

3) Input from a Broad Cross Section of the Body of Christ. From the very beginning we opened the door to both input and feedback from Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, from both the eastern and western traditions. This was done primarily by sending out several chapters at a time, draft by draft, to all who were interested in the project--and even to some who were not, but who were gifted in a field of expertise that was needed and whom we hoped to win over. These included various kinds of specialists as well as experienced evangelists, pastors and those who relate to Muslims on a daily basis. We also feel an absolute commitment to include believers in Christ from a Muslim background in the translation process. Dozens were consulted from many different regions of the Arab and Islamic world. We felt especially committed to our stylist who is a gifted Palestinian poet and accomplished writer, respected by the Muslim community.

Our Perspective on Islam:

4) The Failure of the Church's Mission to the Muslim World. Something has gone drastically wrong in the witness of the Church to the Muslim world through the centuries. Many of the reasons for this are well known, and are too numerous to mention here. We would place the fault mainly with the Church, not with some kind of unusual hardness or unresponsiveness inherent in Muslim peoples. It is therefore in order for the body of Christ to consider midcourse corrections and to develop strategies that will move us forward. These will not be easy decisions, and may take long and painful years to work out. Anyone expecting instant results will be disappointed.

5) Acknowledgement of the Sovereign Working of God in the Muslim World. An examination of Islamic history has led us to the conclusion that God has been sovereignly at work among Muslim peoples outside the initiative of the Church to prepare the way for the Gospel message. We have found redemptive and messianic analogies everywhere. We believe it is time to consider the possibility that the Qur'an is itself a prophetic witness to the unity of God, both in the face of 7th century Arabian idolatry and of the modern, materialistic world in which we live. It is also a significant, albeit incomplete, witness to God's Messiah. The Arabic language itself, with its rich and untapped possibilities for expression, is another part of God's sovereign work, and a uniquely provided path for the Good News.

6) A Messianic Movement in Islamic Society. We believe it is time to consider the possibility of fulfilling the Great Commission to disciple Muslims by encouraging a movement for Jesus inside Islam. A Messianic Muslim would be one who has fully "surrendered" to God by means of the atonement of Christ, acknowledging that without this solution to the problem of sin, there can be no true surrender to God. Discipleship could take place in home fellowships. Bible translators would have the initial, heavy responsibility of providing the terminology for such a movement that would allow it to penetrate as yeast into the Islamic community.

Our Approach to Translation:

7) **Bible Translation is the Foundation of Our Mission.** All discipleship, worship and witness in Islamic society will spring from a clear and dynamic presentation of God's word. A "Targum" style presentation of the Scriptures also has its place. By targum, I mean a special presentation of Scripture in a non-traditional format, such as a Gospel harmony, that can be used alongside traditional translations. I give very little credence to the argument that a multiplicity of translations will only serve to fuel the Muslim charge of the corruption (tahrif) of the Christian Scriptures. Muslims continue to translate, print and circulate translations of the Qur'an throughout the world. There may have been a time when the translation of the Qur'an was frowned upon. But Muslims are awakening to its importance and necessity today. It would be regrettable if through intimidation the Christian community were to lag behind.

8) **The Greek New Testament with Semitic Interpretation.** The Greek New Testament has been our major point of reference for textual and exegetical problems. Nevertheless, Jesus was a Semite, and the original language of Jesus' teachings, and possibly even of the Gospel writers, was a combination of Aramaic and Hebrew. To communicate to other Semitic peoples (i.e., Arab Muslims), we may at times have to "go behind" the language of the Greek New Testament to its Aramaic-Hebrew origins in exegeting certain passages for our readers. This was done in translating a number of important verses.

9) **Commitment to the Contextualization of the Gospel** Our premise, simply stated, is that contextualized Bible translation for the Muslim Arab world primarily calls for the use of Islamic theological terminology coupled with a high level of literary Arabic. The goal is a dynamically equivalent presentation of Scripture for the Muslim Arab readers of today. It must be emphasized that contextualization does not mean that the message is watered down to make it more palatable. If done well, it can make the Gospel come into focus and challenge the reader in a way more literal translations cannot do.

