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**TRANSLATING THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR
CHILDREN: GENESIS AS A TEST CASE**

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Introduction

Several years ago, the Indonesian Bible Society embarked on a project of producing a New Testament for children. This project was concluded with the printing of *Good News for Children* in 1984. A report on the project was published in *The Bible Translator*, April 1986 (pages 239-248).

Purposes and Functions of a Children's Old Testament

Immediately after the conclusion of the Children's New Testament project, the IBS embarked on a similar project with regard to the Old Testament for children. At the outset there were lingering doubts as to the possibility of succeeding in such a task. Can the Old Testament be translated for children? What do we do about the apparent contradictions that bother even adult readers of the Old Testament? Should a child be confronted with two creation stories which happen to be right at the beginning of the Old Testament? Should a child be subjected to the contrasting information found in Genesis 6 and 7 regarding the number of pairs of animals that Noah should take with him into the boat? Furthermore, how do we handle all the violence and sexual explicitness that are contained in many parts of the Old Testament? Is it possible to omit passages which give rise to difficulty for children and still come up with something that can be called the Old Testament? But more importantly, the question of purpose was seriously considered. What would be the function or functions of such a translation, and how would such a translation be used?

The normal use of translations for children is to provide children with Bible stories which they can understand. These stories are either read by the children themselves, or by an adult (a parent or a teacher) to the children, either individually or as a group. This function is of course a primary one. And one line of promotion for the Indonesian Children's New Testament is that it is something appropriate for parents to read to their children. (We were very much amazed to hear that many parents have been using this particular translation for Bible study. Of course that would be the logical thing, since the reading level of many parents does not exceed that of a fourth grade child.)

However, the function of a Children's Bible is much wider than just providing children with stories from the Bible. Primarily it is to make the biblical message accessible to children. And the biblical message is not contained only in stories; it is also found in non-narrative materials: in the Psalms, in the proverbial sayings, in the teachings of the prophets, in the teachings of Jesus, the letters of Paul, and so on. Therefore it was decided in the very early stages of the project that materials from non-narrative parts of the Bible would also be included in the translation. By doing this, the biblical message is not only presented to the child, but the needs of the intended audience are adequately met, since they are provided with sufficient material to lead them into an informed faith and a mature Christian life.

A Children's Bible also functions as a bridge to the common language Bible. This means that as children grow older, they will want to go from the Children's Bible into a complete common language Bible. With this in mind, the Children's Bible does not have to be complete. But at the same time, it must be complete enough to present the Biblical story in such a way that the readers, be they children or parents, get a grasp of the panorama of biblical history and teaching.

A further consideration is that for many children, a Children's Old Testament will be the first Old Testament that they will read or hear being read, and therefore it should be attractive to them.

General Principles for the Selection of Passages

As in the case of the New Testament, there were no existing principles or guidelines that were prepared primarily for an Old Testament for children. There were, however, two sets of guidelines which were of great help in the task of selecting passages for inclusion into the Children's Old Testament.

The first set of guidelines was the general principles used in the selection of passages for inclusion in the *Children's New Testament*. It was discovered that principles used in the Children's NT project were applicable for the Old Testament as well. Among these principles are the following:

1. Passages that best represent the theme or purpose of a particular biblical book should be included.
2. Passages which have gained widespread popularity in Christian communities would normally be included.
3. The passages chosen should depict the real nature of the Scriptures, in both their unity and their diversity. This has reference to various literary genres and themes within the Scriptures. The tendency in preparing Scriptures for children is to limit the passages to narrative materials. This tendency should be avoided and instead various literary genres found in the Bible should be reflected in the passages selected.
4. The intended audience is children from the ages of 3 to 12. Passages selected should be appropriate for this age range. Furthermore, no biblical knowledge of any kind is assumed of the intended readers. In general, the following types of passages would not be included:
 - (a) those which present a great deal of difficulty in cultural matters.
 - (b) those with extremely deep or complicated theological themes.
 - (c) those with gory themes such as rape. Where these are needed to complete a story, they will be included in the bridge material, and summarized in general terms.
5. A further consideration is the religious situation in Indonesia itself. While it is assumed that most of the readers of this translation will be Christians, yet the situation and needs of the wider audience are taken into account, especially in the selection of passages.

