

quite appropriate to use it in the translation of such passages as these. Yet the unsuspecting user of *The Interlinear Bible* would have no way of knowing that such an expression is used because the interlinear equivalent is not a literal translation at those points.

### Conclusion

All too often translators turn to an interlinear edition as the final word. They consider it the last appeal because the Greek or Hebrew words are right there on the page before them. They do not realize that such a volume provides answers which are too simple for some very complex problems. In interlinear versions textual problems disappear and problems of interpretation are literally "glossed over". In addition, they provide absolutely no real help in the important area of meaningful translation.

An interlinear version is a tool. Like any tool, it can be misused. It can even be a dangerous instrument if the user does not know how to use it. It is a tool of limited value, and it is only as good as the materials that went into its making. An interlinear version has all the problems of any literal translation. And those produced thus far have the added limitation of being translations that have been done by individuals rather than ones that have been hammered out in committee work. Bible translators who wish to use interlinear versions would do well to handle this tool with great care.

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## TRANSLATING THE LORD'S PRAYER (MATTHEW 6.9-13)

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The Lord's Prayer is no doubt the most popular prayer among Christians. Many churches include it as a regular part of their liturgy. Children memorize it at a very early age, and keep on using it throughout their life.

The purpose of this short paper is to present some thoughts on the translation of this prayer, looking at both its form and its meaning.

### The form of the prayer

When we talk of the form of the prayer, we have in mind two things: its structure in the original text, and the form it should take in the language of translation. We will discuss the second one first.

The form used in the translation should indicate that this is a prayer, and not some other kind of literature. Some translators have tried to translate the Lord's Prayer as poetry. This is legitimate, as long as in a particular language, prayer *can* take the form of poetry. If, however, prayer is *normally* prose and not poetry, then it is preferable to translate the Lord's Prayer as prose.

One of the problems that the translator faces in choosing the form of the Lord's Prayer is the tradition of the church. This means that in most languages there is already an existing translation of the Lord's Prayer which is used in the

worship of the church. A new translation which varies quite considerably from the existing traditional translation, in so far as form is concerned, is usually not acceptable, regardless of how good a translation it is. What then is the translator supposed to do? Two things are involved here: meaning and form. The translator should translate the Lord's Prayer as meaningfully as possible, but in a form which is as close as possible to the existing form of the Lord's Prayer in that particular language.

For those who want to translate the Lord's Prayer as poetry, a knowledge of the *structure* of the prayer will be valuable. This is not to suggest that the structure of the original text has to be followed in the translation, but simply to suggest that the structure of the prayer in its original form will help the translator in deciding the form of poetry in the translation (for example, how many stanzas, and so on).

The prayer starts with an address to God as Father, then continues with three expressions of praise and prayer to God, recognizing the holiness of his name, and hoping for his will to be accomplished. Then follow three requests for the satisfaction of needs: food, forgiveness, and strength during trials. The final expression of praise is a later addition to the prayer for liturgical purposes. Interestingly enough, however, this final expression of praise echoes the first part of the prayer:

|                          |   |                      |
|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| For thine is the kingdom | — | Thy kingdom come     |
| And the power            | — | May thy will be done |
| And the glory            | — | Hallowed be thy name |

### Understanding and translating the text

#### *Hallowed be thy name*

"Name" in the Bible has a variety of meanings among which are the following:

1. A word by which a person or thing is called. This is the literal, unmarked meaning.
2. Power or authority. An example of this is Acts 3.6: "In the *name* of Jesus of Nazareth, I order you to walk." What Peter is doing here is claiming the power or authority of Jesus to heal the lame man, so "By the power of Jesus of Nazareth . . ."
3. The person himself, and all that he is. In Phil 2.10, for example, "At the *name* of Jesus, every knee should bow". Name here refers to Jesus himself as the exalted Christ.

In the Lord's Prayer, meaning number 3 is probably the right one, in which case, *name* stands for God himself, his nature and being, and all that he is. It is God himself who should be "hallowed".

What is the meaning of "hallowed"? The Greek word comes from a root word which means *holy*, hence the literal translation "made holy". *Holy* in the Bible is one of those words where meaning is difficult to sort out, and which is therefore difficult to translate. When this word refers to God, it seems to contain the following components of meaning:

1. A recognition of God as the only God.
2. A recognition of God as one who hates all kinds of evil, and who loves only the good.

3. God's nature as a perfect being, without any blemish of any kind.

4. A recognition of God as worthy of reverence, honor, and worship.

In the Lord's Prayer, it seems that numbers 1 and 4 are the important components. To "make holy" the name of God is therefore to recognize him as the only God, and to worship him. The German Common Language translation has captured these two components in its translation:

You alone are God

May all people worship you.

If, however, a single line is preferred, then it could be:

"May all people worship you as the only God".

### *Thy kingdom come*

The word *kingdom* here does not refer to a place where God is king, but to the act of God's ruling or of God's establishing his sovereignty and asserting his power. Some possible ways of expressing this are:

"May you rule over us"

"May you be our King".

"May you rule over all peoples".

### *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*

This is an expansion of the second expression. To recognize God as king is also to acknowledge him as one who gives commands and who wants things done. To be under his rule therefore is to obey him and what he wants. Some possible restructurings:

"May your will be obeyed by people on earth as it is obeyed in heaven".

"May your commands be obeyed on earth, as they are obeyed in heaven".

