III

THE COMPANY OF TRANSLATORS

"How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language … hear them speaking about God's deeds of power?"

ACTS 2:8, 11 NRSV

"Every translation is a messianic act, which brings redemption nearer."

FRANZ ROSENZWEIG

CHAPTER 8

God's Secretaries

The overwhelming majority of men and women who have heard and/or read the word of God as revealed in Scripture and by proclamation have done it with the help of a vast company of translators. Apart from the translators, most of them anonymous, there would be precious little reading and hearing of the word of God. Our Bible is the most translated book in the world.

The identity of Jesus — "King of the Jews" — as he hung on the cross on Golgotha was placarded by Pilate in the three languages in common use that day in Jerusalem: Aramaic,[1] Latin, and Greek. There is considerable irony in the fact that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who condemned Jesus to that crucifixion death, ordered and had translated the words that announced, even if not quite in the way he intended, Jesus' sovereignty (John 19:19-20). We don't often think of Pilate in the company of translators, but there it is.

Translation of Scripture became necessary several hundred years before the time of Jesus and the early church when its original language, Hebrew, was gradually replaced in the everyday lives of the people of God first by Aramaic and then by Greek.

Translation into Aramaic

Translation into Aramaic played a decisive role in the years following Israel's return from Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C. In 538 B.C. the liberal-minded Persian leader, Cyrus, released Israel from their years of exile, freeing them to return to their homeland in Palestine. Aramaic was the official language of the Persian empire. Over the years, the many local languages represented in that gargantuan expanse of real estate ("from India to Ethiopia," in the comprehensive phrase that opens the book of Esther), languages that included Israel's Hebrew, were pushed to the sidelines by Aramaic, the official language of government and business.

By the time Pilate added his two cents' worth of translation to Jesus' cross, Hebrew had probably ceased to be the spoken language of daily life in most areas, replaced by Aramaic, the same Aramaic that served as the primary language of Jesus and his early followers. Aramaic as the dominant language of Jesus and his first followers is obscured for us because it is so meagerly represented in our Bibles.

In the Old Testament Aramaic accounts for a few pages of Ezra (4:8–6:18 and 7:12-26), a little over half of Daniel (2:4–7:22), two words in Genesis (31:47),

one word in the Psalms (2:12), and one verse in Jeremiah (10:11).

In the New Testament a bare twenty-one words or phrases are the only traces remaining from the richly layered deposits of the language that Jesus and his early disciples spoke: ten words or phrases from the Gospel writers and Paul: *raca* (Matt. 5:22), *satanas* (Matt. 16:23), *talitha koum* (Mark 5:41), *ephphatha* (Mark 7:34), *pascha* (Mark 14:1), *abba* (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15), *eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani* (Mark 15:34), *Messias* (John 1:41), *rabboni* (John 20:16), *marana tha* (1 Cor. 16:22);[2] three Aramaic place names, Golgotha, Gabbatha, and Akeldama (John 19:13, 17; Acts 1:19); and eight Aramaic personal names, Cephas, Bartholomew, Bartimaeus, Barnabas, Martha, Thomas, Thaddeus, and Barabbas. That's it.

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of which can be dated to the mid third century B.C., sixty-one items translated into Aramaic, including a fragment of the biblical book of Job, would seem to confirm the "widespread and predominant use of Aramaic" during the intertestamental years.[3]

We get a glimpse of the beginning of this process of transition from Hebrew to Aramaic in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. The time was roughly 450 B.C.[4] Ezra and Nehemiah had come from the eastern parts of the Persian empire to Jerusalem to rally the demoralized Jews who had returned from their Babylonian exile. But what had been anticipated as a glorious return to their homeland and a triumphant rebuilding of the destroyed Solomonic temple had fizzled. On arrival their imaginations were electric with Isaiah's visionary preaching of the exile:

> It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
> to raise up the tribes of Jacob
> and to restore the survivors of Israel;
> I will give you as a light to the nations,
> that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.
>
> (Isa. 49:6 NRSV)

That vaulting hope with which they had arrived back in Palestine, expecting to be "a light to the nations," soon dissipated. Many of their brothers and sisters in exile, comfortably established in Babylon, had refused to return with them. The returnees experienced years of drought and bad crops, had meager resources, and were cruelly harassed by their Samaritan neighbors to the north. It looked very much as if the community would not make it. Year after year after year of unrelieved struggle had unraveled the grand tapestry of Isaianic visions; their identity as God's people was hanging by the merest thread.

