

## Tribal Conflict or Harmony? *Original Aramaic reveals harmony in Mark 13:30*

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March 11, 2020

### Introduction

In the year 1960, author C.S. Lewis wrote infamously regarding Mark 13:30, "It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the bible." C.S. Lewis, "*The World's Last Night*" (1960).

Lewis wrote this because Mark 13:30 is commonly translated (from the Greek) as a potentially *unfulfilled* prophecy, "Amen, I say to you, this **generation** will not pass until all of these will occur."

Why do skeptics say 'unfulfilled'? Among the many prophecies in Mark 13, notice the penultimate prophecy here, "And in the days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. **And then they will see the Son of Man when He comes in the clouds with great power and with glory.** Then He will send His angels and assemble His chosen from the four winds, from its beginning of the earth and until to its beginning of heaven." Mark 13:24-27.

Well, here we are now in the year 2020. And the skeptics ask, 'Has any group of people in history ever **literally seen** (Mark 13:26: "they will see") the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and with glory?' The answer would be 'no' in the ordinary physical sense of 'seeing', unless...

"For before sunset throughout all parts of the country [of Judea] chariots were seen in the air and armed battalions hurtling through the clouds and encompassing the cities." Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6:299; as cited in Martin, E., *Signs of the Times in the First Century* (1982).

Christian Preterism asserts the Mark 13 prophecies happened 'metaphorically' or 'spiritually' around 66AD to 70AD with the overthrow of Jerusalem, because the 'sun, moon, and stars' are routinely metaphorical in the Old Testament (see e.g., Genesis 37:9-11; Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; Isaiah 5:30; 13:10; 34:1-6; 58:8-11; 59:9-10; 60:15-20; Jeremiah 4:23-28; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 3:15; Amos 5:18-20; 8:9; Micah 3:6-12; Zephaniah 1:14-15), and clouds are also metaphors (Psalm 18:9-12; 68:34; 78:23; 97:1-6; 104:3; Ecclesiastes 12:2; Isaiah 19:1; Jeremiah 4:13; Ezekiel 30:3; Daniel 7:13; Joel 2:2; Nehemiah 1:3; Zephaniah 1:15).

I should also mention there are some apologists who have cited Josephus' testimony that the sun may have physically darkened around that time (albeit temporarily), and some other astronomical observations (e.g., "So it was when a star resembling a sword, stood over the city [Jerusalem] and a comet which continued for a year." Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6:289).

There is a distinct likelihood these Preterist researchers are right that Mark 13 was fulfilled or partially fulfilled around the 66AD – 70AD overthrow of Jerusalem. Indeed, there is even the possibility that the prophecy was foreshadowing and will be fulfilled yet again ('repeated') in a more literal or fuller sense at the end of this current modern age.

In any case, it is *because* of this eschatological uncertainty that C.S. Lewis made his “most embarrassing” remark above (to his credit though Lewis caveated by quoting Mark 13:32, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, **neither the Son**, but the Father.”)

If only C.S. Lewis read the *Aramaic Peshitta* rather than the Greek translation, he might not have been so easily *limited* in his thinking that the Mark 13:30 prophecy *must* be fulfilled *in a single generation*. Most bible skeptics fall for the same trap with Greek translations of Mark 13:30 because they too focus solely on the Greek word *genea* ("generation").

Fortunately though, when scholars observe that *genea* is merely a Greek translation of the word **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** spoken by Yahshua, as recorded faithfully in the Peshitta, then the skeptics must go back to square one, because **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** can mean any of these plural or singular nouns: tribe(s), family(ies), race(s), nation(s), generation(s), genealogy(ies)... and most importantly, as this article will illustrate, **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** ultimately means 'line of power', because that is the one common thread running conceptually through all of its multiple definitions.

### Peshitta Gospel Text of Mark 13:30

ܐܡܝܢ ܐܘܝܪ ܐܘܝܪ ܠܚܐ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܝܢ ܗܝܫܝܘܬܐ ܕܗܘܪܐ ܗܘܝܠܘܩܬܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܐܫܡܪܐ ܐܝܬܝܢ ܗܘܝܠܘܩܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ

("Amen, I say to you, this **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** ("tribe/generation/nation/family/genealogy ") will not pass until all of these things will occur.")

