

happy about organized campaigns. In the 1820's a very subtle and unfortunate change took place, especially in the United States, from Azahel Nettleton's emphasis on revival to Charles Finney's on evangelism. There are two positions. When things are not going well, the old approach was for ministers and deacons to call a day of fasting and prayer and to plead with God to visit them with power. Today's alternative is an evangelistic campaign: ministers ask, 'whom shall we get as evangelist?' Then they organize and ask God's blessing on this. I belong to the old school".

How did the 'Doctor' see the immediate future? "I see nothing but collapse ... beyond democracy there now looms either dictatorship or complete chaos. The end is more likely ... I'm not sure at all that we have 20 years ... Civilization is collapsing."

This prediction may or may not be correct but we need to recapture for ourselves the 'Doctor's' sense of urgency and his unshakeable conviction concerning the importance of biblical doctrine as well as the necessity of the Holy Spirit's working. Meanwhile we thank God for his powerful and faithful ministry.

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TRANSLATING SCRIPTURE -

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In the first issue of this journal, we included a Study on Modern Bible Translations with special reference to the NIV New Testament. A most helpful feature of that article was the discussion of basic issues raised by modern translations.

What light can be thrown on this controversial subject by

a study of the very early transmitting and translating, for example, of the Old Testament? Here the Rev Philip Eveson addresses himself to this important question. In the next issue, the writer will deal with the LXX in relation to the New Testament, the early church fathers and translation work, as well as textual tradition including, for example, the LXX versus the Massoretic Text, etc.

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The subject of Bible translating has aroused a great deal of heated discussion and the evangelical press is constantly producing literature arguing the pros and cons. My only plea for entering the debate is to redress the balance somewhat and from a study of the very early history in transmitting and translating Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, to emphasise the amazing providence of God in preserving the text and to appeal for an approach to translating which is less governed by linguistic science and the craving to be popular.

There are a number of reasons why it is helpful to tackle the subject from an historical angle and to concentrate attention on the Old Testament:

a) History is meant to teach us lessons. It helps to place our present concerns against a larger background. The problems and tensions we face over these issues are not new ones. Jewish rabbis and the leaders of the Early Christian Church wrestled with the same matters, and it is useful to consider how they grappled with the areas of difficulty.

b) We hear a good deal about New Testament textual problems and there is a tendency, in some quarters at least, to dismiss the Old Testament as presenting no problems of a textual nature. Well, that is not quite the case and the Rev John Waite in Issue No.2 of Foundations argues that the Hebrew text has not been preserved entirely errorless.

c) The New Testament often quotes from the Old Testament, not in the original Hebrew or in Greek transliteration of

the Hebrew, but in Greek translation form. What translation or translations did they use and what can we learn from them?

Before proceeding further, we should perhaps draw attention to some of the considerations to be taken into account in Bible translation work.

1) It is the Word of God which is being translated and not just any piece of literature. The uniqueness of the Book as the 'God-breathed' Scriptures demands a humble, reverent approach.

2) True scholarship is important in such work. It requires expert knowledge in the biblical languages, particularly in the way these languages are used by the various writers of the biblical books. Again, a very good grasp of the language into which the Bible is being translated is essential.

3) The need for honesty and integrity is vital in translating Scripture. Theological bias must be scrupulously avoided. Sectarian interests and emphases have no place in Bible translation work whether they be 'Fundamentalist', 'Romanist', Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, etc.

4) Then there is the necessity for the translators to possess not only an intellectual appreciation of the contents but also a biblical understanding of the text, i.e. men who are taught by the Spirit and have 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor.2:9-16).

5) The considerations in Bible translating are different in a country which already possesses vernacular Scriptures and a long history of biblical study and knowledge than in an area of the world where the Bible is being translated into a new language for the first time. Translating into a new language can involve very acute problems, especially when that language does not seem to possess the corresponding words and ideas of the original. Often new words have to be formed (Cf. Tyndale's inventions: 'scapegoat', 'Pass-over', 'mercy-seat!'). On the other hand, in translating the Scriptures into a new language for the first time, there are no complications as to whether the aim is to

prepare a translation primarily for Christians or for reaching non-Christians. There are no sacred traditions to maintain. But when a revision of existing versions takes place or the bold step is taken to re-translate, it is necessary to bear in mind the long history of ecclesiastical and personal use as well as the missionary interest.

