

the positive and negative elements of the contrast, to give a more natural translation in his own language. The normal pattern in Greek is negative first and then positive; but this is just a matter of form, and it can be changed if positive first and then negative is the normal pattern in another language. With this reversal of order our last model would become:

*God honoured his Son, saying,  
 "Sit here at my right side, until I put your enemies under your feet like a stool."  
 But he did not say that to any angel.  
 Angels are not so honoured.  
 They are only spirits who serve . . . (c)*

A further shift that might be made in this last model, if it is more natural in the translator's language, is a change from direct speech to indirect speech:

*God honoured his Son by saying that he should sit at his right side . . . (c)*

### Conclusion

In this article I have tried to do a number of things. Firstly, I have tried to show how there can be a series of contrasts in an extended passage, which are linked together like a chain. And it is very important for the translator to recognize such contrasts. Then, secondly, I have tried to show how certain elements of the contrasts may be hidden and not clearly stated.

I hope that this article also provides some helpful advice for the translator, in dealing with contrasts and chains of contrasts. I have tried to show how it is important to think through the more difficult contrasts, discovering all the hidden pieces. And I have also tried to stress the importance of restructuring their meaning in ways that are natural and appropriate for the audience which has to understand the translation at the end.

JOHN ELLINGTON

## TRANSLATING OLD TESTAMENT BOOK TITLES

**Dr John Ellington** is a UBS Translations Consultant based in Zaire.

There are many small matters in the work of translation which make a big difference in the overall impact of a new version of the Bible. One such matter has to do with the way in which we translate the titles of the different books of the Bible.

In many older translations important words in the book titles were transliterated rather than translated and the readers were faced with meaningless words. In the old Efik translation in Nigeria, for example, the names of the five books of the Pentateuch as well as Judges, Chronicles and Psalms were taken over directly from English. In the Central African Republic such titles were borrowed from French in the currently used Sango translation. In neither of these cases was there any attempt to adjust the names to the spelling system of the African language. However, in such languages as Luchazi (Angola and

Zambia), Yoruba (Nigeria) and Tshiluba (Zaire) adaptations were made, so that one finds such names as *Njenisisi* for Genesis, *Ekesode* for Exodus and *Kronika* for Chronicles. But in all these cases the titles have been borrowed rather than translated and the reader must be taught the meaning of the strange words introduced into his language by the Bible translator.

Since Bible translators today are more interested in meaning than form, they are beginning to realize the importance of communicating meaning even in book titles. And they are finding that it is relatively easy to find natural equivalents in their own languages for the titles of many of the books of the Bible. This is especially important in the work now being done on the Old Testament in many languages.

There are three forms of book titles that the translator must decide: (1) the *full title* which appears at the beginning of each book; (2) the *short title* to be used at the head of each page of the printed text of the book; and (3) the *abbreviated title* to be used for references. Each of these is important and must be dealt with, but first it may be helpful to look into some background on the titles of the Biblical books.

### Old titles

The early Hebrew titles of the first five books of the Bible were simply taken from the first word or the first few words of the text itself. What we know today as *Genesis* was originally called "IN THE BEGINNING . . ." *Exodus* was given the title "NOW THESE ARE THE NAMES . . ." *Leviticus* was known as "AND HE CALLED . . ." and *Deuteronomy* was called "THESE ARE THE WORDS . . ." The book of *Numbers* was sometimes referred to by its first words, "THEN THE LORD SPOKE . . .", but another title frequently used was "IN THE WILDERNESS . . ." which was taken from a word found later on in the first verse of this book.

When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Greek language these titles were discarded and more imaginative names were invented. In the case of the Pentateuch those who gave new titles to the books attempted to summarize their contents so that the reader would have some idea of what was about to be read. When this Greek translation was in turn translated into Latin four of the five titles of the Pentateuch were transliterated rather than being translated. Only in the case of the book of *Numbers* was the title actually translated into Latin. Many of the titles that are in use today are based on the Latin Vulgate which in turn copied the Greek titles of the Septuagint. (See Robert P. Markham, "Ancient and Modern Titles of the Books of the Bible", TBT, April 1967, pages 86-94; July 1967, pages 133-145.)

