

In the light of an interpretation of angelic intrusion into the history of people before the Flood, the narrative of Genesis 6.1–4 takes on great significance. It unveils a mystery about which we know very little. This mystery is comparable to an iceberg; only its tip is visible.

The interpretation of this narrative presents considerable difficulties, since it involves an understanding of the nature of things in the universe which belong to the domain of speculation. It is true that whether “sons of God” means fallen angels or descendants of Seth has little influence on the essence of the Christian faith. The fact that most scholars today suggest the meaning of angelic beings has to be taken into consideration when a translation of the Bible is undertaken. However, for the sake of easily offended Christians, it may be advisable to provide the alternative meanings (“pious men” or “Sethites”) in a note.

DAUD SOESILO

BELSHAZZAR’S SCALES: Towards achieving a balanced translation of Daniel 5

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This article is basically a report on an extended study which I undertook recently. What I attempted to do in that study was to grapple with the possibility of achieving a balance between faithfulness and readability in translating the Bible into a modern language. I used the text of Daniel 5 – a self-contained unit of the book – as the main data of the research, while comparing and contrasting more than twenty translations of this text.

The standard approach to the quest for balanced translation has been to let the biblical scholar work on the biblical texts with his critical and literary methods, to assure the faithfulness aspect, while letting the linguist wrestle with the question of achieving readability in the language of the translation. This approach has been an improvement over the earlier completely independent endeavor in Bible translating practised by biblical scholars on the one hand, and linguists on the other. However, even this measure of separate application of biblical and linguistic disciplines in Bible translation is no longer satisfactory. With recent advances in the field of linguistics, particularly in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, many works have been produced in descriptive analysis of the biblical texts, that cannot be ignored or set aside as irrelevant. They have contributed a number of important things, which biblical scholars have generally been aware of but have not been using systematically in dealing with the biblical texts.

I started out believing that a Bible translation which fruitfully combines the traditional methods of biblical criticism with sociolinguistic analysis, and literary analysis with discourse analysis, would more successfully

achieve the desired balance between faithfulness and readability. So I followed in the study a model of integrated analysis of biblical text as a necessary preparation for producing a well-balanced translation. It consists of a number of steps, namely,

- establishing the text (text critical work),
 - the structure of the text (structural analysis),
 - the form of the text (form critical analysis),
 - formation of the text (its growth and final shape),
 - the historical setting (historical analysis),
 - analyzing the text itself (to determine its function and meaning),
- and as the goal of the process, the translation proper.

Some illustrations

At the end of this report, I will give my translation of the whole of Daniel 5. But to highlight the results, I will give just a few examples here, with some comments, of the difference between translations which reflect different approaches and emphases.

Right at the beginning of the chapter, we have this opening:

Der Koenig Belschazar machte ein grosse Mahl fur seiner Grossen tausend . . . (Buber-Rosenzweig)

(King Belshazzar made a great meal for his great ones a thousand)

One night King Belshazzar invited a thousand noblemen to a great banquet . . . (GNB)

Once King Belshazzar gave a great feast to a thousand of his nobles . . . (integrated model)

Buber's translation closely follows the word order in Aramaic, thus producing an Aramaizing German. Though faithful to the original text, it is extremely difficult to read and understand for an average German lay reader. GNB, on the other hand, produces a fluent English rendering, but has gone overboard by introducing an element not in the original meaning of the text, namely "one night". The integrated model attempts to maintain a well-balanced translation which is faithful to the original intent of the text, namely a court tale, and yet is natural and readable.

As a second illustration, we look at the end of the chapter, verse 29.

. . . und von ihm herolde, er solle all Dritter im Koenigreich schalten. (Buber-Rosenzweig)

(. . . and about him proclaim, he should reign as the third in the kingdom.)

And he made him the third in power in the kingdom. (GNB)

. . . and to be proclaimed as one of the three rulers of the kingdom. (integrated model)

Setting aside the unresolved problem of the meaning of the term *talti* or *talta*, the following comments are in order: Faithful as it is, Buber's translation is consistently Aramaizing the German, and thus not very

readable. GNB produces a readable translation, but it does not retain the same impact as the original text as a result of changing “to be proclaimed” into “making him”. The integrated model has attempted to maintain the balance between faithfulness and readability by rendering the clause: “(Daniel) to be proclaimed as one of the three rulers of the kingdom.”

In the next case, which is found in verse 5, notice how the Javanese functional equivalent translation (TJV) includes an element which is foreign to the intended meaning of the source text, namely *kaya* “what looked like . . .” The integrated model, however, attempts to produce a dynamic and yet faithful translation.

