



The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible

Sarah Ruden

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A dazzling reconsideration of the original languages and texts of the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments, from the acclaimed scholar and translator of Classical literature ("The best translation of the *Aeneid*, certainly the best of our time" --Ursula Le Guin; "The first translation since Dryden that can be read as a great English poem in itself" --Garry Wills, *The New York Review of Books*) and author of *Paul Among the People* ("Astonishing . . . Superb" --*Booklist*, starred review).

In *The Face of Water*, Sarah Ruden brilliantly and elegantly explains and celebrates the Bible's writings. Singling out the most famous passages, such as the Genesis creation story, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Beatitudes, Ruden reexamines and retranslates from the Hebrew and Greek what has been obscured and misunderstood over time.

Making clear that she is not a Biblical scholar, cleric, theologian, or philosopher, Ruden--a Quaker--speaks plainly in this illuminating and inspiring book. She writes that while the Bible has always mattered profoundly, it is a book that in modern translations often lacks vitality, and she sets out here to make it less a thing of paper and glue and ink and more a live and loving text.

Ruden writes of the early evolution, literary beauty, and transcendent ideals of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, exploring how the Jews came to establish the greatest, most enduring book on earth as their regional strategic weakness found a paradoxical moral and spiritual strength through their writings, and how the Christians inherited and adapted this remarkable literary tradition. She writes as well about the crucial purposes of translation, not only for availability of texts but also for accountability in public life and as a reflection of society's current concerns.

She shows that it is the original texts that most clearly reveal our cherished values (both religious and secular), unlike the standard English translations of the Bible that mask even the yearning for freedom from slavery. The word "redemption" translated from Hebrew and Greek, meaning mercy for the exploited and oppressed, is more abstract than its original meaning--to buy a person back from captivity or slavery or some other distress.

The Face of Water is as much a book about poetry, music, drama, raw humor, and passion as it is about the idealism of the Bible. Ruden's book gives us an unprecedented, nuanced understanding of what this extraordinary document was for its earliest readers and what it can still be for us today

The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible Details

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E says

I really wanted this book to be good, but is kind of a meandering dud. Years from now Ruden will rue that she did not wait until she was older and wiser to write this book.

It is always good to take a fresh look at Biblical passages from a fresh perspective, especially passages we know and love. As a classicist in the Greek and Latin tradition, Ruden has experience in this field, but much of the book is made up of somewhat random observations on various OT and NT texts. Not much depth here, not any clear-cut strategy or philosophy she was trying to impart.

Ruden is a Quaker, which these days means one who believes just about anything. Certainly the type who likes Scripture because it's inspiring, not because it's inspired. She is very wary to take anything at face value, including thousands of years of God's people's wrestling with these texts and forming theology. And it certainly takes a level of chutzpah for one person to attempt to correct 500 years of English Bible translation, but Ruden does not shy away.

At the end of the day, her fresh translations aren't bad. No one will accuse her of being a poetess, but something can be gained from getting the "normal" translation bumped around by something that isn't afraid to dive into the root meanings of words we sometimes take for granted. As someone who craves a "literal" translation, I found things to like in many of her translations. Here's her Psalm 23:

The Lord is the one pasturing me:

I will never go without.

He will always invite me to stretch out in pastures full of green shoots;

He will not fail to guide me to a place of rest, where the water is at peace.

He will bring my life back to me.

He will lead me along wagon-tracks of fair dealing--he would not be who he is if he did otherwise.

I tell you, though I have cause to walk through the valley of deadly darkness, there is nothing fearsome there, nothing for me to fear,

Because of you, you there with me. Your weapon and your crook--I see them, and I know I am safe.

You arrange a feast on a table where I sit, though my enemies loom on the other side.

You refresh my head by bathing it in oil; you fill my cup again and again.

Certainly goodness and unfailing mercy will chase after me everywhere I go, as long as I exist,

And I will live in the Lord's house through all my length of days.

Not bad. One of my biggest pet peeves is "translating" YHWH as "the Lord," and I have no idea why she carries on that tradition/superstition. I do like "unfailing mercy" for *hesed*, although I've always thought "lovingkindness" worked well too.

Matt Miles says

I'm not sure why, but I was expecting more comparisons to the Bible in light of contemporary ancient literature. It's not much of a disappointment, however, because even a deceptively humble focus on meaning

and grammar in the closest possible translations yields beautiful reflections on, to name a few, Revelation, Jonah, and Leviticus/The Good Samaritan that each justifies the purchase of this book. Through discussion, re-translating/re-imagining and showing her work, Sarah Ruden more than makes her case that losing some of the beauty of scripture in its original form takes from the meaning as well. I'm thankful for her effort.

