

Another 'I Have Come' Saying from Ancient Judaism

A Note on *De Sampson* 13

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Abstract

This article adds a further early example of the 'I have come' + purpose formula, as used frequently in early Jewish literature by angelic visitors to earth. This case and other instances already known are relevant to the question of whether pre-existence Christology is implied in the parallel statements of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.

1. Introduction

In *The Preexistent Son* (2006), I sought to make the argument that the closest and most numerous parallels to Jesus's 'I have come' sayings in the Synoptic Gospels were statements made by angels in ancient Judaism.¹ Frequently in Jewish literature, angels declare 'I have come' + purpose, thereby implying that they have come from somewhere to fulfil a particular mission, which is the reason for their earthly visit. Similarly, when Jesus announced his presence with 'I have come' + purpose, he was stating that he had come from somewhere to fulfil the goals of his earthly ministry. In these statements, Jesus was not referring to quotidian local comings (e.g. to Capernaum or to Nazareth); these sayings were about his whole mission, as is clear in e.g. 'I have come to cast fire on the earth', or 'I have not come to abolish [the Law and the Prophets] but to fulfil them' (Luke 12:49; Matt 5:17). I discussed in *The Preexistent Son* a

1. Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 83-189.

number of such angelic passages from ancient Judaism, beginning with the various instances in the book of Daniel.

I have recently discovered another early instance, in the Pseudo-Philonic sermon *On Samson* (*De Sampson*). This is a homily on the life of Samson, surviving only in Armenian.² In line with its transmission in the Armenian Philonic corpus, the first editor of this text assigned the work to Philo, thus putting it in the first century.³ Although now no longer attributed to Philo of Alexandria, the sermon *On Samson* (along with the similar *On Jonah*) is still regarded as an early Jewish production. Folker Siegert, who has worked most on these texts, offers variously a broader timeframe ('im 1. vorchristlichen bis 2. christlichen Jahrhundert'),⁴ and a narrower one, specifically 'the time of Philo',⁵ and Günter Stemberger also places them in the first century.⁶ The editors of the Sources Chrétiennes edition (including Siegert) give broad termini from the second century BCE to the fourth century CE, concluding 'en faveur d'une datation au temps de Philon et du Nouveau Testament'.⁷ The recent English translation, of

2. Royse notes one Greek quotation. See James R. Royse, *The Spurious Texts of Philo of Alexandria* (AGJU 22; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 89-92, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004332058>, on the Greek of *De Samp*. 20.

3. Joannes Baptista Aucher [Mkrtič' Awgerean], ed. and tr., *Philonis Judaei paralipomena Armena: Libri videlicet quatuor in Genesin, libri duo in Exodum, sermo unus de Sampson, alter de Jona, tertius de tribus angelis Abraamo apparentibus, opera hactenus inedita, ex Armena versione antiquissima ab ipso originali textu Graeco ad verbum stricte exequuta saeculo V. nunc primum in Latium fideliter translata* (Venice: Typis coenobii PP. Armenorum in insula S. Lazari, 1826). On the Armenian transmission of the Philonic Corpus, see e.g. Sara Mancini Lombardi and Paola Pontani, eds. *Studies on the Ancient Armenian Version of Philo's Works* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004203785>.

4. Folker Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten. Ps.-Philon, „Über Jona“, „Über Jona“ (Fragment) und „Über Simson“, Bd. 2: Kommentar nebst Beobachtungen zur hellenistischen Vorgeschichte der Bibelhermeneutik* (WUNT 61; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 48, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-157289-0>.

5. Folker Siegert, 'Hellenistic Jewish Midrash, III', in Jacob Neusner and Alan Avery-Peck, eds. *Encyclopaedia of Midrash: Volume 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 232-249 (242), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004531345_016; similarly, Folker Siegert, 'The Sermon as an Invention of Hellenistic Judaism', in Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka, and Heinz-Günther Schöttler, eds. *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 37, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110205244.25>.

6. Günter Stemberger, 'Response', in Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka, and Heinz-Günther Schöttler, eds. *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 46, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110205244.45>.

7. Folker Siegert and Jacques de Roulet, avec la collaboration de J.-J. Aubert et N. Cochand, *Pseudo-Philon: Prédications synagogales. Traduction, notes et commentaire* (Sources

Muradyan and Topchyan, follows this in favouring a cautious approach, again dating *De Sampson* sometime between the second century BCE and the fourth century CE.⁸ The consensus is that it is a non-Christian, Jewish work.⁹

2. *De Sampson* 13.1

The account of Samson in the Bible begins with his parents, the Danite Manoah of Zorah and his wife, who were unable to have children (Judg 13:2). An angel of the Lord first visits the future mother of Samson (Judg 13:3-5; cf. *De Samp.* 6), then comes to her again, during which visit Manoah joins them (Judg 13:9-21; cf. *De Samp.* 11-19). In the course of this second visit, the angel addresses Manoah as follows, in the version in *De Sampson*:

[1] 'He who is now before you was also seen by your wife; *I have come to give you good news about a gift* (եւ եկի ձեզ աւետարանել ստացուած). [2] For the Supporter of everyone in trouble (the only One who can relieve hardship and give commands to nature), having seen your marriage infertile due to the obstinacy of nature, dispatched me for two purposes: to open the closed doors of nature, and fulfil the wish of child-loving souls.' (*De Samp.* 13.1-2; tr. Muradyan and Topchyan)¹⁰

Other translations have a similar coming + purpose clause in 13.1. The *editio princeps* offers a Latin rendering, employing a participle and gerundive:

Qui nunc a te videor, ab uxore quoque tua visus sum, veniens ad annunciandam vobis possessionem. (Aucher)¹¹

Chrétien 435; Paris: Cerf, 1999), 34-35, 37 and ('approximativement un contemporain de Philon') 39.

