

## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Living Bible Paraphrased.** Tyndale House, Wheaton, Ill., 1971. 1020 pp.  
The author of this review, Dr. Keith Crim, is an Old Testament specialist, and a member of the TEV OT Committee.

Many Bible translators are familiar with *The Living New Testament* and with the portions of the Old Testament that have been published previously, and in many cases translators have found this version useful in their work. In the July 1969 issue of *The Bible Translator*, Dr. Robert Bratcher reviewed the New Testament, discussing some of the principles it followed. This present review will be confined to the Old Testament, but the earlier review is useful background for what is said here, especially the discussion of "paraphrase" and its relation to translation, and the comments on the statement in the preface to *The Living Bible* that "The theological lodestar in this book has been a rigid evangelical position".

### I. The Textual Basis

*The Living Bible* (abbreviated as LB) is called a "paraphrase", but the preface to the whole Bible makes no statement as to what text it is a paraphrase of. We are told that it has been under the careful scrutiny of a team of Greek and Hebrew experts to check content. The NT preface, not in the complete LB, said that the NT was a paraphrase of the American Standard Version of 1901. It is significant that this statement has been dropped, because examination of LB indicates that it was based on an informed and scholarly evaluation of textual problems, and is much more than a paraphrase of an earlier English edition. This is welcome news to the translator who may be consulting it in his work. Unfortunately, the notes do not indicate when the translation departs from the traditional Hebrew text, and a detailed study of the entire LB would be necessary to establish the textual base, but a few examples will indicate what has been done.

Prov. 1:19 ASV So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain.

LB Such is the fate of all who live by violence and murder.

The reading "fate" is based on the Septuagint, and is a suggested emendation in the Kittel BH<sup>3</sup>; it is adopted, with a footnote, by NEB.

Prov. 7:22 ASV Or as one in fetters to the correction of the fool.

LB Or as a stag that is trapped.

A footnote in ASV notes that the "Hebrew is obscure". LB has again followed an emendation based on the LXX, as have RSV and NEB.

Prov. 10:10 ASV But a prating fool shall fall.

LB Bold reproof leads to peace.

ASV followed the Hebrew text, where the second line of this verse repeats the second line of vs. 8; LB has followed the LXX, as have RSV and NEB.

In Prov. 11:16, however, LB does not follow the LXX, and the resulting translation is as puzzling as the Hebrew original. Apparently the second line of one verse and the first line of the next were lost by the error of a Hebrew scribe, but they are preserved in the LXX. Thus vs. 16 in Hebrew combines

lines from originally distinct verses, and seems to present a thought that is contrary to the rest of wisdom literature. LB has helped a little by putting in an "implied" word—"mere"—but the meaning is still obscure.

Illustrations of this type could be multiplied. It seems clear that LB deals with the text in a much more sophisticated way than the early portions did. As a result, translators using LB as a supplementary guide will need to check it constantly against other translations to see whether the text has been emended, or whether the meaning has merely been expressed in a different manner.

## II. Literary Form

Any translation such as LB gives precedence to the content over the form of the original. The translator's job is to study the original form to find what it contributes to the message, and then find a form in the receptor language that is appropriate to the message. The form in the receptor language must, of course, often be different from that of the original.

LB has done well in many areas. The first nine chapters of Proverbs are set in paragraphs, indicating that they are essay-type material, and not appropriate to English poetry. In most of the rest of the book, each verse is printed separately, showing that the context is not important, and that each aphorism stands by itself.

The archival material in Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah is well handled, set off from the rest as lists. Moreover, the units in the lists of persons in Ezra are correctly identified as clans and subclans, instead of following the Hebraism "sons of", which is incorrect in English.

The manner in which LB dealt with the poetic books of the OT, however, is less satisfactory. Small poems, such as the Balaam oracles in Numbers, are translated as English verse, but no effort is made to give poetic form to the major poetic sections, even where the material clearly lends itself to poetry in English. In LB the entire book of Job is prose in style and form, but the biblical message is not a calm prose discussion, but a creative, poetic exploration of vital questions, and much is lost when the translator does not even try to achieve poetic form. The same must be said of the Psalms, the basis of so many of the hymns of the church. It jars to find a small gem like Ps. 100 reduced to prose, as it is in LB. Especially bad is vs. 3, "Try to realize what this means". No one can sing that!

