

OLD TESTAMENT TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

*The first volume in the series "Helps for Translators" published under the imprint of the United Bible Societies has now appeared.¹ It is available free to translators working on the Old Testament, and requests should be made to the Bible Society with which the translator is connected. Below we print certain passages from the Introduction, and opposite a specimen page. We hope to publish a review in the next issue of *The Bible Translator*.*

Every Bible translator knows how difficult it is to deal adequately with serious problems of text and exegesis. This is especially true of problems posed by certain Old Testament passages. One can obtain some help in commentaries and technical journals, but there is no place where all the principal problems have been gathered together in a single handy volume. Accordingly, this book is designed to remedy, at least in part, certain aspects of this situation and to provide practical suggestions for the solution of many textual and exegetical problems of the Old Testament.

Plans for this volume began in 1947 at an international conference of Bible translators meeting in Holland. At the time of the conference a committee in Holland was already engaged in preparing a new Dutch translation of the Old Testament. Thus it seemed appropriate to request that this committee undertake the task of drawing up a list of difficult Old Testament passages. Accordingly, Professor A. R. Hulst, a member of the Dutch committee, was asked to assemble the data on the basis of discussions in the sessions of the committee. The problems were classified under three groups: (a) those texts which are very obscure and practically untranslatable; (b) those in which one or more of the ancient versions provide a clue to adequate exegesis; and (c) those in which more than one legitimate translation of the Masoretic text is possible. This designation indicates to the reader something of the nature of the difficulty.

It must be recognized at once that this treatment is by no means exhaustive, either in the selection of problem passages or in the selection of relevant background material. No attempt has been made to cite all translations or textual authorities which might be relevant on a particular point. However, in order to make this document more useful, relatively full citations have been made from the Revised Standard Version. Nor does this treatment pretend to be final; new light may clarify many difficult passages. Yet here it was felt better to be conservative rather than accept attractive, but unproved solutions.

¹ "Helps for Translators", Volume 1, *Old Testament Translation Problems*, by A. R. Hulst in co-operation with other scholars. Published for the United Bible Societies by E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1960. xvi, 261 pp. D. fl. 12.50 (24/-; \$3.40).

of 2 Sam is lost. It is perhaps best, then, to keep to the uncertain translation 'thoughtlessness'.

- 6 : 19 (C) The word *'ešpār* has been rendered 'piece of meat', but this is uncertain. KBL translates 'date cake', and compares it with the Arabic *sofrat* 'provision'. Cf. also Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* IV, 1935, p. 68, from which it appears that *'ešpār* could mean a kind of cake.
- 7 : 23 (B) The word *lāhem* 'for them' should be read instead of the MT *lākem* 'for you'. Since the context refers to Israel in the 3rd pers., the 2nd pers. suff. is unlikely. Furthermore, in this direct address of David to God it is far more appropriate for the nation to be referred to in the 3rd pers. The word *lāhem* is also understood by the Tg and Vg.
- 8 : 1 (C) The AV and RSV have transliterated the words *meteg hā'ammā(b)*, thereby regarding them as a proper name. It is possible, however, that the word *meteg* which as a noun means 'rein, bridle', has the metaphorical sense here of 'power' or 'government', or 'control'. While the word *'ammā(b)* basically means 'yard' or 'cubit', it could possibly mean here 'mother city' or 'fortification'. Thus, the DNV translates the phrase 'the government of the capital', and the BSG 'the bridle of the mother city'.
- 8 : 13 (B) The MT reads the name 'Aram', though six mss, the LXX, and the Pesh read 'Edom'. On the basis of the context in v. 14 and the parallel account in 1 Chron 18 : 12, 'Edom' is clearly the preferred reading in this place. The difference is the well-known change between the *daleth* and the *resh* (cf. above in Gen 47 : 21 and Num 1 : 14).
- 12 : 31 (A) Three different words cause some difficulty in this verse. The verb *šim* ordinarily means 'to lay, place, put', but here, it probably means 'to appoint to' or 'to set to'. Thus, the people were not 'put under' saws and picks' (AV), but they were 'set to work' with saws and picks, i.e. forced labor. The second problem is contained in the *Kethib* reading *malkēn* or *milkōn*, which has no meaning here. One should adopt the *Qere* reading *malbēn* to be translated 'brick kilns' (cf. the AV and RSV). And finally, the word *he'ēbir* 'he made (them) to pass over' (or