

under half of these cases the underlying comparisons have been made more explicit and meaningful. In none of the cases has E introduced new metaphors.

The picture presented by F is only slightly different. F has retained more metaphors than E, and in one case substituted a French figure for a Hebrew one.

G deviates from E and F in that it has the highest proportion of new metaphors. Interestingly both D and S retained more metaphors than any of the others. S introduced one new figure, D none.

MALEME TAAM-AMBEY

TRANSLATING THE LOCUST INVASION IN THE BOOK OF JOEL INTO KITUBA

Mr. Maleme is a UBS Translations Consultant based in Zaire

There are many cultural elements in the book of Joel which present problems of understanding for the Kituba reader. In this article I propose to focus on just one of these, the invasion of locusts (Joel 1.4, and also 2.25).

In the French Common Language translation (FC) the text of Joel 1.4 reads:

Ce que les chenilles laissent de la récolte
est dévoré par les sauterelles;
ce que laissent les sauterelles
est dévoré par les hannetons;
ce que laissent les hannetons
est dévoré par les criquets.

The English RSV text is as follows:

What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

The insect invasion which was the occasion for the prophecy of Joel, is described using terms for which we do not always have exact equivalents in English, French or Kituba.

According to E. Dhorme, if we look at the way the Hebrew words are derived, we may translate as follows: *gazam* "cutting creature", by cricket, and *hāsīl* "gnawing creature", by locust. The real term for locust is *arbeh*, which comes in the series of terms in this text between the cricket and the cockchafer, this last corresponding to *yeleq*.

According to J. Laroche, Hebrew has at least nine words to designate the different species or various stages of development of the locust. (*Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*, Volume 2, page 641.) In brief the meanings which he gives for each of the terms in Joel 1.4 are:

gāzām, from a root meaning to slice or cut

hāsil, from a root meaning to consume or destroy

arbeh, from a root meaning to multiply, found 20 times in the Old Testament

yeleq, translated by Osterwald and Mart as *hurbec*, once as “cricket”.

Locusts are described by Laroche as follows: “Locusts or grasshoppers . . . are extremely numerous in Palestine. They feed only on vegetable matter. When they appear in swarms, they are a terrible plague for the fields. They arrive in millions, in thick clouds which veil the sun. They settle and devour everything. Once all vegetation is consumed, they take flight again, leaving complete devastation behind them; they disappear very quickly. Their invasion is one of the most terrible disasters—it was the eighth plague of Egypt. The prophet Joel (2.1–11) has given a description of it which is both poetic and very exact, and in which terms are chosen which apply also to the devastation of an army.”

In order to understand what the locust invasion means, it is best to consider this passage in the context of the whole prophecy of Joel. The main theme of the book of Joel is to announce to the people of his time the Day when God will demonstrate his power and judge both the people of Israel and foreign nations—the one group on account of their attitude towards their God, the other group on account of their attitude to the people of Israel. That Day will be preceded by all kinds of calamities: an invasion of insects, drought, fire, a military invasion, all illustrating its destructive power. The purpose of the prophecy is clear. The people, stripped of everything, are invited to repent and turn to God. Foreign nations will be judged and destroyed, while the people of God will be restored. Then at last God will pour out his spirit on all humanity.

Interpretation of the locust invasion

This description has been given two interpretations: a symbolic interpretation and a literal interpretation.

Symbolic interpretation. The Targum, certain Church Fathers, and some modern writers see in these locusts the nations which are the enemies of God’s people, for example the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks. Two arguments are given in support of this interpretation, but each argument is open to question:

- (a) In 2.20 Joel seems to say that the locust army comes from the north: “I will remove the northerner far from you” (RSV). But we know very well that locusts always come from the south, from the Arabian desert. (However, some exceptions to this rule have been noted.)
- (b) In 2.1 Joel declares that the Day of the Lord is near. But he distinguishes between the Day of the Lord and the invasion of locusts.

Literal interpretation. Other writers take the locusts in a literal sense, because:

- (a) There is nothing in the text which would lead us to look for a symbolic meaning.
- (b) Joel speaks only of devastation in the fields and of injury to the animals. If

he were referring to invasion by a foreign army, he would surely have spoken of injury to people.

(c) The description is of something that has already happened, and not of a future event such as an enemy invasion.

Perhaps it is possible to reconcile these two views which seem to be opposed, in a middle position, "recognizing, as seems reasonable, that Joel in the second part of his book, considers the invasion of which he has spoken in the first part as a picture of the judgment of God which is coming near" (Vigouroux).

Translation

We have noted that in different versions of the Bible we can find three different ways of translating the four terms for locusts:

1. Transliteration of the Hebrew words. In English this would appear as:

What the *gāzām* has left the *arbeh* has devoured;

What the *arbeh* has left the *yeleq* has devoured;

What the *yeleq* has left the *hāsīl* has devoured.

(See also the translation in French of the Bible de Jérusalem.)

For the reader who does not understand Hebrew, this sort of translation tells him absolutely nothing, because these terms have no meaning.

2. A translation based on the derived meaning of the words. RSV renders the four terms as follows: "cutting locust", "swarming locust", "hopping locust", "destroying locust". A number of other English versions are similar to this. In French, TOB follows this approach, using the terms, *trancheur*, *essaimneur*, *lécheur*, and *décortiquer*; a footnote explains: "In these four terms, we see perhaps the stages of development of the locust, or perhaps different species of insects, or perhaps words from different dialects referring to the one insect. We have decided on a translation based on the derived meaning of the words."

