

The First Foot Forward in Scripture Selection?

Selecting and Using Scripture Portions Effectively in Frontier Missions

by Rick Brown

Most frontier Bible translators would agree that one of the major goals of their role in the total mission task is that the receptor-language community would gain access to adequate Scriptures. Scriptures may be defined as being “adequate” when they include (1) a selection of portions from the Old and New Testaments sufficient to address the basic spiritual needs of that community; (2) in a language that serves them well; and (3) in usable, appropriate media such that motivated members of their community are able to use them for personal growth and church planting. This goal raises at least two strategic questions regarding the adequacy and accessibility of translated Scriptures:

1. What portions or passages from the Old Testament and New Testament are sufficient to address the basic spiritual needs of this community and enable motivated members of the community to use them for spiritual growth?
2. What media are usable and appropriate and available for this community, including print and/or nonprint forms, such that they can enable motivated members of the community to access the Scriptures and use them for personal growth?

These two questions need to be answered on the basis of strategic sociolinguistic and missiological factors. Failure to appraise these factors can lead to missed opportunities and misdirected efforts, with the result that the project requires extended time to reach its objectives or even fails to reach them at all.¹ It sometimes happens, for example, that teams set out to translate particular portions in a particular sequence and format only to discover later that their community or partners want different portions or formats, or need them done in a particular order. Other teams become frustrated because the community seems to prefer the national-language Bible to the vernacular translation. Even mother-tongue translators have been known to persist in reading the national-language translation rather than the vernacular translation on which they are working.

For a new project, the answers to the two questions above will be tentative at first, and should be reviewed and revised as the project progresses. Yet they do need to be answered, even if tentatively, before people begin to develop

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a strategic plan for the work. This is important because the decisions about which portions should be translated and which media should be used affect almost every aspect of the project: the choice of partners, the choice of translators, the means of testing, plans for access, the means of delivery, and the very role of vernacular Scriptures within the community.

For example, if the best form of access and delivery is radio, and if the radio people want thirteen-minute portions, then the strategy will focus on small portions and abridgments, and the team will relate closely to people involved in radio and recording. If the church planters on the ground (or on the air) want to “story” through the Bible using somewhat different selections for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership training, then their needs will influence the selection and sequencing of portions to translate, and the team will relate closely to them. But if the best avenue of access and delivery is the distribution of books, then a printed Bible is likely to be the main objective. In that case, literacy will be a vital form of access, so the team will relate more closely to publishers and educators.

So what are some of the principles which can help the total ministry team in each community identify the portions and media best suited to accomplish these goals?

Communicating a Biblical Worldview

In a sense we could say that one of God’s major purposes for the Bible is to communicate a different worldview to mankind. Through the ages God has initiated messages and events to reform—step by step—the way people think about God, man, and the world. We can call the desired outcome “a biblical worldview.” By this we mean neither a modern Western worldview nor a traditional evangelical worldview nor the worldviews of the diverse cultures reflected in the Bible itself, but rather the worldview that is communicated piece by piece in the message of the Bible itself. In other words, it is the

perspective that God is seeking to instill in his audience through the prophets and apostles, and most of all through his incarnate Word—Jesus the Christ.

The difficulty lies in the fact that God is communicating to people with contrary worldviews, and it takes time and experience to modify worldviews. Fortunately some of that experience can be gained vicariously, by learning from the experiences of others. One of the main roles of history and folklore is to expose us to such experiences and thereby pass on a traditional worldview. Children also learn their worldview (including values) from the way their parents interpret events to them. That is what God does in the Old Testament histories. He not only gives the people experiences, he also sends prophets to interpret those experiences, and he gives us the benefit of their interpretation.

Preparing the Way of the Lord

God spent centuries preparing the sons of Israel for the coming of his kingdom, and he spread their books and synagogues throughout the Western world to prepare the Gentiles. Then, when he sent the Savior King, God also sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for him. But in spite of all this, it was only with difficulty that the people believed and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. People still need preparation today.² It has been observed by numerous missiologists that before an unevangelized people group can grasp the gospel, they need to have a more biblical worldview. In particular they need to understand a number of foundational truths:

- God’s holiness, goodness, love, and faithfulness
- The hopeless sinfulness of mankind
- The consequences of sin
- Mankind’s need for a perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin
- Their need for regeneration through the Holy Spirit
- Their need for a Savior-King, who will establish righteousness forever.

Dr. Jim Slack and other Baptist missiologists have come to the conclusion

that the gospel really begins with the creation story, with God’s good purpose, mankind’s fall, and the promise of one born of a woman who will defeat the serpent. An examination of Acts shows that the apostles began their gospel presentations with appeals to Old Testament prophecies, and if the audience was unfamiliar with the Old Testament, then they began by proclaiming the God of creation.

Luke records the perplexity of a Judean couple who were walking the road to Emmaus on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.... Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.... He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”... “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” (Luke 24:13–21, NIV)

Today, many of the people living in the region called “the 10/40 Window” have similar views of Jesus. Like the couple on the road to Emmaus, they believe that Jesus was a good man, a prophet, and they see no need for him to have died, especially in such a disgraceful way. They see no need for God to require a sacrificial death. Like many of the Jews of Jesus’ day, they believe redemption should come through a powerful prophet-king who subjects the nations to the will of God through force.

Jesus had compassion on the couple going to Emmaus and sought to boost their faith. He could have done this simply by revealing himself as risen from the dead, but first he prepared the way—he explained God’s plan for redemption as revealed through the Old Testament:

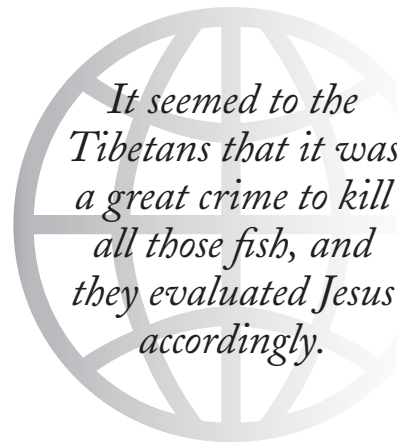
He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27, NIV)

Even before he revealed himself in breaking bread and giving thanks, Jesus enabled them to overcome their doubts by using the Old Testament. Perhaps he showed them how the history recorded in the Old Testament demonstrates that people are hopeless sinners in spite of God's miraculous care, in spite of his guidance through the prophets, and in spite of his laws. Perhaps Jesus pointed to the importance of sacrifice for deliverance from judgment and for reconciliation with God. Perhaps he outlined the whole history of God's preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God and for the reign of his holy and eternal Savior-King, the Messiah. Undoubtedly Jesus mentioned Old Testament passages which foretold the Messiah's suffering and ultimate victory over death. Today this same Old Testament approach that Jesus used is proving effective with people living all over the world. The Old Testament can, according to Galatians 3:24, "lead us to Christ."

Responding Strategically to the Audience's Worldview

The Bible is a large book, and if you add up all that goes into getting it translated into a language for the first time, you find that it requires the equivalent of several lifetimes of work. Given the large number of language communities needing Scripture to be translated, and the small number of trained personnel available to support translation and related activities, it is imperative that financial and personnel resources be used strategically. It is better to enable three language communities to have vital portions of the Bible than to enable one community to have the whole Bible while leaving the other two without an adequate translation. But how can one determine which portions of Scripture are the vital ones for communicat-



ing God's message to a particular audience? How can one ensure that all aspects of God's message are communicated in a balanced way with a minimum of bias? How does one decide what to translate first and what to translate last? These decisions depend on the intended audience.

Adapting to the Audience's Context and Needs

Translation is a form of communication, and the first principle of communication is to be receptor-oriented. As a prerequisite one needs to know the audience.³ What are their fears, their desires, their needs? What are their ultimate questions and concerns? Where do they get their information? Where does that information get its credibility? How is traditional wisdom passed on to the next generation? What are their preferred media of communication? Are they oral communicators, semiliterate communicators, functionally literate, or multimedia communicators? What kinds of media products will be most appropriate for them? What is the status of Christianity in their community? What are their views of Christians and the Bible? What cultural characteristics do they have in common with the cultures of the Bible? How does their worldview compare with the worldview being communicated by the Bible? What have been the barriers to the communication of the biblical message? What have been the door openers? The answers to these questions provide the keys for designing an

effective program for communicating God's message, as God enables.

