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## ARAMAIC AND THE BIBLE

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Targums and in the New  
Testament: Enmity as a Spiritual  
Conflict

*by Iosif J. Zhakevich*

# Genesis 3:15 in the Pentateuchal Targums and in the New Testament: Enmity as a Spiritual Conflict

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**Abstract:** The present paper conducts a comparative analysis of Gen 3:15 in the Pentateuchal Targums and of allusions to Gen 3:15 at Rev 12:17 (and its broader context) in order to demonstrate that the Targums and the book of Revelation both interpret the enmity announced at Gen 3:15 to be a spiritual battle, not a mere reference to the animus between humans and snakes. This view of enmity is indeed the point of departure for the broader interpretation of Gen 3:15 as a messianic text in Rev 12 and the Targums, as other scholars have shown. Moreover, to explain the congruity between the Targums and Rev 12, this study concludes, in agreement with the general view in comparative targumic and NT studies, that such an interpretation of the enmity at Gen 3:15 existed in the early Jewish community and was incorporated into the NT and into the Targums in accordance with each author's literary purposes and theological convictions.

**Key Words:** Targum, New Testament, Messiah, Enmity, Genesis 3:15, Revelation 12:17

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Beginning his discussion on the messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15 with a candid admission, Gordon H. Johnston concedes that “[Gen 3:15] is not an explicitly messianic text.”<sup>2</sup> Despite this reality, scholars have taken note of a shared messianic perspective of this passage in two historical corpora of literature of distinct compositional development, though from a common general Jewish background—Rev 12 and the Pentateuchal Targums (Targum Onqelos, 1st–2nd c. AD; Targum Neofiti, 2nd–3rd

1. Many thanks to Matthew Nerdahl for reading this article and providing helpful suggestions.
2. Gordon H. Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, Gordon H. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 459.

c. AD;<sup>3</sup> and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, 4th–10th c. AD).<sup>4</sup> Addressing this subject in a recent study, Pauline Paris Buisch points to three specific elements in Rev 12 and the Targums that manifest this messianic view—1) that the conflict of Gen 3:15 is to “reach its climax in the eschaton”; 2) that it is to “be concluded by the advent of the Messiah”; and 3) that it is to “involve the woman’s children who are identified as those who keep the commandments.”<sup>5</sup>

This, of course, raises questions about the compositional history of the shared material between Rev 12 and the Targums: How are these similarities to be explained? Are they random accidents of history? Are they evidence of literary interdependence? Buisch cogently argues that this shared messianic perspective is evidence that the two corpora of literature presuppose “a comparable understanding” of Gen 3:15

3. Targum Neofiti will be cited as the representative of the Palestinian Targums, while the Fragment Targums and Targum Neofiti Marginalia will be referenced where pertinent to the discussion. For a textual comparison of the various targumic renditions of Gen 3:15, see Avigdor Shinan, תרגום ואגדה בו: האגדה בתרגום התורה הארמי המיוחס ליונתן בן עוזיאל (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 21–22. For more on the Palestinian Targums, see Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*, Studies in Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 73–83.

4. For a brief introduction to the Targums, see Philip Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 217–53; and Flesher and Chilton, *Targums*, 72–89 (for the dating of these texts, see 84), for Onqelos, 81, and for Pseudo-Jonathan, 88–89 and 158–66. For more on the date of Pseudo-Jonathan, see Stephen A. Kaufman, “Dating the Language of the Palestinian Targums and their Use in the Study of First Century CE Texts,” in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 124; Moise Ohana, “La polémique judéo-islamique et l’image d’Ismaël dans Targum Pseudo-Jonathan et dans Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer,” *Aug 15*, no. 3 (1975): 367–87; Avigdor Shinan, “The ‘Palestinian’ Targums—Repetitions, Internal Unity, Contradictions,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36, no. 1 [1985]: 87; and see Shinan, אגדתם של מתורגמנים: תיאור וניתוח ספרותי של החומר האגדי המשוקע בכל התרגומים הארמיים הארץ ישראליים לחמשה חומשי תורה (Jerusalem: Maqor, 1979), 1:119–46; and 2:xvi. For the key advocate of an early date, see C. T. R. Hayward, “Inconsistencies and Contradictions in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: The Case of Eliezer and Nimrod,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37, no. 1 (1992): 31–55; Robert Hayward, “Red Heifer and Golden Calf: Dating Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,” in *Textual and Contextual Studies in the Pentateuchal Targums*, ed. Paul V. M. Flesher, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 55, Targum Studies 1, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Atlanta, GA: Scholar’s, 1992), 9–32; Flesher, “The Date of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Some Comments,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989): 7–30; and Flesher, “Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Anti-Islamic Polemic,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, no. 1 (1989): 77–93.

