

THE INFLUENCE OF THE VULGATE ON THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CERTAIN PSALMS

SAKAE KUBO

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

The quotations of the OT in the book of Hebrews are taken from the LXX and not from the Hebrew Bible. This means that at times there is some variation between the English translation of an OT citation and that of the OT passage itself. This is true in any secondary translation, for the translation of a translation will differ, sometimes considerably, from the original. However, there are three instances where an OT passage and its citation have been translated in the same way by the AV when clear differences would be expected in the translation. Superficially these look like definite attempts at harmonizing the OT passage with its citation in the NT; however, a closer look reveals a different cause.

The first of these passages is Ps 104 : 4, which is quoted in Heb 1 : 7. The AV reads, "Who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flaming fire." Heb 1 : 7 reads the same except that it has "flame of fire" instead of "flaming fire." The latter is accounted for by the fact that the Hebrew has the reading אֵשׁ לִהֵט, which the LXX has translated literally by πῦρ φλέγον, while Heb 1 : 7 reads πυρὸς φλόγα. But the significant thing in this case is that AV has translated Ps 104 : 4 as "who maketh his *angels spirits*." The Hebrew and the Greek for "angels" and "spirits" are both ambiguous. The former (מַלְאָכִים = ἄγγελοι) can mean any ordinary messengers or angels, i.e., heavenly messengers. The latter (רוּחַ = πνεύματα) can mean either "winds" or "spirits."

In Heb 1 : 7 the context is clearly speaking about "angels" and not "messengers." The author is contrasting Christ and

the angels in this chapter, so ἀγγέλους can only mean "angels." "Spirits" for πνεύματα is permissible, but again the context clearly calls for "winds," which is the translation in RV, RSV, and NEB. The word "winds" corresponds to "flame of fire" in the parallelism. The translation "spirits" was probably due to the influence of Heb 1 : 14 where the expression, "ministering spirits," is found. Ps 104 : 4, on the other hand, is clear in suggesting "messengers" and "winds" instead of "angels" and "spirits" since the previous verse speaks about the use that God makes of the forces of nature to accomplish His ends. Even the AV of verse 3 has "who maketh the clouds His chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind" (רוּחַ). RV and RSV both have "winds" and "messengers."

Here is an interesting case where the Hebrew and the Greek are virtually identical and yet a difference in translation was called for because the NT writer used two words with entirely different meanings from those intended by the OT writer. The deviation is not due to the LXX translator but to the NT writer. Identical translation of the passages was possible only because of the ambiguity of meaning in the two words. Does the fact that the agreement is with the NT passage show that the translation of this passage influenced that of the OT? Did the AV translators follow a policy of harmonization? So it appears on first sight. But that this is unlikely is seen from other citations in the book of Hebrews which could have been harmonized with equal ease, but were not.¹ It is also apparent from the slight differences preserved in these verses under consideration. Besides, Ps 104 : 4 is translated in this manner in all the previous "authorized" English versions (Bishops' Bible, Great Bible, Matthew Bible, and the Coverdale Bible).² The question now must be, "Where

¹ Heb 1 : 5 and 2 Sam 7 : 14; Heb 1 : 8, 9 and Ps 45 : 7; Heb 1 : 10-12 and Ps 102 : 26-28 and others.

² When the revision of the Great Bible was planned by Archbishop Parker, Guest, Bishop of Rochester, was sent the book of Psalms to revise. In his response the Bishop wrote, "Where in the New Testament one piece of a Psalm is reported, I translate it in the Psalms

did Coverdale get his translation?" He did not know Hebrew so he had to rely upon translations of the Hebrew. According to Willoughby, Coverdale used as his main base for the Psalms the Swiss-German Psalter from Zürich, modifying and interpolating it with the Vulgate.³

The Zürich Psalter has *wind* and *botten* while the Vulgate has *spiritus* and *angelos*. Clearly, Coverdale followed the Vulgate.⁴ The book of Psalms in the Vulgate is the Gallican Psalter translated by Jerome from the fifth column (LXX) of Origen's Hexapla.⁵ Coverdale's translation (and so also the AV) is a tertiary translation, i.e., a translation of the Vulgate which was a translation of the LXX which was a translation of the Hebrew.⁶

Our investigation settles down to the question, "Where did Jerome get his translation?" Was he harmonizing with the NT passage or was he misled by the ambiguity of the words

according to the translation thereof in the New Testament, for the avoiding of the offence that may rise to the people upon divers translations." Apparently, however, this alarmed the Archbishop so that the book was sent to someone else to revise, for the initials at the end of Psalms in the Bishops' Bible are T.B., which Dr. Aldis Wright assigns to Thomas Bickley. Cf. Alfred W. Pollard, ed., *Records of the English Bible* (London, 1911), pp. 31, 290-1. This suggests that the official position at least was opposed to such harmonizations.