### Aramaic Grammar of **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ**

Interestingly, **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** is one of those words that is both singular and plural, like the word "sheep" or "deer" in English. So it requires *context*.

Often the word **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** is presented with a pronoun modifier such as **ܕܗܝܫܝܘܬܐ** ("this tribe/genealogy/generation") or **ܥܘܠܡܐ** ("all/any tribes/genealogies/generations").

In both Mark 13:30 and Matthew 23:36, we see the modifier **ܕܗܝܫܝܘܬܐ** ("this generation"). Indeed, that is its most common modifier of the noun **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** in the gospel. If the gospel wanted to say "genealogy of Adam" then it would read just like Luke 2:4 **ܕܕܘܚܘܕܐ ܕܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** ("his genealogy of David"), or any of the examples from Revelation 7:5-8 (i.e., "his tribe of Benjamin").

The Aramaic Crawford Codex of Revelation 7:9 uses **ܪܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܐ** expansively to mean *multiple* generations spanning potentially the entire history of earth, "After this I saw many multitudes which were impossible to count, which were of all people, generations, nations, and languages, standing before

the throne and before the Lamb, and wearing white garments and with palms in their hands."

Now, when there is no pronoun modifier before **ܐܝܘܒܐ** and the context is expansive/interpretive (i.e., Luke 1:50), then we translators are especially invited to consider the fundamental root word for meaning -- and the root word can indeed be suggestive of returning to the source (i.e., Adam, or house of Adam), as we will explore in this article...

## Hebrew roots – the origin of **ܐܝܘܒܐ**

The Hebrew root of the Aramaic **ܐܝܘܒܐ** ("tribe/nation/genealogy") is **שרבט** ("rod/nation/empire"), which itself remains a unique Aramaic word with several available conjugations, and itself reaches back to the Hebrew root **שבט**. See e.g., Jastrow, M., *A Dictionary of the Targumim* (1903), p. 1628. For example, the prophet Jeremiah referred to Jacob's inheritance/lineage as a single **שבט** ("tribe/staff"). Jeremiah 51:19.

Both words -- **ܐܝܘܒܐ** and **שרבט** -- inherently refer to something that exists beyond any one generation, even though technically, an observer can also use **ܐܝܘܒܐ** as a snapshot at any given time to describe his *current* "tribe" as a "tribe", or *present* "nation" as a "nation".

In that *temporal* sense the word **ܐܝܘܒܐ** seems confusing when translated in English, but let me give an analogy for clarity: "family". "Family" has multiple definitions, yet one unified definition. It is just one word, but it can be a snapshot in *current* time & space, or travel *across* time & space *in context*.

For example, I can set the context easily for the English word "family" to refer to my current family now living ("my family is going to the beach tomorrow"). Or I can use the word "family" in an open multi-generational sense ("we are a farming family"). I can even say extremely broadly, "I am part of the human family" to reach across the full spectrum of recorded history. 'Family' can only be understood in context...

**ܐܝܘܒܐ** ("tribe") is precisely like that in Aramaic.

Even the pronoun modifier **ܗܝܘܐ** ("this") doesn't trump greater context. For example, "This family has seen tough times." You would need to read the entire paragraph context to know if I'm taking a snapshot in time (this current living family) or speaking in a multi-generational sense (this family lineage has seen tough times). Even the plural pronoun modifier **ܗܘܢܐ** ("all of them") can only be understood in context and does not trump context. For example, "all of the families attended the service on Sunday" is not more expansive than "this family migrated from Israel." In Hebrew & Aramaic, an interpretation without context is like a flower without a top-- you don't even know what you're seeing, let alone enjoying and utilizing productively!

That is why the *context* of Mark 13:30 is so important – the tribal context of Mark 13:30 can be

found in Mark 13:27, "Then he will send his angels and assemble his chosen from the four winds **from the beginning of the earth and up to the beginning of heaven.**" That is a large context. Note also how this verse (Mark 13:27) appears to match the tribal reference in Revelation 7:1-4, "And after this, I saw four angels standing over the four corners of the Earth and holding the four winds... And I heard the number who were sealed - one hundred and forty four thousand, from all the **שבטים** ('tribes') of Israel."

