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A Comparative Study of Metanoeite in Matthew 3:2 in Greek New Testament, Ga, Asante-Twi And Fante Translations

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ABSTRACT: The Bible is the word of God written in human language. It is made up of the Old Testament originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament originally in Greek. There is the need to translate the Bible into other languages for people all over the world to hear God speak to them in their own languages. The focus of this work is on how the word *metanoeite* (metanoeite; repent)in Matthew 3:2 has been translated in the Ga, Asante-Twi, and the Fante Bible. In translation *metanoeite*, the Ga Bible use *nye tsakea nyetsui* meaning, 'have a change of heart'; the Fante translation use hom nnu homho which means 'regret'; and the Asante-Twi translations use mon nya adwenesakyera meaning, 'have a change of mind'. The researchers set out to find out whether the translation of *metanoeite(metanoeite)* into these mother-tongues will generate new meanings. The methodology used was Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics approach which requires an exegesis of the text and contact with the indigenous speakers of the languages to get insights into the usage of the terms. The findings were that: most of the Ga speaking people used *tsuitsakemo* (change of heart; a verbal noun). Others suggested efonfeemo segblamo (withdrawing the sin one has committed; which is a noun), kumo otsui (be remorseful for sin committed, which is an imperative. The Fante respondents used adwenesakyera meaning 'change of mind; a verbal-noun). The Asante-Twi respondents like the Fante, said that 'repent' should be translated as adwenesakyera. The Asante-Twi and Fante readers did not generate any term for 'repent' because of the fear that they might be changing what is written in the Bible. The Ga respondents on the other hand, said kumo otsui better explains 'repent'. The finding of the research has therefore added to the translation and interpretation of Matthew 3:2 from the Ghanaian/African perspective. It is being recommended that the Bible Society of Ghana should consider the finding of this research in the future revision of the Ga Bible.

KEY WORDS: Bible translation, mother tongue biblical hermeneutics, repent, Matthew 3:2

I. INTRODUCTION

Bible translation is the art and practice of rendering the Bible into languages other than those in which it was originally written (Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew). ¹To some scholars such as Nida, the Bible translation primarily involves the rendition of the biblical text from the original language into a receptor language². It is an approach to missionary work in which the major missionary activity is translating the Bible (or parts of it) into the mother tongue of those being evangelized to enable them read it with understanding³. In trying to translate the bible into the mother-tongues of those being evangelised, sometimes due to differences such as location, languages, audience, point of view and time between the writer and the reader there are some misinterpretations which occur. At times there are difficulties in getting the exact word to give the original meaning of the text and this leads to misinterpretation, misconception and confusion since the receivers are not able to get the original meaning intended for the readers. In Ghana the Bible has been translated into Asante-Twi, Ewe, Fante, Ga, Akuapem-Twi and many others. According to Ype Schaaf, the earliest local translations were the Ga, Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse and the Ewe. Portions of the Bible were first translated into Ga, Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse and Ewe in 1843, 1859, 1896 and 1858 respectively⁴. New Testament translations were published in 1859, 1863, 1896 and 1877 respectively. The complete translations of the whole Bible into Ga, Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse and Ewe

¹ Melissa Petruzzello, "Biblical Translation", *Britannica*, accessed March 13, 2019.

² E. A. Nida, The paradoxes of translation, *The Bible Translator*, 42(2a), 1991. p. 5.

³ Thomas Ahiel. Bible translation in Christian Mission. Pietermaritzburg, 2004, South Africa

⁴ Schaaf Ype., *on their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible on Africa,* Revised ed., Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002. p. 89.

were achieved in 1866, 1871, 1948 and 1913 respectively.⁵ However, in 1964 the Twi Bible (referring to the Akuapem-Twi version of the Bible which was used by all the Akan speaking people) was revised into the Asante-Twi and Akuapem-Twi, with slightly different orthographies.⁶ The main focus of this research is how the word *repent* was translated into the Ga, Asante-Twi and the Fante Bibles.

