

Affirmation by Exclamatory Negation

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The purpose of this paper is threefold: to examine certain mistranslations of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in the light of the language of Israel's neighbors; to look especially into those which seem to be due to a misunderstanding of the nature and force of certain exclamatory and interrogative expressions; and, finally, to see if any of them throw light on the fate of Achan and his family. Indeed, the recognition of some such idioms, which are found in many languages, may remove a number of obscurities, as well as a few erroneous statements, from the current translations of the Old Testament, including the New English Bible.

A not uncommon colloquialism is the interrogative use of the negative *lō* 'not' in such a way as to acquire a strongly affirmative sense¹—as, for example, 'surely, of course' or the like. This idiom, which has long been missed, has recently come to be recognized here and there; and the cruel (as commonly supposed) fate of Achan's family disappears when this idiom is recognized in the somewhat unusual form in which it appears to be expressed.

Before discussing the case of Achan's family, something must be said of this use of a negative particle to express affirmation. Such a usage is found already in Akkadian, for example, in *lā Išum ālik mabrīya minū bašīma* "was not=surely Išum was going before me; what (then) happened?"² and *balāt šarri bēliya mār šipriya . . . lā ašappar* "as my lord the king lives, will I not=I will surely send my messenger. . . ."³ Whether the Ugaritic *l* = *l(ā)* 'not' can be similarly used is doubtful in consequence of the usually defective spelling which causes confusion with *l*=Akk. *lū* 'surely', as for example, in *l āmlk bšrrt špn* "I cannot" or "can I" or "surely I will be king of the recesses of the north."⁴ The Arabic *lā* 'not' may certainly be so used,⁵ as in *lā 'uqsimu yauma-lqiyāmati* "will I not swear=indeed I swear by the day of the resurrection" (Sūra 75:1). The exclamatory Arabic *lā 'alaika* 'not upon thee' in the sense of 'no (harm will come) upon thee', that is, 'don't be alarmed!', clearly illustrates the Hebrew *lō* 'alēkem kol 'ōbērē derek habbîṭū ūrē'ū "not unto you, i.e., may (it not come also) to you, all who pass by on the way! Look and see" what has happened to the poet and may perhaps happen also to you (Lamentations 1:12).

The commonest use of the negative *lō* 'not' with affirmative force is with the interrogative particle prefixed to it, as in *hālō 'abārōn 'āḥikā ballēwī* "is there not Aaron thy brother the