When Jesus reveals to the Samaritan woman at the well that He is el-mahdi, it is a severe challenge to those Muslims who are expecting someone other than Jesus to descend from heaven as God's instrument of divine justice. This is one of the many points where the Gospel must be confrontational. When Jesus claims in the Sermon on the Mount to have come to fulfill all "dīn", this is a shocking statement for a Muslim. Suddenly the implications of Jesus' teaching are brought home with clarity and force. To avoid this key Islamic term because it is exclusively Islamic or has supplementary or emotive components that are non-biblical, is indeed to compromise the Good News and rob it of impact.

Corrective Principles

10) **Commitment to Continual Testing and Feedback.** At every stage, draft chapters were continually circulated among Muslim readers.

Long hours were spent interacting over individual words and expressions as we strained to discern if the desired meaning was indeed coming across. One of our most interesting tests was to make sheets of five parallel columns, each containing the same Gospel passage but in different Arabic translations. We would ask these Muslims to pick the one which was both clearest ('awḍaḥ) and most expressive (mu'abbira 'aktar). From Morocco to the Arabian Gulf, they overwhelmingly chose Sira over both "ecclesiastical" and so-called "neutral" approaches to translation.

11) **Many Translation Choices Cannot Be Made Theoretically.** We strongly affirm the need for a componential analysis of words in Bible translation. We cannot, however, draw hard and fast conclusions regarding the suitability of certain key theological terminology until they have been used in field situations, in reasonably attractive formats and over a period of time. This is particularly true in the production of dynamic equivalence translations where dynamic responses have to be measured in real life situations. If the desired meaning is coming across with the result that the message is sown in the minds and hearts of individuals with the corresponding fruit of commitments to the Gospel, then and only then can we conclude that we have made proper choices. Conversely, if we have no fruit to show for our efforts, then and only then can we conclude that our decisions were not appropriate. We acknowledge an element of risk in this approach. Jesus has, however, challenged us in the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25) not to be afraid of taking risks for Him.

12) **Sira Does Not Claim to Be the "Last Word" in Arabic Bible Translation.** There is a need to explore a wide range of possibilities in Arabic translation. Each will meet certain needs among different kinds of readers. One of our hopes is that Project Sunrise will stimulate a new movement of Bible translation making use of Islamic-styled Arabic of literary quality in which each piece of work will build on the efforts of the previous one.

General Description

At the outset, we were planning to use a level of formality closer to modern standard Arabic. As we worked with our stylist, however, he began to tell us that a literary level of Arabic was more suitable for this work. Having been taught in our linguistic training the importance of common-language style translation for the average reader, this was difficult to accept. Our stylist explained that true literary Arabic is the simplest Arabic of all; the usual word for "classical" Arabic, fugḥa, means "clear, plain, distinct and intelligible." Trusting his opinion and experience, we allowed him to begin drafting in this style. When we tested sample chapters as described above, Arabs from all kinds of educational and cultural backgrounds almost always chose his language as the clearest.

According to our stylist, "literary Arabic" (luga 'adabiyya) is distinguished from "correct, ordinary Arabic" (luga 'adiyya salima)

by its careful and creative choice of vocabulary and use of syntax. This comes more from natural instinct, gifting and inspiration than from following a pattern or well-defined set of rules. Literary Arabic also tends to make full use of all the resources available in the language. The result is a language that is not only more expressive (mu^cabbira) than ordinary Arabic, but which has a feel that stirs and engages the reader's emotions as well.

Sira differs from other Arab Bible translations in its use of saja^c, or unmetered, rhymed prose, the distinctive style of the Qur'an. It is not poetry, which has very strict rules of form. The aim of saja^c is to bring a key word to the last syllable of a verse and then successively rhyme the end of each following verse with that word. When properly and skillfully done, this can be achieved without using either artificial syntax or less appropriate words. In Sira, four different rhyme schemes are used: oon-iin, ooConsonant, aaConsonant or a. Each chapter carries one of these forms throughout its verses. The result is a text that more easily lends itself to memorization. It also facilitates artistic forms of reading and chanting, as the final syllable of each verse can be held for emphasis.