The second set of guidelines was those for the Shorter Old Testament (or Selections from the Old Testament). These guidelines were prepared a number of years ago in order to help in the selection of passages to be included in the Shorter Old Testament. Among these guidelines are the following:

1. The selections include a broad panorama of the promises and mighty acts of God on behalf of his people.
2. Usually, longer continuous sections are used, rather than smaller units.
3. Special attention is given to those passages to which there is later reference in the New Testament.
4. Passages which have special human interest are normally included.
5. Passages which have been of great spiritual resource or have been used widely in corporate and private worship are normally included.
6. There has been no intention of producing an "expurgated" Old Testament from which passages of dubious moral significance, in the eyes of some, have been systematically deleted.

The Shorter Old Testament has been helpful in yet another way, in that the passages included in it have been made the starting point for the

Children's Old Testament project. This means that passages not included in the ShOT would not normally be considered for inclusion in the Children's OT; it further means that only those included in the ShOT will be evaluated according to the general principles mentioned above. In a real sense therefore, the Children's Old Testament is a Shorter Shorter Old Testament.

Organizing the Material

Once passages are selected, then there is the further task of organizing these passages. The choice is between following a typical one-level division comprising sections and section headings, or else using a more topical outline, with titles, sections and subsections, while still following the canonical order within a particular book. In the New Testament, the former procedure was followed except for the Gospels which have been put together as a single story of the life and teachings of Jesus. But what about the Old Testament? After a period of testing out these options, it was decided that more than one level should be used, so that as much as possible, the sections are joined together into larger sections, thus giving the impression that the material is topically arranged. Furthermore, it was also decided that the canonical order of the material would be followed, except for one book, namely the book of Proverbs. This is because the book of Proverbs lends itself to a division by subject matter of themes, and the verses can therefore be arranged under various themes or topics. (Our resolve to follow this method was reinforced by the outline of the Sinhala Children's Bible prepared by the Ceylon Bible Society under the consultancy of Basil Rebera. Many of the topical arrangements within the outline have been either followed or adapted by the Indonesian project. The Sinhala Children's Bible is due to be published sometime this year.)

Selection and Organization of Passages for the book of Genesis

It is simple enough to come up with general principles for the selection of passages, but it is another matter altogether when these principles are applied. The book of Genesis went through several stages of selecting, omitting and organizing passages, until finally we came up with the following outline:

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND THE FIRST HUMAN BEINGS 1.1— 2.4a

The time before creation	1.1-2
The first day	1.3-5
The second day	1.6-8
The third day	1.9-13
The fourth day	1.14-19
The fifth day	1.20-23

The sixth day	1.24-31
The seventh day	2.1-4

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN DISOBEY GOD AND ARE PUNISHED 3.1—4.16

The snake deceives the woman	3.1-5
The woman does what the snake suggests	3.6-7
The man and the woman are afraid to see God	3.8-13
God judges the man, the woman and the snake	3.14-21
The man and the woman are driven out of Eden	3.22-24
The first two brothers	4.1-16

THE GREAT FLOOD: THE STORY OF NOAH 6.5—9.17

A big boat	6.5-22
The flood comes	7.11-24
The flood stops	8.1-19
God's promise to Noah and to all people	9.1-17
The tower of Babylon	11.1-9