Of particular importance for the selection of Scripture portions is a study of the audience's culture and in particular a comparison of their worldview(s) with the worldview being communicated by God's Word. This is important because the audience will initially filter the message through the grid of their own worldview and respond to the message in accord with their own concepts and values. For example, Tibetan Buddhists have taken great offense at scenes in the JESUS film where Jesus is shown helping his disciples catch many fish. It seemed to the Tibetans that it was a great crime to kill all those fish, and they evaluated Jesus accordingly. Middle Eastern people were offended to see the disciples bathing in the river with women present. So these scenes were removed from their respective versions of the film, because people need time to open their hearts to the message, and they will not get time to do so if they are repulsed at the beginning.

Cultural sensitivity is needed for short literacy selections as well. At one time the United Bible Societies promoted a uniform set of selections for new readers, but they soon found out they needed to be more sensitive to the culture. Mundhenk (1973), with input from Hella Goschnick, lists cultural problems that arose from many of the selections, in part because they were taken out of context. Hindus, for example, were appalled at the Parable of the Prodigal Son, because it ends with the father slaughtering a cow. Mundhenk goes on to list a number of guidelines for choosing and translating selections.

Good communicators begin with what their audience already knows and accepts, and they build on that to draw them step by step to an understanding of new things. This is the approach we see throughout the Bible and it helps explain why God spent 2,000 years preparing people for the coming of Christ.

Crossing Worldview Bridges

It is important to give the audience time to become comfortable with the Word and to be convinced, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, that God is speaking to them through it. To this end it is helpful to begin with portions that seem relevant and interesting to them. It also helps to begin with portions that share cultural similarities with the audience, as this makes them comfortable with the story and helps them identify with its characters. For example, nomadic peoples find it easy to identify with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because of their pastoral culture and simple religion. Traditional settled people identify well with the tribe- and clan-based social structure, the agricultural festivals, concerns about honor, purification, blessings, curses, and the importance of having heirs. Household servants and members of large families can identify with Joseph and the sibling rivalry that he faced. Women can identify with the problems of Sarah, Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah. Many monotheistic people groups in the 10/40 Window identify with Abraham's devotion to God, with the strict monotheism of Moses, and with the establishment of rule by law. They are also familiar with the names of many of the heroes of the Bible and are interested in knowing more about them. These points of common affirmation are sometimes called "bridges" because they facilitate cross-cultural communication. It is usually wise to select portions that have many bridges and few barriers as the first portions to be translated and distributed.

Emphasizing Door Openers

Another kind of bridge involves differences which appeal to the audience. These may be called "door openers"⁴ because they appeal to people and encourage them to open their minds and hearts to hear the message. In some places, for example, readers and listeners have been impressed that Joseph forgave his brothers; this is a new value to people who emphasize honor through vengeance. They are also impressed that God was working in Joseph's life to bring good out of the bad things his brothers did. This

is a new concept of God for some people, because they have not viewed God as managing events for the ultimate good of his people and for the building of faith and righteousness in their lives. Yet this appeals to them and opens the door for them to hear more of the Word. Some people, having heard only the story of Joseph, have begun reading the whole Bible in an available language, or have approached Christian believers, asking them to tell them more about finding forgiveness from God.

To give another example, some newcomers to the Bible have been shocked at the personal interest God takes in Abraham and the friendly relationship he has with him in spite of Abraham's faults; yet this appeals to them and gives them hope that perhaps God really does take an interest in them. Women are surprised that Ruth and Rahab were able to decide for themselves what their religion would be; yet this gives them freedom and dignity. These door openers draw people to the Word as a source of light and good news. It is wise for the sponsors of a new translation project to identify biblical stories that both challenge and attract their audience, and to select some of them for early translation and distribution.

While it is true that God uses any number of ways and means to attract people to his Word and draw them to himself,⁵ we should give specific attention to certain themes and portions of the Bible that are particularly appealing "door openers" to some audiences:

- God's goodness, love, reliability, and care for his servants, as seen in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, the Exodus, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostles.
- God's benevolent management of history as he works through events to oppose evil; to train his servants in righteousness and truth; and to fulfill his good purposes for his people. This is clearly seen in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Jonah, Daniel, Job, and in Revelation.
- The love and forgiveness exhibited by true followers of Jesus, seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in the lives of saints today.

A similar theme is present in the life of Joseph.

- The logical consistency of the Bible, together with an inner witness by the Holy Spirit that God speaks to us through the Bible.
- The portrait of Jesus himself—his kindness, devotion, wisdom, power, and ongoing reign as king.
- The offer of personal forgiveness and acceptance by God, as presented in the Gospel and Acts.
- The offer of assured and complete salvation from hell and acceptance into God's kingdom.
- The offer of a personal relationship with God, fully realized in the next life.
- The offer of inner cleansing and renewal through God's Holy Spirit, as presented in the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.
- The offer and example of grace to live through the strengthening and guidance of the Spirit, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in some of the Epistles.
- Power to resist and repel Satan and evil spirits in Jesus' name, as seen in the Gospels and Acts.

Many of these biblical themes challenge the current worldviews of many audiences, but they also present them with fresh hope and understanding. So it could be wise, early in the program, to translate and distribute portions that present appealing themes.⁶

Using Genres Appropriate for Oral Communicators

Most of our frontier audiences are from oral cultures, in which oral communication is preferred over written communication. Oral communicators learn best from narratives, proverbs, and poetry and do not learn as well from expositions, directives, recipes, and other procedural genres:

Research among oral communicators and rural-oriented peoples, whether in the mountains or in cities, produced the following data. Retention among these types of people seldom was higher than 29% of the knowledge shared when communicated by means of logical and systematized outlines of the information. However, when a storying or chronological teaching method was used, retention rose to at least 75–80%. (Slack 1991:9–10)

As a result they learn quite readily from Old Testament narratives and from the Psalms and Proverbs, whereas the Epistles are less effective. The Gospels stand in between, Mark being mostly narrative and John mostly exposition, while Matthew and Luke include both and have many narrative parables within the exposition. Oral communicators easily memorize the narrative and poetic parts and grasp the meanings and implications of these texts, but they usually have less interest in the expositional parts and retain less of the information in them. So it is not surprising that missiologists have found that the most effective way to present the message is to use narrative sections of the Bible, beginning with the account of creation and proceeding in a chronological order, with the addition of some psalms and proverbs:

Oral communicators, most of whom have great difficulty in understanding literate, expositionally formatted Gospel presentations, and almost all of whom cannot remember and recall expositionally formatted presentations, can, as a result of a narrative presentation, understand, apply, remember and recall the entire scope of the Biblical story. (Lovejoy et al. 2002).

The Gospel of Mark has been found to be very effective in the 10/40 Window as an evangelistic tool. One reason for this is that it makes so *few* statements about who Jesus is. Instead Mark presents a steady flow of questions that force the audience to consider for themselves who Jesus really is on the basis of the evidence presented in his Gospel.

Researchers have repeatedly found that oral communicators have difficulty processing and retaining information in expository genres of discourse unless it is embedded in a narrative to which it relates.⁷ For example, oral communicators can usually process the sayings of Jesus in Luke more effectively than those in Matthew, because Luke has retained the narrative settings which gave occasion for the sayings. Similarly, they can appreciate an epistle better if they are familiar with Acts and know how the epistle relates to the people, places, and issues mentioned in Acts.

It is not uncommon, in fact, for people who “story” the Bible to intersperse selections from the Epistles at appropriate places in their narration of Acts. Small Scripture portions have been produced that do the same thing, especially in a series of “biographical portions” such as *The Lives of the Prophets* and *The Lives of the Apostles*.



Eric Miller works with Intersity Christian Fellowship in eastern Africa, where he has spent almost two decades training Christian workers in various locations. For many years he used a traditional expository approach, laying out principles supported by proof texts from the Bible. He made it a habit to give a follow-up course to his students five years later, but was dismayed to discover that after five years his trainees retained almost nothing of what he had taught. Then he switched to an “inductive” approach. He would guide his trainees as they read and discussed whole portions of Scripture in a chronological order. He found that the trainees took a much greater interest in the Word, and five years later their retention level was still high. The same approach has been used by some Bible translation teams as they prepared to translate the text.

