

WATCHMAN'S TEACHING LETTER

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TO THOSE WHOM THE COVENANT BELONGS

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A MONTHLY TEACHING LETTER

This is my one hundred twenty-third monthly teaching letter and continues my eleventh year of publication. This is another in a series on the apostle Paul, though in this lesson, it may appear we have drifted entirely off into another subject. But I believe that what follows is a prerequisite to comprehending some of the positions which Paul advocates, to better understand some of his writings. In the previous lesson #'s 119 and 120, we were considering the various translation errors found in both the Masoretic text as well as the Septuagint. After examining some of these errors, I concluded: What, then, is the bottom line that all of this boils down to? The answer is, we have no perfect manuscripts to guide us. We have to face the fact that some are more accurate than others. And this doesn't open the door for anyone to claim he alone is guided by the Spirit, and that we therefore should follow him. Yahweh save us from those who claim "God speaks personally to me"! Our only alternative is to consider and study all of the manuscripts we already have. For what its worth, we are going to examine yet another translation from the Aramaic which presents an alternate rendering.

What I'm referring to is found in a variance of the rendering of the 18th, 19th & 20th chapters of Leviticus between the KJV and Lamsa's Aramaic Version. I will first present the passages involved, and then go into a discussion on the relevance of the matter. It has to be admitted that Lamsa has many positive comments to make on such things as idioms and various Biblical topics, yet we need to use caution in examining his contributions. I will use "KJV" to indicate the rendering of the King James version and "Lam." for Lamsa's version:

KJV, Lev. 18:2 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God."

Lam., Lev. 18:2 "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God."

KJV, Lev. 18:3 "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."

Lam., Lev. 18:3 “You shall not do according to the doings of the land of Egypt wherein you dwelt, neither shall you do according to the doings of the land of Canaan whither I bring you; neither shall you walk in their ordinances.”

KJV, Lev. 18:4 “Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God.”

Lam., Lev. 18:4 “But you shall do my judgments and keep my commandments and walk in them; I am the LORD your God.”

KJV, Lev. 18:5 “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD.” ...

Lam., Lev. 18:5 “You shall therefore keep my commandments and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them; I am the LORD.” ...

KJV, Lev. 18:21 “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through *the fire* to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.” ...

Lam., Lev. 18:21 “You shall not let any of your semen be cast into a strange woman to cause her to be pregnant; neither shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.” ...

KJV, Lev. 18:29 “For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit *them* shall be cut off from among their people.”

Lam., Lev. 18:29 “For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.”

KJV, Lev. 18:30 “Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not *any one* of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I *am* the LORD your God.” ...

Lam., Lev. 18:30 “Therefore you shall keep my ordinance, and you shall not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and you shall not defile yourselves by them; I am the LORD your God.” ...

KJV, Lev. 19:19 “Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed ...”

Lam., Lev. 19:19 “You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a diverse kind; you shall not sow your field with mixed seed ...”

KJV, Lev. 20:2 “Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever *he be* of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth *any* of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones.”

Lam., Lev. 20:2 “Say to the children of Israel, Any man of the children of Israel or of the proselytes who sojourn in Israel who shall cast any of his semen into an alien woman, he shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.”

KJV, Lev. 20:3 “And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people; because he hath given of his seed unto Molech, to defile my sanctuary, and to profane my holy name.”

Lam., Lev. 20:3 “And I will pour out my anger against that man and will cut him off from among his people; because he has cast his semen into an alien woman to defile my sanctuary and to profane my holy name.”

KJV, Lev. 20:4 “And if the people of the land do any ways hide their eyes from the man, when he giveth of his seed unto Molech, and kill him not.”

Lam., Lev. 20:4 “And if the people of the land do in any way ignore the offense of the man who has cast of his semen into an alien woman, that they may not kill him.”

KJV, Lev. 20:5 “Then I will set my face against that man, and against his family, and will cut him off, and all that go a whoring after him, to commit whoredom with Molech, from among their people.”

Lam., Lev. 20:5 “Then I will set my anger against that man and against his family, and will cut him off and all who go astray after him, because they go astray after alien women from among their people.”

It should be quite evident here that there is a lot of difference between the KJV “giveth of his seed unto Molech” and the Lamsa’s rendering “man who has cast of his semen into an alien woman”! It may be that Lamsa’s version has interpreted the Hebrew idiom in a manner which makes a lot more sense. Had the KJV read anywhere near the Lamsa version, we might have averted all the multiculturalism with its miscegenation that is going on today! You will notice that the penalty according to the Lamsa version for letting “your semen be cast into a strange woman” is “you shall stone him with stones”.

