

3. Another context in which the section heading can be used to give essential information involves the secret message “the abomination of desolation”, which is marked as a secret message in the text by the aside—the reader will know what this means—but which many African readers still do not understand as secret language. In this case the section heading can be used to make that fact clear, “how Jesus warned the people by means of a secret sign-word ‘the terrible thing that spoils’”. This applies to Mk 13.14–23, Lk 21.20–24, Mt 24.15–28.

NOTES

Some problems encountered in translating the Book of Joel into the Bokyi language

The source of all the problems discussed in these notes is the fact that even though both the ancient Israelites and the Bokyi people were and are rural societies living in small villages and farming the surrounding land, their staple foods and farming methods are completely different. Almost all of the staple foods of the Israelites, wheat, barley, grapes, olives and figs are completely unknown in Bokyi. Bokyi people have domestic animals such as sheep, goats, chickens, ducks, a few cows and pigs, but they never feed them or care for them in any way.

The following chart outlines the terms related to agriculture that are found in Joel and are unfamiliar or familiar in Bokyi society. (I used GNB, British edition)

<i>Unfamiliar in Bokyi</i>		<i>Familiar in Bokyi</i>
grapes 1.5	— grape vine 1.7 vineyard 1.11 grape wine 1.5 pruning knife 1.10	fruit trees (grape fruit, called “grapes”)
olives	— olive tree 1.10 olive oil 2.19 oil press 2.24	fruit trees (cocoa trees) small knife 1.12
figs	— fig tree 1.7	fruit trees (mango and others)
corn (grain) 1.9	— wheat 1.11 barley 1.11 granary 1.17	farms (fields) 2.21 crops 1.11 seeds 1.17
plough 3.10		(hoe) sword 3.10 spear 3.10
pastures 1.10		locusts 1.4

grass 2.5	sheep 1:18
	cattle (cows) 3.18
	horses 2.4
	domestic animals 1.18
	wild animals 1.20
	all animals 2.22
spring 2.23	(rainy season)
autumn 2.23	(dry season)
winter 2.23	

Problem 1

Joel reports the destruction of all the food of the Israelites by locusts. God has hit them hard where it hurts the most, in the stomach. The tremendous impact of this destruction on the very life of Israel was, of course, clearly understood by those who first heard the message because familiar terms were used (wheat, barley, wine, and so on). But in a Bokyian translation we are forced to use general terms which lack the necessary impact. If we could translate that God destroyed all the yams, cassava and palm wine a similar impact would be achieved.

In Bokyian there is a wild fig (*kyifem*) and a wild vine (*kaati-esangesang*) with fruit similar to a grape vine, but no crops in Bokyian are even similar to wheat, barley and olives. (Rice and guinea corn are known, but no Bokyian person grows them.)

Therefore, we can only use general terms and sacrifice much of the impact of the original message. Thus in 1.11 “wheat and barley” are combined into one term “seeds” (*esang-byichi*). “Olive trees” in 1.10 is translated “oil” (*bakut*). And “fig trees” in 1.7 is “all trees” (*kangkang byichi*). And in 1.5 “grapes” is translated “fruits of trees used to make wine” (*byirim-byichi mbyi mbe ba-yip ng ba-chi i bato*).

The only other solution that may have a bit more impact would be to translate “food” (*byiryng*) in some contexts instead of “seeds” (*esang-byichi*) for “wheat and barley”. This might have clearer meaning, because seeds are not a common food in Bokyian. This might be better in 1.9,13; 2.14,19, but not in 1.10,11,17; 2.24.

Problem 2

It is most unfortunate that in pidgin English in the Bokyian area a grapefruit is called a “grape”. Thus every Bokyian person wants to translate “grapes” with “citrus fruit” (*emuruku*).

“Grapes” are translated “fruit of trees” (*byirim-byichi*) throughout Joel and the rest of the Bible. Occasionally the term “*gerep*” is added. And there is an explanation of the term “*gerep*” in the Word List that refers to the closest known wild vine (*Kaati-esangesang*).

Problem 3

In Nigeria we normally use the British edition of GNB, because British English is the standard English. However, the British term “corn” is wrongly

understood to be the term for maize (American “corn”) and not a general term for grain as is intended.

The problem is easily solved, of course, by simply using the general term “seeds” in most cases, except in 3.13. Here we used “maize” (*nkurung*), because this is the only grain which is grown in Bokyi.

Problem 4

Ploughs are unknown in Bokyi. However, the cultural equivalent is a short handled hoe (*kyijwap*). This is a case where a good clear picture is the only efficient teacher. In 3.10 both swords and spears are known.

Problem 5

Many Bokyi villages have sheep and goats wandering about the village freely, but no one feeds them or confines them in any way. Many years ago when leopards were common, Bokyi people brought their sheep and goats into the village at night for protection, but this is almost completely forgotten. Therefore, the term “pasture” is unknown.

The only solution is to use general terms for weeds and grasses, for instance in 1.18 “weeds” (*biibyaa*) and in 1.19 and 2.22 “grass” (*aro*). This seems to be quite a satisfactory solution.

Problem 6

Not only in the book of Joel but throughout the GNB Old Testament especially, it is difficult to know whether the term “cattle” is used generally or specifically (American “cows”). A Hebrew dictionary and commentaries do not necessarily help because you cannot tell if GNB agrees with their interpretation or not. The GNB American edition sometimes helps.

Fortunately we now have a Handbook on Joel which give clear guidance at 1.18 and 3.18. The other terms for domestic and wild animals are fortunately easily handled in Bokyi in the book of Joel.

Problem 7

There is no spring, autumn or winter in most of Africa. There is only a rainy season and a dry season.

In 2.23 we translated “rain of rainy season” (*omy-kuifang*), and “rain of dry season” (*omu mu burwom*) and “rain of heads of dry season”. “Rain of dry season” may seem strange, but there are often a few rains after Christmas time which help to soften the ground for ploughing. “Rain of heads of dry season” means the last rains of the rainy season. There is really no alternative solution.

PAUL C. BRUNS