In one country of Asia a large people movement began when the Scriptures were translated in a contextualized fashion (i.e., using the natural idiom of the language rather than imported expressions). One of the keys to this movement was the way in which the translation was used: the evangelists and trainers would guide people through the discussion of whole por-

tions, with lots of time to backtrack and look again at the evidence.

Jesus did the same thing on the road to Emmaus. His disciples were already familiar with the Old Testament, and this enabled Jesus to remind them of all that Moses and the prophets had said concerning him (Luke 24:25–27). Jesus had said earlier that seeing someone rise from the dead was not necessarily enough to produce faith; he said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). So on the road to Emmaus, instead of revealing himself right away as risen from the dead, Jesus led them through the Old Testament.

Don Pederson writes (1997:166),

In searching for effective means of communicating the Gospel, we find in the narrative structure of the Bible God’s choice for communicating with mankind. As missionaries from countries all over the world have used the biblical narrative to lay a foundation for the Gospel, they have given testimony to the power of scripture to bring new understanding to those they teach.

In considering these examples, we see that there are good reasons to begin Bible translation in the Old Testament, especially in the narrative portions, because they impart to the audience the concepts, worldview, and historical background that provide context essential for understanding the Gospels. Translation is a form of communication, and it is usually a good communicative strategy to begin at the beginning and help the reader to progressively develop the key concepts and relevant contextual information.

Overcoming Worldview Barriers

People everywhere filter what they hear through the grid of their own worldview, even if what they are listening to has originated from a worldview other than their own. Extensive familiarity with other worldviews tends to temper this a bit, as it can help one to guard against naively assuming that only one

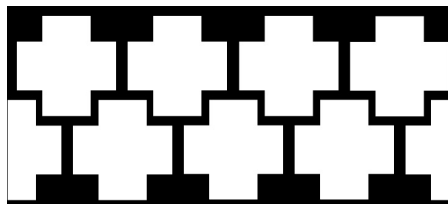
perspective is possible. It also helps broaden the range of interpretations one might consider reasonable. Minority peoples have often had exposure to cultures around them and may have thereby gained some experience with worldviews other than their own. But it is seldom the case that they will have had opportunity for extensive study of biblical history and the cultures involved. So when audiences unfamiliar with the worldview of the Bible encounter a new concept, they tend to interpret it in a way that can let it pass through the grid of their own traditional worldview. For example, if the audience's worldview includes the assumption that God does not love people but can be bribed into awarding blessings or salvation, then when they hear or read in the Bible about people obeying God, their first assumption will be that these people are doing works in hopes of earning God's love or salvation. In this way the audience interprets the event to fit their worldview.

When people are completely unable to make something fit into their worldview, they are likely either to ignore it or reject it. This is referred to as a *barrier*. Barriers are elements of their worldview which cause the audience to distort parts of the message, ignore them or reject them.

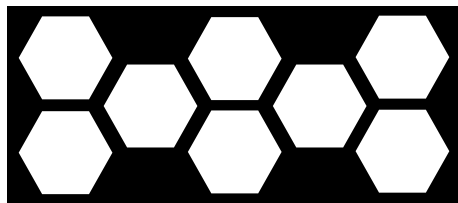
For example, if the audience's view of evil is that it exists because God created the earth with evil in it and decrees harm as he wishes, as opposed to seeing it as the result of mankind's sin and fallen state, then they will not easily recognize the extent of mankind's sinfulness and God's goodness. If their view of sin is that people can avoid it if they are simply told what is right and agree to do it, then they will not see man's hopeless sinfulness nor see the need for regeneration by the Holy Spirit. If they believe that their sins are not consequential unless they outnumber their religious works, and that they can atone for their sins by doing additional religious works, then they will not understand the need for a substitutionary sacrifice. Instead they will regard the death of Jesus as

unfortunate and unnecessary, as did the couple on the road to Emmaus, or they might even deny that he died, as do some of the people groups in Asia and North Africa. If they see the reason for God's commandments in his assertion of control rather than in the holiness and goodness of his nature, then they will not easily trust God's reliability and integrity. If their view of God is that he maintains distance from mankind, not because of mankind's sinfulness, but because of his indifference to mankind, then they will see little possibility of God's becoming a man and will view Jesus as a mere human. If they think the gods often appear as humans, then they may assume that Jesus is simply one among many and they might even attribute divinity to his apostles, as did the people of Lystra in Acts 14: 11–13.

The illustration below represents this process in an abstract way. Let's say that the Bible is communicating a worldview that would cause us to view and interpret the world through a grid of crosses.

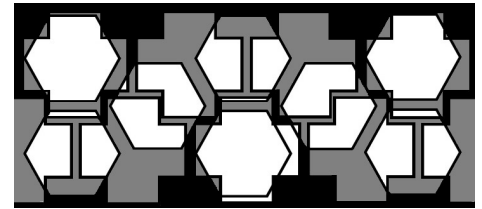


An audience new to the Bible will have a different worldview grid through which they reinterpret their world and everything that happens in it. Let's represent that worldview with hexagons:

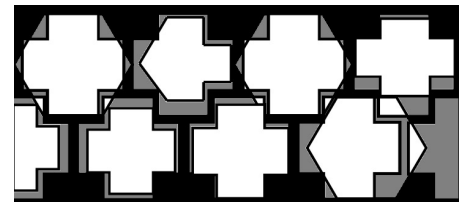


Now when people with a nonbiblical worldview read a message that reflects a biblical worldview, their minds just naturally try to make the biblical message conform to their own worldview. It is as if they were being presented with the cross grid but are looking at it through the hexagon

grid, with the result that what they see are incomplete hexagons and broken crosses, as below:



The task, then, is to provide the audience with materials acceptable to them that can serve as input for modifications to their worldview. This allows them to adjust their worldview to make it more compatible with the biblical message—to make their grid come closer to matching the “crosses” of the biblical worldview. A stage of partial adjustment is illustrated in the following diagram.⁸



So what materials exist that can give people exposure to the biblical worldview? God has in fact provided such materials in the Old Testament narratives. Narratives do not simply state a truth, they demonstrate it, and it is the demonstration that is convincing in the face of opposing views. The narratives can therefore provide an alternative perspective to the audience's worldview without explicitly confronting it. For example, the audience might insist that God distances himself from mankind, but the accounts of Adam and Abraham show that God seeks a holy relationship with the people he created and cares for. The audience might deny the sinfulness of mankind and claim that some people never sinned, but in the Old Testament they see that even the prophets were not without sin and judgment. They might claim that God has no restraints and hence is unreliable, but in the Old Testament they see God's faithfulness to his own covenants and his consistency with his own moral principles. In fact, missiologists have

repeatedly found that Old Testament narratives are effective in overcoming worldview barriers that resist expository approaches.

Some biblical concepts are so contrary to the worldview of some audiences that the audience cannot readily grasp them. To overcome this the audience needs repeated exposure to these concepts in different settings. It is not enough to hear that “God is love”; they need to hear stories in which the love of God is manifest. It is not enough for them to hear that they need a sacrificial substitute for our sins; they need to see biblical examples of the role of faith and sacrifice. They are like scientists who will not believe a discovery until they have repeated the experiment several times. In oral cultures this inductive approach—that is, inferring a principle from several examples—is much more persuasive than a simple declaration of the principle, even if the declaration is from the Bible.

In fact, people sometimes need repeated exposure to the whole biblical panorama of salvation history before they can understand the big picture. And they cannot fully understand individual sayings, events, and portions until they see how these things fit into the big picture. This is the “hermeneutical cycle”: Each time people read through the Scriptures, their understanding of the whole plan of God improves. This in turn helps them to understand the individual messages and events better. As they understand these messages and events better, they come to a greater understanding of the whole plan of God. So they cycle upwards towards better understanding and greater acceptance. But for this to happen the Scripture portions need to appear so relevant and interesting that people will be willing to read or listen through them many times.

