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LOST IN TRANSLATION(S)? ASCERTAINING THE IMPACT AND
INFLUENCE OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS ON CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS THROUGH AN
INVESTIGATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE PSALMS

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Introduction

In contemporary Christian circles it may sound ironic to pose the question, “How well do we know our Bibles?” At first this appears to be a question of biblical literacy; that is, how familiar are we with the biblical *content*. Despite one’s opinions on the incline or decline of biblical literacy, there is no doubt that the Christian marketplace has become saturated with print, computer and other media resources enabling Christians to personally interact with the Bible in innovative ways never before conceivable. However, there is another implicit nuance to the question; that is, how well do we know the nature and origin of the *text* of our Bibles. With the sea of secondary resources exegeting and expounding the Bible, one can easily be lulled into assuming that the shape of the biblical text itself is a universal given not subject to change or alteration. Yet the reality is that the vast majority of people, including pastors and, to a certain degree, scholars, are reliant on translated texts. It is often forgotten that where most begin their investigations of the Bible (i.e. in translations) is the end of an intense scholarly process of deliberative text criticism and vigilant translation of languages completely foreign to most readers today. With a marketplace flooded with Bibles tailored to every imaginable demographic and denomination, it is extremely important to stand back and ask how the original biblical texts are distilled, reshaped and formatted in the translation process

prior to becoming a finished product stamped with bold golden letters designating them ‘The Holy Bible.’

The present study cannot do full justice to this question by providing an exhaustive explanation of all the implications it entails. Rather, my focus will revolve around one particular issue that is yet to be fully appreciated or articulated: methodologically, how have translators taken into account the Dead Sea Scrolls¹ and to what extent have variant readings been incorporated into the body of English Bibles?² By way of demonstration, I will do a case study on the book of Psalms, primarily for two reasons. First, it is highly significant that the number of Psalms scrolls discovered in the Judaean Desert far exceeds the material available for any other biblical book.³ Secondly, the relatively early availability of Psalms material has meant that translation committees were able to access this material with some ease in the footnotes of the most popular Hebrew text, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), and various facsimile editions of the Scrolls, as well as progressively in the full critical publications in the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert series. Therefore, the book of Psalms is an ideal candidate to serve as a litmus test to investigate the impact and influence of the Dead Sea Scrolls on contemporary Bible translations. The data for the study draws on seventeen English translations produced between 1952 and 2005 and is intentionally representative of a diversity of Christian and Jewish traditions.⁴ The study will first provide a brief statistical overview of the number of Scrolls variant

1. The author is aware of the blatant anachronism in referring to “Biblical Scrolls” since one cannot speak of a “Bible” in antiquity. However, in the interests of lucidity the term will be utilized to refer to those scrolls whose material would subsequently be canonized in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

2. While Scanlin, *Dead Sea Scrolls and Modern Translations*, proved to be an influential and insightful resource, the appearance of many new and/or updated translations since this monumental work demonstrates the need to readdress the issue.

3. VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 147.

4. AMP (1987), CJB (1998), ESV (2005), GWORD (1994), HCSB (2004), JPS (1985), NAB (1991), NASB (1995), NET (2005), NIV (1984), NJB (1990), NKJV (1982), NLT-SE (2004), NRSV (1989), REB (1989), RSV (1952), TNIV (2002).

readings incorporated or referenced in the translations and will then proceed to explain the nature of a selection of significant readings. In the process, I will elaborate on methodological trends apparent in contemporary translations pertaining to the use of the Scrolls. In all of this, the aim is to see whether we are lost in the multiplicity of translations currently available, as well as to determine whether or not the intrinsic value of the Scrolls themselves has been lost in the translation process.

1. Statistical Overview of Current Interaction with the Scrolls

The thirty-nine Dead Sea Psalms scrolls contain 786 variant readings when compared to other ancient textual witnesses.⁵ Currently fourteen of these readings have surfaced either in the body of a contemporary translation or at the very least in an editorial footnote as a potential alternate reading (see Figure 1). In effect this means that 1.78% of the available variant readings in the Psalms Scrolls have made their way from the caves of Qumran into the hands of contemporary readers. Undoubtedly this is just the tip of the iceberg as future translations will most certainly exhibit an increasing level of text critical interaction with this new evidence. Of the roster of Bibles surveyed, the NAB proved to be the most advanced in terms of its incorporation of Scrolls variants while the NJB, NRSV (RSV) and TNIV also demonstrated a high level of interaction with the Scrolls. As will be demonstrated below, the nature of the variants used is diverse and in many ways brings the shape and content of the Psalms as they existed in the Second Temple era into sharper relief.

5. The number of variant readings is tabulated according to the Psalms variant list in Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls*, 86–115.

