

God and tried to destroy it.”<sup>2</sup> Whether one uses “to the utmost” or some other similar rendering (such as “beyond measure” or “to the extreme”), the phase should be translated and interpreted so that it expresses Paul’s *intensity of zeal* (not his alleged *intensity of violence*) in persecution. What Paul says is that his persecuting the church was incomparable to that of his contemporaries in its zeal, as was his advancement in Judaism too (1.14).

<sup>2</sup> The words “tried to destroy it” have, of course, no violent connotation in context. What the verb “to destroy” (*πορθέω*) means here is that Paul tried to put an end to the church, and nothing is implied by the word concerning his means. The verb appears again in 1.23, in which it is said that he was preaching the faith he once tried “to destroy”. The meaning in both instances is that he tried to put an end to the Christian movement—to the body as a whole in the first instance, and to the message in the second—by means of persecution.

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## THE NEW JEWISH VERSION OF THE SCRIPTURES<sup>1</sup>

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The appearance in 1962 of *The Torah* marked the beginning of a new translation of the Hebrew scriptures which is still incomplete. The Jewish Publication Society of America, desiring to improve on its translation published in 1917, had drawn together an outstanding group of scholars representative of the three branches of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. In 1966 the Society set up an additional committee to translate remaining parts of the third section of the Hebrew canon, the *Ketubim*. *The Book of Psalms*, published in 1973, is the first part of this committee’s work made available.

In the intervening years the first committee brought out other books. *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* appeared in 1969. This translation of the scrolls connected with commemorative occasions in the Jewish year (The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther) and of Jonah, a part of the ritual on the Day of Atonement, appeared with the Hebrew text in columns parallel to the English, and with a line drawing accompanying each book.

1973 was a banner year. In addition to *The Book of Psalms*, *The Book of Isaiah* was issued in two editions. One is only slightly larger than the other volumes and is near them in price. The other is a folio edition, with a large number of drawings that interpret the text in an apocalyptic style. Because the text of the smaller edition was photomechanically reduced from the larger one, the type is small and less pleasing to the eye.

Finally, in May 1974, *The Book of Jeremiah* made its appearance in a folio edition with beautiful woodcuts. No small edition accompanied it.

The picture to date is complete only if we include *Notes on the New Torah*

<sup>1</sup> *The Torah, The Five Books of Moses*, 1962, \$5.00; *The Five Megilloth and Jonah*, 1969, \$5.00; *The Book of Isaiah*, 1973, \$12.50 (small format, without illustrations, \$4.00); *The Book of Psalms*, 1973, \$6.00; *The Book of Jeremiah*, 1974, \$12.50. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.

*Translation*, 1970, by Dr. Harry M. Orlinsky, editor-in-chief of *The Torah* and continuing member of the original translation committee. Dr. Orlinsky is the only member of this project who served on the RSV Old Testament committee, and his experience uniquely qualified him to prepare the *Notes*. Most of the book consists of explanations of the reasons behind distinctive renderings of words and phrases in *The Torah*, chapter by chapter. Some 97 pages are devoted to Genesis, 54 to Exodus, 20 to Leviticus, 20 to Numbers, and 13 to Deuteronomy. A bibliography and indexes add to the usefulness of the volume. Of particular value is the lengthy introduction, where Orlinsky discusses general translation procedures and the treatment of various idioms.

Orlinsky pointed out that although the shift in meaning of a word from one context to another had been recognized by scholars for generations, this knowledge had not been utilized by translators. He also drew extensively on insights of medieval Jewish scholars. Much of what he says has long been familiar to readers of this journal, but there are many specific insights that will stimulate almost any translator to greater creativity, and anyone translating the Pentateuch should make use of these *Notes*. The introduction to *Isaiah* by H. L. Ginsburg, and that to *Jeremiah* by Bernard J. Bamberger also give helpful information.

What can we say by way of general evaluation of the parts of the New Jewish Version (NJV) that have appeared so far? Textually the translation is conservative, staying close to the traditional Hebrew text and avoiding speculative renderings. In its interpretation of the content, the translation stands in the main stream of modern scholarship, while drawing on the work of Jewish scholars who are not as well known as they deserve to be. In its use of English, the translation is on a moderately high literary level, with a limited number of archaisms.

