

‘Like Kissing Your Mother Through a Veil’: Reading the Bible in Translation Part 2: Reading the Bible in Aramaic

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History

Nehemiah 8: 2-8

ב) וַיָּבִיֵא עֲזָרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה לְפָנֵי הַקָּהָל מֵאִישׁ וְעַד-אִשָּׁה וְכָל מִבְּיֵן לְשִׁמְעַי בְּיוֹם אֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי: (ג) וַיִּקְרָא-בּוֹ לְפָנֵי הָרְחוֹב אֲשֶׁר אֵל לְפָנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם מִן-הָאֹרֶךְ עַד-מַחְצִית הַיּוֹם נֹגֵד הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַמְּבִינִים וְאֲזַנֵּי כָל-הָעָם אֶל-סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה: (ד) וַיַּעֲמֹד עֲזָרָא הַסֹּפֵר עַל-מַגְדֵּל-עֵץ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְדָבָר ... (ה) וַיִּפְתַּח עֲזָרָא הַסֹּפֵר לְעֵינֵי כָל-הָעָם כִּי-מַעַל כָּל-הָעָם הָיָה וַיִּכְפַּתְחוּ עֵמֻדוֹ כָּל-הָעָם: (ו) וַיִּבְרָךְ עֲזָרָא אֶת-ה' הָאֱלֹקִים הַגְּדוֹל וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל-הָעָם אָמֵן | אָמֵן בְּמַעַל יְדֵיהֶם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לֵה' אֲפִים אֲרָצָה: (ז) וַיִּשׁוּעַ וַיִּבְנֵי וְשָׂרְבִיָּה יָמִין עֲקוֹב שְׁבַתִּי הוֹדִיָּה מַעֲשִׂיָּה קְלִיטָא עֲזָרָיָה יוֹזָבֵד חֲנָן פְּלִאָיָה וְהַלּוּיִם מְבִינִים אֶת-הָעָם לַתּוֹרָה וְהָעָם עַל-עֵמֻדָם: (ח) וַיִּקְרָאוּ בַסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים מִפְּרֹשׁ וְשׁוֹם שְׂכָל וַיָּבִינּוּ בַמִּקְרָא:

²So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. ⁴Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. ... ⁵Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ⁷The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear [*meforash*] and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

Jerusalem Talmud, *Megillah* 74d

מניין לתרגום רבי זעורא בשם רב חננאל ויקראו בספר תורת זה המקרא מפורש זה תרגום ושום שכל אילו הטעמים ויבינו במקרא זה המסורת ויש אומריי אילו ההכרעים ויש אומריי אילו ראשי פסוקים

What is the scriptural basis [*minayin*] for the Targum? Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Hananel: *And they read from the Book of the Law of God*: this refers to Scripture; *making it clear*: this refers to Targum; *and giving the meaning*: this refers to the accents; *so that the people could understand what was being read*: this refers to the traditional text; some say it means the decisions, others the beginnings of the verses.

Mishnah, *Megillah* 4: 4

הקורא בתורה לא יפחות משלשה פסוקים לא יקרא למתורגמן יותר מפסוק אחד ובנביא שלשה היו שלשתן שלש פרשיות קורין אחד אחד מדלגין בנביא ואין מדלגין בתורה ועד כמה הוא מדלג עד כדי שלא יפסוק המתורגמן:

The reader of the Torah may not read less than three verses. He may not read to the *meturgeman* more than one verse, and in the Prophets three. If the three of them were three passages, they read each one. They may skip in the Prophets but they may not skip in the Torah. And how much may he skip? Until the *meturgeman* will stop.

Mishnah, Megillah 4: 10

מעשה ראובן נקרא ולא מיתרגם מעשה תמר נקרא ומיתרגם עגל הראשון נקרא ומיתרגם והשני נקרא ולא מיתרגם ברכת כהנים מעשה דוד ואמנון לא נקראין ולא מיתרגמין אין מפטירין במרכבה ורבי יהודה מתיר רבי אליעזר אומר אין מפטירין בהודע את ירושלים:

The incident of Reuven is read but not translated. The incident of Tamar is read and is translated. The first account of the calf is read and is translated, and the second is read but not translated. The Kohanim’s blessing, the incident of David and Amnon, are neither read nor translated. They do not read as a *haftarah* in the Chariot. And Rabbi Yehudah permits. Rabbi Eliezer says, They do not read as a *haftarah* in ‘Cause Jerusalem to know.’

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 8a (Soncino translation)

אמר רב הונא בר יהודה אמר רבי אמאי : לעולם ישלים אדם פרשיותיו עם הצבור שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום

Rabbi Huna ben Judah says in the name of Rabbi Ammi: A man should always complete his *parashiyot* together with the congregation, [reading] twice the Hebrew text and once the Targum.

