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Psalm 130:4–6

A Comparative Analysis of the Iuxta Hebraeos and Iuxta LXX Renderings in the Vulgate

Michael Fieger

Professor emeritus of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Theological Faculty of Chur, Switzerland.
Editor of the German Tusculum Vulgate and Co-director of the Vulgate Institute.

michael.fieger@thchur.ch GND 120145340 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8220-3383

ABSTRACT • This study examines the translation and interpretation of verses 4–6 of Psalm 130 (Vg 129) in both the *iuxta Hebraeos* and *iuxta LXX* traditions, comparing them with the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, the Hexapla, and the Vetus Latina. Special attention is given to the linguistic and interpretative nuances of the Latin renderings—particularly in expressions such as *a vigilia matutina usque ad vigiliam matutinam* (verse 6)—and their theological and literary implications, while exploring Jerome's rationale for these divergent translations. This research is part of a broader project that aims to produce a comprehensive commentary on the Psalms, with a particular focus on the interaction between the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate's two distinct translation traditions.

KEYWORDS • Psalm 130 (129)– Jerome – Vulgate – iuxta Hebraeos – iuxta LXX – Septuagint – Masoretic Text – forgiveness – hope

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG • Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Übersetzung und Auslegung der Verse 4–6 von Psalm 130 (Vg 129) in den beiden Traditionen *iuxta Hebraeos* und *iuxta LXX* und vergleicht sie mit dem masoretischen Text, der Septuaginta, der Hexapla und der Vetus Latina. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit gilt den sprachlichen und exegetischen Nuancen der lateinischen Fassungen – namentlich in Wendungen wie *a vigilia matutina usque ad vigiliam matutinam* (Vers 6) – sowie deren theologischen und literarischen Implikationen; zugleich werden Hieronymus' Beweggründe für diese divergierenden Übersetzungen erörtert. Diese Untersuchung ist Teil eines übergeordneten Projekts, das auf die Erstellung eines umfassenden Psalmenkommentars abzielt und die Wechselwirkungen zwischen dem masoretischen Text, der Septuaginta und den beiden unterschiedlichen Übersetzungstraditionen der Vulgata in den Mittelpunkt stellt.

SCHLAGWORTE • Psalm 130 (129) – Hieronymus – Vulgata – iuxta Hebraeos – iuxta LXX – Septuaginta – Masoretischer Text – Vergebung – Hoffnung

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Introduction

Jerome translated Psalm 130 (129) twice—first from the Greek Septuagint and years later directly from the Hebrew Masoretic Text. For the most part, the two Latin versions (often referred to as the Vulgate *iuxta LXX* and Vulgate *iuxta Hebraeos*) are identical in wording. Verses 1–3 and 7–8 present no significant differences between the two translations. However, verses 4–6 exhibit notable philological and theological differences that merit close analysis.

