

READING EZEKIEL 18 WITH THE ANCIENT VERSIONS¹

Harry van Rooy

Research Unit for Reformed Theology, Faculty of Theology

North West University (Potchefstroom Campus)

2520 Potchefstroom

E-mail: Herrie.VanRooy@nwu.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

Ezekiel 18 is one of the most important chapters in the book of Ezekiel. The chapter contains a number of textual problems, but the ancient versions, the Septuagint, Peshitta, Vulgate, and Targum can help the reader to solve these textual problems. The Septuagint demonstrates the existence of two textual traditions of Ezekiel. The Targum has a number of examples of the way in which this chapter was interpreted in a Jewish context. The Vulgate contains some indications of the interpretation of the text in an early Christian context. The Peshitta confirms many of the readings of the Masoretic Text against the Greek, but also demonstrates the way a translator transformed his text to simplify it for his readers.

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel 18, with its emphasis on individual responsibility, is one of the most important chapters in the book of Ezekiel. The chapter contains a number of textual problems, but the ancient versions, the Septuagint, Peshitta, Vulgate, and Targum can help the reader to solve these textual problems. These versions also shed light on the interpretation of the theologically important theme of personal responsibility. This article will first consider this chapter in the Hebrew Bible; it will then look at textual problems and the contribution of the versions in this regard, and, finally, at the interpretation of this chapter in the versions.

¹ This paper is a revised version of the Van Selms Memorial Lecture read at the Annual Meeting of the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies in Pietermaritzburg in June 2012. Professor Adrianus van Selms is regarded by many as the founder of the study of Semitic languages in South Africa. Those of us who did not study under him, but met him at different conferences and meetings, will remember his encyclopaedic knowledge not only of all the major Semitic languages, but also of Greek and Latin and an array of modern languages. He was able to cite long passages from the Old Testament, the Qur'an, Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Goethe, Vondel and others.

EZEKIEL 18 IN THE MASORETIC TRADITION²

Ezekiel 18 is clearly delimited from the preceding and following chapters. It begins with a word-event formula in verse 1, namely **וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר** (“The word of the Lord came to me”).³ Chapter 19 is of a different kind, beginning with a command to the prophet to sing a lament for the princes of Israel. The chapter as a whole is a complex disputation speech ending with a call to repentance (Block 1997:554-555). A disputation usually consists of three elements, namely a thesis, a counterthesis and a dispute. The quotation of the proverb of the sour grapes in verse 2 can be regarded as the thesis, with the counterthesis in 4b, which states the person who sins will die. This counterthesis is verified in 5-9 with regard to a righteous person who will live because of his righteousness. Verses 10-14 then say that the violent son of a righteous father will die because of his detestable deeds. In verses 15-18, it is stated that the son of an evil person will live if he does not follow in his father’s footsteps.

The dispute is stated in verses 3 and 4, in the words of the Lord, denying the validity of the thesis:

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Thus, the first part of the chapter contains the three elements of a disputation. Verses 19-20 recapitulate the disputation. Some scholars, starting with Fohrer (1952:47, 52), want to restrict the disputation to verses 1-20, with verses 21-32 as a separate section, even a separate prophetic saying not related to the disputation. This idea was rejected by Zimmerli, followed by other scholars (cf. Zimmerli 1979:374-375, and Block 1997:554-555).

What is interesting to note in this chapter is the way the words of the people are used as quotations. The thesis is stated in verse 2 by quoting the proverb of the sour grapes. The summary of the disputation begins with another quotation in verse 19, which says, “Yet you ask, ‘Why does the son not share the guilt of the father?’” This

² The texts of the Hebrew Bible and the versions used in this article are Elliger & Rudolph (1984) for the Masoretic Text, Ziegler (2006) for the Septuagint, Mulder (1985) for the Peshitta, Ribera Florit (1997) and Sperber (1962) for the Targum and Weber (1969) for the Vulgate.

