

succeed with the spirit of the Word but with its grammar and spellings as well. Indeed, I've never, and I repeat never, read such good BM in any Christian literature before. Thank you Bible Society, and thank you translation team, for delivering a NATIONAL Bible into our hands, the national Church."

"I have already received the Malay version of the history of the Revised BM *Alkitab*. I will use it to explain and promote the BM *Alkitab* to a lot of people, so that they will love and use their BM *Alkitab* even more. Personally I feel that the Revised BM *Alkitab* is very helpful. So far, I have not found foreign expressions, they are in common language. So it is only right that Malaysians should use the BM *Alkitab*."

As the Malay proverb goes: *Tak ada gading yang tak retak* (literally "There is no ivory without cracks", that is, "Nothing is perfect"). So this fully Revised BM *Alkitab* is not unlike other translations; it is not perfect, and it can still be improved. So BSM cordially welcomes comments, corrections, and suggestions for improvement. As BM is a living language, we know that choice of words, grammar, discourse, and style are never stationary. They change from time to time, and it is the usage of BM native speakers that brings about such change. At this time we want to give the revised translation a chance to be used for the nurture of the Malaysian churches nationwide, especially for those people who are first- or second-language speakers of BM, and those who continuously use the national language at school, at work, at home and at play, in worship as well as in other church functions and activities. In the final analysis, the effectiveness of a Bible translation will be determined by the users, as it communicates the good news of Jesus Christ to the Christian communities, in this case especially the BM-speaking pastors, teachers, and members of Christian churches who live and worship in BM day in and day out.

## NOTES

### Seventy-seven times or seventy times seven times?

The translator is faced with a difficult choice in Matthew 18.22. Did Jesus say that we should forgive **seventy-seven times** (as in CEV, NIV, NRSV) or **seventy times seven times** (as in TEV, RSV, NLT)? In one way, it doesn't make a lot of difference, since even seventy-seven times is an enormous number of times to forgive. However, the translator still needs to make a choice.

Most modern translations have chosen one option and put the other option in a footnote. So, which rendering should be the one in the text and which in the footnote? The question is: What do the Greek words *hebdomekontakis hepta* actually mean? Since the Greek word for "seventy" is *hebdomekonta* and the suffix *-kis* at the end means "-fold" or "times", we know that the first word *hebdomekontakis* means "seventyfold" or "seventy times". The second word *hepta* means "seven", and "seven

times” would be *heptakis*. The Greek suffix *-kis* is attached to the end of the word and is therefore more like the English suffix “-fold” than the separate word “times”. In Greek the suffix would have to be attached to both words in order to give the meaning “seventy times seven times”, as in *hebdomēkontakis heptakis* ( more literally “seventyfold sevenfold”).

As we have said, the expression which we find in the Greek text of Matthew 18.22 is *hebdomēkontakis hepta*, where the suffix *-kis* is only attached to the first word. A literal translation of this would be “seventyfold seven”, but this does not make sense in English. Based on English language structure, we might have expected that in order to express “seventy-seven times” in Greek, the *-kis* suffix should have been attached to the last word rather than the first word, which would produce *hebdomēkonta hepta-kis* instead of what the text says, *hebdomēkonta-kis hepta*. But we have to be careful not to impose the structure of our language onto another language. It is better to try to understand a language on its own terms. The question is how would the Greek language express “seventy-seven times”? To try to answer this question we need to look at how Greek expresses compound numbers and how it might attach the suffix *-kis* to compound numbers. The problem is that it is not easy to find examples of this construction. There are several examples of the suffix *-kis* attached to a single word, but there is apparently only one other example of the suffix *-kis* attached to a compound number in the whole Bible. (I do not have resources available to me to search in non-biblical Greek texts.)

The only other reference in the Bible which can be directly compared to Matthew 18.22 in terms of the meaning of the Greek suffix *-kis* and a compound number is Genesis 4.23-24, where Lamech says (quoted from the RSV):

I have slain a man for wounding me,  
a young man for striking me.  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.

Lamech was a descendant of Cain, and apparently a violent and selfish person. He demanded an unusual amount of revenge, if he were to be killed. Many Bible translations which have a reference system, make a reference to Genesis 4.24 at Matthew 18.22, because it is very likely that Jesus had Lamech in mind when he replaced the demand for revenge with the command to forgive. The act of forgiveness is what overcomes the evil of revenge-seeking. So, while people like Lamech demand revenge again and again, the Christian is challenged to give forgiveness again and again.

There is no doubt that the Hebrew expression here means “seventy-sevenfold”, and all the translations I have checked say “seventy-sevenfold” or “seventy-seven times” (TEV “seventy-seven lives”). None say “seventy times seven times.” The parallelism with Genesis 4.24 is therefore a major reason supporting the meaning “seventy-seven times” in Matthew 18.22. This is further supported by the Septuagint translation of Genesis 4.24 which says *hebdomēkontakis hepta* – the exact same expression as in

Matthew 18.22. Unless we want to say that we know the Greek language better than the Septuagint translator of Genesis, we need to accept that this is how "seventy-seven times" is or at least can be expressed in Greek.

