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Miscellanea

The Testimony of the Skies *

By R. LAIRD HARRIS, Faith Theological Seminary

The Hebrew Text of Psalm 19:4

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." These majestic words introduce to us a Psalm that is as wonderful in its teaching as it is favorite to the hearts of many of God's people. The subject of the Psalm is neither the wonders of the heavens nor the perfections of God's Law, but rather the greatness of our God as revealed in both His Word and works. The Psalm therefore ends with a humble prayer for God's cleansing power and gracious acceptance.

Familiar as the Psalm is to God's people, probably many do not realize that it is quoted in the New Testament and that this quotation raises certain problems in the interpretation of the Psalm. In Romans 10:18 Paul, arguing that the Jews are sinning against knowledge, points out that a witness to God has been given by the starry heavens even to the ends of the earth. Paul had already asserted this universal witness of nature and conscience in Romans 1:20 and 2:15, but now he quotes from Psalm 19:4 to prove that Jews as well as Gentiles are without excuse and actually disobedient to God's revelation. This much seems clear, but it is the form of the quotation that poses a slight problem. Romans 10:18 says "their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world," but Psalm 19:4 says "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The two verses agree in everything except the word "sound" in the New Testament representing "line" in the Old Testament. The difference indeed is not great. And yet it is very hard to see how the word "line" used in the Old Testament for measurement both in building and as a line stretched forth to measure the destruction of a city can be represented in the New Testament by "sound."

The easiest method of treating with such a problem (which after all is not serious) is to say that it is a matter of obscure interpretation. The Scofield Bible in a note on Hebrews 10:5 ascribes such variations to the freedom of quotation which may be exercised by the Holy Spirit. This would be a fair answer except that the purpose of using the Old Testament quotation is to show the agreement of the New Covenant with the Old, and we should not expect such divergencies. A far better method is to investigate the text both of the New Testament and the Old Testament in these cases and see if there is any evidence of a mistake in copying. The methods of textual criticism should certainly be employed before any answer is given.

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We are all familiar with the science of textual criticism of the New Testament, but some may be surprised to find that the Old Testament text should be treated similarly. This science of textual criticism proceeds on the basis of manuscript evidence for both Testaments. It must be clearly distinguished from the so-called "higher criticism" of a generation ago, which based itself on subjective criteria of style, conjecture, etc., and led to results as numerous as the critics themselves. The higher criticism often ended by such radical division and mutilation of the record that, for many, the very foundations of the faith were destroyed. Textual criticism, on the other hand, proceeds according to evidence and well-established laws, which lead to definite results easily checked by anyone.

B.B. Warfield, in his book *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, gives in compact form the principles of the science of textual criticism, which are applicable with slight modifications to the Old Testament field. There are two basic inquiries—first in the direction of the internal evidence, that is, which of the various manuscript readings fits the whole context best; second, in the direction of the external evidence, that is, which reading has the strongest support in the existing copies. Internal evidence in turn is divided by Warfield into "intrinsic evidence," that is, the suitability of the reading in the context and "transcriptional evidence," that is, the probability of one reading being a mistake arising out of another. External evidence also is not so simple as at first appears, for the majority of manuscripts with a certain reading are not always right (the majority often being late), and the oldest manuscripts are not always correct either. The fact is that all the evidence must be assembled and carefully analyzed before a reading is chosen.

Now when we look at the Hebrew text of Psalm 19:4, we find that all the Hebrew manuscripts agree that the reading of the consonants should be "q w m," "their line." This would seem to decide the matter, but we must remember that we also have some early translations of the Old Testament into other languages, and it is necessary to consult these. Of these translations, called "versions," the most important is the Greek translation, which seems to have been made about two centuries before Christ, called the Septuagint. This version, preserved to us in several important manuscripts, here has the word "phthongos," "sound." The first Latin version made by Jerome, about 400 A.D., was translated from this Greek Septuagint version, and it also says "sound" or, in Latin, "sonus." We may argue from this that the Greek translators of about 200 B.C. had the Hebrew word for "sound" in their Bibles, or at least thought they did.

Soon after the time of Christ, a Jew by the name of Symmachus decided the old Greek version was not satisfactory, so he made a new Greek translation. We have parts of this version of Symmachus and find that he translated Psalm 19:4 with the Greek word "echos" (from which we get "echo"), meaning "sound." So his Hebrew Bible still seems to have the word "sound" here. Somewhere about this time the Jews and Christians of Northern Mesopotamia were using a Syriac translation of the Old Testament called the "Peshitto" version, and this

also has the word "sound," Psalm 19:4 (the evidence is summarized in Meyer's commentary on Romans 10:18). Later on, after 400 A. D., Jerome made a second translation of the Psalms into Latin in addition to the one mentioned above, but this time he translated them out of the Hebrew. This time also he uses the Latin word "sonus," "sound," showing that he believed the Hebrew text of 400 A. D. had, or should have, the word "sound" in Psalm 19:4.

So far it looks very much as if the important evidence, except for the Hebrew manuscripts, all points in the direction of the word "sound" in this place. But there is one interesting exception. Shortly after the time of Christ and before Symmachus did his work, a Jew named Aquila became dissatisfied with the Septuagint Greek version and made his own Greek translation. In this place (see the evidence summarized in Brigg's commentary on the Psalms) Aquila used the word "kanon" (from which we get the expression "canon law"), meaning "rule." Apparently the Hebrew manuscript which Aquila used possessed the word "q w m," "their line." On the other hand, the Hebrew manuscripts used by Jerome in 400 A. D., by Symmachus at about 200 A. D., by the translators of the Syriac Peshitto version soon after Christ and by the translators of the Greek Septuagint version at about 200 B. C., all had the Hebrew word for "sound" in this place. Unfortunately, all these Hebrew manuscripts have been lost, but we know what they were by the versions made from them.