The translators of the Greek Septuagint wanted their readers to understand from the title something of what was contained in a book. They would probably be very disappointed to learn that over a thousand years later people were still transliterating what they wrote rather than translating their titles or creating new ones. Since book titles can be of real help to the ordinary reader, it is important that translators take seriously their responsibility to communicate meaning as they consider the titles they will attach to the books of the Bible.

### The Pentateuch

The word *Genesis* means "beginning" and the book that bears this name is about the beginning of all things. In many languages it is necessary to state *what* begins. So the full title for the first book of the Bible is sometimes called "The Book of the Beginning(s) of All Things". In other languages a noun like "beginning" does not exist, so a verbal expression or an infinitive must be used. What is important in this case is the event of the Beginning. And this idea must be conveyed in natural language. The short title of a book should ordinarily be the key word in the full title. In the case of *Genesis* it would probably be "beginning" or "to begin".

*Exodus* indicates "going out" or "to go out" and this summarizes the contents of the book very well. But the full title may have to state who performs this action and possibly also what they were going out of. Hence it would be possible to say something like "The People of Israel Go Out of Egypt" or "... out of Slavery". If a natural sounding noun occurs in the language one might say "The Going out of the People of Israel". The key term, of course, is "going out" or "to go out". And this should serve as the short title. Other more imaginative titles have been considered by some translators. One of these is "Release from Slavery" which certainly reflects the contents of the book and at the same time catches the attention of the reader, but it generalizes the title by leaving out any reference to the people of Israel. Such titles as this are more often used in separate publications of individual books than in the Bible as a whole.

The book of *Leviticus* presents some special problems because there is the name of Levi in the title handed down to us from the old Greek through the Latin Vulgate. The name of Levi, however, does not occur in the book of *Leviticus*. And the term "Levites" appears only in Lev 25.32, 33. Yet the Greek translation of the OT called this book the "Levitical (book)" because the priests whose duties are described in it were considered the descendants of the tribe of Levi. The focus of the title, however, should not be on the tribe of Levi, but rather on the priestly functions and laws explained in the book. In fact, since its main theme is the holiness of God, a good case can be made for using a title that places major emphasis on this theme. Some have considered "The Book of the Holiness of God" or "The Laws of the Holiness of God". But on the strength of tradition many translators feel obliged to retain some mention of the Levites in the title. In such cases the title of this book might be something like "The Book of the Laws of God's Holiness given by the priests who descended from Levi" if it is not too long. In such a case, the word *holiness* might still be taken as the key word and used in the short title.

The book of *Numbers* receives its traditional name from the census, or numbering, of the people of Israel during their forty years of wandering prior to their going into the Promised Land. Since many languages do not have a word for census, it may be necessary to use a form of the verb "to count". A full title like "The Book of the Counting of the People of Israel" is usually considered helpful to the reader. In this way, the key word, *count*, can be used as the short title.

One of the most prominent features of the book we call *Deuteronomy* is Moses' reviewing the laws which God gave to the people of Israel and his

reminding them of their covenant promises to God. The old Greek title from which we derive our English word literally means “second law”. It comes from a mistranslation of Dt 17.18 which really speaks of a “copy of this law”. In spite of this, the traditional title reflects “a basic problem of this book—the relation of the Law promulgated in Moab to the original Law of Sinai” (*The Jerome Bible Commentary*, page 101). So the translator would not be too far astray if his title were something like “The Book of the Reminder of God’s Law”.

In some translations the first five books of the Bible are called “First Book of Moses”, “Second Book of Moses”, and so on. While the word “of” does not necessarily imply that these books were written by Moses, it was at one time generally thought that this was the case. And some still hold to this position. But others have pointed out that it would be difficult to see how Moses could have written the account of his own death in Dt 34. The majority of modern scholars agree that he did not write all of these five books. It is therefore better not to include the name of Moses in the titles of these books.

### **The historical books**

The book of *Joshua* presents no special problems. It is the story of the people of Israel under Joshua’s leadership, beginning with his taking over at the death of Moses and ending with his own death and burial in chapter 24. Translators should simply avoid the implication that it was Joshua who wrote the book. It is a book *about* Joshua and not a book *written by* Joshua.

