

## PUZZLES IN LUKE

The readers of this journal probably know that the *Translator's Handbook on Mark* is to be followed by a Handbook on Luke. The first drafts for this handbook are based on material from Indonesian languages, Sranan, modern western versions (in Dutch, English, French and German), and from *The Bible Translator* and the A.B.S. and N.B.S. translational files. These drafts are then circulated amongst consultants in various parts of the world, in order to elicit their comments and additional data. As demonstrated by the preliminary edition of chapters 1 and 2, many valuable contributions have been made by these consultants, which have served considerably to widen the scope of the book. It was also thought worthwhile to try another approach, namely to call on the rich treasure of translational knowledge and experience possessed collectively by the readers of this journal. In the following pages, therefore, are given the exegetical and translational notes on seven passages, selected for their specific difficulty. Readers are requested to go over this material, compare the remarks made and the solutions given with versions in the languages with which they are conversant, and send in their comments, corrections, questions, and additional material, especially on the translational notes. The help thus given to the prospective Handbook will be very much appreciated by the authors.

### LUKE

#### 3: 2

**Exegesis:** *egeneto rhēma theou epi Iōannēn* 'the word of God happened, or came to John'. This phrase occurs frequently in the Septuagint, denoting the divine inspiration of a prophet by God and the entrusting of a divine message or commission (cf. e.g. Gen. 15: 1; 1 Sam. 15: 10; Jer. 1: 1). It implies that the person to whom the word of God comes, comes under the power of that word, not just that the word is communicated to him. Some translators render '(a) word from God' but *rhēma theou* is best understood against the background of the Old Testament where *dēbār Jahweh* 'word of God' is not so much an individual message or commission which comes to an individual prophet but rather a divine power which takes hold of the prophet and makes him the instrument of God's speaking and acting. That the word of God came to John is a fulfilment of 1: 76.

**Translation:** *The word of God came to John.* The meaning of the verb, as discussed in exegesis, is aptly brought out by renderings such as, 'took possession of' (Schonfield), 'came over' (Dutch-Willibrord), or 'came-into-existence', i.e. entered the experience (Kanarese). In Timorese the verb used means 'came', then 'came into view', 'became visible', and *word* has been rendered by a specific term used of the weighty utterance of a chief and

ritual speech. In some receptor languages, however, an abstract noun such as 'word' does not belong (or, has not come to belong by familiarity with Biblical languages) to the class of words that can occur in the position of agent with verbs such as those just mentioned. If that is the case, one may attempt, (1) to render the expression as a metaphor, signalled as such by a clue, e.g. '. . . took possession (etc.), as it were, of John'; (2) to modify the agent, e.g. 'the power of God's word took possession of (etc.) John'; (3) to take God as agent, e.g. 'God caused/sent his word to take possession of John'; (4) to shift to a passive construction, as in Javanese, 'John, . . . , was-commissioned with the word of God'. Where the nominal phrase 'the word of God' must be rendered by a verbal clause, 'what God speaks', further changes will be required, which may result in something like 'God spoke his word to John and John began to preach it/act upon it', 'John began to preach/do what God had said to him'. An interesting rendering is given in Nyakyusa, 'when God's voice found John. . . .'

### 3: 14

**Exegesis:** *mēdena diaseisēte mēde sukophantēsēte* 'rob no-one by violence or by blackmail'. In view of the fact that in the next clause John urges the soldiers to be content with their proper pay it is reasonable to suppose that both verbs used in the present clause refer to the obtaining of money by false means.

*diaseiō* (only here in the New Testament) usually means 'to shake', hence 'to use force in order to obtain something valuable', or 'to extort by violence'. The word-picture is the same as that of the English slang expression 'to shake somebody down for his money'. 'To bully', which several translations have, does not have the connotation of extorting money, which is required here.

*sukophanteō* (3: 14; 19: 8) either 'to accuse falsely', or 'to extort'. The latter meaning is required in 19: 8 but here it is used with a personal object and this requires the rendering 'to blackmail'; thus *diaseiō* and *sukophanteō* denote two different ways of robbing people of their money, namely, by violence, and by blackmail.

**Translation:** *Rob no-one by violence* or 'do not press/squeeze' (Bahasa Indonesia, R.C. version, employing a term in common use for extortion). Similar figurative words or phrases found in other languages may be slightly slangish; this is not necessarily an objection against their use in this context. Several versions have 'do not plunder', a somewhat more generic term but fitting also in the context.