³ The translations of the Masoretic Text are taken from the NIV.

summary is then followed by a detailed statement of the counterthesis in verses 21-24. A wicked man who repents will live and a righteous person who commits detestable deeds will die because of such deeds. In verse 25, another quotation occurs, "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just'." This is followed by a recapitulation of the counterthesis, using words from this quotation. The counterthesis consists of the direct words of the Lord, "Hear O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust?" This quotation of the people's words in verse 25 is repeated in verse 29. The final section of the chapter concludes the disputation with a call to repentance. The Lord does not have pleasure in the death of any person, but He wants his people to repent and live. This use of the words of the people is typical also of prophets other than Ezekiel, but it occurs frequently in this book and plays a role in structuring the book as a whole (cf. Van Rooy & Smit 1990).

Theologically, Ezekiel 18 is very important for the idea of personal responsibility. Ezekiel's contribution in this regard is seen as a major innovation in the development of the theology of the Old Testament. This is, for example, the view of Von Rad (1962:394), who says that in Ezekiel 18, the prophet does not revive the old collective concept, but breaks with it. The problem with the collective concept was, according to Von Rad, that the individual could hide behind the concept, while Ezekiel gives prominence to the actions of the individual that has to carry the responsibility for his own actions. However, in scholarly circles, the former consensus on personal responsibility has been challenged lately, especially by Joyce in his seminal work on this topic (1989) and in a summary in his commentary on Ezekiel (Joyce 2009:23-26; cf. also Block 1997:556-557). The main reason for this challenge is the fact that Ezekiel is attempting, especially in the first part of the book, to convince the exiles that God's judgment on them and on the people who remained behind in Jerusalem is just. In this sense, the disaster of the downfall of the kingdom of Judah is primarily a national, and thus collective, disaster. Joyce (2009:23) states that the issue of the responsibility of the individual, as moral independence, should be distinguished from the issue of the moral independence of successive generations.

The issue of corporate responsibility has also been studied in detail by Kaminsky (1995). He presents a very good history of research in this regard (Kaminsky 1995:16-29). As far as Ezekiel 18 is concerned, he states that Ezekiel is trying to convince the generation of his time that the exile was the result of their deeds, and not of the misdeeds of previous generations (Kaminsky 1995:166). In his emphasis on individual

responsibility, Ezekiel appeals to the individual members, who make up the community, to recognise their sins and to repent (cf. Kaminsky 1995:177).

For this understanding of Ezekiel 18, one must look closely at the introduction to the chapter. It consists of a question about a proverb in the mouth of the people, followed by the response of the Lord as indicated above. The question is phrased as a question put to the people collectively. The context of this chapter is the national calamity, of which the exiles say that it is not their fault it happened. They complain that they are not being punished for the sins of their generation, but for the sins of the previous generations. Subsequently, this complaint is refuted by three case studies, as discussed above. Ezekiel uses individuals in his examples, linking each one up with priestly case law, but each individual stands for a generation. In this way, the principle of divine righteousness and just retribution is explained to the people who want to shirk their own responsibility. Ezekiel wants to bring the exiles to a corporate transformation. They must admit their own sins and return to the Lord. The final example is about a righteous third generation that would not suffer because of the sins of the previous unrighteous generation. The complaint of the exiles is that they are suffering for the sins of the previous generation. However, if they had lived according to the law of the Lord as a righteous generation, they would not have been punished for the sins of their fathers. This is the message of the final case. The final call to repentance at the end of the chapter is also directed at the nation as a whole. Instead of thinking about the unjust judgment of the Lord, they should turn their attention to their own lives and repent.

On the other hand, the idea of individual responsibility should not be underestimated. Ezekiel attempts to strike a balance between the individual and the community. The individual members of the community are called upon to take responsibility for the community, for the state of the nation. The emphasis on the individual can be seen in Ezekiel 9, where guards are commanded to go through the city and put a mark on the foreheads of the individuals who are lamenting over the detestable things done in the city (9:4). They will be spared. Although the collective group is emphasised, one person will not take the blame for the sins of another person. An individual's fate, whether it is salvation or damnation, is not predetermined by the actions of a previous generation. God's judgment on a nation and on individuals remains just. The conclusion of Ezekiel 18 states that God is not bent on judgment and destruction. He wants the people to live, and thus calls for repentance. This was the

call that the exiles had to hear, that they should turn away from idols and live according to God's commandments. This was not the message of unconditional hope they wanted to hear, but it was the message they should have taken to heart.

