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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

James

Introduction to James

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the book of James

Greetings (1:1)
Gaining endurance through trials (1:2-4)
Trusting God for wisdom (1:5-8)
What poor and rich people should boast about (1:9-11)
Enduring temptation (1:12-15)
Hearing and doing what God's Word says (1:16-27)
A warning against favoring rich people (2:1-13)
Faith and works (2:14-26)
The need for self-control in speech (3:1-12)
Worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom contrasted (3:13-18)
Worldly desires and the sin and conflict they cause (4:1-12)
A warning against boasting about tomorrow (4:13-17)
Rebuke of rich people (5:1-6)
Waiting patiently for the Lord's return (5:7-11)
Oaths forbidden (5:12)
Prayer, forgiveness, and healing (5:13-18)
Restoration of a sinner (5:19-20)

Who wrote the book of James?

There is wide agreement among biblical scholars that the author of this book was James the half-brother of Jesus, who was a leader in the early church in the city of Jerusalem. He was respected for his wisdom and authority. For example, he had the last word at the Jerusalem Council, an important meeting of the early church, that is described in [Acts 15:13-21](#). In [Galatians 2:9](#), the apostle Paul calls him a "pillar" of the church, meaning one of its most important leaders. However, even though James was an influential church leader and the half-brother of Jesus, in this letter he introduces himself humbly as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is not the same man as the apostle James, who was the brother of the apostle John. That James was killed for his faith a few years after Jesus himself was killed and rose from the dead. This letter was written many years after that.

What kind of writing is the book of James?

The book of James has an opening that is typical of the letters of its time, but it does not have a main body that develops sequentially and logically the way a letter would have. Instead, the book presents a collection of short sayings and reflections on various subjects. (In that way it is similar to the book of Proverbs.) As the outline at the beginning of this introduction shows, the book is made up of many short sections that move around from topic to topic.

James uses many of the devices that speakers used in his time, such as anticipating and answering a question that someone might ask. He also uses many vivid examples drawn from both nature and everyday life. For this reason, many interpreters believe that for the content of this book, James drew on sermons he had preached and on wise advice he had given. He wanted to share all of that wisdom with Christians living in different parts of the Roman Empire to help them face difficult times. It is also possible that James wrote this letter because he was nearing the end of his life and he wanted his wisdom to be preserved and shared after his death.

To whom was the book of James written?

James wrote this letter to believers in Jesus who had a Jewish background. This is clear from many of the things that he says in the letter. For example, he addresses his readers figuratively as “the twelve tribes” in [1:1](#). He speaks of their meeting place as a “synagogue” in [2:2](#). He assumes in [2:19](#) that they are familiar with the essential Jewish affirmation that “God is one,” and in [2:21](#) he calls Abraham “our father.” He calls God by the Hebrew title the Lord of Sabaoth in [5:4](#). He assumes that his readers will be familiar from the Hebrew Scriptures with the stories of people such as Job ([5:11](#)) and Elijah ([5:17](#)). These notes will call attention to the places where James engages his readers in light of their Jewish background.

What is the book of James about?

In this letter, James writes to believers living all over the Roman Empire who are suffering. He tells them that God is working through their sufferings to help them become more mature Christians. James also writes much in this letter about how believers should live in this world and treat one another. He urges them to treat other people fairly, not to quarrel and fight, and to be compassionate and generous.

How should the title of this book be translated?

Translators may choose to call this book by its traditional title, “James.” Alternatively, they may choose a different title such as “A Letter from James” or “The Letter James Wrote.” But note that “James” is actually the English form of the author’s name. In the letter itself, he calls himself “Jacob,” which is the original Hebrew form of his name. So you may want to refer to him in the title of the book by the same name that you will use in your translation for the character of Jacob in the book of Genesis. (See: [How to Translate Names](#))

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

Did James disagree with Paul about how a person is justified before God?

Paul taught in Romans that Christians are justified by faith and not by works. James seems to teach that Christians are justified by works. This could be confusing. However, a better understanding of what Paul and James each taught shows that they actually agree with one another. Both of them taught that a person needs faith in order to be justified. They both also taught that true faith would lead a person to do good works. Paul and James taught about these things in different ways because they had different audiences who needed to know different things about being justified. James wrote primarily to Jewish Christians, while Paul wrote to communities in which there were many Gentile Christians. (See: [just, justice, unjust, injustice, justify, justification](#) and [faith](#) and [work, works, deeds](#))

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

How should the translator signal transitions between topics in the book of James?

James moves briskly from one topic to another. Often he does not end his discussion of one topic with a summary and then begin the discussion of the next topic with an introduction. It might be helpful to your readers if you set topics apart by putting blank lines between them. However, your readers would have the same experience of the letter that its original audience did if you allowed the transitions between topics to remain abrupt. Just as happens in the book of Proverbs, James seems to have wanted each new thought to strike his audience with fresh force. So you may also choose not to put any blank lines between topics in your translation.

James often makes the link between topics through key words, for example, “rejoice” in 1:1 and “joy” in 1:2; “lacking” in 1:4 and “lacks” in 1:5; and so forth. If you can find ways to translate these key words similarly in both of their occurrences, this should help your readers appreciate the link and the transition.

Changes from the present tense to the past tense

In several places where James offers an illustration of a point he has just made, he narrates that illustration in the past tense as if he were telling the story of something that had happened. If this would be confusing for your readers, you could translate these illustrations in the present tense. Notes will identify each of these places and make that suggestion.

Textual issues in the book of James

See the General Notes to chapter 2 for a discussion of one important textual issue in this book.

James 1

James 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Greetings (1:1)
Gaining endurance through trials (1:2-4)
Trusting God for wisdom (1:5-8)
What poor and rich people should boast about (1:9-11)
Enduring temptation (1:12-15)
Hearing and doing what God's Word says (1:16-27)

James begins this letter in 1:1 by giving his name, identifying the people to whom he is writing, and offering a greeting. That was the way people typically began letters at this time. However, as Part 1 of the Introduction to James explains, the letter does not then develop the way other letters did. Instead, it is a collection of short sayings and reflections.

Special concepts in this chapter

Testing and temptation

James uses a word in this chapter that can mean both "trial," as in 1:2 and 1:12, and "temptation," as in 1:13-14. In both cases the word speaks of the situation of a person who needs to choose between doing something good and doing something evil. The difference between the two senses is important. When ULT translates the word as "trial," God is testing the person and wants him to do what is good. When ULT translates the word as "temptation," Satan is tempting the person and wants him to do what is evil.

James 1:1

James (ULT)

In this culture, letter writers would give their own names first, and they would refer to themselves in the third person. If that would be confusing in your language, you could use the first person. If your language has a particular way of introducing the author of a letter, you could also use that if it would be helpful to your readers.

Alternate translation: "I, James, am writing this letter" or "From James" (See: [First, Second or Third Person](#))

ULT

¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes that {are} in the dispersion: Rejoice!

