

The extremely important preparation of the manuscript in its final stage (the form of the translation that will be submitted for publication) can all too easily be neglected. Members of the team may be careless at this point because of weariness after many months of hard work. It is advisable, whenever possible, to have a competent person outside the team read the entire manuscript for consistency, grammatical accuracy, and literary smoothness. Such a person will often discover renderings which have two possible meanings, phrases that sound bad, and other defects which team members have overlooked because they know the text so well.

Conclusions

A list of principles and procedures is, of course, never fixed. Changes can always be introduced, but this should be done only after very careful consideration and for very good reasons. If a change is made in principles and procedures, then each member of the team must know exactly when it starts to apply, and everything which has been done before that time must be carefully reviewed in terms of the revised principles and procedures. All the principles and procedures agreed upon by the committee, both those adopted at the beginning of the project and any modifications or changes adopted later, should be submitted to the related Bible Societies; and there must be agreement between the Societies and the team that such principles and procedures are the ones which will guide the work. If this is done the translation team will have a ready defense against adverse criticism. If the team comes under attack for the way it has rendered any passage, it can appeal to the agreed-upon principles and procedures as a justification for the translation. Furthermore, a clear statement of such principles and procedures can be extremely valuable in helping reviewers and consultants understand the nature of the translation and in assisting them to determine how they can make helpful suggestions.

An adequate set of principles and procedures for translation work has been found to be indispensable. Therefore, those responsible for translation work which is supported by the United Bible Societies have agreed that no translation project will be allowed to go forward until a satisfactory set of these agreed-upon guide-lines has been adopted.

DAVID J. CLARK

THE CASE OF THE VANISHING ANGEL

Dr. David Clark is a UBS Translation Consultant based in Bangalore, India.

The early part of the book of Zechariah consists mainly of a series of visions (Zech 1.7-6.15). The first vision in particular contains a number of unusual and interesting problems, and this article discusses some of them from the point of view of the translator.

How many angels?

One prominent feature of Zechariah's vision is the presence of angels in them. In the first vision, it is not at all obvious how many angels are involved, or which one is referred to at any given point. On such a matter, a translator must have a clear picture in his own mind before he can translate effectively, and so it is to this question that we turn first.

The RSV translates the Hebrew rather literally, and in this way retains the uncertainties of the original. A casual reading of Zech 1.7-17 in RSV will probably leave the reader vaguely puzzled about the number of angels involved. Commentators have shared this feeling, and are divided in their opinions. Some (Thomas, Ellis) hold that only one angel is intended. Others (Driver, Smith) hold that there are as many as three. The majority hold that there are two (Mitchell, Cashdan, Delcor, Baldwin, Mason), but they do not always agree among themselves which one is referred to at each point. How is the translator to decide between these conflicting views?

Some commentators reach their conclusions by proposing changes in the Hebrew text, but in this passage translators do not have any good reason to do this. The Hebrew text here is well preserved, and the translator's task is to deal with the text as it comes to him, not to rewrite it. Let us then survey the evidence, using the literal renderings of the RSV. The terms concerned are as follows:

“a man riding upon a red horse . . . standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 8)

“my lord” (verse 9)

“the angel who talked with me” (verse 9)

“the man who was standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 10)

“the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 11)

“the angel of the LORD” (verse 12)

“the angel who talked with me” (verse 13)

“the angel who talked with me” (verse 14)

It seems certain that the three occurrences of the phrase “the angel who talked with me” (verses 9, 13, 14) all refer to the same person, and the context makes it clear that the vocative “my lord” in verse 9 also refers to this person. It would also appear from the repeated mention of the myrtle trees that “a man riding upon a red horse . . . standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 8), “the man who was standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 10), and “the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees” (verse 11) all refer to the same person.

It is not so clear whether the person among the trees is the same person as the angel who talked with the prophet. It is also not clear whether “the angel of the LORD” in verse 12 is a third figure, or is to be identified with one of the others (if there are two others!).

The large majority of modern commentators (Driver, Mitchell, Smith, Cashdan, Gailey, Delcor, Baldwin, Mason) state or imply that the person among the myrtle trees is distinct from the angel who talked with the prophet. Only two (Thomas, Ellis) identify them, and it is significant that neither gives any serious discussion to the problem. Thomas would prefer to make a change in the text in verses 11 and 12; and from a translator's standpoint, this is bound to make his view less attractive here. Ellis makes the comment that “the ‘man’ (8) and the ‘angel’ (9) are clearly one and the same”; but he does not give any reason for saying this.

A consideration of the wider context of the book of Zechariah suggests that the view of the majority of commentators is the one most likely to be correct. “The angel who talked with me” appears in several other visions (the second, 1.19; the third, 2.3; the fifth, 4.1, 4.5; the seventh, 5.5, 5.10; the eighth, 6.4). In

all these places, he is always referred to in exactly the same way. It therefore seems very unlikely that in the first vision, he would be referred to in several different ways; yet this would be the case if he were identified with the person among the myrtle trees.