Susan Paxton says

After Ruden's *Paul Among the People* I was really looking forward to this. Unfortunately, the material might have best leant itself to a series of articles; there are some valuable insights to be gleaned but only after a great deal of tedium.

Karl Nehring says

Some interesting points, but overall it just seemed to lack focus.

Raully says

Beginning disclaimer: I don't have the expertise to judge the academic side of this book. But I did really like it.

Sarah Ruden is a translator of classics with a love for the Bible predicated upon her Quaker faith. So she is enough of an outsider to the inbred world of Biblical hermeneutics to cast some fresh light on how the languages of Hebrew and Greek/Aramaic work -- and what is often, so to speak, lost in translation for the modern believer. Well worth the time.

Harry Allagree says

Sarah Ruden is my kind of scholar...not afraid to step outside the discipline in which she's been trained, and apply her skills, in this case in Greek/Hebrew literature, to a recently discovered interest, in this case the Hebrew & Christian Scriptures. A Quaker by background, in 2010 she wrote a terrific book on St. Paul -- her first sally into Scriptural translation -- & recently she translated St. Augustine's "Confessions". In this book she delves into a number of well-known, key passages from the Bible. She goes to great lengths to state that she doesn't fit the slot of "Biblical scholar", but is rather a translator seeking to get as close as possible to what the Hebrew and/or Greek really says in these passages. And in doing so, she'll surprise you with a refreshing & wicked sense of humor. Amazingly what we Christians, especially, have seen all these centuries isn't always quite as accurate as we'd like to believe. Ruden claims no certainty that she captures the "real" flavor of the passages, but IMHO I think she does a great job, though I'm no Biblical scholar or expert either. What she translates, for the most part, grabs you in the heart. However, I must say that, as much as I really like most of her translation of the Prologue to John's Gospel (1:1-14), her use of "Idea" in place of "Word", though probably closer to the actual Greek meaning, just strikes me as too "rational", for want of a better term, & doesn't convey the expressiveness that "Word", in that context, conveys.

I'll go out on a limb by saying that I think Ruden's book should be a "must read" for every preacher-in-training, if for no other reason than simply to enjoy Sarah Ruden's exquisite & delicious translations.

John Fredrickson says

I enjoyed sections of this book, but found it to be uneven, often lacking focus. The early part of the book is the best. In this part, the author explores the difficulties involved in translating the bible. This is very well done; one gets a sense, not only of the times and cultures of the bible, but also of the imprecision of the language (as seen by a translator attempting to render it into English). This is interesting stuff.

The latter part of the book lacks focus. It is an aggregation of material that is intended to be demonstrative of something, but it is not clear to me what that is.

Charles says

Sarah Ruden may be my favorite author. It's not that I've read everything she's written—her main oeuvre is translation of classics such as the "Aeneid," and I find all the classics hard going. (The "Aeneid" is something that you know you *should* read—in college, I read the Cliffs Notes instead, and have felt guilty ever since). It's not that I agree with Ruden on politics (she's a liberal, though a thinking, nuanced one, as far as I can tell) or very closely on religion (she's a devout Quaker, and there is only some overlap there with my Crusader-oriented theology, though we're both Christian). I think that, ultimately, it's two things. First, her work is original and fascinating, which in itself is a great deal. But, combined with the second element, the charm and humor that shines through her work, the reader of her books feels like he's sitting down for a few hours of conversation in a nerdy version of the Dos Equis commercial—the Most Interesting Woman in the World (or second most interesting, after my wife).

Ruden is the author of several works, including "Paul Among The People," a highly original view of the Apostle Paul written largely to correct modern misapprehensions about him, showing the revolutionary nature of his doctrine when set against the real pagan world of his time, as opposed to our sanitized, beautified view of that pagan world. "Paul Among The People" should be required reading for every Christian, no matter his politics or brand of Christianity, for it clarifies why Christianity matters. It shows how radical the message of Christianity was (and is); how our society is, even today, wholly permeated by Christian assumptions; and how unpleasant a society without those assumptions really was (and will be, as we hurtle backwards toward it). At the same time, Ruden's earlier book undermines some of the more simplistic views of some conservative Christians, giving a measure of ammunition to modern Christian liberals. And throughout, Ruden's glittering writing and even-handed approach enhances the book.

