

Statement on the contemporary Danish translation of the Bible, *Bibelen2020*

In March 2020, the Danish Bible Society published a contemporary Danish translation of the Bible called *Bibelen2020*. Soon after, a video criticized the translation for omitting the word "Israel" almost entirely in the New Testament and some places in the Tanakh. This criticism was picked up by a Danish right-wing media outlet, 24NYT, which spread the story with headlines such as "New Danish Bible Translation Purges Israel". Since the story appeared, it has spread to other countries, including Germany, France, USA and Israel. Along the way, *Bibelen2020* has been accused of catering to replacement theology, harboring anti-Israel sentiments or even fostering outright antisemitism.

The Danish Israel Mission has not been involved in this new translation in any way. But given the storm this translation has caused and the fact that it is difficult for our international partners to evaluate these serious accusations, we have found it relevant to communicate our understanding of the issues raised. For a detailed response by The Danish Bible Society itself, we refer to their Q&A, which can be found here: <https://www.bibelselskabet.dk/new-danish-bible-2020-and-israel>.

We do understand how certain choices made in this translation could raise concern. It is possible to argue that the translation in some places opens itself to misunderstandings. However, we find the accusations of an anti-Israel or even antisemitic agenda unwarranted. Likewise, we do not find evidence of any intentional move towards replacement theology.

It is worth noticing that *Bibelen2020* is an experimental translation aimed at secular readers with minimal knowledge of Christian or Bible trivia. It is not meant to constitute a basis for exegetical and theological work in the Church (and, in our judgment, neither would it qualify for this use).

Various issues and words have been raised and criticized in relation to the translation of *Bibelen2020*. The *main issue* concerning the translation of 'Israel' in *Bibelen2020*, both in the Tanakh and in the New Testament, revolves around the places where 'Israel' refers to *the people* and not to *the land*. In these places the translators generally chose to translate the word 'Israel' to 'Israelites' or 'the people of God' in the Tanakh and 'Jews', 'the Jewish people', 'God's chosen people' or similar phrases in the New Testament. In the Gospels and Acts 'Israel' is used at least six times as a geographical reference. Five of the times it has been rewritten. In Matthew 2, for instance, Joseph, Mary and Jesus don't return to "the land of Israel", they return "home". In Luke chapter 4 'Israel' is kept as a geographical reference. In the Tanakh 'Israel' is used repeatedly as a geographical reference.

The seven instances in the Book of Psalms, where 'Israel' has been translated with 'us', have drawn special attention as evidence of replacement theology seeping into the translation. For this to be the case, however, this replacement should have been much more consistent. Instead, many of the psalms explicitly refer to 'Israel'. For example:

"He remembers his loyal love for Israel. The whole world has seen that God has saved us." (Psalm 98:3; *Bibelen2020*; our own translation).

"God has chosen the Israelites; Israel is His possession." (Psalm 135:4; *Bibelen2020*; our own translation).

Bible verses must be read in their context. When reading the verses in discussion in their context we understand the Psalms as expressing God's relationship with Israel.

In order to weigh the accusations levelled against *Bibelen2020*, a visit to a key text concerning the promises of the New Covenant may prove instructive. How does *Bibelen2020* deal with Jeremiah 31:31-40? Does it erase the connection to 'Israel', or does it somehow try to sneak in a reference to 'us, the Church'? Here is an excerpt with the translation of 'House of Israel' in v. 33 and 'Israel' in v. 36 respectively:

v. 33: "But when I once make a new deal with *the Israelites*, then I will put my law into their hearts, so that they will never forget that I am their God and they are my people."

v. 36: "He says: 'Even if all the laws of nature dissolve, *Israel* will never cease to be my people.'" (*Bibelen2020*, our own translation)

In the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:7-13) quotes this passage of Jeremiah and here *Bibelen2020* translates 'The house of Israel' from the Greek as follows:

v.10: "The new deal I will make with *the Jewish people*, when the time comes..." (*Bibelen2020*, our own translation)

In our view this key text concerning the relationship between the 'Old' and the New Covenant shows that this translation does not promote or express replacement theology, or antisemitic or anti-Israel sentiment. Quite the opposite, in fact. We see this key text as an example of the general view on these topics in the translation at hand.

In conclusion, there are reasons for criticism. We too have reservations about some of the choices made in this translation – also regarding the translation of 'Israel'. But there are also reasons for joy. This translation proclaims the Gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah who invites and calls all of us into a relationship with Him where He transforms us into new beings. We believe that this translation will be a tool to meet new people all over Denmark, Jews as well as gentiles, with this fantastic message.

Aarhus, 1st May 2020.

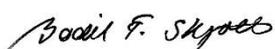
Sincerely,



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