Some special literary features gave the translator of LB trouble. In Proverbs there are several "numerical proverbs", a popular feature of Hebrew wisdom. Prov. 6:16 ASV There are six things which Jehovah hateth:

Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him.

This form is peculiar to Hebrew and is merely a convenient literary device for embellishing the style. English and many other languages have no simple equivalent for it, however. The translators of the Navaho OT, for example, found that readers consistently misunderstood it. Some took it to mean that there are six things the Lord hates but the seventh is what he really hates most. Others said that there must be six plus seven, or thirteen things which the Lord hates. Still others said, "Which is it? Six or seven?" LB reads, "For

there are six things the Lord hates—no, seven.” In English this communicates absentmindedness and uncertainty, much as if one said, “There are six things. No, not six, seven. I forgot one.” LB also falls down on this literary device in chapter 30, where it is used several times.

LB is concerned to identify the participants in actions and dialogue, and for the most part does a splendid job. There are exceptions, however. Jeremiah is a book where there are many sudden shifts from what the Lord is saying to what Jeremiah is saying, and the reader needs help if he is not to become confused. One example can illustrate the problem. In Jer. 4:19-21 the prophet is describing his pain and suffering. In vs. 22, the Lord answers him, and then in vss. 23ff. Jeremiah is speaking again. LB relies on the use of quotation marks around vs. 22 to indicate the change of speaker. This is too subtle for most readers and no help at all to the person who hears the passage read aloud. A simple solution would be to begin vs. 22 by “The Lord answered . . .”

Psalm 132 illustrates the problem of incorrect identification of participants. The Hebrew text nowhere identifies David as the author, neither in the title (it is not called a “Psalm of David”) nor in the text. David is spoken of in the third person and the events he participated in are spoken of as long past. Yet LB has David speaking in the first person! Most scholars agree that this Psalm was written after the time of David to celebrate David’s great service to God in moving the Ark to Jerusalem, and God’s choice of Jerusalem as the central shrine and of the house of David as his kings. By erroneously putting David in the first person, LB then has trouble identifying the participants and has to shift in several places as if David were speaking of himself in the third person, certainly an unnatural procedure in English.

### III. Distinctive Features of Selective Passages

To illustrate some of the strengths of LB, as well as some of the areas where it could be improved, I will comment on some items in Gen. 1-3 and several passages in Ezekiel.

Gen. 1:1 “When God began creating . . .” A footnote gives the traditional interpretation, but this bold translation of vs. 1 as a temporal clause brings out the nature of “beginning” as an event word and not a specified time.

Gen. 1:2, footnote d. “There is no ‘right’ way to translate these words.” Any translator can sympathize with this attitude, but the statement can be phrased more accurately. We cannot be absolutely sure of the meaning of the original here, and even after we have decided on the most probable meaning, there is no easy, concise way to translate it, but there certainly is a right way—express the meaning as clearly and naturally as possible in the receptor language.

Gen. 1:4 “So he let it shine for awhile, and then there was darkness again.” There is no indication in the scripture that the light which God created shone for only a little while. This seems to be an attempt to fit the creation of light into the alternation of night and day, but it can hardly be correct.

The footnotes in Gen. 1 are interesting in that they give a literal translation, “There was evening and there was morning, a second day,” etc., and also give an alternative translation for “day”, that is “period of time”.

Gen. 1:26 "Let us make a man" with a footnote, "Literally, 'men'." Making a single human being can hardly be what is intended here, but the creation of the entire human race. The first man and woman are portrayed in Genesis as the representatives of mankind.

Gen. 1:27 This verse does not read smoothly and the use of nouns and pronouns is awkward. It is perhaps the least satisfactory verse in the chapter.

Gen. 2:7 "Man became a living person". A good rendering.

Gen. 3:4 "That's a lie!" the serpent hissed." Very vivid. The concrete verb is a big plus, and so is the specific verb in 3:12, "Adam admitted".

Gen. 3:24 LB avoids the word "cherubim" here by saying "mighty angels", but elsewhere, e.g. Ezekiel, cherub and cherubim are used. The descriptions in Ezek. 1 make it abundantly clear that the cherubim were not angels but fearsome beasts, unlike anything known to our earthly zoology. The word "cherub" (along with its two plurals "cherubs" and "cherubim"), however, has come to mean something totally different from what the Hebrew meant by it. A cherub in English is a chubby, cuddly baby with wings. The writers of scripture would not recognize them as having anything in common with the terrifying monsters seen in their visions. The fact that "cherub" was originally borrowed from Hebrew has nothing at all to do with its present meaning, and our English word simply does not correspond to the Hebrew. The Bible contains frightening, supernatural beasts that serve God, but not a single "cherub".