That is not this book, though. This book, "The Face of Water," is both less ambitious and more ambitious (and has the same glittering writing as "Paul Among The People"). It is less ambitious in that it has little to say about the modern world or our society today; it does not, at least directly, instruct us how to live or how to view the day-to-day world. It is more ambitious in that any new Biblical translator assumes an awesome responsibility. After all, to believers, you are presuming to offer a new view into the actual Word of God, and for a non-believer, the Bible is by far the most important and influential book in human history, and you are presuming to offer something new, that nobody else has offered before.

Ruden is not translating the whole Bible here, of course. Her project is to show, through showing exactly how she translates certain key passages, and why she does it in a certain manner, the meaning of the passages in as deep a way as possible. The object is for the reader to fully understand these parts of the Bible, and to grasp a certain way of seeing the “beauty and meaning” of the Bible. Ruden begins, in her Introduction, with a variety of thoughts about the Bible. She starts with a subtle, detailed and empathetic comparison of the Hebrew and English versions of David’s reaction to his infant son’s death in II Samuel 12:23, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” Her basic point is that the English translation of the phrase, though twice as long in words, is less richly textured than the Hebrew, because (among other reasons), it “has a flattened-out rendering of the tenses.” In Hebrew, the child will never return—but the father will keep moving toward the child. And so forth. This is the basic mode of the book—concentrated grammatical and vocabulary focus on relatively narrow passages of the Bible through the prism of the original languages.

From here, Ruden establishes a few of her background principles. The absolute historicity of the Biblical account is not all that important, because “[N]o book has experienced such a long, aerobic winnowing of its claims to be revealed truth, and to be truth revealed in the proper forms. . . . I see absolutely no conflict between acknowledging that the production of Scripture is a fallible (if not pathetic) human process and believing that, over time, Scripture reveals God’s will.” The canonical books of the Bible are there for good reasons that are not self-interested; books supposedly suppressed like the “Gnostic Gospels” were not included for good reason and were not “censored.” And, finally, translations may not be perfect, and they may lose many elements of the original, but that does not mean we should despair or whine, for they’re what we have, and they’re actually quite good, being the result of a lot of dedicated, smart people working over a very long period of time.

Against this backdrop Ruden examines several specific passages, from both the Old and New Testaments. These include the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12:7); the Lord’s Prayer (in its two versions); Genesis 1:1-5; John 1:1-14 (“In the beginning was the Word . . .”); the vision of Ezekiel and the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14); the witness of martyrs in paradise (Revelation 7:9-17); the Twenty-Third Psalm; the Beatitudes; and a few more.

For each passage, in Part One, she discusses what she regards as key points, both in the abstract and as viewed, where applicable, against the classical and historical background. For example, she ties “temptation” in the Lord’s Prayer not into its standard modern meaning, but rather to “examination,” under torture, by Roman persecutors. In Part Two, she returns to each passage with a full re-translation, by her, of each one, showing the King James version and her own translation, which while not always euphonious, is meant to convey the meaning as Ruden thinks best—most effective and truest to the original. Finally, in Part Three, she compares the King James for some of the passages to a literal translation of the original language of the passage, shown and translated word-for-word.

Despite Ruden’s leavening of it by humor and chatty asides, this is a dense book, where the reader benefits from close focus and re-reading passages. This is not a book that can be skimmed or read in a few hours of diffident attention; like the Bible itself, it rewards the patient and recursive reader. For example, and related to the title, Ruden spends a long time on Genesis 1:2. First, she establishes that where the Bible tells us that “darkness was upon the face of the deep,” here “deep” is a Hebrew word implying “subterranean water or an abyss, or the fathomless depths of the sea—in any case a horrifying place suggesting the roaring, numbing, consciousness-robbing, subduing underworld bodies of water or bottomless chasms of pagan mythology. . . . not just emptiness or disorder but an ongoing primal catastrophe that preceded God’s creative activity but was subdued by his power.” Thus, when the next phrase is “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” in Hebrew, the spirit “doesn’t just ‘move’ over the water: it hovers or broods or cherishes, like a bird over its eggs or hatchlings.”

The natural reaction to reading this is some degree of confusion on the part of the reader, who doesn't quite understand how relatively simple English words can have been more flexible in Hebrew (or, to a lesser extent, Greek). The answer is, as Ruden covers in detail, that Hebrew has a much smaller vocabulary than English—but much more possibility of combinations, “to create structures of great size, diversity, and nuance,” which, combined with that it's an inflected language, give it a flexibility, and sometimes ambiguity, that is simply not found in English.

