

# The New Covenant and the (un)Faithfulness of God

– Notes on the text and translation of Jeremiah 38,31-32 (LXX) –

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# The text in its narrower context

הִנֵּה יָמַי בָּאִים

נְאֻם־יְהוָה

וְכָרַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִית יְהוּדָה

בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה:

לֹא כַּבְּרִית

אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם

בְּיוֹם הַחֲזִיקִי בְיָדָם

לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם

אֲשֶׁר־הִקְמָה הַפָּרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי

וְאֲנֹכִי בְּעֵלְתִּי בָם

נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται

φησὶν κύριος

καὶ διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραηλ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδα

διαθήκην καινὴν

οὐ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην

ἣν διεθέμην τοῖς πατράσιν αὐτῶν

ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν

ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου

ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου

καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν

φησὶν κύριος

# The problem:

- How could be **ἡμέλησα** the rendering of **בְּעַלְתִּי**?
- They belong to two totally different semantic fields:
  - the meaning of **בְּעַלְתִּי** is related to marriage and/or domination, terms largely interchangeable in ancient culture, especially when used metaphorically,
  - the meaning of **ἡμέλησα** denotes the action of neglecting, disregarding, ignoring.
- The deviation from the meaning of **בְּעַלְתִּי** is detectable in Peshitta, as well: “I blamed/reproached them”.
- The Targum also deviates both from the meaning of **בְּעַלְתִּי** and **ἡμέλησα**: **וְאַנָּא אֶתְרַעִיתִי בְּהוֹן**.

- Hexapla (Field's edition):

- Hebr.: ׀ִ ׀ִ ׀ִ ׀ִ ׀ִ ׀ִ

- Et ego rejeci eos. Aliter: Cum tamen ego dominus essem iis.

- O': καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν

- 'A': καὶ ἐγὼ εἶμι ἐκυρίευσα (αὐτῶν)

- Σ': ἐγὼ δὲ κατεῖχον αὐτοῦς

- Chronology of textual history of Jeremiah:

- before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE – existence of an early Hebrew text variant;

- late 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE – birth of the Greek translation;

- after the second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE – birth of the Masoretic text;

- 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE – new Greek translations of Aquila and Symmachus.



# Proposals for solution:

- supposed root **בעל**II. = *to be slow, or to be patient*?
- Or root **עעל**II. = *to abhor*?
- Should it be rather considered simply “a free, contextual translation”?
- Is there a text corruption or correction? Has the Old Greek apparently read *ga'altî* instead of *ba'altî*?

## *ba'altî* or *ga'altî*? – state of research

- This seems to be the most widely accepted proposal for solving the problem;
- Its roots are going back to Louis Cappel and Charles François Houbigant, in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- the shift from *ba'altî* to *ga'altî* already took place during the process of transmission of the Hebrew version;
- the version in the MT corresponds to a corrected and later variant of Jer 31,32, while the text-variant in the LXX is the Greek rendering of an older/earlier Hebrew text-form;

# *ba'altî* or *ga'altî*? – state of research

- Both *ba'altî* and *ga'altî* have their roots in the textual tradition of the Jeremiaiah-corpus:
  - *ba'altî*: in Jer 3,14 the reason of the divine call to repentance is given as: כִּי אָנֹכִי בָעַלְתִּי בָכֶם.
  - *ga'altî*: Jer 14,19: הַמָּאֵס מֵאֲסֹת אֶת-יְהוָה אִם-בְּצִיּוֹן גַּעְלָהּ נִפְלְשָׁה.
    - If this presupposition is true, it seems that the Old Greek and its Hebrew Vorlage interpret “this sentence as Yhwh’s negative evaluation of the former behavior of His people”.
- “the interchange of *gimmel* and *bêt* and the reference to a related context make it possible to characterize the variant as an example of linguistic exegesis”
- The theological decision behind the shifting from *ba'altî* to *ga'altî*, could be the intention of avoiding any possibility of identifying Yhwh with Baal;
- If this suggestion is true: the variant containing the word *ba'altî* should have existed prior to the Vorlage of the LXX, the Vorlage of the LXX has eliminated it and later the MT has returned to it.