Figure 1

Psalm	AMP	CJB	ESV	GWORD	HCSB	JPS	NAB	NASB	NET
35:5									
37:36		●			●○		●		
38:19							●		●
107:29	●		●		●		●	●	
119:119					○				
135:5									
139:11						●			
141:5									
141:7					○				
142:4					○		●		
144:2			●○	●	○	●	●		●
145:5						○	●		
145:13			●○		●○		●		○
147:20					○				

Psalm	NIV	NJB	NKJV	NLT-SE	NRSV	REB	RSV	TNIV
35:5		●○						
37:36		●○			●	●○	●	
38:19		●			●○	●	●	●○
107:29	●				●		●	●○
119:119								
135:5						●○		
139:11		●○				○		
141:5		●○						
141:7								
142:4				●		●	●	
144:2	●○	●○		●	●	●	●	●○
145:5	●○		○		○	○	○	●
145:13	●○	●○	○	●	●○	●○	●	●○
147:20								○

- Indicates Scrolls variant incorporated into body of translation
- Indicates Scrolls variant explicitly referenced in footnote

2. Overview of Significant Scrolls Readings Currently in Translations

While some of the Scrolls variants that have made their way into these translations make only small changes in the meaning, such as the difference in verbal person (Ps 37:36; 145:5; 119:119), the number of the pronominal suffix (Ps 141:7) or the form of the divine name (Ps 135:5) there is a small number of variants that need a closer look when formulating a text critical translation of the Psalms. The two variants analyzed below have been designated as highly significant as they introduce blocks of material not contained in the Masoretic Text that serves as the primary basis for all modern translations. In each of the variants discussed below, full translations of the passage in the Septuagint (LXX), Scrolls, and Masoretic Text (MT) are provided with the words in question underlined.⁶ Following this, a concise presentation of the divergent translation options is provided with the ancient textual witnesses in support of each reading. Finally, below each translation option is a compiled listing of how the seventeen translations surveyed align themselves with these options.

a. *Ps 107:29*

LXX Translation: He commanded the storm and it became a whisper, and its waves (τὰ κύματα αὐτῆς) were silent.

4QPs^f Translation: He caused the storm to turn to silence, and the waves of the sea (גַּלְיָם יָם) became still.

MT Translation: He caused the storm to be silent, and their waves (גַּלְיָם יָם) became still.

Option 1: “the waves of the sea”; reading supported by 4QPs^f (AMP, ESV, HCSB, NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, REB, TNIV).

6. All translations are the author’s; versification is according to contemporary English translations.

Option 2: “their/its waves”; reading supported by Masoretic Text and Septuagint (CJB, GWORD, JPS, NET, NKJV, NLT-SE).⁷

What we encounter in Ps 107:29 is an example of a reading that was completely lost for the past two millennia as it was previously unknown in both the MT and the LXX. At first glance the impact of this particular variant on contemporary translations appears to be remarkable since ten of the texts surveyed are in exact alignment with the Scrolls. However, when we dig a little deeper it becomes apparent that this initial conclusion is deceiving and requires further explanation. To begin with, it is noteworthy that of all the translations that have incorporated this reading, TNIV alone references its legitimate origin in the Scrolls. It is curious that a further nine translations have aligned themselves with the Scrolls yet fail to indicate to readers that their texts are diverging from the MT. The most likely explanation for this trend is that those translations have opted for the wording on account of a footnote in the critical apparatus of *BHS* which suggests amending the text to read “waves of the sea” as found in the antithetical parallel verse Ps 107:25. If this is the case, then many of these translations have inadvertently aligned themselves with a valuable reading contained in the Scrolls by following the editorial hunch in *BHS*, which, in actual fact, fails to provide any feasible textual support for the proposed restoration. The suggested amendment does not arise from a text critical standpoint but apparently from a formal consideration based on an elusive and debatable characteristic of Hebrew poetry. In short, in the case of the TNIV, this is a clear example of where spending the time and energy to conduct effective text criticism pays off in legitimately restoring a component of the Hebrew text that was all but lost until the discovery of the Scrolls. On the other hand, we need to remember that blindly following the editorial propositions of *BHS* without cohesive textual support may

7. The NJB translation of Ps 107:29 is too idiomatic to effectively show which option is followed.

not be the best translation practice or in the best interest of readers.

b. *Ps 145:13*

LXX Translation: Your kingdom is an eternal kingdom and your dominion endures from generation to generation. The Lord is faithful in all his words and pure in all his deeds (πιστὸς κύριος ἐν τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ὅσιος ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ).

11QPs^a Translation: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures from generation to generation. Blessed be the name of the Lord and blessed be his name from everlasting to everlasting. God is faithful in his words and gracious in all his deeds (נִאֱמַן אֱלֹהִים בְּדַבְרָיו וְחַסִּיד בְּכֹל מַעֲשָׂיו). Blessed be the name of the Lord and blessed be his name from everlasting to everlasting.