It is of interest to look briefly at the Septuagint translation of Leviticus 25.8. It is the only occurrence of an expression "a times b" using the suffix *-kis* "-fold". A literal translation of this verse is: "And you shall calculate to yourself seven sabbath-years, (that is) seven years seven-fold; and they shall be to you seven weeks of years, (that is) nine and forty years." Whereas in English we would say "seven times seven years", and the English translations of this verse all say "seven times seven" (for example, RSV "And you shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years"), Greek says "seven years seven-times" and not "seven-times seven years". The suffix *-kis* apparently cannot be used in the same sense as the English word "times" in "seven times seven". It is possible to say *heptakis heptakis* (literally "seven-fold seven-fold"), which would correspond to "seven times seven times". That is why "seventy times seven times" in English would be equivalent to "seventy-fold seven-fold" in Greek.

Another interesting thing to note from this verse is that "forty-nine" is expressed as "nine and forty". The Greek language has two ways of expressing a compound number like 77. One form is "seven and seventy". This is similar to, for instance, German *sieben und siebenzig*. The other form is "seventy (and) seven", which is similar to English "seventy-seven". Both forms occur in Septuagint Greek, but only "seventy seven" in New Testament Greek. The main difference between Greek and English is that for the higher numbers like 77 Greek would use two separate number words, sometimes with "and" in between, whereas English takes it as one compound number word. Because Greek expresses such a number by two separate words, there are theoretically two possibilities as to which of the two the suffix *-kis* "-fold" would be attached to. It seems that the Greek language normally attaches the suffix to the first word rather than the second, so that "seventy-seven-fold" in English is expressed as "seventy-fold seven" in Greek.

All literal versions of the Bible assume that the structures of the source language and the language of their translation are very similar. As long as that assumption holds, a literal translation may be clear and accurate; but when the assumption does not hold, a wrong meaning may easily be communicated. So, when the King James translators attempted to translate the Greek expression "seventy-fold seven" literally, they came up with "seventy times seven", where the originally intended meaning was "seventy-seven times".

Most English translations use an ellipsis in Matthew 18.22, that is, they omit part of the expression when the same words appear a second time in Greek. The TEV, for instance, has "No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven." The full expression is "seventy times seven times", but because "seven times" has been used in the previous sentence the last occurrence of "times" is deleted as unnecessary. English allows the ellipsis of an independent word like "times", but it does not allow ellipsis of a suffix like "-fold" in "sevenfold". The RSV uses both the

words “sevenfold” and “seventy-sevenfold” in Genesis 4.24, and it would not be acceptable English to delete the final suffix “-fold” in this case.

It has been suggested that Greek text of Matthew 18.22 has an ellipsis like in English, so that the expression “seventyfold seven” which occurs in the text is a shortened form for “seventyfold sevenfold” which means “seventy times seven times”. However, because the Greek *-kis* is a suffix rather than a separate word, this seems an unlikely possibility, and therefore the translation “seventy times seven (times)” is probably not correct.

According to the Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich Greek dictionary, the Greek expression *hebdomēkontakis hepta* might possibly be a shortened form of *hebdomēkontakis heptakis* “seventy times seven times”, but most likely it means “seventy-seven times”. The Blass, Debrunner Grammar of the Greek NT states in section 248 that *hebdomēkontakis hepta* means “seventy-seven times” (not “seventy times seven”) as in the Septuagint of Genesis 4.24. A.T. Robertson says in his Grammar of the Greek New Testament (page 674) that “Moulton considers rightly that the passage in Genesis settles the usage in Matthew to which an allusion may be made.” (This reference is to Moulton’s *Greek Grammar: Prolegomena*, page 98.) It seems, then, that the weight of scholarly opinion is on “seventy-seven times” rather than “seventy times seven times”.

Since there is such strong linguistic and contextual evidence for choosing “77 times” rather than “70 times 7 times”, my recommendation is that translators should put this translation in the text, but include the other option in a footnote, since many earlier translations have chosen that interpretation. This is actually the opposite of what both RSV and GNB have done, which both put the traditional interpretation in the text, and the other one in a footnote.

IVER LARSEN

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### **Where does a soldier get cold beer on a hot day? (1 Kings 20)**

When King Benhadad (the Second) of Aram (Syria) laid siege to Samaria (1 Kings 20.1), King Ahab of Israel at first agreed to pay tribute; but then he got annoyed when the arrogant King of Syria said his men were coming to collect “everything they consider valuable” (GNB, based on ancient translations) or “everything else that you own” (CEV, based on the Hebrew).

Encouraged by a nameless prophet, Ahab called Benhadad’s bluff. In RSV (verse 12) we are told that his messengers went and found the Syrian king with his fellow “kings” in the “booths”. Later on, Ahab and his men attacked at noon, “when Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths” (verse 16).