³ Harold R. Willoughby, *The Coverdale Psalter and the Quartrocentenary of the Printed English Bible* (Chicago, 1935), p. 28. For the OT Coverdale also used Tyndale, Luther, and Pagninus (cf. J. F. Mozley, *Coverdale and His Bibles* [London, 1953], p. 79). Tyndale did not translate Psalms, and Luther differs in his translation of this passage, reading "winds" and "angels."

⁴ Coverdale followed the Vulgate in the numbering of the Psalms since in this and the third instance they are numbered 103 and 94. But the Zürich Bible also follows this numbering. In the Matthew Bible and succeeding Bibles they are numbered 104 and 95.

⁵ B. M. Metzger, "Ancient Versions," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, IV, 753.

⁶ It is interesting to note that the Geneva Bible, which was revised on the basis of the Hebrew text, reads, "Which maketh the spirits his messengers." In the other two passages under consideration, the Geneva Bible forsakes its predecessors more completely and follows the Hebrew.

ἀγγέλους and πνεύματα which are more often translated "angels" and "spirits"? When Jerome later translated this passage from the Hebrew itself, he translated it exactly the same way.⁷ The ambiguity of the Hebrew text, the LXX translation of it, and the use of it in the NT may have combined to give this result.

The second of these passages is Ps 8 : 5 which is quoted in Heb 2 : 7. The AV reads, "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." The point of consideration is the translation of the word אֱלֹהִים. The translation "angels" goes back again to Coverdale.⁸ Where did Coverdale get his translation? Again the Vulgate is the source. The Vulgate has *ab angelis* while Zürich reads *van Gott*. The Vulgate is clearly a translation of the LXX παρ' ἀγγέλους.⁹ The question here goes back beyond Jerome to the LXX translators, so the influence of the NT can be entirely discounted. But it is difficult to know exactly why the LXX translated thus. It may be that the transcendental conception of God which was prevalent at this time, with a corresponding increase in angelic mediators, could not allow man and God to be compared with so little difference between them.

The AV translators, if they were not following their predecessors, could have translated אֱלֹהִים as "God," as RV and RSV

⁷ The New Latin Psalter, however, translated from the Hebrew reads, "Nuntios tuos facis ventos, et ministros tuo ignem ardentem." This Psalter was sponsored by Pope Pius XII and published in 1945 (cf. Augustine Bea, "The New Psalter: Its Origin and Spirit," *CBQ*, VIII [1946], 4-35).

⁸ The AV translation follows exactly that of the Bishops' Bible and the Great Bible. While the Matthew Bible and the Coverdale Bible have "angels," their translation had an obviously messianic application with Heb 2 : 7 definitely in mind. They translated this passage thus: "After thou haddest for a season made him lower then the angels, thou crownedest him with honor and glory." Coverdale must have been influenced by Luther in this direction: see Luther's translation below.

⁹ Jerome, translating from the Hebrew, had *a Deo*. The New Latin Psalter reads *angelis*. The Targum and Syriac also read "angels," while Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion read "God."

have done. The Geneva Bible, following the Hebrew rather than the Vulgate, again corrected the former English versions by translating it as "God."

Among recent commentators, only William R. Taylor and W. Stewart McCullough in *The Interpreter's Bible* understand it as "angels."¹⁰ A. Cohen,¹¹ Artur Weiser,¹² H. C. Leupold,¹³ Hans Schmidt,¹⁴ A. F. Kirkpatrick,¹⁵ and Elmer Leslie¹⁶ regard it as "God." Most of these do not even consider any other possibility. They see the expression as an allusion to the "image of Elohim" in Gen 1 : 27. The term *'elōhîm* is nowhere else translated as "angels" by AV.¹⁷

Luther's translation of this passage must have partly affected the translation of Coverdale and Matthew. He translated Ps 8 : 5 thus: "Du wirst ihn lassen eine kleine Zeit von Gott verlassen sein." The passage was considered as directly messianic from its use in Hebrews so that to the difference in degree is added the fact that this difference will be for only a little while, a clear reference to the incarnation. Coverdale and Matthew followed him in this detail,¹⁸ but followed the Vulgate in translating *'elōhîm* as "angels."

The third instance where a difference in translation is

¹⁰ *The Interpreter's Bible*, IV (New York, 1955), 52.

¹¹ *The Psalms*, "The Soncino Books of the Bible" (Hindhead, Surrey, 1945), p. 19.

¹² *The Psalms*, "The Old Testament Library" (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 144.

¹³ *Exposition of the Psalms* (Columbus, 1959), p. 107.

¹⁴ *Die Psalmen*, "Handbuch zum alten Testament" (Tübingen, 1934), p. 13.

¹⁵ *The Psalms*, "The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges" (Cambridge, 1939), p. 40.

¹⁶ *The Psalms* (New York, 1949), p. 133.

