

On the basis of this evidence Thompson translates Rev 13.3 “The whole world was devastated in the wake of (taking *'ah^are* as the root of *opisō* = ‘behind’) the beast . . .’ Taking into account the possibility that *opisō* = *'ah^are* = ‘because of’, we might perhaps better read “The whole world was devastated because of the beast . . .”

Conclusion

The use of these prepositions in Revelation strongly suggests that the Greek is under significant Semitic influence. An appreciation of this Semitic element will help explain constructions which are otherwise confusing. In several instances allowance for Semitic syntax will significantly alter the meaning of the verse. The translator should proceed with caution, keeping constantly in mind the possibility that although the author wrote in Greek, his thought pattern was Semitic.

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MISCARRIAGE OR PREMATURE BIRTH?

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The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) summarize the covenant governing the relationships between God and his people and among the people of God. This ‘covenant law’ is amplified in the so-called ‘book of the covenant’ in the three chapters following Exodus 20. These chapters contain numerous regulations concerning fairness and justice in human relations. They deal with the treatment of slaves, theft and repayment, various kinds of violence, sexual morals, religious practices and celebrations.

Among those cases of accidental violence regulated in this portion of Scripture is the hypothetical case where men involved in some kind of physical struggle unintentionally collide with a pregnant woman (Ex 21.22ff). In the current debate on abortion in some Western cultures, this passage is often quoted and used to justify the practice of taking the lives of unborn children. The exegesis and translation of this part of Scripture are, therefore, of critical importance. In some ways this problem is similar to the one posed by the translation of *zara'a* and *lepra* where a translation decision directly affects human lives. The mis-translation of these words as “leprosy,” according to one writer, has caused “immeasurable suffering” (Johs. G. Andersen, “Leprosy in translations of the Bible”, TBT, vol. 31, no.2 (April 1980), 212). Likewise, the translation of Exodus 21.22ff may have some bearing on the modern abortion debate and consequently on the decision of whether or not many unborn children will be allowed to live. In fact, Dr. Bruce Waltke has argued that “according to Exodus 21.22-24, the destruction of a fetus is not a capital offense” (*Christianity Today*, “The OT and Birth Control,” Nov. 8, 1968). But this argument seems to be

based on the RSV translation rather than the Hebrew text. Waltke further writes in a letter to the editor of *Christianity Today* in the January 3, 1969 issue outlining the versions and commentators that support his conclusion, but the support for the other position is far stronger than he admits.¹

While it is difficult to find reference in the early Church Fathers to this particular passage, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria stood firmly against abortion. The Didache requires without hesitation: "Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant" (2.2). And the 16th century reformer John Calvin commented directly on the Exodus 21 passage: "The fetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being and it is a most monstrous crime to rob it of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a fetus in the womb before it has come to light" (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, trans. Charles W. Bingham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3.41-42).

A literal rendering of this critical passage would read: "And when men struggle and they strike a pregnant woman and her offspring goes forth and there is not injury, surely he shall be fined . . . But if there is injury, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, . . ." Since the text as it stands is somewhat ambiguous, this passage has posed serious problems for translators as early as the production of the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Based on a text closer to the Samaritan Pentateuch than to the Masoretic Text, the LXX rendering is quite different from MT:

"And if two men struggle and they strike a woman with child, and her child go forth imperfectly formed, surely he shall be fined . . . But if it be perfectly formed, he shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . ."

According to this translation, the degree to which the embryo is formed is crucial. If there were some human resemblance, the person involved would be considered guilty of harming a human being and the *lex talionis* would apply. But if the fetus were in the earliest stages of its development only a monetary fine would be imposed at the discretion of the father (see TOB note).

The MT presumably served as source text for both RSV and NIV, but the translations of these two versions are radically different. It is interesting to note that in this case RSV, which is generally thought to be quite literal, suddenly becomes dynamic and abandons the form of the original in this verse. Translators using the so-called "base-model approach" should be aware of the fact that RSV does not reflect the Hebrew. NIV, on the other hand, gives an equally dynamic rendering, but the exegetical position adopted is quite different from that of RSV.

¹ Waltke subsequently contributed an article entitled "OT Texts Bearing on the Issues," in *Birth Control and the Christians*, eds. Walter O. Spitzer and Caryle L. Saylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1969) in which he takes basically the same position. Later he reported a slight change in his position on the exegesis of Exodus 21.22ff and acknowledged that the evidence supporting his original conclusion is "less than conclusive." See *Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 19.1 (1976), 3.

RSV

When men strive together,
and hurt a woman with child
so that there is a miscarriage,
and yet no harm follows,
the one who hurt her
shallⁿ be fined . . .

ⁿHebrew *he shall*

Does this passage deal with miscarriage or premature birth? Although Jewish interpretation traditionally understood this passage to refer to miscarriage, the *Interpreter's Bible* seems to indicate that the textual justification for this translation has its origin at the beginning of this century: "The reading 'so that there is a miscarriage' rests on a conjectural emendation of the Hebrew text first suggested by Budde" (1.1000).