MT Translation: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures from generation to generation.

Option 1: “God is faithful in his words, and gracious in all his deeds”; reading supported by 11QPs^a, some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint and Syriac (ESV, HCSB, NAB, NIV, NJB, NLT-SE, NRSV, REB, RSV, TNIV).

Option 2: reading not contained; supported by Masoretic Text (AMP, CJB, GWORD, JPS, NASB, NET, NKJV).

Unlike the previous variant that deviated from other ancient witnesses by a single word, the variant in Ps 145:13 is profound as it involves a full line of poetry. Psalm 37, 119 and 145 are unique in the Psalter as they are examples of Hebrew acrostic poems where each line or stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Within this literary form one expects to find twenty-two distinct lines or stanzas corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. However, the form of Ps 145 in the MT is problematic since there is a gap in the expected sequence. Whereas Ps 145:13 begins with the letter

mēm (מֵם), the following line in Ps 145:14 surprisingly starts off with the letter *sāmek* (סֵם). It appears that the MT is lacking the expected line beginning with *nûn* (נּוּן). Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars were aware that Ps 145 in the LXX, Syriac and some later Hebrew manuscripts contained the lacking line beginning with *nûn* exactly where one would expect. Yet due to the later date of the Syriac and Hebrew manuscripts as well as the tendency of the LXX translators to creatively expand or clarify ambiguities in the text, the authenticity of the “missing” line in these witnesses was questioned. However, the fact that this line is contained in the Hebrew text of 11QPs^a, a text that predates all other known witnesses, firmly establishes that this reading was not an innovation of later manuscripts and translations. Therefore, the substantial textual legacy of 11QPs^a in regards to this particular variant is recognizable in the LXX, some Hebrew manuscripts and the Syriac.

Without a doubt this is one of the most significant variant readings discovered in the Psalms Scrolls. The extent to which this substantial reading has been incorporated into modern translations is impressive as ten of the translations have included the reading into the body of their texts and a further two provide a footnote indicating it as a viable alternative to the MT. The fact that seven of the translations incorporating the reading include a footnote explicitly referencing the Scrolls demonstrates a high level of independent interaction with the Scrolls that is not contingent upon the limited information provided in *BHS*. Once again the conscious text critical work of many of these translations is commendable and in this instance the intrinsic value of the Scrolls has been fully appreciated.

This brief analysis of two highly significant Scrolls variants presently in translations has served to establish that in many ways Bibles from across the spectrum have successfully adopted a methodology that has allowed for a degree of dialogue with the Scrolls. In both of these instances material from the Scrolls has been consulted firsthand and the benefits are recognizable. Though statistically only a small number of Scrolls readings have been incorporated into contemporary translations, it is evident that the variants incorporated to date have made an

invaluable contribution to the content, form and shape of today's Psalter.

3. Effectively Utilizing Textual Sources: The Scrolls–Septuagint Dialogue

One particularly intriguing theme that became apparent as I did this case study was the complexity involved in using the LXX as a text critical source for Bible translations in light of the Scrolls. This issue worked its way out predominantly in two ways. First, in a positive light there are ten LXX variants that have been incorporated into translations of the Psalms even though the translators did not know that a corroborating Hebrew reading had been found in the Scrolls.⁸ In this way the Scrolls provide an indispensable interpretive lens through which LXX readings can be viewed and assessed. The existence of an ancient Hebrew text that resonates with select LXX variants firmly establishes that such readings are not the product of the creative, explanatory or expansionistic tendencies of LXX translators. Rather, there are numerous places where the Scrolls indicate that the LXX is in fact a legitimate and faithful translation of an ancient Hebrew text of the Psalms. Just as I did in the previous section, I will over-view two significant LXX/Scrolls variants and discuss the implications of these characteristically unique readings. Following this analysis I will discuss the other side of the issue, and the second trend pertaining to the LXX–Scrolls dialogue that surfaced during the study.

a. Ps 37:28

Due to the complexity of Ps 37:28 in the various witnesses and the fragmentary nature of the Scrolls evidence, the following variant is analyzed in phrases to highlight the precise component of the text in question. As a result, the translation options given below are to a certain degree synthetic because they do not fully elaborate on the nature and origin of each element of the verse,

8. Cf. Ps 17:11; 22:16; 37:28; 49:12; 102:23; 119:16, 17, 101, 119; 139:14.

but focus only on the interaction of English translations with one particular phrase.

LXX Translation:

A: For the Lord loves justice

B: and he will not desert his holy ones;

C: they will be eternally kept.

D: But the lawless will be persecuted (ἄνομοι δὲ ἐκδιωχθή-
σουνται)

E: and the descendents of the impious will be completely destroyed.

