." Finally, the archaic pronouns *thou* (singular subject), *thee* (singular object), *thy* (singular possessive), *thine* (singular possessive), and *ye* (plural subject) are employed. Modern English has no commonly accepted way to distinguish between second person singular and second person plural, using the word *you* for both. Yet Greek clearly distinguishes between second person singular and second person plu-

ral, and the use of archaic pronouns is the only way to make such distinctions. Consequently, archaic verb forms such as *goest* have been retained in the present edition, to match the use of archaic pronouns.

Robert A. Boyd, Ed.

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**Updated Brenton English Septuagint
Spelling and formatting update of the Brenton
English Septuagint with Apocrypha**

Public Domain

Language: English

Dialect: Mixed

Translation by: Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton

Contributor: Adam Boyd

Original work was by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton in 1851. CC0 Public Domain dedication on language updates by Adam Boyd in 2020.

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