Another literary feature is the use of the sira literary type ("sira" is the Arabic technical term for biography). The best known sira in Islamic literature is "es-sira en-nabawiyya" [the Life of the Prophet] of Ibn Hisham, a chronological account of Muhammad's life drawn from both the Qur'an and the Traditions, completed around 200 years after his death. We felt that the title of "Sira" would best describe our chronological presentation of the life of Jesus in this non-canonical format. It can then be used alongside the traditional translations preferred in the Christian community. Roughly half of the Christian leaders consulted at the outset of our work felt that the harmony format would be the least threatening way to inaugurate the use of Islamic-styled Arabic in Bible translation.

Sira follows the format of John Calvin Reid's His Story (Waco, TX: Word Books). Where we felt it necessary we modified his chronology and arrangement, mainly relying on Kurt Aland's Synopsis of the Four Gospels (United Bible Societies). We redivided Reid's nine chapters into thirty for convenient monthly reading. As a result of the harmonization process, it was also necessary to re-verse the entire text. This produced chapters of similar length ranging from 40 to 88 verses with a total of 1673 verses. Most chapters begin with a geographical change, the beginning of a feast or some other major change of events.

The work begins with a four paragraph introduction which explains the intent, philosophy and arrangement of the book. The text itself begins with the prologue of John's Gospel, paraphrased and molded in form to become a special unit of seven verses that could be easily memorized, recited and used liturgically in a way similar to the way Muslims use the first Sura of the Qur'an. Note that this is the only significant occurrence of deliberate paraphrasing. The first verse of this prologue, entitled al-kalima (the Word), is patterned after

the first verse of Sura "al-Isra'" (17). Each of the thirty chapters which follow also carry an appropriate title, such as "The Family of David", "The Dove", and "The Pillow," chosen on the basis of a central theme, event, character or item found in the chapter. The title is followed by a locality reference, either Jerusalem or Galilee, orienting the reader to the area where the majority of events occurred in that particular chapter. These two localities were the foci of Jesus' ministry in a similar way that Mekka and Medina were foci in Muhammad's life.

As in the Qur'an, each chapter begins with the basmala--"In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Muslim interpreters are not in agreement as to whether the expression is part of the text or not. In its sole occurrence in the Qur'an in the context of a story, the use of the basmala is attributed to King Solomon (Qur'an 27:30). It is interesting to note that in Sura "Maryam" (19), which focuses on the birth of Jesus, God is referred to 16 times as ar-rahmān, "the Merciful." Our use of this formula is consistent with early Christian Arab tradition down through the Middle Ages, which introduce both individual chapters and entire books of the Bible with it. It is also entirely in accord with the message of Jesus' life that the coming of the eternal Word of God is itself the focal point of God's mercy to mankind. (compare Sira 1:27 with Luke 1:50)

It is generally acknowledged that each of the four Gospels were organized and compiled with a particular audience in mind. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must do the same for the Muslim world today. The problems faced in communicating the Gospel to the Muslim world are every bit as unique and complicated as those faced by the first-century Gospel writers. We believe it is especially appropriate to begin with the life of Jesus.

Religious Terminology

The religious terminology used is as Islamic in form as we know how to make it at the present time. Of course, we do not claim to have made use of all the possibilities. Neither have we attempted to list exhaustively all Islamic forms used or all occurrences of the form. In many cases, only a single example is supplied. References to verses in Sira are in the form of two numbers--e.g. (27:4); the first indicates the chapter and the second the verse. If a reference is to the Qur'an it is so indicated, as in (Qur'an 2:150).

Besides the individual terms mentioned, we have on occasion used entire Qur'anic phrases where the meanings in the Qur'an and the Bible were essentially the same, as in 13:66 and Qur'an 4:46. Here is an ambiguous Qur'anic reference to the supposed corruption of the Bible which was given a meaningful context in the Gospel story; it shows how this technique can help to clear a point of contention between Muslims and Christians.