James (ULT)

This is the name of a man, the half-brother of Jesus. See the information about him in Part 1 of the Introduction to James. (See: [How to Translate Names](#))

to the twelve tribes (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the nation of Israel by association with the fact that it was made up of twelve tribes. Alternate translation: "to the nation of Israel" (See: [Metonymy](#))

to the twelve tribes (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of Jesus' followers as if they were the nation of Israel, since the community of the people of God had expanded from that nation to include people of every nation who followed Jesus. Alternate translation: "to followers of Jesus" (See: [Metaphor](#))

to the twelve tribes (ULT)

In this culture, after giving their own names, letter writers would then say to whom they were writing, naming those people in the third person. If that would be confusing in your language, you could use the second person. Alternate translation: "to you followers of Jesus" (See: [First, Second or Third Person](#))

in the dispersion (ULT)

At this time, the term **dispersion** referred to those Jews who were living away from their homeland of Israel and who were scattered into various parts of the Roman Empire. If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **dispersion**, you could express the idea behind it with a verb such as "scattered." Alternate translation: "scattered throughout the world" or, if you are using the second person, "who are scattered throughout the world" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

in the dispersion (ULT)

While the term **dispersion** referred literally to Jews, James is using it figuratively to describe followers of Jesus. Alternate translation: "scattered throughout the world" or, if you are using the second person, "who are scattered throughout the world" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Rejoice (ULT)

The word **Rejoice** was used at this time as a greeting. In your translation, you can use the greeting that is typical of your language and culture. Alternate translation: “Greetings!” (See: [Idiom](#))

James 1:2

Consider it all joy (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **joy**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as “happy.”
Alternate translation: “You should be happy” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

ULT

² Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials,

Consider it all joy (ULT)

James says **all** as an overstatement for emphasis. He does not mean that believers should be happy about all the bad things that happen to them when they encounter **trials**. Rather, he means that the **trials** provide a general occasion for them to rejoice because of the valuable things God that is developing in their lives. He describes these things in the next verse. Alternate translation: “You should be very happy” (See: [Hyperbole](#))

my brothers (ULT)

James is using the term **brothers** figuratively to refer to fellow believers in Jesus. Alternate translation, as in UST: “my fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

my brothers (ULT)

James is using the term **brothers** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Be sure that this is clear in your translation so that your readers do not get the impression that James is addressing only men. If you use a non-figurative word such as “believers” to translate the metaphor **brothers**, you may need to use both the masculine and the feminine forms of that word in your language. If you retain the metaphor, you could say “my brothers and sisters.” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

you fall into (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **trials** as if they were a hole or pit that believers could **fall into**. Alternate translation: “you encounter” (See: [Metaphor](#))

you fall into (ULT)

The pronoun **you** is plural here, since James is writing to believers in Jesus as a group. Generally throughout the letter, the pronouns “you” and “your” are plural for this same reason. These notes will identify the few places where they are singular instead. (See: [Forms of You](#))

James 1:3

knowing that (ULT)

It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here, as UST does.
Alternate translation: "I want you to know that" or "You should realize that"

ULT

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

the testing of your faith produces endurance (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **testing**, **faith**, and **endurance**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "when you rely on God to help you through a difficult situation, this teaches you not to give up" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 1:4

But let endurance have a perfect work (ULT)

The expression **let endurance have a perfect work** means “let endurance complete its work.” James is speaking figuratively as if the quality of **endurance** were actively developing the character of believers. Alternate translation: “But make sure that you completely develop the ability not to give up” (See: [Personification](#))

ULT

⁴ But let endurance have a perfect work, so that you may be perfect and whole, lacking in nothing.

perfect and whole (ULT)

The words **perfect** and **whole** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. In this context, the word **perfect** does not mean without any flaws. Rather, it refers to something that has reached its goal. The word **whole** describes something that is not missing any of its parts or pieces. Together, the words describe mature Christian character. If your readers would misunderstand this idea, you could translate this pair of words with a single expression. Alternate translation: “completely mature” (See: [Doublet](#))

lacking in nothing (ULT)

You could state this positively in your translation. Alternate translation: “having all that you need” or “being all that you need to be”

James 1:5

lacks wisdom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **wisdom**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as “wise.” Alternate translation: “is not sure what would be the wise thing to do” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

ULT

⁵ Now if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, who gives to all generously and not reproaching, and it will be given to him.

let him ask from...God (ULT)

Alternate translation: “let him ask God”

it will be given to him (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who will do the action. Alternate translation: “God will give it to him” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

James 1:6

in faith (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **faith**, you could express the idea behind it with a verb such as “trust.”

Alternate translation: “confidently trusting God” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

ULT

⁶ But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing, for the one who doubts has become like a wave of the sea, wind-blown and tossed.

doubting nothing (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this double negative that consists of the negative verb **doubting** and the negative object **nothing**, you could use a positive expression to translate it. Alternate translation: “with complete certainty that God will answer” (See: [Double Negatives](#))

has become like a wave of the sea, wind-blown and tossed (ULT)

The point of this comparison is that anyone who doubts will be like the waves in the ocean, which keep moving in different directions. In your translation, you could express this meaning in a non-figurative way. (However, you could also reproduce the simile, as suggested in the next note.) Alternate translation: “will keep changing his mind about what to do” (See: [Simile](#))

a wave of the sea, wind-blown and tossed (ULT)

If you would like to use a simile in your translation but your readers would not be familiar with a **wave of the sea**, you could use another illustration that would be familiar to them. Alternate translation: “the desert sand swirling in the wind” or “stalks of tall grass swaying back and forth in the wind” (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

a wave of the sea, wind-blown and tossed (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “an ocean wave that the wind is blowing and tossing around” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

James 1:7

For let that man not think (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: "Such a person should not think" (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

ULT

⁷ For let that man not think that he will receive anything from the Lord,

James 1:8

a double-minded man (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of this person as if he had two minds, with one mind deciding to do one thing and the other mind deciding to do something else. Alternate translation: “a man who cannot make up his mind” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁸ a double-minded man, unsettled in all his ways.

a double-minded man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: “a person who cannot make up his mind” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

unsettled in all his ways (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively as if life presented paths for people to follow, and he is speaking figuratively of this person as if he could not settle on which path to take. Alternate translation: “who cannot decide whether to do one thing or another” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:9

Now let the lowly brother boast

James is using the word **boast** in a positive sense. He does not mean it in the sinful sense of bragging or vaunting oneself over others.

Alternate translation: "Now let the lowly brother take satisfaction"

ULT

⁹ Now let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

the lowly brother (ULT)

Since James contrasts this person with "the rich" in the next verse, he is using the word **lowly** as a spatial metaphor to mean "poor." Alternate translation: "a believer who is poor" (See: [Metaphor](#))

brother (ULT)

James is using the term **brother** figuratively to refer to a fellow believer in Jesus. See how you translated the term in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "believer" (See: [Metaphor](#))

his exaltation (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **exaltation**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: "the high place he occupies" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

his exaltation (ULT)

James is using a spatial metaphor to describe poor believers as if they were in a high place. He wants to convey that God has shown special concern for them. Alternate translation: "the special concern that God has shown for him" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:10

but the rich in his lowliness (ULT)

James is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from the previous verse. Alternate translation: “but let the rich boast in his lowliness” or “but let the rich take satisfaction in his lowliness” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

ULT

¹⁰ but the rich in his lowliness, because he will pass away like a flower of the grass.

the...rich (ULT)

James is using the adjective **rich** as a noun in order to indicate a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. It is clear in context that James is speaking of a rich “brother” or “believer,” in parallel with the “lowly brother” he describes in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “a believer who is rich” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

his lowliness (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **lowliness**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “the low place he occupies” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

his lowliness (ULT)

James is using a spatial metaphor to describe rich believers as if they were in a low place in order to indicate that God has taught them humility. Alternate translation: “the humility that God has taught them” (See: [Metaphor](#))

his lowliness (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate explicitly, as UST does, that God has taught rich believers humility by showing them that their wealth does not make them better than other people. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

he will pass away (ULT)

