

# **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

## **ACCORDING TO THE SEPTUAGINT**

**A TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH OF THE GREEK TEXT  
PUBLISHED BY THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF  
GREECE'S APOSTOLIKI DIAKONIA**

### ***Introduction***

This English translation of the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, is offered by an English Orthodox layman for the service of the Orthodox Church. The Greek Septuagint differs very considerably from the Masoretic Hebrew Bible on which most English translations of the Old Testament are based, and the services of the Orthodox Church are a virtual mosaic of scriptural quotations and allusions from the Septuagint.

The Orthodox Church has no definitive or fixed text of the Septuagint as it has for the New Testament in the edition published in 1904 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The most authoritative versions of the Old Testament texts are those that are included in the various liturgical books. The Church of Greece's *Apostoliki Diakonia* has published a text of the Septuagint<sup>1</sup> which is very similar to that of Alfred Rahlfs's standard critical edition<sup>2</sup>, but which has been adjusted to conform to a limited extent to traditional Orthodox readings of the Septuagint as they are found in the liturgical readings of the Church and throughout the writings of the Fathers. This text may be consulted on the *Apostoliki Diakonia* website (the online text differs in a few minor respects from that of the printed edition). Despite its limitations, I have taken *Apostoliki Diakonia*'s text as the starting point for this English version of the Septuagint, because it is published with the authority of the Church of Greece and is readily accessible.

I have sought to be faithful both to the Septuagint and to English culture. I have therefore taken the Old Testament of the Authorized Version of the Bible (the King James Version) as my English base text, and emended it where it differs from the Septuagint. I have also consulted most of the existing English translations, from the first, that of Charles Thomson, the American scholar and Secretary to the Continental Congress of the USA, in the revision of C A Muses<sup>3</sup>, to the latest, *The*

*New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)*<sup>4</sup>. Of these I have made very extensive use of Sir Lancelot C L Brenton's translation of the Septuagint<sup>5</sup>, which has been almost continuously in print since it was first published in 1851, for many years as a Greek-English diglot. Brenton's translation itself is not itself suitable for Orthodox use. Like Thomson's translation, it is based mainly on one source, *Codex Vaticanus*, which differs from the Orthodox Church's Greek text. The order of the Books is not that of the Septuagint. The deuterocanonical books, the so-called Apocrypha, are relegated to a separate section at the end. His readings have many inaccuracies. But Brenton was invaluable for my purpose, for throughout his translation he very obviously kept a very close eye on the text of the Authorized Version.

Although the Greek forms of Old Testament proper names are unfamiliar to many English-speaking Orthodox who come from the western Christian traditions, they are often of very great typological significance and are much quoted by the Church Fathers. For this reason I had originally intended to transliterate them directly from the Greek as they appear in *Apostoliki Diakonia's* edition of the Septuagint. However, I have reluctantly substituted the Hebrew forms for the Greek, because they are so much more familiar in the English-speaking world. Throughout the Septuagint *Kyrios* regularly appears without the definite article as a proper name, the equivalent of the *Tetragrammaton*, the Divine Name. In those few places where I have deemed it appropriate I have rendered it, capitalized and without the definite article, as LORD. Otherwise, I have translated it as 'the Lord'. I have followed the format of *Apostoliki Diakonia's* edition for verse, paragraph and chapter division. I have not attempted to modernize the text of the Authorized Version in any way. My aim has simply been as far as possible to try 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.

For many Orthodox my decision in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to use the Authorized Version of the Old Testament as my template instead of a modern text may seem surprising, even perverse. But I have simply followed the example of Mother Mary and the then Archimandrite, now Metropolitan, Kallistos of Diokleia, who took for their model the language of the Authorized Version when they translated *The Festal Menaion*<sup>4</sup> and *The Lenten Triodion*<sup>5</sup> from the Greek. In their words: "As we see it, the language of the Authorized 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 Authorized Version 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 recent publication of their *Supplement* to the latter only confirms the truth of what they wrote in 1969.

Finally, this translation is very much a ‘work in progress’. I have put it out on the ‘*Orthodox England*’ website to ascertain if it will satisfy a need. If it does so, I hope over time to improve it; and I shall welcome any comments and suggestions that will help me to achieve this.

Michael Asser 2009

<sup>1</sup>*He Palaia Diatheki Kata Tous Hebdomekonta: Ekadosis Apostoliki Diakonias Tes Ekklesias Tes Hellados. Athena, 1997*

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

<sup>3</sup>*Charles Thomson; rev. C A Muses: The Septuagint Bible: the oldest Text of the Old Testament. Colorado, Falcon’s Wing Press 1954*

<sup>4</sup>*A Pietersma and B G Wright, eds.: A new English translation of the Septuagint. New York, Oxford University Press 2007*

<sup>5</sup>*Lancelot C L Brenton: The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English; Samuel Bagster and Sons 1851; repr. Hendrikson 1986*

<sup>6</sup>*Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, The Festal Menaion, translated from the original Greek; pp.13-14: Faber and Faber 1969*

<sup>7</sup>*Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, The Lenten Triodion, translated from the original Greek; Faber and Faber 1978. (Supplement, St Tikhon’s Press 2008)*

**This English version of the Septuagint is based upon the text of the Authorized Version of the Bible (the King James Version), the rights of which are vested in the Crown. This version of the Apocrypha also is based upon the Authorized Version of the Bible (the King James Version), the rights of which are vested in the Crown.**