

## FOCUS ON TRANSLATORS

*Not long ago we received a report on a Swahili Study Bible Workshop which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in June of last year. What follows is the main part of that report. We have omitted just a few sections which refer to matters of mainly local interest.*

### REPORT ON SWAHILI STUDY BIBLE WORKSHOP

Six scholars were invited together with five staff members to participate in the workshop on the Swahili Study Bible. The meeting was also honoured to have the participation of Father Ludger Feldkamper, the General Secretary of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate. The purpose of the workshop was to get help from the experience of the invited biblical scholars and to form a working group to get the project off the ground.

Background information on the Swahili Study Bible was presented. This included the need for a study Bible expressed during the Tanzania Bible Society National Assembly in December 1985, and the findings and recommendations of the Nairobi Consultation of May 1986, the Dar-es-Salaam consultation of November 1986, and the United Bible Societies (UBS) staff consultation of December 1986.

On current study Bibles, it was noted that these have some disadvantages as they are commercially produced, very expensive, sometimes theologically based on some given church tradition, prescriptive rather than descriptive, bulky, and based on formal equivalent translations. A number of constraints on producing a study Bible were also noted. These include the fact that the Bible Societies have produced Bibles without notes; the problem of doctrinal differences; competition with commercial publishers; the cost of production, considering what our people might be willing to pay, and the possibility of providing subsidy.

#### **Aims and objectives of the workshop**

1. To establish principles to be used for the Swahili Study Bible.
2. To review and discuss the nature and type of notes a Swahili Study Bible might require.
3. To prepare pilot notes for Luke.
4. To review and discuss the need for research in order to establish the market and needs of the audience.
5. To establish working procedures.

#### **Establishing principles**

An introductory speech was given in which the participants were informed of the UBS policy on study Bible principles. It was pointed out that a study Bible is a Bible with more than normal helps. The Swahili Study Bible material will be based on the current translation, *Habari*

*Njema Kwa Watu Wote.*

On formulating the principles and preparing the notes, the participants were asked to note the following:

- the aim of the Study Bible is to help the reader to understand the text
- the notes should not go beyond the canonical text
- on exegesis, there should be no doctrinal notes and comments, but there is room for exegetical interpretation—this should however be descriptive rather than prescriptive
- the order of books in the Bible will follow current practice in East Africa, but with the deuterocanonical books being placed between the Testaments
- the language level should be the same as the *Habari Njema* Bible text
- approximately 25%-30% of the page should be used for the notes
- being true to the text and context should have precedence
- neutrality in notes is to be achieved by circulating the notes to a number of reviewers for comment and suggestions
- there is need for a training session for the people who will do the drafting; these people should be contacted and a training session arranged
- drafting can be done in English if a person is not comfortable with Swahili and a translation made later

**Audience**

The participants stressed the need to identify the target audience. It was felt that there could be a difference between the Kenyan and Tanzanian audiences, but that as a whole, the audience as defined in the Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam consultations will be representative of the East African situation. It was further noted that there is a danger of underrating the capabilities of the target audience and this should be avoided.

**Notes**

In the preparation of the notes and footnotes, the following recommendations were made:

1. During initial drafting, there should be no constraint with respect to length of notes.
2. Certain keywords like *Masiha* should have a footnote at the first occurrence and a footnote at all subsequent occurrences referring the reader back to the first footnote.
3. A note should be given explaining the use of *Habari Njema* instead of *Injili*, but generally terms which were not used in the text should not be introduced.
4. The introductions should state the date and authorship where possible, but should be put in such a way that the notes do not become obsolete in view of ongoing studies.
5. An attempt should be made to accommodate cultural differences among East African peoples.

### General

1. The aim of the Swahili Study Bible will be to provide the readers with helps necessary for a better understanding of the biblical text.
2. The primary goal is to lead the reader to an understanding of the text, by giving background information that explains and describes.
3. Emphasis will be placed on explaining the historical context of the text. Historical information should include details such as:
  - dates when Bible people lived and events took place
  - how the historical information in the Bible fits into the wider history of the time
  - more information on important places of the Bible
  - different possible alternatives when the precise location of a place is not known
  - archaeological findings related to the Bible
4. Information which is generally accepted by modern-day scholarship should be given, while at the same time taking into account the Christian experience of the peoples of East Africa.
5. Unnecessary offence to a particular constituency must be avoided. Similarly, implications and applications of the text should be left to commentaries and preaching.
6. Identifying doctrines with particular groups should be avoided.
7. Avoid restating the obvious content of the biblical text. Content summaries will be given in the introductions to the books.
8. Avoid duplicate notes if a given item appears more than once within the same section of text.
9. Use a language level and style which is similar to that of *Habari Njema*.
10. The notes should occupy not more than 25% of the printed page.

