

## Translator's Preface

The final volume of Strack and Billerbeck's renowned New Testament commentary is a series of 33 excurses on various topics related to specific passages of Scripture. The topics range from circumcision to fasting to the synagogue service to the Old Testament canon to Sheol to the date of Jesus' death.

The fourth of these excurses is titled "Das Passhmahl (zu Mt 26, 17 ff.)" (The Passover Meal [on Matthew 26:17ff]). A simple glance at the Table of Contents (p. ii) will perceive the precision with which the authors covered their material.

I know little about the authors, Hermann L. Strack (1848-1922) and Paul Billerbeck (1853-1932). But they are both described as Lutherans – the former as a "German Lutheran theologian and orientalist" (*The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*) and the latter as "a Lutheran minister and scholar of Judaism" (Wikipedia). Actually, as is evident from their joint commentary, both men were scholars of Judaism. Strack founded the *Institutum Judaicum* in Berlin in 1883, and was chairman of the International Conference on Jewish Missions. Billerbeck was born in Prussia to Jewish parents, and did much of the compiling of Jewish rabbinical sources related to the New Testament at Strack's urging.

By the time the final volume of their joint commentary effort went to press, Strack had passed away. Thus, one might think that Billerbeck deserves most of the praise for this excursus. However, as Billerbeck himself said in his Foreword to the final volume: "As editor, Professor Strack has earned the vast majority of the credit for the appearance and dissemination of [the first volume, the commentary on Matthew]. It only due to the insertion of his name and his personality that the printing was able to be begun during the greatest economic distress shortly after the conclusion of the war, and that the work found an equally interested audience not only at home, but also far abroad. This also made the printing of the remaining volumes economically possible."

My interest in what follows is twofold. First, Professor Kenneth Cherney, who was teaching at Martin Luther College when I enrolled there and then was called to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary while I was attending there, referred to Strack-Billerbeck's commentary more than once. He also stressed that anyone rendering the commentary into English would be rendering the Christian Church an enormous service. I have found it to be an indispensable help for sermon preparation, especially on Gospel texts.

Secondly, I have a particularly keen interest in the Lord's institution of his Holy Supper. For several years now, I have especially pondered at length the elements used in the Lord's Supper. This led me to pursue more information about the context in which the Lord's Supper was instituted – the Passover.

A few notes on the translation itself:

First, I am indebted to the Soncino edition of the tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, the Soncino edition of the volumes of the Midrash Rabbah (both the above available in English and the original Hebrew and Aramaic on the Soncino Classics Collection software by Davka Corporation), and Neusner's English edition of the tractates of the Jerusalem Talmud. All three made this translation much easier and more authoritative. See Abbreviations (p. vi) for more bibliographic information on these works.

Secondly, I have adopted an unorthodox method of citing quotations from the Mishnah. Usually Mishnaic passages are cited by chapter and verse (e.g. 5, 1), compared to passages of the Gemara, which are cited by paragraph (e.g. 48<sup>a</sup>). However, this method of citation made it difficult to locate Mishnaic passages on my computer software. It was much easier to search passages cited by paragraph, and in those paragraphs the Mishnah stood out (headed by the word "Mishnah" and printed in all caps). So I cited them the way I would have preferred to locate them. Mishnaic passages are differentiated from passages of the Gemara by the addition of the word "Mishnah" after the paragraph number (e.g. 48<sup>a</sup> Mishnah vs. 48<sup>a</sup>). I sincerely hope this innovation does not confound scholars used to the ancient method.

Thirdly, all other rabbinic quotations, as from the Tosefta, Mekhilta, Sifre, all Midrash besides Midrash Rabbah, etc., I simply translated from Billerbeck's German. The reader will recognize these by their lack of an accompanying footnote. In these cases Billerbeck's citations are retained.

Fourthly, one of the most useful features of Strack-Billerbeck's commentary is their inclusion, whenever possible, of dates for all rabbis cited – either the approximate year they thrived (*floruit*) or died. Unless otherwise noted, the year(s) listed is always Anno Domini (AD).

Finally, although this translation does contain abbreviations, I did not see fit to abbreviate the names of the various rabbinic tractates. I found such abbreviations to be unhelpful, even after working with the sources for several months. Thus I did unto the readers as I would have had them do unto me.

May the Holy Spirit see fit to bless this translation (which is also in many ways simply a re-presentation of already translated rabbinical sources) and use it to give the readers a better understanding of the context of the Lord's Supper. Thus may the Spirit also sharpen the readers' *historical*-grammatical understanding of the source texts for the Lord's Supper, so that the Supper's doctrinal and practical integrity may be preserved in their midst.

Nathaniel J. Biebert  
Monday of Lent 4  
11 March 2013 Anno Domini

## Abbreviations

### Jastrow

Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006). When more exactly cited, cited thus: ([page number].[column number]).

### Levy [volume number]:[page number][column letter]

Jacob Levy, *Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* [The New Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon for the Talmuds and Midrashic Literature], 4 volumes (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1876-1889).

### Neusner, [page number(s)]

Refers to the corresponding tractate (named at the head of each quotation) in Neusner's edition of the Jerusalem Talmud: Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, CD, trans. J. Neusner, Tzvee Zahavy, Edward Goldman, and B. Barry Levy (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2009).