# לעב, לעג, and ἀμελέω

- לעב- (14 verses)

- Greek words or the expressions describing its meaning used for the translation of the verb לעב, in the most cases are related to the marriage and/or domination. It is obvious that in Jer 31,32 (38,32) ἡμέλησα is not the translation of לעב, as it is never done in other passages of the LXX.

- לעג- (9 verses)

- βδελύσσω (act. to make disgusting or abominable, med. to feel disgust, be nauseated, to feel reluctance or horror; be disgusted by, find repugnant, detest, feel sick),
- προσοχθίζω (act. to be angered against, indignant with, pass. to be treated insolently, be outraged; in the Cambridge Greek Lexicon the meaning of the root οχθ is related with being agitated or troubled),
- ὠμοτόκέω (give birth prematurely, miscarry),
- ἀφίστημι (trans. to move aside, detach, separate, remove, repel, distract, split, cause rebellion, induce to revolt, intrans. to be distant, depart, keep apart, to be estranged, etc.; remove, separate, put away, depose, hinder, keep off, etc.).



# לבע, לעג, and ἀμελέω

- ἀμελέω - (8 verses in the LXX and NT together)
  - In the LXX is used to translate:
    - Jer 31,32 (MT): the verb **לבע**;
    - Jer 4,17: the verb **מרה** = to be rebellious
- In the remaining 6 cases it occurs in texts without Hebrew Vorlage
- In Jer 31/38,32 cannot be the rendition of **מרה** because God (due to His dominant position) cannot rebel against Jerusalem, but rather can render other verbs like מאס or שלה.
- It seems to me less possible that the translator has seen a text that contained the sentence in the form **וְאַנְכִי גַעַלְתִּי בָּהֶם**

# Another possibility?

- Is there a possibility that:
  - the sentence known from the MT as וְאֶנְכִי בָעֵלְתִּי בָּם
  - Translated as καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν
  - Could have been: וְאֶנְכִי מְעַלְתִּי בָּם?

# מַעַלְתִּי - ἡμέλησα - בָּעַלְתִּי?

- the verb מעל appears 35 times in the Hebrew Bible
- Its meaning:
  - “sin, commit sin, be sinful, transgress, commit sacrilege” (DCH);
  - “act counter to one’s duty, be unfaithful” (Holladay);
  - “be untrue, violate one’s legal obligations” (HALOT).
- it often occurs with preposition כ (in the meaning of against), like the verb בעל
- in its biblical occurrences its subject is always a human being, but the more generalized semantic field given in Holladay and HALOT it does not exclude the possibility of a divine subject and it could be used as the description of God’s attitude towards his unfaithful people.
- The content of מעל
  - Jos 22,16 - לָשׁוּב מֵאֲחֵרַי (to turn away from)
  - 2Chron 29,6 - וַיִּסְבּוּ פְּנֵיהֶם, וַיַּעֲזְבוּהוּ, עָשׂוּ הָרַע -



