Which Bible Did Jesus Use? — Quick Reference Guide

Septuagint vs. Masoretic Text: Key Differences and Implications

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

Protestant Bibles use the Masoretic Text (MT) for the Old Testament.

Jesus and the apostles quoted the Septuagint (LXX).

They often disagree.

THREE COMPETING TEXTS

Text	Date	Status
Septuagint (LXX)	Translated 250-150 BCE from Hebrew	Used by Jesus, apostles, early Church
Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)	250 BCE - 68 CE	Oldest biblical manuscripts; often agrees with LXX **against** MT
Masoretic Text (MT)	Finalized 700-1000 CE	Protestant Old Testament basis; **1000+ years newer** than LXX

Key Fact: The Septuagint is based on Hebrew texts **1,000+ years older** than our oldest complete Masoretic manuscripts.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USES THE SEPTUAGINT

Statistics

- **~300 OT quotations** in the New Testament

- ~**212** diverge from the Masoretic Text
- ~**185** diverge from the Septuagint
- **Result:** NT primarily uses the Septuagint

Protestant scholars Archer & Chirichigno: - **340 places** where NT cites LXX - **Only 33 places** where NT cites MT instead

Paul's 93 OT quotations: - **51** agree with LXX (22 of these **against** MT) - **4** follow MT against LXX - **38** differ from both

Bottom Line: The NT overwhelmingly follows the Septuagint, even when it contradicts the Hebrew.

CRITICAL DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

1. VIRGIN BIRTH (Isaiah 7:14 → Matthew 1:23)

Text	Reading
LXX	"Behold, a **virgin** (παρθένος) shall conceive"
MT	"Behold, a **young woman** (עַלְמָה) shall conceive"

Hebrew word for "virgin": בְּתוּלָה (*betulah*) — used 50+ times

Issue: Matthew's virgin birth prophecy **depends entirely on the Septuagint translation**. The Hebrew does not require virginity.

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2. DIVINE COUNCIL (Deuteronomy 32:8)

Text	Reading
LXX	"according to the number of the **angels of God**"
DSS	"according to the number of the **sons of God**"
MT	"according to the number of the **sons of Israel**"

Scholarly Consensus: LXX and DSS preserve the original. MT was **deliberately altered** to remove references to divine beings/divine council.

Theology: Original text taught that God assigned nations to divine beings at Babel. MT removed this.

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3. CRUCIFIXION PROPHECY (Psalm 22:16)

Text	Reading
LXX	"They have **pierced** my hands and feet"
DSS	"They have **dug** (כארו) my hands and feet"

Text	Reading
MT	"**Like a lion** (כארי) my hands and feet"

Hebrew difference: One letter (yod vs. vav)

Issue: - "Like a lion my hands and feet" is grammatically awkward/incomplete - LXX (2,000 years old) and DSS support "pierced" - Christological interpretation depends on "pierced"

4. GENTILE INCLUSION (Amos 9:12 → Acts 15:17)

Text	Reading
LXX	"That the **rest of humanity** may seek the Lord"
MT	"That they may possess the remnant of **Edom**"

Critical Problem:

- Hebrew: אָדָם (*adam*, "humanity") vs. אֱדוֹם (*edom*, "Edom") — nearly identical
- MT: Militaristic conquest of Edom
- LXX: Universal seeking of God by all humanity

James's argument at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) that Gentiles should be included in the church ONLY WORKS if you use the Septuagint.

The entire decision to include Gentiles without circumcision depends on the LXX reading.

5. ANGELS WORSHIP CHRIST (Hebrews 1:6 / Deuteronomy 32:43)

Text	Reading
LXX	"Let all the **angels of God worship him**"
DSS	"Bow down to him all you **gods**" (4QDeut)
MT	**[Phrase is completely missing]**

Devastating Issue: Hebrews quotes a verse that **doesn't exist in the Masoretic Text** at all.

Protestant Old Testaments don't have the verse the New Testament is quoting.

6. HOW MANY PEOPLE? (Exodus 1:5 → Acts 7:14)

Text	Reading
LXX	**75 people** went to Egypt
DSS	**75 people** (4QGen-Exod, 4QExod)

Text	Reading
MT	**70 people** went to Egypt

Stephen's speech (Acts 7:14): Says **75**, following the Septuagint.

If the MT is correct (70), Stephen was wrong.

If Stephen (filled with the Holy Spirit) was right, the MT is wrong.

CHRONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Genesis 5 & 11: Patriarchal Ages

Pattern: LXX ages are often **+100 years** more than MT

Patriarch	MT: Age at Son's Birth	LXX: Age at Son's Birth
Adam	130	**230** (+100)
Seth	105	**205** (+100)
Enosh	90	**190** (+100)
Kenan	70	**170** (+100)

Creation Dating

Text	Creation Date	Flood Date	From Creation to Abraham
MT	~4004 BCE	~2348 BCE	~2,008 years
LXX	~5554 BCE	~3298 BCE	~3,394 years
Difference	**1,550 years**	**950 years**	**1,386 years**

Early Church used LXX chronology (~5500 BCE).