5. Pauline Paris Buisch, “The Rest of Her Offspring: The Relationship between Revelation 12 and the Targumic Expansion of Genesis 3:15,” *Novum Testamentum* 60 (2018): 400–01. See also Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 217–22; Max Wilcox, “The Promise of the ‘Seed’ in the New Testament and the Targumim,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5 (1979): 13–14; Michèle Morgen, “Apocalypse 12, un targum de l’Ancien Testament,” *Foi et vie* 80, no. 6 (1981): 72–73; Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 115; Miguel Pérez Fernández, *Tradiciones Mesianicas en el Targum Palestinense*, Estudios Exegéticos Institución San Jerónimo 12 (Valencia-Jerusalem: Institución San Jerónimo-Casa de Santiago, 1981), 33–94.

that existed in the Jewish community of that day, and that the authors of these texts appropriated this interpretation of the passage to their respective compositions in accordance with their theological program.<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is, in fact, generally in line with the view articulated by Martin McNamara concerning New Testament and Targum studies: “All agree that it is not a question of the New Testament being dependent on the Targums (or rabbinic tradition) *but rather both being witnesses to an earlier Jewish tradition*” (my italics).<sup>7</sup> In other words, the common perspective of Gen 3:15 in the Targums and Rev 12 is neither a coincidence of history nor the product of literary interdependence; rather, it is the result of the incorporation of a messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15 that evidently obtained in early Jewish thought.

With a view to contribute to this discussion, the present analysis suggests that the fundamental starting point of this messianic perspective is the presupposition both within Rev 12 and the Targums that the enmity announced at Gen 3:15 is at its core a spiritual conflict, not a mere declaration of the animus between humans and snakes. Various ancient Jewish texts do understand Gen 3:15 to refer to a spiritual battle; other texts, meanwhile, seem to understand it to refer to a natural relationship of tension between snakes and humans.<sup>8</sup> In modern day biblical scholarship, moreover, while evangelical scholars often advocate for a spiritual battle within Gen 3:15, critical scholars contend that the passage is an etiology for the hostile relationship between snakes and humans.<sup>9</sup>

6. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 400. For other discussions of this issue, see McNamara, *New Testament and the Palestinian Targum*, 217–22; Morgen, “Apocalypse 12,” 63–74; and Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 466–67.

7. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 10. For more on methodology, see Shinan, 22–20 תרגום ואגדה בן; C. T. R. Hayward, “The Present State of Research into the Targumic Account of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 32 (1981): 127–50; Geza Vermes, “Jewish Literature and New Testament Exegesis: Reflections and Methodology,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 361–76; Bruce D. Chilton, *Judaic Approaches to the Gospels*, University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 2 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 305–15; Michael B. Shepherd, “Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 1 (2008): 45–58; Fleisher and Chilton, *Targums*, 385–408.

8. See remarks in Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 461–67; and a collection of texts in James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98–100.

9. See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 78–82; R. A. Martin, “The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *Journal for Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 425–27; Walter Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 36 (1974): 361–65; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 117–18; Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 256–61; T. Desmond Alexander, “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed*, ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 19–39; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 243–48; Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–48; John H. Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 1 (March 2001): 5–23; E.

However, a comparative analysis of Rev 12 and the Targums reveals that these texts interpret the enmity of Gen 3:15 to be a spiritual battle. In these texts, this perspective is indeed the foundation and the point of departure for the broader interpretation of Gen 3:15 as a messianic text. That is, the view that this enmity is spiritual warrants the appearance of the three messianic elements in Rev 12 and the Targums that Buisch considers in her study, as indicated above: 1) the integration of the law of God into the context of Gen 3:15; 2) the reference to the eschaton as the temporal point of culmination of this conflict; and 3) the mention of the Messiah during whose reign triumph is achieved. At the same time, while the spiritual nature of the conflict is presupposed, the natural animosity between the actual reptile of the Serpentes suborder is not always denied; rather, this natural animosity is in certain cases perceived to be a manifestation of the spiritual conflict.

Finally, the implication of all this for the composition of Rev 12 and the Targums is, as maintained by targumic scholars more generally, that this view of Gen 3:15 existed in various circles of the early Jewish community and was incorporated into the NT and into the Targums in accordance with each author's literary purposes and theological convictions.

### **The Spiritual Nature of the Conflict in the Targums**

The Targums are unequivocal in their perspective of Gen 3:15 that the nature of the conflict is fundamentally spiritual, albeit not to the exclusion of the physical facet of antagonism between snakes and humans. This spiritual aspect of the conflict manifests itself in various interpretative renderings within the targumic texts. The interpretative translation of the text, however, is not arbitrary or without literary grounds, from the perspective of the targumist. Rather, each rendition in the Aramaic is triggered by the specific articulation of the text in the Hebrew. Therefore, the targumist derives the Aramaic expansion from within the Hebrew text, as the analysis of each of the Pentateuchal Targums below demonstrates.<sup>10</sup>

A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 1 (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 21–28; Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 1:17n15.