ABRAHAM: A PERSON WHO REALLY TRUSTS IN THE LORD 12.1—24.64

God calls Abraham	12.1-3
Abraham leaves his country	12.4-7
Abraham and Lot separate from one another	13.8-18
Melchizedek asks the Lord to bless Abraham	14.18-20
Hagar and Ishmael	16.1-16
God's promise to Abraham	17.1-14
The Lord promises a son to Abraham and Sarah	17.15-27
The Lord appears again to Abraham	18.1-15
Abraham intercedes for Sodom	18.23-33
The Lord fulfills his promise to Abraham	21.1-8
Hagar and Ishmael sent away	21.9-21
The Lord commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice	22.1-19
A wife for Isaac	24.2-33,49-67

JACOB: THE ANCESTOR OF MANY NATIONS 25.20—35.15

The birth of Esau and Jacob	25.20-26
Esau sells his right as the first son	25.27-34
Jacob receives the special blessing for the first son	27.1-30a
Esau asks Isaac to bless him	27.30b-40
Jacob flees from Esau	27.41-45
Isaac orders Jacob to go to Laban	27.46—28.4
Jacob's dream in Bethel	28.10-22

Jacob arrives at the home of Laban	29.1-14a
Jacob works for Laban in order to get married to Rachel	29.14b-23, 25-28,30
Jacob prepares to meet Esau	32.1-21a
Jacob wrestles with the Lord at Peniel	32.22-31
Jacob meets with Esau	33.1-20
The Lord blesses Jacob at Bethel	35.9-15
JOSEPH: THE SLAVE WHO BECAME GOVERNOR 37.2b—50.26	
Joseph and his brothers	37.2b-4
Joseph and his dreams	37.5-11
Joseph is sold and taken to Egypt	37.12-36
Joseph explains the meaning of the dreams of two servants of the king of Egypt	40.1-23
The dreams of the king of Egypt	41.1-16
Joseph explains the meaning of the king's dreams	41.17-36
Joseph becomes governor of Egypt	41.37-44
Joseph gathers the grain in barns	41.46b-49
Seven years of famine	41.53-57
The brothers of Joseph go to Egypt to buy grain	42.1-24
The brothers of Joseph return to Canaan	42.25-38
The brothers of Joseph go again to Egypt together with Benjamin	43.1-34
The missing cup	44.1-17
Judah pleads for Benjamin	44.18-34
Joseph tells his brothers who he is	45.1-28
Jacob and his whole family go to Egypt	46.1-7
Jacob and his whole family arrive in Egypt	46.28—47.12
Jacob asks the Lord to bless the two sons of Joseph	48.1-2,8-21
Jacob dies and is buried	49.29—50.14
Joseph promises to do good to his brothers	50.15-21
Joseph dies	50.22-26

We should note that while the organization of the material follows the ordering of the text, it varies from a higher level translation in that it employs many more headings and sub-headings. Furthermore, topical titles are included in order to indicate to the readers that a particular segment of the text is one unit.

Of course it is obvious that organizing the book of Genesis in this way is much easier than other materials, since the book naturally divides into five parts. Other Old Testament books may not divide that logically and naturally. Nevertheless, it is a valid principle that wherever possible we should try to organize the material in a logical and natural way, at the same time making sure that the resulting material stays within the bounds of what can be described as proper and legitimate translation.

Through such organization, the young reader is provided with an easy outline to follow and is aided in grasping the meaning and message of the biblical material. The following are some explanations for the inclusion and/or exclusion of passages.

Chapter 2 verses 4-25 (the so-called second story of creation) have been replaced by a bridge. The apparent contradiction between chapters 1 and 2 could lead to some problems for children, especially if parents reading the story to the children cannot give a satisfactory explanation. Bridge material, however, is necessary because there are elements in chapter 2 that are included in chapter 3, for instance the existence of the tree that gives life and the tree that gives knowledge of good and evil, and the command not to eat the fruit from this latter tree. The bridge material then helps the reader to understand chapter 3 much better.