Rescuing help came with the arrival first of Ezra and then of Nehemiah, both of whom held prominent positions in the Persian government. When they learned of the desperate straits of their Palestinian brothers and sisters they set out to rally their spirits. It is no exaggeration to say that these two men were

as crucial to the survival of the people of God as Moses was to their formation. They did precisely what was necessary to re-establish the community's identity as a people of God and set them on the way in which they have continued ever since. Ezra reformed their spiritual life; Nehemiah pulled them together politically, rebuilding their defenses.

Ezra arrived with a copy of the Law of Moses written in its original Hebrew. Through the decades of poverty and harassment, these troubled Jews eking out a bare existence in Jerusalem had lost touch with their past — lost the memory of the Moses-led salvation, lost intimacy with the Sinai revelation, lost connection with the wilderness disciplines, lost touch with the family stories of Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Boaz, David and Abigail. Ezra knew that he needed to start back at square one. He would start with the Scriptures. He had a wooden platform constructed in the town square, gathered the people together, mounted the platform, and began reading from the Hebrew scroll, reading them the story of who they were and where they had come from, their identity and their destiny.

But there was a problem. The people who had lost touch with their past had also lost touch with their language. Hebrew, while most of them most certainly understood it, was no longer their first language, their cradle tongue. In the hundred and thirty or so years since their ancestors had been exiled to Babylon (586 B.C.) their Hebrew had receded to the margins of their lives. They had grown up speaking Aramaic, the *lingua franca* of the Persian empire, as had their parents and grandparents going back several generations. And Aramaic would continue to be their primary language long into the future, into the time of Jesus.

It became apparent that Ezra's grand identity-recovering enterprise that day required interpretative help. Luckily, the Levites, the priestly class responsible for staying in touch with their ancient Moses roots, were still completely at home in Hebrew. So as Ezra read from the scroll written in Hebrew, thirteen Levites placed strategically throughout the assembled congregation "gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). "Gave the sense" was probably not translation in a strict sense, but more like assisting the people by explaining and interpreting what Ezra was reading from this long neglected and now unfamiliar text. What seems to have been going on that day is that this post-exilic community in Jerusalem needed *interpretive* help in listening to the Hebrew Bible that would also involve the occasional translation of a Hebrew word or phrase into the Aramaic that by this time was in process of replacing Hebrew as the vernacular language in Palestine.

But "gave the sense" did more than merely provide dictionary equivalents to the words that were being read that day. The Levites' interpretive translation work engaged the *lives,* the hearts and souls, not just

the minds, of the people: at first they wept and then they rejoiced "because they had understood the words that were declared to them" (Neh. 8:9-12). This is the intended end of true translation, to bring about the kind of understanding that involves the whole person in tears and laughter, heart and soul, in what is written, what is said.[5]

These thirteen men are not otherwise mentioned in the biblical story but neither are they quite anonymous. As Ezra's assistants, they saved the day by using the everyday vernacular to interpret and clarify Ezra's reading of God's word for a people of God who at that moment hardly knew what "people of God" meant, let alone that it meant *them.* These men at least deserve the dignity of being named among us again. Here they are: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah (Neh. 8:7). The thirteen interpreters orally supplied the necessary connection — Aramaic! — between past and present that day. Because they "gave the sense" so the people could understand the meaning, the people of God would continue for the next four hundred years or so to use Aramaic, into the time when Jesus would hang on a cross in Jerusalem, identified as their King in this same Aramaic language.[6]

Translation into Greek

The translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek is our first complete translation. Whereas in translation into Aramaic we have only bits and pieces, fragments scattered here and there and, as in the story of Ezra and the thirteen Levites, something only anticipatory and suggestive, the translation of the Scriptures into Greek is complete, the entire Hebrew Bible — and then some — well before the time of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

As it turned out, this Greek translation was *the* Bible of the first Christian church, their "authorized" version. When Paul wrote his letters to the newly formed Christian communities and quoted from the Bible to authenticate and confirm the common relationship of these early Christians with the people of God who had been redeemed from Egyptian slavery, trained into a life of love and obedience in wilderness and promised land, and instructed and challenged by the great preaching prophets of Israel, he almost always quoted from this Greek translation. When Mark wrote his groundbreaking Gospel, he made 68 distinct references to the Old Testament of which 25 are exact or nearly exact quotations from the Greek translation. When Paul and Silas arrived in the Greek town of Beroea and had a Bible study with some Jews in the synagogue there, "examining the scriptures daily to see if these things [the gospel] were so," it was undoubtedly the official Greek translation of the "scriptures" that they studied (Acts 17:10-12). Many centuries later when Walter Bauer wrote his introduc-

tion to what has become the standard lexicon of New Testament Greek, he said, "As for the influence of the LXX [the Greek translation], every page of this lexicon shows that it outweighs all other influences on our literature."[7]