10. For a thorough study of the exegesis in the Pentateuchal Targums, see Alexander Samely, *The Interpretation of Speech in the Pentateuch Targums: A Study of Method and Presentation in Targumic Exegesis*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

**Targum Onqelos**

MT	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel. <sup>11</sup>	וְאִיבְהוּ אֵלֶיךָ בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעְךָ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הוּא לְשׁוֹפֵךְ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפְנוּ עַקֵּב
Targum Onqelos	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your sons and her sons; he will remember what you did to him from the beginning, and you will keep [antagonism] toward him until the end. <sup>12</sup>	וּדְכַבּוּ אֲשׁוּי בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין אֵיתְתָא וּבֵין בָּנֶיךָ וּבֵין בְּנֵיהָ הוּא יְהִי דְכִיר מָא דְּעֵבַדַּת לִיה מִלְקַדְמִין וְאַתְתָּה תְּהִי נָטַר לִיה לְסוֹפָא:

The perspective that the conflict is spiritual reveals itself in Onqelos in its subtle but certain interpretative translation of and addition to the Hebrew text. In the final part of the verse, Onqelos renders the Hebrew “he will *strike you* on the head, and you will *strike him* on the heel” as “he will *remember what you did to him* from the beginning, and you will *keep [antagonism] toward him* until the end” (italics mine). These changes reflect a spiritual understanding of enmity on the part of Onqelos in two interrelated respects.

First, Onqelos interprets the root “strike” (שׁוּף) not as a physical action, in which the human stomps on the head of the snake or the snake snaps at the heel of the human, but as a cognitive experience of remembering (דְּכַר: “he will *remember* what you did to him”) and keeping (נָטַר: “you will keep [antagonism] toward him”). Explaining this translation, Grossfeld states that the word “strike” (שׁוּף) “was understood as the root שׁוּף—‘long for,’ and rendered by the somewhat related roots of ‘to remember’ and ‘to guard/sustain (in one’s heart).”<sup>13</sup> Thus, with respect to the human, the essence of the conflict pertains to the memory of the serpent executing concerted efforts to compel the first humans to disobey God.<sup>14</sup> And with respect to the serpent, the nature of the conflict refers to the serpent’s preservation of a particular, arguably negative, perspective toward the humans. While this perspective of the serpent is unspecified, the parallel structure between דְּכִיר and נָטַר implies an intellectual sense of נָטַר just as it is evident in דְּכִיר. In addition, while the targumic rendering does not make explicit

11. Compare with the NJPS translation.

12. Compare with translation in Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 6B, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 46 at Gen 3:15.

13. Grossfeld, *Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, 46n9. For additional remarks on the meaning of שׁוּף, see Wifall, “Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?” 364; McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 105 and 114–15; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

14. See also Shinan, 2:212. אגדתם של מתורגמנים; Pérez Fernández, *Tradiciones Mesiánicas en el Targum Palestinense*, 40–45.

what it is that the serpent will “keep” (נטר; i.e., lacking a direct object),<sup>15</sup> the context suggests that the reference pertains to the serpent’s act to entice Adam and Eve to disobey God. That is, the text to be supplied in this ellipsis is to be drawn from the preceding line—“you will keep [what you did, i.e., the antagonistic assault] toward him.” Note the structure in the table below:

He will remember <b>what you did</b> to him from the beginning, and you will keep [ <b>what you did</b> ] toward him until the end.	הוא יִהְיֶה דֹכִיר מֵאֵל דְּעִבְדַּת לִיהּ מִלְּקַדְמִין וְאֵת תְּהִי נִטְר [מֵאֵל דְּעִבְדַּת] לִיהּ לְסוּפָא:
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Thus the serpent will not simply strike at the offspring, but, more than this, preserve the antagonism that he expressed toward Adam and Eve in the garden.<sup>16</sup> In an analysis of this verse, Pérez Fernández understands this clause to mean that the serpent will be “lurking to do evil” (“Estar al acecho para hacer el mal”).<sup>17</sup> And in an English translation of this clause, Grossfeld supplies the term “hatred” in order to make the text clear, thus producing: “*you will sustain [your hatred] for it to the end.*”<sup>18</sup> In effect, Onqelos shifts the nature of the conflict from the physical “strike” (שוּרַף) to the cognitive “remember” (דֹכִיר) and “keep” (נטר), with spiritual implications at play in that the context of the passage relates to the obedience and disobedience of God.

