

Translation That Openeth the Window

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**Reflections on the History and Legacy
of the King James Bible**

Edited by David G. Burke

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The King James Bible and Jewish Bible Translations

Leonard J. Greenspoon



Jewish Bible translations and the King James Bible have an interconnected, but largely unexplored history.¹ The KJV was influenced by prior Jewish translators and in turn influenced later Jewish Bibles in English. In this chapter, I first examine certain activities in Jewish Bible translation that deeply influenced the KJV translators. By far the larger portion of this chapter chronicles developments in the post-1611 world of Bible translation, highlighting the influence the KJV had on subsequent Jewish Bible translations into English.²

As editor of the Jewish Publication Society's current version of the Bible (the *Tanakh*, or New Jewish Version), Harry M. Orlinsky, who led Jewish Bible translation sharply away from the earlier KJV model, once remarked that all translations of the Hebrew Bible (with the exception of one he chose not to reveal in public) are basically Jewish. This observation is nowhere more accurate or profound than with the KJV, in spite of the fact that, officially at least, there were no Jews in England in the early seventeenth century. Although it is true that no Jews served as KJV translators, many members of the Old Testament teams for the KJV such as Lancelot Andrewes, Edward Lively, John Richardson, John Harding, and John Rainolds (Reynolds) were deeply steeped in both the Hebrew language and the exegetical traditions of Judaism.³ This enthusiastic embrace of Hebraism, especially by Anglican clerics, led the KJV teams charged with preparing the Old Testament translation to adopt "Jewish" readings of the text already incorporated into earlier English-language versions and to seek out others on their own.

In this latter respect it was Jewish exegete and grammarian David Kimchi (circa twelfth to thirteenth century, also known as Radak) who was, on the whole, the most influential source for Jewish biblical interpretations. An analysis of the first fifteen chapters of the book of Isaiah in the KJV reveals a high number of

English renderings that reflect Kimchi's interpretations. In most cases, the KJV shares these interpretations with earlier English versions, especially the Geneva Bible, but in at least a dozen instances (for example, "the chains" in 3:19; "and their honourable men are famished" in 5:13; "they shall lay their hands upon Edom and Moab" in 11:14; and "the golden city" in 14:4) the KJV's dependence on Kimchi is singular. (Of course, traditional Christian theological considerations could, on occasion, prove more powerful than Kimchi.)⁴

Beyond these specifics, as important as they are, is the larger question of KJV style. Here it can easily be demonstrated how much of what we call "biblical English" is quite literally a reflection of the Hebrew original. Moreover, we should not forget that the KJV translators themselves, with a humility many of their later supporters lacked, acknowledged their appreciation for and reliance on, among other resources, the Septuagint—the earliest of all Bible translations (from Hebrew into Greek), which was prepared by and for Jews beginning in the third century BCE.⁵ David Daiches, in his book *The King James Version of the English Bible*, demonstrates how deeply all English-language Bible translators drew, directly or indirectly, from the Septuagint.

English Bibles for Jews from 1611 through the Late Eighteenth Century

Less than half a century after the completion and publication of the first edition of the KJV in 1611, Jews were once again permitted to reside in England.⁶ Relatively little research has been done on the nature of the Bible used by these Jews or their descendants when it became expedient for them to consult Scripture in English. One of the few scholars to have looked into this topic, especially during the period from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century, is Raphael Loewe. Among his astute observations is this:

There can be little doubt that, as Menasseh b. Israel's Spanish Pentateuch remorselessly slipped into the penumbra of third-generation sentimentalism, English sephardim (most of whom will have needed a crib for Hebrew) will have been relying on the A.V. [Authorized Version, or KJV] Amongst Ashkenazim, the printed Yiddish translation had been used almost exclusively by women; and as, during the second half of the eighteenth century, poor Jewish immigrants from north-eastern Europe climbed through two or three generations into the Anglo-Jewish *bourgeoisie*, residual attitudes and a different educational philosophy will, to some extent, have delayed

(but could not prevent) their resort to a Bible in English, after real competence in Hebrew had been lost. The point that is here being made is that English-speaking Jewry distinguishes itself from the Jewries of other protestant countries, by its acceptance, apparently without significant protest or misgivings, of the national vernacular Bible of its Christian environment; it produced nothing comparable to Mendelssohn's German translation until the American Jewish version of the early twentieth century.⁷

There is scant documentary or literary evidence to back up Loewe's reconstruction, but I have no doubt that he is absolutely correct in his main assertion: namely, that English Jews of this period, whether of recent or more established domicile in England, relied on the KJV when seeking out an English-language version of the Bible. Moreover, I have been able to isolate the time frame when British Jews began, ever so tentatively, to move away from what I might call the "KJV-only" tradition.