James is using a mild expression to refer to death. Alternate translation: “he will die” (See: [Euphemism](#))

like a flower of the grass (ULT)

The point of this comparison is that just as wild flowers bloom only for a short time, rich people will live on earth for the same relatively short time as anyone else, so their riches do not give them any advantage. You could explain the meaning of this figurative expression in your translation. (However, you could also reproduce the simile, as suggested in the next note.) Alternate translation: “after living for only a relatively short time” (See: [Simile](#))

he will pass away like a flower of the grass (ULT)

If you would like to use a simile in your translation but your readers would not be familiar with a **flower of the grass** (that is, a wildflower), you could use a different illustration. You could use something familiar to them that lasts only for a short time. (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

James 1:11

For the sun rose with heat and dried up the grass, and its flower fell off and the beauty of its face perished

Here James is giving an illustration in the past tense as if he were telling the story of something that had happened. (See the discussion of this in Part 3 of the Introduction to James.) If your readers would misunderstand this, you could translate this sentence with the present tense. Alternate translation: "For the sun rises with heat and dries up the grass, and its flower falls off and the beauty of its face perishes"

ULT

¹¹ For the sun rose with heat and dried up the grass, and its flower fell off and the beauty of its face perished. Thus also the rich will wither in his journeys.

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason for the result he implicitly described in the previous verse. Alternate translation: "This is because" (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

with heat (ULT)

Here, **heat** could mean one of two things. (1) It could refer to intense, withering heat. Alternate translation: "and radiated withering heat" or, if you are using the present tense, "and radiates withering heat" (2) It could refer to a hot wind that occurs in full sunlight. Alternate translation: "and caused a hot wind" or, if you are using the present tense, "and causes a hot wind"

the beauty of its face perished (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **beauty**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as "beautiful." Alternate translation: "it no longer had a beautiful appearance" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

the beauty of its face perished (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of the wild **flower** as if it had a **face**. Alternate translation: "it no longer had a beautiful appearance" (See: [Metaphor](#))

the beauty of its face perished (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of the flower's **beauty** as if it **perished** or died. Alternate translation: "it no longer had a beautiful appearance" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Thus also (ULT)

James uses the words **Thus also** to introduce a simile or comparison between a rich person and a fading flower. Alternate translation: "In the same way" or "Likewise" (See: [Simile](#))

the rich (ULT)

James is using the adjective **rich** as a noun in order to indicate a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “a person who is rich” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

will wither (ULT)

James speaks of the **rich** person as if he were a flower that would **wither**. James means figuratively that this person will “die,” as UST indicates. (See: [Metaphor](#))

in his journeys (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of a **rich** person’s activities as if they were a journey that he was taking. This metaphor implies that he is giving no thought to his coming death and that it will take him by surprise. Alternate translation: “in the midst of his activities” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:12

Blessed {is} the man who endures trial (ULT)

Blessed **is** indicates that God is giving favor to someone or that his situation is positive or good. Alternate translation: “The person who endures trial receives God’s favor” or “The person who endures trial is in a positive situation” (See: [Idiom](#))

ULT

¹² Blessed {is} the man who endures trial. For, becoming approved, he will receive the crown of life, which he promised to the ones who love him.

the man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: “the person” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

endures trial (ULT)

Here, **trial** could mean one of two things. See the discussion of the word in the General Notes to this chapter. James may actually want his readers to hear both senses in this case, as this verse is making a transition from a discussion of testing into a discussion of temptation. (1) The word **trial** could mean the same thing as in [1:2-3](#), where it describes the “testing” of “faith.” The reading of UST expresses this interpretation. (2) The word could refer to being tempted, that is, being led by one’s desires to do something wrong, which James discusses in the following verses. Alternate translation: “resists temptation”

becoming approved (ULT)

How you translate this will depend on how you translate **trial** earlier in the sentence. (In your translation, you could also focus on the way that God approves of this person, as UST does.) Alternate translation: “once he has demonstrated his faithfulness” or “once he has demonstrated his obedience”

he will receive the crown of life (ULT)

James is using the possessive form not to refer to a **crown** that belongs to **life** but to describe **life** as if it were a **crown**. Alternate translation: “he will receive the crown that is life” (See: [Possession](#))

he will receive the crown of life (ULT)

James is using the image of a **crown** figuratively to indicate that God will honor this person. Alternate translation: “God will honor him by giving him life” (See: [Metaphor](#))

he will receive the crown of life (ULT)

James is likely not speaking of physical **life** but of spiritual **life**, that is, of living forever in the presence of God after physical death. Alternate translation: “God will honor that person by giving him everlasting life in his presence” (See: [Metaphor](#))

which he promised to the ones who love him (ULT)

In this last clause in the verse, the words **he** and **him** refer to God, not to the person who **endures trial**. Alternate translation: “which God promised to those who love him” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

James 1:13

I am tempted by God (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "God is tempting me" or "God is leading me to do something wrong" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

ULT

13 Let no one being tempted say, "I am tempted by God," because God is untempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.

God...God...is untempted by evil (ULT)

Even though the word that ULT translates as **untempted** is an adjective, not a passive verbal form, it may be helpful to your readers if you translate it with an active verbal form. Alternate translation: "evil does not tempt God" or "God's desires never lead him to do something wrong"

and he himself tempts no one (ULT)

Alternate translation: "and God himself never leads anyone to do anything wrong"

James 1:14

But (ULT)

James is using the word **But** to indicate a contrast between the wrong idea that God might tempt someone and the truth that each person **is tempted by his own desire**. This is actually a strong contrast, and you may wish to use a strong expression for it.

Alternate translation: “No, on the contrary,” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

ULT

14 But each is tempted by his own desire, dragged away and enticed.

each...is tempted by his own desire, dragged away and enticed (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand these passive phrases, you could say each of these things with active verbal forms. Alternate translation: “each person’s own desire tempts him by enticing him and then dragging him away” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

each...is tempted by his own desire, dragged away and enticed (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **desire** as if it were a living thing that could actively tempt people, entice them, and drag them away captive. Alternate translation: “each person wants to do wrong when he desires something that he should not desire and, because he is attracted to that thing, he commits sin and then cannot stop sinning” (See: [Personification](#))

dragged away and enticed (ULT)

Since the word translated as **enticed** often means to use bait to trap prey, James may be stressing the result (the captured prey being **dragged away**) by speaking of it before the method that was used to achieve it (baiting a trap). It may be helpful to your readers to indicate that the method came before the result. Alternate translation: “enticed and dragged away” or “dragged away after being enticed” (See: [Order of Events](#))

dragged away and enticed (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of temptation as if the person who gave in to it were captured in a baited trap. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could translate this metaphor as a simile. It may also be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “It is as if the wrong thing he desired were bait in a trap that caught him so that a hunter could then drag him away” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:15

Then desire, having conceived, bears sin (ULT)

James uses the word **Then** to indicate that what he describes in this verse happens after something that he described in the previous verse. However, he does not mean that this happens after a person is “dragged away and enticed,” as he said at the end of that verse.