Second, the targumic addition of the clause “what you did to him” (מֵאֵל דְּעִבְדַּת לִיהּ) casts the serpent’s act of compelling humankind to disobey God in a morally, that is to say spiritually, negative light specifically by the use of the verb “did” (עבד). The negative force of the verb appears first in God’s condemnatory interrogation of Eve at v. 13: “What is this you have *done*” (Heb: מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂית; Arm: מֵאֵל דָּא עִבְדַּת). Subsequent to this the verb reappears in God’s condemnatory exclamation to the serpent at v. 14: “Because you have *done* this, cursed are you...” (Heb: כִּי עָשִׂית זֹאת אָרְוִר אַתָּה; Arm: אָרִי אָרִי עִבְדַּת דָּא לִיט אַת). Thus when the targumist adds the clause at v. 15 that Eve’s offspring will remember “what you *did* to him” (מֵאֵל דְּעִבְדַּת לִיהּ), the statement bears the force of condemnation on account of its function within the preceding two statements of God.

While the changes are slight, Onqelos’s perspective of the hostility at Gen 3:15 nonetheless is clear—that the hostility is more than natural; it is spiritual.

15. Compare with Onqelos Deut 5:10, 12; 27:1; Targum 1 Sam 30:23; Targum Ruth 1:13.

16. For a helpful discussion on parallel structure, see Edward L. Greenstein, “How Does Parallelism Mean?” in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature*, Papers from a Symposium at the Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, May 11, 1982, A Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 41–70.

17. Pérez Fernández, *Tradiciones Mesiánicas en el Targum Palestinense*, 180.

18. Italics original. Grossfeld, *Onqelos to Genesis*, 46 at Gen 3:15.

**Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan**

MT	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel.	וְאִיבָהוּ אֲשִׁית בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעְךָ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הוּא יִשְׁפֹּךְ לְאֵשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁפָּנּוּ עַקֵּב
Targum Neofiti	And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your sons and her sons. <sup>19</sup> And it will come about that when her sons keep the Law and do the commandments, they will aim at you and strike you on your head and kill you. But when they forsake the commandments of the Law, you will aim and bite him on the heel and make him ill. However, for her son, <sup>20</sup> there will be healing, but for you, O serpent, there will not be healing, inasmuch as they are destined to make appeasement <sup>21</sup> in the end, in the day of the king messiah. <sup>22</sup>	ובעל דבבו אשוי בינג ובין איתתה ובין בניך ובין בנה ויהוי כד יהוון בניה נטרין אורייתא ועבדין פקודייה יהוון מתכוונין לך ומחייי יתך לראשך וקטלין יתך וכד יהוון שבקין פקודי דאורייתא תהוי מתכוין ונכת יתיה בעקבה וממרע יתיה ברם לבריה יהוי אסו ולך חויה לא יהוי אסו דעתידין אינון מעבד שפיותיה בעוקבה ביומא דמלכא משיחא:

19. Literally, “I will put an enemy...” (see Num 35:21–22). See comments in Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1A, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 61n11; B. Barry Levy, *Targum Neophyti 1: A Textual Study*, Studies in Judaism (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 1:96; Roger Le Déaut with Jacques Robert, eds. and trans., *Targum du pentateuque: Traduction des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes avec introduction, parallèles, notes et index*, Genèse, Sources Chrétiennes 245 (Paris: Latour-Baubourg, 1978), 94n10.

20. For challenges in translating לבריה as a singular or as a plural, see McNamara, *Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 61n12; McNamara, *New Testament and the Palestinian Targum*, 219–20; and see a suggestion that this might indicate messianic implications in Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 395.

21. For challenges in translating שפיותיה as “peace,” “appeasement,” “remedy,” “cure,” or “crushing,” see McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 116n12; Michael Maher, ed. and trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1B, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 28n28; David Rieder and Mordechai Zamir, תרגום יונתן בן עוזיאל על התורה, מתורגם לעברית עם באורים ציוני מקורות ומקבילות: בראשית- שמות (Jerusalem: Miryam Rieder, 1984), 15 at Gen 3:15; Shinan, 22, 50; Marcus Jastrow, “שְׁפִיּוֹת,” in *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Luzac & Co., 1903), 1567; and Jastrow, “שְׁפִי, שְׁפִי,” in *A Dictionary of the Targumim*, 1614–15; Michael Sokoloff, “שְׁפִי” and “שְׁפִיּוֹ,” *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2nd ed. (Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 563.

22. See the translation in McNamara, *Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 61 at Gen 3:15; and see similar text in the Fragment Targums and in the Neofiti Marginalia.