Existing Targumim

Name	Books	Origin	Description
Onkelos	Torah	EI/Bab	Generally tends to the literal
Jonathan	Nevi'im	EI/Bab	
‘Pseudo-Jonathan’/ Targum Yerushalmi	Torah	EI	Lots of extra material
Neofiti 1	Torah	EI	Lots of extra material
Cairo Geniza Fragments	Torah	EI	Earliest known Targum manuscripts
Fragmentary Targum (Targum Yerushalmi)	Torah	EI	Only covers some verses of Torah
Targumim of varied date & character on the Ketuvim except for Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel			

Onkelos

Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 3a

ואמר רבי ירמיה ואיתימא רבי חייא בר אבא : תרגום של תורה - אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע Rabbi Yirmiyahu, or some say, Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: The Targum of the Torah—Onkelos the proselyte said it, from the mouth of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.

Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 71c

רבי ירמיה בשם רבי חייא בר בא תירגם עקילס הגר התורה לפני רבי אליעזר ולפני רבי יהושע וקילסו אותו ואמרו
לו יפיית מבני אדם

Rabbi Yirmiyahu said in the name of Rabbi Hiyya bar Ba: Akilas the proselyte translated the Torah before Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, and they praised him and said, ‘*Yofyafita mibenei adam*’ [Psalm 45: 3]

Psalm 45: 3 (2) (New International Version)

וְפִיִּיתָ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם הוֹצַק חוֹ בְּשִׁפְתוֹתַיִךְ עַל כֵּן בֵּרַכְךָ אֱלֹקִים לְעוֹלָם:

You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.

Bereshit 3: 22

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקוֹק אֱלֹקִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעַתָּה פֶּן יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעוֹלָם:

And the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the human has become like one of us, to know good and evil.’

Targum Onkelos, Bereshit 3: 22

ואמר ה' אלקים האדם הוא יחידי בעלמא מניה למידע טב וביש

And the Lord God said, ‘Behold, mankind has become unique in the world, able to know by himself good and evil.’

Pseudo-Jonathan (Targum Yerushalmi)

Bereshit 21: 21

וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּאֵרָן וַתִּקַּח לוֹ אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

And he [Ishmael] dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; his mother took for him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Bereshit 21: 21

And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and he took as wife Adisha [or: Hadisha] and he divorced her; and his mother took for him Fatima as wife, from the land of Egypt.

Targum Yonatan

Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 3a

תרגום של נביאים - יונתן בן עוזיאל אמרו מפי חגי זכריה ומלאכי

The Targum of the Nevi'im—Yonatan ben Uziel said it, from the mouth of Hagai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Ketuvim

Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 3a

ונודעוה ארץ ישראל ארבע מאות פרסה על ארבע מאות פרסה. יצתה בת קול ואמרה: מי הוא זה שגילה סתריי לבני אדם? עמד יונתן בן עוזיאל על רגליו ואמר: אני הוא שגליתני סתריך לבני אדם; גלוי וידוע לפניך שלא לכבודי עשיתי, ולא לכבוד בית אבא, אלא לכבודך עשיתי שלא ירבו מחלוקת בישראל. ועוד ביקש לגלות תרגום של כתובים, יצתה בת קול ואמרה לו: דייד! מאי טעמא - משום דאית ביה קץ משיח.

And the land of Israel was shaken about four hundred *parsot* by four hundred *parsot*. A divine voice went out and said, 'Who is this who has revealed My secrets to mortals?' Yonatan ben Uziel stood up and said, 'I am he who has revealed Your secrets to mortals. It is revealed and known before You that I did not do it for my own honour, or for the honour of my father's house, but I did it for Your honour, so that disagreements should not multiply in Israel.' And in addition he wanted to reveal the *targum* of the Ketuvim. A divine voice went out and said to him, 'Enough!' What was the reason? Because they include the date [of the coming] of the messiah.

Shir Hashirim 5: 10-11

(י) דודי צח וְאָדוּם דְּגוּל מְרִבְבָּה:
י"א) רֵאשׁוּ כְּתָם פֶּז קִנְצוֹתָיו תְּלַמְלִים שְׁחָרוֹת כְּעוֹרֵב:

Basic translation of verse 10: 'My beloved is white and ruddy, pre-eminant above ten thousand.'

Targum Jonathan (trans. by Philip Alexander, 1988)

Then began the Assembly of Israel to speak of the praise of the Lord of the Universe, and thus she said: That *God I do desire* to serve who in the day is wrapped in a robe white as snow, and is occupied with the Twenty Four Books—the words of the Law, and the words of the Prophets and the Writings; and by night He is occupied with the six Orders of the Mishnah. The splendour of the glory of His face shines like fire, on account of [His] great wisdom and powers of argument, for He promulgates new decisions every day, and He will disclose them to His people on the Great Day. And His banner is over ten thousand myriads of angels who minister before Him.