Rather, he means that it happens after a person begins to entertain

the temptation of a wrong “desire,” as he said at the beginning of that verse. It may be helpful to your readers to use the word “when” to indicate this. Alternate translation: “When desire has conceived, it bears sin” (See: [Connect](#)

— [Sequential Time Relationship](#))

ULT

15 Then desire, having conceived, bears sin, and sin, having grown up, gives birth to death.

Then desire, having conceived, bears sin (ULT)

James continues to speak figuratively of **desire** as if it were a living thing, in this case as if it were a woman who became pregnant and gave birth. Alternate translation: “If a person entertains wrong desires, he will become more and more inclined to sin until he finally does commit sin” (See: [Personification](#))

and sin, having grown up, gives birth to death (ULT)

James also speaks figuratively of **sin** as if it were a living thing, a baby girl who grew up to be a woman who also became pregnant and gave birth. Alternate translation: “and if he continues to sin, it will affect more and more of his life until it causes his death” (See: [Personification](#))

gives birth to death (ULT)

Here, **death** could mean: (1) spiritual death, that is, separation from God. This is the interpretation in UST. (2) physical death. Alternate translation: “causes the person to die” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:16

Do not be led astray (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively as if some deceptive guides were trying to lead his readers in the wrong direction. Alternate translation: "Do not be deceived" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

16 Do not be led astray, my beloved brothers.

Do not be led astray (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. The meaning here is probably not truly passive. That is, even though James speaks as if someone else might lead his readers astray, that is probably not what he means. This could be: (1) a warning James' readers not to lead themselves astray, that is, not to deceive themselves. That is the interpretation in UST. (2) a simple active meaning. Alternate translation: "Make no mistake about this" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

Do not be led astray (ULT)

James is referring back to his statement in [1:13](#) that God never desires to do evil and that God never leads anyone to do evil. Instead, as James will say in the next two verses, God gives only good things to people. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could make this connection more explicit. Alternate translation: "Do not deceive yourselves, God is not evil, God is good" or "Make no mistake about this, God is not evil, God is good" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

my beloved brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my dear fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:17

Every good present and every perfect gift is from above (ULT)

Here, **from above** is a spatial metaphor that figuratively describes God. Alternate translation: “God gives us every good present and every perfect gift” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹⁷ Every good present and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning.

Every good present and every perfect gift is from above (ULT)

The phrases **good present** and **perfect gift** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. (As in [1:4](#), the word **perfect** refers to something that has developed to the point where it is fully suited to its purpose.) If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could translate both phrases with a single expression. Alternate translation: “God gives us the things that are just right for us” (See: [Doublet](#))

coming down from (ULT)

Continuing the spatial metaphor, James speaks figuratively of these gifts **coming down from** God. If you use a non-figurative expression to translate this, it may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “They come to us from” (See: [Metaphor](#))

the Father of lights (ULT)

Here, **lights** likely means the lights in the sky, that is, the sun, moon, and stars. James says figuratively that God is their **Father** because he created them. Alternate translation: “God, who created all the lights in the sky” (See: [Metaphor](#))

with whom there is no change or shadow of turning (ULT)

Here, **change** and **shadow of turning** mean similar things. James is using repetition for emphasis. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine them into a single phrase and express the metaphor of a **shadow** (see later note) as a simile. It may also be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “God does not change as shifting shadows do” (See: [Doublet](#))

shadow of turning (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe a **shadow** that is characterized by **turning**. Alternate translation: “shadow that turns” or “shadow that changes position” (See: [Possession](#))

shadow of turning (ULT)

James is contrasting God, the Creator of the lights in the sky, with those lights themselves, which are not as great as their Creator. They create shadows that change position, but God never deviates from wanting only good things for people. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: “turning shadow such as the sun or moon casts. No, God always wants good things for people” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

shadow of turning (ULT)

There could not literally be a **shadow** in God, so this is a metaphor. Alternate translation: “variability” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 1:18

Having willed, he gave birth to us (ULT)

Alternate translation: "God chose to give birth to us"

Having willed, he gave birth to us (ULT)

James says figuratively that God **gave birth to us** because God gives spiritual life to everyone who believes in Jesus. Alternate translation: "God chose to give us spiritual life" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹⁸ Having willed, he gave birth to us by the word of truth, for us to be something like a firstfruits of his creatures.

us...us (ULT)

Here and throughout this letter, James uses the pronoun **us** to refer to himself and his readers. Sometimes by extension he also means all believers or all people. In every case, therefore, the pronoun **us** is inclusive, so use the inclusive form if your language makes that distinction. The same applies to the pronoun "our." However, in some cases the pronoun "we" is exclusive. Notes will identify those places. Everywhere else, the pronoun "we" is inclusive. (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'](#))

by the word of truth (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe a **word** that is characterized by **truth**. Alternate translation: "by the true word" (See: [Possession](#))

by the word of truth (ULT)

James is using term **word** figuratively to describe the message about Jesus that was conveyed by using words. Alternate translation: "by the true message" (See: [Metonymy](#))

by the word of truth (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **truth**, you could translate the idea behind it with an equivalent expression that uses an adjective such as "true." Alternate translation: "when we believed the true message" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

by the word of truth (ULT)

James is referring implicitly to the message about Jesus. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: "when we believed the true message about Jesus" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

for us to be something like a firstfruits of his creatures (ULT)

This is a purpose clause. James is stating the purpose for which God **desired to give us birth**. In your translation, follow the conventions of your language for purpose clauses. Alternate translation (without a comma preceding): "so that we would be like a firstfruits of his creatures" (See: [Connect — Goal \(Purpose\) Relationship](#))

something like a firstfruits of his creatures (ULT)

James is assuming that his readers will know that he is using the traditional Israelite offering known as **firstfruits** as a simile. The law of Moses required the Israelites to offer to God some of the first crops they harvested each year. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could state specifically that this is the name of an offering. Alternate translation: “something like an offering of firstfruits from among his creatures” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

something like a firstfruits of his creatures (ULT)

When they offered some of their first crops to God each year, the Israelites were acknowledging that the entire crop belonged to God and was a gift from God to them. James is using this **firstfruits** offering as a simile to indicate that the believers of his time are an indication that there will be many more people who will belong to God in the future. In fact, since James speaks of **creatures**, he may even mean that believers in Jesus are the first part of God’s creation to be freed from the curse and come back fully under his rule. Alternate translation: “the first of many people who would believe in Jesus” or “the first of God’s creatures to be freed from the curse and come back fully under his rule” (See: [Simile](#))

James 1:19

Know (ULT)

This Greek form could be either imperative or indicative, and so it could mean: (1) if it is an imperative, James is telling his readers to pay attention to what he is about to say. Alternate translation: “This is important” (2) if it is an indicative, James is telling his readers that he is about to remind them of something that they already know. Alternate translation: “You already know this” (See: [Sentence Types](#))

ULT

19 Know, my beloved brothers: But let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

my beloved brothers (ULT)

See how you translated this expression in [1:16](#). Alternate translation: “my dear fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

But (ULT)

But could mean: (1) if **know** is an imperative, then James is using the term **but** as a transitional particle that does not indicate a contrast. If you decided to translate **know** as an imperative, you may have a similar word in your language that you can use for this same purpose. Otherwise, you do not need to translate the term. (2) if **know** is an indicative, then James is using the term **but** to introduce a mild contrast. He is saying that even though his readers already know what he is about to say, he wants to stress it anyway. If you decided to translate **know** as an indicative, you could use a term in your language that indicates a mild contrast. (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

let...be...every man...quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (ULT)

The expression **slow to speak** does not refer to speaking slowly. Rather, like the expressions before and after it, it is an idiom. Alternate translation: “each of you should listen carefully, speak only after reflecting on what to say, and not lose your tempers easily” (See: [Idiom](#))

every man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: “each of you” or “each person” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

James 1:20

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason why people should not get angry, as he said in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “You should not get angry, because” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

²⁰ For the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.