The reader may not recognize what is going on unless he is familiar with the Qur'anic stories. A valuable and indispensable tool for

analyzing the usage of our work is the concordance to the Qur'an compiled by Muhammad Abd el-Baqi [el-Mu^cjam el-Mufahras lil-'alfāq el-Qur'ān el-Karīm], printed by Dar el-Qalam in Beirut. In the field of Qur'anic concordances there is no comparable work.

Note that we have at times employed anachronistic language to provide a more meaningful context for Muslim readers. In some cases this is absolutely essential for the text to have impact, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan (18:19ff) where the terms faqīh and imām, etc., are used to designate the principal characters. As translators living in Palestine and writing for Muslims who already acknowledge the general outline of Biblical history, we are in a unique situation to use anachronistic language whereas other translations teams in non-Islamic settings may not find it appropriate. Following, then, are the principal religious terms used in Sira, arranged by theme.

The Kingdom: Kingdom of God = dīn ^cind Allāh (7:26, 10:24). This term signifies the dynamic interaction of Lordship and submission between God and man, not to be confused with the non-Qur'anic diyāna, sometimes translated "religion". Through the Sermon on the Mount (7:26) and the many Kingdom parables, Jesus will be transforming the Muslim reader's understanding of dīn and teaching him the nature of true dīn, just as He confronted first century Rabbinic Judaism with its quasi-biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God. The word malakūt is used only occasionally, not primarily as a translation of "kingdom", but of "authority" (29:21, 30:67). The use of dīn for kingdom is absolutely necessary if our goal in mission is to encourage a movement for Jesus within Islamic society.

The Trinity and Filial Expressions: To avoid crude, anthropomorphic misinterpretations by Muslim readers, the Father-Son metaphor is retained only where the context itself explains its significance. "Father," 'ab, is retained in: 2:46, 6:10, 9:49, 16:62, 19:21, 23:37, 28:5-6, 28:12, 29:31; in the remaining occurrences, "Father" is translated as Allāh. "Son," 'ibn, is retained in: 1:16, 16:59-60, 19:20-21, 23:37, 23:44; in the remaining occurrences, according to its dominant shade of meaning in the verse concerned, this multifaceted term is translated as: "Word [of God]" five times, "the one who came down" 4x, "Messiah" 3x, "beloved" 3x, "from the Spirit of God" 3x, "Mahdi" 2x, "secret of God" 1x, "pure" 1x, "savior" 1x, as well as by various personal pronouns. The Father-children metaphor is retained according to contextual clarity as in (8:28), where note our original use of el-'abawī, "the fatherly" (i.e. God). Parables often communicate this concept as in 20:23-35. "Children of God" = banūn, 'awliyā', muqarrabūn, 'ahibbā'. Holy Spirit = rūḥ Allāh and sakīnah (27:9-10. See Qur'an 2:248 and 48:4).

The Incarnation: "Became flesh" = tamattala lana baṣāran (al-Kalīma 2, see Qur'an 19:17). For those who feel that the divinity of Jesus was slighted in our trinitarian terminology, compensation comes in the use of the plural of majesty when Jesus speaks in the first person as in (27:9), and the use of the divine form of "in the name of," without the letter alef, when referring to Jesus' name (27:8);

The Messiah: Messiah, Christ = el-mahdi, the non-Qur'anic, but traditional end-time figure who will descend from heaven in the last days as God's instrument for bringing justice to the earth (4:42). The term masīḥ (to Muslims only a proper name for Jesus) is used only occasionally, as in (3:47) after his baptism or "anointing" with the Holy Spirit. "Son of Man", a Jewish messianic title meaning nothing to Muslims and often causing miscommunication (i.e., that Jesus is not God), is also translated mahdi (25:48), or as various personal pronouns referring to Jesus (13:51). Note also the use of ḡālib ez-zaman in (3:17) and the verb ḡāba in (3:18) for Shiite readers.