. . . *dumadakan katon kaya tanganing manungsa* . . . (TJV)

(. . . all of a sudden there appeared what looked like a human hand)

Just then, the fingers of a human hand appeared . . . (integrated model)

Similarly, the German Common Language translation (DGN) introduces an inaccurate meaning in verse 11 (namely Daniel’s being initiated in the secrets of the gods), which is not part of the original text. The rendering of the integrated model is both readable and faithful to the source text.

Zur Zeit deines Vaters Nebukadnezzar bewies er, dass er in die Geheimnisse der Goetter eingeweiht ist. (DGN)

In your father’s time, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. (integrated model)

The Indonesian Common Language translation (BIS), following the English GNB, adds an element which is not found in the original meaning of the text in verse 20, namely *kejam* “cruel” as does TJV. The integrated model, however, has attempted to produce a sensitive, dynamic and faithful translation.

. . . *ia menjadi sombong, keras kepala dan kejam* . . . (BIS)

. . . he became proud, stubborn, and cruel . . . (GNB)

. . . he became proud and grew contemptuously arrogant . . . (integrated model)

The findings

A number of things have been made clear for me, which I would like to call the findings of this study. First, an unbalanced translation – either when faithfulness outweighs readability, or when readability outweighs faithfulness – “has been found wanting”, in the words of Daniel to the doomed King Belshazzar. On the one hand, we observe a translation method which emphasizes rigid faithfulness to the source texts to the extent that it disregards the readers and hearers, such as the one promulgated by Edward Greenstein, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Buber and Rosenzweig’s translation *Die Schrift* is a living example of the application of this approach. This quote from Greenstein describes it very well:

But religion requires a shedding of the sandals – of contemporary idiom – to experience the sacred, the Hebraic. For Buber and Rosenzweig the Germanizing of the Bible was a spiritual act, peeling away a layer of German idiom so that the faint voice of the Hebrew could become more audible.

On the other hand, a translation which gives much more weight to readability over faithfulness is also undesirable. The Good News Bible (Today's English Version) is the product of a translation committee which applies Eugene Nida's functional equivalence method. The aim of this method is described as:

... reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

However, there are examples in the English, Indonesian, and Javanese, as well as the German common language translations which show that at times the concerns for readability outweigh the aspect of faithfulness.

Second, an investigation of the common interests of biblical-critical methods and linguistic studies proves to be fruitful in the attempt to combine the two approaches in preparing a well-balanced Bible translation. In particular, the historical critical method – which concerns itself with the historical, geographical and cultural setting of the biblical texts – touches the interests of sociolinguistics, which takes into consideration the social context and culture of language to discover meaning. At the same time, biblical literary criticism (which concerns itself with the broader literary context, composition, and mood of the biblical texts) and especially form criticism (which concerns itself with the structure, literary form, setting, and intention of the biblical texts) has interests in common with discourse study. These include the following: genre classification, articulation of parts of the discourse (episodes and peak), the status of discourse constituents, the cast of participants, author viewpoint, the main line of development of a discourse, and the like. Thus, these areas of linguistic studies and critical methods represent the most useful tools for the work of Bible translators.

Third, since the biblical text is the source text of the translation, establishing the text using the text-critical method is most important. Further, a comprehensive search for meaning using the integrated analysis model is necessary; and this should precede and become the weight against which the search for readability and naturalness in the vernacular must be measured. The standard practice of analyzing meaning using grammatical and semantic methods is important, but in itself it is not sufficient. The study of the text must be broadened, in fact it must start at the discourse level. Thus, it cannot be stated too strongly that biblical interpretation as well as discourse and sociolinguistic analysis of the source text is an absolute necessity if we want to produce a translation which is totally faithful to the intended meaning of the source text (that is, as far as that can be ascertained at the present state of biblical scholarship), yet dynamically readable for

the target audience.

This model may not be easy to apply for many translators on the field, who have a limited biblical and linguistic background, but it should be held as the ideal. These translators will greatly benefit if the translator's handbooks are prepared along the lines of the model by staff who are equipped with biblical and linguistic scholarship, as well as with practical translation field experience. This integrated analysis model is particularly necessary in the preparation of notes for a Study Bible edition, since virtually any translation of an ancient text needs to be supplemented by commentary, if the sense of the text is to be understood and appreciated by modern audiences.

Fourth, this study suggests that the same model of integrated analysis can be applied to the other five court tales of Daniel: the tale of the ideal courtiers in chapter 1, the court tales of contest in chapters 2 and 4, and the court tales of conflict in chapters 3 and 6. This model should also be applicable to other narrative parts of the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and even to the narrative parts of the New Testament. Further research can be done on the poetic parts of the Bible in line with this same model. Such a task, however, goes well beyond what I set out to do in this study.