Before turning to this period, I will refer to Bobrick's description of the late seventeenth century: "Pride goeth before a fall: in a sense Protestants had become more Catholic than they knew. For they had exchanged one authority for another: 'in the place of the medieval Church,' as one scholar put it, they had Scripture; in the place of an infallible institution, an infallible text; in the place of Tradition, a printed book."⁸

English Versions of the Bible by Jews Prior to 1800

Let us now skip to roughly a hundred years later: the late eighteenth century. In the middle of the winter of 1776, with the Colonial War going badly, King George III appointed December 13 (equivalent to 3 Tevet 5537) as a fast day. The Bodleian Library at Oxford University preserves the Form of Prayer and Sermon for that service at London's Synagogue of the Portuguese and Spanish Jews. Although we are informed that the Congregation's Minister, Moses Cohen d'Azevedo, translated the text "from the original Hebrew and Spanish into English," the wording of all of the Hebrew Bible passages is identical to the King James (or Authorized) Version.

Fourteen years later, on Friday, March 26, 1790, the Great Jews' Synagogue was dedicated (or rather, rededicated) at Saint James's Duke's Place in London. Contained within "A Song and Praise to be Performed" on that occasion are the following Psalms (in the order printed in a pamphlet preserved at the Bodleian Library): 91, 30, 24, 84, 122, 132, and 100. The English text of these Psalms, prepared by David Levi, is a distinctive version, although clearly recognizable as a revision of the KJV. Since it was precisely at this time that distinctive English "versions" of the

Bible appeared by and for Jews and since David Levi is identified with the production of several of these versions, the joint preservation of these two publications by the Bodleian, while in part serendipitous, is also heuristic. This event, for example, encourages us, to consider that, from an intra-Jewish perspective, the preparation of English versions of the Bible, however tentative in its beginnings, was not an isolated event. English-language sermons and English-Hebrew prayer books were being produced almost simultaneously—and sometimes under the same auspices.⁹

At the same time, the very production of a Jewish version of the Bible of any sort in English was, at least in part, a response to outside forces. In this connection, we call special attention to the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 and the American Bible Society a few years later (in 1816). One of the primary purposes of such societies was to make Bibles available to the largest number of people at the smallest cost. Since such inexpensive Bibles were frequently used by missionaries (as, for example, the very active London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, or simply the London Jews Society), Jews might well have perceived the need to produce (if not mass-produce) texts of their own to combat the growing number of “Christian” Bibles.¹⁰

It is then safe to conclude that these late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century developments, which culminated in distinctive English-language Bibles for Jews, were initially the result of forces at work both inside and outside of the Jewish community itself. Although some scholars strive to isolate such forces, in real life circumstances are rarely so simple or neat. The same can also be said with respect to the debate over Septuagint origins in the third century BCE: Was the translation the result of royal initiative or intracommunal needs? Most likely, it was a convergence of the two.¹¹

Around the late eighteenth century, the first of these productions consisted of the KJV and the Hebrew text on facing pages, with notes drawn from Jewish sources, typically Rashi, at the bottom of the page. The titles of such works did not, perhaps, immediately identify them as a Jewish version. Here, for example, is part of the title of David Levi's *Genesis* of 1787: “The First Book of Moses, called Genesis, in the Hebrew, with English Translation on the Opposite Page. With Notes, Explanatory, Exegetical, Critical, and Grammatical. . . .” Levi's work did include a title page in Hebrew, however, and the work opened from left to right, which were sure indicators of an intended Jewish audience.