### 1. The Treatment of the Text

The translators have based their work on the traditional text, and by so doing they have demonstrated that that text makes good sense in innumerable passages which recent translations have felt called upon to emend. Where an emendation has been widely accepted, the NJV may give in a footnote a translation of the emendation, preceded by the words "Emendation yields". There are many such footnotes in *Isaiah*, and a lesser number in other books. I have not discovered any places where an emendation has been accepted into the text, but from time to time the interpretation of one of the ancient versions (as distinct from an emendation based on a supposed *Vorlage* used by the version) is accepted and the traditional meaning is abandoned. There are two examples of this in *Psa.* 19, one in v. 4 and one in v. 5. In RSV, *Psa.* 19.5 reads "yet their voice goes out", and a footnote identifies "voice" as an emendation based on "Gk Jerome Compare Syr". NJV accomplishes the same thing by assigning a new meaning to the Hebrew word. Their footnote reads as follows: "Cf. Septuagint, Symmachus, and Vulgate; Arabic *qawwa*, 'to shout'." This type of procedure was much more widely used in NEB and has been discussed at length by James Barr.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1968.

Two other methods are used for dealing with textual difficulties. It is customary for translators to preserve the consonantal text of a difficult passage, but to change the vowels. NJV regularly cites such changes of vocalization in a footnote, for example, Jer. 7.3, where we read, "Change of vocalization yields 'dwell with you'; so Aquila and Vulgate." Another example is Gen. 10.10. Even with this strict adherence to the text, however, problems remain. In *The Torah* there are notes saying "Heb obscure", or "Meaning of Heb uncertain". There may have been a difference between "obscure" and "uncertain", but if there was, it is nowhere explained, and in later volumes it was abandoned. In Jeremiah some interesting distinctions are introduced. In addition to "Meaning of Heb uncertain" (9.6), we also find "Force of Heb uncertain" (9.24), and even "Exact force of Heb uncertain" (17.16). Every translator must feel the desire to try to communicate the degree of his uncertainty about a problem text, but it is hard to see how this sort of variation in phraseology helps the reader.

## 2. The Interpretation of the Text

By studying the footnotes, which often run between five and ten to a page, and by comparing this translation with others, it is possible to gain helpful insights into the meaning of difficult passages and of old familiar terms. NJV makes extensive use of the ancient versions and the evidence of cognate languages to establish the meaning of difficult passages. It also gives vivid renderings of idioms, and brings out shades of meaning by highlighting semantic components that can be easily missed in a more mechanical translation.

From time to time the reader will notice references in the footnotes to medieval Hebrew scholars, especially Rashi, e.g. Isa. 54.11 and 64.7. Such notes are not numerous, but, judging by what Orlinsky says in *Notes*,<sup>3</sup> the exegesis on which the translation was based reflects in many instances the views of the medieval rabbis.

As an illustration of the manner in which NJV uses the linguistic evidence of the ancient versions, of languages cognate with Hebrew, and of other lexical items, certain passages are illuminating. In Isa. 43.17 an Aramaic root is cited, and in 55.4 the interpretation of the Targum forms the basis of the translation. In Isa. 18.4, the note tells us that אֲבִיטָה is rendered "confident", in the light of הִבִּיט in Job 6.19 and מִבֵּט in Isa. 20.5,6. RSV, by contrast, took it as a verb, "I will . . . look". (In spite of this added light, the entire verse, Isa. 18.4, as translated by NJV, is hard to understand.)

Of considerably more importance is the interpretation of Hebrew idioms. Usually a clear English equivalent is given in the text, and the literal translation of the idiom in the margin. In Psa. 83.3 the text reads, "Your foes assert themselves", and in the margin we note, "Lit. 'lift up the head'," which is quite close to the text of RSV. A different type of contrast with RSV can be seen in Psa. 73.21. NJV margin gives the literal "I was pierced through in my kidneys", which RSV has shifted anatomically to "I was pricked in heart", not exactly an everyday expression. The NJV text has brought out the meaning with "my feelings were numbed". Similar examples

<sup>3</sup> *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*, p. 18.

can be found easily in all the parts of NJV published so far, and a discussion of some of the most frequent idioms is given in Orlinsky's *Notes*.

For the most part, the NJV tends to follow the form of the Hebrew original. In poetic passages, for instance, there is usually a line by line correspondence between the Hebrew and the English. More freedom was used, however, in translating terms in a way that is appropriate to the specific context. In many passages the reader is pleasantly surprised to find a fresh and imaginative rendering of a significant term. RSV Isa. 42.6 reads, "I have called you in righteousness" (בְּצִדְקָה). NJV phrases it as "in my grace", and so gives an insight into the force of the word. In another context, Isa. 45.8, it renders צִדְקָה as "victory", and צְדָקָה as "vindication". In 45.8, שֶׁן (RSV "salvation") is translated as "triumph". Even more striking is "the true way" in Isa. 42.1 for מִשְׁפַּח.