One website calling itself Christian Research Media by one James Lloyd criticizes Lamsa’s translation on Leviticus 18:21 thusly:

“Lamsa’s work is filled with errors, texts where he missed the primary meaning, outright bias, and what can only be considered to be the fruit of the poisoned tree that is the Aramaic translation itself. In short, the Lamsa Bible is devilish through and through, and should be considered apostate in the extreme.

“For example, Lamsa believed it was wrong to mix the races, so he twisted verses in the Scriptures to propagate that perspective. Please understand, the issue here is not whether or not a person believes race mixing is acceptable, the issue is, if you seek to make the Scriptures conform to your individual point of view, you have committed yourself to the Spirit of Antichrist.” Rather it is James Lloyd who is “antichrist” and following Satan’s agenda!

I checked the Septuagint, which is more confusing than the Masoretic text of the KJV. I have an Old Testament published by The Jewish Publication Society Of America (according to the Masoretic Text), and it agrees with the KJV. The following are these same verses from Brenton’s Septuagint:

Lev. 18:2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them, I *am* the Lord your God.

3 Ye shall not do according to the devices of Egypt, in which ye dwelt: and according to the devices of the land of Chanaan, into which I bring you, ye shall not do; and ye shall not walk in their ordinances.

4 Ye shall observe my judgments, and shall keep my ordinances, and shall walk in them: I *am* the Lord your God.

5 So ye shall keep all my ordinances, and all my judgments, and do them; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the Lord your God. ...

21 And thou shalt not give of thy seed to serve a ruler; and thou shalt not profane my holy name; I *am* the Lord. ...

29 For whosoever shall do any of these abominations, the souls that do them shall be destroyed from among their people.

30 And ye shall keep mine ordinances, that ye may not do any of the abominable practices, which have taken place before your time: and ye shall not be polluted in them; for I *am* the Lord your God. ...

Lev. 19:19 Ye shall observe my law: thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with one of a different kind, and thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with diverse seed ...

Lev. 20:2 Thou shalt also say to the children of Israel, If *there shall be* any of the children of Israel, or of those who have become proselytes in Israel, who shall give of his seed to Moloch, let him be surely put to death; the nation upon the land shall stone him with stones.

3 And I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given of his seed to Moloch, to defile my sanctuary, and profane the name of them that are consecrated to me.

4 And if the natives of the land should in anywise overlook that man in giving of his seed to Moloch, so as not to put him to death;

5 then will I set my face against that man and his family, and I will destroy him, and all who have been of one mind with him, so that he should go a whoring to the princes, from their people.”

As can plainly be observed, the expression from the KJV “he giveth of his seed unto Molech” is only confusing, unless the phrase “give of his seed to Moloch” is understood as a Hebrew idiom. We have modern-day idioms similar to this such as, “Things are going to hell in a hand basket”. And “going to hell in a hand basket” would be a good analogy of the race-mixing that is going on today!

Once understanding the Hebrew idiom, one can easily see how casting one’s seed into an alien woman is equivalent to casting one’s offspring into the fiery altar of Molech, as both accomplish the same thing. We should remember that at Ezra 9:2, he referred to Israel as “holy seed” stating: “**For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and their sons; and the holy seed has passed among the nations of the lands, and the hand of the rulers *has been* first in this transgression.**” Inasmuch as there is a “holy seed”, then there has to be an “unholy seed”. Therefore, the mixing of the “holy seed” with the unholy brings forth death to the “holy seed” just as with the fires of Molech!

Job said at 14:7: “**For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.**” But once a man’s or woman’s seed is united with an alien, there is no longer any hope! All is lost down-line forever! Many are under the delusion that women don’t have any seed, but her egg supplies half of the chromosomes making up the DNA of the child!

There are several websites which make the claim that the New Testament scriptures were first written in Aramaic and then later translated into Greek and other languages. Lamsa makes the same claim. This argument doesn’t hold water, as Luke was himself a Greek, and very proficient in writing in the Greek language. Therefore,

both Luke and Acts were first written in Greek. Paul was a very close associate with Luke, and since Paul was proficient in many languages, he would have had no problem writing in them. It would be foolish to claim that Paul first wrote his epistles in Aramaic, for all of his letters were addressed to Greek speaking people. Now, some of the lost ten tribes of Israel did speak Aramaic at the time of the apostles while others spoke Greek. It is only reasonable, then, that the writers of the letters to those lost tribes wrote them in the language then in use by them. Lamsa, in his translation of both the Old and New Testaments wrote on page ix of the introduction, citing Josephus' *Antiquities* 21:11:2, trying to make his point:

“I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness: for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment as common, not only to all sorts of freemen, but to as many of the servants as please to learn them. But they give him the testimony of being a wise man who is fully acquainted with our laws, and is able to interpret their meaning; on which account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors with great patience to obtain this learning, there have yet hardly been so many as two or three that have succeeded therein, who were immediately well rewarded for their pains.”