the anger...of man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: “human anger” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

does not work the righteousness of God (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **righteousness**, you could translate the idea behind it with an adjective such as “righteous” or “right.” Alternate translation: “does not fulfill the righteous purposes of God” or “does not accomplish the right things that God wants to do” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 1:21

Therefore (ULT)

Here James is telling his readers what they should do as a result of what he explained to them in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “Consequently” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

21 Therefore, laying aside all filth and abundance of wickedness, in humility receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

laying aside all filth and abundance of wickedness (ULT)

James is speaking of **filth** and **abundance of wickedness** as if they were clothing that could be taken off. By those expressions he means sin and wrong actions (see later notes to this verse). Alternate translation: “stop committing sin and doing so many wrong things” (See: [Metaphor](#))

filth and abundance of wickedness (ULT)

The expressions **filth** and **abundance of wickedness** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine them into a single phrase. Alternate translation: “every kind of sinful behavior” (See: [Doublet](#))

filth (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of sin as if it were **filth**, that is, something that made people dirty. Alternate translation: “sin” (See: [Metaphor](#))

abundance of wickedness (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **wickedness**, you could translate the idea behind it with an adjective such as “wrong.” Alternate translation: “the many wrong things that people do” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

in humility (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **humility**, you could translate the idea behind it with an adverb such as “humbly.” Alternate translation: “humbly” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

receive the implanted word (ULT)

The word **implanted** describes something that has been placed inside another thing. James is speaking of God’s word figuratively as if it had been planted and was growing inside believers. Alternate translation: “obey the word that you have heard” (See: [Metaphor](#))

receive the implanted word (ULT)

James is using term **word** figuratively to describe the message about Jesus that was conveyed by using words. Alternate translation: “obey the message about Jesus that you have heard” (See: [Metonymy](#))

which is able to save your souls (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the **word** or message as if it were a living thing that could actively **save** believers. He means that obedience to the message will lead to salvation. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: "If you do that, you will be saved" (See: [Personification](#))

your souls (ULT)

James is figuratively referring to one part of his readers, their **souls**, to mean their whole beings. Alternate translation: "you" (See: [Synecdoche](#))

James 1:22

But (ULT)

But draws a contrast not with what James has just said, but with a potential misunderstanding of what he has just said. He wants to clarify that by “receive the implanted word” he does not mean simply to believe it, but to put it into practice. It may be appropriate in your language to translate the word **but** with an expression that introduces a clarification. Alternate translation: “Now” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

ULT

²² But be doers of the word and not only hearers, deluding yourselves.

But be doers of the word and not only hearers (ULT)

At the end of this clause, James is leaving out some of the words that it would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from earlier in the clause. Alternate translation: “be doers of the word and not only hearers of the word” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

be...doers of the word and not only hearers (ULT)

James is using the term **word** figuratively to describe the message about Jesus that was conveyed by using words. Alternate translation: “obey the message about Jesus, do not just listen to it” (See: [Metonymy](#))

and not only hearers (ULT)

In the Bible, the word “hear” often has the idiomatic sense of agreeing with what is heard. James may be using the word in that sense. Alternate translation: “and do not just decide that you agree with it” (See: [Idiom](#))

James 1:23

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding the face of his birth in a mirror (ULT)

James is using a hypothetical situation to teach. Alternate translation: "Suppose someone is a hearer of the word and not a doer. Then he is like a man beholding the face of his birth in a mirror" (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding the face of his birth in a mirror.

is a hearer of the word and not a doer (ULT)

At the end of this clause, James is leaving out some of the words that it would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from earlier in the clause. Alternate translation: "is a hearer of the word and not a doer of the word" (See: [Ellipsis](#))

is a hearer of the word and not a doer (ULT)

See how you translated these expressions in the previous verse. Alternate translation: "just listens to the word but does not obey it" (See: [Idiom](#))

of the word (ULT)

James is using term **word** figuratively to describe the message about Jesus that was conveyed by using words. Alternate translation: "of the message about Jesus" (See: [Metonymy](#))

he is like a man beholding the face of his birth in a mirror (ULT)

Here James begins a simile, an illustrative comparison, that continues through the next two verses. (See: [Simile](#))

a man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that includes both men and women. Alternate translation: "a person" (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

the face of his birth (ULT)

This is an idiom that refers to the **face** a person was born with, that is, that person's natural or physical face. Since the term "face" had many figurative meanings at this time, James is using this idiomatic expression to clarify that he means the hypothetical person's literal, physical face. You may not need to make this clarification in your language. Alternate translation: "his physical face" or "his face" (See: [Idiom](#))

in a mirror (ULT)

A **mirror** is a flat object made of some reflective material, such as glass or polished metal, that people use to see what they look like. If your readers would not be familiar with what a **mirror** is, you could use the name of something else that serves this purpose in your culture. Alternate translation: "reflected in the water" (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

James 1:24

For (ULT)

For introduces a reason, as would be expected, but it is a reason for something that must be inferred from the context. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what James is giving the reason for. Alternate translation: “This did not really benefit him, because” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

²⁴ For he beheld himself and went away and immediately forgot of what sort he was.

he beheld himself and went away and immediately forgot of what sort he was

Here James is giving an illustration in the past tense as if he were telling the story of something that had happened. (See the discussion of this in Part 3 of the Introduction to James.) If your readers would misunderstand this sentence, you could translate this with the present tense. Alternate translation: “he beholds himself and goes away and immediately forgets of what sort he is”

he beheld...himself (ULT)

James is continuing the simile he began in the previous verse, so the pronouns **he** and **himself** refer to the hypothetical person who looks in the mirror. Alternate translation (using the present tense): “such a person looked at himself in a mirror” or, if you are using the present tense, “such a person looks at himself in a mirror” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

and went away and immediately forgot of what sort he was (ULT)

James is saying implicitly that this is a person who sees but does not do, just like a person who hears the word of God but does not obey it. The implication is that he sees in the mirror that he needs to do something such as wash his face or fix his hair. But because he does not do that when he is looking in the mirror, when he walks away, he forgets to do it. The point of the comparison is that a person who does not obey God’s word is like this. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could explain that explicitly. Alternate translation: “but because he did not immediately do what he saw he should do, when he walked away from the mirror, he forgot what he saw and so he did nothing about it” or, if you are using the present tense, “but because he does not immediately do what he sees he should do, when he walks away from the mirror, he forgets what he saw and so he does nothing about it” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

of what sort he was (ULT)

Alternate translation: “what he needed to do about his appearance” or, if you are using the present tense, “what he needs to do about his appearance”

James 1:25

But the one having gazed into the perfect law of freedom and having continued ... this one will be blessed

James is using a further hypothetical situation to teach. This illustration is a contrast to the one he offered in [1:23](#). Alternate translation: "But suppose someone gazes into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres Then that person will be blessed" (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

²⁵ But the one having gazed into the perfect law of freedom and having continued, not having become a hearer of forgetfulness, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in his doing.

the one...having gazed into the perfect law (ULT)

In this verse, James continues to compare hearing the word of God to looking in a mirror. But the image now becomes a metaphor rather than a simile, since James speaks figuratively about someone who has **gazed into the law**. He means someone who has listened attentively to God's word. Alternate translation: "someone who has listened attentively to the perfect law" (See: [Metaphor](#))

the perfect law of freedom

James is using the possessive form to describe a **law** that brings **freedom**. See the notes to [2:12](#) for a further explanation of what James means by the **law of freedom**. Alternate translation: "the perfect law that brings freedom" (See: [Possession](#))

the perfect law of freedom

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **freedom**, you could translate the idea behind it with an adjective such as "free." Alternate translation: "the perfect law that sets people free" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

the perfect law of freedom

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what this **law** gives people the **freedom** to do. Alternate translation: "the law that sets people free to obey God" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

the perfect law of freedom

As in [1:4](#) and [1:17](#), the term **perfect** refers to something that has developed to the point where it is fully suited to its purpose. See how you translated the term in those verses. Alternate translation: "the law that is perfectly suited to set people free from sin"

and having continued (ULT)

