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JEREMIAH AND THE UBS HEBREW OLD TESTAMENT TEXT PROJECT

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The UBS Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP) published between 1975 and 1980 an interim report in five volumes, which have been extensively used by translators and others. This article has been written on the basis of experience in using the Interim Report with Indonesian translators. The first part of the article discusses (briefly, since little comment is required) aspects of the Interim Report which have proved of great practical value in the translation of Jeremiah. The second part of the article discusses in greater detail, though still selectively, some places in which the principles and practice of the HOTTP committee appear to have inhibited them from giving translators information and guidance from which they would have benefited.

Positive Areas

The Indonesian translators, like many others, used TEV as a model text¹ to guide them in matters of meaning and language level. For such groups it is interesting to find out how far HOTTP recommendations are reflected in TEV.

1. In many cases, *TEV agrees with HOTTP* over against other major English translations. For example, in Jer. 15.13, HOTTP "as a price for all your sins" follows the Septuagint (LXX) against the Hebrew Massoretic Text (MT), which literally translated has "not with a price, and in all your sins". TEV sides with HOTTP and LXX, while RSV sides with MT. In Jer. 17.19, RSV treats "Benjamin" as a name, and translates "the Benjamin Gate", whereas HOTTP ("of the sons of the people") and TEV ("the People's Gate") translate its meaning. See also 18.14; 25.9; and 11:16, where TEV reflects to some degree HOTTP's second recommendation: "He puts fire to it, and they break its branches." (NB: the TEV committee did not have all of HOTTP—Ed.)

2. In other cases, *HOTTP's recommendations, though not followed by TEV, deserve serious consideration.* In Jer. 15.8, RSV as usual gives a rather literal translation: "I have made their widows more in number than the sand of the sea; I have brought against the mothers of young men a destroyer at noonday." HOTTP's explanation makes the underlying meaning explicit: "God will bring against the widows, that is, the mothers of young warriors

¹ See Harold W. Fehderau, "The role of bases and models in Bible Translation". TBT 30 (4), 1979, 401-414.

(who, having been killed, cannot defend their mothers) a destroyer or a young warrior enemy, who carries out destruction in the middle of the day, because he need not fear any vengeance." In 49.4, HOTTP's "in her treasures" (as RSV) seems preferable to TEV's unnecessarily generalized "in your power". (Here as in many other places, TEV however rightly changes personal pronouns to produce a more coherent text). See also 2.16; 25.34.

3. In a few places, *the HOTTP committee rightly went beyond form to meaning*. That is, it did not merely give a literal translation, but, either in its translational suggestion or in a comment, made clear what the text really means. For example, on Jer. 10.24, HOTTP usefully comments: "The first person singular 'I' has here a collective meaning. It is the people who speak". The long comment on 15.8 is essential to the understanding of HOTTP's suggested translation; the same is true of the comment on 25.34. On 46.20, HOTTP comments that "the repetition of the verb ('came') suggests the repeated return, the constant buzzing of the gadfly. On 51.39, the literal translation "rejoice" is explained as ironical. See also the comments on 6.6, where HOTTP gives *pāqad* the unusual meaning "investigated", 7.4, 13.12, 39.8.

Problem Areas

1. *The suggested translation does not seem to fit the context*, either within the verse, or within the passage. There may be various reasons for this. Sometimes, the Hebrew text just cannot be fitted into the context, and many translations follow one of the versions or a conjectural emendation. In other cases, the textual problem is so localized that its relationship to the wider context is not apparent. Sometimes, the suggested (often literal) translation would fit the context if its meaning were made clear. Many examples of such problems may be quoted from Jeremiah alone.

In 2.24, MT (and HOTTP) "wild ass" interrupts a description of a camel in vv. 23 and 24b. HOTTP is prevented by its working principles from considering conjectural emendations; but in such cases as this, the text as it stands does not make good sense, and the translator needs further guidance.

