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## IT IS WRITTEN . . . BUT WHERE?

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It is well known that there are numerous cases in the New Testament where the writers have quoted passages from the Old Testament. Often the reader can turn to the OT passage and compare it with the NT rendering. But there are a number of cases where quotations in the NT present serious problems to Bible readers and translators. The problem passages in this regard fall into two main categories: (1) those where the NT writer has quoted from the ancient Greek version of the OT (called the Septuagint) rather than from the Hebrew text; and (2) those places where the quotation in the NT seems to have no parallel at all in the OT. The purpose of this article is to examine these passages and try to provide translators with some suggestions as to how they should be handled.

### Quotations from the old Greek version

A special section is found at the back of most editions of the *Good News Bible* which identifies and lists more than eighty places where the ancient Greek version has been quoted in the New Testament rather than the Hebrew text. The Greek Septuagint version of the OT was in common use during the time when the NT was being written. But because our modern translations of the OT are usually based on the Hebrew text, there are sometimes serious differences between the NT quotation and the OT text on which it is supposedly based. The following examples should serve to clarify the problem.

The words cited in John 12.38 are said to come from “the prophet Isaiah” (see 53.1). Yet a comparison of the two passages reveals some slight differences:

Isaiah 53.1

Who has believed what we have heard?

John 12.38

Lord, who has believed our report?

The word “Lord” appears to have been added to the quotation in John and the words “what we have heard” seems to be understood rather as “what we have reported” in John. These differences exist because John was referring to the Greek version and not to the Hebrew original. These are relatively minor differences, but they should be reflected in any good translation of the NT text.

Some NT quotations from the OT reveal more serious differences. For example, consider the following pair of biblical passages:

Isaiah 59.20-21

And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD.

Romans 11.26-27

The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

The pronoun "he" in Isaiah becomes "the Deliverer" in Paul's letter to the Romans. And there is certainly a difference between coming **from** Zion and coming **to** Zion. Further, in the NT passage the subject of the second proposition is "the Deliverer" while in the OT it is "those in Jacob". And the OT "turn from transgression" becomes "banish ungodliness". Again these differences exist because in Romans, the apostle Paul was quoting from the ancient Greek, while the translation of Isaiah quoted is from the Hebrew text.

In some cases the differences are even more striking. For example, in Acts 7.42-43 the quotation from Amos is considerably different from the actual Hebrew text:

Amos 5.25-27

Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus . . ."

Acts 7.42-43

Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And you took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan, the figures which you made to worship; and I will remove you beyond Babylon . . ."

The difference between "bring" and "offer" or between "sacrifices" and "slain beasts" may not be very serious, but the Greek translators understood Sakkuth to mean tabernacle or "tent" and they took "your king" to mean the god Moloch. And in addition to the other differences, Damascus somehow becomes Babylon in Stephen's speech although this does not come from the Septuagint. These are only the most noticeable differences. While translators may be tempted to reconcile the differences that exist between the OT text and its NT quotation, these must not be harmonized at the expense of faithfulness to the original text of the NT.

There are many other differences between the OT source and the NT quotation. Some of them are very minor and a few are major. Representative samples of these are listed below:

Deuteronomy 18.15  
 . . . him you shall heed.

Acts 3.22  
 you shall listen to him **in whatever he tells you.**

Isaiah 28.16  
 He who believes will not be in haste.

Romans 9.33, 10.11  
 He who believes **in him** will not be **put to shame.**

Isaiah 42.4  
 He will not fail nor be discouraged.

Matthew 12.21  
 And in his name will the Gentiles hope.

Psalms 8.5  
 Yet thou hast made him a little less than God.

Hebrews 2.7  
 Thou didst make him for a **little while lower than the angels.**

In the first chapter of Hebrews there is extensive quotation from OT sources. Verse 3 alludes to Psalm 110.1; verse 5 contains material from Psalm 2.7 and 2 Samuel 7.14; verse 7 is taken from the Septuagint version of Psalm 104.4; verses 8 and 9 come from Psalm 45.6-7; verses 10-12 are from Psalm 102.25-27 and verse 13 from Psalm 110.1. But in verse 6 there is another problem quotation. The words "Let all God's angels worship him" come from Deuteronomy 32.43, but these words appear to have been added by the Greek translators. They are not in the Hebrew Masoretic text as it has come down to us.

### Quotations from doubtful sources

A second kind of problem quotation in the NT has to do with those words that are reported to be quotations in the same terms as passages that are, in fact, taken from the OT, but which do not actually appear in the OT. At least seven such passages exist in the NT.

In Matthew 2.23 we read: "And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'." The wording of this verse would lead most readers to expect to be able to find something like "He shall be called a Nazarene" somewhere in the OT. But no such verse can be found. Commentators have speculated that Matthew may have had in mind Isaiah 11.1, which refers to a "branch" growing out of the roots of the "stump of Jesse" because the Hebrew word for branch is *neser*. However, this seems rather far-fetched. Others see this as an allusion to "Nazirite" (Hebrew *nazir*) in Judges 13.7. And still others argue that in the time of Jesus "Nazarene" was a term of contempt and was virtually synonymous with "despised". The words in question would, therefore, simply be an allusion to the OT belief that the Messiah would be despised. But the fact remains that there is no clear reference on which

the NT "quotation" can be said to be based.

Toward the end of Luke's gospel (Lk 24.45-46) we find the words: "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.' " Some see Hosea 6.2 as a possible reference to the resurrection on the third day; and the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 is also well known. But these references do not constitute the kind of source one would expect after a reference to "scriptures" and the phrase "it is written".

