

3. Thirdly, a translation with a reading age level of 8–12 years calls for some specific translation rules: sentences of no more than 10 to 12 words; very few negative phrases; by preference no passive forms; no idiomatic peculiarities; words of as few syllables as possible; no words of low frequency. (These are all elements that contribute to a high degree to the readability of a text.)

Two translation teams have been formed, one for the Old Testament and another for the New Testament. Each team is composed of a biblical scholar with experience in teaching religion to young people, who is responsible for the first draft, together with another biblical scholar as adviser, an educationalist, and a trained NBS staff member. The whole team is responsible for the final draft of the translation.

FUTURE PLANS

Translation work on the Old Testament started with the books of Samuel and will continue with the books of Kings. As for the New Testament, two selections have been published so far, one on Jesus' death and another on Jesus' birth. A translation of Luke and Acts is being prepared.

While the portions, that is the translations of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Luke, and Acts, are designed as books for children, the Easter and Christmas selections apply to grown-ups too, and have a more or less direct missionary function.

Over a few years we hope to evaluate the impact of this translation work. Then perhaps we shall be able to answer questions like whether it is the right sort of translation for the target groups, and whether the whole Bible should be translated in easy-to-read Dutch. We also hope to find out whether the same translation can be used by children and certain groups of adults, so that just a change of lay-out will make portions like *Samuël en Saul* suitable for these groups of grown-ups.

All these questions are still open. But one thing is certain: none of the existing translations of the Bible, not even the one in common language, can be fully understood by people with a reading age level of below 13 years. And that is the reason why the Netherlands Bible Society is going ahead with the project of a new translation in easy-to-read Dutch.

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“VERSES MARKED WITH BRACKETS . . .”

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“Verses marked with brackets [] are not in the oldest and best manuscripts of the New Testament.” This, or a similar statement, appears in the introductions to a number of modern translations of the New Testament. But it sounds strange to many devout Christians, who believe that the Bible has somehow remained intact, without change or alteration, throughout the

centuries. God, however, is not bound by human ways of thinking: his ways are not our ways. He comes to us through Bethlehem's cradle and Calvary's cross, and he speaks to us through the limitations of a written message.

Throughout the scriptures God is shown to be a God who takes history seriously, a God who comes to people where they are. So the fact that he has seen fit to address us through the imperfect medium of a written word is just another aspect of his mysterious involvement in our world. It is not that God *could not* have done otherwise; it is rather that he *chooses* to confront us in such a way that the possibility of unbelief is always just as real as the possibility of belief. If the scriptures had been handed down from heaven in some magic way that could have been witnessed by many people, and if they had been constantly watched over by a guardian angel, so that no alterations could have crept in, then there would be no choice—all people would be compelled to believe. But God, in his infinite wisdom, has placed the priceless message of salvation in "earthenware jars"—the written word has been placed in the care of human beings, who are both capable of error and sinful.

Recent manuscript discoveries

A second matter that often proves surprising to many readers of the Bible is the fact that none of the original manuscripts of the books of the Bible exist any longer. All that are available are copies of the original manuscripts, and these copies do not always agree with one another. Moreover, the matter of deciding what may have been the original text on the basis of the available manuscripts is a difficult task which requires great skill and experience. For this reason, the United Bible Societies engaged Christian scholars to prepare a Greek text (the New Testament was written in Greek) that can be used by translators who know Greek, but who are not specialists in textual matters. By using this Greek text, the translator can save much time and energy; he can devote his full powers to the translation of the text in a way that is most natural in his own language.

In 1611, when the *King James Version* of the Bible was translated, the translators faced several limitations, one of which was the choice of manuscripts available to them. In fact, it is only in the present century that the best manuscripts of the New Testament have been discovered, and the science of evaluating those manuscripts fully developed.

We will now look at two passages from the New Testament, to see what this means so far as translation is concerned.

Mark 16.9–20

The first passage to be considered is the ending to the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16.9–20). At the time that the King James Bible was translated, the Greek manuscript available to the translators contained these verses. But since that time it has been discovered that they are not found in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. In fact another, shorter ending appears in some Greek manuscripts:

"⁹The women went to Peter and his friends and gave them a brief account of all they had been told. ¹⁰After this, Jesus himself sent out through his disciples, from the east to the west, the sacred and ever-living message of eternal life."

