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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“SHORT NOTES ON  
OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS”

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XVIII  
SHORT NOTES  
ON OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS

A. I SAMUEL 25:22 and II SAMUEL 12:14

Commentators have failed to recognize that the problematic אֶת־אֹיְבִי in II Sam 12:14 (which was relegated to a footnote in the RSV, NRS, and NJB because it was not reflected in the Septuagint) is *not* the well attested noun אֹיֵב “enemy,” but the *Hithpa<sup>c</sup>el* of the rare verb אִיַּב (<sup>o</sup>*iyyēb*), the cognate of the Arabic اَوَّب (<sup>o</sup>*awwāb*) “wont to repent, frequent in repenting unto God, or turning from disobedience to obedience” (Lane 1863: 124; Castell 1669: 54). The name *Job* may well be derived from this stem (BDB 33), especially in light of the secondary form اَوَّب (<sup>o</sup>*awwāb*) “frequent in returning to God.”

McCarter (1984: 296) provided a helpful summary of the traditional interpretations of this phrase in 12:14, stating

As first noted by Geiger (1857: 267), the chief witnesses are euphemistic, and the primitive reading, <sup>o</sup>*t yhwh*, is reflected only in a single Greek cursive MS (c = 376). MT (cf. LXX, OL. Syr., Targ.) has <sup>o</sup>*t yby yhwh*, “*the enemies of Yahweh*.” Some of the ancient translations (LXX, Vulg., Symmachus) did not take this as euphemistic, choosing instead to render the preceding verb (*ni<sup>o</sup>ēṣ ni<sup>o</sup>aṣtā*) as a causative *Pi<sup>c</sup>el* (GKC §52g), a solution followed by the AV (“thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme”) and a few modern interpreters (Hertzberg, Goslinga); but Mulder

(1968: 110–12) has demonstrated the impossibility of this position in the grounds that *ni'ēš* never has such a meaning elsewhere and that in the context it makes no sense to think of David's sin, which is a secret, as having caused Yahweh's enemies—whoever they might be—to blaspheme. . . . Such euphemisms were not introduced to falsify a text but rather out of respect for God and saintly persons (Mulder 1968: 109– 10).

But the reading of the אַתְּ־אֵיבִי as a euphemistic addition in this verse falters in light of the 5,930 other occurrences of the name *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Scriptures which did not receive a euphemistic addition. Therefore, a better explanation is required, and one is readily available.

The final י of the MT אַתְּ־אֵיבִי can be transposed to become an initial י and the reconstructed ואתאיב can be pointed as יִאֲתֵאֵיב, a *Hithpa<sup>e</sup>el* (GKC §54<sup>e</sup>) imperfect meaning “but I have shown myself to be repentant.” Once this derivation comes into focus it is obvious that the phrase does not belong in verse 12:14, but fits perfectly in 12:13. The two verses can be restored as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־נָתָן  
חָטָאתִי לַיהוָה וְאֲתֵאֵיב  
וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל־דָּוִד  
גַּם־יְהוָה הֶעֱבִיר חַטָּאתְךָ לֹא תָמוּת:  
אֲפֹס כִּי־נִאֲמַר יְהוָה בְּדָבָר תִּזְהַר  
גַּם הַבֵּן הַיְלֹד לְךָ מוֹת יָמוּת:

And David said to Nathan,  
 “I have sinned against Yahweh,

*but I have shown myself to be repentant.*”

And Nathan said to David,

“Indeed, Yahweh has transferred your sin, you will not die.

But, since you have outraged Yahweh with this matter,  
the child born to you will die.”

This rare word אִיב (°*iyēb*) “to return, to repent”—which is a synonym of the widely used verb שׁוּב “to return, to repent”—appears also in I Sam 25:22. In this verse the verb carries a nuance which survived in its Arabic cognate, أَوْب (°*awwâb*) “to return” and especially “to return home to one’s family at night” (Lane 1863: 123–124). As I Sam 25:14 and 22 indicate, David’s intention—before Abigail persuaded him not to shed blood—was to wipe out Nabal and his forces overnight (עַרְ-הַבֵּקֶר), before he would return to camp for sleep. The name *David* in I Sam 25:22 can be treated as an unnecessary gloss identifying the 1cs suffix on the noun אִיבִי “my returning,” although it was probably added at first as a gloss when אִיבִי was misunderstood—in grammatical terms—as the *nomen regens* אִיבִי “the enemies of,” which required the *nomen rectum* modifier. Thus, while some interpreters follow the Septuagint, which has simply τῷ Δαυιδ “to David,” and treat the MT אִיבִי as a gloss, I consider the MT אִיבִי “my returning (at night)” to be original, with the name *David* being a gloss. David’s statement in I Sam 25:21–22 included these words:

וַיֵּשְׁב־לִי רָעָה תַחַת טוֹבָה:  
כִּה־יַעֲשֶׂה אֱלֹהִים לְאִיבִי וְכִה יִסְרֶךְ

אִם־אֲשָׂאִיר מִכָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עַד־הַבֶּקֶר מִשָּׁתַיִן בְּקִיר:

And he [Nabal] returned to me evil for good.  
 Thus may God do, and more also,  
 upon my *returning for the night*  
 if I leave from all who belong to him by morning,  
 one who urinates at a wall.

David's zeal was offset by Abigail's appeal. He was ready for God to return upon him evil for good if he failed to kill every last man of Nabal's forces during that very night before he returned to his base for sleep before daybreak or by daybreak. The only "enemy" mention in these verses is the one mentioned by name, namely, Nabal."

**B. RESTORING A ה IN EZEKIEL 38:21  
 LOST BY HAPLOGRAPHY**

**MASORETIC TEXT**

וְקָרָאתִי עָלָיו לְכָל־הָרֵי חָרָב  
 וְאִם אֲדַנִּי יִהְיֶה חָרָב אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו תִּהְיֶה:

And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my  
 mountains,  
 oracle of my Lord Yahweh:  
 every man's sword shall be against his brother.

**SEPTUAGINT**

καὶ καλέσω ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶν φόβον λέγει κύριος  
 μάχαιρα ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἔσται  
 And I will summon against it every fear, saith the Lord:  
 the sword of *every* man shall be against his brother.

In Exek 38:21 the MT לְכָל-הַרֵי חֶרֶב, meaning literally “to all of my mountains a sword,” has baffled many interpreters. Wevers (1969: 290) stated, “Possibly MT means, ‘And I will give the name: Sword, to all my mountains against him’, i.e. God will summon the falling mountains to act as swords, i.e. destroy Gog.” But this interpretation found few followers. Eichrodt (1966: 516) translated “And I will summon every kind of terror against him, says [ . . . ] Yahweh, every man’s sword will be lifted up against his brother,” based upon the proposed emendation of the MT הַרֵי חֶרֶב to חֶרֶבָה, following the Septuagint’s φόβον, as noted in BHS<sup>3</sup>.

Zimmerli (1983: 289) simply listed the variants in the versions, including (1) the Geniza text’s חרבא בכלהון טורי “a sword in all of them my mountain(s),” (2) the Vulgate’s *et convocabo adversum eum in cunctis montibus meis gladium*, “and I will call in the sword against him in all my mountains,” (3) the Targum’s “and I appointed him to fall by the sword on the mountains of my people,” (4) the Septuagint (cited above), and (5) the Latin variant, *omnem timorem gladia*, which follows the Greek text in reading חררה for the הַרֵי חֶרֶב.

Allen (1990: 201) viewed the MT הַרֵי as an “adapted torso” having been written for חר under the influence of the וְנִהְרְסוּ הַהָרִים in 38:20—which was “then made more sensible by adding the suffix.” But this interpretation is less convincing than that of Wevers, noted above. Block (1998: 452, 458) simply stated, “The MT is difficult but not impossible, LXX φόβον “fear,” seems to presuppose *ḥārādā ḥereb* for *hāray ḥereb*,” concluding that “the LXX reading

may itself reflect the translator's uncertainty regarding the meaning of the word [הַרִי].”