Basic translation of verse 11: His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are curled, and black as a raven.

Targum Jonathan

His head is the Law, which is more precious than *pure gold*; and [*His locks* are] the interpretation of the words [of the Law], in which are *heaped up* reasons and precepts. To those who keep them, they are white as snow, but to those who do not keep them, they are *black like* the face of *the raven*.

Comparing three Targums on Bereshit 1: 1-5

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְנִבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר:
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

Targum Onkelos

¹In antiquity the Lord created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was desolate and empty and darkness was on the face of the deep and a wind from before the Lord was blowing on the surface of the water. ³And the Lord said: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ⁴When the Lord perceived the light to be good, the Lord distinguished between the light and between the darkness. ⁵So the Lord called the light day-time while the darkness He called night-time, and it was evening and it was morning one day.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

¹At the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, desolate of people and empty of all animals: darkness was upon the surface of the deep and a merciful wind from before God was blowing over the surface of the water. ³God said: ‘Let there be light to illuminate the world’; and immediately there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵And God called the light Day, and he made it so that the inhabitants of the world might labour during it; and he called the darkness Night, and he made it that creatues might rest during it. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

Targum Neofiti

¹From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth. ²And the earth was waste and unformed, desolate of man and beast, empty of plant cultivation and of trees, and darkness was spread over the face of the abyss; and a spirit of mercy from before the Lord was blowing over the surface of the waters. ³And the Memra of the Lord said: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light according to the decree of his Memra. ⁴And it was manifest before the Lord that the light was good; and the Memra of the Lord separated the light from the darkness. ⁵And the Memra of the Lord called the light daytime and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning: in the order of the work of creation, first day.

A modern translation: New International Version (1984)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And

God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Sampling Targum Jonathan: Isaiah 6

בשנת־מות המלך עזיָהוּ וְאַרְאָה אֶת־ה' יָשַׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשָּׂא וְשִׁלְיוֹ מְלָאִים אֶת־הַהֵיכָל: שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לֹו יָשַׁב כְּנָפַיִם
יָשַׁב כְּנָפַיִם לְאַחַד בְּשֵׁתַיִם: כִּסֵּה כְנָפָיו וּבְשֵׁתַיִם: כִּסֵּה רַגְלָיו וּבְשֵׁתַיִם: יְעֹרְפֵם: וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת
מְלֵא כָל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ: וַיִּגְעֹל אַמּוֹת הַסִּפִּיִם מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרְא וְהַבְּיַת: יִמְלֵא עֵשָׂן: וְאָמַר אוֹיְלִי כִי־נִדְמִיתִי כִי אִישׁ טָמֵא־שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי
וּבַתוֹךְ עִם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַיִם אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ ה' צְבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינָי: וַיִּצְרַף אֵלַי אֶחָד מִן־הַשְּׂרָפִים וּבִידוֹ רִצְפָה בְּמַלְקוֹתַיִם לְקַח
מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיִּגַּע עַל־פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נִגַּע זֶה עַל־שִׁפְתֶיךָ וְסָר עוֹנֶךָ וְסִטְאִתָּה תִכְפֹּר: וְאַשְׁמַע אֶת־קוֹל ה' אָמַר אֶת־מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וּמִי
יִלְדֶנִי וְאָמַר הִנְנִי שְׁלֹחֲנִי:

A modern translation: New International Version (1984)

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.' ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.' ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

Targum Jonathan

¹In the year that King Uzziah was struck with it [leprosy], the prophet said, I saw the glory of the Lord resting upon a throne, high and lifted up in the heavens of the height; and the temple was filled by the brilliance of his glory. ²Holy attendants were in the height before him; each had six wings; with two he covered his face, that he might not see, and with two he covered his body, that he might not be seen, and with two he ministered. ³And one was crying to another and saying, 'Holy in the heavens of the height, his sanctuary; holy upon the earth, the work of his might, holy in eternity is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with the brilliance of his glory.' ⁴And the posts of the temple thresholds quaked from the sound of the speech, and the sanctuary was filled with the dense cloud. ⁵And I said: 'Woe is me! For I have sinned; for I am a man liable to chastisement, and I dwell in the midst of people that are defiled with sins; for my eyes have seen the glory of the Shekhinah of the eternal king, the Lord of hosts!' ⁶Then there was given to me one of the attendants and in his mouth there was a speech which he took before him whose Shekhinah is upon the throne of glory in the heavens of the height, above the altar. ⁷And he arranged [it in] my mouth and said: 'Behold, I have placed the words of my prophecy in your mouth; and your sins will be taken away and your guilt atoned for.' ⁸And I heard the voice of the Memra of the Lord which said: 'Whom shall I send to prophesy, and who will go to teach?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'