*Judges* is a title that is frequently misunderstood and inadequately translated. From the time of the Greek translation of the OT most versions have used a word for “Judges” which conveys the idea of a person who decides legal cases in a courtroom. This book, however, describes the activities of men and women who were not primarily concerned with legal matters. Rather they were national heroes or gifted leaders who acted to deliver the people of God from oppression. So terms like “Deliverers” or “Heroes” have been suggested as a more accurate rendering of the main idea in the title of this book. In languages where no previous translations of the Bible exist, there is a great deal more freedom in translating such terms than where there is a tradition of many years. Some translators in Africa have been misled by the fact that some modern translations such as the *Good News Bible* still use the word “Judges” as a title. A long tradition such as exists in English is difficult to change, but those involved in languages where there is little or no tradition of this type should take care to establish traditions based on the best available scholarship of our day. It should be noted that while the GNB uses “Judges” as a title for this book, in the text itself the noun that used to be translated “judge” is more adequately rendered as “leader” and the corresponding verb, which is more frequent, is translated “to be/become a leader”.

The book of *Ruth* was not written by Ruth, but rather it is a story about a woman by that name. As in the case of the book of Joshua, every effort should be made to avoid the impression that Ruth actually wrote the book.

The two books of *Samuel* were originally written as a single unit, but they were divided into two parts in the old Greek translation. If tradition did not

have such a strong influence on us, we might call 1 Samuel "The Book about Samuel and Saul" and 2 Samuel "The Book about King David". However, in most cases translators feel compelled to use the traditional titles and speak of the First and Second books of Samuel.

The book of *Kings* constitutes a kind of history of the people of Israel during the period when they were ruled by kings, beginning from where 2 Samuel ends. Because of the fact that the books of Samuel also deal with a similar theme, 1 and 2 Samuel were called 1 and 2 Kings in the old Greek and Latin translations. What we know as 1 and 2 Kings were then called 3 and 4 Kings. But this practice has not carried over into many modern translations. So translators simply find an appropriate word for "king" or "chief" and more recent tradition is followed.

The two books of *Chronicles* repeat a great deal of what is found in Samuel and Kings. Perhaps for this reason the Greek version gave these books the rather unusual name of "Leftovers" (Paralipomenon). This title was also transliterated by the Latin Vulgate, but fortunately later translators decided to go back to the Hebrew title which may be translated "Events Day by Day" or "Matters of the Days". More recently some African translators have come up with titles like "The Book of the Daily Actions of the Chiefs of Israel" or "The Affairs of Each Day of the Chiefs of Israel". The key word to be used as a short title would therefore be a word like "actions" or "activities"; but it may be necessary to check to see whether this causes confusion with the title of the book of "Acts of the Apostles" in the New Testament.

While the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* were originally one book, they have been separated out as distinct books by tradition. This undoubtedly happened because the two characters were so central to the two parts of the original book. Consequently, they may be entitled "The Book about Ezra" and "The Book about Nehemiah".

The book of *Esther* is, of course, also named after its central character. The title should present no special difficulties except that attention should be paid to the fact that it is a book *about* rather than *by* Esther.

### **The poetical books**

The book of *Job* is a poetic dialogue depicting the life of a man named Job within the framework of the struggle between God and evil. Some translators prefer to add a descriptive word to the title of this book: "The Book of the Sufferings of Job". Suffering clearly plays a prominent role in this story, but the name Job should remain as the key word and short title.

The *Psalms* make up one of the most important books in the entire OT. They are a crucial part of the worship of both the Jewish and Christian faiths as a kind of book of hymns and prayers. King David is considered the author of many of the Psalms. It is likely that this collection grew and was added to by several generations—as is the case with many hymnbooks and books of prayers. The overall title in the Hebrew text is a word meaning "praises" or "songs of praise". Our word "Psalms" comes from the Old Greek through the Latin *Psalmi*. In most languages there is no difficulty finding a natural equivalent for "The Book of the Songs of Praise" and either "Songs" or "Praise" would be appropriate as a shorter title.

The title of the book of *Proverbs* is easily translated in situations where proverbs are an essential part of the culture. And in almost any culture there is a certain amount of more or less codified wisdom based on the collective observation and experience of the people as a whole. The translator should seek to determine what word is used for that body of wisdom and, if necessary, it can be qualified by using a title like "The Book of the Proverbs/Wisdom of the People of Israel".