4QpPs^a Translation:

A: ...judgment... (Scroll fragmentary yet contains enough text to confirm the presence of phrase.)

B: *Not contained in 4QpPs^a.*

C: *Not contained in 4QpPs^a.*

D: [Evildoers will for]ever be destroyed
([עול ים לעו]לם נשמדו)

E: and the descendants of the wic[ked will be cut off...

MT Translation:

A: For the Lord loves justice

B: and will not leave his godly ones;

C: they are preserved forever (לְעוֹלָם נִשְׁמְרוּ)

D: *Not contained in MT.*

E: but the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.

Option 1 including phrase D: “evildoers will forever be destroyed”; reading supported by 4QpPs^a and Septuagint (NAB, NJB, REB, TNIV).

Option 2 does not include phrase D: “evildoers will forever be destroyed”; a reading supported by Masoretic Text (AMP, CJB, ESV, GWORD, HCSB, JPS, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, NLT-SE, NRSV, RSV).

Once again we encounter a valuable reading in the Scrolls that provides clarity to a formal discrepancy in the MT. As noted above, Ps 37 is an example of acrostic Hebrew poetry. Similar to Ps 145, the expected poetic pattern of this psalm breaks down in Ps 37:28b where one would expect a line beginning with the letter *‘ayin* (ע), but in an unexpected shift the line opens with *lāmed* (ל). Prior to the discovery of the Scrolls, a divergent reading of this verse was known in the LXX, whose reconstructed *Vorlage* (the scribe’s source text) likely contained the reading עוֹלִים לְעוֹלִים נִשְׁמְדוּ.⁹ However, arguments based strictly on this LXX evidence alone are suspicious for two reasons. First, theorizing about the shape and content of the scribe’s *Vorlage* is admittedly a debatable and subjective task. Secondly, as previously noted, in many cases the LXX translators are known to have creatively interacted with the text so it is not uncommon to find corrective translations that adjust and address inconsistencies in the Hebrew text. Therefore, on its own the LXX reading is suspect.

To the great interest of text critics, a reading that resonates with the assumed LXX *Vorlage* was discovered in the Scrolls. However, it is the precise nature and location of Ps 37:28 in the Scrolls that makes this variant so intriguing. Among the biblical Scrolls, Ps 37 is fragmentary, as we have material only for Ps 37:1–4 (11QPs^d) and 37:18–19 (4QPs^c). Yet a great deal more of Ps 37 is found in the *peshet* text of 4QPs^a. This document is a sort of commentary, and contains a line-by-line interpretation of the psalm. It witnesses to a Hebrew text that contained the *‘ayin* line at Ps 37:28 exactly where one would anticipate it. Therefore, in combination with the LXX, 4QPs^a provides a direct window into the oldest known form of Psalm 37, which contained a consistent and complete acrostic poem.

Clearly such a variant as this is vitally important on a content level, as it alters both the tone and meaning of Ps 37:28. Beyond this, the fact that this reading has been incorporated in four modern translations, three of which explicitly reference its origins in the LXX, demonstrates a heightened awareness of

9. Cf. *BHS* footnote.

important LXX variants. However, on its own the legitimacy and authenticity of this LXX variant is questionable. By recognizing the value and power of common readings between the Scrolls and the LXX, translators are able to provide an English rendering that interacts with multiple sources in an effective and innovative manner, thus bolstering the legitimacy of some LXX readings. Furthermore, by engaging with an excerpted reading from a *peshet* text, translations will enter into the new frontier in Scrolls studies that seeks to bring the biblical text into sharper relief through constructive dialogue with exegetical and para-scriptural texts. Ultimately, the restoration of the lost line in Ps 37:28 in four contemporary translations is noteworthy, though the case for the LXX reading would have been significantly stronger had the Hebrew evidence from 4QpPs^a been consulted.

b. *Ps 22:16*

LXX Translation: For many dogs encircle me; a gathering of the wicked surrounds me. They gouged (ὠρυξάν) my hands and feet.

XHev/Se4 Translation: For dogs have encircled me; an assembly of evildoers surround me. They have pierced (כִּאֲרָוּ) my hands and feet.

MT Translation: For dogs have encircled me; an assembly of evildoers surrounds me. Like a lion (כִּאֲרָוּ) at my hands and feet.

Option 1: “they have pierced”; reading supported by XHev/Se4, some Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint (AMP, ESV, GWORD, HCSB, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NLT-SE, RSV, TNIV).

