



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

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Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

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Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

“He Hates” or God Hates—The Text of Malachi 2:16 By Kyle Pope

Many Christians have started using the formal equivalence translation published in 2001 by the evangelical publisher Crossway, known as the English Standard Version. When reading from this translation in the book of Malachi, the student of Scripture will notice at once a reading dramatically different from that found in most other English translations. Malachi 2:16 reads:

“For the man who hates and divorces, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” (ESV)

This stands in contrast to most English translations which put God as the subject of the verb “hate” rather than the man who divorces his wife because he “hates” her. Most have rendered this in one of two ways: (1) *As an indirect quote about God’s attitude (“For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away” KJV, cf. NKJV, CEB, GLT, ISV), or (2) As a direct quote of God’s attitude (“For I hate putting away, saith Jehovah” ASV, cf. RSV, NASB, NRSV, NET, NLT).* Why do these translations put this so differently? Why does the ESV make man the subject of the verb? And which translation represents our best understanding of the original text?

The Hebrew Text

It is clear that Malachi 2:13-17 is a rebuke of the faithless attitude Jews at the close of the Old Testament period held toward marriage and divorce. Unfortunately, the text of verse 16 poses a number of challenges both in terms of translation and determination of the original text. The Hebrew Masoretic text (the standard text preserved through a rigorous scribal process represented in most Hebrew texts dating back to at least the eighth century AD), has three words that form the opening phrase of the verse—*ki sane’ shalach* (כִּי שָׁנֵא שָׁלַח)

שָׁלַח). The first word, *ki* is a conjunction that usually means “because” but can also introduce a conditional phrase in the sense of our word “if.” The third word is the infinitive form of the word meaning “to send away,” used generally of any type of sending, and specifically of divorce (Deut. 22:19, 29; 24:1-4; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1, 8). An infinitive form is not bound to a subject, but abstractly describes an action. Here it is not “he sends away” (which would be a third-person singular verb) but simply “sending away” (generally). An infinitive can be translated as a noun (e.g. “**divorce**” RSV, NASB, NIV84, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, ESV) or abstractly (e.g. “**putting away**” KJV, ASV, or “**sending away**” YLT, GLT).

The major questions about translation rest on the second word in the verse. In the Masoretic Text (MT) the word *sane’* is in the third-person singular masculine form of the word meaning “hate”—so it properly means “**he hates.**” We should note that all of the translations mentioned

above that put it “**I hate**” acknowledge in their footnotes that the Hebrew reads “**he hates.**” The problem is this seems to demand an unusual shift in the “he” that is being addressed. The next phrase in the Hebrew reads literally, “**says the Lord God of Israel**” (RSV, NASB, NIV84, NLT, NRSV, ESV, cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, GLT). Is Malachi quoting the Lord? If so, who is the “he” the Lord says “hates”? Is Malachi summarizing the declaration of the Lord? We do this all the time—“He says that he hates onions!”—rather than, “He says, ‘I hate onions!’” The next phrase raises further questions. The Hebrew speaks of “**his clothing.**” About whose clothing is this speaking? If God hates and God says, is this speaking of God’s clothing? If not, where is the shift?

In the face of this, many translators have concluded that something must have accidentally dropped out of the text in the course of scribal copying. A footnote in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), the foremost edition of the Hebrew MT, suggests that the second word is probably *sane’ti* (שָׁנְאֵתִי), meaning “I hate.” If so two letters are missing from the text. A footnote in the NET Bible speculates that the first-person pronoun *’anoki* (אֲנֹכִי) “I” originally could have been the second word but accidentally dropped out in the course of scribal copying. If so, an entire four-letter word is missing from the text. All of the texts cited above that put this “**I hate**” rely in one form or another on the assumption that the text is incomplete. Is this the solution?

Additional Ancient Evidence

When faced with these kinds of dilemmas, translators and scholars often look to two additional sources for clues to help resolve such questions: (1) *Older Biblical Manuscripts*, and (2) *Ancient Translations*. In the case of this text, while we have additional evidence from both of these types of sources, unfortunately this evidence doesn’t resolve the mystery but actually demonstrates a separate textual tradition.

Most of us are familiar with the texts called the Dead Sea Scrolls. These biblical and extra-biblical texts discovered in the caves near Qum-



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ran represent the oldest known manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament ranging in age from ca. 200 BC to AD 70. In most cases their readings have confirmed the remarkable reliability of the MT. In other cases, they reflect better readings or separate traditions.

In cave four a fragment known as 4QXII^a (or 4Q Minor Prophets^a) was found containing portions of Malachi 2:10-3:24. Although the portion containing 2:16 is dark leather and badly damaged the opening words of the verse can be clearly seen. There are four words—but not reflective of a lost pronoun “I.” The Hebrew reads *ki ’im santah shalach* (כִּי אִם שָׁנַתָּה שְׁלַח).

