

## HOW WAS THAT?

It is generally not too difficult to translate “dreams”; but the translation of “visions” may not be so easy. In one African language the translators were having problems with “visions”, and eventually they decided to try the phrase “strange things” as the closest equivalent they could find. So “seeing visions” became “seeing strange things”. In a number of passages this equivalent seemed to work quite well. However in one passage quite the wrong meaning came out. In Daniel 7.1 the translation “saw strange things on his bed” meant to all the Africans who read it “saw bed bugs on his bed”!

—Reported in *The Bible Translator*, April 1951

\* \* \* \* \*

It’s not only translators of the Bible who have their problems in translating for people who are not familiar with the sacred text. The following comes from the introduction to an edition of the Koran in the Penguin Classics series:

In this edition the traditional arrangement [of chapters] has been abandoned . . . The new arrangement is primarily intended for the uninitiated reader who, understandably, is often put off by such mundane chapters as “The Cow” or “Women”, which are traditionally placed at the beginning of the book.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following is an extract from an editorial in the *Guardian* (London), written in 1977. It touches on the issue of biblical measurements, the subject of an article by Euan Fry in the April 1978 issue of *The Bible Translator*.

*“Like the clock which struck thirteen, thereby casting doubt on all that had gone before, the attempt to sell the Bible by cultural updatment may lead people to suspect those parts which have been left alone. It is well known that God, speaking in 6,000 B.C., did not give specifications to Noah in kilograms and metres, as he is quoted as doing in the Good News Bible, because the French Academy did not invent those units until 1791 (A.D, at that). If the Bible Society, coupled with the name of the Metrication Board, can put across such obvious falsehoods how can we be sure even of such basics as the Ten Commandments? Were they commandments or simply guidelines to see the Israelites through a difficult few weeks? And should they also not be brought into line with modern usage? People do not go round coveting their neighbour’s ox or his ass, though they might have an eye on the black Labrador and the budgie. Not on the maidservant, though perhaps on the au pair.*

*A criticism of the metric system, and therefore of the Good News Bible, is that they pretend to an exactitude which they cannot achieve, whereas the old measures, though a bit vague, were, more or less, believable . . .”*