### Soncino, [page number(s)]

Refers to the corresponding tractate (named at the head of each quotation) in the Soncino edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Rabbi Isidore Epstein, ed., *Soncino Talmud*, 30 volumes (Brooklyn, NY: Soncino Press, Ltd, 1990).

**NOTE:** Occasionally Soncino and Neusner translate corresponding tractate titles differently (e.g. *Berakoth* in Soncino vs. *Berakhot* in Neusner). The translator followed each edition's spelling when using that edition's translation. In cases where Billerbeck's German of the Tosefta for a certain tractate is being rendered into English (see p. v), Soncino's title spellings are used.

### Sonc. MR, [page number(s)]

Refers to the corresponding book of the Bible (named at the head of each quotation) in the Soncino edition of the Midrash Rabbah: Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 volumes (Brooklyn, NY: Soncino Press, Ltd, 1990).

## Glossary

### Babylonian Talmud

One of two central texts to rabbinic Judaism (v. “Jerusalem Talmud” *infra*) originating among scholars primarily of the Jewish academies of Sura, Pumbedita, and Mata Mehasia, considered second to the Torah, compiled over the 3rd through 5th centuries AD, comprised of rabbinic decisions, opinions, and legends pertaining to Jewish civil and ceremonial law, divided into the Mishnah and Gemara (utr. q. v.). The Babylonian Talmud is generally held in higher regard than the Jerusalem.

### Baraita (or Baraita)

Tradition in Jewish oral law not incorporated in the Mishnah (q. v.) and whose authority is less than that of the Mishnah, usually introduced in the Gemara (q. v.) by “It was taught” (אָתָּא) or “Our Rabbis taught” (תַּנּוּ רַבֵּינָן) or “A Tanna taught.”

### Emurim

Lit. “devoted objects,” that is, the fat, the fat tail, the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them, all of which were to be burned on the altar.

### Gemara

Component of the Talmud comprising rabbinical analysis of and commentary on the Mishnah (q. v.). The Gemara of the Jerusalem Talmud (q. v.) was first published in the late 4th century, while that of the Babylonian Talmud (q. v.) was published around 500 AD.

### Haggadah

Text recited during the Passover meal and on the following night, on the basis of Exodus 12:26,27; 13:8; also refers to the whole content of non-legal anecdotes and explanations in the ancient rabbinical literature (cf. Halacha, q. v.).

### Hagigah

In the context of the Passover, a special festival offering sacrificed and eaten by celebrants at the Passover meal, especially when their meal company was too large to fill up on a single Passover lamb.

### Halacha

Decisive, binding law of Jewish tradition. When it says in the Talmud that the Halacha follows a certain rabbi, it means that his opinion, in contrast to the others, is binding for the practice in question.

### Haroseth

Fruit mash served during the precourse of the Passover meal, prepared from crushed or ground-up figs, dates, almonds, and other fruits, with cinnamon and other spices added, and mixed with wine or wine vinegar.

### Hazereth

Lettuce served during the precourse of the Passover meal, considered the chief herb for fulfilling the requirement of bitter herbs in Exodus 12:8.

### Jerusalem Talmud

One of two central texts to rabbinic Judaism (v. "Babylonian Talmud" *supra*) originating among scholars primarily in the Jewish academies of Tiberias and Caesarea, considered second to the Torah, compiled over the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, comprised of rabbinic decisions, opinions, and legends pertaining to Jewish civil and ceremonial law, divided into the Mishnah and Gemara (utr. q. v.).

### Mazzah (or Matzah or Matzo)

Unleavened bread served during the main course of the Passover meal, required in Exodus 12:8.

### Midrash

Ancient Jewish commentary on part of the Hebrew Scriptures, attached to the biblical text, whose origins range from as early as the 2nd century through the 13th century. Midrash Rabbah, a collection of Jewish commentary on 10 books of the Bible, is considered to be the greatest of the Midrash; it was first published together in 1545.

### Minhah

Lit. "laid down," referring either to an offering, especially a meal-offering, or to the declining sun, in which case it means *afternoon*. The definition in the Glossary of the Sonc. MR (rf. p. vi): "the second of the three statutory daily services which has to be recited between 12.30 p.m. and sunset."

### Mishnah

First and more authoritative component of the Talmud (cf. Gemara *supra*), binding as Halacha (q. v.). It was redacted and edited chiefly by Rabbi Judah the Prince (ha-Nasi) I, generally called Rabbi, in the early 3rd century AD.

## Talmud

Usually refers to the Babylonian Talmud (q. v.), but also used for entire body of Talmudic literature, including the Jerusalem Talmud (q. v.).

## Tamid

One of two daily burnt offerings at the temple in Jerusalem, commanded by God in Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:3-8. One was commanded to be offered in the morning and the other in the evening (בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם, “between the two evenings,” usually translated “at twilight”). However, *Pesahim* 58<sup>a</sup> Mishnah says that, prior to the destruction of the temple, the second tamid was ordinarily offered at “at nine and a half hours” (3:30 p.m.).