Chapter 4 verses 13-16 are excluded because they include the information about the Lord putting a mark on Cain to warn anyone who would meet him not to kill him. Verses 17-24 are also omitted because they simply contain an account of Cain's descendants, while verses 25-26 contain information about Adam's two other sons.

Chapter 6 verses 1-4 have been replaced with a bridge, because of some difficult problems: supernatural beings, giants, and so on, which may be interesting to children, but are quite difficult to translate and explain.

Chapter 7 verses 1-10 have been omitted because of the apparent disagreement with 6.19-20 regarding the number of pairs of animals Noah should take into the boat. Also verses 6-10 contain information repeated in 6.11-15.

Chapter 8 verses 20-22 have been replaced with a bridge for the following reasons: firstly, some information is repeated in 9.8-16; and the passage also contains reference to "ritually clean animals", which is contained in 7.1-5 which has been omitted.

Sections omitted from the Abraham narrative as not playing any important role in the story are: **11.27-32; 12.8-20; 14.1-16; chapter 19; chapter 20; 21.22-34; and chapter 23**. Besides 12.8-9, sections omitted because of the problems of strange names and places are **chapter 15 and 25.1-18**. Sections which have been included because of their particular interest for Muslims are chapter 16, chapter 17 (circumcision), and 22.1-19 (the sacrifice of Isaac).

In the Jacob narrative, sections omitted as not being very important to the development of the story are: **chapter 26; 28.6-9** (but the information about Esau marrying one of Ishmael's daughters has been included in a bridge); **29.31—30.24** (a bridge lists the children

of Jacob); and **30.25—31.55** (summarized in a bridge). **Chapter 34** has been omitted since it is not directly related to the story of Jacob.

The following passages have been omitted as not being very important to the story of Joseph: **41.45-46a,50-52; 48.8-27; 47.13-31; 48.3-7; 49.1-28**. **Chapter 38** has also been omitted as being unrelated to the story of Joseph. **Chapter 39** is very interesting, but perhaps is too explicit for children. Therefore it has been replaced by a bridge.

The Translation Task

In a translation for children, functional equivalent principles are applied and implemented as far as they can go. And since no biblical knowledge is assumed of the intended audience, these functional equivalent principles insure that the resulting translation will be faithful to the biblical text in terms of meaning and at the same time appropriate to the intended audience in terms of language, style, and readability. What follows are some of the translation principles used in the preparation of the Indonesian Children's Old Testament together with illustrations from the book of Genesis.

1. **Implicit information is made explicit.** This is perhaps the most important principle, especially if we remember that the intended audience is assumed to have no biblical knowledge at all. An example is found in 1.4b "God separated the light from the darkness." As the text stands, it seems like light and darkness are two things which are put into two separate places. But the separation here is not spatial but temporal, that is, it is not in terms of place but in terms of time. Accordingly this information is made explicit in the translation: "God separated the light from the darkness and determined the time when light will shine."
2. **The meaning of terms** are, whenever possible, included in the translation. In a higher language level translation, there is recourse to notes (either footnotes or endnotes) to explain the meaning of names and technical terms. But while a word list is also envisaged for this project, yet this is reduced to a bare minimum, simply because children would not, as a rule, be able to use such a word list. Books for children in Indonesian schools are almost always straight texts with no notes of any kind, and the Indonesian child is therefore not trained to consult or make use of notes. It is for these reasons that whenever possible, the meanings of names and other terms are included in the translation. Some examples follow:
 - 3.20 "The man called his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living." Before this verse the expression *ha adam* "the man" has appeared quite frequently, but without explanation as to what *adam*

means. In the Indonesian translation, the meanings of both *adam* and *hawa* "Eve" are included in this verse: "The man's name was Adam, which means 'humankind'. He named his wife Hawa (Eve), which means 'life', because Eve is the mother of all humankind."

