

A Dead Sea Scroll Solves a New Testament Mystery

The case of Deuteronomy 32:43 and Hebrews 1:6

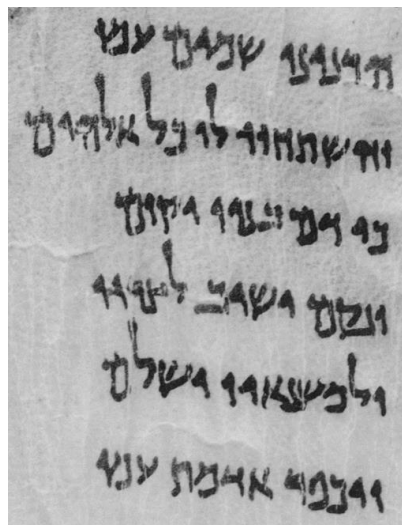
An opinion of Dr. Galen Currah, May 2020



Cave 4 at Wadi Qumran was discovered in August 1952, and was excavated from 22–29 September 1952 by Roland de Vaux, Józef Milik and Gerald Lankester Harding.



Amongst the scores of manuscripts and fragments found in Cave 4 were texts from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 32, copied sometime before the common era. Deuteronomy, chapter 32, verse 43 was found intact, consisting of six cola or lines written in ancient square Hebrew.

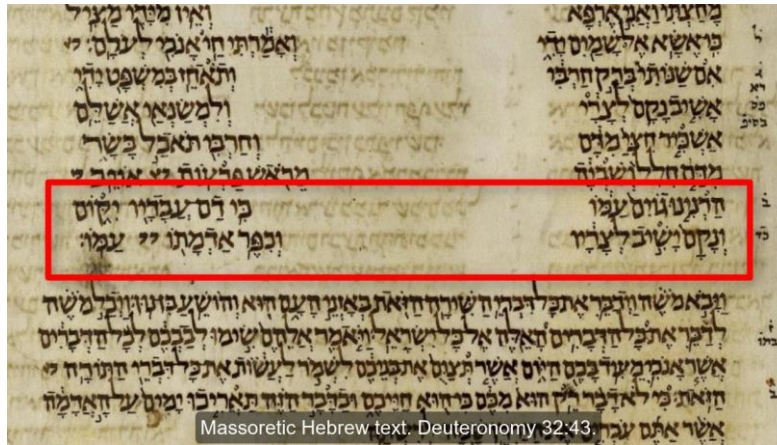


Photographer: Najib Anton Albina. Taken in January 1956. Published by Ulrich Skehan in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, 1995, vol. 14, pp. 137-142. Downloaded from www.deadseascrolls.org.il

Translated, it reads in English:

Rejoice, you heavens, with him,
And bow down to him all gods;
For he will avenge the blood of his sons,
And he will render vengeance to his adversaries,
And those who hate him he will requite,
And he will cleanse the land of his people.

The Hebrew Bible, or the Torah, which contains the Book of Deuteronomy, was standardized by scribes called Masorites by the close of the tenth century CE.

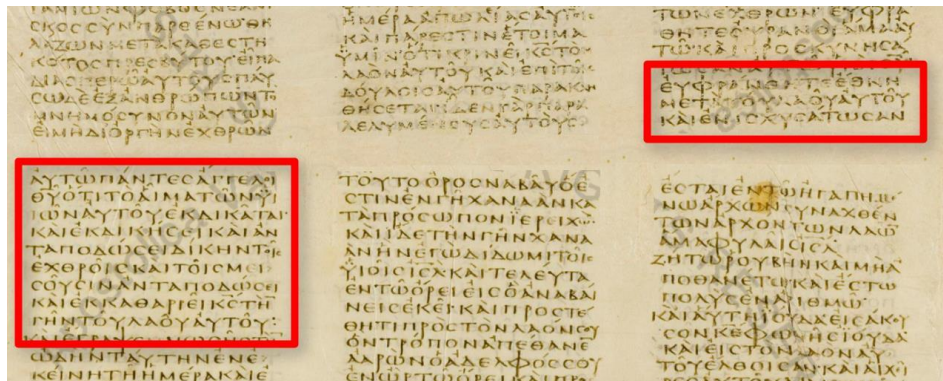


The Aleppo Codex. Its consonants were copied by the scribe Shlomo ben Buya'a in Palestine circa 920 CE. Its vowels and notes were provided by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher or in his scriptorium. archive.org/details/Aleppo_Codex

Most English versions of the Book of Deuteronomy were translated from the standard Masoretic Hebrew text, in which 32:43 consists of four lines that read as follows:

Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people,
The blood of his servants will he avenge,
And he will render vengeance to his adversaries,
And he will cleanse his land and his people.

The Hebrew Torah was translated into Greek after 200 BCE, probably by the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt.