We should now try to find which reading is correct. As can be seen above, the external evidence from the Hebrew manuscripts and the various translations is divided. And yet the oldest evidence favors the reading "their sound." When we look to the internal evidence, we should first ask what the Hebrew would be for "their sound is gone out through all the earth." Of course, there are several Hebrew words for "sound," but one very common one is the word translated "voice" in verse three of our Psalm. This Hebrew word in the form "their sound" would have the consonants "q l m." "Their sound" is very close to the word "q w m," "their line," and we can easily understand how the present Hebrew text reading "q w m" may have arisen by mistake in copying the "w" instead of "l." We would say that the "transcriptional evidence" points to a simple mistake in copying one letter.

Now the "intrinsic evidence" mentioned by Warfield also should be investigated. Which reading suits the context better? Each one may decide for himself on inspection of the Psalm. Verse one tells about the witness of the heavens to God. Verse two says the regular succession of day and night tells of a God of order. Verse three, according to the Authorized Version, declares that this witness of the heavens sounds out to all men. In this place the Revised Version makes a flat negative statement: "their voice is not heard." This translation is no closer to the Hebrew than is the Authorized Version and is against the context in the last half of verse four, which says that their words go out to the end of the world! The Revised Version here is really a mistranslation. Now, it seems clear that the context of verse four is telling about the universal witness of the heavens. The parallel last half of

verse four speaks of the words of the heavens being heard far and wide. Verses five and six specify the sun, whose heat all men feel as a testimony to the creator God. The conclusion should therefore be obvious that the first half of verse four should read "their sound is gone out through all the earth," and the Hebrew reading "q w m" should be rejected in favor of "q l m."

The above is a simple problem in Old Testament textual criticism, and the result is not new. For example, Meyer's commentary on Romans 10:18 reaches the same conclusion. A further word may be said as a consequence of the above extended discussion. What about the relation of the New Testament quotation to the above argument? First we shall notice that the Old Testament text as corrected by textual criticism is in exact accord with the New Testament quotation, and the problem we noticed at the beginning simply vanishes! There was no problem, really. The only problem was one made for us by a mistake in copying one Hebrew letter.

Our second point is even more important. From what did Paul quote his Old Testament verse? From the Hebrew or from the Septuagint? It is usually said that the New Testament authors quote freely from the Septuagint, and this is logical, for they wrote in Greek. It would seem at first sight that here Paul followed the Septuagint Greek version in opposition to the Hebrew text. But does the above evidence argue so? Rather the above discussion shows that at least some Hebrew manuscripts of Paul's time were in exact accord with the Septuagint Greek version of Paul's time. It is no wonder that Paul followed this same reading of the text as the Septuagint translators had done before him and the Peshitto translators, the Jew Symmachus and the Christian Jerome, were to do after him. Actually from this comparison of Psalm 19:4 with Romans 10:18 we cannot say that Paul quoted from the Septuagint. The fact is that at that time the Hebrew and Septuagint agreed, and this particular corruption entered the Hebrew text or gained ascendancy in the Hebrew tradition after Paul's day.

A word of caution should be added before closing our study of this particular text. It should not be thought that our results, which note minor errors in copying, work against the doctrine of verbal inspiration. We know that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21) and were so moved that they wrote without error. But God entrusted His sacred Word to human channels which revered the record, but unavoidably made some mistakes in copying. Most of us have even noticed mistakes in printing of the English Bible in cheaper editions. The Scofield Bible in a note to 1 Corinthians 10:8 points out how especially easy it is for numerals to be miscopied. But these mistakes are minor and do not affect to any appreciable extent the facts and doctrines of Holy Scripture. Rather they are to be corrected by careful, consecrated study. As Warfield points out, it is important in the study of the Bible to "test its correctness" to show how well it has been providentially preserved by God as well as to "emend its errors." (*Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 4.)

We have shown how scholarly study of the Old and the New Testa-

ment text yields results both of interest and value. There are many such Old Testament quotations in the New Testament which should be similarly studied. Perhaps the meaning of this Psalm will be made clearer to some by this treatment. And to this end we should close with a literal translation of the first part of this fine specimen of Hebrew poetry in praise to the God who has given a universal revelation of Himself in His works of creation and a special holy revelation of Himself in his Word of redemption, mentioned after verse seven.

To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David

The heavens are declaring the glory of God, and the expanse of the sky is showing the work of His hands.

Day to day utters speech, and night to night shows knowledge.

There is no speech and no language where their voice is not heard.

Their sound has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

He has placed a tent in them for the sun,

Who is like a bridegroom going out of his room [to the wedding]

Or is like a young man keyed up to run a race.

From one end of the heavens is his [the sun's] going out,

And his course is unto their other end, and there is nothing hid from his heat.

Did John the Baptist Practice Infant Baptism?

This question is raised in an article of the *Presbyterian* of December 3, 1942. The Rev. J. R. Browne of Greenfield, Mo., writing on the topic "Did John the Baptist Baptize Infant Children?", arrives at an affirmative answer. His proof he finds in the prophecy Joel 2:1-16, in which he says a striking picture of John the Baptist is given us "preparing the bride in the wilderness for her coming Bridegroom." The call is there issued, "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the Bridegroom come forth of His chamber and the bride of her closet." That this was fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist the writer holds is proved not only by the report of the work of John in general, but by John's statement "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom," John 3:29. While it is very true, as Mr. Browne contends, that the Church is called Christ's bride and that this is an Old Testament name for the Church, we must say that what he presents here as proof for infant baptism as practiced by John, the reference to children in Joel's prophecy, is not convincing.

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