

January 13, 1963

Rabbi Abraham AvRutick
Brunswick Hotel
Lakewood, New Jersey

Dear Abe:

I am putting into letter form, special delivery, some of the thoughts I tried to express over the phone this morning.

When the new J.P.S. translation was first announced I did not share the alarm of some of our fellow Orthodox Rabbis. At most, I felt slightly revolted by the cheap publicity.

However, I now have some authentic information, in advance of the official publication, that is genuinely alarming and that, I believe, requires immediate action by the R.C.A. which has, at the last Executive Meeting, referred the matter to the Publications Commission for a report in March. My recommendation is that the commission, or preferably a specialized sub-committee of it, report before February 14th, which is the official publication date for the book.

The information came to me from a lay scholar who is an observant Jew and who attended a meeting of The Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis. (I ask you to keep this particular aspect confidential since I do not want his identity to be revealed to the others.) At this occasion, Prof. [REDACTED] regaled his learned audience with contemptuous references to Orthodox Jewry to which he referred as "the lunatic fringe." He maintained that the restraint the translators felt on their account during the preparation of Genesis was almost completely abandoned by the time they reach Deuteronomy.

The major departures from the Masoretic tradition should be sought in footnotes throughout the text which refer the reader to "superior readings" in the Samaritan, Vulgate, and - I believe - Septuagint translations.

I would like to refer you and the committee to a particular verse which, according to my informant, can best serve as a criterion for loyalty or disloyalty to the Masorah. That is in Genesis 10:10 where four cities are mentioned, in the land of Shinar, as being in the kingdom of Nimrod. Biblical scholars have identified the first three, but have not excavated the fourth, identified in the Bible as Kalneh.

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Rabbi AvRutick

Non-Masoretic exegetes have therefore largely accepted Prof. Albright's emendation, discarding the Masoretic punctuation, and reading, instead, "Kulanah" - i.e., "all of them."

I understand that there are many such other elements that appear in the translation.

My recommendation is that the Publications Commission appoint a sub-committee consisting of specialists in the field of Biblical literature. While there is no time nor may it be worthwhile to go over the translation exhaustively, it is most important that more than just two or three examples of deviation from tradition be cited. If we do that, we risk the chance of having our protests trivialized by the opposition.

May I recommend, amongst others to serve on that sub-committee, Rabbi Joseph Baumgarten of Baltimore and Dr. Menachem Brayer. I would make a special point to suggest to Rabbi Baumgarten to be in contact with Dr. [REDACTED] of Lawrence, New York who will be able to fill him in with many details.

Once again, the importance here is not to engage in a publicity duel, but to warn off in time any Orthodox Synagogues, Schools, or individuals from purchasing the book and becoming a partner in this deception. All this, of course, provided the sub-committee substantiates the reports that I have heard and that I am now transmitting to you.

If at all possible I shall try to be at the convention, but as I told you, since Rabbi Jung is not well it might very well be impossible for me to attend.

Please let me know what decision has been reached on this matter.

Sincerely,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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