

NOTES

The chronology of John 12.12-19

It is always encouraging when a translator drafting a portion of Scripture into his own language becomes aware that literal renderings of words and phrases can sometimes be seriously misleading. It is even more encouraging when such a person realises the limitations, in certain passages, of a verse-by-verse translation, following the traditionally accepted sequence of verses—and then, on his own initiative, takes steps to avoid this and produce an accurate and intelligible translation.

Some time ago the translator working on the new translation of the New Testament into the Mataco language of the Northern Argentine Chaco area became concerned about the chronology of the Triumphal Entry passage in John 12.12-19, particularly verses 17 and 18. Although his base translation, the Spanish *Version Popular*, follows all other translations in maintaining the order of verses in numerical sequence, he realised that to do this in Mataco could create in the mind of his readers misunderstanding and confusion as to the real order of events. Rightly believing verses 17 and 18 to be a type of “flashback explanation” of the events described in verses 12 and 13a, he tentatively produced a translation of the entire section which read as follows:

12-19 The next day, when many people had already gone to Jerusalem to gather for the festival of Passover, Jesus mounted a donkey and then he too went into that city. And the people who had been with him the day recently when he called Lazarus who was in the tomb to rise from amongst the dead, they told others what they had seen Jesus do. And that's why the people, when they heard that Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem, cut palm leaves and went to meet him and kept crying out saying:

“God is great!” “Blessing is with the man who comes with the word (authority) of the Lord! Blessing is with him who is the King of the people of Israel!”

Just as the age-old Writing says:

“People of Zion, don't be afraid.

Look upon your King, he comes on a little donkey.”

But at first his disciples did not understand such things. But later when Jesus entered his greatness, then they remembered that all things that had been done thus were indeed what the age-old Writing had said about Jesus.

But the Pharisees, when they saw those things, spoke amongst themselves saying:

“You see this. If it is so, we can do nothing. Because look, everybody is going with him!”

We can see that the order of verses within this portion has now become 12a, 14a, 17, 18, 12b, 13, 14b, 15, 16, 19.

After careful study of the passage and then discussion of the draft with the translator (a work sequence we follow throughout the New Testament), I agreed that this was a far clearer and more satisfactory ordering of the events. The only minor adjustments we made were changes in single words, and these have been included in the transcription above. The translator added that he had found the passage difficult to follow in the existing Mataco translation, a fairly literal work published in 1962 which, in this passage and in every other matter, maintains the strict verse-by-verse order of traditional versions.

Further encouragement for us came with the visit of the United Bible Societies' Translation Consultant for the region, with whom we took the opportunity to discuss the passage. He was satisfied with the rearrangement of the verses, agreeing too with our numeration, and suggesting certain adjustments to clarify overall interrelation of the discourse structure.

May all translators show more and more understanding, imagination and initiative of this kind!

ROBERT LUNT

What did Isaac go out to do? (Genesis 24.63-65)

In the context of the story of Isaac and Rebecca there are several fascinating translation problems. One of the more interesting and difficult ones is found in Genesis 24.63-65 where we read in the Good News Bible:

He went out in the early evening to take a walk in the fields and saw camels coming. When Rebecca saw Isaac, she got down from her camel and asked Abraham's servant, “Who is that man walking toward us in the field?”

At first glance the reader might have the impression that the words “walk in the fields” in verse 63 and “walking . . . in the field” in verse 65 come from similar expressions in the Hebrew. This, however, is far