Option 2: “like a lion”; reading supported by Masoretic Text (CJB, JPS).¹⁰

10. The NAB, NET, NRSV and REB translations of Ps 22:16 are too idiomatic to effectively show which option is followed.

The theological impact of the variant in Ps 22:16 could not be greater. For Christian theology the messianic import of Ps 22 is largely influenced by the Synoptic tradition that records Ps 22:1 as Jesus' final agonizing words on the cross (Matt 27:46 = Mk 15:34). Yet it is precisely this theological interest that previously called into question the legitimacy and authenticity of the LXX reading as it is *possible* that the manuscript evidence was impacted by Christian redaction. Despite the support from a smattering of late Hebrew manuscripts, for the same reasons as outlined above, the LXX reading was destined to be viewed with a degree of suspicion. Yet once again incredible substantiating Hebrew evidence in favor of the LXX has been identified in the Scrolls. By taking into account the reading from XHev/Se4, collectively the evidence is in favor of the reading "they have pierced." Not only is the long legacy of this reading apparent, but also its existence in both later Greek and Hebrew witnesses is highly significant. Therefore, on both theological and textual levels the profundity of this reading can be firmly rooted in a text that predates any potentially Christianized form of Ps 22.

As is evident in the concise analysis above, this LXX variant has had an immense impact on contemporary translations. In total, eleven translations have incorporated the reading, nine of which provide an explanatory footnote referencing the LXX and other minor supporting witnesses. Yet the fact that all of these translations are unaware that the Scrolls corroborate the LXX questions the grounds on which the reading was adopted. It is intriguing that these eleven translations are predominantly Christian endeavors; whereas, those translations adhering to the MT in this instance are primarily from within and targeted to Jewish contexts. Therefore, one might suspect that the text critical decision to follow the LXX in this instance was in some way guided by Christian theological interests rather than by sound text critical methodology. In any case, the fact that no contemporary translation is aware of the presence of this reading in the Scrolls is disappointing, as such evidence no doubt solidifies the legitimacy and authenticity of the LXX reading. This example provides further evidence that the full value of the Scrolls-LXX dialogue has not been fully articulated in contemporary translations. The

prevalence of overlapping variants between the Scrolls and the LXX should undoubtedly be an area that is targeted in future text critical translations. Hopefully, designating this as an area of focus will mean that future English Bibles will benefit from much Scrolls/LXX evidence, whose intrinsic value and contribution is yet to be fully seen.

c. Counterbalancing the LXX with Scrolls/MT Readings

Conversely, the second trend apparent in the Scrolls–LXX dialogue in contemporary translations pertains to how the Scrolls can function as an affirmative text critical source when in agreement with the MT. Currently there are eighteen LXX variants that have been incorporated in Bible translations, apparently without the knowledge that the Scrolls provide support for the MT readings.¹¹ Because no translation has adopted a methodology that consistently takes the Scrolls into account, the feasibility of such LXX variants is open to question. This is not to say that a variant reading is only valid in so far as it agrees with the Scrolls. However, it is not too much to say that any text critical translation that does not allow for interaction with all available sources is ultimately deficient in its critical decisions, as crucial evidence may be left unaccounted for. Therefore, in regards to the eighteen LXX readings mentioned above, they ought to be reconsidered with the Scrolls factored into the equation. In this way translations will benefit from a higher degree of consistency and viability in the variant readings incorporated into the body of translations.

The two trends discussed here in regards to the Scrolls–LXX dialogue have demonstrated two distinct areas to which future translations must pay closer attention. On the one hand, by placing the Scrolls and the LXX in conversation with one another, a highly valuable set of overlapping variants will come to the fore. On the other hand, by appreciating where the LXX diverges from both the Scrolls and the MT, translators will be in a position to assess the feasibility and legitimacy of unique LXX readings. In

11. Cf. Ps 12:7a, 7b; 18:13a, 13b 42; 19:4; 23:6; 31:10; 36:1; 44:4; 49:11; 53:5; 89:19; 105:28; 109:28; 118:12; 119:11; 119:101.

short, translators would be wise to keep an eye on both the biblical and exegetical Scrolls when considering the LXX. The Scrolls can act to some degree as a fail-safe and provide a fresh perspective on the potential origin and authenticity of LXX variants.

4. *Ascertaining Idioms in the Scrolls*

Often discussions over Bible translations revolve around questions of dynamic versus formal equivalence. How idiomatic is too idiomatic? Is a rigidly literal translation a better translation? While some contemporary translations are known for their exceptional ability to provide a literal yet comprehensible rendering of the Hebrew text, most fall on the spectrum somewhere between the poles of dynamic and formal equivalence and offer accessible yet intelligible renderings of the Hebrew text. On the most fundamental level this is a matter of translation technique; that is, how do translations handle the Hebrew text of the MT, particularly when it is problematic or unintelligible? How do we make sense of a text that does not seem to make sense? In many such instances the English rendering receives a degree of nuancing in the translation process, often involving the addition of words or phrases not contained in the Hebrew text in order to make an intelligible English translation. Yet often the helping words or phrases so desperately needed to clarify ambiguities in the MT are in fact contained in the Hebrew text of the Scrolls. Therefore, in light of this fact, modern Bibles must address two questions. First, is the default commitment to the text critical maxim *lectio difficilior portior* (the more difficult reading is preferred) a predisposition towards a deficient text? Second, when should the creative license that drives translation technique be relinquished in favor of proactive investigative text criticism? In response to these questions I will analyze two Scrolls variants to demonstrate the validity and value of minor semantic variants in light of the tendency for obscured translation technique in five typically literal translations: the ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV and RSV.

