

KVSA VERTAALPRYS / CASA TRANSLATION PRIZE

The CASA translation competition is sponsored annually for the best student translation from, or into, either Latin or Classical Greek.

THE PRAYER OF JACOB CHAPTER 1

Sihe Khumalo (University of Pretoria)

The primary source that will be used in this translation is *The prayer of Jacob* chapter 1. The selected text is from Henrichs and Preisendanz 1974:148–149. I will also make reference to the translation of the text in Charlesworth’s *Old Testament Greek pseudepigrapha with morphology* (1983).¹ According to Penner and Heiser (2008), the term *pseudepigrapha* does not mean ‘false books’ or ‘false writings’, but rather refers to writings that were not written by those whose names appear in them (falsely attributed writings). The Old Testament pseudepigrapha builds on the narratives, themes, and worldview of the canonical books of the Old Testament. This explains why books may be attributed to significant Old Testament figures. This source was selected because it demonstrates dramatically the enduring influence of the Old Testament on Jewish thinking after the exile.

The *prayer of Jacob* is included in collections of Old Testament pseudepigrapha though it is preserved in only one Greek manuscript (papyrus XXIIb)² and its original composition dates sometime before the fourth century CE (Charlesworth 1983).

However, the meaningless mystical words (*voces mystica*)³ reflect earlier (first century) Jewish prayers (Van der Horst and Newman 2008:217). Although it is said to be a Jewish prayer from the patriarch Jacob, it is often categorized as a magical incantation belonging to the genre of magical texts. The prayer’s themes and language may reflect influences from the Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic Jewish literature, ancient Jewish prayers, and Greek magical papyri (Reif and Egger-Wenzel 2016:609). In this prayer, the patriarch Jacob summons God and requests wisdom and deification. Is it Jewish or pagan? The prayer mentions that the one who recites this prayer should be from the race of Israel but also refers to the serpent

¹ See also the translation of Betz 1986.

² Cf. Penner and Heiser 2008.

³ These are words not immediately recognizable as belonging to any known language and are commonly associated with curse tablets. It has been proposed that such words were intended to represent the language that demons or gods can understand (Van der Horst and Newman 2008:217).

gods. According to Davila (1997:6), it is difficult to definitively assign the prayer to a Jewish, pagan, or even a Christian background; in other words, it may be considered as generic. He suggests that the prayer resembles other texts among the Greek magical papyri indebted to Judaism for some of its content (Davila 1997:6):

- The charm of Solomon produces a trance (PGM IV.850–929)
- Versions of the eighth book of Moses
- The tenth hidden book of Moses
- The charm of Pibechis for those oppressed by demons (PGM IV.3007–86).

In light of this, a few questions arise. Could the knowledge and understanding of ritual and religion in the Graeco-Roman world shed some light on religion today, specifically the syncretism of some religions? Can we compare ancient rituals to some African rituals with elements of Christianity and ancestral veneration? Could the ‘speaking of tongues’ in some Christian denominations be compared to *voces mystica*? Taking into account the gaps in space, time, and culture, which place us at a great disadvantage for understanding, it is a worthwhile study to try to comprehend ritual in the religions of the Graeco-Roman world.

In this translation of the *Prayer of Jacob*, I have aimed at a literal translation. Where necessary an idiomatic or alternate interpretation is provided. Preisendanz’s text contains some words that appear to be Greek but Charlesworth calls them ‘insignificant’ and omits them from his translation; these are underlined and placed in parenthesis. I will also transliterate both Charlesworth’s insignificant words and *voces mystica* in italics. The ellipses and numbers in brackets (as shown below) may indicate an incomplete Greek word with missing letters. So I have added in underscore marks to indicate the missing letters – having one line for each letter. In addition to this, both *voces mystica* and incomplete words are separated by an underscore mark to illustrate their possible structure. Because of the nature of my literal (and idiomatic in some places) translation, I have not followed the divisions Preisendanz recommends as this would ‘reduce the attractiveness of an idiomatic translation’ (Charlesworth 1983:718).