Just as translation into Aramaic had become necessary in the years following Cyrus's decree that Aramaic would be the official language of the huge and multi-languaged Persian empire, so two hundred years later translation into Greek became necessary when Alexander the Great conquered everything Persian and nearly overnight (as history goes) turned everyone into Greeks, or at least people who spoke Greek. As Aramaic had become the *lingua franca* of Cyrus's Persian empire, so Greek became the *lingua franca* of Alexander's Greek empire. And for the same reason — in order to run a government and conduct business with such a diverse population speaking so many tongues (a regular Babel it was), there had to be a common language. This time the Greeks were in charge, so the language was Greek.

But something else had happened in that two hundred years. In the time between Cyrus and Alexander, the Jewish community had gradually been dispersed all over the Persian/Greek world. The dispersion that had begun under the Babylonians was reversed by the Persians, whose policy was to repatriate exiled peoples to their homelands so they could rebuild their places of worship.[8] This back-and-forthness weakened any sense of place, further stirring the huge dispersion melting-pot. The process of dispersion was continued by the Greeks, who were great colonizers. Under their rule the Jews, earlier uprooted and later restored to Palestine, learned to make themselves at home virtually anywhere. After a hundred years or so of Greek rule, there were Jews in most of the major cities of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world. Wherever they landed they established a synagogue, faithfully nurturing in the soil of their Holy Scriptures (the only soil left to them) their identity as God's people. Two years into his blitzkrieg that would take him all the way from Macedonia to India in ten years, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt and immediately created a new city there in his own honor. The year was 332 B.C. In typical Alexandrian hubris he named it Alexandria. Within a couple of generations Greek-speaking Jews made up one third of the city's inhabitants and outnumbered the Jews in Jerusalem. The Jewish population continued to multiply not only in Alexandria but throughout the Greek empire. Every decade removed the Jews further from the language of their Scriptures. They needed their Bible in Greek for reading in the synagogues.

So it is fitting that the initiative for translating the Bible into Greek took place in Alexandria. The story is told in *The Letter of Aristeas,* a kernel of historic fact elaborated into a legend. But the legend is worth telling for what it conveys to us of the Jewish regard for translation as such. Aristeas, the legend goes, held high office in the court of Ptolemy II (285-247 B.C.),

who was a great patron of learning with a library of more than two hundred thousand books. The story Aristeas tells is that Demetrius, the royal librarian of Ptolemy, informed the king that the Jews had valuable books that deserved a place in the library. The king gave him the go-ahead. Demetrius told him that these books were in an odd script and would require translation. So the king ordered that a letter be sent to Eleazar, high priest in Jerusalem, to acquire the manuscripts accompanied by translators. The high priest selected six elders from each of the twelve tribes as translators. When the seventy-two elders arrived in Alexandria, the king treated them to a sumptuous banquet and tested them with hard questions. They passed muster and three days later were taken by the librarian Demetrius to the island of Pharos (famous for its lighthouse), offshore from Alexandria, and put to work in a building that had been prepared for them. They went to work and in seventy-two days the seventy-two elders had completed the work. Seventy-two was rounded off to seventy and the translation has been called the *Septuagint* (seventy, in Roman numerals LXX) ever since.

The legend, as legends do, developed. Later tellers of the tale recounted that the seventy-two each worked independently in a separate cell without seeing or talking to one another. At the end of the seventy-two days all the versions were found to be word-for-word identical.

The legend entertains, as legends are supposed to do. But the kernel of fact is indisputable: the translation of the Bible into Greek that was made in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy II became the official Bible of the far-flung Jewish communities and eventually of the beginning Christian church.[9]

But the significance of the *Letter* for us is the enormous respect and honor in the Jewish (and later Christian) community that was given to this translation and its translators. They believed that the same Spirit of God at work in the writing of Scripture is also at work in the translating of Scripture. A hundred years or so after the *Letter,* Philo, an Alexandrian Jew contemporary with Jesus, without referring to the *Letter,* gave a similar evaluation of the translation, designating the original writing of Scripture in Hebrew and the translation of Scripture into Greek as "sisters." Jews, he wrote, who are bilingual in Hebrew and Greek

> regard them [the original and the translation] with awe and reverence as sisters, or rather as one and the same, both in matter and words, and speak of the authors not as translators but as prophets and priests of the mysteries … hand in hand with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses.[10]

For both Jews and Christians the original and the translation were on a par with one another as authoritative Scripture.