James is leaving out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from the context. Alternate translation: "and who has continued to obey that law" (See: [Ellipsis](#))

a hearer of forgetfulness (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe a **hearer** who is characterized by **forgetfulness**. Alternate translation: "a hearer who is forgetful" (See: [Possession](#))

a hearer of forgetfulness (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **forgetfulness**, you could translate the idea behind it with a verb such as "forget." Alternate translation: "a hearer who forgets" or "someone who forgets what he hears" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

a doer of the work (ULT)

By association with the **work** that it takes to carry out God's commands, James is using the term **work** figuratively to mean what God commands. Alternate translation: "someone who does what God commands" (See: [Metonymy](#))

this one...blessed...will be...his (ULT)

While the word **blessed** is an adjective and so the expression **will be blessed** is not a passive verbal form, it may be helpful to your readers to translate this with an active verbal form. Alternate translation: "God will bless such a person" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

in his doing (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **doing**, you could translate the idea behind it with a verb such as "do." Alternate translation: "in what he does" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 1:26

If anyone thinks to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his heart, the religion of that one {is} worthless (ULT)

James is using a hypothetical situation to teach. Alternate translation: "Suppose someone thinks that he is religious, but he does not bridle his tongue, thus deceiving his heart. Then his religion is worthless" (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

²⁶ If anyone thinks to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his heart, the religion of that one {is} worthless.

thinks to be religious (ULT)

The word translated **religious** could refer to a pattern of behavior rather than to participation in worship activities. Alternate translation: "thinks that he is honoring God by his actions"

not bridling his tongue (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of a person **bridling his tongue** as if he were controlling a horse with a bridle. Alternate translation: "but he does not control his tongue" (See: [Metaphor](#))

not bridling his tongue (ULT)

A **bridle** is headgear that is used to control a horse. If your readers would not be familiar with what a **bridle** is, you could use a different illustration that would be familiar to them of a device that is used in your culture to control animals. (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

not bridling his tongue (ULT)

By association with the way that the **tongue** is used in speech, James is using the term **tongue** figuratively to mean what a person says. Alternate translation: "not controlling what he says" (See: [Metonymy](#))

deceiving his heart (ULT)

James is figuratively using one part of this hypothetical person, his **heart**, to mean the person himself. Alternate translation: "deceiving himself" (See: [Synecdoche](#))

the religion of that one {is} worthless (ULT)

James says **worthless** as an overstatement for emphasis. There would conceivably still be some value in the religion of a person even if he did not carefully control what he said. But James wants to emphasize how inconsistent it is to claim to love God but then to say things that hurt and disparage other people. He will develop this point further in [3:9-10](#). Alternate translation: "his actions are not as pleasing to God as he thinks" (See: [Hyperbole](#))

James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **religion** as if it could be physically **pure** and **undefiled**. Alternate translation: “Religion that is pleasing and acceptable” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to look upon orphans and widows in their distress, to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Pure and undefiled religion (ULT)

The terms **pure** and **undefiled** mean similar things. They both indicate that something is free of contamination. James is using these terms together for emphasis. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine them into a single phrase. Alternate translation: “Religion that is completely acceptable” (See: [Doublet](#))

before God (ULT)

The word **before** means “in front of” or “in the presence of” another person, and in this case **before** him indicates “where God can see.” Seeing, for its part, represents attention and judgment. Alternate translation: “from God’s perspective” (See: [Metaphor](#))

God and the Father (ULT)

James is not talking about two different people. He is expressing a single idea by using two nouns connected with **and**. The noun **Father** further identifies **God**. Alternate translation: “God the Father” (See: [Hendiadys](#))

the Father (ULT)

Father is an important title for God. (See: [Translating Son and Father](#))

to look upon orphans and widows in their distress (ULT)

Here, **look upon** is an idiom that means “show concern for” or “help compassionately.” Alternate translation: “to help orphans and widows in their distress” (See: [Idiom](#))

to look upon orphans and widows in their distress (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that orphans and widows are in practical and financial **distress** because their fathers or husbands have died and so are no longer providing for them. In this culture, women and children were dependent on male relatives for support. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate explicitly what kind of **distress** James wants his readers to help relieve. Alternate translation: “to help poor orphans and widows with their practical needs” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

to keep oneself unstained by the world (ULT)

This is not a purpose or result clause. James is not telling his readers that they should help **orphans and widows** in order to stay **unstained by the world** or that this would be the result if they did help them. Rather, James is saying that this is a second thing that characterizes **religion** that pleases God. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could add the word “and” before this clause in order to clarify this.

to keep oneself unstained by the world (ULT)

James is using the term **world** figuratively to mean the system of values shared by people who do not honor God, by association with the way those people live in the world. Alternate translation: “to keep oneself unstained by the value system of ungodly people” (See: [Metonymy](#))

to keep oneself unstained by the world (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the influence of ungodly people as if it could physically stain a person. By **unstained** he actually means free from sin. Alternate translation: “not to allow ungodly people and their influence to cause oneself to sin” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 2

James 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

A warning against favoring rich people (2:1-13)

Faith and works (2:14-26)

Special concepts in this chapter

Favoritism

Some of James's readers treated rich and powerful people well and they treated poor people badly. Treating some people better than others is called favoritism. James tells his readers that this is wrong. God wants his people to treat everyone well.

Justification

Justification is what happens when God makes a person righteous, that is, when God puts a person in right standing with himself. James says in this chapter that God justifies people when they do good works along with having faith. But that is because the good works demonstrate the faith that a person has, as James says explicitly in [2:18](#). James is not saying that people need to add good works to their faith in order to be justified. (See: [just](#), [justice](#), [unjust](#), [injustice](#), [justify](#), [justification](#) and [righteous](#), [righteousness](#), [unrighteous](#), [unrighteousness](#), [upright](#), [uprightness](#) and [faith](#))

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

But someone may say, "You have faith, and I have works" (2:18)

When James says this, he seems to be raising an objection that someone might make to what he has been saying. Public speakers at this time commonly raised such objections in order to answer them, and James is probably using that device. However, if that is what he is doing, we would expect the objection to be, "You have works, and I have faith," since James has been stressing the importance of works accompanying faith. So why does this hypothetical speaker say instead, "You have faith, and I have works"?

It appears that James actually has this speaker addressing these words to the same "you" whom he has been addressing himself since 2:16 as "one of you" and whom he then goes on to address in the rest of this chapter. In other words, James is raising this hypothetical objection so that he can address this same "you" in this verse as well. James is saying, "Someone might reassure you that you nevertheless have faith, while I (James) have works. He might argue that both are valid expressions of religion and that it is not necessary for a person to have both." James then answers this argument by observing that he can show his faith through his works, while a person who claims to have faith but not works has no means of proving that.