a. *Ps 104:27*

LXX Translation: All wait for you to give (δοῦναι) food to them (αὐτοῖς) in due time.

11QPs^a Translation: All of them look to you, to give to them (לָהֶֿם לְתַתֵּן) their food in due time.

MT Translation: All of them look to you, to give (לְתַתֵּן) their food in due time.

Option 1: “to give to them”; reading supported by 11QPs^a and Septuagint

Option 2: “to give”; reading supported by Masoretic Text

Translations typically reflective of MT:

(*Literal translation obscured by translation technique)

*ESV: These all look to you, to give them their food in due season.

*NASB: They all wait for You to give them their food in due season.

*NIV: These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

*NRSV: These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

*RSV: These all look to thee, to give them their food in due season.

In comparison to the impact of variants such as Ps 22:16 or 145:13 discussed above, the reading in Ps 104:27 is admittedly minor. Yet thoroughly engaging the Scrolls requires the text critic to spend time not only focusing on the big picture but also paying due attention to the minute details. The issue with the text of Ps 104:27 in the MT is that despite having a direct object, the transitive verb תַּתֵּן (“to give”) lacks an indirect object, thus resulting in an awkward literal translation. As is evident in the above analysis of typically literal translations, corrective action has been taken and the indirect object “(to) them” has been supplied for clarity in the text. This translation technique is not uncommon and in all fairness is often necessary when working from source to target language. However, the idiom rendered in the text in the translation process is in fact legitimately contained in the text of 11QPs^a. Here the indirect object לָהֶֿם (“to them”)

directly follows the verb and therefore a literal translation of the scroll does not require any added words to clarify the meaning of the text. In this instance it seems that by attempting to faithfully give the sense of a difficult reading in the MT, translations have inadvertently aligned themselves with a reading found in the Scrolls. The question as to whether or not readings such as this are “better” will no doubt remain an issue of debate in text critical circles. Be that as it may, this is an overt example of where a small amount of text critical legwork could have provided a legitimate textual basis for the idiomatic reading desired by literal translations.

b. *Ps 119:163*

LXX Translation: I hate and detest injustice, but I love your law (τὸν δὲ νόμον σου ἠγάπησα).

11QPs^a Translation: I hate and abhor lies, but I love your law (ותורתכה אהבתי).

MT Translation: I hate and abhor lies; I love your law (תִּוְרַתְךָ אֶהְבֵּתִי).

Option 1: “but I love your law”; reading supported by 11QPs^a, Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac and Septuagint.

Option 2: “I love your law”; reading supported by Masoretic Text.

Translations typically reflective of MT:

(*Literal translation obscured by translation technique)

*ESV: I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.

*NASB: I hate and despise falsehood, but I love Your law.

*NIV: I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law.

*NRSV: I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.

*RSV: I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love thy law.

Once again, in the grand scheme of things the variant in question in Ps 119:163 is minor. Yet, as was the case above,

contemporary Bible translations have much to gain from examining the minor semantic variants contained in the Scrolls. The issue in the present text is both syntactical and grammatical. Thematically, it seems clear enough that the two poetic units of Ps 119:163 are antithetically parallel to one another; there is a definite contrast of ideas apparent in this verse. However, though on a thematic level the desired contrastive effect is evident, grammatically the contrast is not firmly established. In order to achieve a translation that expresses this thematic contrast, translations must supply the adversative conjunction “but.” In so doing, the translation technique, though communicating the general meaning of the original text, essentially imports a word into the translation without supporting textual evidence. Once again the desired effect of the contrast could have been established grammatically by incorporating the adversative *wāw* contained in Ps 119:163 of 11QPs^a. Furthermore, the fact that the MT stands alone as the sole witness not containing an adversative conjunction suggests that the reading contained therein may be deficient. In short it seems ironic that those translations establishing themselves as predominantly adherent to the MT in their commitment to difficult readings are often required to exercise a degree of flexibility in their translation techniques which ultimately places their final translation in alignment with other texts without the knowledge that a legitimate textual basis for the desired translation exists. In this way a higher degree of awareness of the minor semantic variants in the Scrolls would greatly benefit contemporary translations by giving ancient support to necessary renderings.