One thing that becomes very clear through this book is how very many translations of the Bible there are, backed by enormous dictionaries that analyze the classical languages (Hebrew and Greek) in which the Bible was originally written, with both surrounded by endless works of exegesis and analysis. The average Christian is probably aware of five or ten translations (the King James, of course, which is Ruden's default choice here “because of its beauty and familiarity”; various “Revised” and “Standard” versions that are hard to distinguish; perhaps some dated “contemporary” versions; and, for those a bit more adventuresome, maybe Douay-Rheims). From Ruden's bibliography and her casual references to academic reference works, the reader quickly becomes aware there is a lot out there—which is daunting, but if the reader is interested, worth pursuing.

For a counterpoint to Biblical translation that Ruden does not mention at all, one might consider the Qur'an. That book has experienced no “winnowing” at all, much less a “long, aerobic” one. Exegesis by those with a more flexible view of Christian doctrine, and textual criticism by those who may not be believers at all, underpins much of the modern view of the Bible (along with the much longer tradition of exegesis by those without a flexible view of Christian doctrine). Certainly, there are many who reject such collective exegesis and analysis, in favor of the supremacy of (generally untutored) individual interpretation, including such extreme versions as “King James Onlyists,” who believe that the King James translation was itself divinely inspired and is inerrant. Naturally enough, viewing the Bible as an organic whole yet in some ways pasted together, for example seeing the Book of Daniel as not prophetic and written at the time of Babylonian Captivity, but rather as written centuries later, during the time of the Maccabees, has its challenges to faith. But there is no reason a believing Christian, whether traditionally orthodox or more, um, supple, can't combine wholehearted belief in Christian doctrine with a modern approach to Biblical translation and analysis.

This is, for better or worse, in sharp contrast to Muslim practice, where any textual analysis that involves novelty of any sort is banned and can get you killed, which is why the extremely few scholars who analyze the Qur'an as the Bible is routinely analyzed often hide their identities (e.g., the pseudonymic Christoph Luxenberg). Of course, the majority Muslim position is that the Qur'an is uncreated, which is different than the Christian position that the Bible is divinely inspired, and that suggests that textual analysis, at least of the Qur'an in Arabic, is nonsensical for a devout Muslim, like saying one can have a square circle. On the other hand, the created hadith are also not subject to objective analysis in Islam, other than for their chains of transmission (isnad), and the hadith are more important for actual Muslim doctrine than the Qur'an. Given that there is little to zero extra-Qur'anic evidence for the existence of Muhammad, and that the Qur'an in its current form antedates Muhammad (due to Uthman's compilation of an “official” version and the destruction of all other proto-documentation), this seems like an area ripe for study. I wouldn't hold your breath, though, waiting for it. But it would be interesting.

In any case, whatever your religion, this book has a lot to offer. It probably has less to offer atheists, but even they should still find this book of interest, given that the Bible is the common inheritance and (increasingly invisible) skeleton on which our culture is hung. Thus, whatever your perspective, you will be the richer for having read this book.

Laura says

I started this book with pencil and notebook in hand, anticipating taking many notes. I have been listening to Tim Mackie's podcasts (The Bible Project) about Hebrew poetry and have grown super interested in the challenges and opportunities of translating poetry from one language to another effectively.

But after awhile I stopped trying to take notes, because I realized Sarah Rueden wasn't actually going to teach me how to translate Hebrew or Greek. She couldn't possibly do that. I had hoped that what I read here would transfer to helping me a better reader of the scriptures elsewhere, and I assumed it would do that by teaching me some linguistic tools and skills. It WILL make me a better reader, but not because of tools or skills; it will help me simply because now I have a healthier respect for how immensely difficult it is to grasp a "dead" language (one that no one currently speaks anyhow) and appreciate the many nuances of meaning. I won't be quite so quick to say "Oh, this is what this word *means* in Hebrew" because I will know that even scholars better learned than I can't quite pin down precisely how a word was used or the feelings it evoked in its listeners. I learned how little I know.