Source text: *The prayer of Jacob* (reproduced from Henrichs and Preisendanz Vol. 2, 1974:148–149)⁴

Προσευχὴ Ἰακώβ

Ἰπάτερ πατριάρ[ρχ]ων, πατήρ ὄλων, πατήρ δυνάμε[ων] τοῦ κό[σμ]ου, κτ[ί]στ[ι]α παν[τ]ὸς ...] κτίστα τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ ἀρχαγγ[έ]λων, ὁ κ[τ]ίστης ὀνομ[ά]των] σφ[η]ρικῶν,] καλῶ σε, πατέρα τῶν ὄλων δυνάμε[ων], πατέρα τοῦ [ἅ]παντος [κό]σμου [καὶ τῆς] ὄλης γενέσεως καὶ οἰκουμένης καὶ ἀοικήτο[υ], ᾧ ὑπεστ[α]λλ[μέν]οι οἱ χ[ε]ρουβὶν, ὅς] (5) ἐχαρίσατο [Αβρ]αάμ ἐν τῷ [δοῦναι τὴν] βασιλείαν αὐτῷ [16].

ἐπάκου[σόν] μοι, ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων, ὁ θεὸς ἀγγέλων κ[αὶ ἀ]ρχαγγέλων, βα[σι]λεύς...] λελεαχ' ...αρωαχ' του...αχ' αβολ[.]ω.....[υρ]αμ' του...βοαχ κα [10] θ[.]ρ-α [7] χαχ- μαριρο[κ...] υραμ' [9] ιθθ [7] σεσοικ....

ὁ κ[α]θ[ή]μενος] ἐπὶ ὄρους ἱεροῦ Σ[ι]ναΐου [9] ι[.]β[ο] [6] αθεμ [10] (10)

[ὁ] καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῆς θα[λά]σσης [.]εα' ...βλ [6] δ[.]κ [8] ε[.]θης [9]

παραχθ[η]. ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν δ[ι]ρα[κοντ]εῖων] θεῶν, ὁ [θεὸς ὁ καθήμε]ν[ος] ἐπὶ τοῦ [Ἡ]λίου Ἰάω, ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ.....] τα[.]ω[.]ι...χ, ὁ [καθήμε]ν[ος] ἐπὶ τοῦ...]θε[.....]

...μα...σι Αβριήλ· Λουήλ· [.....]μ[.] τ[ὸν] [κ]οιτῶνα χε[ρ]ο[υ]β[ι]ν ...]χιρε...ος [7] ι[.]

ε[.]ς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων θεὸς Αβαώθ, Αβραθιαώθ, [Σα]βα[ώ]θ, Α[δ]ωνάι, ἀστρα....ε (15)

[κ]αὶ βριλεωναι [Α]δονάι, χα...αώθ, ὁ κ[ύ]ριος τῶν ὄλων· ἐπικαλοῦμαι σε, ἐπὶ χ[ι]άσ[μα]τος δόντα]

δύναμιν ≤τοῖς> ἄνω καὶ τοῖς κάτω καὶ τοῖς ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς· ἐπάκουσον τῷ [ἐ]χ[ο]ντι [τὴν]

εὐχὴν, ὁ κύριος θεὸς τῶν Ἑβραίων, Ἐπα[γ]αήλ αλαμν, οὗ [ῆ] ἀένας δύναμις, [Ἐ]λω[ή]λ,

Σουήλ· διόρθωσον τὸν ἔχοντα [τὴν] εὐχὴν [ἐ]κ τοῦ γένου[ς] Ἰσραήλ [κ]αὶ τῶν

χαριζομένων ὑπὸ σου, θεὲ θεῶν, ὁ ἔχων τὸ κρυπτόν ὄνομα Σαβαώθ, (20)