Highlighting the Relevance of the Scriptures

People have much on their minds, such as survival, social standing, and the duties of work and family. For most oral communicators, reading is hard work, leisure reading is unknown,

and private reading is seen as unsociable. So if they are to read or learn to read a portion of Scripture, it needs to seem relevant to their needs, which of course vary from community to community. For this reason, Bible publishers have produced Scripture portions on a number of themes, personal, social, historical, or with a focus on holidays such as Christmas and Easter. These have met with a good response from some communities.

The series appeals to many in the 10/40 Window because they feel a religious obligation to believe in the prophets and their writings but actually know very little about them.

In 1982 the Asia Region of the United Bible Societies began developing sets of portions for resistant people groups. One set addresses felt needs. Another set is a series of biographical portions on the prophets and Jesus. This series appeals to many in the 10/40 Window because they feel a religious obligation to believe in the prophets and their writings but actually know very little about them. It also appeals to their need for entertainment, because many of these biographical portions are gripping stories, especially those about Joseph, Abraham, Jonah, David, Elijah, Daniel, and Jesus. Each portion is a booklet consisting of translated biblical passages that together present the story of a biblical character and introduce a key biblical theme. These sets have done well, and it is reported that a significant percentage of those who work through them follow up with further Bible study and participation in inquirers’ classes.⁹

Providing Biblical Context

There was a time when people thought that the meaning of a message was to be found almost exclu-

sively in the words and sentences used. But recent advances in cognitive studies of language use have highlighted the vital role of context in communication.¹⁰ By context we mean the whole cognitive environment of the speaker and addressee: their worldview(s), their culture(s), the situation in which they are communicating, their conventions of communication, the immediate context of what they have already said, and any other shared information. Against this shared background the speaker chooses words and sentences that will evoke concepts and assumptions in the mind of the addressee and which will enable the addressee to modify some of those assumptions or add new ones. But most of the information that is evoked is not actually encoded in the words used, and sometimes important assumptions are left implicit (see Gutt 2000 and Farrell and Hoyle 1995 for more information).

One of the examples discussed by Farrell and Hoyle relates to Luke 5: 12–14:

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” (NIV)

With some knowledge of the cultural context of that day, we can reasonably assume that this story would have evoked a whole scenario in the minds of the original audience:

- The leper was a social outcast because he was socially unclean and the law required people to keep their distance from lepers so that they not become unclean themselves.
- The leper was not able to worship at the temple because he was unclean.
- Since the man was “covered with leprosy,” he had probably been

suffering from his disease and uncleanness for a long time and might have been deformed by it.

- The man wanted Jesus to restore him to a clean status so that he could return to society and worship in the temple.
- It is not clear whether Jesus fully restored the man's appearance to normal or just cured him of the disease and its uncleanness.
- Jesus told the man to keep quiet. If the man had told people that Jesus had touched him, then they would have considered Jesus unclean, and they would have been obliged to avoid him.
- Nevertheless Jesus' holiness seems to be more powerful than leprosy and uncleanness. When he touched the leper, instead of Jesus' becoming unclean, the leper became clean.
- Jesus sent the man to the priest so that he could be certified to be clean in accord with the Law of Moses. Only then could he be restored to society and allowed to enter the temple courts.
- To give his offering, the man had to travel to Jerusalem.

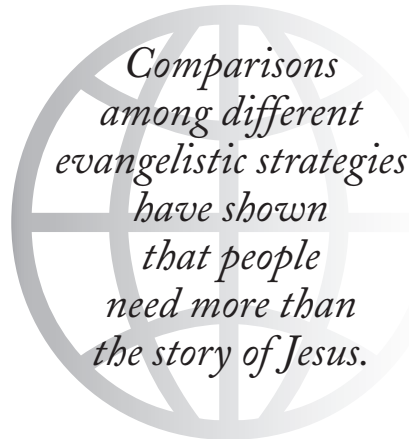
The story evokes these assumptions and more in the minds of those familiar with the original context. Such familiarity comes from a knowledge of certain Old Testament passages. But for the newcomer to the Bible who is unfamiliar with the context, the words of the story can evoke very different thoughts:

- A sick man asked Jesus for a bath.
- Jesus touched him instead.
- Jesus told the man to obey someone named Moses who had told him to give a priest an offering in exchange for a bath.
- Jesus told the man to give a testimony about his bath to Moses and the priest.

A person who is totally unfamiliar with the original context can get some wrong ideas—and they do! Some listeners think it was the priest who actually healed the man of leprosy, because they cannot think of any other explanation for giving the priest an offering. To correct this idea it has been customary for translators to include in the translation some of the vital information that was implicit in the original communication. Some put it in footnotes, but of course footnotes are usually ignored by new readers. Nor are footnotes suitable for audio

tapes. Many translators have therefore included contextually relevant background information in the text itself (sometimes bracketed) to enable the audience to draw the intended conclusions.

There are at least two problems with this approach. One is that it expands the translated text in ways that are not acceptable to some language communities, and the other is that it forces the audience to hear the background infor-



mation every time they hear the text, so that they memorize it with the text. A better alternative is to provide the needed information by translating and distributing key Old Testament passages prior to the Gospels. Old Testament stories are much more interesting than footnotes or textnotes and are more likely to be heard and remembered. They can provide some of the contextual information that the audience needs in order to understand the Gospels and other New Testament books.

For example, Abraham is mentioned by name seventy-three times in the New Testament, with allusions to a variety of the events in his life. David is mentioned fifty-nine times, and Moses eighty times by name. And then there are Adam, Noah, Enoch, Melchizedek, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, Samuel, Solomon, Jonah, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, and others. These references fail to have their intended effect on the audience if the audience does not know who they were and why they are being mentioned. It is possible to give short vignettes about each one in the footnotes, but a lot simpler and more effective to inform

the audience with some interesting Old Testament selections, published together with all or part of the New Testament as a panoramic Bible.

The provision of key Old Testament narratives is, in fact, the only practical way to provide the readers of the New Testament with adequate concepts of who these people are and why they are important to the New Testament message. In addition, there are many other Old Testament concepts which are important for understanding the New Testament. As it is often said, the New Testament utilizes Hebrew concepts in Greek dress, in which case the translators should first study and translate the key biblical concepts as they are developed in the Old Testament.

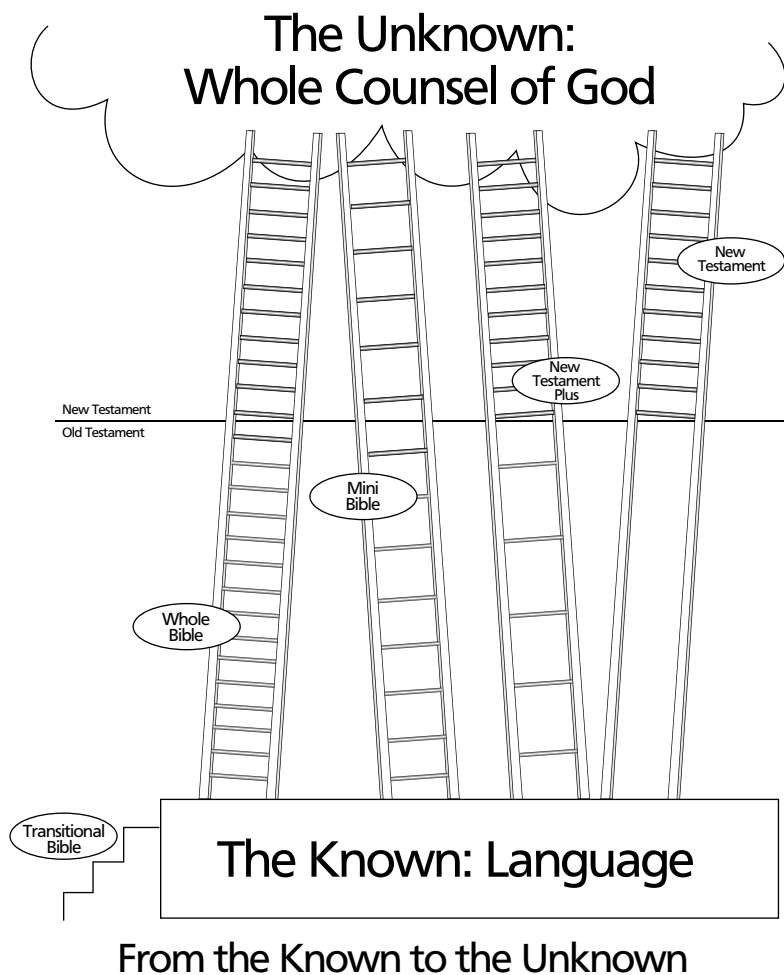
The biblical lexicographer Reinier de Blois (2000:19) writes,

It would not be an overstatement to say that it is extremely difficult—if not impossible—to understand the New Testament well without a thorough understanding of the Old. Much of the terminology that is used in the New Testament has its origin in the Old Testament and that has consequences for our semantic analysis of those terms.