<p>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</p>	<p>And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between the offspring of your sons and the offspring of her sons. And it will come about that when the sons of the woman keep the commandments of the Law, they will aim and strike you on your head. But when they forsake the commandments of the Law, you will aim and bite them on their heels. However, for them there will be healing, but for you there will not be healing, as they are destined to make appeasement in the end, in the day of the king messiah.<sup>23</sup></p>	<p>ודבבו אישוי בינך ובין איתתא בין זרעית בנך ובין זרעית בנהא ויהי כד יהוון בנהא דאיתתא נטרין מצוותא דאורייתא יהוון מכוונין ומחייין יתך על רישך וכד שבקיין מצוותא דאורייתא תהוי מתכוונין ונכית יתהוון בעיקביהוון ברם להוון יהי אסו ולך לא יהי אסו ועתידין הינון למיעבד שפיותא בעיקבא ביומי מלכא משיחא</p>
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Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan, introducing interpretative expansions that are similar to each other, indicate even more definitively that their understanding of the hostility at Gen 3:15 is more than merely natural. However, in these two Targums the natural aspect of the conflict does remain.<sup>24</sup>

The spiritual element is added to this battle in both Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan in that the battle is conditioned by the practice of keeping or not keeping the commandments of the law, a condition that the biblical text lacks. On the one hand, the sons of the woman will strike the serpent when they keep the law. Thus Neofiti reads: “And it will come about that *when her sons keep the Law and do the commandments*, they will aim at you and strike you on your head and kill you”; and Pseudo-Jonathan states: “And it will come about that *when the sons of the woman keep the commandments of the Law*, they will aim and strike you on your head” (italics mine).<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, when the sons of the woman do not keep the law, the serpent will attack them. Neofiti reads: “*But when they forsake the commandments of the Law*, you will aim and bite him on the heel and make him ill”; and Pseudo-Jonathan states: “*But when they forsake the commandments of the Law*, you will aim and bite them on their heels” (italics mine). This integration of the law into the context of the battle portrays the battle as being governed by the relationship of the sons of the woman to the law of God. McNamara remarks that this expansion correlates with the Jewish theological concept that “one’s eternal destiny was determined by

23. See the translation in Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 28 at Gen 3:15.

24. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 393. The plural nouns and verbs in these texts indicate that the targumists understood the singular forms in the Hebrew (“he” הוא; “will strike” יִשׁוּף; etc.) to function as collectives; but regarding the singular understanding of offspring in Neofiti, see footnote 20 above.

25. Italicized text represents the targumic additions.

one's attitude to the Law."<sup>26</sup> And in another work he notes that "The belief that the righteous would be rewarded for their good deeds and that the wicked would be punished for their sins was, of course, commonplace in Jewish literature."<sup>27</sup>

The actual incorporation of the expanded text into these two Targums, just as in Onqelos, is intricately linked to the words that appear in the Hebrew text. Thus the trigger that prompted the expansions concerning the commandments of the law is the verb "strike" (שׂוּף). While the verb is retained in the verse and rendered as "strike" with respect to the sons, and "bite" with respect to the serpent, the verb is also reinterpreted and linked directly to the practice of the keeping of the law. Maher explains that the similarity of the root שׂוּף ("to strike") to the root שׂוּף ("to pant") triggered and allowed for the expansion concerning the law. He writes:

The idea of "keeping" (Nf, Ps.-J.) or "toiling in" (Nfmg, P, V, N, L) the Law seems to have been introduced into this verse because the *meturgemanim* took the verb שׂוּף in *יִשְׂוּפְךָ רִשְׁ*, "he shall bruise your head," to be derived from שׂוּף, "gasp, pant," which they took to refer to the striving and the effort required in the observance of the Torah. By then linking the verb שׂוּף with the same verb שׂוּף in the sense of "pant after, long for," and thus "strive to reach a goal," the *meturgemanim* (Nf, P, V, N, L, Ps.-J.; cf. Nfmg) derive the idea of "take aim" from *יִשְׂוּפְךָ* and *תִּשְׂוּפְנִי*, "he/you shall bruise."<sup>28</sup>

In other words, upon linking שׂוּף and שׂוּף, evidently due to the phonetic similarity between the words, the targumists then applied שׂוּף specifically to a desire for the law. Indeed, this very usage of שׂוּף appears at Psa 119:131: "I open my mouth and *pant*, for I long for Your commandments" *פִּי-פָעַרְתִּי וְאֶשְׁאָפָה כִּי לְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ יִאֲבָהּ* (ESV; italics mine).<sup>29</sup> This type of interpretive procedure conceivably served as the grounds for the expansion that the battle between the sons of the woman and the serpent is not

26. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 209, and see page 115. For a sampling of the theological relationship between success and obedience to the law in targumic thought, see Pseudo-Jonathan Gen 3:24; 4:8; 15:1; 17; 25:23; 27:40 (also Neofiti and Onqelos); 30:18; 38:25; 39:10; 49:1; Pseudo-Jonathan Num 24:14; Neofiti Deut 33:29. Note also the Hebrew text of Deut 28 and 30:15–18. For comments, see Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 30n58; McNamara, *Neofiti I: Genesis*, 61n13; Le Déaut with Robert, *Targum du pentateuque*, 94n10; Morgen, "Apocalypse 12," 72–73; A. Melinek, "The Doctrine of Reward and Punishment in Biblical and Early Rabbinic Writings," in *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. J. Zimmels, J. Rabbinowitz, and L. Finestein (London: Soncino, 1967), 275–90; C. T. R. Hayward, "A Portrait of the Wicked Esau in the Targum of Neofiti 1," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 291–301; R. P. Gordon, "The Targumists as Eschatologists," in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977*, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 113–30.

27. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 30n58.

28. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 27n27; and see Shinan, 213–2:211, אגדתם של מתורגמנים.

29. See *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. "שׂוּף"; See also Isa 42:14; Job 5:5; 7:2; 36:20; Jer 2:24; 14:6; Ecc 1:5.

merely natural antagonism between humans and serpents, but that this battle is rather governed by the sons' success or failure to keep the law.

As noted above, however, while the targumists reinterpret the root שׁוּף “to strike” as שׂאף “to pant,” they nonetheless also proceed to include the meaning of the actual root שׁוּף “to strike” with respect to the sons and with respect to the serpent, thus providing a double translation of this verb—on the one hand, as “to keep the law,” deriving from שׂאף, and on the other, as “to strike,” deriving from שׁוּף.<sup>30</sup> David Golomb refers to this approach as “creative exploitation of ambiguity,” where instead of choosing one translation, the targumists “pick ‘both-and.’”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the sons will “strike” the serpent on the head if they keep the law (Ps-J: וּמַחֲיִין יִתֵּךְ עַל רִישֶׁךְ), or, alternatively, the serpent will “bite” the sons at their heels if they do not keep the law (Ps-J: וּנְכִיתָ יִתְהוֹן בְּעִיקְבֵיהוֹן). With this reworking of the text, while the nature of the battle is elevated to the realm of the spiritual (i.e., keeping the law), the physical aspect of the battle remains, and, in fact, serves as the practical outworking of the spiritual state of the conflict.

In the end, assessment of the targumic rendering of Gen 3:15 demonstrates that, in the view of the targumists the conflict announced at Gen 3:15 is at its core a spiritual, not merely a natural, conflict.

### **The Spiritual Nature of the Conflict at Revelation 12:17**

Very much a comparable perspective of the conflict of Gen 3:15 is expressed in the NT at Rev 12:17 in a manner that parallels the targumic text in various ways. Two specific elements at 12:17 represent this congruity with the Targums: 1) the perception that the serpent is more than a mere snake, in fact, a spiritual personality; and 2) the association of the woman's offspring with the commandments of God, similar to the text of the Targums.

30. Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 27, n. 27; Shinan, 213–2:211; אגדתם של מתורגמנים, Pérez Fernández, *Tradiciones Mesiánicas en el Targum Palestinense*, 44–47.

31. David Golomb, “Ambiguity in the Pentateuchal Targumim,” in *Textual and Contextual Studies in the Pentateuchal Targums*, Targum Studies 1, ed. Paul V. M. Flesher (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992), 141; see also Levy, *Targum Neophyti 1*, 52–53.

**Revelation 12:17**

<p>Rev 12:17</p>	<p><sup>17</sup> Then the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.</p>	<p><sup>17</sup> καὶ ὀργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.</p>
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The first element at 12:17 that reveals the text’s presupposition that the conflict of Gen 3:15 is spiritual is the perspective of Rev 12 that the serpent of Gen 3 and the devil, Satan, and the dragon are one and the same spiritual personality. While 12:17 mentions “the dragon” (ὁ δράκων) without further specification, Rev 12:9 explicitly identifies the dragon as the devil (Διάβολος), Satan (Σατανᾶς), and “that ancient serpent” (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος). On the one hand, this identification of the dragon forges a clear connection to Gen 3, in that the dragon is described with the lexical term “serpent” (ὄφις), which corresponds to the term used to describe the serpent in Gen 3 (cf. Heb: שָׁרָפ; LXX: ὄφις).<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the depiction of this dragon as a spiritual personality demonstrates that Rev 12, with 12:17 included, imagines the serpent of Gen 3 to be more than a mere snake. Admittedly, such an explicit identification of the serpent is absent from the Targums. Nevertheless, as noted above, Onqelos does hint that the serpent wields the cognitive faculty of keeping antagonism toward the offspring. Overall, however, this suggests that while the Targums and Rev 12 share the broader view that the conflict is spiritual, the Targums do not follow the exact same reading of the serpent within Gen 3 vis-à-vis Rev 12.<sup>33</sup>