3. A translation based on the nearest equivalent for each term. Some versions have followed this last approach, like the French Segond and FC which is quoted at the beginning of this article. This is a good model, which has been followed by most of our African versions.

(A rather different approach to translation is followed in the English Good News Bible. The translators have apparently felt that any attempt to distinguish between four different types of insect will have little meaning for the modern reader, and may actually result in a loss of impact in the verse as a whole. They have therefore given a general picture of one swarm of locusts after another:

Swarm after swarm of locusts settled on the crops; what one swarm left, the next swarm devoured.)

How should the four terms be translated in Kituba?

If we decide to base our translation of the terms on the nearest equivalent, we have to choose between different types of locusts or insects and names for the different stages in the development of the one creature.

To understand this problem better, we will compare two draft translations of this passage in the two national languages of Zaire: Kituba and Lingala.

Kituba

- a. Bima yina bikisaka *bampasu* na bilanga,
“What the locusts left in the fields”
- b. *bana-mpasu* me dia yo.
“the young locusts have eaten.”
- c. Bima yina me bikisaka *bana-mpasu*,
“What the young locusts left”
- d. *bana na yo* me dia yo.
“their offspring have eaten”.
- e. Bima yina me bikisaka *bana na yo*
“What their offspring have left”
- f. *bana na yo mpi* me dia yo.
“their offspring have eaten.”

We note here that his Kituba translation has followed the interpretation which says that the reference is to successive stages in the development of the same insect. But for lack of terms the Kituba equivalents in the last two lines are the same: “their offspring”—and this results in some loss of the full picture of the devastation of the countryside. And there is also some loss of meaning as well.

Lingala

- a. Biloko ya bilanga oyo *bambinzo* etikaki,
“The crops which the caterpillars have left”
- b. *makonko* elei yango.
“the grasshoppers have eaten.”
- c. Oyo *makonko* etikaki
“What the grasshoppers have left”
- d. *makokolo* lei yango.
“the cockchafers have eaten.”
- e. Oyo *makokolo* etikaki,
“What the cockchafers have left”
- f. *makelele* esilisi yango.
“the crickets have finished off.”

We notice here that four different terms have been used in Lingala to translate the four words: the translators have chosen different sorts of locusts or insects, following other versions of the Bible like Segond and FC.

Lingala *bambinzo* translates Hebrew *gāzām*

makonko translates *arbeh*

makololo translates *yeleq*

makelele translates *ḥāsil*

I believe this model followed in Lingala would have been good in Kituba also. Instead of requiring the reader to make an effort to understand the meaning of items which are strange to him, terms which are already familiar to the reader are given as the closest equivalents.

Unfortunately the translation which refers to successive stages in the development of the one insect does not present this insect as a real menace to

vegetation, according to our way of thinking, and it does not really give a picture of complete devastation. However, the invasion of different sorts of insects does express a real calamity, first for the crops and then for the people. The four terms would be best translated in Kituba as follows:

bimpiatu for Hebrew *gāzām*

bampasu for *arbeh*

bansololo for *yeleq*

makelele for *hāsīl*

Cultural problems

I have chosen the locust invasion as the subject of this study for the simple reason that in many parts of Africa the presence of locusts, grasshoppers or crickets in the fields is not thought of as a plague, but rather as a source of extra food. Because the people eat all these insects they welcome the appearance of each sort in the fields, in spite of the destruction it may bring.

In these days our old people often recall the good times when they gathered many locusts in the fields, while today there are almost none left. They have all been wiped out by the frequent government campaigns to get rid of insect pests. For our people the main component of meaning of locusts is their value as food, whereas in Palestine the main component is disaster.

H. Lesetre describes a locust invasion in Palestine in these terms:

“Locusts are presented in advance as one of the plagues which will ravage the crops of unfaithful Israelites. (Deut 28.38,42). People would pray towards the temple for this plague to be removed from the country. The author of proverbs 3.27 observes that locusts have no king and go out in swarms. Amos (4.9) refers to an invasion of locusts in Israel: gardens, vines, fig trees, olive trees, all have been devoured, but still the guilty people have not repented. But it is the prophet Joel who gives the most vivid description of the ravages of the locust plague . . .”

How, then, can we deal with the Biblical view of locusts in the region of Africa where Kituba is spoken? I believe that when the experiences and beliefs of people are different in a matter like this from those of the people of the Bible, a word or note of explanation is necessary if the passage is to be well understood. The first hearers of Joel would have immediately grasped what the invasion of locusts was referring to, but that is not the case for the Kituba hearer. In order for the Kituba reader or hearer to receive the same message as Joel’s first audience, it is necessary to do one of the following things:

- (a) Add, at the first occurrence of the word locust, a classifier such as “very destructive”.
- (b) Describe in words their destructive activity, “which devour everything green”.
- (c) Provide a footnote saying that for the people of Israel a locust invasion was considered a terrible calamity.

Editorial note

This article was originally written in French. It has been translated here, and modified to take some account of the renderings of Joel 1.4 and 2.25 in English versions.