

PRACTICAL PAPERS FOR THE BIBLE TRANSLATOR

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INTRODUCING GUIDES FOR TRANSLATORS

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For many years now the United Bible Societies have published a series of Helps for Translators. The current list of available Helps is printed on the inside covers of each issue of *The Bible Translator*. The list is divided into three major categories: Texts and Textual Aids, Translator's Handbooks, and Other Aids. It will soon be necessary to add a fourth category: Translator's Guides.

The UBS is in the process of preparing a series of Guides for Translators that will eventually cover the entire Bible. The first volume to appear will be *A Translator's Guide to the Gospel of Matthew*. This volume should be available for distribution in the near future. Work is continuing on the rest of the New Testament, and additional volumes will be published on a regular basis until Guides to the entire New Testament have been made available.

For the Old Testament the first volume to appear will be *A Translator's Guide to Selected Psalms*. The pattern for the Old Testament will be to provide guide material in the first place only for the important sections that may be included in a Shorter Bible. The reason for this is that there is a high priority need for this type of material in small language situations which may never have a complete Bible. After this initial task has been completed, work will continue on the remaining sections until Guides to the entire Old Testament are available.

The publication of Guides for Translators does not mean that the UBS Translator's Handbook series is being abandoned. That series has been in progress since *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* was published in 1961, and work is continuing on Old Testament and New Testament volumes. This new series of Guides will not replace the Handbooks, as the two are designed to meet different needs. The Handbooks are full-range commentaries for translators, and they seek to deal with problems of the original text, interpretation, vocabulary analysis, discourse structure, and so on, from a scholarly and technical standpoint. That is to say, the Handbooks seek to meet the needs of the translator by providing him with background information and scholarly opinion, on the assumption that he will then be in a position to make the decisions that will be required for his interpretation of the text and the transla-

tion of the text into his own language. This type of commentary is certainly needed; but experience has shown that the translator tends to use his Handbook as a reference work, to which he turns only when he faces a difficulty in his translation task.

The Guide series will not take decision-making away from the translator, but it will provide him with a type of help different from that found in the Handbooks. The Guides are intended to give strictly practical guidance to the translator about what he should do in translating the passage before him into his own language. Scholarly theories and technical opinions are not reported, although it will be obvious to the expert that they lie behind the practical recommendations that are being made. Suggestions are made on the basis of what other translators have found helpful in solving problems, but no attempt is made to show that the recommendations are valid or to find support for them in scholarly opinion. In short these are guides that should be the constant companion of the translator, both answering the problems he raises in approaching the text and alerting him to problems that he may not have thought about in looking at the text.

The base-model approach

The Guides are written from the standpoint of a base-model approach to translation. It is assumed that the ultimate **base** for any translation has to be the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. But it is not expected that every translator will learn Hebrew and Greek. Rather, a formal equivalent, more-or-less literal, translation is provided as the substitute translation base, and this reflects, at least to some extent, what is found in the original texts. At the same time it is recognized that a formal-literal translation is often meaningless and at times even conveys the wrong meaning. The translator needs a **model** translation to show him the kinds of things that need to be done in restructuring to produce a meaningful translation. In these Guides two texts are provided. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) serves as the substitute base for the original text, while Today's English Version, also known as The Good News Bible (GNB), serves as the translational model of what needs to be done in English. It should be obvious that to translate literally either the base or the model into the new language will produce an inferior translation. The Guide will help the translator avoid literal translation by showing the relationship between base and model and by suggesting other ways in which the base may be restructured in languages that are different from English.

The material of the text is dealt with section by section in meaningful units. Often these will correspond to the section divisions in GNB, but at times they may be shorter. The RSV text for the section is printed on the right side of the page and the GNB text on the left. The fact that the translator has before him the base and the translational model should help him to compare the two and decide what he needs to do in his own language. Next comes a brief treatment of how the section heading may be translated and of any important discourse elements that need to be kept in mind during the translation of the section.