- 3.24b** "At the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim." The cherubim are perhaps related to the Mesopotamian *karibu*, a winged monster which is placed in front of temples and palaces. The Biblical "cherubim" are creatures of a higher world, whose functions include guarding sacred objects and places (see Ex 37.7-9, Ezek 28.14-16). In higher level translations, the term "cherubim" would be included in a word list. But in a translation for children, it is perhaps best to include some description in the translation. In the case of the Indonesian Children's Old Testament, it was decided to translate "cherubim" as "angels", since "special guards" (Asia Pacific New Reader texts) or "living creatures" (GNB) do not include the component of "heavenly" or "spiritual". Also included is a short description of these "angels": "He (the Lord) placed in the east of the garden a few angels in order to guard the entrance. These angels are like lions with wings and have human faces."

In some cases, the meaning of a name is included in an introductory statement of bridge material. For instance, the introduction to the story of Ishmael's birth (16.1-16) is as follows: "This is the account of the birth of Ishmael. The word Ishmael means 'The Lord hears'." The introduction to 17.1-14 is as follows: "Actually Abraham was named Abram by his parents. But the Lord named him Abraham, because the word 'Abraham' means 'the father of many nations', and the Lord wanted to give him descendants which would become a big and great nation."

- 3. Technical terms are translated according to meaning.** As a rule, technical terms are avoided in the translation. In a higher level translation, some of these terms could be retained and perhaps explained in a word list. But to help children and their parents to immediately grasp the meaning of these terms, efforts have been made to translate these terms according to their meaning in specific contexts.
- 4. Prose versus poetry.** Very early in their education, Indonesian children are exposed to poetry and become aware of its proper and appropriate use. The poetic form is regarded very positively in Indonesian literature and has a wide range of usage and function. Couplets in verse form are quite popular in teaching; in fact this form is used very extensively on TV to inculcate into the minds of viewers national values and proper conduct. About a year ago, the Indonesian government decided to enforce the law that every motorcycle rider should wear a helmet. This campaign was aided tremendously by

couplets which were broadcast both on radio and on TV in between shows.

Poetry therefore is regarded very highly in the country. And subject matters which are put into poetic form are almost always positive in nature. These include love poems, songs, and didactic materials. But curses, judgment pronouncements, scoldings, and similar subjects which are primarily negative in nature are usually rendered as prose rather than poetry.

In summary then, when materials with positive content are put into poetic form, their value, significance and effectiveness are enhanced, but when materials with negative content are rendered as poetry, the element of seriousness disappears.

These considerations are taken into account in dealing with materials which are poetry in the Hebrew text. A few examples can be given.

Poetry to Prose: The curses that God pronounces on the man, the woman, and the snake in 3.14-21 are poetic material in the Hebrew, and in fact are printed as verse in most translations. But God pronouncing a curse in poetic form simply does not sound right; in fact, it would be outright ridiculous. Therefore this section has been translated in prose form. Similarly, Isaac's rather negative pronouncement to Esau (27.39-40) is translated as prose.

Poetic form retained: Several parts have been rendered as poetry in the translation, including the following:

12.2b-3 God's promise to Abraham. In the Hebrew, only verse 3 is in poetic form, but in the Indonesian translation, 2b has been translated also as poetry.

25.23 the words of the Lord to Rachel.

27.27b-29 Isaac's words of blessing to Jacob. (Incidentally, GNB translates this as prose, but renders Isaac's words to Esau in 27.39-40 as poetry. The Indonesian translation does the exact opposite.)

Conclusion

The aim of every translation of the Bible is to enable a particular audience to understand the biblical message and appropriate it in their lives. Translations for children are aimed at enabling children as children to understand and appreciate the biblical message. Therefore such translations use language that is appropriate for children. Furthermore, such translations incorporate within themselves passages which are both appropriate for children and which clearly convey biblical themes. Every time a translation for children is undertaken and made available, the Bible becomes an open book not only for adults but for children as well.

It is hoped that the Indonesian Children's Bible project will contribute towards making God's Word open for all people, and especially for children.