Translation into American

Two thousand years later I found myself in the company of translators, but without any self-awareness that I was a translator. I was a pastor in America. My work involved calling the two to three hundred people who made up my congregation to worship and serving them the Eucharist. I preached sermons and taught Bible studies, I prayed with and for them, I visited the sick and cared for souls, I baptized and confirmed, I married and buried. We were all fluent in American English. Who needed a translator with these people and under these circumstances?

And yet I often found myself identifying with Ezra's thirteen Levites in post-exilic Jerusalem. George Steiner in his wide-ranging treatment of translation, *After Babel,* convinces that translation *within* a language (intralingual) is on a continuum with translation *between* languages (interlingual).[11] I was most conscious of being in the company of the Levites when I was in the pulpit, attempting to make the Scriptures understandable in the colloquial language of the day. Just as the Levites assisted Ezra in Judah by "giving the sense" for understanding the Bible in those post-exilic days of a rapidly disintegrating biblical culture, I was doing something very similar as a pastor in postmodern American, for neither was my congregation familiar with their past, with their Scriptures, their biblically formed identity. In parallel with the Levites using vernacular Aramaic, most of my "translation" was also oral, giving the interpretation, the "understanding," of the Scriptures as they were read out in the sanctuary to my assembled congregation, and also providing an occasional American equivalent to an unfamiliar idiom or metaphor.

And then something happened that without my being aware of its significance at the time put me in the company of translators. It took place in the early 1980s in our small town twenty miles from the city of Baltimore. A financial downturn had raised anxieties among many in my mostly middle-class congregation. Race riots flaring up in many of the cities of America including nearby Baltimore exacerbated the anxiety. The entire community in which I lived and worked was suddenly security conscious. Neighbors were double-locking their doors and installing alarm systems. Men and women who had never held a gun were buying guns. Racial fears developed into racial slurs. Paranoia infected the small talk I would overhear on street corners and in barbershops. To my dismay, all of this seeped into my congregation without encountering any resistance.

My dismay soon turned to anger. How could this congregation of Christians so unthinkingly absorb the world's fearful anxiety and hateful distrust — and so easily? Overnight, it seemed, they had turned their homes into armed camps. They were living defensively, guardedly, timidly. And they were Christians! I

had been their pastor for twenty years, preaching the good news that Jesus had overcome the world, defining their neighbor with Jesus' story of the good Samaritan, defending them against the status quo with Jesus' story of the cautious servant who buried his talent. I had led them in Bible studies that I had supposed were grounding them in the freedom for which Christ had set us free, keeping their feet firmly in, "but not of," the world around us for which Christ died. And here they were, before my eyes, paralyzed by fear and "anxious for the morrow."

As my anger and dismay subsided, I began plotting a pastoral strategy that I hoped would recover their identity as a free people in Christ, a people not "conformed to the world" but living robustly and spontaneously in the Spirit. Galatians seemed a good place to start. I was angry and this was Paul's angriest letter, provoked by a report that Christian congregations that Paul had formed a few years before had abandoned the life of freedom for the security system of the old Jewish codes. I thought it was Galatians-time for my congregation. The secure and cautious conditions of suburbia had softened and blurred the sharp edges of the gospel and left them undefended against the anxieties of the day. I thought that the parallel between our congregations, Paul's in Galatia and mine in Maryland, was exquisitely serendipitous, and I was going to make the most it.

But I also knew that this was going to take awhile. I decided that I would teach an adult class on Galatians for a year and follow that up by a year of preaching through Galatians. I was going to soak them in Galatians. They were going to have Galatians coming out their pores. After two years they wouldn't know whether they were living in Galatia or America. But they were going to know something about freedom, the freedom for which Christ set them free.

I announced an adult class for the study of Galatians to the congregation. Our adult church-school class met in the basement of our educational wing on Sunday mornings, bare cement block walls, folding chairs, a horseshoe arrangement of vinyl-surfaced tables, an easel of newsprint — our suburban Presbyterian equivalent of the catacombs. I had always loved the intimacy and leisure of these gatherings, the immersion in Scripture, the experiences of surprise and recognition — God's word! — and the ambience of honesty and revelation that always seemed to develop. As we set ourselves in the arena of God's revelation, moments always seemed to occur when first one, then another, would become capable of revealing herself, himself, cautiously edging out from behind the disguises and make-up by which we all attempt to make ourselves respectable and acceptable in the world.