But Lamsa completely overlooks the fact that Josephus explains in his “Wars Of The Jews” Preface ¶1, why he first wrote his *Wars* in Aramaic rather than in Greek thusly:

“1. Whereas the war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been the greatest of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations; while some men who were not concerned in the affairs themselves, have gotten together vain and contradictory stories by hearsay, and have written them down after a sophistical manner; and while those that were there present have given false accounts of things, and this either out of a humor of flattery to the Romans, or of hatred towards the Jews [sic Judaeans]; and while their writings contain sometimes accusations, and sometimes encomiums, but nowhere, the accurate truth of the facts, I [Josephus] have proposed to myself, for the sake of such as live under the government of the Romans, to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country, and sent to the Upper Barbarians; I Joseph, the son of Matthias, by birth an Hebrew, a priest also, and one who at first fought against the Romans myself, and was forced to be present at what was done afterwards, [am the author of this work.]”

For the reader who is unfamiliar with all of this, I will now explain what was going on: First of all, the “Upper Barbarians” to whom Josephus sent his *Wars* in Aramaic were no other than some of the lost tribes of Israel! Josephus' objective in sending his *Wars* to the Upper Barbarians was to influence them to come back to Judaea 700 years after their Assyrian captivity and help the Judaeans in Palestine to fight the Romans. So

Josephus was explaining in his “Wars Of The Jews”, Preface ¶1, why he first wrote in Aramaic and then rewrote his *Wars* in Greek. He knew that some of the ten lost tribes were then still in Persia and Parthia, and that they spoke in Aramaic. Christ’s disciples did no differently, for they spoke and wrote the language of the people to whom they ministered. No doubt Josephus’ rewriting, of his *Wars* in Greek was an effort to present them to a Greek speaking audience.

So while Lamsa is correct that Josephus did part of his writings in Aramaic, he is blind to the reason why. Lamsa citing Josephus’ *Antiquities* 21:11:2 proves nothing concerning the original language the New Testament was written in. Evidently Judaea, at the time of Christ, was a bilingual nation with the natives familiar with both Aramaic and Greek. At Matthew ch. 10 we are told that Yahshua Christ sent out the twelve apostles, and later the seventy at Luke ch. 10. We are not informed where all of them went, but we know they were sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Had they gone to the lost tribes, the two main languages they would have encountered would have been Greek and Aramaic, and after they returned we are not informed they encountered any language problems. I believe that is because most of the people in Judaea, at that time, were bilingual. You will notice that Josephus had no problem writing in Greek, only in speaking it. But that doesn’t mean that if he met someone knowing Greek only that he couldn’t carry on a conversation with that person!

In the Preface to Lamsa’s translation of the Bible we are told: “George M. Lamsa, B.A., F.R.S.A., the translator of this work is uniquely fitted for the task to which he has devoted the major part of his life. He is an Assyrian and a native of ancient Biblical lands, where he lived until World War I. Until that time, isolated from the rest of Christendom, his people retained Biblical customs and Semitic culture which had perished everywhere else. This background, together with his knowledge of the Aramaic (Syriac) language, has enabled him to recover much of the meaning that has been lost in other translations of the Scriptures.”

The fact that Lamsa could trace his lineage back to the Assyrians could be good or it could be bad, depending on the situation. The original Assyrians were White people tracing back to Shem, but some of them were also closely related to the Babylonians, and “Egypt and Babylonia were inhabited by mingled races”, *History Of Assyria* by Olmstead, page 504. Also it should be noted that Assyria had absorbed many Hittites. And even though he may be a pure White Assyrian, he is not under the Abrahamic covenant, therefore I question his Biblical authority to be commenting on Scripture. Nevertheless, he has many positive observations to help the Bible scholar.