Ps 130 MT	Ps 129 Vg iuxta Hebr.	Ps 129 Vg iuxta LXX	Ps 129 LXX
[1] שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעֲמַקִּים קְרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה׃	[1] *Canticum graduum* De profundis clamavi ad te Domine	[1] *Canticum graduum* De profundis clamavi ad te Domine	[1] Ὠιδὴ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν. Ἐκ βαθέων ἐκέκραξά σε, κύριε
[2] אֲדֹנָי שִׁמְעָה בְקוֹלִי תִּהְיֶינָה אָזְנֶיךָ קַשֻּׁבוֹת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי׃	[2] Domine exaudi vocem meam fiant aures tuae intendentes ad vocem deprecationis meae	[2] Domine exaudi vocem meam fiant aures tuae intendentes in vocem deprecationis meae	[2] κύριε, εἰσάκουσον τῆς φωνῆς μου· γενηθήτω τὰ ὦτά σου προσέχοντα εἰς τὴν φωνὴν τῆς δεήσεώς μου.
[3] אִם־עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמָר־יָהּ אֲדֹנָי מִי יַעֲמֹד׃	[3] si iniquitates observabis Domine Domine quis sustinebit	[3] si iniquitates observabis Domine Domine quis sustinebit	[3] ἐὰν ἀνομίας παρατηρήσῃ, κύριε, κύριε, τίς ὑποστήσεται;
[4] כִּי־עִמְּךָ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּוָּרֵא׃	[4] quia tecum est propitiatio cum terribilis sis	[4] quia apud te propitiatio est propter legem tuam	[4] ὅτι παρὰ σοὶ ὁ ἱλασμός ἐστιν. [5] ἕνεκεν τοῦ νόμου σου
[5] קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה קִוְּתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחָלְתִּי׃	sustinui Dominum sustinuit anima mea et verbum eius expectavi	sustinui te Domine sustinuit anima mea in verbum eius [5] speravit	ὑπέμεινά σε, κύριε, ὑπέμεινεν ἡ ψυχή μου εἰς τὸν λόγον σου. [6] ἤλπισεν
[6] נַפְשִׁי לַאדֹנָי מִשֹּׁמְרִים לַבֹּקֶר שֹׁמְרִים לַבֹּקֶר׃	[5] anima mea ad Dominum [6] a vigilia matutina usque ad vigiliam matutinam	anima mea in Domino [6] a custodia matutina usque ad noctem	ἡ ψυχή μου ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἀπὸ φυλακῆς πρωίας μέχρι νυκτός· ἀπὸ φυλακῆς πρωίας
[7] יַחֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי־עִם־יְהוָה הַחֶסֶד וְהַרְבֵּה עִמּוֹ פְדוּת׃	expectet Israhel Dominum [7] quia apud Dominum misericordia et multa apud eum redemptio	speret Israhel in Domino [7] quia apud Dominum misericordia et copiosa apud eum redemptio	ἐλπισάτω Ισραηλ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον. [7] ὅτι παρὰ τῷ κυρίῳ τὸ ἔλεος, καὶ πολλὴ παρ᾽ αὐτῷ λύτρωσις,
[8] וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכֹּל עֲוֹנֹתָיו׃	[8] et ipse redimet Israhel ex omnibus iniquitatibus eius	[8] et ipse redimet Israhel ex omnibus iniquitatibus eius	[8] καὶ αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται τὸν Ισραηλ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτοῦ.

Verse 3–4 LXX: Forgiveness, Law, and the Fear of God

To appreciate Jerome's approach to verse 4, we must first consider its context in the Greek Septuagint:

LXX 129:3	
ἐὰν ἀνομίας παρατηρήσῃ, κύριε, κύριε, τίς ὑποστήσεται;	If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
LXX 129:4	
ὅτι παρὰ σοὶ ὁ ἱλασμός ἐστιν.	Because with You there is propitiation / forgiveness

Verse 129:3 in the Septuagint poses a rhetorical question, which highlights the concept of lawlessness (ἀνομία), reflecting a Hellenistic concern for order.

Verse 129:4 then provides the key answer, where ἱλασμός can be translated as "propitiation" or "forgiveness." In other words, God's forgiveness/atonement is available, which implicitly allows humanity to stand despite their sins. The Septuagint thus shifts the focus from human lawlessness in verse 3 to God's mercy in verse 4.

Jerome's Latin translation *iuxta LXX* closely mirrors the LXX in Verse 3:

Vulgate 129:3 iuxta LXX	
si iniquitates observabis Domine / Domine quis sustinebit	If You observe iniquities, O Lord— Lord, who shall endure it? / who will stand?

For Verse 4, Jerome's Latin translation (4a) follows the Septuagint as well:

Vulgate 129:4a iuxta LXX	
quia apud te propitiatio est	for with You there is propitiation / forgiveness

Here *propitiatio* corresponds to Greek ἱλασμός, denoting God's merciful forgiveness.

Years later, when Jerome produced a fresh Latin translation *iuxta Hebraeos*, Psalm 130 (129):4 took on a somewhat different form. This corresponds to the Hebrew version as it is vocalized in the Masoretic text.