Levi, along with several of the other earliest “translators,” was not always on the best of terms with the British rabbinical establishment, who may, at least at this point, have looked askance at these attempts to Judaize what is clearly a Christian text.¹² Levi may have had such thoughts in mind as he subtly enhanced his role from notes corrector to text translator in subsequent editions of his work.¹³

It was left to Isaac Delgado to produce the first freestanding work that differed at all from the KJV, as can be seen from a partial excerpt of the characteristically lengthy title of his work: "A New English Translation of the Pentateuch: Being a Thorough Correction of the Present Translation, Wherever it deviates from the genuine sense of the Hebrew Expressions; or where it renders obscure the Meaning of the Text; or, lastly, when it occasions a seeming Contradiction." In spite of the seemingly clear meaning of the title, this is not, in fact, a continuous text; rather, Delgado reproduces only verses from the KJV for which he offers a new translation or interpretation.

A few examples from his Preface are indicative of his *modus operandi*. At Exodus 32:29 Delgado insists that the KJV wording "For Moses had said" is insufficient to alert readers to the fact that this verse belongs sequentially before and not after the preceding verse. He would write, "Moreover, Moses had said" or "Moses had also said." At Judges 9:28, in an admittedly difficult grammatical context, the KJV translators (among others) rendered the particle *'t* as the marker for the accusative case, whereas Delgado insists that here, as often elsewhere (so he believed), it is used for the nominative; hence, "the very man." Psalm 76:4, which reads, "thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey" in the KJV, becomes "more terrible and excellent" in Delgado, with the transposition of letters in a Hebrew root. It is not clear whether Delgado's corrections, taken individually or cumulatively, constitute an advance in Bible translation. In any case, however, his edition, with its emendations and their rationale, is characteristic of the initial stages not only of English Jewish Bible translating but also of English Jewish Bible marketing: the volume is dedicated to the Lord Bishop of Salisbury and contains an appropriately impressive list of subscribers.¹⁴

Jewish Bible Translators in the Early Nineteenth Century

We jump the decades, as it were, to Solomon Bennett, whose 1834 pamphlet, prominently dedicated to His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, is titled (far more briefly here than in its fuller formulation on the title page) *Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible*. Courting support from royalty, and, if possible, from the ecclesiastical hierarchy (that is, the Anglican hierarchy), the dedication points to a desire for acceptance and support that was both financial and, I suppose, social or cultural.

Among Bennett's innovations are two from the Servant Song contained in Isaiah 53. At verse 9 he has, "And he delivered himself to the grave like wicked men; but suffered death on account of his riches; though he committed no violence, nor

was there deceit in his mouth." Verse 12 in Bennett's edition reads, "Therefore will I reward him publicly; and he shall divide the spoil with the mighty; because he has exposed his soul unto death; he was numbered amongst transgressors; though he bare the sins of many others, and made intercession for transgressors."

Further examples demonstrate that these translations did not exist in a vacuum or, more accurately, that these translators did not operate in a vacuum: Five years later, in 1839, Selig Newman published his succinctly titled *Emendations of the Authorised Version of the Old Testament*. On its title page he identifies himself as author of the "Abridged Hebrew Grammar" and the "Complete Hebrew and English Lexicon." He judiciously omits the fact that he had at least once before been involved in a dispute over the christological interpretation of certain Old Testament passages that, according to the *Sunday Times*, became so vociferous and potentially violent that women needed to be escorted away!¹⁵ I can detect some of the same passion, seething somewhere just below the surface, in Newman's *Emendations*. As an example, let us look at his revision and supporting analysis at Exodus 11:2 and 12:35, 36 (as earlier in Exodus 3):

[In many passages in which the KJV] translators were either decidedly wrong, or where the meaning in the original is dubious, they have not given the happiest rendering. [Such cases] may prove dangerous to the infidel, by strengthening him in his unbelief, as well as to the believer, by raising doubts in his mind, of the authenticity of a book, which apparently contains so many incongruities. For example: "One shall borrow of his, or her neighbour:" but the meaning of *sh'l* in the original is not borrow, but ask: i.e. "One shall ask or demand." This is perfectly in accord with justice . . . whilst the permission or order to borrow without intending to restore, being a licence to defraud, could not have emanated from the fountain of justice.¹

Almost a hundred years later, Joshua H. Hertz, then chief rabbi of the British Empire, wrote:

[The KJV] translates, "Every woman shall borrow of her neighbour." This translation is thoroughly mischievous and misleading. If there was any borrowing, it was on the part of the Egyptians, who had been taking the labour of the Israelites without recompense. . . . [Chapter 3] Vv 21 and 22 lend a poetic and unforgettable touch of beauty to the going out of Egypt; and yet these verses, as few others, have been misunderstood and been looked upon as a "blot" on the moral teaching of Scripture. . . . In modern

times, enemies of the Bible vie with one another in finding terms strong enough in which to condemn the “deceit” practised on the Egyptians.¹⁷

From Newman’s perspective—and he was not alone—the stakes were equally high at Judges 11:31, where Jephthah’s vow is softened through the introduction of a nonfatal alternative: “Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me . . . shall surely be the Lord’s, or [rather than “and”] I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”

When we attempt to understand what motivated these early Jewish translators, it seems that they were especially concerned to remove from their English versions (since they could not change the Hebrew text!) any possible inconsistencies, to say nothing of outright contradictions. With equal or even greater vehemence, they sought to extirpate any expression that would suggest character flaws on the part of biblical personages. Even the hint that an Israelite would have acted improperly and with anything less than complete probity was enough to impel many of these translators to seek out even the most obscure linguistic or syntactic parallel to avoid such infelicities—especially when such actions had divine sanction behind them. What was at stake, in the view of these translators, was the sanctity of the text and the safety, perhaps even the survival, of their fellow Jews in a society in which they still labored under many social and legal impediments. A shifty Jacob in the Bible could easily in the hands of their enemies become a shiftless Jacob from London’s East End; Israelites who pretended to borrow from the Egyptians with no intention of repaying them could become blood-sucking money lenders; spitters in the face (as in the ceremony of Levirate marriage) could be transformed into recent, uncouth Hebrew immigrants; and so on.¹⁸

The biblical text also needed to be defended against the onslaughts of those who directed their hatred at the Book rather than the people of the Book. Such individuals apparently plucked passages from their context to pit one biblical verse against another, much as “defenders” of the Bible today quote scripture out of context to “prove” its truth. And, it should be added, this defense was generally mounted with minimal change to the KJV, which, as a result, apparently provided common ground for defender and detractor alike.

I might add that things have not changed as much as we might imagine or have hoped. Biblical passages are still mined by those not favorably disposed to Jews and Judaism. Historically this practice was equally true for avowedly atheistic Nazis as it was for a distressingly high percentage of “Christian” leaders at the time of the Holocaust, as I discovered while working on a project in connection with Yom HaShoah (the yearly commemoration of the Holocaust).¹⁹ The specific Exodus imagery just discussed has been the basis of a lawsuit, filed by an Egyptian jurist, to

levy on contemporary Judaism a heavy fine supposedly equal to the cost of goods taken by the departing Hebrews.²⁰ Jewish exegetes from the medieval period on, including Newman himself, would have argued that these goods should best be seen as payment—albeit only partial—for the centuries of forced labor on the part of the Hebrews.

Jewish “Authorized” Versions of the Bible

It was just two years after Newman’s work, in 1841, that an entire biblical book was produced as “an independent Jewish translation” (as Hertz described it),²¹ with David Aaron de Sola’s *Genesis*. De Sola came from a well-connected Sephardic family, providing one indication that Bible translation among English-speaking Jews was moving from the periphery to the center. Other indications of this trend follow later. The beginning of *Genesis* in de Sola’s rendering, which was in turn used in some later Jewish versions, is: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. But the earth was without form and a confused mass; darkness was on the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God hovering on the surface of the waters. God said: ‘Let light be; and light was.’”

Jewish translators, as much as they were concerned with combating inimical individuals and movements outside of their religion, were also finding a place for their works at the highest levels within their religion. Let us look, for example, at *The Way of Faith*, by David Asher, whose version was among those influenced by de Sola. The title page of the last edition of Asher’s work, appearing in 1848, includes this endorsement: “Specifically sanctioned by the Rev. Dr. Adler, Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the British Empire.” Similar wording is found in Abraham Benisch’s *Pentateuch* of the next decade: “Newly Translated. Under the Supervision of the Rev. the Chief Rabbi” (on this point, Benisch writes in his Preface: “The proof sheets were submitted to the Rev. the Chief Rabbi, whose suggestions were implicitly complied with in all those particulars bearing on religious subjects”). Several decades later, in 1881, Michael Friedlander’s *Jewish Family Bible* was “printed with the sanction of the Rev. Dr. Adler, the Chief Rabbi.”