In your translation, you may wish to express this implicit information, as UST does. Alternatively, you may wish to translate as ULT does and leave it to Bible teachers and preachers to explain the meaning. See the further discussion in the notes to [2:18](#). (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Major textual issues in this chapter

Faith without works is “useless” or “dead” (2:20)

In James [2:20](#), some ancient manuscripts say that faith without works is “useless.” ULT and UST follow that reading. Some other ancient manuscripts say that it is “dead,” perhaps under the influence of [2:17](#) and [2:26](#), where James uses the term “dead” to describe faith that is not expressed in works. If a translation of the Bible already exists in your area, consider using the reading found in that translation. If not, we recommend that you follow the reading of ULT and UST. (See: [Textual Variants](#))

James 2:1

My brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: “My fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹ My brothers, do not with favoritism have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory.

do not with favoritism have (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **favoritism**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent phrase. (See the discussion of favoritism in the General Notes to this chapter.) Alternate translation: “you should not treat some people better than others, because that is not consistent with” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to refer to **faith** that other people have in **Jesus**. Alternate translation: “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (See: [Possession](#))

of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe **Jesus** as characterized by **glory**. Alternate translation: “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (See: [Possession](#))

James 2:2

For if (ULT)

James is using a hypothetical situation to teach. He describes the condition in this verse and the next verse, and he describes the result in 2:4. Alternate translation: “Suppose” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

² For if a gold-ringed man in splendid clothing comes into your synagogue, and a poor one in filthy clothing also comes in,

a gold-ringed man in splendid clothing (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that he is giving an example of what a wealthy person might wear. (The expression **a gold-ringed man** does not mean a man who is ringed around with gold, but a man who is wearing a gold ring.) If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use a different example from your own culture, or you could use a general expression. Alternate translation: “someone who is dressed like a wealthy person” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

a...man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that could mean either a man or a woman. Alternate translation: “person” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

synagogue (ULT)

A **synagogue** is a Jewish meeting place for worship. James uses the term because he is writing primarily to Jews who have put their faith in Jesus as their Messiah. (See the discussion in Part 1 of the Introduction to James.) In your translation you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: “meeting place” (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

a poor one (ULT)

James is using the adjective **poor** as a noun in order to mean a kind of person. (ULT adds **one** to indicate this.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “a person who is poor” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

James 2:3

and (ULT)

James is continuing to describe the condition in the hypothetical situation that he introduced in the previous verse. Alternate translation, as in UST: “and suppose” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

³ and you look at the one wearing splendid clothing and say, “You sit here well,” and to the poor one you say, “You stand there,” or, “Sit by my footstool,”

you look...say...you say (ULT)

In these three instances **you** is plural, since James is speaking to all of his readers about what they might do in such a situation. (See: [Forms of You](#))

you look...at (ULT)

In this context, this expression means to look at someone or something with admiration. Alternate translation: “you look admiringly at” (See: [Idiom](#))

You sit here well...You stand there...Sit by my footstool (ULT)

Since these comments are addressed to the rich person and to the poor person as individuals, **you** is singular in the first two instances and the implied “you” in the command to **sit** is also singular. (See: [Forms of ‘You’ — Singular](#))

You sit here well (ULT)

In this context **well** means “honorably.” It does not refer to how well the rich person would be able to sit in the indicated seat. Alternate translation: “Sit here in this place of honor” (See: [Idiom](#))

You sit here well (ULT)

This is an imperative, but it should be translated as a polite request rather than as a command. It may be helpful to add an expression such as “please” to make this clear. Alternate translation: “Please sit here in this place of honor” (See: [Imperatives — Other Uses](#))

and (ULT)

The term **and** introduces a contrast between the way the rich person and the poor person are treated. Alternate translation: “but” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

You stand there...Sit by my footstool (ULT)

These statements addressed to the poor person probably are direct imperatives rather than polite requests, since James is illustrating how believers might treat poor people differently from rich people. Not adding “please” to these statements would show the contrast with the way the rich person is addressed. (See: [Imperatives — Other Uses](#))

You stand there...Sit by my footstool (ULT)

The implications are that the poor person is being told to stand or sit in a humbler and less honorable place. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly, as UST does. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Sit by my footstool (ULT)

This imperative statement uses the singular first-person pronoun **my**, since it is something that one of the believers might say to the hypothetical poor person. If this would not be natural in your language, since the statement is introduced by **you** (plural) **say**, you could also use a plural form in the statement itself. Alternate translation: "Sit on the floor by our feet" (See: [Forms of You](#))

James 2:4

have you not distinguished among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts (ULT)

In this verse James describes the result of the hypothetical situation he has been describing since 2:2. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “Then you have distinguished among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts.” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

⁴ have you not distinguished among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts?

have you not distinguished among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this sentence, you could reverse the order of these phrases, since the second phrase gives the reason for the result that the first phrase describes. Alternate translation: “have you not become judges who think evil things and so begun to consider some people better than others” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

have you not distinguished among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts (ULT)

As James describes this result, he uses the question form for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: “you have considered some people better than others, because you have become judges who think evil things!” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

become judges of evil thoughts (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe **judges** who are characterized by **evil thoughts**. He is not speaking of people who judge whether thoughts are evil. Alternate translation: “become judges who think evil things” (See: [Possession](#))

become judges of evil thoughts (ULT)

James is describing something more than passively assuming a certain role and thinking in a certain way. He is describing taking action based on that way of thinking. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: “made wrong judgments about how people should be treated and then treated them that way” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:5

Listen (ULT)

James uses this expression to emphasize what he is about to say.
Alternate translation: "Pay attention to this" (See: [Idiom](#))

my beloved brothers (ULT)

See how you translated this in [1:16](#). Alternate translation: "my dear fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to the ones who love him?

did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to the ones who love him (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: "God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

the poor (ULT)

James is using the adjective **poor** as a noun to refer to a group of people. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: "people who are poor" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

in the world (ULT)

James is using the term **world** in a different sense than in 1:27. Here it refers to the world that we live in, and so it indicates ordinary life. Alternate translation: "in this life" (See: [Metonymy](#))

to be rich in faith (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of having much **faith** as if that made a person wealthy. Alternate translation: "to have strong faith" (See: [Metaphor](#))

to be rich in faith (ULT)

Your language may require you to specify the object of **faith**. Alternate translation: "to have strong faith in Jesus" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

heirs of the kingdom that (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of the people to whom God has promised the kingdom as if they were going to inherit wealth from a family member. Alternate translation: "participants in the kingdom that" (See: [Metaphor](#))

heirs of the kingdom that (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **kingdom**, you could express the idea behind it with a verb such as "rule." Alternate translation: "to enjoy advantages when God rules, as" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 2:6

have dishonored the poor (ULT)

What James means by this is clear from the example he gives in [2:2-3](#). Alternate translation: “you have treated people who are poor much worse than you have treated people who are rich”

ULT

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor! Do not the rich overpower you and themselves drag you into court?

the poor (ULT)

James is using the adjective **poor** as a noun to refer to a group of people. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “people who are poor” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

Do not the rich overpower you and themselves drag you into court (ULT)

The word that is translated **themselves** here is the same word that is translated **they** in the next verse. It is effectively the subject of a new independent clause, so you could translate this as two sentences. Alternate translation: “Do not the rich overpower you? Do they not drag you into court” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

Do not the rich overpower you and themselves drag you into court (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: “It is the rich who overpower you and drag you into court themselves!” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

Do not the rich overpower you and themselves drag you into court (ULT)

James is implying that rich people do not deserve to be treated better by the believers to whom he is writing, since rich people have actually treated them badly. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: “People who are rich do not deserve to have you treat them better than others. They are the ones who overpower you and drag you into court themselves!” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

the rich (ULT)

James is using the adjective **rich** as a noun to refer to a group of people. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “people who are rich” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

Do not the rich overpower you (ULT)

Alternate translation: “Is it not the rich who oppress you”

drag you into court (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the rich as if they would physically **drag** the poor into court. Alternate translation: “force you to go to court” (See: [Metaphor](#))

drag you into court (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly why rich people were taking poor people to court.
Alternate translation: "force you to go to court so that they can exploit you through lawsuits" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:7

Do they not blaspheme the good name that has been called upon you (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "They are the ones who blaspheme the good name that has been called upon you!" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

⁷ Do they not blaspheme the good name that has been called upon you?