Translation of the text

¹Once King Belshazzar gave a great feast to a thousand of his nobles, and drank wine in their company. ²While under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar gave orders to fetch the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines, could drink out of them. ³When they had brought in the gold and silver vessels which had been taken from the Temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, the king, his nobles, his wives, and concubines drank out of them. ⁴They drank wine and praised the gods made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. ⁵Just then, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace next to the lamp. When the king saw the palm of the hand as it was writing, ⁶he turned pale and was very alarmed; his hip-joints went slack and his knees knocked together. ⁷The king shouted for someone to bring in the enchanters, the wizards, and the astrologers. Then, addressing the wise men of Babylon, the king said, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me its meaning will be robed in royal purple and wear a gold collar around his neck, and will become one of the three rulers in the kingdom."

⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they were not able to read the writing or tell its meaning to the king. ⁹Greatly alarmed, King Belshazzar turned even paler, while his nobles were perplexed. ¹⁰Attracted by the noise made by the king and his nobles, the queen-mother came into the banquet hall. "O King, live forever!" said the queen. "Do not be alarmed, and do not look so pale. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who

has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In your father's time, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him. King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, wizards, and astrologers. ¹²Considering that Daniel, whom the King called Belteshazzar, has extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and insight to interpret dreams, to explain riddles, and to solve problems, let Daniel be called now and he will give the interpretation."

¹³Then Daniel was brought before the king. The king addressed Daniel: "Are you that Daniel, one of the Judean exiles whom my father the king had brought from Judah? ¹⁴I have heard about you that you have the spirit of the holy gods in you, and that illumination, insight, and extraordinary wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵The wise men and the enchanters have already been brought before me to read this writing and to tell me its interpretation, but they were not able to interpret the writing. ¹⁶But I have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and to solve problems. Now if you are able to read the writing and to tell me its interpretation, you will be robed in royal purple and wear a gold collar around your neck and become one of the three rulers in the kingdom."

¹⁷Then Daniel answered the king: "You may keep your gifts for yourself, or give your presents to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king, and tell its interpretation to him. ¹⁸O King, the Most High God gave kingship, greatness, honor, and glory to your father Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹Because of the greatness which God gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and stood in fear of him; for he killed and spared whomever he wished, exalted and humbled whomever he pleased. ²⁰But when he became proud and grew contemptuously arrogant, he was deposed from his royal throne and deprived of his honor. ²¹He was driven away from human society, and his mind became like that of an animal: he lived with wild asses, ate grass like an ox, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he came to know that the Most High God rules over a human kingdom and appoints over it whomever he wishes. ²²But you, Belshazzar his son, have not humbled yourself, although you should have known all this. ²³You exalted yourself against the Lord of Heaven, and had the vessels of his house brought to you so that you, your nobles, your wives and concubines, could drink wine out of them; and you praised the gods made of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood and stone, that do not see, hear, or know anything. But you did not glorify God, in whose hand is your very breath and the whole course of your life. ²⁴That is why God sent that hand to write this inscription. ²⁵This is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Tekel, Peres. ²⁶And this is the interpretation of the writing: Mene, God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷Tekel, you have been weighted in the scales and found wanting. ²⁸Peres, your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

²⁹Then Belshazzar gave orders to have Daniel robed in royal purple, to have a gold collar put around his neck, and to have him proclaimed as one of the three rulers of the kingdom. ³⁰That very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was slain.

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MUST OUR READERS BE MINDREADERS?

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Magic is one of my hobbies, and one form of magic which I especially enjoy is reading people's minds – or at least appearing to read people's minds. Whether magicians really can read other people's minds may be debated, but one thing is sure: the individuals who read our translations of the Bible are not mindreaders; they read only what we write in our translations, not what we intended to say but didn't.

Before the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, every copy of the Bible was copied by hand. Of course scribes made errors due to tired minds, failures in reading correctly or failures in hearing correctly. Thousands of examples of such errors could be mentioned, but Bruce Metzger is probably correct in calling the text of Lk 3.23–38 in Codex 109 (14th century) “perhaps the most atrocious of all scribal blunders.” The scribe of this Greek manuscript was obviously making his copy from another manuscript which had the genealogy of Jesus in two columns of twenty-eight lines each. The scribe of manuscript 109 copied all the way across the two columns before dropping down to the next line. The result is amazing: God is the son of Aram, and Pharez is the source of the human race! The manuscript from which the scribe copied was apparently similar to the following form:

son of Heli,	son of Judah, son of Jacob,
son of Matthat,	son of Isaac, son of Abraham,
son of Levi . . .	son of Terah . . .
.
.
son of Amminadab,	son of God,
son of Aram, son of Hezion,	
son of Pharez	

But the form of manuscript 109 is similar to the following:

son of Heli, son of Judah, son of Jacob,
 son of Matthat, son of Isaac, son of Abraham,
 son of Levi, son of Terah . . .