The two HOTTP comments on 4.16 seem to contradict one another. On the one hand, HOTTP notes that RSV's "besiegers" may have followed MT; on the other hand, HOTTP's suggestion "guards" is explained by saying that "the guards referred to here are those who had the responsibility to watch a besieged city in order to arrest any escaping citizens." In fact, it is so difficult to fit "guards" into the context that many translations emend *nōš'erīm* either to *nēšōrīm* "invaders, besiegers", or to *šārīm* "enemies". But if RSV may have followed MT, "besiegers" should perhaps be suggested as a possible translation of *nōš'erīm*.

5.13 is a more complex case, as differences between translations show:

RSV The prophets will become wind; the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them!

NAB The prophets have become wind, and the word is not in them. May their threats be carried out against themselves!

JB And the prophets? Nothing but wind; the word is not in them. . . . (14a) . . . this is what is going to happen to them (14b) for saying this: now I will make my words . . .

TEV (13-14) They have said that the prophets are nothing but windbags and that they have no message from the Lord . . . Because these people have said such things, I will make my words like a fire in your mouth . . .

HOTTP Thus shall it be done to them.

The problem is how the suggested translation fits the context. There are at least three possible solutions. (1) According to NAB, whatever threats the prophets have uttered will be turned back on themselves, not against those whom they have threatened. NIV chooses this solution also. (2) According to RSV, the words are connected with v. 12 to give the meaning: The prophets have said that no evil will come, that there will be no war or famine. But they will experience everything that they have said would not happen. (3) JB and TEV connect the words with what follows. Perhaps the HOTTP comments could be expanded to include exegetical and translational implications of a textual decision. In this way, translators would be helped to apply the committee's recommendations.

6.2 raises three problems. HOTTP suggests the translation "the comely and the spoiled—I have destroyed of Zion." This is followed by most major translations except JB, which gives different meanings to the same Hebrew words. The first problem with the HOTTP recommendation is how the perfect tense "I destroyed" fits with the future tenses of vv 1 and 3. Secondly, the English suggested translation implies several "comely and spoiled" persons, but the French suggested translation and the remarks make it clear that only one person is referred to. Thirdly, HOTTP does not make it clear that in the expression "daughter of Zion", Zion *is* the daughter. On all these points, many translators will need more help than is given in the Interim Report.

In 6.27, HOTTP suggests the translation: "Among my people (as an assayer (of metals) I established you (literally: I have you), as a fortress (literally: you fortress) (with an allusion to the title given to the prophet in Jer. 1.18); you will examine (and test . . .)." The complicated parentheses are no doubt intended as guidance for the translator, not as part of the translation itself. The main problem, however, is that "fortress" does not seem to fit the context: a fortress does not test and examine people. Is it possible that "fortress" is secondary, having been added under the influence of 1.18? Alternatively, as John Bright suggests, *mbsr* may be vocalized as *m^ebaššer*, one who searches through, a tester. In any case, the translator faces the difficult choice between following the HOTTP suggestion and producing a strange translation on the one hand, and risking unfaithfulness to the text on the other hand.

In 27.1, the problem is not textual but translational. MT, followed by HOTTP and NAB, has "Jehoiakim"; but as the HOTTP comment indicates, the context requires "Zedekiah" (so RSV, JB and TEV). The HOTTP comment suggests putting the entire verse in a note, but this is not acceptable in many areas; putting the verse in parentheses may be less objectionable. From the point of view of textual analysis, HOTTP feels bound to retain "Jehoiakim"; but on the basis of dynamic equivalent translation principles, it would seem better to have "Zedekiah" in the text, and "Jehoiakim" in a note. Here as in other places, HOTTP's guiding principles inhibit the committee

from giving valuable help to the translator. Similar examples may be found in the HOTTP discussion of Jer. 2.34; 3.8; 11.20; 20.12; 30.5,8; 33.2; 38.10; 46.9; 48.31; 50.9; 51.29 and 49.