1 Cf. Brockelmann, *Grundriss*, 2:183, §105c.

2 Gössmann, *Era*, 34-35:v. 13. Cf. Lambert, *Iraq* 24 (1962), 120-21:13.

3 Saggs, *Iraq* 20 (1958), 82-83: xxxix obv. 11-12; cp. Wiseman, *ibid.*, 31-34: i 49-51.

4 Driver, *CML*, 110-11 (cf. 114-15); s. Gordon, *UT* (1965), 425.

5 Wright, *Grammar*, 2:98, 40b-c.

Levite?" where it is replaced by the Syriac *bâ* 'lo!' in the Peshitta's *bâ 'abârôn aḥûk l'wāyâ* "lo! (there is) thy brother Aaron the Levite" (Exodus 4:14). Some such rendering admirably brings out the force of the Hebrew idiom. This force is intensified when the interrogative particle is omitted and *lō* 'not' serves alone almost as an exclamation conveying a positive sense of surprise or assurance, as in the Hebrew *lō* 'akzār 'he (is) not fierce!', implying that 'he is indeed fierce/cruel' (Job 41:2); in such cases it may be preceded by *hēn* 'lo!', as in *hēn lō b'e'yādām tûbām* "lo! is not, that is, their well-being indeed is in their own hands" (Job 21:16). The same idiom may occur in prose, not necessarily at the head of the sentence, as in *w'e'ānōkî lō 'eh'e'yeb k'e'ahat šiphōtêkâ* "and shall I not (or,) and I shall indeed become like one of thy hand-maidens," as the LXX's *kai idou egō esomai hōs mīa tōn paidiskōn sou* shows (Ruth 2:13). At this point, then, the interchange of *lō* and *hālō* may be noted; for, in speaking of the difference between gleaners and robbers, one prophet says of gleaners, when they come to a field: *lō' yaš'irû 'ôlêlôt* "do they not, that is, they surely leave gleanings" (Jeremiah 49:9), a translation which is proved to be the right sense by the parallel *hālō' yaš'irû 'ôlêlôt* "do they not, that is, they assuredly leave gleanings" (Obadiah 5). In other words, the coming enemies will be no easy-going parties of gleaners but raiding bands of robbers. This last expression is often rendered *bâ* 'lo!' in the Syriac version (for example, 1 Kings 14:29; 15:7, 23) and *ecce* by Jerome (for example, 1 Kings 14:29). Another instance supported by a parallel passage is *hālālayik lō' ḥal'elē ḥereb w'e'lō' mētē milḥāmāh* "thy slain were surely those slain with the sword, yea surely those who died in battle" (Isaiah 22:2), which may be taken, therefore, in the light of *ṭōbīm hāyū ḥal'elē ḥereb mēḥal'elē rā'āb* "those slain with the sword are/fared better than those slain by famine" (Lamentations 4:9); in other words, death in battle is preferable to flight, starvation, or captivity. Another perhaps uncertain instance may be found in *lō' ta'āleb hāsēb 'el 'ah'arēhem*, in the passage where David enquires whether he shall again go up to attack the Philistines, and the Lord answers, "of course thou must go up, but by going round and taking them in the rear" (2 Samuel 5:23; cf. 1 Chronicles 14:14).

Once this idiom is admitted, several puzzling passages can be cleared up.

When Amos says to Amaziah, "I am no prophet . . . nor am I a prophet's son, though a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees," doubt may be felt whether he is speaking the literal truth; for he goes on to say that the Lord had taken him from following the herd and bidden him to prophesy to Israel his people (Amos 7:14-15) at the very moment he was vigorously denouncing Jeroboam and the people of Israel. Can the outraged prophet's "I am not a prophet . . . nor a prophet's son!" mean that he is indeed such, indeed a trained one (cf. 1 Samuel 10 and 1 Kings 20:35), and that, although he earns his living as a farm-worker, he has been called to this task by the Lord who has commissioned him on the present occasion to stand up and deliver His message in the very presence of the priest of an important local shrine; for he has, in fact, prophesied already on many previous occasions, and so he continues to do afterwards? Another example of this idiom occurs in Hosea's *rîbû b'e'immekem rîbû kî hî' lō' 'išti w'e'ānōkî lō' 'šāh* "plead with your mother, plead, plead; for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband" (Hosea 2:4; RV), although she afterwards speaks of him as "my first husband" (Hosea 2:9). Here the sense is greatly improved if the clause is rendered "I am not her husband and she is not my wife," implying that they are actually married; thus, he is so angry that he contemplates turning her out to die of thirst in the wilderness. The point, however, is perhaps best brought out by treating the clause as a question and translating it "(is) she not my wife and (am) I not her husband?" (NEB).

Another important passage is that containing the statement that God said to Moses, "I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:2-3, P; RV), a statement which, as thus translated, is scarcely credible when the reader had been told that "then men began to call upon the name of Jehovah" (Genesis 4:26, J); the substance if not the actual circumstance of the first passage must have been known to the author of the second passage (cf. Genesis 28:13, J). Indeed, although he may have composed his account any number of centuries after this event, he shows himself well aware of other events between the creation and the death of Adam. Sense can be made of this statement, however, if the final clause of God's declaration of his identity is treated as an emphatic or interrogative announcement and translated, "I am Jehovah; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty; and did I not (or, of course I did) let myself be known to them as to my name Jehovah(?)"⁶ Incidentally, the text requires no correction for *šēmî* 'my name', to which *Yhwh* 'Jehovah' is in apposition, stands in the accusative case as defining the sphere to which "I let myself be known" is limited, namely, God's name, and no other part of His personality, not His face, hands or feet. Consequently, *šēmî Yhwh lō' nōda'tî* means simply "(as far as concerns) my name, (namely) Jehovah—of course I made myself known." This explanation also has the advantage of eliminating the need to speculate as to how much must be read into the exact sense of *šēm* 'name'—for example, as to whether it denotes simply the divine name or connotes God's personality and activity in history; and the clause is added by God to establish his identity with El Shadday and so prove that He is not some heathen god trying to deceive Moses.