A figure called "the angel of the LORD" appears again in the fourth vision (3.1, 5, 6). There is no question there of his being identified with the angel who talked with Zechariah, and this supports the view that he should not be identified with this person in the first vision.

We come then to the conclusion that two separate persons are intended by the prophet, "the angel who talked with me" (verses 9, 13, 14), and the person among the myrtle trees (verses 8, 10, 11).

Some translators may be puzzled as to how one and the same person could be called both "a man" (verses 8, 10) and "an angel" (verse 11). It seems from the Biblical accounts of angels that they usually had the appearance of men, and were not always recognized as angels at first sight. This kind of variation in their description occurs in a number of places in the Old Testament, and is not to be taken as confusion or inconsistency. Compare for instance the descriptions in Gen 18.2, 22; 19.1, 5, 10, 12, 15; Jg 13.3, 6, 8-11, 13, 15-19. In view of the complications in Zechariah's first vision, it would probably be best for translators who accept that the same person is mentioned in verses 8, 10 and 11 to make this clear by referring to him in the same way at each occurrence. In most cases, it would be helpful to identify him as an angel at the first mention in verse 8. (See the translation base suggested at the end of this article.)

We now come to the figure described as "the angel of the LORD" in verse 12. Of the commentators who distinguish between "the angel who talked with me" and the angel "among the myrtle trees", two (Driver, Smith) hold that "the angel of the LORD" in verse 12 is a third participant, distinct from both the others. Another commentator (Mason) tentatively identifies him with "the angel who talked with me". However, the majority (Mitchell, Cashdan, Delcor, Baldwin) identify him with the angel among the myrtles.

The last view seems to fit the context best, and this must be a significant factor for the translator. As the text stands, "the angel of the LORD" in verse 12 is most naturally taken as referring to the person described by the same words in the previous verse. If a change of person was intended, as Mason thinks, then the prophet chose a most confusing way of showing it. If a completely new participant were intended, then again the intention was not at all clearly expressed. Furthermore, if we suppose a new participant at this point, we complicate the narrative to no purpose. We therefore conclude that "the angel of the LORD" in verse 12 is the same angel as has already been mentioned in verses 8, 10 and 11.

Translators who accept the above conclusions may be surprised to find that they are not embodied in the text of the Good News Bible. Most English versions translate Zech 1.7-17 rather literally, and like the RSV, retain the ambiguities of the Hebrew. GNB has not done this, but has chosen one particular interpretation, and has made its interpretation clear in its translation. In fact GNB has adopted the minority view that only one angel is mentioned throughout Zechariah's first vision. The second angel has thus vanished! I do

not know what reasoning lay behind this decision, seeing that the question was not discussed at all in the translator's notes which were circulated with the GNB drafts.

If translators wish to follow the interpretation proposed in this article, they will need to depart significantly from the text of GNB at this point. For this purpose, an alternative translation base will be suggested later. Before that can be done, however, it is necessary to discuss some other problems in the passage.

What colour horses?

The second problem concerns the horses of verse 8. Some translators may have difficulties in talking about horses at all, if these animals are unknown in their areas. In other passages in the Bible where horses are mentioned, it may be sufficient to use a more general term like "animal"; but in the context of Zechariah 1, it is probably significant that the animals in the vision were horses, and not, for instance, camels or donkeys. In the ancient world, the horse was usually associated with military activities, and was not normally owned by individuals for private use. The context here is probably at least partly military, as the horses have been out patrolling the earth (verses 10 and 11). The translator should try at least to leave open the possibility of conveying this information. Here, therefore, rather than just using a general term, it would be better to borrow a specific term from English, French, Spanish or some other important language. One might say, for instance, that the man in verse 8 was "riding on an animal called horse". If necessary, a fuller description of the animal and its use could be given in a Word List.

A more serious problem concerns the colours of the horses in verse 8. The Hebrew uses three different colour terms in this verse. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation, has four colour terms. In the eighth vision (Zech 6.2-3), horses appear again, and there the Hebrew has four colour terms, two of them different from those in 1.8. Scholars have spent much energy in trying to reconcile these differences. The task is made harder because the meanings of two of the five Hebrew terms involved are not known for certain anyway. Our present concern is not so much to solve the problems of the Hebrew words as to discuss the choice of colour terms in the languages of today. Even in English, the choice is far from simple.

For the first colour, most English versions use the word "red" (RSV, JB, NAB, GNB, NIV). This is indeed the normal meaning of the underlying Hebrew word. The problem is that unless it has some further qualification, the English word "red" refers to a brilliant red colour that no real horse ever had. The text of Zechariah 1 does not give any hint that the horses of the vision were anything other than ordinary horses which had the same sort of colours as the horses of everyday experience. But if we say that the first horse was "red", we immediately make him sound strange and improbable.