Salvation: The Arabic root naḡara is used in its various derivatives as the principal word for salvation; when followed by one of two prepositions, it can mean "salvation from" = naḡara min (2:2), or "victory over" = naḡara ʿala (1:35,36). Note also the use of the important Qur'anic expression el-ʿurwat el-wuṭqa ("the most trustworthy handhold" Qur'an 2:256) following naḡr for "horn of salvation" (1:35 and 18:18). Note the parallel use of military language in the O.T. use of the root yashaʿ = "salvation" in the name Joshua (and Jesus). We have also used naḡara at times as a translation for John's "eternal life", an Aramaic expression meaning both life and salvation (30:81). Thus, the noun naḡr is used with the verb istamsaka bi = "obtain eternal life (18:15 cf. Mk 10:17).

Heaven and Hell: Heaven = el-janna as the abode of the righteous = 'aṣḡāb el-yamīn (25:49 & 19:65). Hell = en-nār, jahannam, laḡa, sa'ir, jahīm, as the abode of the wicked = 'aṣḡāb es-simāl. Note the use of el-'a'raf (20:53, see Qur'an 7:46,48) for the divider between heaven and hell (Luke 16:26).

Spiritual Rebirth: those born again or from above = el-mutajaddidūn (4:10).

Sacrifice: As the Lamb of God, Jesus is the "mighty sacrifice" ʿaḡīḡ (3:35, cf. Qur'an 37:107) or el-'aḡḡa (3:39, 4:19), and the basis for a new covenant (26:10-11, see Qur'an 19:87). The traditional Arabic word for the cross, ḡalīb, is retained because of its Qur'anic significance (Qur'an 4:157) and our reinterpretation of its use (14:38).

The Ascension: To "ascend" into heaven = ʿaraja, instead of the traditional sa'ada (4:17). Note the use of this root in relation to Muhammad's so-called "mi'raḡj" or "night journey."

The Demonic: "A touch of Satan" = fīḡhi massun min aṣ-ṣayṡān (11:7). Demons = ṣayṡān and jinn, and only occasionally 'arwah. Beelzebub = el-ṡāḡūt (11:39, cf. Qur'an 2:256, meaning demons, whatever is worshipped beside God).

Eschatology: The Day of Judgement = yawm ed-dīn (7:36), yawm el-haṣṡr (10:34), yawm el-faḡl (25:54).

The Parable: To "tell a parable" = ḡaraba lahum maṭalan (10:12, lit. "strike a parable"). "_____ is like a ..." = maṭalu ... ka-maṭali

Discipleship: The disciples of Jesus are the Qur'anic ḡawariyyūn and 'ansār (7:7-10, 13:56, see Qur'an 3:52). Jesus as master = el-mawla (13:17) in a majority of occurrences; the term rabb is applied to Jesus only indirectly (12:18). Note that the form ar-rabb, i.e. with the definite article, is non-Qur'anic, an invention of ecclesiastical Arabic for the Hebrew "Yahweh"; in the Qur'an rabb is always in construct or with a pronoun-suffix, as in rabbukum = "your Lord"

Religious Duty: Witness = ṡahāda (30:81). Prayer = ṡalāt (8:4, 25:28). Alms = zakāt (8:2). Fasting = ṡawm (8:11). Pilgrimage = ḡajj (6:1).

Festivals and Religious Functions: Passover = ʿīd en-nahr (4:1). Feast of Tabernacles = ʿīd el-ḡiyām (16:1). Feast of Dedication = ʿīd el-'anwār (20:1). Temple = bayt Allāh (2:17). Synagogue = maṡjid (9:2). High priest = mufti (26:2). Priest = 'imām (1:4). Sanhedrin = es-ṡuyūk or el-maḡlis el-'aḡla (26:2). Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees = fugahā' (24:19). When a distinction is needed between the groups, Sadducees = "a group not believing in resurrection" (24:6). Levite = sādin bayt Allāh (18:22, in Islamic use, Sādin = doorkeeper of the Kaṡaba). Ritual cleansing = wuḡū' (3:50). Baptism = ṡabḡa (3:4-5, see Qur'an 2:138).