[.]ι...χ· θεὸς θεῶν, ἀμήν, ἀμήν, [ὁ] χιόνα γεννῶν, ἐπὶ ἀστέρων ὑπ[ε]ρ αἰώνων κ[αὶ] ἀεὶ διὸδ εὐ[ω]ν [κ]αὶ ποιῶν] τοὺς

ἀπλανεῖς καὶ πλανωμένους ἀ[σ]τ[έ]ρας διώκειν τὰ πάντα τῆ σῆ δημι-

ουργία· πληρῶσόν με σοφίας, δυνάμωσ[όν] με, δέσποτα, μέστωσόν μου

[τὴν] καρδίαν ἀγαθῶν, δέσποτα, ὡς ἄγγελον ἐπ[ι]γ[ι]ειον, ὡς ἀθάνατον

[γε]νάμενον, ὡς τὸ δῶρον τὸ ἀπὸ [σο]ῦ δεξάμε[νον], ἀμήν, ἀμήν'. (25)

[.]λέγε ἐπάτις πρὸς ἄρκ[τον] καὶ ἀ[π]ηλιώτην [τὴν] προ[σ]ε[υ]χ[ή]ν τ[οῦ] Ἰακώβ.

⁴ The symbols in the text indicate editorial or conjectural additions to the text. When occurring in brackets, dots denote estimated number of letters lost or deleted; outside of brackets they denote mutilated or illegible letters. Numbers inside brackets indicate larger numbers of missing letters (cf. <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/encoding.php>).

who are favoured by you, God of gods. The one who has the secret name Sabaōth.¹⁵ *_ i _ _ ch*, God of gods; amen, amen. The one who brings forth the snow,¹⁶ and over the stars above eternity and always travelling through and creating the wandering stars and fixed planets urging all of them by your creative power. Fill me with wisdom, put power into me, Master; Fill my heart with good things, Master; like¹⁷ an angel¹⁸ on the earth, as one becoming immortal, as one having received the gift given by you, amen, amen. Say¹⁹ the prayer of Jacob seven times to the North and East.²⁰

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Betz, H D 1986. *The Greek magical papyri in translation, including the demotic spells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Charlesworth, J H 1983. Prayer of Jacob. In Charlesworth, J H (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* Vol. 2, 715–723. New York: Doubleday.
- Davila, J 1997. *Ancient magic (The Prayer of Jacob)*. Online Lecture accessed at <https://otp.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/abstracts-lectures/ancient-magic-the-prayer-of-jacob-2/>.
- Henrichs, A and Preisendanz, K 1973/1974. *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. 2 Vols. Stuttgart: Teubner. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?5002:001:0>.
- Penner, K and Heiser, M S 2008. *Old Testament Greek pseudepigrapha with morphology*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press.
- Reif, S and Egger-Wenzel, R 2016. *Ancient Jewish prayers and emotions: Emotions associated with Jewish prayer in and around the Second Temple period*. Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter.

¹⁵ The common Hebrew epithet for Israel's God literally meaning 'of hosts'; Van der Horst 2008:241.

¹⁶ Betz (1986:261) translates as 'the one who produces the snow'; Van der Horst (2008:243) as 'sits over the snow'.

¹⁷ May be understood in a causal or consecutive sense, *i.e.*, the need for wisdom is related to the status of being an angel; so Van der Horst 2008:244.

¹⁸ Or 'terrestrial angel'. Angels on earth are understood to be divine messengers; Van der Horst 2008:245.

¹⁹ Betz (1986:261) translates as 'pronounce'.

²⁰ The aorist middle participles agree with the aorist imperatives possibly indicating that 'at the moment God gives the petitioner wisdom, empowerment, and good, he or she becomes an angel and receives these as God's gift'; Van der Horst 2008:246.

- Van der Horst, P W 1998. Neglected Greek evidence for early Jewish liturgical prayer. *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 29.3:278–296.
- Van der Horst, P W and Newman, J H 2008. *Early Jewish prayers in Greek*. Berlin / New York: De Gruyter.