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MAN AND ADAM IN GENESIS 1-5

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The Hebrew word *'adam* occurs 34 times in the first five chapters of Genesis. It may be translated as "man" or as the proper name "Adam". Ancient versions such as the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate translate it as a proper name in more than two of every three occurrences. The King James Version has "Adam" 18 times and "man" 16 times. RSV and the New Jewish Version (NJV), on the other hand, translate "Adam" only eight times and "man" appears 26 times (including the capitalized form "Man" in 5.2). NEB has "Adam" only four times. NAB, Moffatt and Smith-Goodspeed have the proper name five times and "man" 29 times. In the Jerusalem Bible we find "Adam" six times and "man" 28 times (including "Man" in 5.2). This bewildering variety in translation can be a source of confusion to the reader of the Bible. And it may also be the cause of problems for the Bible translator who has not had the opportunity to study the Hebrew language (and who therefore either does not consult the better commentaries or fails to understand much of what is written in them).

The aim of this article is to help translators to understand more clearly the problems involved in the translation of this Hebrew word *'adam* and the renderings of it that are found in the various translations available.

At what point in the translation of the early chapters of Genesis is the name of Adam to be introduced? It appears first in 2.19 in the King James Version, Ostervald and the Modern Language Bible (Berkeley). But it comes as late as 4.25 in a number of other translations (such as JB, BP, NAB, Crampon, Moffatt, Smith-Goodspeed).

The early introduction of the proper name in older and more conservative versions, might possibly be based on the theological views of the translators rather than on linguistic evidence. But it seems more likely that the real reason in most cases (except the Berkeley Version) is that the older translations were strongly influenced by the Latin Vulgate. There is, however, considerable disagreement even among those translations that are clearly based on the original language. So we must examine more carefully the basis on which this translation decision should be made.

The article rule

For most translators the proper rendering of the word *'adam* in a given context is based on some clear feature of the text. The feature chosen most frequently has to do with the presence or absence of the definite article *ha*, "the", in the original Hebrew text. Without the article, *'adam* is taken as a proper name. If the article is present, then the translation should be just "man". This argument is found in a wide variety of sources, but it is perhaps most clearly stated in the Genesis volume of the *Anchor Bible*. In his comment on 2.22 the author Speiser says: "In Hebrew the defined form *ha'adam* is "man", the undefined *'adam*, "Adam", since the personal name cannot take the definite article" (page 18).

The crucial question for those translators who wish to follow the "article rule" strictly is whether or not the article is present in 2.20b, 3.17 and 3.21. In each of these cases a preposition comes before the word *'adam* and the article would be recognized only from the vowel pointing. And since the vowel points were added some time after the sixth century A.D., the presence of the article in the original is much less certain in these three cases. *The Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project* published by the United Bible Societies recommends the vowel pointing of the Massoretic Text which results in the translation "Adam" in all three cases. On 2.20 we read: "The vocalization . . . is intentional. It conveys the meaning 'and for Adam', as distinct from the meaning 'and for the man' . . . The same case occurs in 3.17 and 21." (Volume 1, page 7).

Only two of the 20 French and English translations consulted followed the "article rule" and the Massoretic Text more or less strictly. They are NASB and NJV. In addition to the three disputed cases mentioned above these two versions also have the proper name in 4.25; 5.1a, 3, 4, 5.

TOB and RSV omit references to "Adam" in 2.20b, but use the proper name in 3.17 and 3.21. In other words, they have accepted the vowel pointing of the Massoretic text in the two disputed cases in the third chapter but have chosen to vary the text in 2.20b. NEB translates "Adam" only in 3.21 before the occurrence that all agree on in 4.25.

A large number of other translations (NAB, Crampon, Moffatt, BP, BJ, JB and Smith-Goodspeed) reject the vowel pointing of the Massoretic text in all three instances. Consequently they translate "man" in each case.

A higher rule

Even those who try to follow the "article rule" all the time find it impossible to introduce the proper name in 1.26; 2.5 and 5.1b, 2, where a strict application of the rule would require its use. It is only recently that the principle of translating in a way that is appropriate to the context ("contextual translation") has been clearly defined and made popular. However, it is quite clear that even the most literal translations have found it necessary to adopt this principle at times. The four cases mentioned above of *'adam* without the article being translated as something other than the proper name "Adam" show quite clearly that the principle is valid.

In 1.26 it is not possible to translate *'adam* by the proper name because of

the presence of a plural pronoun: "Let us make 'adam in our own image . . . and let *them* rule . . ." This is also the case in the section 5.1b-2: "He blessed *them* and named *them* 'adam . . ." The curious translation of the KJV, "called *their* name Adam", is a classic example of what happens when people use formal equivalence in translation. Likewise the proper name cannot be a suitable translation for 'adam without the article in 2.5 because of the presence of the negative. It would be quite stupid to translate: "there was no Adam to cultivate the land".

Virtually all modern translations (with the exception of the BJ/JB in 5.1b) agree that 'adam without the article should not be rendered as a proper name in the above mentioned four cases. So it is clear that all good translators accept the principle of contextual translation, at least in some measure. This then, constitutes a higher rule which must supersede any rule of formal equivalence such as the "article rule". And this higher rule should be applied consistently rather than being limited only to those cases where the translator feels that he has a problem.

The principles of translating meaningfully and in the way that best suits the context do not mean that the translator is free to translate in any way that he likes. He must continue to operate within the framework of well defined principles. Nevertheless, with regard to the translation of man and Adam in Gen 1-5 there are at least two modern translations which appear to have followed no clear rules. *The Living Bible* introduces "Adam" in 2.23; 3.9, 12, but there is no immediately apparent reason for translating in this way. Similarly, the *Version Synodale* has "Adam" in 3.8, 9, 12 and 24 in addition to those cases where the use of the proper name can be justified on the basis of the article rule or the larger context.