The first and last words are the same as the MT, but the second word is the conjunction *’im* meaning “if.” It is attested in Scripture in combinations with *ki* in a conditional sense—“**FOR IF** (*ki ’im*) **you refuse to let them go**” (Exod. 9:2) or “**BUT IF** (*ki ’im*) **you indeed obey His voice**” (Exod. 23:22). The third word is a form attested nowhere else in Scripture. Like the MT it is from the verb meaning “hate,” but scholars believe “the form שָׁנַתָּה may be read as the second masculine singular” with an unusual ending, but one that is “well attested in documents at Qumran” (Fuller, 55). If so, it would read, “For if you hate.” But how would the fourth word fit in? In Hebrew the three letters used in the root meaning “send away” could represent the infinitive “divorce” (or “sending away”), the imperative “send away!”, or the masculine third-person singular “he sends away.” To understand it in this last sense, we would have to supply the conjunction “and.” This is how one translator of the Dead Sea Scrolls renders it—“**For if you hate AND divorce**” (Abegg, *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*). This is essentially what the ESV does, “**For the man who hates AND divorces.**” But there is no conjunction “and” in the Hebrew text, and 4QXII^a has “For if YOU hate [and] HE divorces” if we take it as a third-person masculine singular.

So what if we treat it as an imperative? That would put it, “For if you hate, divorce!” Rather than a prohibition or a rebuke, that would almost treat this as a command to divorce. Interestingly enough, that is exactly the way the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament done between the Old and New Testaments) rendered this—“**If, having hated, divorce! says the Lord the God of Israel, then iniquity will cover his garments, says the Lord Almighty**” (Fuller). Here the imperative shows the negative consequences if one does divorce—iniquity covers his garments. The ancient Aramaic translation known as the Targum

of Jonathan (probably composed in the second century AD) put this much the same way, “**Because, if you hate her, release her . . . and you shall not cover the sin with your clothing**” (Lier). The same is seen in the fourth-century Latin Vulgate, which put it, “**When you have hate, divorce! . . . However, he shall cover his garments with iniquity**” (Pope).

When the Old Testament Scriptures were first brought into English Malachi 2:16 was handled just as these early Greek, Aramaic, and Latin translations had. Using the Latin Vulgate, Wycliffe (1395) put it, “**When thou hatest her, leave thou her (not)**” as did Coverdale (1535)—“**Yf thou hatest her, put her away,**” and the Roman Catholic Rheims-Douay (1582)—“**When thou shalt hate her put her away.**” Even when the Geneva Bible (1557) and the Bishops’ Bible (1568) began to look to the Hebrew texts as their basis, they still rendered this the same—“**If thou hatest her, put her away**” (Geneva); “**If thou hatest her, put her away**” (Bishops). The King James Version (1611) would break away from the translation tradition that we now see stretching back to the Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Jonathan Targum, and Latin Vulgate, and rely solely on the Hebrew Masoretic Text to render this, “**For the Lord the God of Israel saith, that he hateth putting away.**” Since then, all subsequent translations have also leaned pri-



marily on the MT (attempting in some cases to create hypothetical reconstructions of texts nowhere attested in the surviving manuscripts).

Which Translation Is Best?

So what can we conclude about which translation best reflects the original text? At present, I don't think we can determine that. There are two strong and ancient ways the text has been preserved: (1) *The Masoretic Tradition* ("**Because He hates divorce**"); and what I'll call (2) *The Dead Sea Scrolls-Septuagint Tradition* ("**For if you hate, divorce!**"). The KJV, NKJV, GLT, CEB, and ISV best preserve the Masoretic Tradition, with the Common English Bible reflecting it most literally in this passage. Frankly, none of the modern English translations actually reflect the Dead Sea Scrolls-

Septuagint Tradition (although some try to create hybrids of both approaches). Translations that render this "**I hate**" (ASV, RSV, AMP, GNB, NASB, NIV84, NLT, NRSV) must do so on the presumption that something is missing (even from 4QXII^a). That is a speculative conclusion. Translations that render this "**hates and divorces**" (Abegg, CSB, ESV, HCSB, NIV11) must mix pronouns ("you"—"he"), insert pronouns not found in the text, and insert the conjunction "and" into the text. The NIV is a curious example of trying to have it both ways. The original edition put it, "**I hate divorce**" (NIV84), but the most recent update now reads "**The man who hates and divorces his wife**" (NIV11). While these translations may still convey the general tone of God's rebuke of the cruelty of divorce, they do not reflect the actual wording found in the manuscripts of either tradition.

For Further Study

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- Lier, Gudrun Elisabeth. "Translation Techniques in Targum Malachi: a Comprehensive Analysis." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 41.1 (2015):1-19.



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