

Making God's Word Clear for his People:

***Professor John Jeske's Involvement in the Translation of the New
International Version of the Bible***

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On March 26, 1998 I interviewed Pastor John Jeske at St. Luke's Church in Watertown, WI. The purpose of the interview was to get Pastor Jeske's personal insights into one of the highpoints of his ministry. In 1974 Pastor Jeske was serving as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. It was in July of that year that Professor Jeske was asked to assist in the translation of the Old Testament for the New International Version of the Bible. This project became significantly important to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod because the NIV would eventually become the most widely used translation in the Synod.

The Wisconsin Synod's participation began in January of 1974. At that time a Bible Translation Seminar was held to decide which translation of the Bible the Synod would use in its publications. At the end of three days the seminar resolved the following:

- 1) The King James translation fails to speak to the people of our day.
- 2) The New International Version gives promise of being acceptable.
- 3) The Seminary faculty would be asked to study the New Testament of the NIV and report to the district conventions the following summer.
- 4) The Seminary would offer the services of its Old Testament scholars to the New York Bible Society for its translation of the Old Testament.

The offer made in the fourth resolution led to a meeting with Dr. Edwin Palmer, the executive secretary of the NIV. Dr. Palmer and one of his colleagues came to Mequon to meet the Seminary faculty in July, 1974. At dinner, Professor Jeske sat across

from Dr. Palmer and talked with him for a number of hours. It quickly became apparent that the two men shared a common interest in the accurate translation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Two weeks later, Dr. Palmer called Professor Jeske and invited him to join the Old Testament translation team for the NIV. After receiving permission from the Seminary and the Synod, Professor Jeske accepted the invitation.

Professor Jeske was asked to be part of a translation team which worked on the books of Exodus and Numbers. They met for ten weeks during the summer of 1975 in Athens, Greece. Professor Jeske was part of an Intermediate Editorial Committee. This committee was the second in a series of four. Its job was to dismantle and reassemble the translation of an Initial Committee. In turn, the IEC's translation would be reviewed by a General Editorial Committee. Finally, the Committee on Bible Translation would review the GED's translation and make all final decisions.

In order to be properly prepared, Professor Jeske did all of his preliminary translating at the Seminary during the spring of 1975. When he traveled to Athens he took only the Hebrew text, his own notes, and Luther's German Bible.

A typical day for Professor Jeske began at 6:00 a.m. when he would awake and spend some time doing personal translation work. Following breakfast, the translation team would meet at 8:00 a.m. to begin work. The team worked for about eight and a half hours each day translating seven verses per hour on average. This schedule was fairly consistent for the entire ten weeks that the men spent in Athens. Little time was taken for recreation. As Professor Jeske says, "We weren't there for fun and games."

The following summer, 1976, Professor Jeske traveled to Spain to continue the translation work. His work in Spain was very similar to his work in Athens except that in Spain he worked on a level three committee (GED).

Professor Jeske's final involvement in the translation occurred during Christmas break of 1976. In order to participate he had to get permission from the president of the Seminary to be absent from teaching for an extra week after the Christmas break.

Professor Jeske's involvement in the translation of the NIV was an opportunity that comes along once in a lifetime. It was an opportunity for which he is very thankful. He was extremely impressed with the men who worked with him in both Greece and Spain and his association with these men led to some very close friendships.

As a church body we can be thankful that Professor Jeske was able to serve in this way. He was able to bring a conservative, Lutheran perspective to the translation of the NIV. Each time that we read our NIV Old Testament we would do well to thank our God for the gift that he has given us in Professor John Jeske.