On the Sunday set for the beginning of the study, fourteen men and women showed up, my usual take from our congregation. My routine was to arrive early, brew an urn of coffee, prepare hot water for tea,

put out the condiments and Styrofoam cups, spread Bibles out on the tables. Small talk consumed the first few minutes as we got our coffee and took our places around the tables. I always felt that for the first ten minutes or so the Bibles on the table were competing for attention with the liturgical act of stirring cream and sugar into the coffee cups; most Sundays the Bible would eventually pull out in front, but on this particular Sunday those white Styrofoam cups seemed to be winning. Here I was laying the groundwork for a major renewal of Spirit-torched imagination in my congregation. Galatians, Paul's angry, passionate, fiery letter that rescued his congregation from their regression to culture slavery, was on the table and nobody was getting it. Sweetly smiling, they were giving more attention to stirring sugar into those Styrofoam cups than to the Spirit words that pulsed in Paul's metaphors and syntax. It was obvious that they weren't getting it. And I was offended, mightily offended.

I don't know why I was particularly struck that day, for it happens all the time: parents with children, friends with friends, pastors with parishioners, teachers with students, coaches with players. We get hold of something that turns life inside out — a truth-probing idea, a blaze of beauty, a passionate love — and urgently press our discovery on another person. After a short time of polite listening, the person, obviously bored, either wanders away or changes the subject, not unlike those times as an adolescent when we fell totally in love with another and couldn't wait to tell our best friend. Whereupon our friend said, "I don't know what you see in him, in her." Here we have just discovered this extravagantly beautiful person, every sentence coming from his lips a melody, every step she takes a figure in a dance, and our friend, our *best* friend, says, "I don't know what you see in her."

That is how I felt that Sunday morning in that Presbyterian basement room in Maryland. They were reading sentences that charted a revolution — and stirring sugar into their coffee.

Later in the afternoon, I told my wife of the sputtery morning launch of the Galatians study. Frustrated and fuming I said, "I know what I'm going to do; I'm going to teach them Greek—if they read it in Greek, those sweet smiles will vanish soon enough. If they read it in Greek, Paul's somersaulting, cartwheeling, freedom-trumpeting Greek, they'll get it." She gave me one of her sweet smiles and said, "I can't think of a better way to empty out the classroom."

The smile did it. I abandoned the Greek project. What I did instead was spend the week doodling with Paul's Greek, trying to turn it into how I thought it sounded in American English. I tried to imagine Paul as pastor to these people who were letting their hard-won freedom in Christ slip through their fingers. How would he write to them in the language they used when they weren't in church? I had no plan, no program, nothing ambitious like Greek. I just wanted them to hear it the way I heard it, the way the Gal-

atians heard it, the way Luther heard it, the way so many men and women through our Christian centuries have heard it and found themselves set free by and for God.

The next Sunday I brewed the coffee and heated the water for tea as I always did, but I omitted the Bibles. Instead of Bibles I had fourteen copies of my doodles — one page double-spaced, about 250 words — spread out on the tables. And I read:

> I, Paul, and my companions in faith here, send greetings to the Galatian churches. My authority for writing to you does not come from any popular vote of the people, nor does it come through the appointment of some human higher-up. It comes directly from Jesus the Messiah and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. I'm God-commissioned. So I greet you with the great words, grace and peace! We know the meaning of those words because Jesus Christ rescued us from this evil world we're in by offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. God's plan is that we all experience that rescue. Glory to God forever! Oh, yes!
>
> I can't believe your fickleness — how easily you have turned traitor to him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing a variant message! It is not a minor variation, you know; it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God. Those who are provoking this agitation among you are turning the Message of Christ on its head. Let me be blunt: If one of us — even an angel from heaven! — were to preach something other than what we preached originally, let him be cursed. I said it once; I'll say it again: If anyone, regardless of reputation or credentials, preaches something other than what you received originally, let him be cursed.

And so it continued. We went over the pages week after week, trying to get Paul's Greek into the American that they spoke when they weren't in church, the words and phrases they used when they were at work on the job, at home playing with their children, out on the street. Every week I brought in another page. We tested the metaphors and phrasings against American English, suggested emendations, threw out clichés, all the time trying to preserve the sharp edge of Paul's language in our vernacular.