THE TEXT OF EZEKIEL 18 AND THE ANCIENT VERSIONS

Although different opinions exist about the text of Ezekiel, generally speaking the Hebrew text of the book is in good condition. The Septuagint of Ezekiel is frequently shorter than the Hebrew. Some scholars think that the Greek Ezekiel is a translation of a slightly different edition of the book, with the Hebrew reflecting a second, revised and expanded edition. With regard to the reconstruction of the original Greek and the relation of the Greek to the Hebrew, Papyrus 967 plays an important role. Some scholars state that this papyrus is of fundamental importance for the discussion of the history of the transmission of Ezekiel into Hebrew as well, while others want to restrict the importance of this papyrus to the transmission into the Greek Ezekiel. Nevertheless, the Septuagint remains the most important source for reconstructing the Hebrew text in places where it is problematic. These issues have been discussed in detail elsewhere (cf. Van Rooy 2012). The other ancient versions, the Targum, Peshitta, and Vulgate go back to Hebrew originals close to, but not identical with the Masoretic consonantal text. To demonstrate the value of the versions for improving the Hebrew text of Ezekiel, a number of examples will be discussed.

The first part of Ezekiel 18:7 reads as follows: וְאִישׁ לֹא יוֹנֶה חֲבֻלָתוֹ חֹב יָשִׁיב. The problem is related to the phrase חֲבֻלָתוֹ חֹב יָשִׁיב. It is a very difficult appositional construction, if one wants to retain the Masoretic Text: “His pledge (=that that was pledged to him) for guilt he returns”. The feminine form of the first noun occurs only here in the Old Testament. Elsewhere in Ezekiel, the corresponding masculine noun is used. In Chapter 18, it is used in the corresponding statements in verses 12 and 16, and in a similar context in 33:15. The versions have the readings listed below:

Septuagint: ἐνεχρασμὸν ὀφείλοντος ἀποδώσει (“he shall restore a debtor's pledge”)

Peshitta: וְהָשִׁיב חֲבֻלָתוֹ חֹב (“and he returns the pledge that he took”)

Vulgate: “pignus debitori reddiderit” (“he returns the pledge of the debtor”)

Targum: משכון דחובתא אהיב (“he returns the pledge of a debt”)

In all four versions the word “pledge” is retained, but not in the same way. The Peshitta probably had a problem with the Hebrew text it translated and tried to solve it in its own way to make sense of the phrase, by rephrasing “the pledge which/that(?) he took”. In verse 12, where the Hebrew has a shorter phrase (חֵב הַיְבִיב), the Peshitta has “and does not return the pledge to its owner”. In verse 16, it adds “of a man” to “pledge”. In all three instances, the Peshitta stands on its own, and the translation can be regarded as an attempt to simplify the Hebrew. The Targum has a double rendering with “pledge” and “debt”, and this translation can be regarded as a simplification of the Hebrew as in the Masoretic Text, with the omission of the possessive pronoun.

This leaves the translations of the Septuagint and Vulgate to consider. They agree to such an extent that two possibilities may be considered, namely that either they were translated from a similar *Vorlage*, or the Vulgate was influenced by the Septuagint. The latter possibility is weakened by the translation of the Vulgate in verse 16 (*retineo*, “to hold back”), while the Septuagint uses a cognate verb (ἐνεχουρασμὸν οὐκ ἐνεχούρασε) like the Hebrew. The Vulgate could have followed this example with the verb “pignero”, but rather has a more idiomatic translation. This makes it possible that the Septuagint and the Vulgate had a *Vorlage* other than the Masoretic Text, probably חֵב לְהִיב, as proposed by *BHS* and Zimmerli (1979:570). Zimmerli’s proposal does not contain the article. *BHS* refers to the versions in general and does not mention the translations of the Peshitta and Targum. Zimmerli refers only to the Septuagint, and the Vulgate supports this reading. Allen (1994:265) regards the reading of the Vulgate as a conflation of the readings of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, but does not discuss this opinion, and it is quite clear that the Vulgate agrees with the reading of the Septuagint, pointing to a similar *Vorlage*.