2. *The meaning of the suggested translation is hard to determine.* Sometimes the suggested translation is presented in such a way that it is difficult to make sense of it. At other times, the recommended text is translated literally, but with no clue as to the meaning of the literal expression. For example, it is unclear in Jer. 2.31 whether "generation" is to be understood literally, or whether it has the extended meaning of "people" (TEV). Similarly, in 2.36, it is not clear whether "go away" and "changing your route", in the suggested translation, are literal or figurative.

In 9.4 (4), 5 (6), HOTTP offers a suggested translation which is grammatically incomplete: "(They have taught their tongue to speak lies), perversion; they are unable to come back. (v. 5) oppression upon oppression . . .)". Moreover, HOTTP does not tell the translator whether "they are unable to come back" may mean "they are unable to repent" or "they are unable to stop sinning", as in TEV and other translations. In 9.25 (26), the text certainly reads "uncircumcised"; but LXX adds *kardias autōn*, "of their hearts", implying that "uncircumcised" is to be understood figuratively. TEV telescopes vv. 25-26, and so makes the figurative meaning clear: "All these people are circumcised, but have not kept the covenant it (?) symbolizes."

In the careful discussion of 11.15, a difficult text, the Interim Report leaves the translator on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, he is told that "no other text could claim to have better support than the MT". On the other hand, the translation proposed on the basis of MT is difficult almost to the point of incoherence. This is also the case in the suggested translation of 17.16: "(I did not withdraw) from (being) a shepherd (following behind you) (i.e. to follow as a shepherd behind you)." Faithful to its guiding principles, HOTTP rejects conjectural emendations. But the translator would also be helped by some guidance on whether, in this context, "shepherd" means one who takes care of the people (a function of the ruler), or whether it means "prophet", one who must speak out in God's name, but does not wish calamity to fall on the people. A simpler example is 51.13, where the HOTTP recommendation "your end has come, the cubit's (length) (where) your (cloth) will be cut off" is both difficult to decipher in itself, and difficult to relate to the context. Further examples in this category may be found in the discussion of 9.16 (17); 10.18,25; 15.16; 17.2; 51.3.

3. *The relation between the Hebrew and Greek recensions.*

In Jeremiah as in Ezekiel, there are important differences between MT and LXX. HOTTP aligns itself with general scholarly opinion in stating that "both the MT and the Septuagint are the result of specific literary developments which took place after the period in which the Septuagint translation was made. Therefore, it is no longer always possible to establish, by means of textual analysis, the form of the text prior to these two specific literary developments." HOTTP accordingly decided "not to mix these two textual traditions, one belonging to the MT, the other to the Septuagint, but to stay with the MT." This principle is applied throughout Jeremiah, with the exception of 22.23. Yet

in many places, LXX makes better sense than MT, so it is unfortunate that it is not even considered in the Interim Report. For example, in 7.31, the LXX singular “the high place” seems to fit the context better than the MT plural. In 23.17, HOTTP offers a translation of MT which is difficult, without further guidance, to relate to the context, whereas translations generally follow the simpler LXX. In 31.7, the LXX shout of joy: “the Lord has saved his people!” (LXX 38.8) suits the context better than MT “O Lord, save your people”. The suggested translation of 40.5: “and since (in fact) he had not yet gone back—go back!” does not establish any connection between “go back” and the rest of vv. 4-5, and leaves the translator in need of further guidance. Similarly in 41.1 (LXX 48.1), no help is given to the translator in resolving the problem of why, if “chief officers of the king” is the true text, only one person is mentioned. LXX, followed by JB, omits these words, and RSV translates “one of the chief officers of the king”. Further examples of this kind may be found in 12.4; 31.9; 28.13; 29.26; 31.35; 40.5,8; 46.16; and 48.44.

In all such passages, it seems necessary to take LXX seriously as a viable alternative, especially in those places where MT is almost impossible to translate. Translators who are concerned for meaning have used and will continue to use the LXX evidence; so do commentators. It would be most valuable if the HOTTP committee, or some similar expert group, could provide translators with guidelines for evaluating the LXX evidence, especially in such books as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The value of such guidelines would perhaps not even be limited to translators.