8. Gohar Muradyan and Aram Topchyan, 'Pseudo-Philo, *On Samson* and *On Jonah*', in Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds. *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 750-803 (750), following Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* (vol. 2), 40.

9. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* (vol. 2), 40: 'Die Identität des Verfassers bleibt also ungeklärt. Lediglich, daß es sich um (einen) Juden handelt, ist seit den ersten Bearbeitern, A.F. Dähne, C.G.L. Großmann, Jacob Freudenthal u.a. unbestritten.' This is true of all the current scholarship I have seen, although Lieu rightly cautions: 'as in other recent studies, these texts too could participate in the debate as to how we determine both date and the labels "Jewish" or "Christian"'. See Judith Lieu, review of *Pseudo-Philon: Prédications synagogales*, by Folker Siegert and Jacques de Roulet, *JJS* 52 (2001): 160-161 (161), <https://doi.org/10.18647/2321/JJS-2001>.

10. Muradyan and Topchyan, 'Pseudo-Philo, *On Samson*', 760.

11. Aucher, *Philonis Judaei paralipomena Armena*, 556.

Siegert attempts in his translation not to translate the Armenian as such, but to translate the supposed Greek *Vorlage*:¹²

„Ich, den du jetzt vor dir siehst und den deine Frau (bereits) sah, bin ein Bote [statt „und ich kam“], der euch einen Zuwachs ankündigt.“¹³

Noting that the Armenian reads ‘und ich kam’, Siegert has nevertheless repackaged the German producing a translation of his retroversion. The French translation is similar, effectively a translation of Siegert’s German:

«Celui que tu vois devant toi et que ta femme a déjà vu est un messager qui t’annonce un progéniture.»¹⁴

Despite the varied syntax of modern versions, the Armenian appears clearly to contain ‘I have come’ + purpose clause. I am very grateful for the assistance of James Clackson (Jesus College, Cambridge) and Bert Vaux (King’s College, Cambridge) on the Armenian.¹⁵ The key elements for the argument here are the main verb and the infinitival complement.

Main verb:	եկի (<i>eki</i>)	1st sing. aor.	‘I have come’
Complement:	աւետարանել (<i>awetaranel</i>)	inf.	‘to announce’

As in Greek, the infinitive after verbs of motion in Armenian commonly indicates purpose.¹⁶ That is, just as in the other examples of this literary tradition, the angel declares ‘I have come’ + purpose.¹⁷

12. Folker Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten. Ps.-Philon, „Über Jona“, „Über Simson“ und „Über die Gottesbezeichnung ‚wohlthätig verzehrendes Feuer‘“*, Bd. 1: *Übersetzung aus dem Armenischen und sprachliche Erläuterungen* (WUNT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-157397-2>.

13. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* (vol. 1), 58.

14. Siegert and de Roulet, *Pseudo-Philon: Prédications synagogales*, 114. This similarly has the aim of capturing the Greek *Vorlage*, rather than being a literal translation (45).

15. I have also made use of Robert W. Thomson, *An Introduction to Classical Armenian* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1989).

16. See Antoine Meillet, *Altarmenisches Elementarbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1913), 111, and Hans Jensen, *Altarmenische Grammatik* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1959), 215, citing quotidian examples (Matt. 28.1 and 2.2 respectively) of *ἔρχομαι* + purpose translated by the Armenian եկ- + inf. as above.

17. Indeed, the Armenian of *De Sampson* here mirrors very closely the wording of the ‘I have come’ sayings in the Armenian Synoptic Gospels: եկի + infinitive of purpose is used in Mk 2.17/Matt. 9.12/Lk. 5.32; Matt. 5.17 (*bis*); 10.34-35 (*tris*); Lk. 12.49, 51. See <https://bible.armeniancathedral.org/index.htm>.

3. Conclusion

The significance of this example of the angelic 'I have come' + purpose formula is that it is one of the earliest instances, and one of those closest in time to the New Testament authors. Earlier examples can be found in the books of Daniel and Tobit (Dan 9:22-23; 10:12,14,20; 11:2 [OG]; Tob 5:5 [N]),¹⁸ but – depending on when the *De Sampson* is dated – it may be the next case before 4 Ezra 6.30; 7.2 and 2 Baruch 71.3.¹⁹ This example from *De Sampson* 13 might therefore further bolster the case that the Synoptic 'I have come' + purpose sayings have angelic resonances and therefore point to Jesus' coming from heaven, with the resulting implications for the pre-existence of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels.²⁰

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18. The examples in Dan. 9:22-23 and 10:14 also follow the pattern of using եկի + inf. to express 'I have come' + purpose in the Armenian Bible.

19. Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*, 119-124.

20. In addition to my thanks to James Clackson and Bert Vaux noted above, I am very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful input.

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