On this question of consistency, the committee preparing the *Ketubim* expressed in the preface to *The Psalms* a certain ambivalence.

"Consistency in rendering Hebrew terms was an aim but not an unqualified rule. Where its employment would have resulted in encumbered or awkward language it was abandoned. On the other hand, within a given psalm, key or thematic words and phrases were, as far as possible, rendered consistently."<sup>4</sup>

This is certainly a conservative attitude toward major "content words".

Function words are handled deftly. כִּי, so frequently abused by being translated as "for", whether that fits the context or not, is translated as "so" in Psa. 90.7, and omitted two verses further on, where its closest English equivalent is a zero expression. בְּיָדוֹ has usually become "in his hand" in English translations, even in a passage such as Isa. 6.6, where that does not at all accord with the use of tongs. (Cf. RSV, NEB, etc.) NJV reads "flew over to me with a live coal". Here "with" is correct, and "in his hand" clearly wrong.

Not everything is handled so well, however. Isa. 1.29 does nothing to clarify the meaning of "the terebinths you desired", or "the gardens you coveted". And in 10.31 there is no way of telling what "Madmenah" might be: "Madmenah ran away". Isa. 11.5 is traditional, and it sounds as if the coming one wears two girdles, one higher up than the other.

"Bare the pates" in Isa. 3.17 is translationese, of which too much remains in NJV. An unsuccessful attempt to find an appropriate English expression is "fair Zion" (e.g. Isa. 1.8) for the traditional "daughter of Zion". At least NJV got away from a literalism that misleads the reader, because surely no one who did not already know that Zion is the daughter could discover that fact from the English. But after a while "fair Zion" becomes tiresome, and "fair Chaldea" (Isa. 47.1,5) and especially "fair Babylon" in, of all places, Psa. 137.8, can hardly reflect the tone of the Hebrew original.

Meaning is also sometimes obscured by defective discourse structure. In Isa. 5.30 the pronouns "he" and "him" have no identifiable antecedent. Presumably they refer to the nation Israel, but unless the participants in a discourse or an event are identified, the reader will inevitably be confused.

<sup>4</sup> *The Psalms*, p. vi.

At 8.5-7 the quotation is broken at an impossible place, and the Lord is not allowed to finish his declaration, due to a shift in Hebrew between direct and indirect discourse, a shift that is preserved in English against the logic of the passage.<sup>5</sup>

Taking these passages as representative of the whole translation gives a picture of an uneven work. In a sense that is true. Parts of NJV are hard to understand; other parts achieve admirable clarity. Looked at from the point of view of the Bible translator, however, there is a wealth of insight to be gained, and then applied in future translation projects.

### 3. The English Style of the Translation

This feature of NJV is of concern primarily for native speakers of English, but anyone consulting this translation needs to be aware of the level of usage and the general style of the work. What the translators say of *The Psalms* is intended to apply to the other books as well: "The style of the translation is, on the whole, modern literary English."<sup>6</sup>

That the style is literary, not spoken English, is easy to see. A wide vocabulary is used, sentence structure is often involved, and a weighty dignity is evident. There might be some dispute, however, about the word "modern". To be sure, the archaic pronouns and verb endings of older translations have been abandoned. But surely it is a strange idea of modern style that lets a writer use "lest" (e.g. Isa. 6.10; Psa. 7.3; Gen. 3.3; 4.15). "Give ear" may be more of a biblicism than an archaism (e.g. Jer. 7.24, 26), but "Lo" (Jer. 8.17; Isa. 10.33; 13.9 and often elsewhere) and "Hark!" (Jer. 8.19; Isa. 13.4) are hard to excuse. We find "of yore" in Isa. 1.26; 23.7, and in one verse, Isa. 23.11, we find "'Twas" twice and "o'er" once. The unmarked meaning of "stout" in modern literary English is "overweight" and not the old-fashioned "bold" or "brave" required in Isa. 14.31.

Such instances could be multiplied, but it is better to draw the veil of charity. Everyone who translates the Bible into English is easily betrayed by echoes of earlier translations, and only those who have tried for a completely modern style know how hard that is to achieve. The NJV translators have succeeded better than many. It is only a pity that they did not take more pains to achieve their avowed goal, a translation in "modern, literary English".

The greatest value of the NJV lies in the faithful and consistent efforts its translators have made to determine the true meaning of the Hebrew text and their success in making that meaning clear. It is also a work of merit to publish a translation in a beautiful and dignified form, with illustrations that are true art, in books that are a joy to own and read.

<sup>5</sup> See my article, "Hebrew Direct Discourse as a Translation Problem", *TBT* Vol. 24, No. 3, July 1973.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 6.