

journey”, since modern readers are not likely to realize that that is a relatively short distance. The necessity of adding “only” is largely removed, however, when the modern equivalent of the distance is given: “about three quarters of a mile from the city” (TC); “half a mile away” (Gdsp); “about half a mile away from the city” (GNB — American edition); “about a kilometre away from the city” (GNB — British edition); and “a kilometer away” (FC). Only Charles B. Williams and William F. Beck combine “only” with the modern equivalent distance in “only half a mile away”.

And if Moff was not quoted in connection with our discussion of the addition of “only” in 1 Timothy 5.12—where GNB translates “Do not drink water only but take a little wine”—it is because Moff has recast the translation in such a way that he doesn’t even have occasion to use the word “water”: “Give up being a total abstainer; take a little wine”. As we know, there are many different ways of dealing with translation problems. We should add the word “only”, or its equivalent, only when the context requires it.

NOTES

Translating Ruth 3.16

Ruth 3.6-15 is an account of the meeting between Boaz and Ruth at the threshing floor. When Ruth returned home from that meeting, Naomi her mother-in-law, asked her, *mi 'at bitti*. This question translated literally is: “Who are you, daughter?” This is how KJV translates it in English. But such a translation, which suggests that Ruth was not known to Naomi, would make no sense to the reader. So the rendering of Naomi’s question as an inquiry about identity has proved to be something of a problem for translators.

Ruth does not give a direct answer to Naomi’s question, but the storyteller says, “she (Ruth) told her (Naomi) all that Boaz had done for her”. It is this statement in the storyteller’s narration that has probably influenced versions in their treatment of Naomi’s question as an inquiry about how Ruth fared in her meeting with Boaz. So, (RSV) “How did you fare my daughter?” (GNB) “How did you get along, daughter?” (NIV) “How did it go, my daughter?” But such English renderings should not be regarded as accurate translations of Naomi’s question to Ruth and as models to be followed.

The Hebrew question *mi 'atta*, “who are you?” (masculine), *mi 'at*, “who are you” (feminine), and *mi 'attem*, “who are you?” (plural), do not occur frequently in the Old Testament; but wherever such a form of the question occurs, it is a question about the identity of a person. No

one would be convinced that Boaz' question, *mi 'at*, to Ruth at 3.9 means anything else than "who are you?"—an enquiry about identity. Neither should we be convinced by claims that the same question, *mi 'at*, at 3.16 must mean something else than an enquiry about identity.

If Naomi wanted to know how Ruth had got on in her meeting with Boaz, the question *mi 'at*, "who are you?", was a very odd way to do it. The storyteller had other ways to express such an inquiry as he demonstrates when Ruth returned from her first meeting with Boaz. One way would have been to use the expression *hashalom bitti* meaning, "Did things go well for you, daughter?"

2 Kings 9.1-13 has the account of the meeting between one of Elisha's young prophets and Jehu, an army commander of Israel. Jehu was with other commanders when the young prophet came to meet him. The prophet and Jehu went indoors where they could not be seen by the others. There the prophet anointed Jehu as the next king of Israel. When Jehu came out and joined the other commanders, they inquired of him *hashalom* (2 Kings 9.11). This was an inquiry about what had happened while Jehu was with the prophet and whether everything was all right. GNB translates the question as "Is everything all right?", RSV "Is all well?" and NIV "Is everything all right?" The question *hashalom* would have suited Naomi's purpose very well if she wanted to inquire about what happened between Ruth and Boaz and if everything went according to plan.

One scholar, Jack Sasson, in his commentary on *Ruth* (page 101) understands Naomi's question to mean "Who are you, daughter?" in the sense that she wanted to know whether, after Ruth's meeting with Boaz, her status had changed from an unattached widow to a woman who now belonged to him. Sasson's point is a very good one and the translator could render Naomi's question as Sasson does: "Who are you now, daughter?". A translator may express it differently, but it is quite correctly a question about identity and is to be preferred to questions such as "How did you fare, daughter?" or "How did you get along, daughter?" and so on.

Here, however, I want to propose that Naomi's question be translated as: "Is that you, daughter?" Such a translation faithfully renders the Hebrew expression as a question concerning identity and can be explained in the context of the circumstances of the story's plot and the author's skill as a storyteller.

There are two meetings between Ruth and Boaz. The first is described in chapter 2 and the second in chapter 3. There are many similarities between the accounts of the two meetings. But what is more important for understanding Naomi's question to Ruth in 3.16 is the contrast between the two accounts. The feature of the first meeting is its open publicity and the feature of the second meeting on the threshing floor is its close secrecy.

The first meeting takes place in broad daylight. Ruth's arrival at the harvest field is quite open and her actions throughout the day are quite

public. She gleaned in the open fields, beats out the grain and then leaves the fields while it is still daylight, and the storyteller gives the impression that it was still light when she reached home. So Ruth's arrival and departure and all her activities were open for all to see.