Lamsa, in his introduction on page iii says this about his Assyrian lineage: “When Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C., many of the princes and noblemen of this once vast empire fled northward into inaccessible mountains where they remained secluded and cut off until the dawn of the twentieth century. Nahum says: ‘Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.’ Nah. 3:18. Some descendants of the Assyrians and some of the descendants of the ten tribes who were taken captive by the Assyrian kings in 721 B.C., and settled in Assyria, Babylon, Persia and other places east of the river Euphrates, were among the first converts to

Christianity.” In other words, the Lamsa family was confined to the very mountains which Nahum had prophesied they would be driven to. And even if Lamsa is a white man, he is not an Israel sheep. Reread Nahum chapter 3, I think you’ll find it interesting! Although Lamsa recognizes that the ten tribes of Israel were carried to Assyria around 721 B.C., he fails to see the entire story!

One can tell he knows little of Israel Identity, for he remarks: “Some of the descendants of these Hebrew tribes are still living in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey ...” While Lamsa might be helpful in certain areas, he is a disaster in others, so we have to be careful with his material!

Lamsa states further: “The Assyrians remained dormant during the Persian, Greek, Roman and Arab conquests. Being isolated and surrounded by their enemies, they remained secluded throughout the centuries, thus preserving the Aramaic language, which was the language of the Near East, and perpetuating the ancient Biblical customs and manners which were common to all races and peoples in this part of the ancient world. ... As we have said, the survival of this small remnant of this segment of the ancient Semitic culture was due to the isolation, tenacity, and warlike character of the Assyrian people who were living isolated, now under the Parthian Empire, now under the Persian Empire, now under the Arabian Empire and now under the Turkish Empire.”

This should be enough information to serve as a guide for George M. Lamsa’s historical and racial background. We will now explore the historical background of the Aramaic Peshitta Bible which he so highly praises:

“ History Of The Syriac Versions

“ Peshitta text of Exodus 13:14-16 produced in Amida in the year 464. The name ‘ Peshitta ’ was first applied to the standard, common Syriac Bible in the ninth century, when it is called such by Moshe bar Kepha. However, it is clear that the Peshitta had a long and complex history before receiving its name. In fact the Peshitta Old Testament and New Testament are two completely separate works of translation.

“The Peshitta Old Testament is the earliest piece of Syriac literature of any length, probably originating in the second century. Whereas the majority of the Early Church relied on the Greek Septuagint, or translations from it, for their Old Testament, the Syriac-speaking church had its text translated directly from the Hebrew. The Hebrew text that served as a master copy for the translation must have been relatively similar to the Masoretic Text of mediaeval and modern Hebrew Bibles. Although previous studies had suggested that it was translated from Aramaic Targumim, this is now rejected. However, some isolated targumic influences can be seen in the text (especially in the Pentateuch and Books of Chronicles), with the addition of little interpretive asides. The style and quality of translation in the Peshitta Old Testament varies quite widely. Some parts may have been translated by Syriac-speaking Jews before being taken over by the church, while other parts may have been worked on by early Jewish converts to Christianity. As Syriac is the language of Edessa, it is likely that the translation took place in that region. However, Arbela and Adiabene, with its large and influential second-century Jewish population, has also been suggested as the

place of origin. A few scholars have pointed to a few supposedly Western Aramaic features in the text, which may suggest that the original translation took place in Palestine or Syria. However, the interpretation of these features is extremely difficult. ...

“The early Syriac versions of both Old and New Testament with the four gospels, excluding the Diatessaron [*i.e. four Gospels made into one*], is called the Old Syriac (Vetus Syra) version. There are two fifth-century manuscripts of the Old Syriac separate gospels (the Sinaitic Palimpsest and Curetonian Gospels). These are a comparatively free translation of the Greek text, the so-called ‘Western’ recension of it, and apparently making use of the Diatessaron text for phrasing. The Old Syriac Gospels were probably produced in the third century (although some date it to the early fourth century). The Old Syriac uses the Peshitta Old Testament for Old Testament quotes (and thus is the earliest witness to its existence) in the gospels, even in places where the quote is quite different in the Greek. There is also evidence that translations of the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles also existed in the Old Syriac version, though according to Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* 4.29.5, Tatian himself rejected them.

“The Peshitta is a reworking of Old Syriac material to form a unified version of the scriptures for the Syriac-speaking churches. The name of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa (d. 435) is popularly connected with the production of the Peshitta. However, it is extremely unlikely that he was involved with its production. By the early fifth century, the Peshitta was the standard Bible of the Syriac-speaking churches. Unlike the Greek canon, the Peshitta did not contain the Second Epistle of Peter, the Second Epistle of John, the Third Epistle of John, the Epistle of Jude and the Book of Revelation. However, examination of the earliest extant Peshitta manuscripts shows some variation, including Diatessaric and Old-Syriac features existing long after their supposed replacement. The subsequent divisions of the Syriac-speaking church did not displace the Peshitta as the common scriptures of all groups.