To the degree that this matter is discussed at all, scholars have asserted that Jews never produced an “authorized” version. Surely this is correct, if by “authorized” we adopt the connotation of the Church of England: authorized for use in churches (that is, synagogues). However, two of the versions, as we have seen, were “sanctioned” by the chief rabbi and another prepared under his supervision. This process is, I believe, parallel to the conditions that led to authorization, with this significant difference: unlike the Anglican “authorized,” the Jewish “sanctioned” centered on use

at home and in schools; so Asher's text was "intended for the use of Jewish Schools and Families." No Jewish version was intended to usurp the central place of the Hebrew text in synagogue worship.

In addition to providing parallels to the KJV's authorization, such versions also offer another indication that English-language versions of the Bible had been adopted (or, more cynically, co-opted) by the Jewish establishment. This practice can also be detected in the following notices about translators of various versions: Marcus Kalisch served for several years as secretary to the chief rabbi, after which he held posts as tutor and literary adviser to the Rothschild family (it doesn't get much more "establishment" than that); Hermann Gollancz, who received a knighthood in 1923, was the first Jew to obtain the Lit.D. degree from the University of London and a professor at University College, London, in addition to being rabbi at several prominent synagogues; and Michael Friedlander's son-in-law was none other than Moses Gaster, renowned scholar and Sephardic chief rabbi in London.

While preparing a review of Mary Wilson Carpenter's *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market*, I learned that there existed a subgenre, or category, of family Bibles, which represented a Victorian phenomenon that sought to market the KJV to middle-class English men and women.²² Until reading Carpenter's book, I was unaware that Friedlander, with his *Jewish Family Bible* (see also Abraham Benisch's *Jewish School and Family Bible*), stood in this tradition, although it should not have surprised me, inasmuch as Jews have not lacked acumen and oft-times originality in marketing Bibles, on occasion adopting and adapting techniques from the larger, that is, Christian world. It may be churlish of me to note, given the overall excellence of her volume, that Carpenter does not include Friedlander or any other Jewish version in her extensive listing of British family Bibles.²³

The KJV and Anglo-Jewish Bible Translations during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

The pattern of Jewish versions of the Bible during this time period, the latter half of the nineteenth century, is not nearly so clear as their enhanced pedigree. In the always-astute judgment of Rabbi Hertz, the "revisions" of Gollancz (1880) and Friedlander (1881), for example, "were practically limited to the correction of Christological passages."²⁴

The versions produced by Marcus Kalisch, beginning with his Exodus volume of 1855, and Abraham Elzas, who produced editions of Proverbs, Job, and several of the minor prophets during the first half of the 1870s, by contrast, tended to sepa-

rate themselves from the pattern established by the KJV translators. From Kalisch, for example, we have this rendering of Genesis 1:2: "The earth was emptiness and dreariness." More extensive is this citation from Elzas: "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; A woman that feareth the Lord she will be praised. Give ye unto her the fruit of her hands, And let her deeds praise her in the gates!" (Prov 31:30-31).

But there were limitations, imposed not by the translators but by their community, on the quantity and the extent of such differences. The successive editions of Abraham Benisch's work are most instructive within this context. He was concerned, in part, as translators before and after him, that distinctive Jewish understandings of the text were lost in versions prepared by non-Jews, citing as examples Leviticus 23:40, in which the KJV's "boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees and willows of the brook" fails to do justice either to the Jewish experience of Sukkot or to Benisch's careful philological analysis of the passage, and Leviticus 23:15, in which the rendering "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath" does not accord with rabbinic calculations for determining the time between Passover and Shavuot. This latter passage continues to be a point of contention in some contemporary Jewish versions of the Bible, where questions can reasonably be raised of fidelity to the plain meaning of the text (*peshat*) versus rabbinic understanding.²⁵

