

Destined to sin? : The independence of the Peshitta translation of Gen. 4.1-8

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This paper is an examination of the interpretive techniques employed by the Peshitta translator in Gen. 4.1-8, which reveal a distinct independence from the Jewish exegetical traditions found in the Targums and the LXX. With possible suppressed mythological allusions and syntactic ambiguities, the Hebrew narrative of the births and offerings of Cain and Abel provides a complex text to translate. Noting briefly the grammatical and philological challenges of the MT, this paper will analyze how the Syriac translator understood his presumed Hebrew *Vorlage* and how he articulates its perceived meaning, which ultimately depicts Cain as a man destined to be ruled over by sin. In an effort to determine how the Peshitta's version of Gen. 4.1-8 was understood by latter commentators, we will also analyze the works of Ephrem and some of the early Syrian fathers.

In Gen. 4.1, the Syriac renders the birth story accurately and avoids any rabbinic traditions regarding Cain's satanic origins, while in v. 7 it deviates from the MT and demonstrates Cain's incapacity to prevail over sin, which stands in stark contrast to the renderings of the LXX and the Targums. Whereas the LXX of v. 7 focuses upon Cain's cultic transgression, and the Targums highlight the nature of good works and forgiveness, the Peshitta portrays Cain's ultimate submission to sin. In v. 8, the lacuna found in the MT offers an opportunity for expansion in the text and despite the lengthy theological debate reflected in the Targums, or the interpretive phrase of the LXX, the Peshitta, again, maintains its independence with its own interpretive addition.

With various theories regarding the possible literary dependence of the Peshitta upon the Targums or the LXX, we shall discover that the Syriac version of Gen. 4.1-8 preserves a distinctly independent exegetical tradition where Cain is portrayed as one who will be ruled over by the sin that lies in wait at the door.