Heb. 130:4	
כִּי־עִמְּךָ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן תִּוָּרֵא׃	For with you (is) forgiveness, that you may be feared (nif. yiktol 2 pers).
Vulgate 129:4a iuxta Hebr.	
quia tecum est propitiatio cum *terribilis sis*	For with You is propitiation (forgiveness), although You are fearsome / terrible.

As Aquila's extremely literal Greek version suggests, Jerome was aware of an interpretive tradition connecting the fear of God with a stance of patient waiting. In fact, a fragment from Aquila renders part of this passage as ἕνεκεν φόβου ὑπέμεινα κύριον, "for fear (of You) I have waited for the Lord."

In both of Jerome's versions of verse 4, we see that he introduces additional concepts (law in the former, fear in the latter) alongside God's forgiveness. Yet, forgiveness stands above both law and fear as the overarching theme: whether one emphasizes adherence to God's law or reverence before God's awe, it is ultimately God's gracious forgiveness that allows hope to flourish.

Verse 5 LXX: From Law to Hope

Let us now turn to verse 5 and first look at the Greek text from the Septuagint:

LXX 129:5 ἕνεκεν τοῦ νόμου σου ὑπέμεινά σε, κύριε, ὑπέμεινεν ἡ ψυχή μου εἰς τὸν λόγον **σου**.	For the sake of your law I endured (waited for) you, O Lord, my soul endured (waited) for your word.
Vulgate 129:4bc iuxta LXX *propter legem tuam* sustinui te Domine / sustinuit anima mea in verbum **eius**	Because of Your law I have waited for You, Lord; my soul has waited on His word.
Vulgate 129:4b iuxta Hebr. sustinui Dominum sustinuit anima mea et verbum eius expectavi	I have waited for the Lord; my soul has waited, and for His word I have awaited
Heb. 130:5 קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה קִוְּתָה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחָלְתִּי׃	I have hoped in the LORD (YHWH); my soul has hoped, and for His word I have waited

This Latin verse is almost identical to the translation found in the *Psalterium Romanum* (*et propter legem tuam sustinui te Domine / sustinuit anima mea in verbum tuum*). The Roman Psalter corresponds exactly to the Greek version, but Jerome writes *in verbum eius*. Thus, although he provides a translation of LXX, he is influenced by the Hebrew text, in which the pronominal suffix is in the third person (ו).

Propter legem tuam corresponds to the Greek variant ἕνεκεν τοῦ νόμου σου. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that the Greek translator understood an unvocalized form תורא as a defective spelling of תורה—which would explain the appearance of "law" in the Greek text. Understanding the text in this way, it seems more natural that the phrase should be related to the next sentence (and, therefore, in the LXX editions it reached verse 5).

Sustineo corresponds to ὑπομένω and has in common with it the meanings of 'to bear' and 'to wait (patiently)'. The second meaning, similar to that of *exspecto*, is also found elsewhere in Jerome.[1]

[1] Epistle 17; see Du Cange et al., *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis*. Niort: L. Favre, 1883–1887, s.v.

Thus, Jerome's use of *sustineo* in his Latin text resonates with understanding the transition of the act of waiting (a passive, patient endurance) into active hope (expectantly looking for God's word to be fulfilled), in the next verse. Jerome has artfully combined elements from the Hebrew meaning (God's forgiveness and the fear He inspires) with elements from the Latin liturgical tradition (the call to wait on the Lord and His word, *Psalterium Romanum*).

Verse 6: Collective Waiting – From Individual Yearning to Communal Hope

LXX 129:6 ἤλπισεν ἡ ψυχή μου ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἀπὸ φυλακῆς πρωίας μέχρι νυκτός· ἀπὸ φυλακῆς πρωίας ἐλπισάτω Ισραηλ ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον.	My soul hoped in the Lord; from the morning watch until night. From the morning watch let Israel hope in the Lord.
Vulgate 129:5-6 iuxta LXX speravit anima mea in Domino a custodia matutina usque ad noctem speret Israhel in Domino	My soul hoped in the Lord; From the morning watch until night, let Israel hope in the Lord