Smoothing the Learning Curve

Christian workers used to say, “The New Testament holds the most important information, so it will be more effective to present that first.” This assumption, however, has not survived the test of time. Comparisons among different evangelistic strategies have shown that people need more than the story of Jesus.

For example, in many Old Testament-deprived communities of Africa, “Christians” take a very casual view of sin, idolatry, and repentance, because they have not been exposed to the Old Testament narratives that demonstrate the seriousness of these matters. The result is syncretism, continued idolatry, and a lack of repentance. These same “Christians” are sometimes mistrustful of God, assuming he is capricious like their traditional divinities. They have not seen the Old Testament narratives that demonstrate God's faithfulness and integrity. So in communities where there is no heritage of a Judeo-



Christian worldview, giving people the New Testament before giving them any parts of the Old Testament is like sending students to secondary school without giving them a primary education first. It is not an effective strategy. MacDonald (1995) cites and endorses a remark by David Strange, a translation consultant, that “trying to translate the New Testament without the Old Testament in place is like trying to build the fourth story of a building without the three lower stories in place.”

To use another illustration, think of a ladder (see graphic above). Its purpose may be to help a person ascend to the top, but that does not mean that only the top rungs are needed. The following figure compares four different kinds of Scripture product with four different ladders. Notice that the first ladder is thorough but slow-going and the last ladder begins with a very steep learning curve!

The ladder on the far left represents a whole Bible, which includes all the books or rungs of the ladder. Next to it is a mini-Bible, also called a “partial Bible” or a “panoramic Bible.” It has a selection of portions from the Old and New Testaments chosen to fit the context and needs of the receptor-language community. The third ladder is a New Testament Plus, a complete New Testament with Old Testament portions but fewer of them. Note that the two ladders in the middle are shown with the same number of rungs, but the rungs of the mini-Bible are more evenly distributed, making it easier to climb and presenting an easier learning curve for new readers and others new to the biblical worldview. The ladder on the far right is a New Testament only. Newcomers to the Bible have considerable difficulty getting started with this ladder!

Some bilinguals need only a few books of the Bible in their own

language in order to move on to a Bible or partial Bible in the national language. They may require only a transitional Bible with one or more key portions from the Old Testament and one or more from the New Testament. But for those who need more, a translation project can begin with a series of stories, which can be expanded into “biographical portions” later, or into whole books, resulting in a “panoramic Bible.” In this way the believers are provided with highly usable Scripture products without making them wait a generation until they have the whole Bible. As the local translation team carries on with the work, they can fill in the gaps in the partial Bible to produce a whole Bible.

The panoramic Bible smooths out the learning curve not only for the audience, but also for the translators. It allows both the translators and the audience to deal with new terms and concepts gradually instead of all at once as in the New-Testament-only approach. This gives the translators an extended opportunity to work on key terms, and it allows the audience time to absorb the new biblical concepts one by one. Most Old Testament narratives are also much easier to translate than are the Gospels and Epistles—and much easier to read. Thus the translators can grow in their skills while completing and publishing portions early in their program, and new readers can begin with texts that are much simpler than the Gospel texts in terms of structure, genre, and content.

The value of the *oral* panoramic Bible may be seen in the work among the Wolof community of Senegal. The Wolof New Testament was completed in the 1980s but did not enjoy much circulation. For eleven years a missionary named Paul Bramsen tried to evangelize Wolof people offering them small illustrated Scripture booklets, but the people just tore them up. Then in 1992 he decided to adapt the chronological Bible teaching method of New Tribes Mission to radio. He prepared a series of one hundred programs of chronologically arranged Bible texts, fifteen-minutes each. They were to be aired once a

week. The series began with fifty-nine stories from the Old Testament, then thirty-seven from the four Gospels, one from Acts 1–2, and one from Revelation 19–22, making eighty-eight. Then the whole series was reviewed with twelve summary stories at the end. From the beginning the broadcasts were popular. Whereas people had refused the booklets and torn some of them up, they tuned in regularly for the radio program. By 1998 people were still listening and there were eleven broadcasts per week on various stations in Senegal.¹¹

Matching the Cultural Patterns of Communication

In general, oral communicators do not perceive reading as pleasurable. They view reading as hard, lonely work, but they listen with pleasure to their own language spoken by a good storyteller or by actors in a drama. Being aware of this, some translators in the western parts of the 10/40 Window prepared the *Lives of the Prophets* series (including the *Lives of the Apostles* series) in dramatic form in a number of languages so that it could be recorded for audio media. Professional directors were engaged, and they in turn hired qualified actors to do the voicing and musicians to provide appropriate music. By devoting time and skill to mixing the voices, music, and sound effects, these directors produced commercial-quality cassettes that people now enjoy listening to over and over again. These have sold exceedingly well and have had a major impact. It often happens that when neighbors or fellow workers hear one of the tapes they ask to borrow it, and this increases the circulation of the tapes. Because of the good quality, people can give the tapes as gifts without being accused of proselytizing.

I have met expatriate missionaries who were frustrated because the language community in which they worked, including the dedicated mother-tongue translators, persisted in reading the national-language Bible rather than the vernacular translation. What the missionaries failed to realize is that the minority-language

community in question uses two or more languages and uses them in separate social domains. For example, they use the national language in the market, in school, and in their places of worship, and they use the local language at home or in small groups. As a result, some groups see reading as the domain of the national language, which is why literate members of the community prefer to use the national language for most of their reading. They reserve the vernacular for oral communication, and they prefer it in that domain.

In one such case I asked the mother-tongue translators why they were translating the Scriptures, given that they did their personal reading in the national-language translation. They said their goal was to reach the rural people of their language community who were illiterate and monolingual. It happened that they were also involved in a radio ministry and used broadcasting as the primary means of delivery. Yet the expatriates who were assisting the project were still focused on print.

Translation projects like this would be more successful if the whole team recognized the patterns of language use and designed the language program to fit those patterns. For example, in some cultures it would be well to focus on the use of audio media for the vernacular Scriptures.

In an earlier paper (Brown 2001) I summarized many of the features of oral communicators, but five of them should be noted here:

- They like dialogue and drama much more than monologue.
- They are sensitive to the sounds of words and voices.
- They like repetition.
- They are very good at memorizing.
- They memorize what they hear, not what they read (unless they read it aloud to themselves repeatedly).

If a tape uses good language and is pleasant to listen to, oral communicators will listen to it repeatedly, several times in a row, for several days of a week. Housewives listen while they care for children and work in the kitchen. Farmers and gardeners

listen while they work in their fields. Factory workers listen while they work at their shop. And because the people are oral communicators, they quickly memorize the tapes. Then the farmers no longer need batteries, because they can recite the words from heart while they are working in their fields. In the evenings villagers sometimes play a tape and act out the different parts. They can do this because they have not only memorized the words, they have memorized the intonation and every note, pause, and sound effect, with the result that they know exactly when to come in and how to say their parts.

The biblical narratives touch on many aspects of everyday life as well as on ultimate issues of mankind's condition, purpose, and eternal destiny. Once these narratives have been inscribed on the hearts of people through memorization, everyday events begin to bring them to mind. When they encounter sibling rivalry, they are reminded of the story of Joseph, and this leads them to think about God's kindness and forgiveness. When they encounter trials, they are reminded of Job and of God's ultimate purposes for him. When they face temptation, they are reminded of Adam and Eve and David, whose sins led to tragedy. Whenever they face troubles, they may remember the trials of David and how he went constantly to God in trusting prayer. Many things in life can remind them of the parables in the Gospels and bring the Lord Jesus into their thoughts.