6) In areas where there are translations of the Scriptures there is the fundamental question of whether it is necessary to attempt a revision or re-translation when existing versions have served the needs of Christians so well for many generations. Various reasons are given for attempting such work including,

(i) where there has been a multiplicity of versions, Christians have felt the need of one authoritative, generally-accepted translation. Cf. the background to Jerome's Latin version and our own King James version. In the preface to the A.V. the translators tell the reader that their aim has been "out of many good ones to make one principal good one".

(ii) advance in knowledge. The meaning of the original languages has become better known over the years. This is particularly true of Hebrew and Aramaic. The A.V. translators admit "There be many words in the Scriptures, which be never found there but once (having neither brother nor neighbour, as the Hebrews speak), so that we cannot be holpen by conference of places." Ugaritic, Akkadian and Aramaic texts recently found can be of some help here. Then, again, more ancient Hebrew and Greek texts of the Scriptures have come to light which are sometimes of aid in deciding what the original texts should be.

(iii) language is always changing. Words and phrases become obsolete or change their meaning over the years.

7) Finally there is the matter of the method of translating. Long ago Alfred the Great wrestled with the two opposing principles in translation work, i.e. the word for word method and the meaning for meaning. The early Wyclif translations of the Vulgate were word for word which often

did not make much sense in English besides being quite unhelpful in conveying the meaning of the original. If the method of 'meaning for meaning' is adopted, the problem then is of how far to go in this direction. Are we to translate the words of the original as literally as possible provided that no violence is done, let us say, to English or Welsh or Gaelic usage and that the sense of the original is not impaired, or are we to convey the meaning of the original in free, idiomatic language without much regard for the exact wording of the original but at the same time avoiding the danger of producing a paraphrase? The jargon now used by linguistic experts for these two latter approaches is 'formal correspondence' or 'formal equivalence' (as witnessed in the A.V. and R.S.V.) over against 'equivalent effect' or 'dynamic equivalence' (as, for example, in the Good News Bible).

In this study we shall concentrate on the Hebrew, Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament Text.

THE HEBREW BIBLE

Most of the Old Testament is written in 'the language of Canaan' (Is.19:18), the language spoken by the Israelites in Canaan and through which they worshipped God. It is also designated 'Jewish' in II Kings 18:26, Is.36:11, etc. Despite its presence in modern English versions, the term 'Hebrew' is not used of the Israelite language within the Old Testament literature. The first known occurrence of the word with this meaning appears in the Apocrypha (Prologue to Eccclus). Aramaic passages in the Old Testament are to be found in four places: (i) Dan.2:4 - 7:28; (ii) Ezra 4:8 - 6:18; 7:12-26; (iii) Jer.10:11; (iv) in Gen.31:42 two Aramaic words for a place-name.

Both Hebrew and Aramaic belong to the same broad branch of Semitic languages, known as North-West Semitic and cover the area of Syria and Palestine. Canaanite, Aramaic, Ugaritic and possibly Eblaite belong to this branch. Within the Canaanite group can be placed Hebrew, Moabite and Phoenician. They could almost be described as different

dialects of the language of Canaan. But Aramaic was a separate division within the main branch so that the ordinary citizens and soldiers in the days of Hezekiah would not have been able to understand 'Imperial' Aramaic, which had become the common language of diplomacy (II Kgs.18:26).

Syriac is a later development within the Aramaic grouping, arising in the first century B.C. The A.V. in line with Christian writers stretching back to the Early Church uses this word 'Syriac' to refer to the Aramaic of Bible days (cf. Dan.2:4, etc). To confuse matters even more, until the end of the nineteenth century A.D. Aramaic was also called Chaldean (cf. Baxter's 'Analytical Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon').

The script used to write down the words of the OT deserves some comment. When Moses and the early prophets wrote the Word of God they would have used an early Hebrew script, different from the Hebrew characters we are used to in our Bibles. All the books of the OT written before the Babylonian exile would have been written in this Old-Hebrew or Phoenician script. This was an alphabetical script in contrast to the cuneiform (wedge-shaped) writing and the Egyptian hieroglyphics. From this script most of the alphabets of the world, including Greek and Latin, are derived. The origins of this alphabetical script are unknown but it may have been developed in the south of Palestine or the Sinai peninsula around 16th century B.C. In the amazing providence of God a script emerged just prior to the giving of the law at Sinai and the writing of the Books of Moses which was 'easy to learn and required hardly any improvement'.¹ Some biblical fragments of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, are written in this early script and Jewish coins issued during the times of independence and revolt from 1st century B.C. to 2nd century A.D. bear this Old Hebrew script. A direct descendent of the early alphabet is the Samaritan script still in use today among the surviving Samaritan families who live in Israel.