And I enjoyed it. Sarah Ruden pulls together a Hebrew passage and a Greek passage that either present similar challenges in translation, or mirror one another in some way. And that alone is worth the price of this book. Her insight into scripture, her honest assessments of how different translation options will land on the ears of English speakers, and her deep regard for the beauty of biblical languages all make this book rich. She is a little idiosyncratic in some of her references and sometimes appears to be heading off the beaten path in her writing, but I really appreciated her rather unacademic and inviting approach to sharing the challenges of translation. I'm tempted to go back and read it again just to appreciate her wit once more.

Theresa says

A valuable book on so many counts!

As Ruden says at the outstart, she is not a theologian or a pastor or anything of the sort. She is a classics translator, Greek and Latin texts. In that capacity, she 'stumbled onto Paul of Tarsus's letters and began to learn Biblical Greek'. Further, she recognized that to some degree we define ourselves in relation to the Bible, whether we mean to or not. She decided to learn Hebrew as well, and the result is this book.

When I was a theology student, I balked at the language requirements, reasoning that no matter that I passed the courses, I would never be good enough in those languages to translate in any truly adequate way. This book affirms that in my case, and at the same time corrects my thinking that learning them wouldn't matter beyond fulfilling academic requirements.

Far from stuffy, Ruden writes for any reader who loves language. Or who is curious about the Bible, maybe. Or who simply enjoys learning how we have arrived here culturally speaking. It illustrates the art of translating in such a straightforward way that you can't fail to get an appreciation for the meaning and beauty of the Bible.

A key point is that ancient languages are not like modern ones, serving mainly to convey information...

Rather, biblical texts, like all ancient rhetoric and poetry, are 'primarily a set of live performances, and what they meant was tightly bound up in the WAY they meant it'.

An example of this is the story of Jonah, which is a comedy in the Hebrew. How many times have I heard or

read that story, and missed the fun of it.

My favorite part of Ruden's book is Part 1, on grammar, vocabulary, voice, style, poetry. It sets the stage for Parts 2 and 3, in which she offers her translations side by side with the traditional King James version.

In the end, you have not only a much better appreciation of the art of translation, but in her illustrations, you will have been offered an overwhelming feeling for the transcendent beauty of the Bible.

I loved reading this book.

Judy says

A Greek scholar examines some of the most well-known stories and passages in the Bible: Genesis 1, John 1, 23rd Psalm, Beatitudes, David & Bathsheba and the Lord's Prayer, even sections of Ezekiel and Revelation. Some of this sailed right past me, yet she is a good writer whose commentary is eye-opening.

Jeremy says

Before picking up this book from the library, I had been reading the gospel according to John. For the first time, I noticed the theme of water throughout the book: there is the water of baptism, the miracle of water into wine, the living water Jesus described to the Samaritan woman, and the pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the lame man who was unable to get into the water, among other examples. On the same day I told my brother-in-law how I had noticed this theme, I walked into the library to return some other books and I noticed *The Face of Water* standing up on a shelf, standing out from the other books. On the inside flap it stated that the author is a Quaker and I had also been reading a lot about the Quakers, so I figured I had to read this book. I had high hopes of really enjoying it, but it was just okay.

The author's stated purpose is to "bring a fuller and more nuanced discussion of the Bible into the public sphere, where it belongs." To be honest, the writing style is often dense, difficult to follow, and sometimes impenetrable. Although she states she wants to bring discussion into the public sphere, the ideal readership of this work may be translators in general or biblical translators in particular. I can't recommend this to a general audience, or even to a general Christian audience interested in biblical commentary or study.

Big Ideas:

- + Problems/challenges with biblical translation
- Sometimes the historical context is unclear or uncertain
- Ancient Hebrew has a much smaller vocabulary than English, which means that one word can have multiple meanings and proper understanding depends greatly on context
- Forms of grammar and syntax in Hebrew and Greek are different from English, for example: conjunctions (and, but) and prepositions (on, after) function differently in Ancient Hebrew and are often lacking, which

means that the exact way in which words are connected is not always clear. According to the author, this means the writing is not pre-sorted by human rationality but is closer to a description of things as they are, without judgment, leaving the reader to sort it out. Just consider the difference between “I like you, but” compared to “I like you, and...”

+ Interesting tidbit (which everyone but me probably already knew)

- Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, which split from the northern kingdom called Israel, the capital of which was Samaria. Eventually the entire Jewish territory came to be known as Israel

+ Examples of nuanced ways to understand certain passages anew:

- In the Lord’s prayer, “our daily bread” is more like “our daily ration of bare subsistence” and “lead us not into temptation” is more like “spare us from having to defend our faith by trial and unto death by the Romans.” The passage beginning with “for Thine is the kingdom” seems to have been added later by early translators and is not found in original manuscripts.