Ezekiel 18:9 contains an interesting example, where the readings of the versions disagree. The Masoretic Text reads וּמִשְׁפָּטַי יִשְׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲמַת (“He keeps my stipulations by acting faithfully”). However, the Septuagint has καὶ τὰ δικαιώματά μου πεφύλακται τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά (“He keeps my stipulations by doing them”). The reading of “them” at the end goes back to a Hebrew text with the *nota accusativi*, with suffix three masculine plural, with the consonants in a different order (אָתָם), or it could represent a misreading of a text that is the same as the text in the Masoretic Text. The other three versions agree with the reading of the Masoretic Text. In this

ἐπορεύθη (“He did not walk in the way of his righteous father”). The phrase of the Masoretic Text is omitted by the Peshitta. It is found in the Vulgate (“et haec quidem omnia non facientem”), although the fact that it refers to the father is not very clear in the translation, as it uses the same form of the participle to describe the actions of the son in the previous verse and later on in verse 11. The Vulgate was clearly translated from a text similar to the Masoretic Text. The Targum has a “word for word translation” of the Hebrew according to Sperber (1962:302: והוא ית כל אלין לא עבד). However, the text in Ribera Florit (1997:110) omits the negative particle. Neither Ribera Florit nor Sperber notes this variant. It is possible that the Babylonian version omits the negative particle to make it clear that the son did these evil things. Here it is evident that the Targum (probably) and Vulgate translated the same text as the Masoretic Text has, while the Peshitta probably omitted the phrase because it does not fit easily into the context. It is again not certain from where the reading of the Septuagint originates. It probably reflects an edition different from that contained in the Masoretic Text. In this instance, the Masoretic Text can be regarded as the older one as it contains the more difficult reading. On the other hand, the version of the Masoretic Text is not found in any Hexaplaric or Lucianic witness, making it clear that the variant phrase in the Septuagint was the reading of the original Greek.

Ezekiel 18:14 reads as follows: והנה הוליד בן וירא את כל חטאת אביו אשר עשה ויראָהּ (‘‘But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things’’). The problem in this verse is the verb ויראָהּ. The repetition of the verb ‘‘to see’’ does not make good sense. The Septuagint reads καὶ φοβηθη (‘‘and he feared’’, probably reflecting a *Vorlage* with the verb ירא). This is followed by the Vulgate (‘‘timuerit’’). The Peshitta does not translate this verb. It frequently omits a word or a phrase when something in the Hebrew does not make sense. The Targum follows the Hebrew closely. Although, for example, Block wants to retain the verb ‘‘to see’’, most commentators prefer to follow the Greek and Vulgate. What is important in this instance is the agreement between the Vulgate and Septuagint. They probably share a common *Vorlage* in this instance. It is again unnecessary to accept influence of the Septuagint on the Vulgate in this instance as well.

The first phrase in Ezekiel 18:17 reads as follows: מעצני השׁיב ידו (‘‘He withholds his hand from the poor’’). In the context of a positive appraisal of a person, the

righteous person from the third generation, this reference does not make sense. The versions have the following readings:

Septuagint: καὶ ἀπὸ ἀδικίας ἀπέστρεψε τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ (“And he turned his hand back from iniquity”)

Peshitta: ܡܢ ܩܪܝܒܐ ܠܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ (“and from the poor he does not turn his hand away”)

Targum: מִמִּסְכִּינָא לֹא אָתִיב יָדִי (“and from the poor he does not withhold his hand”)

The negative particle comes from manuscripts cited in the apparatus of Sperber (1962:302). Other manuscripts and the edition of Ribera Florit (1997:110) do not have the negative particle, agreeing with the Masoretic Text.

