

## The Septuagint [slide one]

1. It seems that I start each class with “this was the situation” but...”This was the situation.” Baruch brought us the Deuteronomy through Kings books and then Ezra brought us what we will call the final edition of the 39 books...but they were both long gone. A lot of copying and a lot of years of exposure had taken place. [slide two]
2. Something else very relevant had taken place: while there were still many, many Jews in Judah and Palestine there was a huge colony of Jews in Egypt (and they would stay there for a long time – see John Mark and the Coptic Church). They had lost the ability to read and write Hebrew as the lingua franca had been, for generations, Greek. If this sounds odd to you, remember how much English changed after the French/Normans invaded. Here is an example of English before the Normans. [Slide three]

The Lord’s Prayer in 1000 AD English: Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum, Si þin nama gehalgod. to becume þin rice, gewurþe ðin willa, on eorðan swa swa on heofonum. urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us todæg, and forgyf us ure gyltas, swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum. and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge, ac alys us of yfele. soþlice.

And 400 years later, it looked like this: [Slide four] The Canterbury Tales:

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote  
2: The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,  
3: And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
4: Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
5: Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
6: Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
7: Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
8: Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,  
9: And smale foweles maken melodye,  
10: That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
11: (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);  
12: Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

- a. We could then go to Shakespeare to see what happened to English after another 200 years but you get the idea. Language changes. And when languages are not used, they quickly fade away.
  - b. Gaelic is taught in schools now...but the children play in English.
3. The making of the Septuagint is bound up in legends. [Slide five] It is said that Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, wanted the Jews to have a copy of their holy scriptures that they could read (and for the Alexandrian Library) so he ordered six scholars from each tribe (72 in total) to take

the Hebrew scriptures bequeathed to them by God through Baruch and Ezra and translate them into Greek.

- a. It was not called the Septuagint until 700 years later when Augustine of Hippo called it that. Until that time, it was just the Greek scriptures or the scriptures.
  - b. The biggest legend – and it is entirely without merit – is that Ptolemy II put each of the 72 scholars in a separate tent and told them to write down the law of Moses and all of them wrote exactly the same words for the first five books.
  - c. The truth is that that translation process continued for centuries. The Books of Moses were translated several times as were other Hebrew scriptures, some of which we looked at when we spent the summer on the Apocrypha.
  - d. Some of the books use Hebrew idioms and expressions while others are emphatically Greek in style, indicating different translators in different eras.
  - e. The Septuagint did something else quite important: [Slide six] it added vowels. While they didn't get the pronunciation perfect, this unlocked the Hebrew text for many, many other languages.
4. The Septuagint had undergone many revisions and rewritings between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the time of the early church. Paul quoted it more often than any other version. [Slide seven] The early church embraced it – including all those extra books. However, they adopted some versions of some of the books from Hebrew sources instead of the versions they got from the Egyptian Jews (especially Daniel, dropping the extra material).
5. Pre-Christian Jews such as Philo and Josephus accepted the Septuagint as equal to the Hebrew scriptures preserved in Palestine and Babylon. Some of them are in the Dead Sea Scrolls [Slide eight] and they show us that our Bibles are an accurate representation of what was written two to three hundred years before Jesus.
6. However, after Christianity began to blossom and especially after its official acceptance by Rome, those non-Christian Jews (remember: they had long been considered denominations of the same faith), backed away from the Septuagint. Perhaps it was because it had been championed by a rival faith. The Jews then went back to Aramaic and Hebrew scriptures they had called targums [Slide nine]

(which are wonderful). Many centuries later, they would gather these all together and make a Hebrew version of scripture called the Masoretic Text.

7. Once that happened, Greek Christians began to notice some differences between their scriptures and the Hebrew/Aramaic targums. They wanted the most accurate version of the scriptures, of course, so they began to embrace the newer Greek versions of scripture which had been written closer to the Hebrew text. [Slide ten] Origen, a scholar and bishop in North Africa, made a comparative version of six texts with textual notes on what was added, left out, and differences. Sadly – tragically – it only exists in fragments today.
  - a. Christians have always examined their scriptures. The Bereans searched them. Paul warned us to rightly divide them.
  - b. While often accused of being close minded, no atheist or Islamic group questions their materials and ideas as much as Christians do theirs.
  - c. This class is proof of that and a continuation of our tradition of searching and questioning.
  
8. While all of this was going on, Christians were writing, too, and some of those writings would become scripture. Luke refers to this in [Slide 11 -- Luke 1:1-4]. One of those lost sources he used might have been a document we call “Q” for the German word for “source.”
  
9. Rather than go on for another semester length on this, suffice it to say that three of the Gospels are very alike though they differ in some important ways. You can lay out Matthew, Mark, and Luke in columns and see that they agree about most details and stories and that they are telling the same story but in different ways. The thought is that these were written from mostly the same sources with some unique source material or perspective thrown in.
  - a. Luke records the private sayings and thoughts of Mary, indicating he interviewed her and her family.
  - b. Matthew is writing to Jews and speaks of kingdom matters more than the others.
  - c. Mark is episodic and makes no attempt to be biographical or complete (hence the truncated ending). Mark was also the

earliest of the three and one reason for the blunt ending is probably because they expected Jesus back any time then.

- d. John was written much later. He intentionally includes a broader view of what the life of Jesus meant and includes stories unique to his book, mentioning that he had to leave much out (Slide 12 -- John 21:24,25).
10. All during this time, Christians were writing to each other, to government officials, and writing theological statements. So many wrote so much that if every Bible were to suddenly disappear, we could reconstruct nearly the entire Bible from their letters. But which of their writings were scripture and which were, well, just writings?