

parison with the other possible routes the Israelites could have taken. There are usually sufficient details in the immediate context to make clear the approximate distance intended by the writer. Accordingly, the translation should keep the relative uncertainty of the original, but the description should always be expressed in a way that is appropriate to the language of the translation.

NOTES

Luke 12.46—Is there an anti-climax here?

“I’ll saw you in two and treat you as a pagan.” To the modern reader the second part of this sentence comes as rather an anticlimax after the first part. Once someone had sawn me in two, I shouldn’t be very interested in the way he treated me afterwards!

But that is what Luke 12.46 sounds like in most translations, ancient and modern: “The Lord of that servant . . . will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers” (KJV); he “will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers” (NIV) “The master will cut him in pieces and make him share the fate of the disobedient” (GNB).

There are really two problems in this verse, one inside the other. The larger problem is to know how the two clauses are related to one another. The smaller problem is that of the meaning of the verb translated “cut . . . in pieces”.

The large-scale problem is actually the easier to solve. The second clause seems to describe the result of the first, as NEB makes clear: “*Thus* he will find his place among the faithless.” Whatever the master is going to do to his servant, it is something which will prevent him from ever being included among God’s people. And this would certainly not have been an anti-climax for the people to whom Jesus told this story.

The smaller and more difficult problem frightens many translators. RSV has simply “punish”, which is much too weak. A footnote in GNB gives the alternative translation “throw him out”, and this is the interpretation chosen in a new version being published by the BFBS in a comic or cartoon format—though “cut him in pieces” would have made a much more exciting picture!

The Greek verb is uncommon. Literally, it should mean “cut in two”, and there is a non-biblical text which speaks of this being done with a sword. Some people have thought that this was just vivid exaggeration, like the camel going through the eye of a needle, or like the English saying “I’ll tan your hide”, which no one takes literally. But in Luke 12.46, a literal meaning fits the context perfectly, and there is no direct evidence of the word being used in a weakened sense.

Translators may like to note a solution of the problem which was first suggested in 1964, and has recently been taken up by I. H. Marshall in his commentary on Luke. This is that the Greek verb “cut in two” is used with the meaning “cut off”, in the sense of “cut off from God’s people”. Similar

language is commonly used in the Old Testament, for example in Lev 17.10, where GNB translates “. . . shall no longer be considered one of God’s people” (see also Lev. 17.14, 20.17, 22.3, Ezek 25.7, and many other passages). This is not very different from the thought of Rom 11.22 (GNB “. . . you too will be broken off”) and Gal 5.12, though different Greek verbs are used in those passages.

If this suggestion is correct, the generally accepted solution of the large scale problem must be somewhat revised. The second clause would say essentially the same as the first, but in positive terms. The whole text could be translated: “The master . . . will cut him out of God’s people, and make him share the fate of the unbelievers.” Perhaps at this point, where the meaning of the parable is being brought out, it would be even better to translate “master” as “Lord”, meaning “God”, since only God can do what is here described.

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Some points to consider in translating the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11–32)

Verse 11. In KJV and RSV this story begins, “And he said . . .”. NEB has “Again he said . . .” and the Jerusalem Bible “He also said . . .”. These might be all right for the average reader if he has started to read from the beginning of the chapter which gives the setting for the parable. However they will cause problems for anyone who begins reading at this point. Who is “he”? To whom was he speaking? And why did he tell this story? A good translation should consider the possible problems in advance, and avoid them. The Good News Bible has “Jesus went on to say . . .”, identifying the speaker and indicating that there is a connection between what follows and what has gone before. The Living Bible has “To further illustrate the point, he told them this story”. This is partly helpful, but it does not identify “he” and “them”. A suggested rendering to overcome all the problems might be: “To further illustrate the point to the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, Jesus told them this story”.

There will be a special problem where the parable is used in a selection such as a set of stories for New Readers. Here the story is separated from its original setting in the gospel, and the reader must be given enough clues about the setting to enable him to understand it correctly. It may be wise, therefore, to consider including verses 1 to 3 of the chapter as a preface to the parable whenever it has to stand in a selection by itself.

Verse 13. RSV has “the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.” The problem here has to do with the share of the property which the son received from his father. “Property” normally refers to land, buildings and stock, not to money. Before he left, the son must have sold his property, so that it would have been the money he got from it that he wasted in the foreign land. GNB brings this meaning out well: “. . . sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living.” NEB has “. . . turned the whole of his share into cash . . . squandered it in reckless living.”