Vulgate: “a pauperis iniuria averterit manum suam” (“He will have turned his hand away from injuring the poor”)

It is clear that the Targum, Peshitta and Vulgate all had a reading with “the poor”, but that they went different ways in solving the problem relating to “the poor” in this phrase. The Peshitta added the negative particle. The same happened in manuscripts of the Targum, although some of them have the equivalent of the Hebrew. The Vulgate added the word “iniuria”, so that the text would explicitly state, “he will have kept his hand away from the injury of the poor”. The only translation that does not retain “the poor” is the Septuagint. Its translation with ἀπὸ ἀδικίας is in line with the corresponding phrase in verse 8. This implies the Hebrew לְמַעַן, as in verse 8. There are two possibilities, namely that the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint had this Hebrew word, or that the translator changed the word in agreement with verse 8. In the light of the translation technique of the Septuagint Ezekiel, which is fairly literal, the first possibility is probably correct and the reading of the Masoretic Text should be seen as a corruption, perhaps influenced by the word for “poor” in verse 12.

Ezekiel 18:18 has a phrase containing the word for “brother”, namely הָיָה לְאָחִי (“He robbed a brother”). In line with verse 10, the word for “brother” is often regarded as a corruption. The previous noun should then be read as the feminine form, as in verses 7, 12 and 16. The Septuagint does not have the translation “brother” (καὶ ἀρπάσῃ ἄπραγμα), using the same combination of noun and verb as in verses 7, 12 and 16. This is then taken as the basis for emending the Hebrew text. The Targum

retains “the brother”, as it does in verse 10, with again an expansion to make the sense clear: גול גזילא לחד מאחווי (“He robbed one of his brothers”). The Peshitta goes the same way, although its translation is freer: אה אהסר לאחוי (“and he hurts his brother”). The Vulgate renders the phrase as “vim fecit fratri” (“He offered violence to a brother”). The three versions other than the Septuagint render a text similar to the Masoretic Text. The reading of the Septuagint can again be regarded as evidence for a different edition of the book, and should not be used to motivate emending the Hebrew, as is done by *BHS* and Zimmerli.

Ezekiel 18:24 has a phrase in the middle that is frequently regarded as a later addition. The Masoretic Text has the following:

וְיָשׁוּב צַדִּיק מִצַּדִּיקוֹתָיו וַיַּעַשׂ עֲוֹנוֹת כְּכֹל הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה הַרְשָׁע יַעֲשֶׂה וְחַי כֹּל-צַדִּיקוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה
 לֹא תִזְכָּרְנָה בְּמַעֲלֵוֹ אֲשֶׁר-מָעַל וּבַחֲטָאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-חָטָא בָּם יָמֹת

The phrase in question is יַעֲשֶׂה וְחַי. The NIV translates it as follows:

But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die.

In this translation, the first word of the phrase is omitted, and the first part of the verse is interpreted as a question. This is exactly what the Vulgate does, also turning the first part of the verse into a question.

Si autem averterit se iustus a iustitia sua et fecerit iniquitatem secundum omnes abominationes quas operari solet impius numquid vivet omnes iustitiae eius quas fecerat non recordabuntur in praevaricatione qua praevaricatus est et in peccato suo quod peccavit in ipsis morietur.

(“But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity according to all the abominations that the wicked man used to work, shall he live? All his justices that he has done shall not be remembered: in the prevarication, by which he has prevaricated, and in his sin, which he has committed, in them he shall die.”)

The original Greek and the Peshitta omit the phrase as a whole, taking the first part of the verse as one sentence, with a protasis stating the case and an apodosis stating the

result. When a wicked person sins, his good deeds will not be remembered. The Targum retains the phrase, but makes explicit that the last part of the phrase should be taken as a question: יעבד היתקיים (“Will he do this and live?”).

What must be taken into consideration here is the basic agreement between the Septuagint and the Peshitta. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that this agreement frequently points to a different common *Vorlage*. We can conclude that the Peshitta and Septuagint had a *Vorlage* different from the Masoretic Text. The Targum probably had as *Vorlage* a text similar to the Masoretic Text, and solved the problem by turning the first part of the verse into a question. The Vulgate probably had a similar Hebrew text, also making the first phrase a question, but omitting the verb at the beginning of the problematic phrase.

These examples demonstrate how the ancient versions can throw light on textual problems, sometimes offering solutions and sometimes pointing to the existence of different *Vorlagen* and editions of Ezekiel. As is well known, *BHS* does not present all the evidence that can be gleaned from the versions, making it necessary to consult the four ancient versions to get a complete picture of the differences and agreements between them and the Masoretic Text.

