

LXX GENESIS 43:23: ἴλεως ὑμῖν

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Gen 43 recounts how Joseph's brothers confess to his steward that their original payment apparently never reached him and so they had returned with enough money to pay that debt as well as to make new purchases. The steward, however, assures him that there is no problem and that the original payment did indeed reach him. MT Gen 43:23 reads:

שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם אֵל-תִּירְאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְאֵלֵי אֲבִיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם מַטְמוֹן

LXX Gen 43:23 translates: ἴλεως ὑμῖν, μὴ φοβεῖσθε· ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν ἔδωκεν ὑμῖν θησαυρούς. The two words ἴλεως ὑμῖν have proved a mystery. In the books of the Prophets the word ἴλεως is used to represent הלילה, though it is totally unclear how this development came about.¹ This usage and sense ("it could not be," "may it not be") are not pertinent to our text. Furthermore, ἴλεως in the LXX Pentateuch seems to always carry the normal sense of the word, i.e., "propitious." Indeed, scholars have assumed that this is the case here. Thus, Wevers renders the text, "God has been gracious to you,"² while Harl offers, "Dieu

¹ The הלילה usage is imitated in Matt 16:22 (in spite of D. Tabachovitz, *Eranos* 61 [1963] 28) and 1 Macc 2:21. P. Katz, *TLZ* 82 (1957) 113-114, following a brief observation by H. St. John Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909) 38, called this "eine art primitiver Homonymie," wherein the Greek term has been given the sense of a similar sounding Hebrew word (הלילה) and so bears no relationship to the genuine meaning and usage of the Greek word. Attempts to interpret ἴλεως in these passages as merely an extension of the sense "may God be gracious" (e.g., Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958] 376) are special pleading and lack all force.

² J.W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 733.

vous préserve”³ and Tabachovitz, “Gott ist euch gnädig.”⁴ To be sure, there is no “God” or “Dieu” or “Gott” in the text and supplying it out of the air seems impossible.⁵ Wevers seeks to solve this problem by assuming that ἴλεως here is a noun (“ἴλεως ‘grace, mercy, pardon’”), i.e., “grace is yours,” but of course ἴλεως is not and cannot be a substantive.⁶

Two possible solutions suggest themselves. First, a simple haplography could have produced our defective text: ἴλεως ὑμῖν, μὴ φοβεῖσθε, <ὁ θεός> · ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν ἔδωκεν ὑμῖν θησαυρούς. This solution is simple, straightforward and seems to have persuasive force. But it carries one problem. The word order, unexceptionable in good (classical) Greek, is not what one expects from the LXX. To be sure one could suggest: ἴλεως ὑμῖν ὁ θεός, μὴ φοβεῖσθε · ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν κτλ. But this error does not lend itself to ready paleographic explication.

In fact, there may be no need for emendation here at all. We should consider reading ἰλέως instead of ἴλεως: “matters are going propitiously for you” (or: “may matters go propitiously for you”), a perfectly appropriate rendition of שְׁלוֹם לָכֶם.⁷ Though evidence for the adverb ἰλέως is meager, there is no reason to doubt its

³ M. Harl, *La Bible d’Alexandrie: La Gènes* (Paris: Cerf, 1986) 284.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, 27.

⁵ S. Daniel, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire du culte dans la Septante* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1966) 276, n. 10, assumes the ellipsis to be “Joseph.” This is no improvement.

⁶ Two inscriptions appear on the surface to support the possibility of ἴλεως as predicate adjective with the ellipsis of the divine subject. They are IG 14.1030 = *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romanae* #193 (3rd century) and CIG 4957g (3.1258) = J.A. Letronne, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines de l’Egypte*, vol. 2, #557 (p. 524) (Paris, 1842; reprint Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1974). However, in each case the text is neither secure nor clear. But even were we sure that they contained the ellipsis of θεός (*vel sim*), they might still be of little relevance since the former is a dedicatory inscription, while the latter is carved on a temple. Thus, in both cases the physical context might be enough to suggest the deity as unexpressed subject of ἴλεως. But this is not the situation in the LXX passage.

⁷ The ellipsis of a form of εἶναι is commonplace. For the ellipsis of εἶναι with an adverb, see e.g. 3 Kgdms (= 1 Kgs) 2:18. An excellent parallel to our ἰλέως ὑμῖν is εὐτυχῶς Ἀμμαίω, the final two words of a letter from Dionysius to Ammaeus (Dion. Hal. *Amm.* 2.17 [Usener-Radermacher, 438]).

existence.⁸ An entry in Hesychius confirms it.⁹ Similarly, the editor of a third-century BCE Cypriote inscription reads the adverb¹⁰ and LSJ (revised suppl. 1996) approves.¹¹ A scholion on Oppian *Cyng.* 3.219 glosses μείλιχα [μυθεῖσθαι] with ἰλεως, which surely must be the adverb, not the adjective. A late medical text uses the superlative of the adverb.¹²

In sum, one can choose either to assume a simple haplography or to reinterpret the syntactical valence of ἰλεως. Either produces the appropriate sense and syntax that have hitherto been absent.¹³

⁸ Cf. e.g. τέλεως (adjective), τελέως (adverb).

⁹ See *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* (ed. K. Latte; Hauniae: Munksgaard, 1966) 2.359, l. 23 (with apparatus) and *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon* (ed. M. Schmidt, 1860; [repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965]) 2.354, l. 23.

¹⁰ See T.B. Mitford, *The Nymphaeum of Kafizin* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) 227-228 (#291).

¹¹ Nonetheless, it should be noted that neither the reading nor its interpretation as an adverb is secure.

¹² Moschion, *περὶ γυναικείων πάθων* (ed. F.O. Dewez; Vienna: Graffer, 1793) ch. 52, p. 24.

¹³ I am indebted to Prof. G.M. Browne for helpful suggestions.