This simple form of the idiom continued in the Hebrew language till long after the biblical period—as, for example, in *kî šām lō' šayyid ḥarbēb ūdēgē hayyām q'erûbîm* "surely there is fish in abundance there and sea-fish close at hand," to which the editor adds the expected comment "*biffez ce mot*" against *lō'* 'not',⁷ whereby editors so often betray their ignorance and lack of imagination!

The strengthened form of the same idiom may be detected also in the Hebrew *kî lō'* 'surely indeed', as seen in *kî lō' kēn bêtî 'im'el* "surely indeed my house is true to God" (2 Samuel 23:5).⁸ Another instance of this idiom may be found in Job's *kî lō' nišmattî mippēnē ḥōšek* "yes, indeed I am reduced to silence in face of the darkness," that is, Job faces the difficulty of understanding what God has said (Job 23:17). This interpretation is recognized in one Hebrew manuscript, which omits the negative *lō'* 'not'.⁹ Thus emendation is again unnecessary. A Babylonian-Canaanite *kî/kê lâ* 'surely of course' may perhaps be found at the end of a letter from a certain Labaya to the king protesting against charges which he declares false; and he adds that, if the king sends him an order to keep his wife in confinement or even if he orders him to commit suicide, *ki-e la-a ip-pu-šu ši-bi-ir-ti*

6 Martin, *Stylistic Criteria* (1955), 16-19.

7 Derenbourg, *Kaššîlâh et Dimnâh* (1881), 290:6-7.

8 Cf. Wellhausen, *Bücher Samuelis* (1891), 212; Smith, *Books of Samuel* (1912), 382; S. R. Driver, *Books of Samuel* (1913), 359-60; Schulz, *Bücher Samuels* (1920), 2:272-73.

9 Cf. Driver and Gray, *Job* (1921), 24.

LUGAL(ri) "surely indeed I will carry out the king's instruction."¹⁰ Such a man is hardly likely to say that he will flout the royal orders, as current translations imply. Roman emperors—for example, Nero—used to issue such instructions to anyone who displeased them, and the philosopher Seneca was one of those who obediently committed suicide.¹¹

Dr. D. N. Freedman has recently drawn attention to a variant form of this idiom in *maddûa' lō'* . . . 'why not . . . ?' in "why does not the bush burn away?" (Exodus 3:3, NEB).¹² In verse 2 Moses had noticed that although the bush was 'on fire' (*bô'ēr bā'ēš*) it had not been 'consumed' (*'ukkāl*); in verse 3, therefore, he decided to go and see this wonderful sight, saying to himself "Why does not the bush burn away?" Clearly the Hebrew *bā'ar* 'burned' cannot mean in verse 2 simply 'was on fire' and in verse 3 'burnt away', especially as this possibility has been described by a different verb, namely the Hebrew *'ukkāl* 'was consumed' in an intervening clause. The difficulty disappears if *maddûa' lō'* *yib'ar hassēneh* is translated "Why, is it not burning?" which is equivalent to "What can I have been imagining? Of course it is burning!"

Such negative methods of strong asseveration may be found in a number of passages other than those here discussed (for example, Exodus 8:22; 1 Samuel 14:30; 20:9; 2 Samuel 5:23; 2 Kings 5:26; 1 Chronicles 14:14; Isaiah 11:3; Jeremiah 4:27; 5:18; Lamentations 3:36-38; Ezekiel 7:11; 16:43; 47; Zechariah 14:18; Psalm 50:8-9; Job 8:12; 11:11; 14:16; 29:24; 37:23). The idiom here examined is easily missed, when the sense of a passage may at once be obscured or turned into nonsense; often it is ambivalent, when the whole passage may call for careful consideration. Consequently, translators or commentators, though adopting it here and there, have rarely wholeheartedly accepted it.¹³ The reason for this general neglect of the problem is not far to seek: the speaker by intonation or gesticulation makes his meaning clear to the hearer; but an ancient manuscript without a full system of vowels, with no stops and often no divisions of the text into paragraphs or verses, and even no separation of one word from another, reduces the reader to complete confusion in seeking the sense of the passage which he is trying to understand.