# The translation of מַעַל in the LXX: - I.

- ἀδικέω: to be unjust, perpetrate injustice, be wrong; act unjustly/unlawfully, do wrong, be in the wrong, be mistaken, behave badly, do wrong to, harm, damage (2Chron 26,16; Ez 39,26);
- ἀθετέω: to annul, violate, contemn, to baffle, elude, to rendere ineffectual, to treat treacherously, to reject as false, uncanonical or spurious; dishonor, break, annul, break faith with, disbelieve, reject (1Chron 2,7; 1Chron 5,25; 2Chron 36,14; Ez 39,23; Dan 9,7);
- ἀμαρτάνω: to miss the mark, to make mistake, to make an error, miss, be wrong, sin, to fail to obtain; fail to hit the mark, fail to achieve, fail to gain, lose, fall short, be deficient, make a mistake, commit an offence (2Chron 12,2);
- ἀνομέω: to act illegally, to be corrupted (by sin); break the law (1Chron 10,13);
- ἀπειθέω: to be disobedient, disobey, to be unpersuaded, act coy, refuse, not to believe, not to lend credence, to be incompatible; be disobedient, remain unpersuaded, show disregard (Deut 32,51);
- ἀσυνθετέω: to transgress, be unfaithful; (Ezr 2,10; Ezr 10,10; Neh 1,8; Neh 13,27);
- ἀφίστημι: trans. to move aside, detach, separate, remove, repel, distract, split, cause rebellion, induce to revolt, intrans. to be distant, depart, keep apart, to be estranged, etc.; remove, separate, put away, depose, hinder, keep off, etc. (2Chron 26,18; 2Chron 28,19.22; 2Chron 29,6; 2Chron 30,7);

# The translation of לעל in the LXX: - II.

- **λανθάνω**: to escape notice, be unobserved, remain unknown or hidden, (causative meaning:) to cause to be forgotten, (medial or passive:) omit, forget, to forget oneself; escape notice or detection, be unaware, fail to realise, fail to be detected by, cause to forget, cease/fail to think of, forget (Lev 5,15; Num 5,27);
- παραβαίνω καί ὑπεροράω: (Lev 26,40)
  - παραβαίνω = to proceed beside with, to advance, proceed, to go off course, deviate, to disobey, violate, betray, to neglect, pass over, to omit, transgress; pass by unnoticed, escape, pass over, omit, overstep, transgress, break, transgress against, offend.
  - ὑπεροράω – see beneath.
- παραπίπτω: to fall beside, to occur, to offer oneself, to throw oneself in front, to fall out, deviate, to make a mistake, to go to perdition, to be in an unfavorable position; fall nearby, come along, turn by, appear opportunely, come one's way, to offer, arrive, come up against, fall foul of, fall in one's path, rush past, rush on, deviate, go astray, make a mistake, fawn, cringe (Ez 14,13; Ez 15,8; Ez 18,24; Ez 20,27);
- παροράω: to see next to/beside, to look sidelong, turn one's gaze to the side, to see poorly, have a visual defect, fall into error while watching, not to take into account, neglect, disdain, to transgress, omit, pass over in silence, to let by, permit, tolerate, (in passive voice:) not to be considered, to be violated; see or detect in, cast a sideways glance, cast a furtive look, disregard, overlook, have faulty vision (Lev 5,21; Num 5,6);



# The translation of מעל in the LXX: - III.

- **πλανάω**: to make err, make wander, lead into error, cheat, deceive, to make uncertain, obscure, to stray, ramble on, to deviate, move aside; drive hither and thither, lead or entice this way and that, travel without fixed course and intention, wander, roam around, distract from the main point, mislead, deceive, behave unpredictably, prevaricate, be shifty (Prov 16,10);
- **πλημμελέω**: to commit an error or mistake, behave badly, sin; act discordantly or inappropriately, do wrong, offend (Jos 7,1, Jos 22,16.20.31);
- **ὑπεροράω**: to gaze from above, not to notice, take no account of, overlook, to despise, disdain; look over at, look beyond, disregard, disdain, scorn, take no notice, be scornful (Num 5,12).



# ἡμέλησα - יַהֲלֵעַמָּ?

- The semantic field of ἀμελέω:
  - be negligent, unconcerned and indifferent, neglect, disregard, ignore, not care about;
  - to be careless/negligent, not take care.
- Perhaps, the modern dictionaries do not show too many connection points between מעל and ἀμελέω, but the semantic field of the Greek words used in the LXX for translating יַהֲלֵעַמָּ (especially ὑπεροράω, λανθάνω and ἀφίστημι) could suggest that the translator may have seen this word in the text he had to translate.

