

souls. If we are checking an Old Testament book, it is often new to some of our African members, and we frequently find ourselves taking time off while excited comments are made on some fresh treasure from God's Word, and notes are made for future sermons. What a joy it is to see some word or verse go home, and these dark-skinned African faces light up with joy and wonder, and to realise how literally true are the words, "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light."

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## Readers' Corner

From J. L. Swellengrebel

Reading the learned and interesting note on Acts 2:24 in the January 1959 TBT, I imagined St. Peter, or St. Luke, looking down from heaven and saying with a smile: "How clever those fellows are! I never knew it was that which I should have meant to say!"

The author of the note holds the opinion that the translator of the LXX who chose the rendering (*perieschon me*) *ôdines thanatou* in Ps. 17:5, 114:3 (= MT 18:5; 116:3), seems to have confused two very similar Hebrew words, i.e. *hëbhël* and *hëbhël*, which have the same plural form and mean, respectively, 'bond' and 'pangs of birth'. Assuming that the said translator had before him the same wording as we know from the Masoretic Text—which is probable but not certain—this opinion seems readily acceptable. Because of this misreading the translator chose the Greek word *ôdines*, known in Greek since Homer in the sense of 'pangs (of birth)' and in that sense also used several times in the LXX. In Ps. 18:5 etc., however, this sense fits badly. Therefore, according to the author of the note, "it may reasonably be inferred... that the phrase *ôdines thanatou* in the LXX was meant to convey the meaning 'the bonds of death', in conformity with the Hebrew phrase it was translating."

On the ground of the facts so clearly expounded by Mr. Bratcher, I am inclined to hold a different view: The LXX translator, starting from the—misread—Hebrew word *hëbël* = 'pang(s of birth)', naturally chose the Greek word having the same meaning. The fruit of his misreading was a mistranslation, which resulted in a rather forced metaphor (although perhaps not so forced as Mr. Bratcher is suggesting; with the wider meaning 'anguish', the construction in Ps. 18:5 etc. can be taken as a subjective genitive instead of an objective genitive: anguish death is inflicting, instead of pangs of birth death is experiencing).<sup>1</sup> That drawback the LXX translator accepted, in the same way

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the construction of *ôdines tou thanatou*, which is found in the Polykarpbrief I, 2, according to Bauer, *Griech-Deutsches Wörterbuch z. N.T.* (1937), p. 1481. Cp. Kittel, *Theol. Wörterbuch z. N.T.*, IV, p. 338: *Fraglos hat die LXX dies ôdines tou thanatou nicht im eigentlichen, sondern im übertragenen Sinne, nicht von Geburtswehen, sondern von qualvollen Schmerzen überhaupt verstanden. Die Vorstellung von einer Geburt, bei der der Tod Schmerzen erleidet oder hervorruft, liegt Ps. 17:5, 6, 114 (116):3... wo ôdines tou thanatou vorkommt, gänzlich fern, wie die Verba perieschon, ekuklôsan beweisen. Dazu hat LXX oft ôdines im Sinne von qualvollen Schmerzen entsprechend dem hbr AT (vgl. Ex. 15:14; Hos. 13:13; Na. 2:11; Js. 13:8; 21:3 usw) Nach Hi 39:2, wo luein ôdinas heisst: die Wehen (durch Geburt der Frucht) beendigen, ist also Ag. 2:24 nicht zu erklären.*

as he, and other translators, have had to accept many other unusual constructions, words, and metaphors in translating the OT.

And now, what about St. Peter's, or St. Luke's, use of the phrase (*lusas*) *tas ôdinas tou thanatou* in Acts 2:24? What did St. Peter mean when he uttered these words? Is it possible he has meant to say or wanted his hearers to understand 'the bonds of death'? A theoretical possibility must be granted. St. Peter *may* have compared the LXX with the Hebrew text, *may* have seen and preferred the original words, meaning 'the bonds of death', and *may* have supposed that the Greek words *hai ôdines tou thanatou* conveyed this meaning. I do not know of, nor does the note procure, any facts depicting St. Peter devoted to LXX criticism or showing him to have held the said supposition. Or, in the centuries since the LXX, the general Greek word *hai ôdines* may have changed its meaning, from something like 'pangs of birth' to something like 'bonds'. Arguments for this change of meaning are unknown to me and apparently also to Mr. Bratcher. Therefore I cannot but come to the conclusion that St. Peter has accepted the LXX phrase on its face value. Forced or vague phrases sometimes tend to stick to the memory of their readers or hearers. So the phrase in question did. Perhaps it became a traditionally known idiom in connection with death; the fact that St. Peter is using it in Acts 2:24 outside its immediate LXX context can be taken to point in this direction. As with many other phrases hallowed by traditional use, the users of this particular phrase would be hard put to it when compelled to explain its exact meaning. The same would have been true of St. Peter who, according to my view, has used the words in a rather vague sense, suggesting the horribleness of death.

It is this vagueness and forcedness which makes the phrase difficult to interpret, as Mr. Bratcher shows in his note. How can we ascertain what association the phrase had in the thought of St. Peter, or St. Luke, and what meaning it was thought to convey? Must we interpret it in the light of the LXX only? Or have its associations and meaning changed since the LXX, as specially unusual and half-understood words or phrases tend to do? If the latter be the case, to what extent and in which direction? It is here, in my opinion, that the real problem lies for the present-day interpreter or translator. To assume that St. Peter, or St. Luke, meant to say what the Masoretic Text is saying but the LXX and the Acts are not saying, seems to be a short cut, thus avoiding the real problem.

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