The Greek and Latin languages offer instances of a similar use of the negative particles where affirmative answers are expected. For example, the Greek *ou* 'not' (in contrast to the similar use of *mē* 'not', which is similarly used when the speaker expects a negative reply) is so used in *ou nu kai alloi easi neōteroi huies Achaiōn* "are there not" for "surely there are younger sons of the Achaeans!" and in *ouch hora(i)os ho moi huios epeptare pasin epessin* "dost thou mark" for "surely thou markest how my son sneezed a blessing on all (my)

¹⁰ EA 254:41-46.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15:60-63.

¹² *Biblica* 50 (1969), 245-46.

¹³ Cf. Thenius, *Klagelieder* (1855), 134, 157; Wellhausen, *Bücher Samuelis*, 26-27; König, *Syntax der hebräischen Sprache* (1897), 472, § 351 i; Eitan, *REJ* 74 (1922), 7-11; idem, *JBL* 41 (1922), 41; Gordis, *Festschrift Ginzberg* (1945), 181-83; idem, *VT* 5 (1955), 89; Rowley, *Festschrift Eissfeldt* (1947), 191-98; Sperber, *Festschrift Marx* (1950), 573; G. R. Driver, *Biblica* 35 (1952), 152; idem, *Expository Times* 67 (1955), 91-92; idem, *Orientalia et Biblica Lovaniensia* 1 (1957), 151; Vogt, *Expository Times* 68 (1956), 301-2; G. R. Driver, *ibid.*, 302; Albrektson, *Lamentations*, (1963), 66-69.

words!"¹⁴ The Latin examples are similar, as in *non taces?* "art thou not silent?" for "surely thou has something to say,"¹⁵ and *quid? auiam tuam . . . pater tuus non manifesto necavit!* "what? did not thy father" for "surely, as everyone knows, thy father murdered thy grandmother!"¹⁶ Similar usages can indeed be found also in most modern languages. The two well-known passages, the first describing Achan's sin at the attack on Ai (Joshua 7:15; 24-26) and the subsequent reference to the punishment then inflicted on him and his family (Joshua 22:20), look curiously forced, if not actually inconsistent, as usually translated, although no one seems to have noticed the fact beyond suggesting different sources (J and R^d for the first two, and P^s for the second).¹⁷ This division into different sources is certainly right, but it is no guarantee that the text is correctly translated in the current versions.

In verse 25 the MT has: "The Lord will bring trouble on you on this very day"; its *bayyôm hazzeh* 'on this day, today' ought not to be weakened to the equivocal 'now' (NEB). Its purpose is to emphasize the immediacy of the punishment. The text then goes on to say: "Then all the Israelites stoned him to death (and they burnt them with fire and pelted them with stones), and they raised a great cairn of stones over him, which remains to this day" (NEB). The LXX omits the bracketed words, for which the Vulgate has only *et cuncta quae illius erant igne consumpta sunt*, omitting "and pelted with stones"; the Peshitta has "and all Israel stoned him and all that was his with stones and they burnt them with fire," and the Targum has "and all Israel execrated and stoned him with stones and burnt them with fire after execrating and stoning them with stones." Clearly all these translators found the MT overloaded or confused, but that does not make it necessarily wrong. The difficulty lies in "and they burnt them with fire and pelted them with stones"; to whom does the MT apply 'them'? In verse 15 the text says that "the harbinger of forbidden things shall be burnt, he and all that is his," where "he and all that is his" is a somewhat ungrammatical addition to the opening "he that is taken with the devoted thing" (RV), that is, "the harbinger of forbidden things" (NEB). All that has happened is that the original punishment was virtually impossible to carry out, inasmuch as oxen, asses, and sheep could hardly have been burnt *en masse*; for to attempt to execute such a holocaust would have looked too much like an enormous burnt offering. And "all that is his" is a vague expression leaving unclear what was to be done with the man's other property, as well as his family. Further, how could what had been "burnt with fire" be afterwards "stoned with stones?" All becomes clear when the actual execution is carried out: the offender himself was stoned to death, the *hērem* 'devoted thing' (RV) or 'forbidden things' (NEB), that is, that part of the spoils of war which Achan impiously kept for himself, although it had been devoted to the Lord, and his personal goods such as his tent and its contents were burnt, while all that lived, namely his family and his beasts, were "pelted with stones," that is, they were driven away so as to remove any possibility of their con-