The main body of material in the Guide consists of a running commentary, sentence by sentence or phrase by phrase, of each verse in each section of the text. The order of the GNB text is followed in this presentation. The reason for this is that the translator should find it much easier to work with understandable meaning units, rather than with the formal equivalents that make up the substitute translation base. At times, and particularly when the base does not accurately reflect the original, reference is made to what the original text says. Problems of interpretation are briefly dealt with, and an effort is made to state as clearly as possible what the original text meant. This is followed by various suggestions as to how this meaning may be presented to the reader in the receptor language. These suggestions often take the form of quoting a number of different kinds of possible restructuring.

In addition to this type of running commentary, the Guides include suggestions about how to resolve important textual problems and what to do when no clear decision can be made between different interpretations of the text. Other modern translations may be referred to where difficult problems of interpretation have to be faced. Although there are no lengthy word studies, often the meaning of a difficult word is discussed in the commentary. All of this material is included at the point in the text where the particular problem is to be faced, in order to avoid the need for turning elsewhere to find an answer to a problem in the text that is being translated.

The Guides are not reference works but companions for the translator. They should be used at every stage of the translation process. The fact that each Guide contains a brief introductory section on "How to translate the Book of _____" should help the translator use the Guides wisely. As with all the Helps for Translators published by the United Bible Societies, suggestions for improving the usefulness of this new series will be gratefully received.

What follows next is a sample of the kind of approach that is taken in the new series.

A TRANSLATOR'S GUIDE TO THE FIRST PSALM

The First Psalm should be seen as a kind of introduction to the book of Psalms. It reminds the reader that the truly happy person is the one who is in right relationship with God. But it also strongly emphasizes the idea that to be in right relationship with God involves the study of God's law and an effort to live by its teachings. In contrast with many of the psalms, there is no Hebrew title.

PSALM 1

Good News Bible

Revised Standard Version

True Happiness

1 Happy are those
who reject the advice of evil men,
who do not follow the example of
sinners
or join those who have no use for God.

1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the
wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

²Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the LORD,
and they study it day and night.

³They are like trees that grow beside a stream,
that bear fruit at the right time,
and whose leaves do not dry up.
They succeed in everything they do.

⁴But evil men are not like this at all;
they are like straw that the wind blows away.

⁵Sinners will be condemned by God
and kept apart from God's own people.

⁶The righteous are guided and protected by the LORD.
but the evil are on the way to their doom.

²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

SECTION HEADING: *True Happiness* (1.1–6): “The Righteous are Happy”

1.1 *Happy are those who reject the advice of evil men, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God.*

Happy: The Hebrew word is used with the sense of “congratulations”, and although the word has frequently been translated as “blessed” (RSV), the meaning is much closer to the idea of “happy”, “fortunate”.

those who: RSV “the man who”, but English more readily uses a plural to speak in general terms. Each language will have its own way of speaking of “any person who”, “the people who”.

reject the advice of evil men: Literally, “do (does) not walk in the advice of evil men”, but the Hebrew verb “walk has the sense of “live”, “follow”, and the meaning is “they do not listen (refuse to listen) to what evil men tell them to do”.

do not follow the example of sinners: Literally “do not stand in the way of sinners”; but “the way of sinners” means “the kind of life sinners live” and “stand” has the sense of “participate in”. We might translate, “they do not do what sinners do”.

sinners: This refers to the same group as “evil men” and those who have no use for God”. It is used in a restricted sense for those who are opposed to God and righteous people. In some languages a different word may be needed, rather than the word “sinners”, which would apply to all people.

join those who have no use for God: Literally, “do not sit in the seat of those who scoff/mock”; and “sit in the seat” means “participate in the deliberations of”, “join in the discussions of”. We might translate “they do not spend their time with those who reject God”.