The meetings between Ruth and Boaz on that day are also quite public. The storyteller describes their meetings in such a way that one could understand that not only were Ruth and Boaz seen together, but that what they said to each other was heard by others.

The second meeting between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor is in striking contrast to the first meeting. While the first meeting was marked by open publicity, the second meeting on the threshing floor is marked by privacy and secrecy.

Ruth's arrival at the threshing floor is secret. She keeps hidden until Boaz goes to sleep. Then she goes very quietly and lies down by Boaz' feet. Suddenly Boaz wakes up and finds a woman lying at his feet. It is the darkest hour of the night, and Boaz, unable to see and recognise the person at his feet, asks, *mi 'at*, "Who are you?" (the same question Naomi asks Ruth). Ruth identifies herself and their entire meeting is hidden from view by total darkness.

The storyteller achieves the atmosphere of secrecy not only by excluding the workers in this episode and timing the second meeting to take place at night in total darkness, but also by using two very effective stylistic devices to create the effect of anonymity. One is the minimal use of the names of the three persons involved in the episode. The storyteller uses "the man" and "the woman" instead of the names Boaz and Ruth (3.8,14,16,18). The name Naomi occurs once (3.1), Ruth once (3.9) and Boaz twice (3.2,7) in the entire episode. What a contrast to the account of the first meeting marked by its publicity. There the name Naomi is used six times, Ruth four times and Boaz ten times!

The second device is the use of only the minimal quotative formula throughout all conversations from the time that Ruth arrives on the threshing floor to the end of the episode. So the words spoken by Ruth, Boaz and Naomi are introduced only by the verb *watt'omer*, "she said" and *wayy'omer*, "he said". Speaker and hearer are never once explicitly identified in the quotative formula.

Secrecy is crucial for the success of Boaz' plans to fulfil his responsibility to Ruth and Naomi on the next day. So Boaz warns Ruth that no one must know that she had come to the threshing floor (3.14). The circumstances of darkness used by the storyteller to hide the meeting of Ruth and Boaz must continue in order to hide any knowledge that Ruth had ever been on the threshing floor that night. So the storyteller informs his readers that Ruth's departure from the threshing floor is hidden by darkness: it is too dark for one person to recognise another (3.14). But how is he to ensure that darkness has hidden Ruth's journey from the threshing floor to her mother-in-law's home? He does this in a most dramatic fashion: the single utterance by Naomi the moment Ruth arrives at home: *mi 'at bitti*. The darkness that hid Ruth's departure

from the threshing floor also hides her journey home. Naomi, unable to see Ruth hidden in darkness, but aware of her presence, eagerly asks, "Is that you, daughter?" So the storyteller masterfully assures his readers that Ruth reached home unseen—the secret of her meeting with Boaz is safe.

A parallel circumstance of the presence of an unseen person which prompts the same question is found in the account of Isaac's blessing of Jacob, Gen 27.18-29. Isaac has sent his older son Esau to hunt and cook the meat and bring it to him before he gives Esau his blessing. But Jacob, the younger brother, impersonates Esau and presents himself and the cooked meat to Isaac. Now Isaac is expecting Esau to return, but he is also blind. So when Jacob arrives, Isaac is aware of the presence of someone but he cannot see that person. It is the inability to see the person that makes Isaac ask the question, *mi 'atta beni*, literally "Who are you, son?" Of course Isaac did not need an introduction to his son. He could not see which one of his two sons was before him and the force of his question was, "Who is it, son? Are you Esau or Jacob?"

Isaac's question *mi 'atta beni* is identical in form to Naomi's question *mi 'at bitti*. When we compare the circumstance and linguistic usage in both instances we are convinced that Naomi's question is an inquiry about identity and not welfare.

Isaac's question is appropriate to a situation where the person addressed is known and expected, but visual confirmation is impossible because he is blind. So also Naomi's question is appropriate to a situation where the person addressed is known and expected, but visual confirmation is impossible because Ruth is hidden from view. Naomi's question *mi 'at bitti* has the force, "Who is it? Is it you, daughter?", or restructured, "Is that you, daughter?"

Translators and revisers who want an accurate translation of Naomi's question should render it: "Is that you, daughter?". The New King James Version has after all revised KJV to read, "Is that you, daughter?"

BASIL REBERA

"For our sake God made him share our sin"? (2 Corinthians 5.21, GNB)

This is perhaps one of the most striking statements in the Bible. It is also one of the most difficult to translate, and one of the places at which the GNB translation has been most criticised.

Some of the criticism is unfair. "Christ did not share our sin; he bore our sin," is a typical comment. Two things may be said in reply. First, if Paul had wanted to say "God made him bear our sin", there were other ways of putting it in Greek. Three different words are used for carrying sin, or carrying it away; GNB translates them all as "take