The Square Hebrew alphabet familiar to us (cf. Ps.119) began to supersede the old script soon after the Jews

returned from the Babylonian exile. According to Jewish tradition Ezra brought it back with him from Babylon. This Square script, also called 'Aramaic' or 'Assyrian', is a development from an Aramean form of the Old Hebrew script and began to be fashionable in Assyrian and Babylonian commercial circles from the 8th century B.C. As the Aramaic language became more popular, familiarity with the Aramaic script naturally spread.

Here then, we have an interesting development. From about the time of Ezra, the Jews gradually took over this 'Aramaic' script to write the Hebrew language and to copy out the OT scriptures, and the majority of the Hebrew texts found at Qumran are in varieties of this 'Aramaic' or 'Square' script. This situation is not surprising when we remember that the Jews began conversing in the Aramaic tongue from the Persian period onwards and all the officials and men of ability were corresponding in it and thus using the 'Aramaic' script. It is important to appreciate that the use of the 'Aramaic' characters to produce fresh copies of the Hebrew text of Scripture did not involve translating into the Aramaic language. They simply transliterated the Hebrew using the new script. It is also clear from the Qumran scrolls that, for a long time, the two scripts were in use side by side and some traditionalists, even though they accepted the 'Square' script, could not bring themselves to use it for the divine name YHWH (cf. Habakkuk commentary and the Psalm scroll from Cave 11). It is possible that the Samaritans kept their scriptures in the old script for the same traditional reasons and also to give the appearance of orthodoxy and sanctity.

Hebrew, in common with Aramaic and other Semitic languages, has twenty-two letters all of which are consonants. But four of them were introduced at a fairly early date to serve a dual role. Not only were they consonants but they were sometimes used to represent vowels. In early Hebrew documents these consonants used as vowels are rarely found but they become very common in the Qumran texts. Our Hebrew Bibles today also possess a fair number of these vocalic consonants to aid pronunciation, and for many centuries

the OT text existed in this way as a consonantal text. When Hebrew and Aramaic were spoken every day it presented no problems to read and write using only consonants. But when the languages passed out of daily usage the need for helps in the pronunciation of the OT grew.

Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as we have noted above, bear witness to a stage when vocalic consonants were added to the text in great abundance to facilitate accuracy in pronunciation. This practice was soon abandoned in the 2nd century A.D. because of the danger of adding to the text. When Greek was widely spoken among the Jews during the early Christian centuries, transliterations of the OT Text using Greek characters became popular but later rabbinical authorities considered it quite improper and unacceptable. The well-established oral tradition of the Jewish rabbis for reading the Scriptures also had its limitations. There thus emerged from about the 5th century A.D. various vowel systems invented by the rabbis, but the one which gained general acceptance was the Iberian system of vocalization consisting of dots and dashes to denote various vowel sounds. This system was not completed until the 10th century A.D. The advantage of the dots and dashes, called 'pointing', lay in the fact that it enabled the Jewish scribes to write the vowels over, under and within the consonantal text without in any way altering or disturbing it.

In all this activity the rabbis were seeking to preserve the right pronunciation and meaning of the consonantal text as it had been handed down to them orally. The form of the Hebrew text which we now possess, consonants and vowel points, is known as the Massoretic Text (Massora = tradition), the textual tradition of the Jewish scholars called Massoretes. These are the men who gave themselves to the task of carefully transmitting a text which has remained, with very minor exceptions, constant from at least the early 2nd century A.D., and who eventually worked out the vowel system for preserving the traditional pronunciation and removing ambiguity in the reading and interpretation of the text.