1.2 *Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law
of the LORD,
and they study it day and night.*

Instead: A sharp contrast is drawn between the negative things in verse 1 and the positive things in verse 2. In some languages it may be easier to indicate the contrast in other ways. For example, it would be possible to translate verse 1: "No one is happy who listens to . . ." Verse 2 could then begin "The person who is happy finds joy . . ."

they find joy in: The Hebrew has "his joy is in" (RSV "his delight is in"), but it is more natural in many languages to use a verbal form, that is, "he enjoys", or "they enjoy", if the plural form is used to express the general meaning of "a person".

in obeying the Law of the Lord: RSV, "in the Law of the Lord"; but to find joy in the Law means essentially that it is a joy to obey the Law. A literal translation will not make this clear. The Hebrew word of "Law" means "instruction", and particularly "the instruction that God gives", but in this context that instruction is to be found in written form, probably the Law of Moses (= the Law that God gave through Moses).

study: The Hebrew word has the sense of reading to yourself in a low voice and thinking about what has been read; it is sometimes translated as "meditate", but active study is closer to the sense or "thoughtfully read". We might translate "read and think about".

day and night : "continually", "without ceasing", although, of course, this is an exaggeration.

1.3 *They are like trees that grow beside a stream,
that bear fruit at the right time,
and whose leaves do not dry up.
They succeed in everything they do.*

like: The point of comparison is, of course, that as trees prosper when they have plenty of water, so people prosper when they study the Law of the Lord.

grow: RSV "planted"; but the emphasis is on the fact that the trees grow there, although the Psalmist may have in mind the idea that just as men plant trees, so God puts people where they can grow. But it may be simpler to translate "that stand/are".

stream: RSV "streams of water"; but in English the addition "of water" is redundant and the use of the singular is more normal. The Hebrew word refers to a man-made water channel or canal, but the emphasis is on the water and not on the particular form of the stream that brings the water to the tree.

at the right time: "When the time for them to bear fruit comes".

leaves do not dry up: That is, they never suffer from drought.

succeed: The Hebrew verb has the general sense of "turn out well", and should not be understood only in a financial sense.

- 1.4 *But evil men are not like this at all;
they are like straw that the wind blows
away.*

But: The Hebrew does not have a conjunction, but the form makes the contrast with the earlier verses emphatic.

evil men: The same Hebrew word as in verse 1.

straw: RSV “chaff”, that is, the straw and husks of grain left after the seed has been removed; but in a non-agricultural situation it may be more meaningful to speak in general terms of *straw*.

blows away: The Hebrew verb means “blow away”, “scatter”.

- 1.5 *Sinners will be condemned by God
and kept apart from God’s own people.*

sinners: The Hebrew has “evil men” in the first line, and “sinners” in the second line (see RSV), but since “evil men” has been used in verses 1 and 4, language style may prefer to use only “sinners” here.

will be condemned by God: Literally “will not stand up on the judgment” (see RSV); but “judgment” refers to God’s judgment, and “will not stand up” means that they will not be declared innocent, but will be condemned, that is, “God will condemn the sinners”, “sinners cannot endure God’s judgment”.

kept apart from God’s own people: Literally, “(will not stand) in the congregation of those who are righteous” (see RSV); but the Hebrew word “righteous” does not mean primarily “those who are good”. It refers essentially to the idea that they are people who belong to God. Those who are not able to stand in the congregation of the righteous are, then, those who are not allowed to participate with God’s chosen people, those excluded from the people who belong to God.

- 1.6 *The righteous are guided and protected by
the LORD,
but the evil are on the way to their doom.*

guided and protected by the Lord: RSV, “the Lord knows the way of”, but this does not mean simply that the Lord knows where they are going. Rather, the meaning is that God will go with them along the way, that is, will take care of them. The Hebrew verb translated “know” has a much larger meaning than the English word, and a literal translation will not usually convey the correct meaning. We may need to shift to the active “the Lord guides and protects/takes care of those who obey him”.

are they on their way to doom: The Hebrew has “their way will be destroyed”, but this does not mean that the path they are following will be torn up. Rather, it is a Hebrew way of saying “the path they are following leads only to one place—destruction”, that is, “God will destroy the evil people/those who disobey him”.