

A Note on Psalm 100:3

Hebrew Text:

דָּעוּ כִּי־יְהוָה הוּא אֱלֹהִים הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא אֲנַחְנוּ עָמַד וְצֹאן מִרְעִיתוֹ:

Geoff's Translation:

“Know that Yahweh, He is God. He Himself made us; and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”

Analysis:

Many English translations take the phrase: “not we ourselves” (וְלֹא) and alter the Hebrew text to read: “and we are His” (וְיָרָו). The Hebrew text as the Masoretic Tradition (a group of Scribes in the 6th century who translated and copied the Hebrew text—“MT”) clearly reads ‘not we ourselves’ (וְלֹא). I am, therefore, hesitant to *alter* or *change* the MT. Many English translations and most commentators assume that the text is intelligible to leave it as is and so they resort to changing it to ‘and we are His’ (וְיָרָו). To be sure, there are some ancient translations, some Hebrew manuscripts and interpreters who believe this to be the case but I believe that the MT is accurate and it should be retained for the following reasons:

1. The Masoretes copied the text with intense and careful scrutiny and we ought to be overly hesitant about altering or changing the Hebrew text as if we knew better than they did or if we have more knowledge of ancient Hebrew than they did.
2. The phrase: “He made us and not we ourselves” (הוּא־עָשָׂנוּ וְלֹא אֲנַחְנוּ) is not *only* talking about the creative power of God—though certainly God did create us and we did not create ourselves. But the deeper issue is that God *made us and chose us to be His people*. Thus, this is not only talking about creation but *sovereign choosing to be God’s special people*. God is the one who *made* (that is, ‘chose’) us to be His special people—not we ourselves. We didn’t choose God! We didn’t choose to be His worshippers; He chose us! He ‘made’ us to be His people. Compare this with Ephesians 2:10 where Paul picks up the same thought: “For we are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” (αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς...).

Calvin says it well: “It must be remembered that the prophet is not here speaking of creation in general ... but of that spiritual regeneration by which he creates anew his image in his elect. Believers are persons whom the prophet here declares to be God’s workmanship, not that they were made in their mother’s womb, but in that sense in which Paul, in Eph 2:10 calls them ‘workmanship’ (ποίημα), that workmanship of God, because they are created unto good works which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them; and in reality that agrees best with the subsequent context [of Ps 100]” (Calvin, *Psalms, Part IV*, 54).