Another passage that has puzzled commentators for centuries is found in John 7.38: "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" The Greek text can be punctuated in such a way as to exclude the first part (that is, "He who believes in me") from the quotation, but there can be no doubt that the remainder comes from some outside source. Some cite Zechariah 14.8 as a possible source, but it is perhaps somewhat more likely that this is a rather free paraphrase of the Greek version of Proverbs 18.4: "The word in a man's heart is deep water, and a river gushes forth, and a well of life."

In John 12.34 the crowd begins its answer to Jesus with the words "we have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever." However, there is no place in the first five books of the OT or elsewhere in the OT where such a statement is made in these words. Nevertheless, the **essential idea** may be contained in Psalm 89.4-5; 110.4; Isaiah 9.7; Ezekiel 37.25 or Daniel 7.13-14.

The following quotation was apparently well known in the early Church and has been the subject of a great deal of speculation on the part of Bible scholars.

Therefore, it is said,  
 "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
 and Christ shall give you light." (Eph 5.14)

This is clearly a quotation from some outside source, but it is **not** from the OT. In the immediate context there is no mention of the Law, the Prophets or the Writings (or Scriptures). The quote is prefaced simply by the words "It says . . ." (or possibly to be understood as "He says . . .") It is very likely that the source is an early Christian hymn or possibly some other Christian writing that was well known in the first century, but has been lost today. Some translators feel so certain of this that they translate "the hymn says" (*The Translator's New Testament*) or "as the hymn has it" (Barclay). It is certainly a mistake to translate the introduction to this quotation "the Scripture says . . ." Yet the *Living Bible* goes even further with "God says in the Scriptures . . ." This error should definitely be avoided by translators in other languages.

As Paul writes to Timothy (1 Tim 5.18), he seems to be citing two well known OT quotations: "For the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain,' and 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" The first of these does indeed come from the OT. The same words are, in fact, also found in 1 Corinthians 9.9. It is an almost word for word quotation of Deuteronomy 25.4, so it presents no special problem. However, the second sentence cited comes not from the OT, but from the words of Jesus as reported in Luke 10.7. The two quotations are separated only by the conjunction "and". But NEB seeks to set the second one apart from the first by translating the conjunction "and besides".

Leaving aside the very difficult question of what the words actually mean, the quotation in James 4.5 presents serious difficulties with regard to its source. The passage reads: "Or do you suppose it is in vain that the scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit which he has made to dwell within us?'" One commentator suggests that this sentence "seems to be a poetical rendering of Exodus 20.5" (ICC, page 262). But most commentators can only acknowledge their ignorance.

### **Some suggested guidelines**

In the face of the above problems regarding quotations taken from the Greek version of the OT or from some other source, what is the translator to do? A few simple guidelines are presented here in the hope that they will be found helpful by those involved in translating these difficult passages into languages around the world.

**1. Be aware of the existing problems.** The Bible is a more complex book than many people realize. It would be nice if all the OT quotes in the NT were just like the OT passages from which they are supposed to have been taken, but as we have seen, this is simply not the case. Translators must take into account the very prominent place held by the Greek Septuagint during the period when the NT was being written. They should be aware that many of the quotations they are dealing with are taken from that version and not from the Hebrew text on which our modern versions of the OT are based. Translators should also know that there are a number of quotations that seem to be from the OT, but in fact cannot be found there.

**2. Make use of all available helps.** In addition to the usual Translator's Handbooks and commentaries on the various books of the NT, it is important to consult the list of Septuagint passages found at the back of the *Good News Bible*. Another very important booklet is Robert Bratcher's *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* which was first published by the United Bible Societies in 1961. A second revised

edition of this volume appeared in 1984 and should be a part of every NT translator's library.

3. **Translate the NT text as it stands.** This is the most important recommendation of all. The NT text must be allowed to speak for itself. For some translators there may be a temptation to harmonize the NT with its OT counterpart where such exists. But this temptation must be resisted. If the NT text says "Babylon" where the OT has "Damascus", we must translate what the NT author wrote. We have no right to change his text even though we may realize that what he wrote does not, in fact, come from the Hebrew original.

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## TRANSLATING *HAGIASMOS* "SANCTIFICATION" IN PAUL'S LETTERS

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The word *hagiasmos*, translated "sanctification" or "holiness" in some English translations, occurs ten times in the New Testament, eight of which are in the writings ascribed to Paul. The term is always used in relation with believers. (It occurs in Rom 6.19,22; 1 Cor 1.30; 1 Th 4.3,4,7; 2 Th 2.13 and 1 Tim 2.15. Outside Paul's writings it appears in Heb 12.14, where it is a Christian virtue, and in 1 Pet 1.2, where it denotes the setting apart of the believer.)

In order to translate this biblical term in a way that is meaningful to present-day readers, it may be necessary to use more than one word. In this article I will look at the way this was done in the Bahasa Indonesia Sehari-hari (BIS) translation, a functional equivalent translation of the Bible into modern Indonesian.

*Hagiasmos* is a term belonging to the *hagios* "holy" group of words. In the Septuagint (LXX), words from the *hagios* group are used to translate the Hebrew *kadosh* and words derived from this root. (O. Procksh in his article on *hagios* in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, page 95, remarks that the LXX translators "rightly employed the relatively little-used Greek *hagios* as a rendering of the Hebrew *kadosh*." Employing a word that was not in frequent use among the ancient Greeks, the LXX translators invested it with the same meaning as *kadosh*, thereby giving the word a deeper meaning than it originally had in its Greek culture.)