The Ashanti or Asante are a major ethnic group in Ghana. They were apowerful, militaristic, and highly disciplined people of West Africa. Theancient Ashanti migrated from the vicinity of the north western Niger Riverafter the fall of the Ghana Empire in the 13th century.⁷Around the 13th century AD, the Ashanti and various other Akan peoplesmigrated into the forest belt of present-day Ghana and established small states in the hilly country around present-day Kumasi. During the height of the MaliEmpire the Ashanti, and Akan people in general, became wealthy through thetrading of gold mined from their territory. Early in Ashanti history, this goldwas traded with the greater Ghana and Mali Empires.

The Ga people occupy the South-eastern coast of Ghana. The present location stretches from the Atlantic coast in the south and to the foot of the Akuapem Togoland hills in the north, and from *Larjma* in the west to Tema in the east⁸. They are bordered on the east by the Dangme, a group that has close association with respect to language and historical evolution to the Ga, and on the west by the Fanti, who have also influenced the Ga in a number of ways⁹. The Ga State is made up of six communities namely Ga Mashie (Accra central), Osu (Christianborg), La (Labadi), Teshie, Nungua and Tema.

Fante also spelled as Fanti, people of the southern coast of Ghana between Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi. They speak a dialect of Akan, a language of the¹⁰ Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Oral tradition states that the Fante migrated from Techiman in what is now the north-western Asante region. During the 17th century; they established several autonomous kingdoms that later joined in the Fante confederacy¹¹. With the Bible in Fante, parts were translated and published in 1896, and the full Bible in 1948.

II. METHODOLOGY

Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics¹²as a method of this study borrows from several fields of study which includes Biblical studies, Bible translation studies and language studies (i.e. Ancient or classical Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek) along with local Ghanaian languages. The methodology uses a five step approach to arrive at its end: The first is to identify a biblical text that has wrongly been translated into one's mother-tongue with the second step outlining a discussion on why the translated text is problematic. The third step gives explanation of the methodology to be used and its proponents, while in the fourth step Bible study resources such as commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, word study helps among others are used in the exegetical study of the text. The fifth step surveys the various interpretations of the text in question by scholars and their reasons for such interpretation.

Exegesis of Matthew 3:2

Matthew 3:2 is the second verse of the third chapter of the gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Matthew introduces us to one of the characters of the New Testament. This was the John born to Zachariah and Elizabeth whose miraculous birth to this too old couple was announced along with his call to be the forerunner of the messiah in Luke 1.¹³ Repent was the first word of John the Baptist's gospel, it was the first word of Jesus' gospel (Matthew 4:14), the first word in the preaching ministry of the twelve disciple (Mark 6:12) and the first word in the preaching instructions Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:46-47).¹⁴ Also repent was the first word of exhortation in the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38). And it was the first word in the mouth of Apostle Paul through his ministry (Acts 26:19-20) Johns message was a call to repentance. John told his listeners to make a change of conduct and be reformed in order not to miss the kingdom of heaven. Matthew's use of the word heaven is seen as a reflection of the sensibilities of the Jewish audience this gospel

⁵Schaaf Ype., on their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible on Africa, Revised ed.

⁶ Schaaf Ype., on their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible on Africa, Revised ed.

⁷ Edgerton, Robert B: *Fall of the Asante Empire: The Hundred Year War for Africa's Gold Coast*. Free Press, 1995

⁸ Ammah, E.A, 'Annual festival of the Ga People', *The Ghanaian*, Vol. 4, No. 38 Aug 1961, p. 9

⁹ Ammah, E.A, 'Annual festival of the Ga People', *The Ghanaian*, Vol. 4, No. 38 Aug 1961, p. 9

¹⁰ Schaaf Ype., On their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible on Africa

¹¹ African art: Asante, Fante, and Baule 2018 Encyclopaedia Britannia, Inc.

¹² Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Doing African Biblical Studies with Mother-Tongue Biblical

Hermeneutics Approach," All Nations University Journal of Applied Thoughts, Vol. 1, No. 1 2012. p.55-75.

¹³ Clark W. Howard. "The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers" a Historical Introduction to the First Gospel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. p.1.