But even this shorter ending was not an original part of Mark's Gospel. It was added by some scribe for the same reason that 16.9–20 was added, that is, because of dissatisfaction with the ending of the Gospel as he knew it:

"⁸So they (the women) went out and ran from the grave, because fear and terror were upon them. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

Evidently it was felt that this verse was not a satisfactory conclusion to the Gospel, because it seemed to be in conflict with the verse immediately before it, where the angel commands the woman to tell the disciples about the resurrection. There is also a problem in the omission of any mention of the resurrected Lord's appearances, such as are found in the other Gospels.

In the light of these factors, there are two possibilities. The first is the possibility that the original ending to Mark's Gospel was lost, while the second is that the Gospel originally ended with verse eight. I myself think that the second of these two possibilities seems most likely. Both Matthew and Luke followed Mark's Gospel up to this point, but not beyond, so the problem must lie in our interpretation of the text, rather than in the loss of part of the text. In other words, Mark *intentionally* ended his Gospel with 16.8, which speaks of the fear of the women. He probably did this because he wanted in this way to emphasize the awesome aspect of the event; it was an event so forceful and shaking, that even the witnesses were *at first* too frightened to speak of it. The fact that Mark says "they said nothing to anyone" does not mean that they *never* told of the event, but only that *at first* they were too overcome to speak of what they had seen. Moreover, the omission of any resurrection appearance is not too serious a problem, when we consider that the reality of Easter is assumed in Mark's entire account. Without this faith he could never have written his Gospel; but for his own reasons, he felt it unnecessary to make mention of any resurrection appearance.

John 7.53—8.11

The evidence is overwhelming that the story of the woman caught in adultery is not an original part of the Gospel of John. Not only are these verses absent from the earliest and best Greek manuscripts, but the style and vocabulary differ from the rest of the Gospel. Moreover, the story interrupts the way the main story goes on from 7.52 to 8.12.

On the other hand, scholars are certain that the account is an accurate description of an event from Jesus' ministry. It is found in various manuscripts of John's Gospel after 7.36 or after 7.44 or after 21.25. And in one manuscript of Luke's Gospel it is placed after Luke 21.38. What should the translator do then? Perhaps the following suggestions will be helpful in answering this question.

1. It should be kept in the New Testament, since it is apparently a true witness to Jesus Christ and it has been a recognized part of the Gospel tradition for many centuries.

2. Preferably it should be placed at the end of the Gospel of John, with a note indicating the various textual possibilities. This arrangement would allow the sensitive reader to see more clearly the relation between chapters 7 and 8 which must be understood in the light of the Festival of Shelters. For the Jews of New Testament times the celebration of this festival was associated with the themes of life-giving water and of light. So when Jesus declares that he is the source of life-giving water (7.37-39) and of light for the world (8.12-20), he is declaring that he is the reality of what was symbolized by the Festival of Shelters. I realize that even the best reader may miss seeing this relation. But, if 7.53-8.11 is placed at the end of the Gospel, then the reader will have a better chance to understand the full impact of chapters 7 and 8.

3. It may be necessary to keep the story in its traditional place (after 7.52), if the feelings of people against placing it in a new position are too strong. In such instances, it should be placed in brackets with a note indicating its textual uncertainty, as the *Good News Bible* has done. In my opinion this is less desirable from a purely translational point of view; but it may be wiser, if its transfer to a new place in the text may possibly result in a split in the local Christian community or in the refusal to use the translation. Our "wisdom" must not be allowed to destroy our "weaker brother"

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HOW IS YOUR HANDBOOK WEARING?

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People who have worked with UBS Translator's Handbooks generally agree on three things. First, that most normal commentaries contain a great deal of information which translators do not need, since it does not directly affect the meaning of the text. Second, that normal commentaries often fail to deal with questions which translators have to answer. Third, that there have been many changes and developments in the 18 years since the first Handbook, on Mark, by Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, was published in 1961.

This therefore seems a good time to ask: How is this first Handbook wearing? Does it still answer translators' questions as well as it did 18 years ago? And is there anything translators can learn from later commentaries on Mark?

It would be impossible to answer these questions completely in a single article. All I will try to do here is to note some of the problems met by a group of people translating Mark 9.1 to 10.11 into Scots Gaelic. Other groups might have different problems, and might come to different conclusions. This is only a sample.