Protestants use MT chronology (~4000 BCE).

Both can't be right.

Other Numerical Differences

Passage	MT	LXX/DSS
Goliath's height	9'4"	**6'4"** (DSS agrees with LXX)
Exodus 1:5	70 people	**75 people** (DSS agrees with LXX)

TEXTUAL CORRUPTIONS IN THE MASORETIC TEXT

1. Missing Numbers (1 Samuel 13:1)

MT literally says: "Saul was **one year old** when he became king, and he reigned **two years** over Israel."

This is nonsensical.

Problem: The numbers are **completely missing or corrupted**.

Modern translations: - NIV **guesses** "thirty…forty-two" - NRSV **leaves blanks**: "Saul was…years old" - LXX: **Verse is absent**

If the Masoretic Text is "inerrant," why does it contain literal nonsense?

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2. Missing Paragraph (1 Samuel 10:27-11:1)

MT: Abruptly jumps from one scene to "Then Nahash the Ammonite went up…"

Who is Nahash? Why is he attacking?

DSS (4QSam): Contains an **entire missing paragraph** explaining: - Who Nahash is - Why he's attacking - His previous atrocities (gouging out right eyes) - "About a month later, Nahash…"

The MT lost an entire paragraph. Modern Bibles (ESV, NRSV) now include it based on DSS.

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3. Missing Verse (Psalm 145)

Psalm 145 is an acrostic — each verse begins with successive Hebrew letters (22 letters).

MT: The verse beginning with נ (nun) is **missing**.

LXX & DSS (11QPsa): Contains the missing verse: "God is faithful in his words and gracious in all his deeds"

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4. Missing Text (Judges 16:13-14)

MT: Delilah weaves Samson's hair, but **text doesn't say when/how Samson fell asleep**.

LXX & DSS: Contains **additional text** explaining Delilah made Samson sleep.

MT lost text through scribal error.

DELIBERATE ALTERATIONS: THE TIQQUNE SOPHERIM

"Corrections of the Scribes" — Jewish tradition **openly acknowledges** making **18 deliberate changes** for theological reasons.

Examples:

Genesis 18:22 - **Original:** "But YHWH stood before Abraham" - **Changed to:** "But Abraham stood before YHWH" - **Reason:** Original implied YHWH was in subordinate position

Numbers 11:15 - **Original:** "that I may not see **my** evil" - **Changed to:** "that I may not see **their** evil" - **Reason:** Avoid Moses speaking harshly about God

Job 7:20 - **Original:** "I have become a burden **to you**" - **Changed to:** "I have become a burden **to myself**" - **Reason:** Humans can't be a burden to God

Significance: If scribes **deliberately altered** the text, it's not "pristine" or "inerrant."

BOOKS IN DIFFERENT LENGTHS

Book	MT Length	LXX Length	DSS Evidence
Jeremiah	52 chapters	**1/8 shorter**, different chapter order	**4QJer** supports shorter LXX
Job	42 chapters	**1/6 shorter** (400 lines fewer)	N/A
Esther	10 chapters, God never mentioned	**+107 verses**, prayers, God mentioned frequently	N/A
Daniel	12 chapters	**+3 sections** (Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, Bel & Dragon)	N/A

Two different versions of Jeremiah coexisted and were both considered Scripture.

MISSING BOOKS (Deuterocanonical)

Books in Septuagint (used by early Church) but rejected by Protestants:

- 1 & 2 Maccabees
- Wisdom of Solomon

• Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
• Tobit
• Judith
• Baruch
• Additions to Daniel and Esther

NT references to these books:

• **Hebrews 11:35** → References **2 Maccabees 7** (mother and sons martyred)
• **Matthew 27:43** → Nearly identical to **Wisdom of Solomon 2:18-20**
• **James 1:19** → Echoes **Sirach 5:11**

Protestant Bibles removed books the NT authors knew and used.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: THE GAME CHANGER

What the DSS Proved

Before DSS: Scholars debated whether LXX differences were translation errors or different source texts.

After DSS: We now have **Hebrew manuscripts that agree with LXX against MT**.

DSS Classification (Emanuel Tov)

Text Type	Percentage
Masoretic-like	~35%
Non-aligned	~35%
Septuagint-family	~5%
Samaritan-like	~3%
Other	~22%

Only 35% of DSS match the Masoretic tradition.

65% represent other traditions, proving textual plurality from the beginning.