Above and beyond these particular considerations, however, is this statement from a later (1854) edition of Benisch:

The Anglo-Jewish community, in common with all other religious denominations whose vernacular is the English tongue, are so wedded to the diction of the authorised version that every departure from its phraseology, however well-founded, seems to grate upon their ears. For this reason we have in this version restored the renderings of the Anglican translation in all those cases where it can be done without doing violence to the principle of fidelity. This is a sacrifice which we regret, but which appeared to us absolutely necessary, if we did not wish unconsciously to themselves to bias against this Jewish translation the conservative feelings of many co-religionists in whose eyes, from long association, the Anglican Version, despite its manifest unfitness for Jewish families and schools, is invested with a kind of semi-sacredness.²⁶

Given the reticence and restraint generally characteristic of Prefaces or Introductions to Bible translations, this is quite an admission. In any case, the Anglo-Jewish community had spoken; moreover, contemporary Jewish translators in America largely followed their lead.

The KJV and JPS Version of 1917

This connection between the Protestant KJV and Jewish translations into English is nowhere better or more fully documented than in the edition the Jewish Publication Society of America (JPS) brought out in 1917. As I have shown elsewhere, the connection is profound: verse-by-verse comparisons between the Jewish version of 1917 and the Revised Version, the Protestant revision of the KJV from 1885, reveal agreement—typically word-for-word agreement—in most passages. This situation accorded well with the goals of the JPS leadership, who sought the speedy production of a Jewish version that, especially when leather-bound and gilt-edged, would find the same prominent place on the library shelf in middle- and upper-class Jewish homes that the KJV occupied in proper Protestant abodes.

Where it was necessary for any reason to incorporate materials not found in the KJV or its revision, Editor-in-Chief Max L. Margolis deliberately chose KJV-sounding language, so as to achieve a text that seamlessly combined the new with the old. This accorded well with his view that it was to the language of the KJV that immigrant Jews (of whom he was one) should turn to elevate and perfect the English they spoke.²⁷

In my review of Alister McGrath's book *In the Beginning*, I noted that he "is particularly strong on technology, both in terms of Gutenberg's mid-fifteenth-century innovations and the possibilities and difficulties facing the original and subsequent printers of the KJV."²⁸ In this regard, he writes:

The early printings of the King James Bible included many errors. Many of these arose from weaknesses in the book production processes of the period. Proofing was often a haphazard business. . . . Contemporary sources suggest that a 'reading-boy' would then read the proof copy aloud to the compositor, who would check it against the original copy. Errors could arise in all kinds of ways.²⁹

The publication history of the JPS 1917 is not nearly so long or so colorful as the KJV, with its Wicked Bible, among others. Nonetheless, there is an illustrative example for the JPS version that exhibits not only the frank admission of error but also an immediate Bible recall to redress the error. The following letter was received by a number of prominent American Jewish leaders:

Dear Sir,

Owing to an error in one of the folios in the several advance copies of the New Translation of the Bible, which we gave to our guests at the dinner

held in New York on January 22, 1917, we are asking you to kindly return to us the copy which you received and we shall in turn send you a perfect one. Please be good enough to forward it to us as soon as you possibly can.³⁰

In his autobiography, *I Have Considered the Days*, JPS President Cyrus Adler recalls the details of this incident:

On Monday evening, January 22, 1917, the Publication Society celebrated the completion of the new Jewish translation of the Bible by giving a dinner at the Hotel Astor in New York. It was a very interesting and noteworthy occasion, but a strange thing happened. While we were seated at the table, Rabbi Charles I. Hoffman, of Newark, discovered two misplaced lines in the first chapter of the Book of Isaiah. Of course there was consternation among us, and since every person present had been given a copy of the Bible, as a souvenir at the dinner, we asked them all to return them and finally had the plates corrected. It seems that a printer's boy had dropped a page of type and covered up the fact. He had the whole page reset, and the errors occurred in this way. But it was very strange that Rabbi Hoffman, with his eagle eye, and possibly because his middle name is Isaiah, should have discovered this error in a few minutes.³¹

Jewish Bible Translations in the Post–World War II Period

It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s, when JPS began to conceive and prepare its new version, that the decisive break with the KJV—under the leadership of Harry M. Orlinsky—took place.³² I once asked Orlinsky what he had thought, when, at the very beginning of the very beginning, that is at Genesis 1:1, he replaced (as it were) the familiar “In the beginning . . .” He told me that he had never read the KJV or any other English-language version when he set out to produce the new JPS one. Over many years of acquaintanceship with Orlinsky, I learned that it was best to take at face value his pronouncements, even one as seemingly unlikely as this.