5. Missing Scrolls and Scribal Errors in Contemporary Translations

As has been demonstrated above, the Scrolls have proven invaluable in providing clarity to occasionally difficult, even potentially corrupt, passages of the MT. Yet in such instances the Scrolls must be handled with care to ensure not only proper comprehension of what exactly they say but also methodological conscientiousness in regards to how this new information is

appropriated by translations. Unfortunately, at times contemporary Bibles have mismanaged the Scrolls on both of these fronts, resulting in defective translations. In this way, it is true that in some cases the intrinsic value of the evidence of the Scrolls has been lost in the translation process. In order to demonstrate this unfortunate trend, we will look briefly at two deficient readings from the NJB.

Psalm 35:5a is recognizably difficult to translate, and the inclusion of an extensive—albeit confusing—footnote in *BHS* indicates that something is amiss in the text of the MT. A literal translation of the problematic phrase highlights the issue, “(And) Draw the spear and shut (וְסָגַרְתָּ) to encounter my pursuers.” Clearly the difficulty lies with the verbal form וְסָגַרְתָּ which disrupts and complicates the verse to the point that it becomes unintelligible. The proposed editorial emendation in the *BHS* critical apparatus suggests reading וְסָגַרְתָּ (‘‘and spear’’), a nominal form unattested in the Hebrew Bible, likely meaning axe or spear. In support of this suggested emendation is a smattering of ancient witnesses with various permutations of the phrase, none of which explicitly affirm וְסָגַרְתָּ as a legitimate reading. Intriguingly, the *BHS* editors reference the nominal use of סָגַר in the *War Scroll* (1QM) in order to verify that, despite its absence from the Hebrew Bible, the noun סָגַר was within the vocabulary of written Hebrew in the late first century B.C.E. In short, by dialoging with the Scrolls, *BHS* has not affirmed a textual basis for the reading וְסָגַרְתָּ but has established that there is such a noun as וְסָגַרְתָּ, as evidenced by the *War Scroll*.

It is evident that the vast majority of contemporary English Bibles accept the conjectural emendation proposed by *BHS*.¹² However, in Ps 35:3 the NJB has grossly misinterpreted the function of the Scrolls evidence. The NJB has rendered the problematic phrase ‘‘Brandish spear *and pike* to confront my pursuers’’ (emphasis added) and supplied readers with the explanatory footnote stating that ‘‘and pike’’ (*wesagar*) is a

12. The GWORD and NKJV attempt to retain the problematic verbal form, yet in doing so, in order to provide idiomatic English, are forced to contort the translation to the extent that the syntax of the Hebrew phrase is compromised.

conjectural reading following “a Qumran text.” To begin with, one must inquire what Qumran text is in view here. A search of the Scrolls confirms that Ps 35:3 is not explicitly contained in any biblical or excerpted text. Though 4QPs^a contains Ps 35:2 and 4QPs^f a fraction of Ps 35:4, Ps 35:3 is unaccounted for. Therefore, one can only assume that the NJB is in some capacity reliant upon the *War Scroll*’s use of a noun סגַר in 1QM 5:7, 9. However, upon closer inspection it is clear that the form וְסַגַּר (wesagar) is not contained in the text of the *War Scroll*. Rather the nominal forms appear as הַסַּגַּר and וְהַסַּגַּר (1QM 5:7, 9). Therefore, it appears that in accepting the conjectural emendation of the verb וְסַגַּר to the noun וְסַגַּר, the NJB has misunderstood how the form appears in the *War Scroll* and subsequently misapplied that information, resulting in a defective text critical reference to the Scrolls.¹³ In short, in this instance the NJB appeals to a reading in the Scrolls that simply does not exist.

The second example of mismanagement of the Scrolls is drawn from Ps 141:5 in the NJB. Whereas the previous examples stemmed from the misapplication of Scrolls data, the present case is unique as it involves the incorporation of a probable scribal error from the Scrolls into a present-day translation. The word in question appears in the MT as וְהִתְפַּלְתִּי (“my prayer”), a reading confirmed by the Greek equivalent προσευχή μου in the LXX. Upon consulting the Scrolls a peculiar phenomenon surfaces, as 11QPs^a has the form וְהִלְפִתִּי. The most plausible explanation for this divergence is that 11QPs^a suffered from metathesis whereby the scribe, intending to write וְהִתְפַּלְתִּי, inadvertently switched the position of פ and ל resulting in the present confounding variant.