¹⁴ David Guzik. "Study Guide for Matthew 3." The Ministry of John the Baptist. Blue Letter Bible Institue. 2

was directed to.¹⁵ This text was therefore to tell the Jews that their much awaited Messiah will soon come and so they must repent in order not to miss the kingdom that he will present to them when he come.

Morphological and Syntactical Analysis of Matthew 3:2¹⁶

Îkai. Đ le,gwn\ metanoei/te\ h;g
giken ga.r h` basilei,a tw/n ouvranw/nÅ [and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." NIV].
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Greek word	Meaning	Function
Îkai.Đ	And, even, also	Conjunction coordinating
le,gwn	To say, speak	Verb participle present active nominative masculine singular
metanoei/te	To repent	Verb imperative present active 2 nd person plural
h;ggiken	to come near	Verb indicative perfect active 3 rd person singular
ga.r	For	Conjunction coordinating
h	The	Definite article nominate feminine singular
basilei,a	A kingdom	Noun nominative feminine singular common
tw/n	The	Definite Article genitive masculine plural
ouvranw/nÅ	Heaven	Noun genitive masculine plural common

Analysis of the Greek Text

An understanding of Matthew 3:2 depends on understanding what the words *legoon*, *metanoeite*, *heggiken*, *basileia*, and *ouranoon* mean in context.

Legoon: this is the verb participle present active nominative masculine singular of legoo (to speak or to say).¹⁸ The verse 2 of Matthew chapter 3 is a continuation of verse 1. The verse 1 spoke of how John the Baptist came to the Desert of Judea to preach, therefore the *saying* (legoon) at the beginning of verse 2 shows that whatever comes after the *saying* were the words spoken by John the Baptist and that is why the words in the verse 2 are in quotation marks.

Metanoeite: this is the verb imperative present active 2^{nd} person plural.¹⁹ Imperative here signifies a command. The word in the Greek signifies a changing of our minds and hearts from evil to better.²⁰ The word used here implies a total alteration in the mind, a change in the judgment, disposition and affections, another and a better soul. That is to consider your ways, change your minds, you have thought amiss; think again and think aright. The change of the mind produces a change of the way and that is gospel repentance.²¹ Therefore *metanoeite* as was used in this context is a command used by John for evangelical purpose to tell the Jews to change from their evil ways and that was why he used it in the 2^{nd} person plural.²²

Basileia ouranoon: the kingdom of heaven; the phrase is used by Matthew about thirty times in the Gospel and New Testament. The name as descriptive of the kingdom of the Messiah had its origin in the vision of Daniel 7:1, where the kingdom of "one like the Son of Man"²³ is contrasted with those of earthly rulers²⁴. The kingdom implies the dominion of a king over his subjects, so the kingdom of heaven is God's reigning in and over his rational creatures. The kingdom of heaven is a familiar use among the Jews as appears from diverse passages of the gospels. They seemed to have borrowed them from the above mentioned book of Daniel which they wholly misunderstood and misinterpreted, inferring from them that god will erect a temporal kingdom the seat of which would be at Jerusalem, the capital of the world. The expected sovereign of this kingdom, they learned from

¹⁵ David Guzik. "Study Guide for Matthew 3."

¹⁶ Bible Works 6.

¹⁷ Bibleworks, "Matthew 3:2". NIV.

¹⁸ BNT Bible Works.

¹⁹BNT Bible Works.

²⁰ Beza Theodore. "Commentary on Matthew 3:2". *The 1599 Geneva Study Bible*, 1599-1645.

²¹ Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, BibleHub Matthew 3:2.

²²Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary, BibleHub Matthew 3:2.

²³Ellicott's commentary for English readers.

²⁴ Ellicott's commentary for English readers.

Daniel, to call the Son of Man, by which title they understood the promised Messiah, or the anointed one of God. 25

Heggiken: is at hand; it is to be noted that the Kingdom to which John referred to was in the future but near. It did not begin with Abraham, David or even with John the Baptiste. It is therefore not an earthly kingdom and hence must have a King sent from heaven.²⁶ And this is why they must repent because the King will soon come and it will be unfortunate on their path to meet him unprepared.