Another feature of oral cultures is that they do not value reading. So as nonprint media become available to them, they move from being primary oral societies to becoming multimedia societies, skipping the stage of literacy. As for those oral communicators who do go to school, few become long-term functional literates. Viggo Sogaard of the United Bible Societies writes (1993:170),

Of the millions of school children learning to read and write, it is estimated that about half of them will probably stop the learning process before any measure of reading skill has been achieved. Persons with no more than four years in school

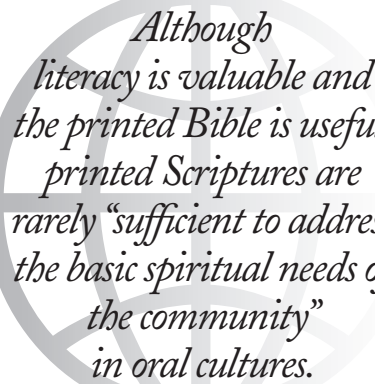
will probably become functionally illiterate, as their reading skills will deteriorate for lack of use. We have a tendency to neglect this large group of people, but we must remember that for thousands of years before printing made mass literacy possible, God was at work, and he is not limited to one single medium of communication.

Orality is even more pervasive in people groups whose languages are only now being committed to writing. It is a simple fact that very few of them will ever become functionally literate to the extent that they can absorb the message and worldview of the Bible through reading alone. In other words, although literacy is valuable and the printed Bible is useful, *printed Scriptures are rarely “sufficient to address the basic spiritual needs of the community” in oral cultures. For that they need to have the Scriptures in nonprint media that fit the communications patterns of their culture.* Nonprint media include programs designed to foster group memorization and recitation. Scholars and translators who come from highly literate subcultures tend to think that a written Bible is necessary for church growth and for church leaders, but experienced church planters disagree:

By means of chronological Bible storying one can evangelize, disciple, plant a church, train leaders and develop a complete set of ministries for a local church among oral communicators who have no literate skills (Lovejoy et al. 2001).

Building Trust in the Scriptures

In many parts of the world the people are wary of “Christians” and “Christian” materials. As a result they may refuse a Gospel or New Testament. But many of these same people feel less threatened by portions from the Old Testament, especially if these are presented as biographical portions. As a result the people are willing to read them or listen to them. This gives them a chance to taste the Word of God and see that it is good. It gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to confirm to their hearts that the Word is true and relevant. All this serves to build trust in the Scriptures, with the result that those who begin



Although literacy is valuable and the printed Bible is useful, printed Scriptures are rarely “sufficient to address the basic spiritual needs of the community” in oral cultures.

with *the Lives of the Prophets* series usually continue with it right through the story of Jesus (which is often the Gospel of Luke). The trust built up in the Old Testament portions helps the audience to give serious consideration to the gospel story.

It might be noted that in some languages the actors whose voices are heard on the tapes are well known in the community and their names are written on the covers. This kind of endorsement helps build confidence in the product and enhance sales.

Presenting the Whole Counsel of God

It often happens that resources are not available to translate the whole Bible in a particular language, so portions are selected for translation. Even where a whole Bible is being translated, because of the long time required for this task, selected portions have usually been published beforehand or alongside the whole Bible. But whenever one translates or distributes a partial Bible, there is a danger that the selection process itself will introduce a bias. So another role of the worldview comparison is to provide a checklist of themes of the biblical message that should be included in the series of selections. Since barriers in the audience’s worldview make some themes harder to communicate, these need extra attention. One also needs to note any themes which are taught in expository passages only, since they might not get conveyed successfully within an oral culture without some supporting narrative passages. But otherwise there should be a balance in the

themes, such that the set of selected portions can indeed present “the whole counsel of God.”

In 1974 the UBS Sub-Committee on Helps for Translators completed a list of recommended Old Testament selections, circulated it to Bible Societies worldwide, and published it in *The Bible Translator*.¹² Their article lists the following six principles:

1. The material selected represents a broad panorama of the Old Testament “history of salvation.”
2. As far as possible, large continuous sections are used rather than smaller units.
3. Special attention is given to passages which are important for the New Testament.
4. Accounts which have special human interest are included.
5. Passages which reflect deep spiritual concerns and which are important for corporate worship are included.
6. No attempt is made to “expurgate” the Old Testament by systematically deleting accounts which reflect dubious moral principles.

Of special note is their desire to provide a whole panorama of the Old Testament, to provide essential background to the New Testament, and to provide texts for use in corporate worship. Since the UBS committee was looking for a set of Old Testament passages which could form the basis for panoramic Old Testaments around the world, they did not discuss variations needed for differences in culture and worldview, but other UBS consultants have written about this in some detail.¹³

Equipping the Saints for Service

Bible translators fulfill a unique role in the total task of advancing the kingdom of God. They are specialists within a wider team that includes other Christian workers, and their particular role is to help equip the others with the Scripture tools they need to evangelize people, disciple believers, train leaders, and otherwise foster church-planting movements. It is the Scripture, after all, that equips God’s people “for every good thing God wants us to do” (2 Tim. 3:17, NLT).

In every situation the translation team needs to be in dialogue with the total

team, especially with those who are leaders among the local believers, so that they can know which Scripture products are needed at which stages of the work. Together they can map out a translation strategy that will equip the believers in the most effective way.

In most current missiological thinking and practice, what is wanted initially is a strategically selected and contextually appropriate series of Bible stories with clear-cut themes and characters. Avery Willis, Senior Vice-President of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, has written,

The International Mission Board believes that one of the greatest needs in reaching all the peoples of the world with the gospel is to give the 67% of the world's population that are primary oral learners an oral mini-Bible relevant to their worldview and situation... We believe that such a plan could set forward the progress of getting the Word to all peoples much faster than the traditional methods. It would not preclude the normal translation process, which would continue after the essential portions of the Bible had been translated for the oral Bible. Both are needed but the overwhelming need of primary oral learners is for an oral Bible.¹⁴

Rick Love, International Director of Frontiers, said,

Frontiers is putting a greater emphasis on storying the Bible and wants to partner with Bible translators in this task, [which] will result in more effective contextual evangelism and church planting.¹⁵

Radio ministries have also found tapes of chronological Bible texts to be effective in their broadcasts. The IBRA radio ministry alternated between broadcasting the *Lives of the Prophets* tapes and broadcasting a soap opera series called *Church in My Home*. The result was a doubling of the number of reported house churches over a year's time.

Hovig Nassanian and Derek Knell, of FEBA Radio, wrote,

The *Lives of the Prophets* series is one of the best radio programs

we've had the pleasure of broadcasting...we are persuaded that many of our listeners find it attractive and appealing.¹⁶

David Tucker, President of Trans World Radio International, wrote,

We at Trans World Radio are committed to bringing the truths of the Word of God to the peoples of the world through the use of the media available to us. We applaud the initiative...to find an appropriate way to connect The Word with the various oral cultures in a timely and practical fashion.

Ron Green of Campus Crusade's JESUS Film Project¹⁷ wrote,

Historically, the JESUS Film Project has recognized the need for our film to be the centerpiece of a "trilogy" which would address Old Testament stories to build bridges to Christ and discipleship stories to lead new believers to the next level of following Him. Because of the cost-prohibitive medium of film, this dream has not yet become a reality, but we clearly recognize that a transitional and perhaps more beneficial medium exists in audio and radio formats. Our hope is to use these venues as much as possible to ensure that Scripture content can be made available to oral cultures in the format of chronological Bible storying.

In many places the churches read or study scheduled selections from an official lectionary or Sunday-school curriculum or from a set designed by the Scripture Gift Mission. They usually want these portions to be translated first, and that is indeed a way to get the Scriptures quickly into use.¹⁸ Some churches use selected psalms in their worship, and they want the translators to include those psalms.

Some countries have a religious education curriculum in their schools in which the classes on Christianity study particular portions such as Luke and Acts. It has been a successful strategy to translate and publish as a book those portions needed by the school, often in diglot form, with the vernacular text facing the text in the language of education.