The second element at 12:17 that points to the text’s view that the conflict is spiritual is the text’s association of the woman’s offspring with the commandments of God. On the one hand, Rev 12:17 draws a direct link to Gen 3 in employing the specific term “offspring” (σπέρμα), which corresponds to the Hebrew equivalent זָרַע and which serves as the antecedent to the pronoun הֵן at Gen 3:15. Aune points out that, “The phrase τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς, literally, ‘her seed,’ is a very unusual expression, for ‘seed’ or ‘offspring’ are normally associated with a male progenitor”; and so he interprets this feature to be a point of connection to Gen 3:15, in which the offspring

32. For some discussion on the serpent in Gen 3 and Rev 12, see Morgen, “Apocalypse 12,” 65–67; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 98–100; and Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 461–63.

33. But note Pseudo-Jonathan’s introduction of the adversarial angel Sammael at Gen 3:6, to whom Maher refers as a “hostile and destructive being” (Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 26n8). See Pseudo-Jonathan Gen 4:1; and for further reference, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd ed., trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003), 2:1389–90.

is specifically associated with Eve.<sup>34</sup> Osborne, adding to this conclusion, observes that “σπέρμα... is found only here in the book and alludes to Gen. 3:15.”<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Rev 12:17 reveals its presupposition that the battle is of spiritual kind in that this offspring is described as “those who keep *the commandments of God* and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ; cf. 14:12; italics mine).<sup>36</sup> This statement articulates the fact that the serpent is executing a battle against a very specific group of individuals—those who keep the commandments of God.<sup>37</sup> As noted in the discussion on the Targums, placing this conflict in the context of the law of God indicates that this conflict is not one that is defined merely by the natural hostility between the humans and the snakes; rather, the essence of the battle is spiritual in that the dragon’s (i.e., the serpent’s) hostility is strategically aimed at those who demonstrate their obedience to God.

Therefore, as in the case of the Targums discussed above, so in the case of Rev 12:17, the perspective of Gen 3:15 is that the conflict is of spiritual nature.

### **The Implications of the Parallels between Revelation 12:17 and the Targums on Genesis 3:15**

Furthermore, the analogous reference to the offspring who keep the commandments both at Rev 12:17 and within the Targums raises questions about the literary relationship between these two literary corpora. Is the NT borrowing from the Targums? Are the Targums relying on the NT? Are they independently drawing on a tradition of their time? Buisch states that “Targumic borrowing from the New Testament is highly implausible ... and New Testament borrowing from the Targums is impossible since the New Testament antedates the Targums as we have them.”<sup>38</sup> How then is this shared perspective to be explained? Ultimately, analysis of the similarities and differences in the presentation of this tradition within the Targums and at Rev 12:17 reinforces the scholarly view that both the NT and the Targums adopted an already existing interpretation of Gen 3:15, which, in this case, relates specifically to the perception that the conflict is spiritual.<sup>39</sup>

34. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Dallas: Word, 1998), 708; and G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 679; and Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 397n32; but see also Michael Rydellnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 135n19.

35. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 485.

36. Osborne, *Revelation*, 485–86.

37. Note Johnston’s discussion of the plural understanding of offspring at Rev 12:17 and its relationship to the singular pronoun  $\text{הוּ}$  “he”(?) at Gen 3:15 in Johnston, “Messiah and Genesis 3:15,” 469–71; and see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 679.

38. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 389; and see footnote 7 above.

39. See McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 10. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 400.

Considering these questions on a broader level between Rev 12 and the targumic expansions of Gen 3:15, Buisch points to various similarities and differences between these compositions and contends that these two literary corpora do share a common interpretation of Gen 3:15, but without evidence of literary dependence. The similarities she identifies include the appearance of the same characters (a woman, a serpent, the Messiah, and the offspring who keep the commandments); the parallels in plot (a deadly conflict between the woman/woman’s offspring and the serpent; and the eventual defeat of the serpent); and a common temporal setting (the eschatological time-period).<sup>40</sup> The differences she notes are: the relationship between the woman and the messiah (as to whether or not he is the son of the woman); the outcome of the offspring’s obedience (as to whether they execute an attack on the serpent or endure an attack by the serpent/dragon);<sup>41</sup> the reference to healing and appeasement in the eschaton; the description of the battle in heaven; the mention of Jesus; and the distinct rendering of the term “offspring” נָרַע in each composition—the figurative sense in σπέρματος “offspring” in Rev 12, in contrast to the concrete sense in בנהא/בניה “sons” in the Targums.<sup>42</sup>

