

Preface

This book grew out of a sabbatical in the United States in the fall of 2002. I had actually intended to do some writing on the OT historical books at that time, but I first wanted to follow up on something I had been thinking about from a course in Aramaic I had taken long before. Some reading I did for that course argued that the Logos title in John was rooted in the Targums—the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew OT. I thought that such a view made good sense in light of echoes in John 1:14 of the OT theme of the manifestation of God’s glory in the tabernacle and temple. I figured that “the Word” must be a way of referring to the OT name of God and that this argued for a targumic origin. So before doing my other writing, I decided to write a paper for the Evangelical Theological Society annual convention that year, covering basically the material in ch. 2 of the present book in the section, The Manifestation of the Glory of the Lord in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

In researching this paper, it was not long before I realized I was on to something big. Thankfully, I had no one warning me that I might be going down a blind alley—I might have listened, and, as so many others have, been discouraged from looking seriously at the Targums to explain the Logos title.¹ Far from roaming a blind alley, I was discovering that the concept of the divine Word in the Targums was a vital key to understanding John’s Gospel. As an OT scholar, I was quite stunned (and still am) to discover to what extent this subject had been neglected in Johannine studies.

I decided to write a longer paper for a journal article, but soon realized that there was enough material for a book. Along the way I wrote two more papers. Again on sabbatical in the fall of 2006, I wrote a paper for the ETS annual convention entitled “Caiaphas Prophecies in the Targums,” which is the subject of ch. 10 in this book. I also eventually did write a journal article, which basically distills the portions of the present book dealing with *Targum Isaiah*.² The time seems to have been right for my discoveries; the Targums have become more and more accessible in English translation, and electronic Aramaic texts with parsing information

¹C. K. Barrett’s comment is typical: “*Memra* is a blind alley in the study of the biblical background of John’s logos doctrine” (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 153).

²John L. Ronning, “The *Targum of Isaiah* and the Johannine Literature,” *WTJ* 69 (2007): 247–78. Because this article was published at quite a late stage in the production of this book, I have not referred to it.

have been made readily available. Etheridge's nineteenth-century translations of *Targum Onqelos* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (covering the Pentateuch) are online, so one can easily search by keyword to find passages of interest.

I am conscious of the fact that the present book could be improved by a few more years of research, but if I wait any longer I will feel like the lepers outside the gates of Samaria during famine, who discovered the abandoned spoils left behind by the Aramaeans who fled in panic. After helping themselves to the spoils for a while, they said, "We are not doing what is right. Today is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent. If we wait until morning light, punishment will find us. Now come, let us go and tell the house of the king" (2 Kgs 7:9). Likewise, I invite the reader to participate in these surprising discoveries, since an understanding of the Targums helps us to experience what the apostle John experienced and described for us: "We saw his glory."

I take a conventional view of the authorship and date of John's Gospel. That John the Apostle is the author has been ably defended by others and I have nothing to add, and it seems clear that John is familiar with the synoptic tradition and expects his readers to be as well, and that he is writing after the destruction of Jerusalem, which is much on his mind as he writes.

While I will not argue at length that John is dependent on the Synoptics, I will here give what I think is a rather compelling example of such dependence. After his resurrection, around a charcoal fire, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15–17). The threefold question is commonly related to Peter's threefold denial, which in John's Gospel also took place around a charcoal fire (18:18). The first time the question is "Do you love me more than these?" When we look at the definitions of love given by Jesus in the upper room, we can see that when Peter boasted that he would give his life for Jesus, he was boasting of having what Jesus said is the greatest love: "greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (15:13). In saying that he would lay his life down for Jesus (13:37), Peter was saying, "I have that greatest love." Further, in saying that even if the rest of the disciples were to forsake Jesus, Peter would lay his life down for Jesus, he was in effect saying to Jesus, "I love you more than these do." Around the first charcoal fire, Peter's boast of this love proved untrue. Around the second charcoal fire, Jesus asks him if he would repeat this boast: "Do you love me more than these (do)?" Peter is willing to affirm that he loves Jesus, but he is unwilling to affirm his previous boast, proven wrong at the first charcoal fire, that he loves Jesus more than the other disciples do.

The point in all of this is that in John's Gospel there is no record of Peter comparing himself to the other disciples in this matter of the greatest love. This information is found only in the Synoptics (Matt 26:33–35; Mark 14:29–31). Thus it is only by combining the record in John (love means laying one's life down for his friends, and Peter's claim that he will do so for Jesus) with that of the Synoptics (Peter boasting that he would lay his life down for Jesus even if all the rest of the disciples forsake him) that we can see that in the Lord's question in John 21:15, he is asking Peter if he will repeat his boast of love that was disproved by his denial. Thus if John omits something in his gospel that is mentioned in the Synoptics, it

does not follow that he is unaware of it. It may be rather that he takes for granted his reader's knowledge of it.

A note on translations: Much of this book is based on comparison of original English translations of Hebrew (OT) texts with Greek (NT, and sometimes LXX) texts, and both of these with Aramaic texts. I have facilitated such comparison by using a literal, formal equivalence type of translation. Thus the translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated, although for OT and NT texts my translations are usually close to NASB. For the Aramaic texts the translations are usually close to those which appear in The Aramaic Bible series (exact quotes are footnoted, as are substantive differences). The translation method in The Aramaic Bible is also literal, but I have not followed several of the translation practices in this series, such as the use of italics to indicate changes or additions to the Hebrew text, and the transliteration of *Memra* and *Dibbera* (which I translate as “Word,” relating them to the Logos title in John). Furthermore, I have uniformly translated קָבַל as “receive” and סָעַר as “help” because of how I believe these words relate to John's Gospel.

In quoting from the various texts, I have frequently used italics to emphasize particular words and phrases. Unless otherwise noted, all italicized text in such quotations should be understood as indicating my particular emphases rather than as an integral part of the translation. When citing texts I have used curly braces {} to indicate variant readings from the same tradition (e.g., different MS readings from *Tg. Onq.*), square brackets [] to indicate marginal glosses (*Tg. Neof.*), and angle brackets <> to indicate where the translation represents wording missing from the original texts that has been supplied from somewhere else. Simple parentheses are used for comparing one text to another, whether a translated text to its original (such as comparing a Targum text to the MT text upon which it is based, or an LXX reading to MT), an original to a translated text, or one translated text to another. Where the verse numbering in English translation differs from the Hebrew and Aramaic or LXX, I have elected to use the English numbering, even when the discussion focuses exclusively on the MT, Targum, or LXX.

Quotes from the Talmud are from the Soncino edition.³ Quotes from the Mishnah are from Danby.⁴ Quotes from Philo are from the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) edition.

³I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud* (35 vols.; London: Soncino, 1935–1952; 18-vol. ed., 1961).

⁴Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933).