The JESUS Film Project wants to see the JESUS film dubbed into the languages of the world. Many other

groups are also eager to use the JESUS film. Since the script is based on Luke, they want this Gospel to be translated into every language, so Luke is an obvious portion to select for translation. But the JESUS Film Project also sees the need for preparing the audience with Old Testament portions. In December 2001, they hosted a consultation of fifteen mission agencies at their headquarters in San Clemente, California. The official report of that consultation states,

Three emphases emerged from the consultation that we cannot ignore:

1. the need and desire for an Oral Bible Network to be established among those agencies and organizations wishing to accept the responsibility of taking His Word to a world that will not or cannot receive it in written form,
2. the need and desire to develop for use by any agency or worker an Oral Bible product that remains true to the process—a worldview-driven, holistic, systemic approach to evangelism, discipleship, pastor/leader training and church planting that is based solely on God's Word and is reproducible, regardless of the socio-economic or ethno-linguistic situation (this may be the integration of several products),
3. the need and desire to develop and maintain a systematized pool of resources available to all on orality and literacy, Chronological Bible Storying, the Oral Bible, and other related topics.

In summary, if Bible translators want to maximize the impact of the Word in a given language community, they would do well to cooperate with other Christian workers to produce the kinds of Scripture products that these workers need and in the order in which they need them.

Identifying Portions of Proven Effectiveness

Sometimes the reason Christian workers ask for particular Scripture portions is that they appeared in a popular oral story set like *God and Man* (Schultze 1984). In asking for them they may be unaware that they are not appropriate

to the worldview of their receptor-language community. In this case the workers probably need some help studying and evaluating the worldview of their receptor-language community so that they can identify biblical portions that will present the needed themes using culturally appropriate stories.

Then there is the question of which portions not to translate in the initial partial Bible. Every person seems to have a favorite book he or she cannot imagine others doing without. Of course, all of the Bible *is* valuable; but the issue here is prioritizing those portions which can enable the local community to meet their basic spiritual needs. Highly educated locals and outsiders may prefer a certain book such as Ephesians because it matches their own way of thinking or because it is appropriate for someone with a developed theology, but that does not make it the highest priority for a Bibleless language community. As Søggaard (1993:104) notes,

we all tend to assume that those Scriptures that have greater value to the members of our culture have the same value to members of other cultures. Those portions written to people within Greek culture seem to speak more to Euro-Americans, but Asians or Africans may be drawn more to other parts of Scripture.

To identify which portions really are effective for a community at this stage of its development, we can use the scientific approach: testing. There are at least two ways to do this, and the team would do well to use both if possible. The first is to find out which portions have been effective in neighboring language communities of similar culture and worldview. For this to work, the neighboring communities need to have experience with a broad selection of portions or with a whole Bible. The task is to research the use of the Bible in that group and collect testimonies from people. Which portions have been significant in their coming to faith and in their growth in the Lord? Which portions have been important for church growth? Which portions have had little impact or have offended the audience because of cultural differences? The answers

to these questions can help the team identify portions of proven effectiveness for cultures similar to their own. Then they can use that knowledge to select a tentative set of portions for their own community.

The next test is to try out the selected second-language portions with bilingual members of the receptor community. The task is to see how they respond to them. This can take a while, so the testing of the response to the second-language Scriptures may need to continue after the first-language translation is already underway. Even so, the results of this testing may help the team to revise their planned selections for the partial Bible.

Planning the Scriptural Nurture of the Audience's Spiritual Progress

Christian communicators sometimes use a "Gray Matrix," developed by Frank Gray of FEBC, to help them identify the current spiritual state of their audience and the next stage in their progress. These stages make up what is usually called an "Engel scale."¹⁹ The goal is that the communications program will lead the audience stage by stage towards a more positive attitude toward the biblical message, towards faith in Christ, into discipleship, and finally to incorporation into the church. A chart for a 10/40 community is shown on the next page. Most 10/40 audiences can be represented as starting in the lower left-hand quadrant, indicating little correct information about the biblical message and a bias against it, especially against the gospel.

One goal of the Old Testament portions is to draw the audience towards the right, towards greater openness and acceptance of Scripture, and then upwards towards greater understanding of the biblical message. At the same time, these portions communicate fundamental themes of the biblical message and prepare the audience to understand and accept the Gospel.

After considerable preparation from the Old Testament, the audience is ready to seriously consider the person and claims of Christ in the Gospels.

Isn't he more than a prophet? Isn't he the One the prophets said would come? Didn't he need to die as a perfect sacrifice for our sins? Didn't he rise from the dead and receive all authority as the Messiah King? By the end of the Gospels and throughout Acts the audience begins to feel challenged with the question of whether to accept the claims of Christ and follow him.

Those who reject him are shown in the upper left quadrant as moving away from acceptance, while those who put their faith in him increase in knowledge and acceptance of the Word.

The preceding plot represents a strategy for some of the people groups of the 10/40 Window. Other communities may require different strategies and a somewhat different selection of portions, based on their worldview, for example, the status of the church in their community, the media and skills available for accessing Scripture, and the strategies of other Christian workers.

Selecting and Sequencing Appropriate Media

Another function of a Gray Matrix is to plot the kinds of media that are most appropriate at various stages of the audience's progress along the path.²¹ It is usually the case that unbelievers can be reached most effectively by forms of mass media, such as broadcasts, recordings, booklets, public reading, public oral recitation, and oral story telling. This takes them through the Old Testament narratives, the JESUS film, and a Gospel, several times if possible. For seekers who have heard the gospel, it is usually most effective for them to consider a Gospel and the evangelistic messages of Acts in the company of a believer, either in small groups or one-on-one. The believer often plays a vital role at this stage in answering questions and helping the seeker come to a decision to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. For discipling new believers it is helpful to present Scriptures in media that can be discussed in small groups, such as recorded media, books, and oral recitation/storying. Although broadcasting lacks the flexibility of

schedule that other media allow, it can nevertheless be used for discipleship and church planting, and it has been used to deliver recorded Scripture by encouraging listeners to record the broadcasts. For Scripture use in church, the best media have usually been public reading from

books or lectionaries and oral recitation, although audio cassettes have also been used in small churches.