To this analysis we may add a few similarities and differences specifically with reference to the offspring who keep the commandments at Rev 12:17 and in the Targums (except Onqelos, which lacks this expansion). Consider the textual elements of this reference in the table below:

study the Law and keep the commands	לעיין באוריתא ונטרין פיקודיא <sup>43</sup>	Fragment Targums
keep the Law and do the commands	נטרין אורייתא ועבדין פקודייה	Neofiti
keep the commandments of the Law	נטרין מצוותא דאורייתא	Pseudo-Jonathan
those who keep the commandments of God	τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ	Rev 12:17

As regards the similarities, two observations are in order. First, all the renditions share the interpretation that the offspring is a plurality, inasmuch as the participles used to refer to the offspring are consistently plural (עבדין; נטרין; לעיין; and τηρούντων), whereas the grammatical number of the offspring at Gen 3:15 is ambiguous (if not

40. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 397–98.

41. See comments in Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 393, 399; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 708; and Osborne, *Revelation*, 485.

42. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 398–99. Buisch infers that “The use of σπέρμα in Rev 12:17 shows that this source had not been influenced by the Targumic agenda to concretize and remove any metaphor, in which case τέκνον or υἱός would have been the term of choice” (400; and see 391).

43. Neofiti Marginalia yields the same text here.

singular, i.e., הוּא).<sup>44</sup> Second, all the renditions employ the equivalent of the locution “keep” to communicate the idea of obeying the law (נטר in Aramaic and the corresponding τηρέω in Greek). These subtle similarities add to the contention that a common perspective of Gen 3:15 lies beneath these formulations of the text.

As regards the differences, three comments are in order. First, the targumic texts all use verbal participles to describe the offspring’s act of observing the law (נטרין; לעיין; נטריין; עבדין), while Rev 12:17 uses an attributive participle to convey the same idea (τῶν τηρούντων).<sup>45</sup> Second, two different patterns of syntactic structure are employed to convey a similar notion of observing the law. On the one hand, the Fragment Targums and Neofiti use two clauses conjoined by the conjunction *waw* with nearly the same diction. On the other, Pseudo-Jonathan and Rev 12:17 use one clause that manifests a similar structure and similar diction—the participles נטריין and τῶν τηρούντων represent the action “keep” in the first position; the direct objects מצוותא and τὰς ἐντολὰς represent the noun “commandments” in the second position; and the prepositional phrases דאורייתא and τοῦ θεοῦ represent the modifiers “of the Law” and “of God,” respectively, in the third position. Third, while the Targums make reference to the Law (אורייתא) and to the commandments (מצוותא), they do not explicitly associate these with God. In contrast, Rev 12:17 makes the link between the commandments and God explicit (τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ), while also adding the particular remark about the offspring’s commitment “to the testimony of Jesus” (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ). Thus the distinct features within each expression of the text exhibit evidence of literary independence on the part of the author of each composition.

In the end, the combined assessment of these similarities and differences suggests that, a common tradition of Gen 3:15 does seem to sustain the renderings of the Targums and Rev 12:17; however, literary dependence seems not to be in effect between these compositions. Articulating this conclusion in a helpful manner, Buisch writes that “both the New Testament and the Targums presuppose a comparable understanding of the same biblical text but without sharing exact wording.”<sup>46</sup>

44. Shepherd, “Targums,” 52; and see Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 83–89.

45. Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 90–95, §3.4.3; David M. Golomb, *A Grammar of Targum Neofiti*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 34 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press: 1985), 121–22; Edward Morgan Cook, *Rewriting the Bible: The Text and Language of the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum* (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1986), 190–91 and 217–19; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 612–55, especially 618; David L. Mathewson and Elodie B. Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 205–26.

46. Buisch, “Rest of Her Offspring,” 400.

## **Conclusion**

A comparative analysis of Rev 12:17 and the Pentateuchal Targums demonstrates that these two bodies of texts share a common understanding of the conflict at Gen 3:15—that the conflict is more than merely natural; indeed, that it is a spiritual conflict. This perspective is in fact the interpretive foundation and the point of departure for the larger messianic interpretation that Gen 3:15 receives at Rev 12:17 and in the Targums. For it is this perspective that sustains the integration of the law of God, the reference to the eschaton, and the inclusion of the Messiah into the context of Gen 3:15. The fact that this view of the conflict appears in both of these literary compositions suggests that this understanding of Gen 3:15 existed in the early Jewish community prior to the production of these texts, and that this interpretation was ultimately incorporated into Rev 12 and into the Targums in accordance with their literary and theological program.<sup>47</sup>

47. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 10.