The question of cherubim leads to a consideration of Ezekiel, a book that is difficult for different reasons. LB has done a good job in general in Ezekiel. Chapter 1 is notoriously hard to translate, but in LB it is clear and forceful. The wording of vs. 16, "each wheel was constructed with a second wheel crosswise inside," is not completely clear, but the idea has been grasped correctly, as the footnote shows.

Beginning with chapter 2, Ezekiel is addressed as "Son of dust", instead of the traditional "Son of man". Having wrestled with this problem I can empathize with the translator of LB. The problem is that he has translated literally the semitic idiom "son of" instead of finding an equivalent that would express the idea "being in the nature of". "Man of dust" would be better than "Son of dust". The Hebrew *ben adam* means "having the nature of one created from the soil". Cf. Gen. 2:7.

Chapters 16 and 23 are difficult because of the raw imagery used, but LB has done a splendid job. The language is vivid and forceful, as it must be in faithfulness to the original, but it is not coarse or offensive. 23:8, "robbed her of her virginity" is especially to be commended, because it correctly renders an idiom that everyone, even down to NEB, has translated literally and missed the meaning of.

Chapter 37 is another job well done. Verse 9 brings out the three meanings expressed by the Hebrew *ruach* in different contexts; breath, wind, and Spirit. Verse 4, however, contains a remnant of literary style no longer current, "O dry bones". We do not use "O" in direct address except in formally religious settings, or as a conscious archaism. But LB retains it consistently throughout. It is to be hoped that future editions will be more contemporary at this point.

Ezek. 10:9-13 presents a difficulty. Two Hebrew words for “wheel” are used and the account specifically says they refer to the same objects. Translations obscure this, and LB is not at all clear. “‘The Whirl-Wheels’, as I heard them called” will be hard for most readers to interpret.

#### IV. Other Points

In the reproduction of weights and measures, LB is not consistent. In the description of the temple in Ezek. 40ff, measures of length are given in feet, but such items as  $87\frac{1}{2}$  ft. long, or  $8\frac{3}{4}$  ft. thick give the impression of greater accuracy than we can justify. Archaeological evidence shows that most ancient measures were not standardized to anything approaching the degree to which we are accustomed. It is preferable to round these figures off to 90 ft. and 9 ft. respectively.

In Ezek. 45:10 the measurements are not transposed at all, but left for the reader to figure out. In a popular translation such as LB the reader’s understanding would be greatly advanced if all weights and measures were given in modern equivalents.

Throughout LB there are footnotes saying that something in the translation is “implied”. If it is implicit in the text, the translator does not need to apologize for making it explicit. But sometimes material in this category seems to reflect a view of the text that cannot be sustained by careful exegesis. To take a non-controversial example, Prov. 10:15 reads: “The rich man’s wealth is his only<sup>b</sup> strength. The poor man’s poverty is his only<sup>b</sup> curse,” and the footnote says “only” is implied in both instances. This is not implied by the text itself, and it is not in accord with the theology of the Wisdom Literature, where wealth was seen as a sign of God’s blessing and poverty as a sign of punishment. This view is taught in Deuteronomy and is accepted in Proverbs, without in any way denying man’s duty of caring for the poor. LB does the reader a service by marking these “implied” interpretations, and the footnote “implied” should be taken to mean, “let the buyer beware”.

Since this review is not an evaluation of LB as an English document, I have not concentrated on matters of style. The style is, unfortunately, uneven. At times it is racy, colloquial and forceful. At other times it is stiff and a bit old-fashioned. “Lest” was a useful word, but it has simply passed out of current usage, and does not belong in a contemporary translation. The use of “O” with the vocative has been noted above, and many more instances of outmoded language could be pointed out.

The reviewer of a Bible translation inevitably feels like the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, 11:32, “Well, how much more do I need to say? It would take too long . . .” (LB). Translators need to evaluate carefully any other translation that they are using as a help, and I hope this discussion of some of the distinctive features of LB will alert the translator to look for other features that will help him, and to be alert to potential pitfalls.

Many readers of LB have testified to the contribution it has made to their understanding of God’s word, particularly in some of the neglected portions of scripture. LB is a serious, responsible work that deserves careful study and evaluation. If used with care it can be an aid in translation work.