Key DSS Agreements with LXX Against MT

1. **Deuteronomy 32:8** — "sons of God" (DSS) vs. "sons of Israel" (MT)
2. **Deuteronomy 32:43** — Angels worship phrase present (DSS) vs. missing (MT)
3. **1 Samuel** — 4QSam agrees with LXX in 124 places against MT
4. **Jeremiah** — Shorter text like LXX vs. longer MT
5. **Exodus 1:5** — 75 people (DSS) vs. 70 (MT)
6. **Goliath's height** — 6'4" (DSS) vs. 9'4" (MT)

Conclusion: The Septuagint often preserves older, more accurate readings than the Masoretic Text.

DEVASTATING QUESTIONS FOR SOLA SCRIPTURA

1. Which Scripture Is "Scripture Alone"?

   • The Septuagint (used by Jesus and apostles)?
   • The Masoretic Text (basis of Protestant Bibles)?
   • **How do you decide?**

2. The NT Depends on LXX Readings Not in MT

Examples: - Virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) - Gentile inclusion (Amos 9:12) - Angels worshiping Christ (Deut 32:43)

If the NT theology depends on the LXX, isn't the MT insufficient?

3. Who Decided the Canon?

The Bible doesn't contain a table of contents.

   • The **Church** decided which books are Scripture
   • Catholics include Deuterocanonical books (following LXX/early Church)
   • Protestants exclude them (following later Jewish canon after Christianity
     emerged)

"Scripture Alone" requires Church authority to establish what Scripture is.

4. No "Original Text" Exists

DSS proves: - Multiple textual traditions coexisted - No single "pure" Hebrew text - Textual diversity from the beginning

There is no "original autograph" to which we can appeal.

5. Textual Criticism Requires Judgment

Every time scholars choose between variants, they exercise authority.

Examples: - 1 Samuel 13:1 — Translators must **guess** missing numbers - DSS readings — Modern Bibles **choose** which variants to adopt

"Scripture Alone" cannot function without human authorities making decisions.

DEVASTATING QUESTIONS FOR BIBLICAL INERRANCY

1. Which Text Is Inerrant?

MT and LXX contradict each other hundreds of times. Both can't be inerrant.

Issue	MT	LXX	Both Inerrant?
Creation date	4004 BCE	5554 BCE	❌ No
People to Egypt	70	75	❌ No
Goliath's height	9'4"	6'4"	❌ No
Isaiah 7:14	"young woman"	"virgin"	❌ No

2. "Original Autographs" Are Useless

Evangelical claim: "Inerrancy applies to original manuscripts we don't have."

Problems: - We don't have them - Can't verify them - DSS proves no single "original" ever existed - **If we can't access inerrant originals, what's the point?**

3. Deliberate Alterations Prove Non-Inerrancy

Tiqqune Sopherim: 18 documented deliberate changes

Question: If the original was inerrant, why did it need correction?

Either: - Original was errant (scribes corrected real errors) - Scribes introduced errors (by "correcting" an inerrant text)

Either way, inerrancy fails.

4. Textual Corruptions Are Undeniable

1 Samuel 13:1 — Nonsensical (numbers missing)

All we have is corrupted text.

If God inspired inerrant originals but allowed them to be lost/corrupted, what's the practical value?

5. NT Endorses "Errant" LXX Readings

Stephen (Acts 7:14): Says **75** people (LXX), not 70 (MT)

If MT is correct, Stephen was wrong.

If Stephen (inspired) was right, MT is wrong.

Can't have both inerrant.

6. Inerrancy Is Unfalsifiable

Evangelical formula: "The Bible is inerrant in the original autographs."

Problem: We don't have them, so we can't test the claim.

Any error in existing manuscripts is dismissed as "copying error."

This makes inerrancy a faith claim, not a demonstrable fact.

THE BOTTOM LINE

What The Evidence Shows

1. **The NT authors used and endorsed the Septuagint**
2. **The Septuagint often preserves older, more accurate readings** (proven by DSS)
3. **The Masoretic Text is a late, edited, standardized version** (not the pristine original)
4. **Deliberate alterations occurred** (Tiqqune Sopherim)
5. **Textual corruptions exist** (1 Sam 13:1, missing paragraphs, etc.)
6. **Multiple textual traditions coexisted** (no single "original")

The Devastating Question

"If Jesus and the apostles used the Septuagint, which includes books Protestants reject and readings that differ from the Masoretic Text in doctrinally significant ways, then are Protestant Bibles based on the wrong Old Testament?"

Implications

For Sola Scriptura: - Requires choosing which textual tradition is "Scripture" - Depends on Church authority to establish canon - Cannot function without interpretive tradition - **Logically incoherent as stated**

For Biblical Inerrancy: - Must choose between MT and LXX (both can't be inerrant) - "Original autographs" we don't have are functionally useless - Deliberate alterations and corruptions are proven - Unfalsifiable claim about lost documents - **Not sustainable given textual realities**

CONCLUSION

The confident Protestant assertion "The Bible says…" becomes far more complex when we ask:

"Which Bible? Which manuscript tradition? Which reading?"

The textual evidence demands humility, not certainty.

For the full 80-page deep dive with extensive documentation, see the comprehensive version.