### *Give us this day our daily bread*

Here is the first request for the fulfilment of human need, and it is not surprising that it concerns bread or food. The material aspect of life is not neglected in the Bible, but is spoken of as something which is important. The promise of the Bible is that God himself provides all these things that a person needs for his daily existence (see for example Matthew 6.33).

There are two translation problems here. First, *bread* is more accurately *food*. There are two things that we should guard against in this matter. First, bread should not be translated in such a way that the word used refers to a particular kind of food, unless of course that particular food has come to mean food in general in the language. Among the languages of Irian Jaya, for example, sweet potato, being the staple food, has come to mean *food* in general, and therefore can be used in translating *bread* here. Secondly, bread should not be translated in such a way that it refers to *all material needs*. It is true of course that God provides for all our material needs, and that we should pray about these needs. But it is also true that in this text, as in other texts of the NT, the Greek word for *bread* just does not have the wider meaning of "material needs".

The second problem is connected with the Greek word translated *daily*. New Testament scholars are still not agreed as to the meaning of the Greek. Generally, there are three suggested meanings of the Greek word:

1. for today
2. for tomorrow
3. needed for existence

The RSV follows meaning number 1, while the GNB follows number 3, but with a footnote which reads, "or 'for today' or 'for tomorrow'".

Any of these three meanings is legitimate. If the translation uses footnotes, it is recommended that the alternate meanings be placed in the footnote, as the GNB has done.

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*

*Debts* in this context refers to *moral debts*, that is, to actions which are regarded by God as going against his will. To retain *debt* here, as many translators have done, is to open a possibility for misunderstanding, since today *debt* by itself just doesn't have the meaning of *moral debt*. There are therefore two possibilities for expressing the meaning of this term:

1. "the wrongs we have done . . . the wrongs that others have done to us" (GNB). This expresses very clearly the meaning of the term.
2. "sins". This is what is found in Luke's version of the prayer (Luke 11.4). It should be mentioned that there are two versions of the Lord's Prayer, and the two versions should remain different where they are different. In this case, however, while the two versions use different words, the meaning of the two words is practically the same. This will allow translating the two words in the same way in both Gospels.

Another translation problem is the tense of the second line: *as we forgive our debtors*. In the Greek text, the tense for "forgive" is perfect, and some translations have retained this (for example, New English Bible, "Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we *have* forgiven those who have wronged us". Also Phillips, "Forgive us what we owe you, as we *have* forgiven those who owe anything to us".) A study of the variations of this particular line in various manuscripts of the Greek New Testament shows that sometimes the verb is future, sometimes present, sometimes past. Could it be that in the original prayer as taught by Jesus, a participle was used which did not indicate any tense? It is because of this that most translations now render the verb as present, as the RSV and GNB have done.

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*

This is obviously the most difficult part of the prayer. What does it all mean? And how can it be translated meaningfully? There are three problems:

1. *Lead us not*. The Greek verb is in the subjunctive mood, which means that there are two possibilities of understanding this phrase:
  - (a) As in the RSV and GNB, and most translations, this means that we pray for God not to lead or bring us into temptation or hard testing. This understanding is legitimate, since in the Bible, God often leads or brings people into difficult situations, either as a test of their trust in him, or as punishment for their disobedience.
  - (b) Because of the Aramaic background of the verse, some scholars suggest that the sense of the verb could be causative (for example "Cause us not") or perhaps, with a permissive force (for example "Do not allow us").

2. *Temptation.* The word translated "temptation" can mean trials, testing, difficulties, especially as they are related to the end of the age, or temptation to become unfaithful to God, or to leave the faith. The source of the temptation then would be the Evil One, mentioned in the second line.
3. *Evil.* If the Greek word is taken to be in the neuter gender, then the word can mean simply "evil". If, however, the gender is masculine, then the expression stands for the devil, or the Evil One.

Taking the above possibilities, we can come up with the following possible ways of expressing the meaning of this part of the prayer:

1. Don't allow us to be defeated by temptation, but keep us safe from the power of the Evil One.
2. Don't allow us to become unfaithful to you when we are tested, but keep us safe from the power of the Evil One.
3. Keep us faithful to you when we face trials, protect us from the power of the Evil One.
4. Keep us faithful to you when we are tempted by the Evil One, protect us from his power.

[*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*]

It is now generally admitted that this last part of the Lord's Prayer is not part of the original text found in the Gospels, but was added later for use in the worship of the church. It is, however, retained in many translations because of the tradition: it has been there all the time, and this is not the time to take it out. However, it is advisable to set these verses apart with square brackets, to mark them as not being in the best and oldest New Testament Manuscripts.

This final expression of praise deals with three aspects of God: his kingdom, his power, and his glory. The method of translating "event" words as verbs works very well with this last part. So may we suggest the following:

|         |   |  |
|---------|---|--|
| kingdom | — | God rules, <i>or</i> God is king       |
| power   | — | God is all-powerful                    |
| glory   | — | God is praised, <i>or</i> God is great |

Taking the above suggestions, we may express the whole of this conclusion in one of the following ways:

1. You are our powerful and great king forever and ever.
2. You are our ruler. You have power over us. You deserve to be praised forever and ever.
3. You rule over us,  
You have power over us,  
You are our great king forever and ever.

The "Amen" is a fitting ending to every prayer and has the sense of "May it be so, as we have prayed".