

Tuesday 13 June 2023

Tēnā koutou,

Kia noho te atawhai o te Ariki, o Īhu Karaiti, ki ō koutou wairua
(Piripai 4:23 – He Tīmatanga)

A New Māori Translation of the Bible

In 2008, in response to the launch of *Te Kawenata Hou*, a bilingual New Testament with Te Paipera Tapu and the Good News Translation produced by Bible Society New Zealand (BSNZ), a group of Māori and Pākehā Christians approached BSNZ about the need for a contemporary Māori Bible. BSNZ has been glad to support this effort. Over the years, the following people have been involved in the project (in no particular order), in what we refer to as “the translation committee”: the Most Rev Archbishop Don Tamihere, the Ven Archdeacon Dr Te Waaka Melbourne, Rev Dr Rangi Nicholson, Hineira Woodard, the Rt Rev Bishop George (Hōri) Connor, Dr Ray Harlow, Rev Dr Wayne Te Kaawa, the Ven Archdeacon Dr Lyndon Drake, Matt Hakiha, and David Moko.

Under the guidance of BSNZ’s Translations Director, Dr Stephen Pattemore, the team set to work producing some sample translations, with the intention of seeking feedback from Māori and Māori-speaking Christians. In 2014 BSNZ published *Te Rongopai a Ruka*, a booklet containing three versions of the Gospel of Luke in te reo Māori: Te Paipera Tapu (2012 reformatted edition), and two new translations of different styles. The desired feedback from readers was meant to lead to the development of a translation brief for the whole project. Unfortunately, very little feedback was received about these translations. In 2021 *Pukapuka Karaipiture Tuatahi* was published in celebration of BSNZ’s 175th anniversary and to reflect the importance of the Māori scriptures as part of our heritage. This small booklet includes photographs of the first ever Māori Scriptures published (1827), alongside new translations of those same passages for comparison. Again, we hoped to hear from readers about the new translations.

He Tīmatanga

This year, we have published *He Tīmatanga*, a collection of new translations of Scripture portions, made by different translators in their different styles. These portions are from the Old Testament (Genesis 1-11, Ruth, 1 Samuel, Amos, Jonah) and the New Testament (Acts 1-11, Philippians, 1-3 John). *He Tīmatanga* is the culmination of many years of translation work and collaboration by the translation committee, currently made up of the Ven Archdeacon Dr Te Waaka Melbourne, Hineira Woodard, the Rt Rev Bishop Hōri Connor, Dr Ray Harlow, Rev Dr Wayne Te Kaawa, and the Ven Archdeacon Dr Lyndon Drake. They offer these translations in a spirit of generosity, recognising the need for a new Māori translation that speaks to younger generations, and hoping to spark interest and engagement.

The translator of Genesis 1-11 chose to include the names of atua Māori in the creation narrative of Genesis 1. The intention was not to present this as the “right” or “final” version, but to encourage discussion among Māori Christians. The translation committee and BSNZ agreed to publish this translation, knowing it would be controversial, precisely because this is an issue (among others) that needs to be discussed and a decision agreed upon by Māori to help steer this new translation project.

Seeking feedback

The purpose of this publication is to encourage kōrero and to make decisions (in time) about key aspects of the translation work. At BSNZ, we want to support a translation that will meet the needs of Māori Christians and stay true to the original text and meaning of the Bible. Getting feedback from readers and leaders is an important part of the Bible translation process. By publishing sample translations at this stage of the project, i.e. in the very early stages, our hope is that the translation brief that is decided upon will be widely accepted by the intended readership, and ultimately that the future Bible translation will be useful and acceptable when it is complete.

With the guidance of the translation committee, BSNZ has set up an online feedback form with specific questions on a range of issues (found at www.hetimatanga.nz). I want to stress that this is not the only way we are hoping to hear from Māori and Māori speakers, and we are delighted to know that wānanga are taking place.

The survey is open until the end of June. As I write this, we have received 40 responses. As expected, the issue of atua Māori has been contentious; there are some who are very much opposed to their inclusion, and others who are positive about it. This question is one for Māori to decide together, along with the other issues highlighted in the online survey. We at BSNZ encourage Māori to be the decision-makers.

In particular, we are seeking feedback about the following:

- Should one dialect be chosen (whose?) or many dialects be used?
- What name should be chosen to represent the divine name YHWH? TE ARIKI (as in *He Tīmatanga*), IHOWĀ, another?
- Is it acceptable/desirable to mention the names of Rangī-nui, Papatūānuku, Tangaroa, and Tānerore in Genesis 1?
- Is a word-for-word or thought-for-thought style of translation needed?
- How should footnotes be used?
- Are some translations in *He Tīmatanga* easier or better than others to read? Why?

When the online survey closes, I will be collating the responses (along with responses received in other ways) to report back to a new translation oversight group. It will be the responsibility of this group to deliberate on all these important issues and to develop a comprehensive translation brief.



Going forward

As a result of the publication of *He Tīmatanga*, we have seen more interest in this venture to translate the Bible into Māori these last couple of months than in the previous fourteen years!

BSNZ has asked Pīhopa Te Kitohi Pikaahu, who is a member of our board, to gather members of different Māori denominations and confessions, who have the mana and expertise, to serve as a translation oversight group. This new group may include members of the original translation committee who have worked tirelessly to get us to this point.

We welcome responses to the work done so far and to *He Tīmatanga*. We also welcome recommendations of people who ought to be involved in the ongoing work. As a member of the United Bible Societies, BSNZ is proud to support Bible translation work around the world in many different languages. Our hope is that here in Aotearoa the translation oversight group (still being established) will take the lead in this new Māori Bible translation project. We gladly offer our support and expertise.

Mā te Atua koe e manaaki.

Ngā mihi nui,

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