In Hebrew **שר** means "head" or "ruler". And **בתה** means "house" or "family" or "daughter". So there remains here too the possibility of an expansive reading of **שרבתה** to include the entire 'house of the head'. However, when we actually do the leg work and check that expansive reading against every example of the word **שרבתה** in a bible concordance, we see that the word primarily takes the meaning of a *temporal, limited* class of persons. Scholars find the same situation with the Greek as well, though the Greek uses more conjugations from its root, *genea*.

It was because of this Greek-bias that C.S. Lewis wrote regarding Mark 13:30, "It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the bible."

There is much to love about C.S. Lewis, especially the first book in his Chronicles of Narnia, but he wrote incompletely on Mark 13:30. Indeed, should there be any bible skeptics reading this article who may still doubt the Peshitta's authority, allow me to remind them of Mark 8:38

**כל מי יבוזני וישתבשני בשבטי בני אדם  
בשבטי בני אדם יבוזנו וישתבשנו בשבטי בני אדם**

("For everyone who shall be ashamed of me and my words **שבטי בני אדם** ("in this generation/genealogy") sinful and adulterous, of him also shall His Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with His holy angels.")

### Greater Temporal Meaning – the Definitive Example in Matthew 23:36

Matthew 23:36 is very insightful, if not definitive, in the word study of **שבטי בני אדם** because we see the word in that verse covering an *extensive* historical time period: from Cain & Abel all the way through Zechariah, "Truly I say to you that all these things will come upon this **שבטי בני אדם** ("tribe/genealogy")." Importantly, the time period from Abel to Zechariah also matches the Hebrew bible canon of those days: Genesis to Zechariah. So Matthew 23:36 is an example where the single word **שבטי בני אדם** is able to cover all of bible history, which of course is *many* generations, not one generation.

When Cain killed Abel, that event was from an earlier *generation*. It was also a crime committed before the *tribe* of Israel *even existed*. Accordingly, the matter being described in Matthew 23:36 is the *genealogy* of Cain, which continues from generation *to* generation.

The Messiah comes from the genealogy of Seth, and probably His apostles were from that genealogy as well. But in any case, what is clear is that Cain & Abel were brothers. They were *family*. That's

the greater point about **גֵּוּלָהּ**.

Indeed, keeping true to the Hebrew root word **שָׂרַבַּט**, we can go farther in an interpretive sense and describe **שָׂרַבַּתָּא** as a line of power. When that line is people, then **שָׂרַבַּתָּא** is a lineage (genealogy), which later in bible history took the meaning "tribes" in the context of the Hebrew *experience*.

No man can track the specific identity of the 12 tribes today. We can only trust the Father knows, and that's a happy thought. If my neighbor is descended from an ancient Israelite, then **גֵּוּלָהּ**. If not, he's still my neighbor, **גֵּוּלָהּ**.

John 1:47, "Yahshua saw Nathaniel when he came to him and said about him: 'Behold, truly a son of Israel in whom is no deceit.'"

John 8:39, "Yahshua said to them, 'If you were children of Abraham, you would have been doing the works of Abraham.'"

Mark 3:33-35, "And he answered and said to them, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' And he looked on those who were sitting with him and he said, 'Here is my mother and here are my brethren. For whoever shall do the will of **אלהא** is my brother and my sister and my mother.'"

## Conclusion

We see the word **גֵּוּלָהּ** throughout the bible, and we translators are often *tempted* to read it succinctly as "tribe" or "generation", which is simply because most verses require little debate using that succinct option.

But there are *other* verses, such as Mark 13:30, which do require debate and likely call for the word's greater meaning. The openly greater *context* in Mark Chapter 13, where we find Mark 13:30, is one that very suggestively crosses multiple generations. And so the Mark 13:30 prophecy cannot be strictly limited to one "generation" of 70-years. In Mark 13:30, the word "generation" is probably a 'mistranslation' of **גֵּוּלָהּ** in the sense that a mistranslation can be 'a word taken out of its context'.

In its proper Aramaic context, the Mark 13:30 prophecy is about some 'genealogy' or 'line of power', which is best seen through the focusing lens of a uniquely Jewish people in bible history, even through the present day.