Geography: Modern Arabic geographical names are used. Examples: Sychar = Nablus. Region of Caesarea Philippi = diyār ḡabal es-ṡayk. Hinnom Valley = wādī er-rabāba. The Gospel becomes relevant to modern political problems in the Middle East as we more accurately translate "the earth" (tan ḡan = ha-'aretz) in Matthew 5:5 and other places as 'arḡ el-ḡi'ād = "promised land" (e.g. what "the meek" inherit).

Personal Names: Biblical personal names have been simplified by assigning a unique name to each character in the Gospel narrative. Many of the names have been arabized by 1) using Islamic Arabic forms (Jesus = ʿIsa) 2) translating the meaning of the original name into Arabic (Nathanael = ʿata) 3) using a name in Arabic that sounds similar to the original name (Barabbas = ʿabbās). If none of these methods seemed appropriate or more possibilities were needed, various Syriac, Hebrew, Greek or Latin forms were used if they were simple, e.g. Simon the priest = simʿan. Simon the Pharisee = ṡimʿun. Simon the Leper = simun. Simon, brother of Jesus = samiʿ. Simon the Zealot = fādī. Simon of Cyrene = libī ("a Libyan"). Simon Peter = ṡafwān (a cognate form in Arabic meaning rock and also an Arabic personal name). Queen of Sheba = Bilḡis. Herod = 'Antibas. Israel as a people = banū 'isrā'īl (9:6 = the "sons of Israel", a Qur'anic form). John's use of "the Jews" is usually translated as "people" = an-nās (3:50).

Sin: There is less use of kaṡaya, and more of ḡunūb, ṡayyi'āt and other words.

Money & Measurements: Monetary units = dinar, dirham, fiis. Units of distance = mīl (mile), qawsayn (two bow's lengths), šibra (width of a hand).

Miscellaneous: Jesus is the "way" = es-sirāt (27:4); also the "divider" = furqān, instead of a "sword" (12:23). The direction of prayer = qibla (4:39-42). Jesus speaks of "wrapping turbans (amā'im) in layers" instead of "lengthening phylacteries" (24:16). Godfearer = hanīf (9:2). The feeding of the 5000 = sending down a "spread table" = mā'ida (13:8-10, cf. Qur'an 5:112-115). The traveler = 'ibn es-sabīl (18:20). Jesus speaks of "biting of hands" = ya'addu 'ala yadayhi, instead of "gnashing of teeth" (25:46). The "important matters of the law" = 'arkan ed-dīn (24:25).

FEEDBACK ON THE RABITA

Whither Rabita by an "Interested Observer," and Several Observations by the Editor

The article on Rabita ["The Rabita - Fifteen Years Old in 1987"] in the First quarter 1987 [II/1] issue of SEEDBED is most encouraging. One rejoices in what the Rabita has done in the last fifteen years. It is most heartening to see the responsibility of the organizing and planning of the Rabita in the hands of North African Christians.

One of the problems mentioned in the article faced by the organizers stems from the fine North African custom of hospitality. One does not invite people and then ask them to pay when they arrive. Asking a guest for remuneration for hospitality given would be a shame. This, by the way would be true in any Western home in the U.S. or Canada or Europe. One would never ask a guest to pay.

However, I wonder if the parallel with Rabita is wholly applicable. The custom of hospitality has its limitations according to circumstance. The Rabita is a large conference gathering. What would be a parallel situation in North Africa? Do cultural or religious conference organizers pay for all guests that come? Would not someone visiting a cultural gathering in a large city be expected to find lodging and meals in a hotel when he comes to the conference? Or would the organizers suggest some low cost lodging in the area?

This also raises the question of the strategy of the Rabita organizers as regards funding for its continued ministry. The article pointed somewhat critically to certain missions that did not contribute to the Rabita what might have been expected in view of their purpose of seeing a developed leadership in North Africa. There may be something of a misinterpretation here. Perhaps the missions in question face the same problem as the Rabita leadership - funding. In any case what will be the strategy of the Rabita committee for the