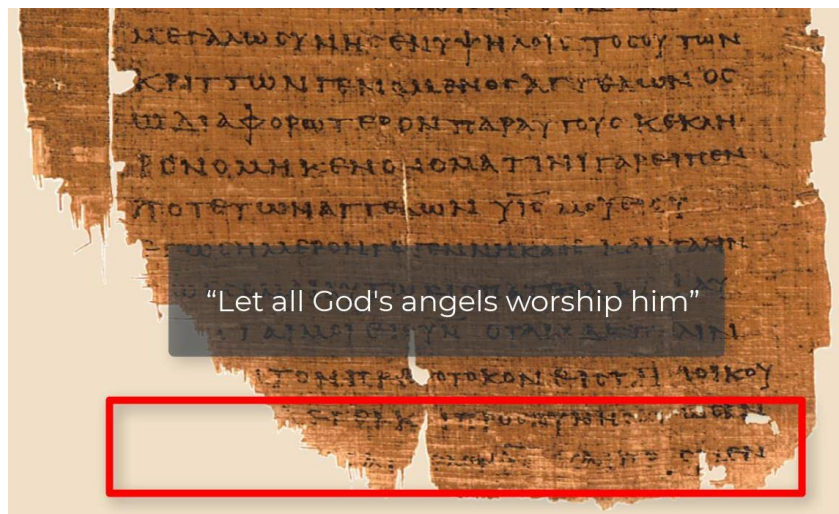


Codex Vaticanus The oldest extant copy of the whole Greek Bible, copied in uncial letters on vellum in the early fourth century CE.]

In Greek, Deuteronomy 32:43 consists of eight cola, which read as follows.

Rejoice, you heavens, with him,
 and let all the sons of God worship him;
 rejoice you Gentiles, with his people,
 and let all the angels of God strengthen themselves in him;
 for he will avenge the blood of his sons,
 and he will render justice to his enemies,
 and will reward them that hate him;
 and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.

For centuries, Bible readers have wondered about the New Testament verse in Hebrews 1:6 that seems to misquote Deuteronomy 32:43. It reads: “Let all God’s angels worship him” (Hebrews 1:6 ESV16).



Comparing Dead Sea Scroll Q4Deutq with the Greek version of Deuteronomy 32:43, we now understand that Hebrew 1:6 quotes from that Greek version, which had translated the Hebrew phrase “sons of God” by “angels of God.”

DEUTERONOMY 32:43 THROUGH THE CENTURIES			
HEBREW BEFORE 100 BCE	HEBREW FROM 100 BCE	GREEK FROM 200 BCE	HEBREW FROM 980 CE
Rejoice, heavens, with him	Rejoice, heavens, with him	Rejoice, heavens, with him	Rejoice, nations, with him
And bow to him, all gods	And bow to him, all gods	And bow to him, all sons of God	
Rejoice, nations, with his people		Rejoice, nations, with his people	
And be strengthened in him, all sons of God		And be strengthened in him, all angels of God	
For he will avenge the blood of his sons	For he will avenge the blood of his sons	because he will avenge the blood of his sons	For he will avenge the blood of his sons
For he will render vengeance to his enemies	For he will render vengeance to his enemies	For he will render vengeance to his enemies	For he will render vengeance to his enemies
And those who hate him he will requite	And those who hate him he will requite	And to those who hate him he will render vengeance	
And he will purge the land of his people	And he will purge the land of his people	And the LORD will purge the land of his people	And he will purge his land for of his people

Red = conjecture

The Greek translators must have understood the phrase “all gods,” which occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible, to mean “spirit beings,” so they rendered it “angels.”

Thus, the three existent versions of Deuteronomy 32:43 include, the Septuagint Greek having eight cola, the Qumran Hebrew having six cola, and the Masoretic Hebrew having four cola.

DEUTERONOMY 32:43 THROUGH THE CENTURIES			
HEBREW BEFORE 100 BCE	HEBREW FROM 100 BCE	GREEK FROM 200 BCE	HEBREW FROM 980 CE
הַרְנִינוּ שָׁמַיִם עִמּוֹ	הַרְנִינוּ שָׁמַיִם עִמּוֹ	εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοὶ ἅμα αὐτῷ	הַרְנִינוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ
וְהִשְׁתַּחוּ לֹא כָּל אֱלֹהִים	וְהִשְׁתַּחוּ לֹא כָּל אֱלֹהִים	καὶ προσκυνήσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ	
הַרְנִינוּ גוֹיִם עִם עִמּוֹ		εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ	
וְהַעֲיִזוּ (וְהָבוּ עִז) לֹא כָּל (בּוֹי) אֱלֹהִים		καὶ ἐνίσχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ	
כִּי דָם בָּנָיו יִקּוּם	כִּי דָם בָּנָיו יִקּוּם	ὅτι τὸ αἷμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐδικαίεται	כִּי דָם עֲבָדָיו יִקּוּם
וְנָקַם יֵשִׁיב לְצַרּוֹ	וְנָקַם יֵשִׁיב לְצַרּוֹ	καὶ ἀνταποδώσει δίκην τοῖς ἐχθροῖς	וְנָקַם יֵשִׁיב לְצַרּוֹ
וּלְמִשְׁנָאוֹ יִשְׁלַם	וּלְמִשְׁנָאוֹ יִשְׁלַם	καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἀνταποδώσει	
וַיִּכְפַּר אֲדָמָתָ עִמּוֹ	וַיִּכְפַּר אֲדָמָתָ עִמּוֹ	καὶ ἐκκαθαρεῖ κύριος τὴν γῆν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ	וַיִּכְפַּר אֲדָמָתָ עִמּוֹ

Red = conjecture

Scholars have restored two cola for the conjectured Hebrew text from which the Septuagint would have been translated, and which probably lay behind the quotation in Hebrews 1:6. (Emmanuel Tov (Emmanuel Tov. Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. Lviii + 481 pp. ISBN 2012 978-0-8006-9664-1) 249, Table 8.)

These same scholars comment that some Bible copyists sought to reword certain texts to avoid mention of false gods, or wanted to make Deuteronomy chapter 32 consist of exactly 70 cola. (“Commentary on the Critical Apparatus” in *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007. Prepared by Carmel McCarthy. 152-4*)