THE INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL 18 IN THE ANCIENT VERSIONS

The possibility of finding indications of interpretations of the ancient versions in their translations is related to a number of issues. Of special importance is the translation technique used by the translator. The more literal a translation, the smaller the possibility will be of finding overt interpretations in that translation. Another important issue is text-critical matters, as discussed in the previous section. In these instances, the interpretations are related to finding solutions for translating a corrupt or problematic text. The possibility of interpretations that play a role may also be found with respect to unfamiliar words, such as *hapax legomena*. Figures of speech in the original may be unclear to the translator, or the translator may want to make explicit what is implicit in a figure of speech. Finally, theological interpretation may also play a role, especially where the original may contain something that could lead to negative views of God or the text. In the four versions of Ezekiel 18 under discussion, there are examples of all these possibilities. Examples of all these cases are found in any

translation, but more so in a free translation.

The role of the translation technique can be explained by referring to translation equivalents in Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel. This translation tends to be free and to add information to elucidate the original. An example of the technique is found in the first verse of the book of Ezekiel. In this verse, the date “thirty years” appears, giving rise to many theories about what this thirty years could mean. Possibilities suggested are the age of the prophet, the years since the reform of Josiah and many others. The Targum gives its own interpretation, namely thirty years since the high priest Hilkia found the Book of the Law under the porch in the temple court. This is typical of the Targum of Ezekiel. An example of the explanation of a proverb is found in Ezekiel 18:2, with regard to the proverb of the sour grapes. The Targum translates the proverb with *אבהתא חטן ובניא לקן* (“The fathers sinned and the children were punished”) (both verbs are participles of a root three-*yod*). The same translation occurs in Jeremiah 31:29, where Jeremiah refers to the same saying. The following idiomatic expression is found in Ezekiel 18:13: *דמיו פו יקה* (“His blood will be upon him”). The Targum explains this idiom as follows: *חובת קטוליה ביה תהי* (“The guilt for his death will be upon him”). Related to this is the rendering of one of the actions described in this chapter. In verse 6, the Masoretic Text reads *לא אכל על ההרים* (“He does not eat on the mountains”). This is repeated in verses 11 and 13. In verse 6, the Targum renders it with *בטוריא לא פלה לטעותא* (“On the mountains he did not serve/worship the idols”). The remark in the Masoretic Text probably refers to some kind of communal meal on the mountains in honour of idols. This is the interpretation of the Targum as well, making the oblique reference of the Hebrew explicit to Aramaic speakers. Explication is also found in verse 30, where the Hebrew has *שובו ורשעו וקל פשעכם* (“Repent! Turn away from all your offenses”). The Targum translates *תובו לפלחני ואעדו מנכון פלחן* (“Return to my worship, and remove the worship of the idols from you”). In contrast to this rendering, the Peshitta translates the idioms directly, not trying to explain the idioms in translation. In 18:6, for example, it has *סכל סלוא לא אכל על ההרים* (“And he does not eat on the mountains”).

A typical expression occurs in the Targum of Ezekiel 18:1. The Masoretic Text states briefly, *ויהי דבר יהוה אלי לאמר* (“And the word of the Lord came to me”). The Targum is more circumspect in its rendering of this very common expression and states, *והוה פתגם נבוא מן קדם יה עמי למימר* (“And the prophetic word from before the Lord was with me, saying”). This seems to be the default rendering of this expression

in Targum Jonathan and typical of the way in which the distance between the Lord and the prophet was maintained. This may be regarded as an indication of the theology underlying the translation of the Targum.