14 Homer, *Il.* 10:165 and *Od.* 17:545.

15 Plautus, *Ampbitr.* 2:ii 71.

16 Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 14:40.

17 Carpenter and Harford-Battersby, *Hexateuch* (1900), 2:331-32, 355.

taminating the whole Israelite camp by their presence.

This explanation accounts for the different verbs used for stoning, namely *rāgam* for the actual offender and *sāqal* for his family, which, though personally innocent, would have benefitted from the offence and would in any case have infected the whole community with guilt (cf. Deuteronomy 24:3-4; 2 Samuel 24:1-17; 2 Chronicles 21:1-27).

The force of the Hebrew *rāgam* 'stoned to the accompaniment of abuse or curses', which is suitably applied to the actual offender, is brought out in the Syriac *rēgam* 'stoned to the accompaniment of execrations'¹⁸ and the Arabic *rajama* 'threw stones; hurled insults at, cursed (a person)',¹⁹ while its deterrent effect may be recognized in Muhammad's 'we (that is, God) have adorned the lower heaven with torches (that is, stars) and placed them as a means of rebutting the devils (*ja'alnâhâ rujummaⁿ liššayâtîni*).²⁰ At the same time no physical action is inherent in the cognate Akkadian or Ethiopic verbs. These are the Akkadian *ragāmu* 'to cry out', used almost exclusively as a legal term meaning 'to raise a claim',²¹ and *rigmu* 'cry, lamentation, shout', but occasionally more or less literally, as in *rigim kakkāya dannūti* 'the crash of my mighty weapons'²²; and the Ethiopic *ragama* 'cursed' is used almost exclusively in an ecclesiastical sense and never for any physical act.²³ Contrariwise, the Hebrew *sāqal* 'pelted with stones' is not represented, unfortunately, in the cognate languages,²⁴ so that how it may have differed in usage from the preceding verb cannot be precisely determined. Usage, however, seems to suggest that *rāgam* is employed in cases where the offence has been a direct affront to God, while *sāqal* serves for offences committed by one man, or his agent, against another. Thus *rāgam* is the punishment prescribed for forsaking God in favor of other gods (2 Chronicles 24:21; Ezekiel 16:40), for sacrificing children to Molech (Leviticus 20:2); for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:27), and for murmuring against God's servants, which is tantamount to rebellion against Him (Numbers 14:10). It is prescribed, also, for any one consulting wizards (Leviticus 20:27), for those violating either the Sabbath (Numbers 15:35-36) or the *ḥērem* devoted to God (Joshua 7:25), and for those numbering the people as though trusting in mere numbers rather than in God (2 Kings 12:18; 2 Chronicles 10:19). The only exception is the stoning of the 'stubborn and rebellious son' who is also 'a riotous liver and a drunkard' (Deuteronomy 21:20). Perhaps this case is included because the rebellious son's father, like Moses and Aaron quoted above, is acting as God's agent in controlling His people. Quite otherwise, *sāqal* hardly serves except in Deuteronomy for offences against God, offences such as worshipping false gods (Deuteronomy 17:5-7) or seducing others to do so (Deuteronomy 13:10), blasphemy (2 Kings 21:9-15) and violating the sacred mountain (Exodus 19:12-13). In all these cases the result is the death of the offender, even if only a beast, as in the last instances. In three other cases stoning is follow-

18 Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 712-13.

19 Freytag, *Lexicon*, 2:129-30.

20 Sūra 67:5; Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge* (1910), 47.

21 Muss-Arnold, *Dictionary*, 1953-54.

22 Bezold in Schrader, *KB* 2 (1892), 96-97, iii 53.

23 Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae*, 316.