The traditional English title *Ecclesiastes* has its origin in the old Greek and Latin versions and it means "leader of the assembly". This in turn is an attempt to translate the Hebrew word "Qoheleth", which has simply been transliterated in some recent versions like the TOB in French and the new common language translation in German. Martin Luther translated "Qoheleth" as *Prediger* (Preacher). Others have suggested that it might be better rendered "Philosopher" (so in the GNB text, but not the title). In any case, the transliteration of the Hebrew, Greek or Latin is hardly helpful to the ordinary reader. The content of the book shows the thinking of a person who was not satisfied with simplistic answers to the difficult problems of life. So in some languages it may be a good idea to translate "The Book of One who Thinks Deeply" or "The Thinker" or "Profound Thinking".

*Song of Songs* is a literal translation of the Hebrew and Latin titles. Like "King of Kings" and other similar OT expressions, this is a common way to convey the idea of the superlative in Hebrew. It really means "The Greatest of (All) Songs" or "The Most Beautiful Song". In some African languages it has been possible to say "The Song which Surpasses All Others" or something similar. The expression "of Solomon" in the first verse may mean that the book was (1) written by Solomon, or (2) dedicated to Solomon, or (3) about Solomon. It is not necessary to put the name of Solomon in the title. And it would certainly be misleading to overlook the superlative and leave simply "The Song of Solomon" as has been done in many translations following the King James tradition (RSV, NASB and Living Bible). It is interesting to note that the NASB has "Song of Solomon" as a title, but the page heading in this translation reads "Song of Songs". The most important thing in translating this title is to find the most natural equivalent to the Hebrew superlative expression.

### Abbreviated Titles

The primary purpose of abbreviating the titles of the books of the Bible is to make cross-referencing possible. Reference systems are based on short forms, usually consisting of two or three letters, for each book. In addition to being *short*, abbreviated titles should meet two other requirements: Each book of the Bible should have a separate and *distinct form* that will enable the reader to distinguish it from all other books; and the abbreviation should be as *clear* as possible within the limits of the requirements for it to be short.

In languages where identical prefixes are used for certain classes of words, it may be necessary to base the abbreviated forms on the stem of the word rather than the initial letters, since these would all be the same. For example, in some Bantu languages in Africa the infinitive form of the verb is used for the titles of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and some other books of the Bible.

In each case the infinitive begins with the letters *ku-* or *ko-*. It is clearly impossible to use the first two letters of the names of these books because they would all be the same. If the first three letters are used for the abbreviated title, some books would still have identical short forms since the stems of two or more words might begin with the same letter. Therefore, it is necessary to base the abbreviated form on the stem of the word rather than the first letters.

In everything he does the translator should keep in mind the average reader and try to decide what is easiest and best for that person to understand the Scriptures. The same rule should apply to the translation of the titles of the books of the Old Testament and the abbreviated forms that are chosen.

BASIL REBERA

## BOOK TITLES (2): THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

**Dr. Basil Rebera** is a United Bible Societies Translations Consultant based in Bangkok, Thailand.

In the article before this one the author has explained how the translators of the Septuagint used the titles of the books to give their readers something of the message of each book. The same thing can be done with titles in modern translations for the prophetic books of the Bible. And in this article I want to make some suggestions along these lines.

For the prophetic books we could use titles that contain both the name of the writer or central figure in each book and the message associated with that person. For one thing this would preserve something of the traditional titles in existing translations, which have only the name of the prophet or an expression such as "The Book of (Name of the prophet)". It would also mean that the name of the prophet could be used as a convenient short title at the top of the pages of the text and as the basis for an abbreviated title for references.

It is not possible to always produce descriptive titles of two or three words for the prophetic books when the focus of the title is a prophetic theme or a combination of themes. Some of the models for titles given below may seem a bit long. But they are only models, and the translator will often be able to come up with something more concise while using constructions that are natural in his own language.

### **Two books included with the prophets**

There are two books of the Bible that are frequently linked with the prophetic books, because the English Bible includes them within its arrangement of the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi. These books are Lamentations and Daniel, which in the Hebrew Bible are placed in the group of Holy Writings and not among the Prophets.

There are some traditions that make the prophet Jeremiah the author of **Lamentations**, and the title in certain versions bears that prophet's name. There is, however, no mention of the name of Jeremiah in the Hebrew text of the book. It would be best to have a title that is impersonal and focuses only on the message of the book. The book contains poems lamenting the destruction of