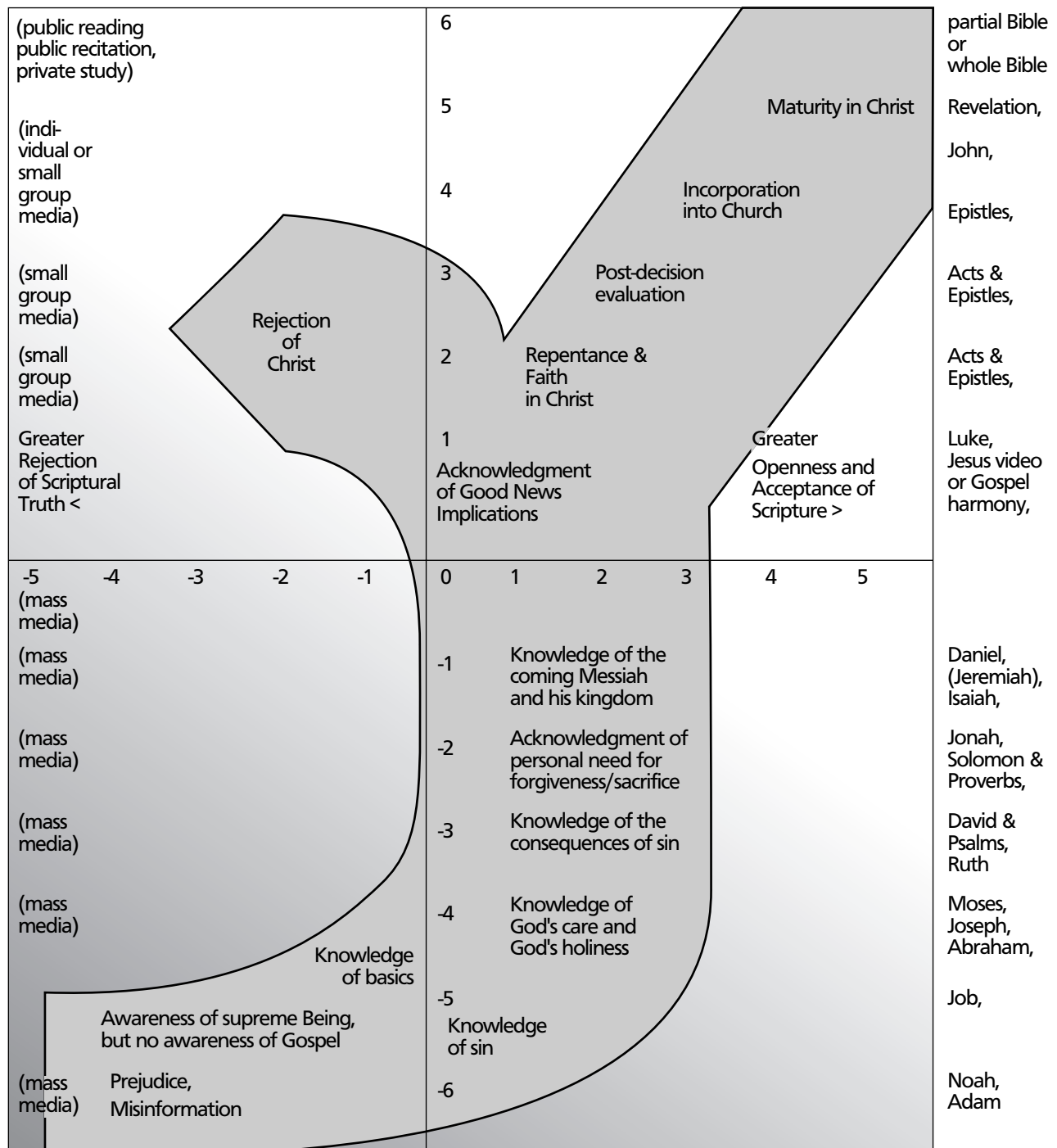
Making decisions together

As members of the one body of Christ and local members of the total team for the total task, we want the total

team, and especially those from the local churches, to make the final decisions on selections, sequencing, and media. At the same time we want to make well-informed choices, as God enables. One way to facilitate this is to draw up a tentative list of options and a tentative list of pros and cons

A 10/40 Audience's Anticipated Responses to Biblical Biographical Portions²⁰

Greater Understanding of the Biblical Message



Lesser Understanding of the Biblical Message

for each option, based on whatever research is needed to do this. The larger team can then add or remove options, add pros and cons, and most importantly, prayerfully weigh the pros and cons. If the translation project is part of a wider macroteam approach to a cluster of related languages, then the broader team will be involved in the decision making. When those concerned have agreed on the options and have assigned weights to the pros and cons of each option, then they can be in a position to make informed decisions that result in an initial translation plan. Yet even that plan will need to be reviewed and perhaps revised in the light of further feedback as the project progresses and portions are released and put into use.

Summary

Different language communities have different needs and situations, different worldviews and attitudes, and different spiritual conditions. They also will require different strategies, different media, and a somewhat different selection of portions. Nevertheless, the same selection principles apply and can be applied as outlined in the list below, in alliance with other Christian workers, especially the leading local believers.

- Compare the biblical worldview with the worldview of the audience and note the bridges, barriers, and door openers.
- Discover which portions have been most effective in neighboring language communities that have a similar culture and worldview.
- Locate the audience on a Gray Matrix and map out a tentative path to the goal.
- Select portions relevant and appropriate to the context that can move the audience along the path.
- Include passages that affirm the bridges to the audience's culture and worldview.
- Wherever possible, include passages that are door openers.
- Include several passages that address barriers, giving careful attention to their translation.
- Try to include the portions requested by other Christian workers in that community.

- Ensure that the selections present all of the major themes of the Bible.
- Choose a sequence that levels out the learning curve by introducing new terms and concepts gradually.
- Try to get the selections tested in a second language with bilinguals in the community.
- Develop Scripture products which match the local patterns of communication.
- Choose media and portions to fit the stages of spiritual progress.

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Additional Recommended Reading

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Endnotes

¹Dye (1999) lists seven “conditions necessary for Scriptures to be used.” The first of these is “spiritual hunger,” and one of the factors affecting “hunger” for the Scriptures is whether they include “portions in an attractive form, with appropriate sets of passages” including “non-print media.”

²Another of the seven conditions listed in Dye(1999) for Scriptures to be used is that the people have enough “initial understanding” to be able to understand the Scriptures.

³In the preface to Sogaard 1993, James Engel writes that the most important thing that Christian communications professionals have learned over the years is that “we cannot communicate effectively and create understanding unless we take the audience seriously.” He says this receptor-oriented approach characterizes Sogaard’s whole book. Sogaard, who is media consultant to the United Bible Societies, summarizes this approach with four questions (1993:99):

1. Who is my listener/reader/viewer?
2. Where is my listener/reader/viewer?
3. What are the needs of my listener/reader/viewer?
4. How can I meet the needs of my listener/reader/viewer?

⁴Lovejoy et al. (2001) do not use the term *door opener*. Instead they use *bridge* to refer to both similarities in worldview and appealing differences.

⁵Some of the other things that can draw a person to the Word besides appealing themes include the prompting of the Holy Spirit, dreams, and visions (common in the 10/40 Window; according to Bush and Pegues 1999), dissatisfaction with life or religion, personal need for God’s intervention, despair at one’s own sinfulness or uncleanness, concern for salvation, a desire to know God, testimonies from believers in Christ, and curiosity about the Bible.

⁶Being aware of culturally significant themes can help the translators render a translation that is not only more natural, but also more tangible for the audience they are intending to reach. In general, if the main themes of a passage are not clear in the mind of the translators, they are unlikely to be clearly communicated in the translation.

⁷See Ong 1982:165 and Slack 1991.

⁸“People will never be able to adopt an entirely biblical worldview and somehow entirely slough off their own. The people we read about in the Bible seemed to have struggled with this themselves. What we are referring to as a biblical worldview is obviously not the Hebrew or Greek worldview, for we see many instances in Scripture of clashes between the Israelites’ expectations for God (based on their worldview) and his expectations for them (based, we might say, upon his own worldview). Ultimately, what we are describing as a biblical worldview is what we understand to be God’s view on things. Our own worldview increasingly comes to reflect his as we grow in faith and are transformed from within, but it is a process that is never completed here.” (Nicely stated by Pete Blackburn in personal correspondence. See also Blackburn 1996.)

⁹Personal correspondence from UBS staff involved with this project from 1982–2002. The final stage of the project was the completion of a glossary and explanatory notes for the New Testament designed specially for readers in most of the 10/40 Window. They were the inspiration for the series called *The Lives of the Prophets*, which includes *The Lives of the Apostles*, which is further discussed below.

¹⁰See Blakemore 1992, Sperber and Wilson 1995.

¹¹See Bramsen 1998 for an account and for transcripts of the programs.

¹²See United Bible Societies 1974.

¹³See Mundhenk 1973 and Thomas 1983 on choosing, translating, and testing culturally appropriate selections. Thomas outlines principles for selecting portions for maximal impact with particular audiences. At the same time he also suggests principles for avoiding the bias to which selection processes are prone:

1. Select materials according to *themes* traditionally recognized by the church as distinctive of the Gospel
2. Select materials in a way which maintains a *balance*, between

such types of material as narration of events and teaching, description and exhortation, word from God and about God and to God

3. Select materials according to the *situation* of the audience to which the message is to be addressed and received as good news. (ibid.: 414–415)

Ken Thomas wrote his remarks before worldview themes and narrative had come into focus as criteria for selecting and balancing portions for oral cultures, but his article nevertheless has many ideas that are still applicable. One notes that on the basis of his criteria, selecting a complete New Testament with few Old Testament portions would fail to provide a balance because the New Testament has few passages that are addressed to God, little poetry, and not as much narrative and description as one finds in the Old Testament.

¹⁴Personal communication.

¹⁵Personal communication.

¹⁶Personal communication.

¹⁷For a more extensive statement from Campus Crusade for Christ International, see Douglass 2000.

¹⁸See Simons 1984 and Pohlig 1999 on translating the lectionary.

¹⁹See Engel 1988 and Sogaard 1993 for similar two-dimensional scales. Sogaard 1993:64–74 discusses examples of several different plots on such a scale.

²⁰Start reading at the bottom of the chart.

²¹See Evans 2002 for observations on media effectiveness and guidelines for media selection.