(Rob no-one) *by false accusation*, or 'no blackmail' (N.E.B.). A concept such as blackmail (i.e. extortion by intimidation, either using false accusations or threatening public exposure of actual misdeeds) again is a rather specific one, which more often than not will be without an exact equivalent word or phrase in the receptor language. If so, some more generic term for 'swindle', or a descriptive paraphrase like the one given in the R.S.V., or like 'to rob/to enrich oneself by tricks' may be adequate. For both terms more material is hoped for, giving either figurative expressions with specific meaning, or paraphrases, or more generic terms used here.

**3: 16**

**Exegesis:** *en pneumati hagiō* 'with', rather than 'in the Holy Spirit' cf. A-G, s.v. *en* I 4 c, III 1 a. The phrase 'to baptise with the Holy Spirit' occurs only in connexion with, and contrast to, John's baptism with water (Matt. 3: 11; Mark 1: 8; Luke 3: 16; John 1: 33; Acts 1: 5; 11: 16) and not as an independent expression. It is therefore best understood as an analogy to the baptism with water and to be interpreted along the same lines as that phrase.

**Translation:** The rendering should as far as possible parallel that of 'to baptise with water', but some adjustments may be necessary, e.g. where the rendering of 'baptise' includes a reference to water, as in Timorese, 'enter into the water/river'. Cf. also *T. H.-Mark* on 1: 18. Examples of such adjustments or of other adaptations would be appreciated.

**5: 1-11**

**Translation:** These verses contain several nautical and fishing terms, which though perfectly clear in their own cultural setting, may cause considerable difficulties in a culturally different context, where for example fishing in general, or the particular way of fishing mentioned in this narrative, is unknown. In the first case the translator will have to make up short descriptive phrases, where necessary supplying further explanation in a note. In the other case the same solution may be preferable; or the translator may attempt to adapt terms belonging to a way of fishing that is different but well known in the culture concerned, expanding their meaning in a suitable and carefully worded contextual conditioning, or adding a qualification; or again description and adaptation may be used in conjunction, as seems to be the case in Navajo. Elsewhere both the general situation and the particular fishing method described in this narrative are existent, but certain concomitant features do not fit, which may make the use of an otherwise appropriate rendering impossible, or at least questionable (cf. *The Bible Translator*, vol. I, p. 19, 1950, on difficulties in Urundi with the rendering of one of the somewhat different terms used in Matt. 4: 18). Or, although the general situation, method and concomitant features are similar, the vocabulary in the receptor language may be more, or otherwise, specialized than in Greek or English. Such specific terms can usually serve as quite acceptable renderings, but they may compel the translator to make explicit what is only implicitly stated in the original, which may eventually lead to exegetical decisions. On all such descriptions, adjustments, specifications, qualifications and decisions material will be welcome.

**6: 45**

**Exegesis:** *ek gar perisseumatōs kardiās lalei to stoma autou* 'out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks' (R.S.V.).

*ek gar perisseumatōs kardiās* 'for out of the abundance of the heart'. *gar* introduces a statement of the general rule underlying that which has been stated in the two preceding clauses.

*perisseuma* (only here in Luke) 'fulness', 'abundance', here used in a concrete sense, 'that which fills and overflows the heart'.

**Translation:** *Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks* may be an acceptable Biblicism in English, but it should not be made a rule to imitate this literalism, against which no less a translator than Luther has already declaimed. One useful basis for rendering the phrase is found in 'his mouth says only what his heart is full of' (Goodspeed). Other solutions are that of Luther, *wess das Herz voll ist, dess gehet der Mund über* (which the heart is full of, with that the mouth flows over), and 'it is what fills the heart that comes out at the lips' (Rieu). This latter solution is acceptable only if the second part of the clause clearly suggests speaking. This essential condition has not always been kept in mind, as is demonstrated by one pioneer version in a language that differentiates between 'mouth (as organ of eating)' and 'mouth (as organ of speech)'. Because the first term was chosen the resulting expression, 'what is inside a man flows over at his organ-of-eating', suggested seasickness rather than utterance of speech!

7: 35 Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.

**Exegesis:** *kai edikaiōthē hē sophia apo pantōn tōn teknon autēs* 'and wisdom is proved right by all its children'. The meaning of this saying in its present context is far from clear, and the interpretations vary considerably (see Commentaries). There is no point in enumerating them. It will suffice to deal with a few questions which may influence the translation.