24 An Ugaritic *sql* 'pelted with stones' (Koehler, *Lexicon* [1953], 667, is recorded in no Ugaritic vocabulary up to date, so far as I know.

ed by the death of the offender, whether a newly wedded wife who is found to be not a virgin, or a married woman or a betrothed woman and a man caught sleeping together (Deuteronomy 22:20-24). Lastly, the goring ox must be stoned to death as a public menace (Exodus 21:28-29, 32). The other persons who are (but are not said to be) killed are those who offend the religious susceptibilities of the Egyptians in such a way as to endanger the lives of their own community (Exodus 8:22) and the family, including the cattle, of an offender who himself is put to death by stoning with execration (Joshua 7:25). Incidentally, stoning by the mob (Exodus 17:4; 2 Samuel 30:6) or by someone with a personal grievance (2 Samuel 16:6, 13) is not a judicial punishment and so must not be subsumed under either of the two categories here discussed.

If, then, Achan alone was stoned to death and his family were only pelted with stones with the intention of driving them out of the community, what can be meant by "Remember the treachery of Achan . . . who defied the ban and the whole community of Israel suffered for it. He was not the only one who paid for that sin with his life" (Joshua 22:20; NEB). What the whole community had suffered was the repulse of the attack on Ai, when they lost some thirty-six out of two or three thousand men, no very serious matter except that Achan apparently kept some of the spoil for himself, although the text here does not make clear how or when he succeeded in doing this. In any case "the whole community of Israel suffered for it" is an exaggeration, especially as immediately after the execution of Achan they triumphantly captured the place (Joshua 8:1-29). Further, the statement that "he was not the only one who paid for his sin with his life" is strange; for the other thirty-six victims of the attack are not said to have been involved in violating the *ḥērem* in any way and, as suggested above, Achan's family are not said to have been put to death. The only way out of the difficulty is to take *lō* 'not' not in a negative but in an interrogative sense and to translate the verse as meaning "was not Achan . . . faithless in regard to the *ḥērem* when disaster befell all the community of Israel; and he, one man!alone—did he not perish on account of his guilty act?" Achan alone was a sinner; the thirty-six who perished in the first attack on Ai were only doing their duty as soldiers, and his own family was not stoned to death but merely expelled from the community together with their beasts lest they should contaminate it through their connection with the actual offender.

Similarly Josephus²⁵ ends his account of the story of Achan by saying, "when the enquiry was made, man by man, they took Achor, who upon God's reducing him to a terrible extremity could not deny the fact; so he confessed the theft and produced what he had taken in the midst of them, whereupon he was immediately put to death and attained no more than to be buried in the night in a disgraceful manner and such as was suitable to a condemned malefactor." Incidentally, not *ākān* 'Achan' but *ākōr* 'Achor' (1 Chronicles 2:7), as also the form in two versions show (LXX's *Achar*, except Lucian LXX's *Achan* beside *Achōr*, and Peshitta's *ākār*), is probably the offender's true name, as echoed in *ākār* 'troubled' and *ēmeq* *ākōr* 'vale of Achor, that is, trouble' as playing of the offender's name (Joshua 7:25-26).

25 In *Ant. Jud.* 5 i 14 §§ 14-45 (Whiston).

Not many years ago I had the honor of making a small contribution to an anniversary volume entitled *Occident and Orient* (1936), which was offered to Dr. M. Gaster on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The present invitation doubles the honor and has given me the greatest pleasure; for, whereas many of the father's interests were beyond my ken, those of the son largely coincide with my own field of study, especially insofar as we share a common interest in the value of Greek and Roman studies in advancing research into ancient Hebrew language and literature. *O si sic omnes!* I therefore offer this brief article in honour of Dr. T. H. Gaster, knowing that he has always kept in mind the Roman poet's wise advice, *Vos exemplaria Graeca nocturna versate manu, versate diurna*,²⁶ and I am hoping that *Thespis* and similar works may be followed by other equally valuable studies.

שערי פשר לעולם פתוחים

26 Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 4:2-3.