However that may be, there are few English-speaking Jews today who are unfamiliar with the KJV or its descendants, especially in the RSV (Revised Standard Version) and NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) incarnations. For many of them, the New Jewish Version, which relies on and is reflective of its editor's preference for dynamic or functional equivalence,³³ just doesn't ring true as a rendering of the Hebrew text.³⁴ Perhaps they share, unconsciously to be sure, the judgment

of Max L. Margolis, who was editor-in-chief of JPS 1917, when he stated that the KJV “has an inimitable style and rhythm; the coloring of the original is not obliterated. . . . What imparts to the English Bible its beauty, aye, its simplicity, comes from the [Hebrew] original.”³⁵ No prophet am I, nor the child of a prophet, but looking into my crystal ball (of fine British crystal, I hasten to add), I have no difficulty in predicting—for reasons practical as well as ideological—a future Jewish translation far more in the tradition of the KJV than the present JPS version.³⁶



Notes to Chapter 8

1. I offer my sincere thanks to the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies for awarding me a fellowship that, among other things, allowed me to conduct much of the research that lies behind this article.

2. For more on Jewish Bible translation, see Leonard J. Greenspoon, “Jewish Bible Translation,” in *The Biblical World* (ed. John Barton; New York: Routledge, 2002), 2:397–412, and “Jewish Translations of the Bible,” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2005–20.

3. For a discussion of the scholarly credentials of the various KJV translators, see Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2001); see also Adam Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the Kings James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003).

4. David Daiches, *The King James Version of the English Bible: An Account of the Development and Sources of the English Bible of 1611 with Special Reference to the Hebrew Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), esp. 182–218.

5. For a very accessible presentation and discussion of the translators’ Preface, see *The Translators to the Reader: The Original Preface of the King James Version of 1611 Revisited* (ed. Erroll F. Rhodes and Liana Lupas; New York: American Bible Society, 1997).

6. For the circumstances of the Jews’ return to England and the role of Menasseh ben Israel in this process, see Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 275–78, and bibliography cited there.

7. Raphael Loewe, “Review of A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525-1961*,” *JJS* 21 (1970): 88–89. For the translation of Moses Mendelssohn, see Abigail E. Gilman, “Between Religion and Culture: Mendelssohn, Buber, Rosenzweig and the Enterprise of Biblical Translation,” in *Biblical Translation in Context* (ed. Frederick W. Knobloch; Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 2002), 93–114, and Leonard J. Greenspoon, “Jewish Bible Translation in/and the Enlightenment,” *Studia Hebraica* 2 (2003): 319–28.

8. Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters*, 288.
9. See also Leonard J. Greenspoon, "The Birth of a Bible," *Norii* 10 (summer 2002), http://www.revistanorii.com/10/Leonard_Greenspoon_The_Birth_of_a_Bible.html.
10. See further Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Bringing Home the Gospel: Yiddish Bibles, Bible Societies, and the Jews," in *Yiddish Language and Culture, Then and Now: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Symposium of the Philip M. and Ethel Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization, October 27 and 28, 1996* (ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon; Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1998), 291–304.
11. See Leonard J. Greenspoon, "It's All Greek to Me: Septuagint Studies Since 1968," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 5 (1997): 147–74.
12. On David Levi, see articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1906), 8:25–26, and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), vol. 11, cols. 78–79. Several other versions from this period are edited by members of the Alexander family. Of Levy Alexander, it is written: "[His] translations were slovenly pieces of work, displaying ignorance alike of English and Hebrew. Levy seems to have been of a somewhat quarrelsome disposition. . . . Levy continued his abuse of the chief rabbi on the fly-leaves of the separate fascicles of his translation of the Bible" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1:348; see also *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 2, cols. 571–72).
13. On this see Loewe, "Review," 88.
14. On this last point, see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Top Dollar, Bottom Line? Marketing English-Language Bibles within the Jewish Community," in *Biblical Translation in Context* (ed. Frederick W. Knobloch; Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture; Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 2002), 115–33.
15. For more information on Newman and his career, see the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 9:294.
16. Selig Newman, *Specimen of a New Version of the Hebrew Bible* (London: B. Wertheim, 1839), iv.
17. Joshua H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (2nd ed.; London: Soncino, 1961), 217–18. See also Leonard J. Greenspoon, "The Portion: The Politics of Biblical Translation," *The Forward* (January 30, 2004).
18. On these issues see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Traditional Text, Contemporary Contexts: English-Language Scriptures for Jews and the History of Bible Translating," in *Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia* (ed. Jože Krašovec; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 289; Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 565–76.
19. Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Heroes and Villains: Reading and Misreading the Bible in Tough Times," Harold and Bernice Goldstein Lecture (Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa), and "Heroes and Villains: How the Jewish Bible Was Read and Misread