“In the West-Syriac Church, theological dispute within the Byzantine Empire necessitated the production of a Syriac Bible that was closer to the Greek text. Philoxenus of Mabbog (died 523) produced a New Testament text along these lines, the Philoxenian Version, but it appears that this may have just covered a few key passages and text for those books in the Greek canon that were not in the Peshitta. In the seventh century, a complete Syriac Bible based on the standard Greek was produced. The Syro-Hexapla is a version of the Old Testament based on the fifth column of Origen’s Hexapla (to which it is now the most important witness). The Harklean Version, under the supervision of Thomas of Harkel, is a fairly close Syriac translation of the Greek New Testament, but oddly containing a few Old-Syriac features. In spite of the existence of these translations, the Peshitta remained the common Bible of the Syriac-speaking churches, and these more technical (called ‘spiritual’ in their time) translations were mostly confined to the desks of Syriac theologians.

“In the East-Syriac Church, and the earlier common tradition, Syriac translators of Greek exegetical literature (especially the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia) often had to provide a precise, literal translation of the Greek text under discussion to

accompany the Peshitta text so that the argument of the exegete might still be understood.”

This pretty well covers the history of Syriac versions of the Bible. This is not Lamsa’s history of the Peshitta, but an independent appraisal on the subject. In his introduction to *Idioms In The Bible Explained* he states in part:

“ All languages of the world, both ancient and modern, have idioms, metaphors and mannerisms of speech. This style of speech is called colloquialism. An idiom is a saying that foreigners cannot understand without being trained and is often taken literally and therefore misunderstood. This is because when we use an idiom we say one thing, but we mean another. For example, in Aramaic we say, ‘ If your hand offends you, cut it off,’ which means, ‘ If you have a habit of stealing, cut it out.’ An English idiom, ‘ He is in a pickle,’ really means, ‘ He is in trouble.’ Therefore, idioms and colloquialisms are not to be taken literally. A student must know their true meanings in order to translate them accurately into another language.

“ Idioms, metaphors and figures of speech constitute a great barrier in mastering a foreign language. Translators from one language into another have always been cognizant of these difficulties. This is one reason why the Bible is misunderstood and has been subjected to revision throughout the centuries. The Sixteenth Century translators of the Holy Bible did not understand the idioms of the languages from which they translated. Therefore they translated idioms literally and their true meanings were lost. ... They translated many Eastern idioms and metaphors literally, not knowing their true meaning. For instance, ‘ You shall handle snakes.’ They did not know that the word ‘ snake ’ refers to ‘ an enemy ’.” From this we can see that Lamsa was simply adhering to the idiom when translating Lev. 18-20.

One of the big problems with Lamsa’s translation is that he follows the same chronology of Genesis chapter 5 as the KJV. For those who are not aware of it, there is a 1486 year discrepancy between the Septuagint and the Masoretic texts on the patriarchal chronology from Adam through Abraham. So this is no small matter! If you want to know more concerning this patriarchal chronological discrepancy, obtain my brochure entitled *Patriarchal Chronology* and you will clearly see the Septuagint is more nearly on target. Other texts somewhat aligned with the LXX on this chronology are Josephus and the Samaritan. I showed in my *Patriarchal Chronology* that one Ephrem the Syrian testified that the Masoretes deliberately subtracted from the chronology sometime after the crucifixion. What other motive could the Canaanite-jews have had but to prove that Christ was not the promised Messiah, and didn’t come at the appointed time which would have been 5,500 years after the promise given to Adam, (Gal. 4:4.). This shows that the Syriac versions were translated from an altered Hebrew text sometime after the crucifixion. That is, if Lamsa faithfully followed the Syriac versions. **I hope the reader is beginning to see why we should carefully analyze all ancient manuscripts!**

I also checked Lamsa’s translation to see how he rendered Joshua 2:1, 6:17, 25; Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 to see if he had made Rahab a harlot, and he did. Josephus alone clears Rahab from such a vile category, which shows that Josephus had yet another manuscript to work from.

My own opinion is that the Syriac versions are a valuable source for referencing various passages, but I surely wouldn't categorize them as being perfect. Far from it! But I consider Lamsa's Syriac version of the Old and New Testament, his *New Testament Commentary*, his *Gospel Light*, his *Old Testament Light* and his small booklets on Hebrew idioms to be a valuable part of my library.