

## INTRODUCTION

Every Bible translator knows how difficult it is to deal adequately with serious problems of text and exegesis. This is especially true of problems posed by certain Old Testament passages which seem almost to defy intelligible rendering. One can obtain some help in commentaries and technical journals, but there is no place where all the principal problems have been gathered together in a single handy volume. Accordingly, this book is designed to remedy, at least in part, certain aspects of this situation and to provide practical suggestions for the solution of many textual and exegetical problems of the Old Testament.

Plans for this volume began in 1947 at an international conference of Bible translators meeting in „Woudschoten”, Zeist, Holland, under the auspices of the Netherlands Bible Society. At this conference the problem of the Old Testament text was discussed at considerable length, and the conclusion was that a translator should wherever possible follow the Masoretic text. However, it was clearly recognized that there are a number of passages in which the Masoretic text is unintelligible and therefore untranslatable. Such circumstances reflect two different types of problems: (1) instances in which the correct meaning of an obscure word or expression is not known, and (2) those in which the Hebrew text has become irreparably corrupt. At these points Bible translators need guidance if they are to find satisfactory solutions which are in line with the highest standards of contemporary scholarship. In some cases ancient translations, e.g. in Greek and Syriac, provide significant clues. There are a number of other passages which can be interpreted in a variety of ways without violating any grammatical rules. The practical problem for the conference, however, was to determine how translators could be provided with the information which would help them find satisfactory solutions in line with contemporary scholarship.

The delegates meeting in Woudschoten felt that the Bible Societies had a key responsibility to provide the required assistance, but that existing commentaries are often of such an individualistic character as to fail to meet the translators' needs, for too often the writers of

such commentaries have indulged in types of textual emendation or conjectures which have not had wide support. Bible translators, who are preparing a text to be used by all the churches, must make certain that the alternative which they select has the greatest possible weight of authority and the widest usage by the church.

At the time of the Woudschoten conference a committee in Holland was already engaged in preparing a new Dutch translation of the Old Testament. Thus it seemed appropriate for the conference to request that this committee undertake the task of drawing up a list of difficult Old Testament passages.

Accordingly, Professor A. R. Hulst, a member of the Dutch committee, was asked to assemble the data on the basis of discussions in the sessions of the Dutch translation committee. At first the problem passages were classified under three groups: (a) those texts which are very obscure and practically untranslatable; (b) those in which one or more of the ancient versions provide a clue to adequate exegesis; and (c) those in which more than one legitimate translation of the Masoretic text is possible. Later these three lists were combined into a single one for more ready reference, but the designation of *a*, *b*, and *c* is still retained and indicates to the reader something about the nature of the difficulty and certain aspects of the solution. Under the imprint of the United Bible Societies, the Netherlands Bible Society has arranged to publish this volume containing more than twelve hundred problem passages, following the order and versification of the English Bible. It must be recognized immediately that this treatment is by no means exhaustive, either in the selection of problem passages or in the citation of relevant background data. Many other texts could have been added, especially in such books as Hosea, Job, and Ezekiel. The practical limitations of a publication of this nature have made it necessary to eliminate a number of these passages, especially some in class *c*. This, however, is not as serious as it might seem, since commentaries generally provide helpful suggestions for these types of difficulties.

Another element of "incompleteness" in this volume is the fact that no attempt has been made to cite in a comprehensive manner all translations or textual authorities which might be relevant on a particular point. At first the committee dealt with these passages only in terms of the Dutch translation. Later, however, in order to make

this document more useful to English-speaking translators, relatively full citations have been made from the Revised Standard Version.

This treatment of difficult Old Testament texts is not primarily technical, but practical. Thoroughly comprehensive and scientific discussions of these problem passages belong to a textual commentary or scientific journal. Nevertheless, as will be observed, Professor Hulst has made full use of technical publications which contain extensive treatments of textual data. However, he has purposely not included numerous highly hypothetical solutions since these would be too subjective and tentative. It must be recognized, of course, that this type of treatment cannot be ultimate and definitive. As new light on these problems becomes available, especially from the Qumran material, it is inevitable that many difficult passages will be clarified. However, the committee has been purposefully conservative in its adopting of new evidence, for it has seemed better to "lag" a little, rather than to be found guilty of accepting attractive, but unproved, solutions.

It will be evident to anyone using this volume that the committee has no mere theoretical or "armchair" interest in the problems of Bible translation. This is the work of men who have grappled with these problems firsthand and who have had a very practical goal in mind, namely, the effective communication of the Word of God to increasing numbers of men and women through new translations and revisions.

Bible translators are deeply indebted to the Netherlands Bible Society for having sponsored this project of textual and exegetical study. Our thanks must be extended to the Dutch translation committee which has given special attention to these hundreds of problems in order that their findings and judgments might be properly recorded. We are particularly indebted to Professor Hulst, who not only kept the minutes of these discussions, but who has supplemented the data, rewritten the material in book form and added the bibliographical information. We are no less indebted to Mr. Cullen Story and Dr. Robert Bratcher of the American Bible Society for giving their most valuable assistance in the editing of this volume.

U.B.S. Subcommittee on Translation.