

MISCELLANEOUS
BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER THREE

ELIMINATING 'THE ENEMIES
OF THE LORD'

IN II SAMUEL 12:14

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III

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II Sam 12:11–14 in the RSV

Thus says Yahweh, “Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.” 13 David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “the LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. 14 Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned *the LORD*, the child that is born to you shall die.”

I have added the italics in vs. 14 to highlight the omission in the RSV, NRS and NJB of any translation for the אֹיְבֵי in the MT, which at first glance seems to mean “the enemies of.” The full text of 12:14, with the problematic אֹיְבֵי underlined, appears in the MT and Septuagint as

אָפֶס כִּי־נֵאֵץ נֶאֱצַת אֶת־אֹיְבֵי יְהוָה
בְּדַבַּר הַזֶּה גַּם הַבֵּן הַיֵּלֹוד לְךָ מוֹת יָמוּת

But, because you have utterly scorned *the enemies of Yahweh*, by this deed the child that is born to you shall die.”

πλὴν ὅτι παροξύνων παρώξυνας
τοὺς ἐχθροὺς κυρίου ἐν τῷ ῥήματι τούτῳ
καί γε ὁ υἱός σου ὁ τεχθείς σοι θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖται

But because you have greatly upset
the enemies of the Lord by this thing,
your son also that is born to you shall surely die.

Commentators have failed to recognize that this problematic אֹיְבֵי in II Sam 12:14 is *not* the well attested noun אֹיֵב “enemy,” but the *Hithpa^cel* of the rare verb אִיַּיְבַּ (°*iyyēb*), the cognate of the Arabic أَوَّب (°*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 أَوَّب (°*awwāb*) “frequent in returning to God.”). The MT אֹיֵבֵי is not the sign of the direct object but the prefix of the imperfect *Hithpa^cel* (1cs).

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, [ַ]*t yhw*, is reflected only in a single Greek cursive MS (c = 376). MT (cf. LXX, OL. Syr., Targ.) has [ַ]*t yby yhw*, “*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[ַ]ēš ni[ַ]aštā*) as a causative *Pi^cel* (GK² §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 on 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 אֹיֵבֵי as a euphemistic addition in this verse falters in light of the 5,930 other occurrences of

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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 ם of the MT אַתְּ-אֵיבִי can be transposed to become an initial ן and the reconstructed וַאֲתֵאִיב can be pointed as וַאֲתֵאִיב, the *Hithpa^cel* (GKC §54^o) 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 22:14, but fits perfectly in 22:13. The two verses can be restored as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-נָתָן
חָטָאתִי לַיהוָה וַאֲתֵאִיב
וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל-דָּוִד
גַּם-יְהוָה הֶעֱבִיר חָטְאֶתְךָ לֹא תָמוּת:
אֲפֹס כִּי-נִאֲצַח יְהוָה בְּדָבָר הַזֶּה
גַּם הַבֵּן הַיֵּלֹד 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 אֵיב (°*iyēb*) “to repent, to return” (a synonym of שׁוּב “to return”) appears also in I Sam 25:22. However, it has yet to be recognized by translators and commentators. About half of the translations follow the Septuagint and ignore the MT אַיִבִי, while others follow the Vulgate and translate it

traditionally as “enemies.” Here is a sampling:

- unto the enemies of David, KJV, ASV, NAS, NAU, NKJ
- to the foes of David DRA
- *inimicis David* Vulgate
- τῶ Δαυιδ LXX
- with David NIV, NIB,
- to David RSV, NRS, NAB
- on David NJB

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-הַבְּקָר**), 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 τῶ 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:

וַיִּשָׁב־לִי רָעָה תַחַת טוֹבָה:
כֹּה־יַעֲשֶׂה אֱלֹהִים לְאִיבִי וְכֹה יִסְיֶף

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אִם-אֲשָׁאִיר מִכָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ עַד-הַבֶּקֶר מִשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר:

And [Nabal] returned to me evil for good.

Thus may God do upon my *returning-for-the-night*
and do even more,

if by morning I leave(alive) from all who belong to him
(anyone) 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.”

Just as the Arabic cognate **أوب** (*awwâb*) “to repent, to return” makes it possible to eliminate the **אֶת־אֵיבֵי יְהוָה** “the enemies of Yahweh” in II Sam 12:14, the same cognate makes it possible to eliminate the **אֵיבֵי דָוִד** “the enemies of David” in I Sam 25:22.