

Some notes on Acts 2.17–21

At a recent meeting of the Asia Pacific committee in charge of preparing New Reader model texts, some problems were discovered in the translation of Acts 2.17–21. Two of these problems are discussed in this brief note.

The first problem is the relationship between the groups of the people mentioned in verses 17 and 18. The GNB reads:

- (17) Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message,
 Your young men will see visions,
 And your old men will have dreams.
- (18) Yes, even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days . . .

Here we have four groups mentioned: sons and daughters, young men, old men, and servants. The question is: are these meant to be four groups, or is the fourth group (“servants”) meant to be a general grouping which includes the first three groups?

The answer to the above question depends on the meaning of the greek expression *kai ge* which is found at the beginning of verse 18. In some cases this expression can be used to express limitation (“at least” in Luke 19.42), and emphasis (meaning “even”, or “yes”.) Here, of course, it is used for emphasis. But does the expression here mean “even on my servants”, suggesting that they are a separate group? Or does it mean “yes, on my servants”, referring back to the people already mentioned? The GNB has “Yes, even on my servants”, which tends toward the first of these two alternatives, and the RSV has “yes, and on my menservants and my maidservants”, which can be interpreted to mean the second of these two alternatives.

Another problem here is the use of the pronoun “my”. In verse 17, the pronoun used is “your”, but in verse 18, the pronoun used with “servants” is “my”. What does “my” here mean? Are the servants here God’s servants in a religious sense, that is prophets, priests, and others? Or are these people who are servants in real life who now serve God? Or are these really the same as the three groups above, who because of the gift of God’s Spirit have now become God’s servants?

This last alternative is very attractive. The structure of this part of the passage would then be as follows:

- I will pour out my Spirit on everyone (general)
 Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message (particular)
 Your young men will see visions (particular)
 Your old men will have dreams (particular)
 Yes, on my servants both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit . . . (general)

The second problem concerns verses 19 and 20. The GNB reads:

- I will perform miracles in the sky above
 and wonders on the earth below.
 There will be blood, fire and thick smoke;
 The sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will turn red as blood . . .

An examination of these lines indicates that line 1 deals with the sky above, line 2 with the earth below, line 3 with what happens on the earth, and lines 4 and 5 with what happens in the sky. The structure of this part of the passage then is sky-earth-earth-sky, an a-b-b-a pattern.

If this understanding of the structure is accepted, then the passage can be rearranged in order to make the meaning much clearer:

I will perform miracles in the sky above:

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will turn red as blood.

I will perform wonders on the earth below:

there will be blood, fire, and thick smoke.

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Names of God: a comment on Mark 11.3 and parallels

In his valuable article on Names of God in the New Testament (April 1984, page 210) Jacob Loewen points out that there are very few instances in which Jesus is called *kurios* before his resurrection. I wish to suggest that there are even fewer than he mentions, because there are strong reasons why Mark 11.3 (and the parallels at Matthew 21.3 and Luke 19.31) should not be translated "The Master (or Lord) needs it", but "Its master needs it".

- (1) If Jesus instructed his messengers to describe him as *ho kurios* (the Lord) the impression created by Mark's Greek would have been that Jesus was arrogating to himself the Divine Name translated *kurios* throughout the Septuagint. But throughout his Gospel Mark is careful to avoid suggesting that Jesus directly claimed any such title as Lord or Son of God; others might call him so, but his own title was Son of Man.
- (2) The order of the Greek words is against the customary translation. If Mark had meant "The Lord needs it" he would have written *ho kurios chreian echei autou*; but in fact he wrote (and Matthew and Luke followed this order) *ho kurios autou chreian echei*, which means "Its master has need (of it)". Perhaps the word *kurios* was chosen to hint that the one who needed the animal was really Jesus, who was its master because he was Lord of all things; but whatever the interpretation, the translator's business is to give the exact force of the Greek. In this instance this is done in *The Translator's New Testament* and the translation of J. B. Phillips. (It is given as a possible alternative translation as a footnote in the *New English Bible*.)

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