Exegesis of Statements in he New Testament and Gospels Expressing "Metanoeite"

Metanoeite appears three times in the New Testaments as well as the Gospels. It was first used in Matthew 3:2 by John the Baptist. It was a command used by John the Baptist to tell the people to change from their evil ways. This was a command which applies to anyone who wants to be right with God. At this point John the Baptist was playing his role as the forerunner. He was trying to put the people on the right path before the Messiah comes. The second time *metanoeite* was used was in Matthew 4:17, this time around it was used by Jesus Christ during his preaching. He made this command after his temptation in the wilderness. After His temptation he learnt that John has been arrested so he returns to Galilee. Upon returning, he started preaching and commanded the people to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.²⁷ This was actually the beginning of his ministry. The third *metanoeite* which is the last in the New Testament and the Gospel can be found in Mark 1:15, this passage is parallel to the passage in Matthew 4:17. This command here was given after the temptation of Jesus Christ, commanding the people to turn a new leaf as the kingdom of heaven is near. Therefore from the three passages mentioned, *metanoeite* is said to be a 2nd person plural of the verb *metanuw* which is used as a command.

Meaning of Matthew 3:2

"Repent," This is a present imperative which is a command. Without repentance, it is impossible to be saved. The Hebrew equivalent means "to change one's actions," while the Greek word means "to change one's mind."²⁸ It implies a willingness to change. Salvation therefore requires faith in Christ and repentance. John's ministry was one of spiritual preparation for the coming of Jesus the Messiah and His message. Jesus also called on His hearers to repent (cf. Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).

"for the kingdom of heaven" Matthew, writing to Jews, is sensitive to their aversion to using God's name, so he uses an indirect phrase, "kingdom of heaven", whereas the other Synoptic Gospels use "kingdom of God" (Matthew used "kingdom of heaven" 32 times and " kingdom of God" only 4)²⁹. The Kingdom of God refers in an Old Testament sense, to the reign of God, not to a geographical area. That is God is King of all creation.

"Is near"; this is a perfect tense verb which describes the culmination and continuing results of a process started earlier. The nearness of the kingdom is stressed in the. "Near" can be understood in one of two ways: (1) near in location or (2) near in time (Matt. 12:28).³⁰ It describes the time between the two comings of Jesus Christ.

Analysis of the Text in Ga, Fante, and Asante Twi

Analysis in Ga Text

*ni ekee ake, Nye, tsakea nyetsui; shi ŋwei maŋtseyeli le ebeŋke*³¹ (and he said that, you should have a change of heart; for the kingdom of heaven is near). *ni ekee ake* this signifies the words of someone, or that someone is about to be quoted. Thus whatever follows are the exact words spoken by John the Baptiste. *nye* this here is referring to the 2^{nd} person plural (you) which means that he was referring to a group of people. *tsakea nyetsui* also signifies a change of heart. This represent *metanoeite* in Ga, but in this context the translator used change of heart. *shi ŋwei maŋtseyeli le ebeŋke* for the kingdom of heaven is near. This statement made here is dependent on the previous message which is for the people to have a change of heart. This is in a way to say that having a change of heart is a necessity for one before the kingdom of heaven comes. Therefore, the Ga Bible's particular word for repent is change of heart. Therefore, it can be concluded that for one to attain the kingdom of heaven he/she must repent and this repentance is marked by having a change of heart.

Analysis of the Text in Fante

*Na osee de, Hom nnu homho, na osor ahenman no aben.*³² (And he said that, you should regret your action, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand)

²⁵ Benson Gledon "Commentary on Matthew 3:2" Benson's Note on the New Testament.

²⁶ Barton Johnson W. "Commentary on Matthew 3:2". People's New Testament.

²⁷ John Lightfoot. "Commentary on Mattew 3:2". John Lightfoot's Commentary on the Gospels.

²⁸ Matthew Henry. "Commentary on Matthew 3:2". Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary.

²⁹ Albert Barnes. "Commentary on Matthew 3:2". Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

³⁰Bob Utley. "The First Christian Primer: Matthew". Bible Lesson International. 2013.

³¹Dmale Krokron (The Bible in Ga). United Bible Societies/Bible Society of Ghana, 2006.