### Contents of the helps

This study Bible will have the following types of reader helps, each of which has the primary goal of leading the reader to a better understanding of the biblical text.

1. **Introductions:** these will take the form of brief but informative articles and may contain such general details as:
  - how the Bible came into being (including the canon)
  - how the Bible is translated
  - history of the Swahili translations
  - how to study the Bible
  - how to use this particular Swahili Study Bible

#### **Specific introductions:**

To the Bible: a general statement to introduce the reader to the collection of biblical literature, and the difference this makes to our understanding of Scriptures. Textual problems will be explained to show why they occur.

To literary sections: (for example) Pentateuch, Historical Books,

Wisdom Literature, Prophetic Books, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelation.

To the Testaments and the deuterocanon.

To individual books: these will be brief and may include information such as:

- date and authorship of the book
  - major themes of the book
  - structure and outline of the book
  - background information concerning the people for whom the book was originally written
  - what the name of the book meant—if it had a special meaning
2. **Section headings:** to reveal the structure and content of the text; they should be brief and restricted to describing the content of the passage(s) following. The present section headings in *Habari Njema* should be re-examined and where necessary be re-written.
  3. **Parallel passage references:** references to other extended passages of substantially the same content should be printed immediately beneath the section headings.
  4. **Footnotes:** these will cover textual, exegetical, cultural, historical, and linguistic problems. These should seek to throw light on the biblical world, bearing in mind the experience and cultures of the peoples of East Africa. Such information should include, where necessary:
    - information on the daily activities of different societies mentioned in the Bible (housing, food, drink, work)
    - their customs (such as marriage, burial, vows)
    - the way they organized their society (laws, social classes, army)
    - their religious customs
    - what societies in the Bible thought about the world around them (for example, the whole concept of Jew/Gentile)
    - the similarities or differences between societies existing in Bible times
    - when there are differences between manuscripts in the original language (alternative readings)
    - when the original word(s) can have several meanings (alternative renderings)
    - when there is a special meaning because it is poetry or a play on words
    - literal translation of the word in the original (where a modern translation uses a word more easily understood)
    - Hebrew and Greek terms will be transliterated only when necessary to identify the form.
  5. **Cross references:** should be printed in the margins.
  6. **Glossary/Word List:** it should have an extensive glossary giving a short explanation of important biblical terms and concepts, as well as other unusual items that the reader may find difficult to understand
  7. **Topical Index:** a list of the major references to the most important topics and themes in the Bible (persons, events, geographical features,

major themes). All major contexts will be given in order to point out the contextual meaning of these terms.

#### 8. **Supplementary Items:**

**Maps:** a number of simple maps will present the essential geographical features of the setting of biblical accounts. A brief introductory paragraph will give guidance to the reader concerning their use. Maps will be of a historical nature, and a map index will be provided.

**Charts:** chronological; Jewish calendar showing seasons and festivals; genealogical; Old and New Testament time charts, and perhaps others.

**Tables:** biblical weights and measures, currency, and so on.

**Illustrations:** illustrative pictures, drawings or plans of unfamiliar items will be given: for instance, the Temple, the tabernacle, fauna and flora, and so on.

#### **Format of the footnotes**

Footnotes will be presented in the following format:

- placed below the biblical text in double column on each page
- in smaller and different type from the biblical text
- in block form (rather than a separate paragraph for each note)
- each note is marked with a raised index letter at the appropriate place in the text
- each footnote repeats the index letter found in the text, and also gives the chapter and verse reference in bold print
- index letters (a, b, c . . .) will run by chapters, starting again with each new chapter.

*One of the people who took part in the Study Bible Workshop was Dr Peter Renju who was one of the translators of the modern Swahili version of the Bible called Habari Njema Kwa Watu Wote. He is now a UBS Translation Consultant, and in thinking about the types of notes required for a Study Bible he wrote the paper which follows.*

#### **COMMUNICATION TRIGGERS AS BASES FOR SOME OF THE NOTES FOR STUDY BIBLES**

In these notes I want to try to give some kind of justification for some of the notes that should be included in our study Bibles.

Back in 1984, at a UBS Translations Workshop, we were given some general principles and guidelines for study Bibles. The first two recommendations relating to notes were: (a) The explanation of the text in its canonical shape should be the primary purpose of the notes, and (b) The notes should help the readers to understand the book as a whole, and the development of thought, both within the book and in relation to major biblical themes.

The task of preparing notes for study Bibles is by no means an easy one. There are of course various kinds of notes which are universally