The Massoretic scheme of pronunciation, in the nature of the case, presents a stylized system and from early Greek and Latin transliterations of the Hebrew text as well as from other sources, it is clear that we cannot regard it as authoritative. In other words, we cannot say that in every case the Massoretic system gives us evidence of the exact pronunciation of the Hebrew and Aramaic as they were spoken by the rabbis of Old and New Testament times. Almost a thousand years, in fact, separates the time when Hebrew was a generally spoken language and the completed Massoretic work of pointing the text. Nevertheless, it is a remarkable system and along with the Massorites' other careful work it has greatly assisted in our understanding of the text.

Turning, finally, to the type of Hebrew language used in the Bible, scholars are not sure what Biblical Hebrew really was as a language. Does it represent the language spoken by the Israelite tribes in Canaan and by the Jews in post-exilic times or was it more of an ecclesiastical language? Now this is a very complex subject and we can only briefly refer to tentative conclusions but it does raise some interesting points. Granted that the Massoretic system of pronunciation is late and artificial, the actual language which we find in the consonantal text seems not to have reflected the full range of contemporary Hebrew usage during the biblical period. The later Mishnaic Hebrew (i.e. the Hebrew of the rabbinic oral teaching - 'the teaching of the elders'), on the other hand, bears witness to a more developed colloquial type of Hebrew. Ullendorff ² suggests that Mishnaic Hebrew "is perhaps the vernacular so rarely encountered in the predominantly (though not exclusively) formal language of the OT". He compares the language of the Quran which is a more literary type and 'a supra-tribal koine' with the various popular and tribal Arabic dialects and he concludes that in like manner Biblical Hebrew may well be a kind of "compromise language of the tribal confederation, Israel and Judah, while the Mishnaic was the colloquial".

The suggestions of Ullendorff are certainly interesting

and thought-provoking but does not the OT itself provide us with clues to establish our thinking in the right direction? The Bible informs us that Moses was the first to give Israel an authoritative body of literature (cf. Ex.24:4; Deut.31:9,24-26), presumably in the Old Hebrew alphabetical script and in the language of Canaan (Ex.34:27f; 40:20; I Kgs.8:9; Deut.31:10-13,22). The language of the Mosaic Law has influenced the language used in the worship of God in Tabernacle and Temple (cf. many of the psalms and prayers of the OT) and both in turn have helped shape the OT literature produced in the Davidic court and by the prophetic movement. From the beginning, then, it would appear that the language of the OT has transcended the colloquial and tribal dialects. The evidence seems to be pointing us in the direction of saying that Biblical Hebrew was in many respects a special 'koine' Hebrew set apart from the very first when the law was given to Moses.

The Lachish Letters are of some interest in this connection. They present us with one of four examples to date of ancient extra-biblical Hebrew. These letters were written at the time when Judah was defeated by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. and reveal the distressed state of the land. They are written in a very neat Old Hebrew script and although there are certain stylistic differences, overall, they bear testimony to the language of Biblical Hebrew and scholars have commented on certain similarities with the books of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. E.Wurthwein³ is of the opinion that the Lachish Letters confirm the fact that the language of the biblical books preserved in the Massoretic Text is "predominantly that of pre-exilic Judah" and that the writing is "the product of a literary tradition centuries old".

By way of summary, we have noticed that while it was necessary to transliterate the OT Scriptures from the Old Hebrew script into the Square script, the language and style in which the Scriptures were originally written were not altered. There is movement with the times to preserve pronunciation and to clarify the text but again the language remains constant. Here is a clear indication of

the providence of God preserving the language and literary style as originally given. The Biblical literature is neither allowed to become colloquial nor permitted to be passed on in contemporary speech.

TO BE CONTINUED

REFERENCES

1. E. Würthwein, The Text of the Old Testament, translated by E.F.Rhodes, 1979, p5
2. E. Ullendorff, Is Biblical Hebrew a Language? Studies in Semitic Languages and Civilizations, 1977, pp 3-16
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CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WORK?

REFLECTIONS FROM CHURCH HISTORY

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This is the fourth article we have published on the subject of social action. In Issue 2, Alan Gibson provided us with an agenda for evangelical discussion and in the following issue Ian Stringer argued convincingly that it is through the responsible exegesis of the Bible that our attitude to social action should be formed and developed. "Exegesis", he warned, "is hard work. There are no valid short cuts" (p30, Issue 3). 'Issues in Social Ethics' was the title of an article by Peter Milsom in Issue 5 in which he summarized papers given at the 1980 B.E.C. Study Conference.