³²Nwoma Kronkron. (The Bible in Fante). United Bible Societies/Bible Society of Ghana, 1948.

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Na ssee de; this statements indicates that what the writer is about to say are words spoken by someone (John the Baptiste). *Hom* in the passage illustrates that John the Baptiste was talking to some people and not just one person and that is why he used the 2nd person plural (You). *nnu* in Fante means to regret an action. That is to be remorseful for doing something bad. *homho* means yourselves. This implies that those listening to him should regret themselves (that is their evil ways or their bad deeds). *na soor ahenman no aben* (for the kingdom of heaven is near). The use of "na" (for) indicates a conjunction, it means that His audience need to regret their action because the kingdom of God is near. The *soor* means heaven/ upwards, *ahenman* means kingdom. Thus *soor ahenman* together means the kingdom of heaven. *no aben* means is near. When these words are put together, it tells that John was commanding his listeners to regret their bad deeds for failure to do that will make them miss the kingdom of heaven which is near.

Analysis of the Text in Asante-Twi

se: Monsakyera mo adwene; na osoro ahennie no aben.³³

se; means "that". In this passage it stands for an introduction to a statement or quotation from someone. *Monsakyera;* means "You change", the You here is in it plural form. So John is preaching that they should change. *Momeans* "Your" that is to say something that belongs to someone, or is related to you. *Adwene*means mind. That is the ability for rational thought. *Na*means (for), it indicates a conjunction, it means that His audience need to have a change of mind because the kingdom of heaven is near. *osoro ahennie no aben:osoro*means heaven, *ahennie;* this symbolises a kingdom which is ruled by a King. *no aben;* is near, or to be close by. *Monsakyera mo adwene; na osoro ahennie no aben.* Together this means that those John the Baptiste was referring to were to have a change of mind for the kingdom of heaven is near. That is to say that in order for them to have access to the kingdom at hand they must have a change of mind. Thus the Asante word for *metanoeite* is *adwenesakyera*

WhatFante, Asante-Twi andGa Bible Readers Say About Metanoeite

According to the data representation, all the respondents who speak Fante used words different from the one used in the Fante Bible to refer to the word repent. Most of them used the word *adwensakyera* or *sakyera* or *nsakyera*. It should be noted that none of them came up with the word *hom nnu homho*. But they all try to explain why it was used and not any of the words they provided, and they eventually end up saying that is the best word with the exception of few people who did not agree that it is the best word to be used in the Fante Bible. Some of them suggested that the best word to be used is *adwensakyera* whereas others advocated for the current one (*hom nnu homho*) to be maintained. Those who wants it to be maintained admonished that the Bible is sacred therefore irrespective of the discrepancies in it, no change should be made to it.

Secondly, most of the respondents who speak Asante-Twi pronounce repent as it is written in the Asante-Twi Bible, and few of them use *sakyera*. It is evident from their response that their answers were influenced by what is written in the Bible. When asked as to why that particular word and not any other word, they explain that repentance must first be from the mind before the heart will accept it. They mostly end their explanation by saying that that is what is written in the Bible and that is what makes it perfect. They argue that they did not use change of heart or being remorseful as was written in other Bibles because that is how the Asante also pronounce their word.

Finally, most of the respondents who speak Ga had varying views on the pronunciation of repent in Ga. They used words such as *dzadzemɔ*, *tsakemɔ* and *tsuitsakemɔ*. But with the exception of two respondents who do not think change of heart is the best word to represent repent in the Ga Bible, the rest agreed with what is written in the Bible. Most of them agree with what is written in the Bible because they believe the Bible is sacred, and everything written in it comes from God therefore whatever word is used in it is the best. Those who did not agree with what is written in the Bible argue that repent goes beyond just having a change of heart. Rather it begins with the person realising that he has done something bad, and then accepting it in his heart and finally making up his mind to change his ways, this way it reflects in the person's actions and character that he has changed. Some recommended words such as *efonfeemo segblamo*, *kuumo otsui and dzadzemo*.