(1) The clause sounds very much like a proverb which is applied by Jesus to the present situation in which both John the Baptist and he are rejected by their contemporaries. Since *edikaiōthē hē sophia* does not appear to refer to this rejection but rather to suggest some form of acceptance, it seems justified to interpret *kai* as a weak 'and yet' or 'but', though the (probable) proverbial nature of the saying does not commend an emphatic rendering of *kai*.

(2) On the same grounds *sophia* seems to have some reference to Jesus himself, whether he be the personification of wisdom (cf. Richardson, *Theological Wordbook*, p. 283), or wisdom refers to the 'purpose of God' (v. 30) which is realised both in John and in Jesus.

(3) *teknōn* 'children' of wisdom are, in one sense or another, those who accept wisdom as their true guide in life. They vindicate wisdom, i.e. they prove that wisdom is right by their life, and/or by their acceptance of the message of John and of Jesus.

**Translation:** In this saying wisdom is spoken of as a person (similarly in 11: 49, 'the wisdom of God said'). The translator should not too easily assume that this specific use of an abstract noun is acceptable in the receptor language. Only careful investigation of linguistic and stylistic usage can decide whether this figure of style can be imitated or not. This decision will, of course, influence the details of translation to be discussed below.

*Wisdom*, used without further qualification, will easily be taken here as referring to human wisdom. In order to avoid that misunderstanding it may be wise to add an indication of the possessor, e.g. 'God's wisdom' as done in the N.E.B., Brouwer (Dutch), Balinese, Sranan, and cf. also Rieu.

*Justified.* If the passive is to be avoided one may say something like, 'the children of God's wisdom prove/acknowledge it to be right/its-being-right' (the latter construction in Balinese).

*Her children.* In the Bible 'child' (and also 'son', compare also the helpful note in N.T.Wb., p. 122) is often used in a metaphorical sense. If followed by a reference to a person it can have the meaning of 'follower', 'pupil', 'disciple', 'subject', 'one who belongs to/trusts in' that person; if followed by a noun indicating a quality, it refers to one who possesses that quality, often one who possesses it to a high degree. In some languages a literal rendering covers the metaphorical meaning also, e.g. in Sumbanese, or in Shilluk, but in others a freer rendering along the above-mentioned lines must be given, e.g. 'persons that come-forth from the wisdom of God' (Balinese, similarly Sranan; the former rendering is still rather close to the original metaphor, because the Balinese term for 'person' can mean 'child' in some contexts and that for 'come-forth' is also used in the sense of 'be born'); or 'who are really wise' (Goodspeed), 'those who belong to her' (Dutch-Brouwer), 'people that have been made (or: have become) wise'.

Yet other and more serious difficulties will arise if an abstract noun for 'wisdom', 'the being-wise', does not exist in the receptor language, or, though existent, cannot be used in this context. Then one may have to turn to 'God's wise ways are acknowledged to be (or: are proved) right/just by all those who follow them', or, 'all who have been made (truly) wise show God to have been wise' (or, 'God has been wise').

## 8: 55

**Exegesis:** *kai epestrepsen to pneuma autēs* 'and her spirit returned'. For *epistrepō* cf. note on 2: 39 and A-G s.v. 1 b α. *pneuma* means here 'life-spirit', and the clause implies that she came back to life from death, cf. A-G s.v. 2.

**Translation:** *Her spirit returned.* As the concept of the life principle leaving the body at death is widespread, it will usually be possible to use a rather close formal equivalent. *Spirit* then may be rendered 'soul' (Malay, Javanese, South Toradja), 'life', 'breath' (Sranan, Toba Batak), or whatever other term for the vital principle is common in the culture. Such a literal rendering may suggest, however, that strength, or courage, returns to a person that felt exhausted, or afraid, which would imply that the girl had not been dead. If for this or other reasons it is impossible to keep close to the wording of the original, one will have to select another expression, meaning 'she became alive (again)'. Examples of other similar expressions are asked for.

## Abbreviations

- T. H.-Mark: *A Translator's Handbook on Mark*, by Eugene A. Nida and Robert G. Bratcher (Leiden, 1961).  
 N.T.Wb: *A New Testament Wordbook for Translators (Some Exegetical Articles in Preliminary Form)*, by Robert G. Bratcher (A.B.S., 1964).  
 A-G: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, 1957).