The majority of English translations and commentaries today accept the miscarriage interpretation, but a number of others see it as referring to premature birth. The German commentators Keil and Delitzsch, for example, clearly state: "If men strove and thrust against a woman with child . . . so that her children came out (came into the world), and no injury was done either to the woman or to the child that was born, a pecuniary compensation was paid . . . A fine is imposed, because even if no injury had been done to the woman and the fruit of her womb, such a blow might have endangered life" (134-135). This interpretation is reflected not only in the *New International Version* (1978), but also in a number of modern French translations including the *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* (1975), the *Nouvelle Version Segond Révisée* (1978) and the *Bible en français courant* published in 1982.

The exegesis of this passage hinges on two important phrases: (a) *wyts'w yldyh*, "and her offspring go forth" and (b) *yhyh'swn*, "and is injury" (in verse 22 with the negative and in verse 23 without). The debate as to whether or not the woman was making a deliberate effort to separate those involved in the fighting (as in Deut 25.11) is immaterial to the question at hand. With regard to the clause "and her offspring go forth," translators have long been puzzled by the use of the plural "offspring" or "children." Some have suggested that it may indicate that the woman's capacity for childbearing might be affected by the accident (Lange, p. 90), but it seems more likely that the "plural is employed for the purpose of speaking indefinitely, because there might possibly be more than one child in the womb" (Keil and Delitzsch, p. 135). It must be remembered that this is a hypothetical occurrence.

The verb *yts'*, "go forth" is a very general term used of armies marching off to war, of persons going out to a tent or house and of judgment being pronounced. But in the context of childbirth it seems always to refer to live birth except in Numbers 12.12 where there is no doubt whatsoever that stillbirth is intended. There the subject is not *yeled*, "child", but *met*, "something dead" (from the verb *mut*, "to die" BDB 559). The verb *yts'* is used twice in the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25.25-26) and three times in relation to the birth of another set of twins, Perez and Zerah (Gen 38.27-30). Jeremiah uses it twice (1.5 and 20.18) in speaking of his own birth. Likewise Job uses this term in his lament in

NIV

If men who are fighting
hit a pregnant woman
and she gives birth prematurely
but there is no serious injury,
the offender
must be fined . . .

1.21 as well as when he wishes that he had expired immediately after his own live birth (3.11).

The term *'swn*, "injury" or "mischief" is generally understood as referring to some undefined bodily harm. It is used only here and in the Joseph story (Gen 42.4,38; 44.29) where it may mean "fatal accident." The text of verse 22 clearly states that there is "no injury," but if the miscarriage interpretation is accepted in the preceding part of this verse, the translator is required to add something here since miscarriage is usually considered "harm" or "injury." Many translations add the word "further" or "other" (NEB, NASB, NAB, Smith and Goodspeed, Moffatt) and GNB does the same kind of thing more dynamically, translating "but she is not injured in any other way." The *Jerusalem Bible* surprisingly goes even further with "though she does not die of it." [*New Jerusalem Bible* (1985) "but no further harm is done."—Ed.]. Such translations seemed forced by the decision to reject the option of premature birth in the previous line. If this option were accepted, there would be no need to add these words which the translators undoubtedly considered to the implicit information.

In his article "Abortion and the Mosaic Law," Jack W. Cotrell concludes that with regard to this passage "the weight of scholarly opinion . . . is outweighed by the text itself" (*Christianity Today*, XVII.12 (March 16, 1973) 9). And more recently H. Wayne House published an extensive study of Exodus 21.22-24 in the *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 41 (1978), 108-123). He draws support from the modern Jewish scholar Cassuto (*Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967) and concludes unequivocally that "the passage does not deal with a miscarriage . . . Instead [it] concerns a woman who is struck in a struggle and so prematurely gave birth. If there was no bodily injury resulting to the mother or child because of the blow, the liable man was to pay a fine . . . If bodily injury did occur to the woman or her child, *lex talionis* was enforced depending on the extent of the injury, from life to life to bruise to bruise" (123).

The Bible clearly does not give a direct answer to every social question of our day; and the purpose of this article is not to resolve the complex issue of abortion. Rather it aims to point up the existence of an exegetical problem involved in one passage of Scripture that has been used by some to speak to this issue. The interpretation of Exodus 21.22ff is much more complex than one would imagine on reading RSV and GNB. In fact, these two versions alone give the clear impression that there is no problem at all.

Every translation committee is obligated to weigh the evidence and reach its own conclusion. But those who are using the so-called "Base-Model Approach" should not be misled by the fact that both RSV and GNB follow the miscarriage interpretation without any acknowledgment that there exists another possible view of this text that is very different in meaning. In the final analysis those working on other languages may decide that the scholars who translated NIV in English and TOB and FC in French are incorrect in their exegesis of this passage. But their position should not be ignored. And whichever option is chosen, the translators owe it to their readers at the very least to acknowledge the other possibility in a footnote.²

² The writer is indebted to Dr. Donald S. Deer for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.