Findings

From the data representation, the researchers found that even though *hom nnu hom hu* is what is written as repent in the Fante Bible, the words they all use as repent is *adwenesakyera*, *sakyera or nsakyera*. Thus nobody used *hom nnu homho* to mean repent. Also, most of the people who speak Asante-Twi used *adwenesakyera* which is the same word used in the Asante-Twi Bible. And this informs the researchers that the people have accepted the word used in the Bible. Most of the Ga speaking people used *tsakemɔ* and *tsuitsakemɔ* (*verbalnoun*). There were some who did not agree so they suggested *efɔnfeemɔ* segblamɔ, kuumɔ otsui(an imperative - to be remorseful for a sin committed, feel it in your heart and make one's mind to change it) and *dzadzemɔ* to be used in place of repent in the Ga Bible. The researcher seeskuumɔ otsui as the best word to mean repent. This is because this word does not only deal with the heart; repentance begins with the person being remorseful, that is,

³³*Twer* Kronkron (The Bible in Asante-Twi). United Bible Societies/Bible Society of Ghana, 1931.

the person truly regrets his action in a way that he or she feels it in his or her heart because in biblical psychology the heart is the seat of all emotions. Having felt this way, the person eventually makes up his or her mind to change his or her attitudes. And this is why this word is seen to be the perfect word for repent in Ga. Thus it gives the exact meaning of the word repent.

Despite their different views, most of the respondents in all the three languages acknowledged that the Bible is sacred and that whatever is written in it must be maintained without making changes to it. Therefore, even though they know that some of the translation are difficult to put together to make sense, they still use it as it is. Others also believe in trying to get an equivalent meaning of the original text makes the Bible more confusing for the reader. Also the researcher found out that the Ga people use the word *solemo* for baptism and not *baptiste* as was used in the Ga Bible.

The researchers also found out that most of the mother-tongue Bible readers wish to have short notes in the form of footnotes to explain some of the texts as is seen in some of the English Bibles.

III. DISCUSSIONS

From the response of the people it will be taken that those who believe that the Bible must be retained at all cost and that everything that was translated must be left to be as such irrespective of what is wrong with it. This is in line with fundamentalist translation³⁴. Fundamentalist mostly take words literally from the Bible without giving a deeper thought to it. Just as the respondents, they believe that the Bible is sacred therefore everything written in it must be taken as it is. This view is also supported by David Ahl's literal translation which attempts to keep the exact words and phrases of the original text (David Ahl, 2015. 1).³⁵

Also, the response of those who wants the word that truly explains the word repent in their mother tongues is in line with Nida's dynamic equivalence theory Nida, Eugene A, 1986³⁶. This theory focuses on choosing an expression which yields an equivalent meaning in the targeted language. The response of these respondents agree with the dynamic equivalence theory that states that the translator must use a word which is equivalent in meaning to the original word in order for the people to better understand the text. And this is why some of them disagree with the current words used since they believe those words are not the equivalent meaning of the original text.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Bible is the word of God written in human language. The translation of the Bible from the original text to the mother-tongue was done purposefully for everyone to get the word of God in their own language for them to feel that God is speaking to everyone and not just to those whose language the Bible was officially written in. And since this is the case, the translation of the Bible must be in a way that it gives the exact meaning intended for the people. Therefore, if the Bible is not well translated to the mother-tongue, it will distort the meaning of the text. The researcher therefore sets out to find out whether the translation of *metanoeite(metanoeite)* into Ga, Fante, and Asante-Twi will generate new meanings. This research has contributed to the field of Mother-tongue Biblical Hermeneutics by generating a new term in Ga to mean repent; by findingout thatthe Asante-Twi and Fante readers did not generate any term for 'repent' because of the fear that they might be changing what is written in the Bible.: The Ga respondents on the other hand, said *kumo otsui* better explains 'repent'. The finding of the research has therefore added to the translation and interpretation of Matthew 3:2 from the Ghanaian/African perspective. It is being recommended that the Bible Society of Ghana should consider the finding of this research in the future revision of the Ga Bible.

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³⁴Mark Strauss, Introducing the Bible' Bethel University, Minnesota. 2015. p. 1

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