- In the gospel of John, the “word” at the beginning is more like “the light of Truth that explains the whole purpose of existence”

- In Ezekiel’s dry bones, the ruach of God seems to function in many ways: as a spirit hand guiding the prophet (and blurring the lines between the spirit and physical realms), and as either a spirit breath animating soldiers or a wind filling them with life

- In Psalm 23, it’s more like, “He will guide me to a place of rest, where I can quench my thirst, and where the water is at peace.” And “He restores my soul” is more like, “He causes my life force to return.”

Rama says

Bible: The translation and reinterpretation of selected passages

Author Sarah Ruden takes a fresher look at the translation of selected texts from the ancient Hebrew version of Old and New Testaments. The commonly used Bible is the King James Version (KJV) that is largely focused on religious and theological meaning rather than the cultural and historical significance of the texts. In the last fifty years, Biblical scholars have challenged the idea that New Testament is a sacred scripture. John Dominic Crossan, Robert Funk, James R. Butts, Barnes Tatum and Elaine Pagels have used historical and cultural methods to interpret Jesus’ parables and apostolic writings. This group created “Jesus Seminar” to discuss the Gospels, Epistles, and Parables of Jesus to understand the real Jesus. However the church had the drive to find “God” in these writings, hence many translators and commentators “overlook” smaller details that may have given a different meaning to the texts of the “sacred scripture.”

Christianism arose when a small group of Jews became convinced that their leader, a poor and relatively uneducated man from the tiny town of Nazareth (a back-water of the Galilee), whom the Romans tortured to death as a troublemaker had risen from death. He is known to have paid with his own life for the sins of others. How can another man pay for our sins? Is that logical or rational? Could we tell the judge that someone will pay for our crimes? No, we cannot. God judges in the same way. We have to assume responsibility for our own actions. But for more than two billion people this is a divine truth; we have to accept Jesus as a savoir so that all our sins are forgiven. Then we are reborn and will find ever lasting peace in heaven (John 3:16.)

The first Bible translated by Jerome into the Latin version (Vulgate) occurred almost 500 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Martin Luther’s Bible in German was published in the early sixteenth century. William

Tyndale lost his life popularizing the sacred scriptures as the Word of God, and everyone has the right to read it. This was a revolutionary thought for those days but the publication of the King James Version of Bible in 1611 challenged the monopoly of Roman Catholic Church on the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

One interesting conclusion reached by the author is with regards to Paul and his epistles. The first four Pauline epistles in conjunction with the four canonical gospels forms a major work in the teachings of Jesus, but she boldly suggests that Paul did not write about willingness to “give up my body to be burned” (1 Corinthians 13:3.) It is really give up my body so that I can boast about it. But that is not what came out of the pulpit, observes Sarah Ruden. Paul is discussed in greater detail in her previous book, “Paul among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time.”

Some of the passages translated in this book includes; Paul on circumcision (Galatians 5:1-12); Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21 and Leviticus 19:18); fragile joys of life (Ecclesiastes 9:7-11); Ezekiel’s Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Genesis 1:1-15); the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel II 12:7); The beatitudes of (Mathew 5:3-12); Genesis 1:1-5; and Mathew 6: 9-13 (The Lord’s Prayer).

There is a chapter on the re-interpretation of the Parables of Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), which concludes that you must know who your friends are. Paul on the love of God through Jesus (Roman 8:31-39) and Revelation’s Martyr’s in Paradise (Revelation 7:9-17) are few interesting translations and interpretations I have read in this book. Proverbs 27:19 says, “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man,” which may have played a role in the mind of the author for the title of this book.

Stven says

Even though this text strays into extremely wonky-detail territory for many a long stretch, I like the approach the author is taking and a lot of it I find fascinating. This is not merely a selection of Biblical passages freshly translated but a patient discussion of the means, methods, challenges and pitfalls of attempting Biblical translation. "Don't be like me," she writes, "sitting in Beginning Hebrew class during the fourth week of the term and becoming convinced that this was all a practical joke, and that at any moment the teacher would whip out the real, logical rules...."

Much illumination was found herein, and I recommend this book to anyone interested in examining meaning in the Bible. The author's tone of voice is relatively light (but not precious or cute, a trap some writers fall into when trying not to sound too academic) and her train of thought nicely plain and followable.

Donald says

Review forthcoming (in First Things, hopefully).