Block's suspicion that the Greek translators did not know the meaning of הַרִי is right on target, for this word is actually a rare word in Hebrew, a *hapax legomenon* and only a homograph of the common suffixed noun הַרִי “my mountain(s).” Instead of being read as a parallel to the וְעַל-הַרִי “and upon my mountains” in Isa 14:25 or the כִּי-יִגִיעַ גִּי-הַרִים of Zech 14:5, the הַרִי in Ezek 38:21 needs to be repointed as הַרִי and recognized as the cognate of the Arabic verb هارِه/هور (*hwr/hâra*) “he threw it down, pulled it down, demolished it” and the adjectives هارِي (*hârî*) / هَائِر/ (hâ‘ir) / هَارٍ (*hârin*), meaning “becoming thrown down, pulled down, pulled to pieces, demolished” (Lane 1893: 2906–2907). The י of הַרִי is not a 1cs suffix but a part of the stem, like the י of פְּרִי “fruit.” In the context of all the destruction mentioned in Ezekiel 38, this הַרִי is best translated as “demolition” or “collapse.”

If this interpretation of the הַרִי is correct, then the next word, חֶרֶב “sword,” should be repointed as חֶרֶב “desolation.” And, if the repointed חֶרֶב הַרִי means “demolition, desolation,” then the preceding word, לְכָל “to all,” should be emended to לְכָלָה “for annihilation,” restoring a ה which was lost by haplography. This restoration of לְכָלָה in Ezek 38:21 finds support in the use of לְכָלָה in Ezek 13:13,

וְגַשְׁמֵם שֶׁטֶף בְּאֶפְי יְהוָה  
וְאֲבָנֵי אֲלֻגְבִּישׁ בְּחִמָּה לְכָלָה

and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger,  
and great hailstones in wrath for annihilation.

Similarly, the mention in Ezek 38:19–20 of a “great shaking” (רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל / σεισμὸς μέγας) and the “falling to earth of all the walls” (וְכָל-חֹמֶה לְאַרְצֵי תְּפוּל) support the interpretation of הָרִי as “collapse” or “demolition.”

Thus, in summary, the problematic phrase in Ezek 38:21, וְקָרָאתִי עָלָיו לְכָל-הָרֵי חָרָב “And I called against him to all of my mountains a sword,” should be emended and re-pointed to read וְקָרָאתִי עָלָיו לְכָל־הָרֵי חָרָב “And against him I have called for annihilation, demolition, desolation.”

### C. ZECHARIAH 2:8 (MT 2:12)

#### “THE APPLE OF HIS EYE”

The expression or idiom עֵינֹו בִּבַּת “the apple of his eye,” occurring in Zech 2:8 (MT 2:12), is also found in Arabic and Syriac. The Hebrew word for the fruit called an “apple” is תְּפֹיחַ, which is totally unrelated to the word בִּבַּת appearing in Zech 2:8. The Hebrew word בִּבַּת, used in this idiom may be derived from (1) a word for “baby, babe,” indicating the “baby of the eye,” or (2) from בַּבַּת meaning “gate,” indicating the “gate of the eye.”

The Greek translation of Zech 2:8 (LXX 2:12) used the word κόρη meaning “damsel, maiden, daughter,” but translated “pupil” when used with reference to the eye. The Vulgate has *pupillam oculi eius* “the pupil of his eye.” The

English “pupil” is the diminutive of *pupa* “girl, doll,” so called because of the image which is reflected in another person’s eye—which appears like a tiny doll. (The English word “apple” indicated in Old English and Middle English “fruit, apple, the eyeball, or anything round.) The “apple of the eye” meant nothing other than the “round [center] of the eye.”

In Deut 32:10 the expression “the apple of his eye” also appears, but a different word is used for the “apple.” There it is **אִישׁוֹן עֵינָו**, the meaning of which is clarified by the same expression in Arabic, **إنسان العين** (*‘însân ‘al‘ayin*), which means “the image that is seen [reflected] in the black of the eye, what is seen in the eye, like as in a mirror, when a thing faces it . . . the pupil or the apple of the eye, or the black of the eye” (Lane 1863: 115). The derivation of the word **אִישׁוֹן** could be related to the word **אִישׁ** “man,” but it is more likely a noun related to the word **אִשָּׁשׁ** “to glitter, to be dark.”

In Psalm 17:8 the expression appears as **אִישׁוֹן בַּת־עַיִן**, which adds the word *daughter* of the eye,” like the Greek expression noted above, “the daughter of the eye.” Thus, “the apple of the eye” can be expressed three different ways in Hebrew, and all three were used to express affection. Jerusalem and Zion were considered to be the objects of God’s affection. The translation of Zech 2:8 in the NRSV “. . . truly, one who touches you touches the apple of *my* eye,” rather than reading “*his* eye,” remains preferable.