In verse 25, words of the people about the Lord are quoted. The quote is repeated in verse 29. Thinking the way of the Lord is not just they say, **לֹא יִתְּכֶן הָרַךְ אֲדֹנָי**. This kind of indictment was too harsh for the translator of the Targum, who rendered the phrase with **לֹא מְפָרְשֵׁן לְנָא אֹרְחַת טוּבָא דִּי** (“The good ways of the Lord were not explained to us”). However, when he talks of the unjust action of the people, he follows the Hebrew directly. The Hebrew poses, **הֲלֹא דְרַכִּיכֶם לֹא יִתְּכֶנוּ** (“Is it not your ways that are unjust?”). The Targum says, **הֲלֵא אֹרְחַתְכוֹן דִּי לְכוֹן לֹא תְקִנְוּ** (“Is it not your ways that are not right?”). Here the Targum uses the same verbal root (although with the Eastern ק, not the Western כ) as the Hebrew. The translator must have understood the indictment, but could not render it as such in Aramaic. He softened it by making the people say that the good ways of the Lord were not explained to them, an indictment not of the Lord but rather of his prophets. The Peshitta does not use a verb to translate the Hebrew verb, but says in verse 25, **לֹא טוּבָא דִּי אֲדֹנָי** (“The ways of the Lord are not good”). In this way, the statement is even more direct, going in a direction that is different from that of the Targum.

The Peshitta of Ezekiel is a literal translation. In this kind of translation, there is less scope for interpretational expansion of the text. When it occurs, it is not of the same extent as in the Targum. In Ezekiel 18:6, an example occurs. The Hebrew has **וְעֵינָיו לֹא נִשְׂא אֶל-גִּדּוּלֵי בַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל** (“And he does not look to the idols of the house of Israel”). The Peshitta has a double translation for the phrase, “the idols of the house of Israel”, namely **אֵלֵי אֲדֹמָה**, **אֵלֵי אֲדֹמָה** (“He does not lift his eyes to the idols and to the objects of reverence of the house of Israel”). Here the second phrase defines the first one. The idols have become the objects worshipped by Israel. In Ezekiel 18:7, something similar occurs. The Masoretic Text has **וְאִישׁ לֹא יִדְּבֶה** (“And he does not oppress anyone”). The Peshitta reads **לֹא מְלֵא אֲדָמָה** (“And he does not oppress a person or harm anyone”). This may perhaps also be an attempt at clarification.

As the Vulgate is also a fairly literal translation, one would not expect too much overt interpretation in the translation. However, in some instances, the translation reflects the ideas of the society for which it had been translated. An example occurs in Ezekiel 18:21. The Masoretic Text has the following: **וְהִרְשַׁע כִּי יִשׁוּב מִכָּל-חַטָּאתָו אֲשֶׁר**

הִשָּׁחַת (‘‘But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed’’ (NIV)). The Vulgate translates the text with ‘‘si autem impius egerit paenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis quae operatus est’’ (‘‘But if the wicked does penance for all his sins which he had committed’’). The phrase is translated in the same way in 18:30. The idea of penitence was very important in the early church, with the possibility of someone receiving forgiveness from sins through public penitence, which was the precursor of the later sacrament of penance. Baptism was the sign of a believer receiving forgiveness upon entering the church and penitence was an opportunity for a believer to receive forgiveness for sins committed after entering the church. In the third century, the church received the authority to accept penitence, as can be seen in Tertullian’s *De paenitentia* 7.2, which deals with the repentance of somebody who lapses after baptism. Penitence is frequently mentioned in the Canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils (such as Nice 325 and Constantinople 381). While the Hebrew has a general verb, ‘‘to return from’’, followed by the Targum (יתורב), Peshitta (ܘܥܫܘܬܘܢ) and Septuagint (ἀποστρέψῃ), the Vulgate uses a term from the Early Church. The word ‘‘paenitentia’’ occurs 94 times in the Vulgate, with a significant number in the translation of the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 5:5, Judges 21:6, 1 Samuel 15:29, 1 Kings 8:33, 2 Chronicles 6:24, 7:14, 33:12, Ezra 10:2, Job 21:2, 42:6, Jeremiah 8:6, 18:8 and 31:19, Lamentations 2:14 and Ezekiel 18:21 and 30 and 33:14). It does not always translate the same Hebrew construction. Hebrew that is similar to Ezekiel 18:21 occurs in 1 Kings 8:33, 2 Chronicles 6:24, 7:14, Jeremiah 18:8, Lamentations 2:14 and Ezekiel 33:14. In Leviticus 5:5, it translates the *hit’pael* of יהה. In Judges 21:6, the phrase וַיִּנְחָמוּ is translated by ‘‘ductique paenitentia’’. In several phrases, namely in 1 Samuel 15:29, Job 42:6 and Jeremiah 8:6, 31:19, the same Hebrew word is translated using ‘‘paenitentia’’. ‘‘Paenitentia’’ occurs in Job 21:2 as part of the translation of the Hebrew תִּנְחָמוּתֵיכֶם. In 2 Chronicles, the Latin phrase ‘‘egit paenitentiam’’ is used to translate וַיִּכְנַע. In Ezra 1:2, it translates מִקִּוּיָּהּ. It is especially the cases similar to Ezekiel 18:21 that seem to have the same link to the original early Christian public penitence. It is, however, interesting to note that the Vulgate does not use the same construction for the similar Hebrew expression in verse 23. The Hebrew has הֲלוֹא הִלֵּינוּ מִדְּרָגָיו בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָגָיו (‘‘Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways’’ (NIV)). The Vulgate has ‘‘et non ut convertatur a viis suis’’ (‘‘and not that he should be converted from his ways’’). Repentance (penitence) and conversion are related in early Christian thought. In verses 26-28, the Vulgate uses the more literal ‘‘averto’’ to render the