The Good News Bible, Segond, and Maredsous, all introduce Adam first in verse 3.20. Can this be justified on the basis of the principle of contextual translation? The only possible clue that might justify such a translation here would be the presence of the proper name Eve in the sentence.

Again in 4.1a we find the word 'adam preceded by the article translated as a proper name by GNB, RSV, KJV, LB, Synodale, Segond, Ostervald, Maredsous, and Berkeley. And again we find the proper name Eve in the immediate context, the only other occurrence of this name in these chapters.

Adjustments for the sake of smooth translation

Further adjustments are necessary if the translation is to be in smooth, readable style. The need for such modification in 5.2, for example, is clearly indicated by the fact that a wide variety of translations find it necessary to capitalize the word "Man" (RSV, Crampon, BP, Ostervald, NJV, JB). Yet meaningful translation requires, among other things, that the translator should not depend on capitalization to convey meaning. Since there are no special sounds for capital letters, this meaning cannot be carried over in speech or reading. Thus the meaning conveyed by the written word "Man" is better communicated through the use of some similar expression like "mankind" or "human beings". This would be the case not only in 5.1b-2 but also in 1.26.

Another bit of adjustment in translation would change “no man” in 2.5 to a more common expression like “no one” (Moffatt and GNB) or “not anyone” (LB). There may be other instances, too, where the noun “man” may be rendered by a pronoun. Ordinarily in English or French we do not find it necessary to repeat a noun several times in succession in a longer passage, but for the sake of variety we often substitute a pronoun. Such stylistic adjustments may also be made in translation without affecting the meaning of the passage. Thus BJ uses the subject pronoun *il* instead of “man” in 2.23; Maredsous uses the pronoun *lui* in 2.16 and 2.20b; and GNB uses pronouns in four cases. Even Jerome substitutes the pronoun in the Vulgate version of 2.16.

Any translation problem as complex as this will probably require a footnote in most modern editions of the Bible. The particular type of footnote should be suited to the kind of solution followed in making the translation as well as to the audience the translator has in mind. As a very minimum it should be pointed out at 1.26 and 2.20b that the Hebrew word *'adam* may be translated either as “man” or “Adam”. Then the note should give a brief explanation of the solution adopted in making the translation.

Summary

Most versions, it seems, try to follow rules of some kind in determining the proper translation of the Hebrew word *'adam*. They also translate contextually to some extent. The only questions to be answered, therefore, are:

Which rules should be followed?

How far should we take the principle of contextual translation?

This article has suggested some answers to these two questions with regard to the translation of the 34 instances of *'adam* in Genesis 1–5. They may be summarized as follows:

1. *Textual decisions* The decision on whether or not to follow the vowel pointing of the Massoretic Text (or at what points to emend it) forms the basis for the application of the following rules in the cases of 2.20b, 3.17 and 21.
2. *The article rule* This basic rule transforms all occurrences of *'adam* with the article to “man” and all occurrences without it to “Adam”.
3. *The plural pronoun rule* The application of this rule results in changing “Adam” in 1.26 and 5.1b–2 to “man” because of the presence of plural pronoun forms in the immediate context.
4. *The negative rule* This rule changes “Adam” to “man” in 2.5 because of the presence of the negative in the immediate context.
5. *The proper name rule* In 3.20 and 4.1a “man” is transformed to “Adam” by the application of this rule. The presence of the proper name “Eve” in the same sentence indicates this change.
6. *Translation adjustments* Once the application of these rules is completed, it is necessary to make certain modifications in the translation. The word “man” then, becomes “human beings” in 1.26 and 5.1b, 2. “No man” in 2.5 becomes “no one”. And for stylistic reasons “man” may be rendered by a pronoun in a number of cases.

When these steps are put down in writing they may seem unnecessarily complicated, but a process something like this must go on in the head of the translator if he or she is to produce a translation that is both faithful and readable. A translator cannot work without guidelines or rules in the choices he or she makes. Rather the rendering should be based on firm textual evidence while at the same time the principles of meaningful translation are taken seriously.

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TRANSLATING "BELIEVE" IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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One very interesting fact about the Gospel of John is that the noun form "faith" (Greek *pistis*) is never used, but the verb form "believe" (Greek *pisteuein*) is used about a hundred times. This is quite different from the first three Gospels, where the noun form "faith" is used as frequently as the verb form.

In this paper, we will look first at the occurrences of the verb "believe" where the person or thing believed in is given in the text. Then we will look at those instances where the object of "believe" is not stated.

"BELIEVE" WITH SOMEONE OR SOMETHING AS OBJECT

In most cases in John's Gospel, the object of "believe" is clearly mentioned in the text. The objects may be divided into two general classes: (1) believing in something, and (2) believing in someone.

Believing in something

In some cases, Jesus uses the expression "believe in me" to mean "believe what I say". Some examples of this usage are found in 4.21, 8.45, 46, 10.37, 38. In these cases most translations simply have "believe me". In English, of course, this is a natural expression, and it may be so in many other languages. But in some languages, it may be much clearer to translate the expression as "believe what I say".

In other cases, we find the word "believe" followed by "that . . .". Most if not all of these cases have something to do with a fact about Jesus. When it comes from Jesus himself, it is to assert that a fact about him is true, and sometimes to challenge his listeners to accept this fact, or face the consequences. Two examples may be given.

8.24 "If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins."

Here Jesus asserts a fact about himself, (he is the "I Am"), and makes clear the consequences for those who do not believe this fact ("you will die in your sins"). Most commentators take the "I am" expressions in John's Gospel as