# Palaeographic arguments

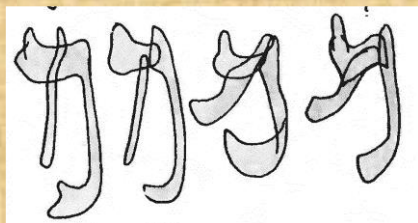
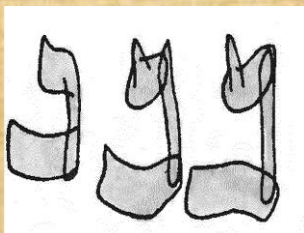
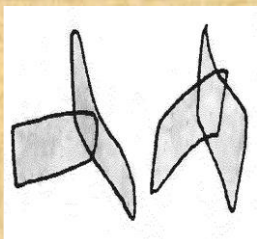
- The question: is there one or more letter in the Hebrew script, whose form in the period between the 3<sup>rd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE (the broader time-span when the first version of LXX was born) that can be confused with the letter *beth* (because of **בַּעַלְתִּי**)?
- The gimmel from **בַּעַלְתִּי** has very different form, therefore according to my opinion it is less probable that the translator has seen this word.
- The most similar letter to the *beth* in the above-mentioned period is the *mem*. This is the reason why at the beginning of this section I have chosen to examine the semantic field of the verb **מעל**.

# *gimmel, beth and mem*

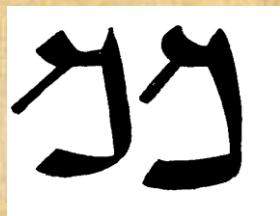
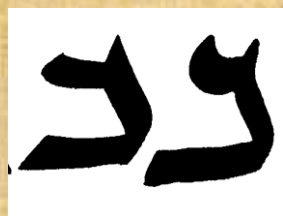
- the Elephantine papyri, 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE:



- 4QSam<sup>b</sup>, Proto-Jewish script, late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE:



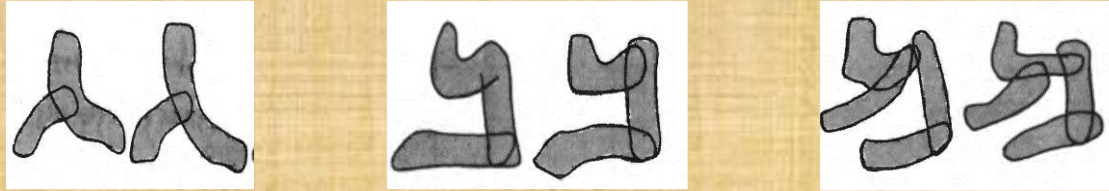
- 4QJer<sup>a</sup>, Proto-Jewish script, early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE:





# *gimmel, beth and mem*

- 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, Early Hasmonean script, second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE:



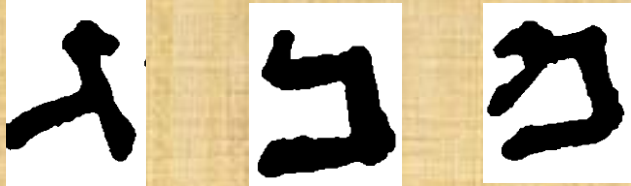
- Qumran War Scroll, Early Herodian period (cca. 30 BCE):



- Psalms scroll from Qumran (11QPs), Herodian period:



- Nahal-Hever:



# Closing thoughts

- I am aware: my proposal is only one of the many hypotheses;
- Perhaps we will never know for sure what was on the scroll the translator has worked from, but it seems likely that the translator – due to the similarities between letters *beth* and *mem* in the Hellenistic period – has seen a word which he could have read מַעֲלֵתִי.

*Thank you for your kind attention!*  
תודה לכולכם על ההקשבה ותשומת הלב!