4. Textual problems which have little relevance for dynamic equivalent translations. Some details, though textually significant, present no problems for translations of the dynamic equivalence type. Among these are the spelling of names (Nebuchadnezzar or Nebuchadrezzar, 49.30; 50.17); the frequent repetition of “Thus says the Lord” (23.23-24; 49.5 etc.); pronominal changes (29.19; 38.22; 47.7), where dynamic equivalence translations will change pronouns freely in order to make the referent clear; interjections such as “behold” and “thus” (3.5; 4.16 etc.); and the explicit identification of implied participants (“Jerusalem” for “she” in, for example, 44.19).

The intention of this article has been essentially constructive: namely, to explore ways by which the Interim Report can come to be of greater value and help to translators, especially those who do not have a working knowledge of Hebrew. It is recognized that the final reports will be more detailed, and will contain much valuable additional information. But meantime, perhaps for a number of years, the final reports will not be available. Perhaps discussion aroused by the Interim Reports will enable them to be better used by translators, and even enable to final reports to be fashioned in such a way as to be of the greatest possible use to translators all over the world.

Editorial note

Also at the Crete Workshop, Dr. Noel D. Osborn, a UBS Translation Consultant based in Indonesia, presented a complementary paper entitled “Exodus and the HOTTP”. This covered much of the same ground as Dr. Arichea’s article printed above, and reached broadly similar conclusions.

While working with translation projects in the Philippines, Dr. Osborn

noticed, first, that HOTTP recommendations did not always coincide with readings adopted by TEV (though some adjustments will be made in future editions); second, that a number of the problems discussed in the *Preliminary and Interim Report* were not serious problems for the translator; and third, that many of the proposed solutions seemed to show little concern for the problems of dynamic equivalence translation.

An analysis of the 155 texts of Exodus discussed in HOTTP showed that in 70% of the cases where TEV did not follow the recommendations of the Preliminary Report, the reason was that TEV was following the Septuagint and/or the Samaritan Pentateuch. In 14 other cases, the problem was avoided by dynamic equivalence translation. Dr. Osborn also analysed divergences between HOTTP and RSV.

He recognized that this kind of analysis did not explain *why* the TEV translators and the HOTTP textual critics were at variance so much of the time. One of the most important factors would be a difference of objective: while the TEV translators are concerned primarily with communicating the *meaning* of the Hebrew text, the members of the HOTTP committee are concerned primarily with the *establishment* of that Hebrew text in its earliest attested form. This entailed a difference of method: while the TEV translators used the method of dynamic equivalence translation, the HOTTP scholars concerned themselves with the formal characteristics of the various witnesses to the text.

Dr. Osborn concludes: "My purpose has not been to draw a 'distinction' into a 'division', but rather to bring some light to a growing uneasiness that is being felt, I suspect, by translators and consultants the more they get into the results of the HOTTP. Both the HOTTP and the Good News Bible are invaluable aids to translators when properly used and understood. May the inevitable 'distinction' between the two become and remain a positive and creative factor in the hands of the translation consultant in contributing to better quality in translation."

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THE "WEAK" AND THE "STRONG" AND PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS

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It should be axiomatic for the translator of any of Paul's letters to read carefully through the entire letter to discover its contents, themes, and structure prior to beginning to translate. This article is not intended to be a substitute for such careful study, but it is written to help the translator better understand one of the situations in the Christian community at Rome which led Paul to write this letter as he did,¹ and to suggest ways in which an understanding of that situation may lead to more meaningful translations, especially of chapters 14 and 15.

¹ Sam K. Williams has recently written, "The Apostle says quite clearly why he writes (Rom 1.9-15; 15.22-28); what is not clear is why he writes *what* he writes." "The 'Righteousness of God' in Romans," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 99: 245, 1980.