During the Holocaust,” Harold and Bernice Goldstein Lecture, Yom HaShoah Commemoration, Sioux City, Iowa.

20. On this see *Bible Review* 19 (2003): 12.

21. Joshua H. Hertz, “Jewish Translations of the Bible in English [being the concluding lecture in series, “Translations of the Bible,” Toynbee Hall, 1919],” in *Sermons, Addresses and Studies*, vol. 2: *Addresses* (London: Soncino, 1938), 70–93.

22. Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

23. I should also make mention of another outstanding and very recent monograph that is particularly relevant to this discussion: David S. Katz’s *God’s Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004). In addition to its many other virtues, Katz’s book is one of the very few that mentions any of the nineteenth-century Jewish Bible translators discussed here.

24. Hertz, “Jewish Translations,” 85.

25. On this, see further Greenspoon, “Jewish Translations of the Bible.”

26. As quoted in Hertz, “Jewish Translations,” 81.

27. Leonard J. Greenspoon, *Max Leopold Margolis: A Scholar’s Scholar* (Biblical Scholarship in North America 15; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 55–75 (chapter 3: “Bible Translation”), and “Biblical Translators in Antiquity and in the Modern World: A Comparative Study,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 60 (1989): 91–113. See also Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture 1888-1988* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), esp. 97–116.

28. Leonard J. Greenspoon, “How the Bible Became the Kyng’s Owne English,” *Bible Review* 19 (December 2003): 54.

29. Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 213–14.

30. As quoted in Leonard J. Greenspoon, “A Book ‘Without Blemish’: The Jewish Publication Society’s Bible Translation of 1917,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 79 (1988): 1–2.

31. Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941), 290.

32. See Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), and Harry M. Orlinsky, *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation* (New York: KTAV, 1974), esp. 349–440.

33. For a rousing defense of this practice, see Harry M. Orlinsky and Robert G. Bratcher, *A History of Bible Translation and the North American Contribution* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), esp. 180–205.

34. In all fairness, I should note that this version is very influential in non-Orthodox (and even some Orthodox) Jewish circles. It is the basis for the following editions,

among others: *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society)—*Genesis*, commentary by N. Sarna (1989); *Exodus*, commentary by N. Sarna (1991); *Leviticus*, commentary by B. A. Levine (1989); *Numbers*, commentary by J. Milgrom (1990); *Deuteronomy*, commentary by J. H. Tigay (1996); and subsequent commentaries on the five Megillot; David L. Lieber, Jules Harlow, et al., *ETZ HAYIM: Torah and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), prepared for Conservative congregations; W. Gunter Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), used in Reform congregations; and Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2003).

35. Greenspoon, *Max Leopold Margolis*, 69.

36. JPS is considering initiating a new version, as are other groups. In their deliberations and consultations, they will undoubtedly consult a number of sources and resources, including Frederick E. Greenspahn, "How Jews Translate the Bible," in *Biblical Translation in Context* (ed. Frederick W. Knobloch; Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 2002), 43–61; and Edward Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); "What Might Make a Bible Translation Jewish?" in *Translation and Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute May 14-16, 1989* (Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), 77–101.