¹⁷ Besides "God" and "gods," AV translates it as "judges" in Ex 21 : 6; 22 : 8 (RV and RSV translate it "God" in both places).

¹⁸ RSV and NEB also translate the expression βραχύ τι in Heb 2 : 7 as "a little while." The problem here centers around the question whether the author of Hebrews considered this passage as directly messianic or as an ideal representation of man's destiny which he regarded as at present frustrated but to be realized through Jesus Christ in the future.

expected but is not found is Ps 95 : 8, which is quoted in Heb 3 : 8. AV translated it thus: "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation: and as in the day of temptation, in the wilderness." With very slight differences ("heart" is changed to "hearts" and the second "as" is omitted) the same translation is found in Heb 3 : 8. The point at issue here is the translation of מְרִיבָה and מָסָה. The AV by translating מְרִיבָה as "provocation" and מָסָה as "temptation" in Ps 95 : 8 considers these words as common rather than proper nouns.

What is the reason for this, since wherever these two words occur in the OT, AV has consistently translated them as Meribah and Massah, proper place nouns, except here?¹⁹ Again this translation goes back to Coverdale²⁰ and through the Vulgate to the LXX. For the sections involved the Zürich Bible is the same as the Vulgate, but for the verse in its entirety Coverdale is closer to the Vulgate. RV and RSV translate, "as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness." The dependence upon a secondary translation is apparent. The Vulgate consistently translates מָסָה as *temptatio*, as it does also in Ps 95 : 8. However, while it translates מְרִיבָה as *contradictio* in every other passage, it translates it in Ps 95 : 8 as *inritatio*. The reason for this seems to be that the LXX translated מְרִיבָה here as παραπικρασμός instead of ἀντιλογία, which is the usual translation except for Ex 17 : 7, where it is λουδόρησις.²¹ The Vulgate, following the LXX, translated it *inritatio*²² instead of going back to the Hebrew מְרִיבָה; Coverdale, following the Vulgate, translated

¹⁹ Ex 17 : 7; Num 20 : 13, 24; 27 : 14; Deut 6 : 16; 9 : 22; 32 : 51; 33 : 8; Ps 81 : 7.

²⁰ The Bishops' Bible and the Great Bible are identical with AV, but Coverdale and Matthew read, "as when ye provoked in tyme of temptation in the wilderness."

²¹ The Vulgate omits מְרִיבָה in Ex 17 : 7.

²² Jerome goes back to *contradictio* when he translates from the Hebrew. The New Latin Psalter reads "ut in Meriba, ut die Massa in deserto."

it as a verb, "provoke," and later in the Great Bible as "provocation,"²³ which the Bishops' Bible followed. This translation influenced the translation of מִסָּוָה as "temptation" instead of "Massah," as it is transliterated elsewhere.

The translation of Heb 3 : 8, 15 is also called into question. Should not παραπικρασμός here read "Meribah" and πειρασμός, "Massah," instead of "provocation" and "temptation"? The problem is somewhat complicated in that the understanding of the author concerning these words must be taken into account. Verses 9 and 16, the former referring to "temptation" and the latter to "provocation," would lose their effect if the translations were not used. Meribah and Massah would not be as appropriate. Moffatt may have chosen the best way to deal with the problem when he capitalized "Provocation" and "Temptation," following the LXX pattern of translating proper nouns. In this way, the effect of verses 9 and 16 would be kept and the words still maintained as proper nouns.

The harmonization in translations of these passages with their corresponding NT passages is not due to a conscious, deliberate policy. Rather, it is due to the influence of the Vulgate which in turn was influenced by the LXX. The Vulgate Psalter, as we have mentioned, is a translation of the LXX, from which the book of Hebrews quotes. Therefore, it can easily be seen how these passages could be translated similarly. This explains the similarity since these passages are all from the book of Psalms. Instead of direct harmonization, we have indirect harmonization, i.e., the passages are not harmonized by comparing directly the English translation of the OT passages with that of the NT, but somewhat unconsciously by translating two passages whose basis is the LXX text.

There are OT passages in modern translations which are

²³ The Geneva Bible alone had "Meribah" and "Massah." It is to the credit of its translators that in the three cases discussed here they went back to the Hebrew text for their translation instead of to the Vulgate.

dependent on the versions instead of the Hebrew text. These are passages where the Hebrew is either obscure or where the versions seem to give a better reading. This study indicates, however, that the AV has some passages where it is dependent upon the Vulgate and indirectly on the LXX where such is not the case. The Hebrew is certainly superior in these three cases cited. The Bishops' Bible and the AV were purportedly brought into harmony with the Hebrew text, and though the latter version had outstanding Semitic scholars on its committees, some of these tertiary translations slipped through. Even the better readings of the Geneva Bible which they had at their disposal did not direct them to the right renderings. At this stage the translation of the NT passages may have had some influence in preserving these readings.