The vast majority of contemporary translations accept the MT reading “my prayer” with no hesitation. However, in this instance the NJB has translated the noun as a verb allegedly meaning “that would make me party to.” Ironically, the explanatory footnote provided for this reading references the presence

13. It is possible that the editors of the NJB were attempting to indicate the existence of a cognate form *sagar* (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 1:215). However, if this were the case the brief footnote fails to express this interest.

of the variant *hitlaphatti* in 11QPs^a as the source. It appears that the translators of the NJB misconstrued the deficient reading in 11QPs^a as a Hithpael form of the verb לִפְתֹּחַ (“to attach oneself?”). Ultimately the error in the NJB is threefold. First, the transcription *hitlaphatti* included in the NJB footnote is erroneous as the Scrolls reading does not contain the הִ prefix. Second, the Hiphil form alluded to in the NJB is unattested in the Hebrew Bible so it is difficult to affirm with any degree of certainty the legitimacy of the proposed rendering. Finally, and most importantly, the translators seem to have missed the plausible explanation of metathesis and therefore have incorporated a probable scribal error into the body of the translation.

Certainly other examples of mishandling the Scrolls could be discussed in other translations at various points throughout the Hebrew Bible.¹⁴ The above examples of mismanagement and misinterpretation of the Scrolls indicate that, like any manuscripts, the Scroll documents are complex and at times contain difficult texts and even errors. Therefore there is a need to examine the nature and origin of variants closely to ensure that readings, especially unique ones, are accurately assessed and appropriately applied in translating texts.

Conclusion

As the sixtieth anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls quickly approaches, it is evident that despite the indispensable and insightful research that has taken place so far, the field of Scrolls studies is still very much in its infancy, with vast amounts of uncharted territory awaiting exploration. There is no doubt that the next sixty years will prove themselves as invigorating and full of new research discoveries as the first. As the case study on the Psalms has demonstrated, the extent and ability of contemporary Bible translations to constructively dialogue with

14. Most notorious perhaps are claims to variant readings in Nehemiah when no evidence exists among the Scrolls (cf. GWORD Neh 3:20; NET Neh 7:3).

the Scrolls could and should be an area that receives increased attention in coming years.

In light of the selected Scrolls variants and trends discussed above, five recommendations are in order in hopes of finding a way forward to guide the interactions of future translations with the Scrolls. First, the accomplishments of the seventeen translations surveyed must be recognized and commended for their successful efforts in utilizing the Scrolls. In many instances these translations have highlighted significant readings that are vital for consideration in any text critical endeavor on the Psalms. As such, the textual variants already in translations must be seriously considered and serve as a baseline of noteworthy readings.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to rethink and reshape traditional translation philosophies in order to allow for more breathing room to interact with sources aside from the MT. By adopting a new perspective from the outset, translations will ensure a higher level of text critical and methodological consistency in the translation process. This will require a heightened awareness on behalf of translation committees of the vast and diverse array of primary sources that collectively witness to the biblical text. Beyond this, it is crucial not only to interact with individual sources but also to recognize and articulate the relationship between witnesses sharing common readings with the Scrolls.

Thirdly, it is essential to think outside the box and interact with the Scrolls in innovative ways. By crossing over genre boundaries and exploring biblical, exegetical and para-scriptural texts among the Scrolls, Bible translations will progressively diversify the types of resources available in their text critical arsenal. The intense scholarly discussion presently taking place on this particular issue is indicative of the fact that in many circles the constricting and anachronistic genre labels applied to “non-biblical” Scrolls are dissolving and such writings are receiving the detailed investigation they deserve.

Fourthly, if there is any place where the Scrolls must be consulted it is where the text of the MT is unintelligible and unmanageable. In such cases massaging the text in the translation process often means that not only are literal translations

failing to adhere to their own translation philosophies but are interpolating idiomatic elements into the translation that lack any textual basis. Such difficult readings in the MT should serve as a warning sign to translators that something may be awry in the text and as such there is an urgent need for text critical investigation of earlier witnesses in hopes of clarifying ambiguities.

Finally, in order to ensure that the Scrolls are appropriately and accurately handled, translation committees should familiarize themselves with and use both print and computer research tools presently available for Scrolls studies. Reading the text of the Scrolls requires a vastly different skill set and knowledge base than what those accustomed to reading the medieval Hebrew of the MT may have been able to develop. By delving into such resources, translators will greatly benefit from the guidance of detailed scholarly work as well as be able to personally engage the original texts of the Scrolls in an environment that enables and ensures appropriate dialogue and comprehension of the text.

The prospect that the text of Bibles that sit on bedside tables, desktops, in pew backs, and libraries may change in light of the Scrolls should be met with anticipation rather than anxiety. It is in the best interests of faith communities to explore how the biblical texts looked in the era that birthed Christianity and Judaism. By stretching beyond the medieval text of the MT and restoring lost readings from an earlier era, the shape and content of our Bibles will more accurately reflect the Scriptures as they were in antiquity, thus providing greater insight into the textual, literary and theological complexities they encompass.

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