There are in English a number of technical terms used by people who have experience with horses to describe the kind of colour that was probably intended here. NEB and NJV use the term "bay", and Moffatt uses the term "chestnut". Other forms in this general area of meaning are "sorrell" and "roan". I have never had much contact with horses, and am not at all sure what the distinctions between these terms are. Even the dictionaries I have used

are not much help, since they define "bay", "chestnut", and "sorrel" all as "reddish brown"! In any case, none of these words is common language English, and so none of them would be suitable in a translation like GNB. It would be much simpler to use a more general and better known term, even if it is not particularly connected with horses. The obvious word would be "brown", which is a common language word, and can well be used of horses, even if it has no special link with them.

The problems connected with this term may well be different in other languages. The translator needs to consider not only the intended colour of the animal, but also the range of colour terms available in his language, and the contexts in which particular terms are normally used. Not all languages use the same range of colour terms, and in some languages, the ordinary word for "red" might be perfectly acceptable when used of horses. Presumably Hebrew itself was such a language. In other languages, there may be no distinction between red and brown. In other languages again, technical terms for horse colours may be well known. At any rate, the translator should try to avoid using any term that denotes a colour that no real horse could ever be.

Of the other two terms used in verse 8, one is "white", and this should not cause problems in many languages. The other term is of rather uncertain meaning. Several English versions use the word "sorrel" (RSV, JB, NAB, NJV, Moffatt), but many users of English would not know this word at all, and would certainly not know how it differed from the first colour. NEB and GNB use a different word, "dappled". This is also a technical term used to describe horses, but it is used in other contexts as well, and is therefore somewhat better known than "sorrel". However, it is not a common word, and a simpler term would be desirable. "Dappled" means having various shades of grey, and "grey" is probably the simplest term that could be used. It is a well-known word, it is distinct from both "brown" and "white", and it is quite appropriate to use for horses. In some languages, there may not be a colour term equivalent to the English "grey", and so it may be necessary to mention the colours from which grey can be made up, namely "black and white".

We may note further that the Hebrew colour terms are all in the plural, implying that there was more than one horse of each colour. Probably there were three troops, all the horses in each troop being of the same colour. The wording of GNB seems to imply that there was only one horse of each colour. Translators could avoid this by saying "some brown, some grey, and some white".

Talking horses?

Verse 8 mentions one man on a brown horse, and a number of other horses. No riders are mentioned on the other horses, which are referred to in RSV as "these" (verse 9), "they" (verse 9), "these" (verse 10), "they" (verse 10), and "they" again (verse 11). The problem is that "they" in verse 11 begin to speak, and give a report to the angel who was among the myrtle trees. It is just possible that Zechariah intended to say that the horses spoke, but it seems very unlikely. Commentators in general agree that "they" in verse 11 must refer to riders on the horses. No riders have been mentioned up to this point, but it is quite reasonable to suppose that just as the first brown horse had a rider, so did all the others. The presence of such riders could easily have been taken for

granted, and thus not mentioned specifically in the Hebrew.

In other languages, including English, it is not really satisfactory to keep the ambiguity of the Hebrew, though most English translations including GNB do so. If a translator accepts the view that the horses all had riders, and that the riders are the speakers in verse 11, then it would be much clearer to state this plainly in verse 8. Then there will be no confusion when the reader reaches verse 11. This is what the German Common Language translation *Die Gute Nachricht* has done, and in this it provides a helpful example for translators to follow.

Conclusion

We sum up with a possible translation base that incorporates the suggestion made in the earlier sections of this article. It follows GNB as far as possible. Apart from the questions discussed above, it differs from GNB only in verse 15. No special comments are made on this difference, since it represents an expansion of GNB rather than an alternative understanding of the Hebrew.

This translation base has three aims: (1) to introduce all participants in a way which is natural in English; (2) to make it clear which participant is referred to at each point; (3) to use words which will be easily understood even by people who are not familiar with horses.

⁸I saw an angel of the LORD riding a brown horse. He had stopped among some myrtle trees in a valley, and behind him were other horsemen. Some of their horses were brown, some grey, and some white. ⁹There was another angel there who talked with me, and I asked him, "Sir, what do these horsemen mean?"

He answered, "I will show you what they mean." ¹⁰Then the first angel, the one who was among the myrtle trees, said, "These horsemen were sent by the LORD to go and patrol the earth."

¹¹Then the horsemen reported to the first angel, "We have patrolled the earth, and have found that the whole world lies helpless and subdued."

¹²Then the first angel said, "Almighty LORD, you have been angry with Jerusalem and the cities of Judah for seventy years now. How much longer will it be before you show them mercy?"

¹³The LORD answered with comforting words to the angel who talked with me, ¹⁴and this angel told me to proclaim what the LORD Almighty had said: "I have a deep love and concern for Jerusalem, my holy city, ¹⁵and I am very angry with the nations that relax in peace and quiet. For I intended to punish my people in moderation, but the nations I used to do so brought them to disaster. ¹⁶So I have come back to Jerusalem to show mercy to the city. My Temple will be restored, and the city will be rebuilt."

¹⁷The angel who talked with me also told me to proclaim: "The LORD Almighty says that his cities will be prosperous again and that he will once again help Jerusalem and claim the city as his own."

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