This verse is notably shorter than the Greek original. Jerome drops the second mention of the morning watch. Instead of the poetic repetition and the personal note, he presents a single, straightforward command to the community (Israel) to hope in the Lord from dawn till dusk. The effect of Jerome's simplification is a streamlined, but less emphatic, verse. The LXX's dual structure (personal and collective, with repeated imagery) carries greater emotional resonance and theological weight. Jerome's Latin gives a continuous time frame ("morning until night") for Israel's hope, implying constancy, but it lacks the image of the watchmen or the direct echoing of dawn that the Hebrew will have. Moreover, by removing "my soul hoped in the Lord," Jerome shifts the focus entirely to the collective Israel. The individual voice of the psalmist, so prominent in the preceding verses, momentarily steps into the background in the Latin, allowing the corporate voice to dominate. In the Vulgate, Psalm 129:6 is thus a call to the community to maintain hope in God throughout the day (and implicitly, continually).

The first word of the verse—ἤλπισεν and *speravit* respectively—may be due to a lacuna or to a variation, reading הוחל instead of הוחלתי in the previous verse of the Hebrew text. In this case the word is more naturally linked to the next sentence and verse.

Now, looking at the Hebrew Psalm 130:6, we find a different but related imagery:

Heb. 130:6 נַפְשִׁי לַאדֹנָי מִשֹּׁמְרִים לַבֹּקֶר שֹׁמְרִים לַבֹּקֶר׃	My soul to Adonai, more than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.

Vulgate 129:5-6a iuxta Hebr. anima mea ad Dominum a vigilia matutina usque ad vigiliam matutinam	 My soul to the Lord From the morning watch to the morning watch

A literal translation is: “My soul [waits] for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning—watchmen for the morning.” The psalmist’s soul waits for the Lord more eagerly than the night watchmen wait for the first light of dawn. The phrase “watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning” uses repetition not to indicate duration, but to intensify the comparison — one can almost feel the longing of guards longing for their shift to end at sunrise. The emphasis is on the depth of yearning: just as sentinels yearn for daybreak after a long night, so the soul yearns for God’s redemption. The Hebrew verse is an individual statement (“my soul…”) brimming with collective imagery (“watchmen”), and it sets up the next verse which directly addresses Israel.

Jerome’s Latin *iuxta Hebraeos* translation of verse 5 is, at first glance, remarkably concise. He renders it simply as: *anima mea ad Dominum* (‘My soul to the Lord.’). However, this brevity represents a conscious choice and a deliberate, economical translation strategy. This elliptical Latin construction, well attested in biblical Latin, mirrors the Hebrew idiom in which the object of hope or waiting can be expressed without repeating the verb. Consequently, Jerome’s version provides a condensed rendering of the Hebrew that illustrates the integration of Semitic syntax into Latin. Within the context of the Psalm as a whole, this minimalist phrasing aligns coherently with the adjacent lines that employ verbs of hoping and waiting. Verse 5 in Jerome’s *iuxta Hebraeos* text thus functions almost as an intransitive cry of devotion: ‘[My] soul [is] toward the Lord.’ This concise formulation effectively conveys the posture of hope and expectation characteristic of the Hebrew original.

Summary

The comparison of Psalm 130 (Vg 129) 4–6 in Jerome’s *iuxta Hebraeos* and *iuxta LXX* translations reveals a subtle but decisive theological evolution. The *iuxta LXX* version, shaped by the Greek tradition, moves from the human reality of sin toward divine forgiveness mediated through the “law” and culminates in a collective call to hope. The *iuxta Hebraeos*, closer to the Hebrew idiom, transforms this dynamic into a movement from fear of God to intimate, personal trust—an ascent from reverent awe to interior expectation. Jerome’s two renderings thus mirror the psalm’s own progression: from confession and forgiveness to watchful waiting and communal hope. The study highlights Jerome’s mastery in balancing fidelity to the sources with theological depth, showing how the Latin text becomes not merely a translation, but a meditation on hope grounded in divine mercy.