After the second week of using this new format, as I was cleaning and straightening up the room, I noticed that all the Styrofoam coffee cups were half-full of cold coffee. I knew I had them. I've never taken so much satisfaction in cleaning up after guests — pouring all that cold coffee into the sink and pitching their cups into the waste can!

We pored over a freshly xeroxed copy of the translated text every Sunday morning through that autumn, winter, and spring. In nine months we had completed Galatians. Without knowing what we were doing, or the impact it would make on our culture, we had joined the company of translators, "God's secretaries."[12] The next autumn I set out on a nine-month course of preaching this same Galatians text to the worshipping congregation. The following summer I started writing, hoping to make a book of these two

years of Galatians conversations and prayer, worship and teaching, pastor-and-congregation collaboration in listening to the Spirit's great freedom text, recovering and submitting ourselves and our culture to God's shaping word.

Several years after the book was published,[13] I received a letter from an editor. "Do you remember that book you wrote on Galatians? Well, I photocopied the translation portions, taped them together, and have been carrying them around ever since, reading them over and over and reading them to my friends. All of us are getting really tired of Galatians. Why don't you translate the whole New Testament?"

I protested that it was impossible; I was a pastor — it had taken me two years to translate one of the smaller New Testament books. And besides, weren't there enough translations and paraphrases already? In the most recent definitive history of the Bible in English, David Daniell calculates that over twelve hundred new translations into English of the Bible, or parts of it, were made from the original Hebrew and Greek between 1945 and 1990. Thirty-five were fresh translations of the whole Bible, and eighty were fresh translations of the New Testament alone. His comment, "these are huge figures," is a huge understatement.[14]

My editor persisted. After a couple of years of letters and telephone conversations, it seemed "good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (editor and publisher, my wife and me) that this was the work set before us. I resigned from my congregation (after twenty-nine years) and set to work translating the biblical text into an American English vernacular.

When I sat down with the Hebrew and Greek texts to translate them into American for the congregation beyond my congregation, it didn't seem all that different from what I had been doing for thirty-five years as a pastor, a life ordained by my church to bring the word of God in Scripture and sacrament to the people whom I had been called to assist and guide into a life of worshipping God the Father, following Jesus the Son, and receiving the Holy Spirit in all the details involved in raising families and working for a living, living a joyful and responsible life in the American neighborhood. I was always aware as a pastor that I was required to be neighborhood-specific. Generalities and "big" truths would not do. My neighborhood was American; in *The Message* the language was necessarily American. I set to work. It would take me ten years.

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1. When the New Testament Greek text (and many translations) reads "Hebrew" here it almost certainly intends "Aramaic," a sister language to Hebrew.

2. *Mammon* ("that in which one puts his trust," from the same root as "Amen"), a word Jesus used to refer to money, is possibly Aramaic. If it is included the count the would be twenty-two.

3. Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ,* revised by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and

Matthew Black (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), vol. 2, pp. 22-23.

4. The chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah is much discussed and argued by scholars. We can place them roughly in the quarter century of 450 to 425 B.C. — in round numbers, a hundred years after the first returnees from Babylonian exile. See I. W. Provan, V. P. Long, and T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003), pp. 285-303.

5. Much attention has been given in our day to this complex and comprehensive work of interpretation. "Hermeneutics" labels the discipline. For a thoroughgoing account see Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), and Paul Ricoeur, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

6. Translation into Aramaic for centuries was mostly oral. But eventually there were written translations. The culmination of this process took place in Babylon in the fifth century A.D. with official rabbinic Targumim ("translations") in Aramaic. See F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments,* revised ed. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1991), pp. 123-35.

7. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* third English ed., revised and edited by Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. xxii.

8. Strikingly documented in the Cyrus Cylinder, a cuneiform inscription. Translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts,* ed. James Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 316.

9. The *Letter of Aristeas* refers only to translating the Torah, the first five books of Moses. The rest of the Old Testament was done piecemeal over the next hundred years or so. By the beginning of the Christian era the whole Hebrew Bible was complete in Greek translation.

10. Quoted in C. K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents,* revised ed. (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 294.

11. George Steiner, *After Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

12. The title of Adam Nicolson's book on the work of the company of translators, the fifty or so scholars and pastors, who translated the King James Bible in the seven years 1604 to 1611 (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

13. *Traveling Light: Modern Meditations on St. Paul's Letter of Freedom* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1988; first published as *Traveling Light: Reflections on the Free Life,* by InterVarsity Press, 1982).

14. David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 764-65.