Hebrew שׁוּב. In verse 30, the Hebrew uses the same verb in the *qal* and *hiph'il*. The *qal* is translated with “paenitentia”, and the *hiph'il* with the verb “converto”.

Although not part of the original translation, it is interesting to note how ancient Greek witnesses to Ezekiel 18 divided the text into segments. Olley (2009:45-60) lists the detail of divisions in the Masoretic Text, Papyrus 967, A and B. Codex Vaticanus (B) divides the chapter into two sub-sections, with the second beginning at verse 25b, after the people has said that the way of the Lord is not right. It starts with a strong call on the people, namely ἀκούσατε δὴ. Papyrus 967 has new sub-sections at verse 21 and 30b. Verse 21 states the possibility of repentance of the impious, while verse 30b calls the people to repentance. Olley (2009:345) states that the division of B draws the attention to God’s justice in dealing with his people. The division of A emphasises the possibility of repentance. This exposition demonstrates how divisions can be used in a text to emphasise different aspects of the text.

The Hebrew and Greek of Ezekiel 18:2 differ in a fine point of detail. The Masoretic Text has the following: מֵהַלְכֶם אֲתֶם מְשָׁלִים אֶת־הַמַּשָּׁל הַזֶּה עַל־אֲדָמָתָא שְׂרָאֵל? (“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel?”) The Septuagint has τί ὑμῖν ἡ παραβολὴ αὕτη ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ (“What have you to do with this parable among the sons of Israel?”) In the Masoretic Text, the proverb is attributed to the exiles, while in the Septuagint the proverb is placed in the mouth of the people of Israel, who refer to the people of Jerusalem, with the exiles concurring. The Septuagint is here broader than the Hebrew, showing that not only the exiles, but also the people left behind in Jerusalem think that they are being punished for the sins of their fathers.

In 18:11, the Septuagint emphasises the distinction between the righteous father and the violent son more than the Hebrew does. The Hebrew has וְהוּא אֶת־כָּל־אֲלֵה לֹא עָשָׂה (“And he [the father] did not do all these things”). The LXX states, ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ δικαίου οὐκ ἐπορεύθη (“And he did not walk in the way of his righteous father”). This version shifts the focus from the father to the son, and makes it clear that the son did not follow the example of his father.

CONCLUSIONS

After a discussion of the message of Ezekiel 18, this paper discussed the use of the ancient versions to solve problems in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel. This was followed

by a discussion of interpretations of the Hebrew reflected in the ancient versions. The Septuagint demonstrates the existence of two textual traditions of Ezekiel. The Targum has a number of examples of the way in which this chapter was interpreted in a Jewish context, with expansions to elucidate the text for its readers or to soften statements about God for theological reasons. The Vulgate contains some indications of the interpretation of the text in an early Christian context. The Peshitta confirms many of the readings of the Masoretic Text against the Greek, but also demonstrates the way a translator transformed his text to simplify it for his readers.

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