Do they not blaspheme the good name (ULT)

The word **blaspheme** can have a technical sense. It can describe a human being wrongly denying that something is divine. But the word can also have the general sense of "insult," and that is probably the sense in which James is using it here. (However, by insulting the **name** of Jesus, these rich people were also guilty of blasphemy in the technical sense, since Jesus is divine and his name should be honored.) Alternate translation: "Do they not insult the good name"

the good name (ULT)

James is referring figuratively to the **name** of Jesus by association with the way that it is **good**. Alternate translation: "the name of Jesus" (See: [Metonymy](#))

that has been called upon you (ULT)

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "by which you are called" or "by which you are known" (See: [Idiom](#))

that has been called upon you (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "by which people call you" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

James 2:8

If, however (ULT)

James is using these words to introduce a contrast with what he said in 2:6, “you have dishonored the poor,” meaning “you have treated rich people much better than you have treated poor people.”

Alternate translation: “But if, instead of favoring rich people” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

ULT

⁸ If, however, you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You will love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.

you fulfill (ULT)

The verb **fulfill** comes from the same root as the adjective “perfect” that James uses several times earlier in this letter. It means to make something accomplish its purpose or reach its goal. Alternate translation: “you completely obey”

the...law...royal (ULT)

There are two possible reasons for why James describes the **law** that he quotes here from [Leviticus 19:18](#) as **royal**. (1) When Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, he said that this law was one of two that summed up all of the other laws and guided life in the kingdom of God. (The other law was to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength.) Alternate translation: “the law that guides life in the kingdom of God” (2) James may say that this **law** is **royal** because God, the true king, gave it to people. Alternate translation: “God’s law” (See: [Metonymy](#))

You will love your neighbor as yourself (ULT)

Here the law of Moses is using a future statement to give a command. Alternate translation: “You are to love your neighbor as you love yourself” (See: [Statements — Other Uses](#))

You will love your neighbor as yourself (ULT)

The words **you** and **yourself** are singular in this quotation because, even though Moses gave this law to the Israelites as a group, each individual person was expected to obey it. So in your translation, use the singular forms of “you” and “yourself” if your language marks that distinction. (See: [Singular Pronouns that refer to Groups](#))

your neighbor (ULT)

This is an idiom. It does not mean only someone who lives nearby. Alternate translation: “other people” or “anyone you encounter” (See: [Idiom](#))

you do well (ULT)

Alternate translation: “you are doing what God wants you to do”

James 2:9

you favor (ULT)

Your language may require you to specify the object of **favor**.
Alternate translation: "you favor the rich" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

⁹ But if you favor, you are committing sin, convicted by the law as transgressors.

convicted by the law as transgressors (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "and the law convicts you as transgressors" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

convicted by the law as transgressors (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the law as if it were a human judge. Alternate translation: "and you are guilty of breaking God's law" (See: [Personification](#))

James 2:10

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason for the statement he made in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “The reason why showing favoritism makes a person guilty of breaking God’s law is that” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

¹⁰ For whoever might keep the whole law but stumble in one thing has become guilty of all.

whoever...might keep (ULT)

Here, **keep** is an idiom that means “obey.” Alternate translation: “whoever might obey” (See: [Idiom](#))

but stumble in one thing (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of a person disobeying a commandment as if he would **stumble**, that is, trip and lose his balance while walking. Alternate translation: “but disobey one thing” (See: [Metaphor](#))

but stumble in one thing (ULT)

James is using the adjective **one** as a noun to refer to one commandment of the law. (ULT adds the term **thing** to show this.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate the term with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “but disobey one commandment” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

guilty of all (ULT)

Alternate translation: “guilty of breaking the entire law”

guilty of all (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly why James says that this is true. Alternate translation: “guilty of breaking the entire law, because God gave the entire law to show people how he wanted them to live, and if you break one part of it, you are not living in that way” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:11

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason for the statement he made in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “The reason why breaking one law makes a person guilty of breaking every law is that” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

the one...who said (ULT)

James is referring implicitly to God, who spoke the commandments quoted in this verse when he gave the law to Moses. Alternate translation: “God who said” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

11 For the one who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If, then, you do not commit adultery but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Do not commit adultery...Do not murder...you do not commit adultery...you do murder...you have become (ULT)

The implied “you” in the two commandments that James quotes in this verse is singular because, even though Moses gave these laws to the Israelites as a group, each individual person was expected to obey them. The word **you** is also singular in the rest of the verse because James is carrying forward that usage from the commandments. So in your translation, use the singular form of “you” if your language marks that distinction. (See: [Singular Pronouns that refer to Groups](#))

James 2:12

Thus speak and thus act (ULT)

The implied “you” in these imperatives is plural. James returns here to the plural usage that he follows in most of his letter. So in your translation, use the plural form of “you” if your language marks that distinction and if it reflects it in imperatives. Alternate translation: “Speak and act in this way” (See: [Forms of You](#))

ULT

¹² Thus speak and thus act, as ones who are going to be judged by means of the law of freedom.

ones who are going to be judged (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who will do the action. Alternate translation: “people whom God is going to judge” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

the law of freedom (ULT)

As in [1:25](#), James is using the possessive form to describe a **law** that brings **freedom**. Alternate translation: “the law that brings freedom” (See: [Possession](#))

the law of freedom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **freedom**, you could translate the idea behind it with an adjective such as “free.” Alternate translation: “the law that sets people free” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

the law of freedom (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what the **law** gives people the **freedom** to do. Alternate translation: “the law that sets people free to obey God” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

the law of freedom (ULT)

In this context, it appears that when James speaks of **the law of freedom**, he is referring to the commandment that he quoted in [2:8](#), “You will love your neighbor as yourself.” If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say this explicitly and explain how this law sets people free. Alternate translation: “the law to love one’s neighbor, which sets people free to obey God by giving them a principle to follow in all of their actions” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:13

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason why people should be guided in their actions by the principle of loving others, as he said in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “You should follow the principle of loving others because” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

¹³ For judgment {is} merciless to those who have not done mercy. Mercy boasts against judgment.

For judgment {is} merciless to those who have not done mercy (ULT)

James is using the word **judgment** figuratively to represent God, the one who judges. Alternate translation: “when God judges people, he will not be merciful to people who have not shown mercy to others” (See: [Metonymy](#))

For judgment {is} merciless to those who have not done mercy (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **judgment** as if it were a living thing that could act in a **merciless** way. Alternate translation: “When God judges people, he will not be merciful to people who have not shown mercy to others” (See: [Personification](#))

to those who have not done mercy (ULT)

The word translated **mercy** can also refer to compassion. Since James is referring in this context to following the command to love others, that is likely what it means here. Alternate translation: “those who have not acted compassionately towards others”

Mercy boasts against judgment (ULT)

There is an implied contrast between this sentence and the statement in the previous sentence that “judgment is merciless.” If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that contrast explicitly at the start of this sentence with a word such as “however.” Alternate translation: “However, mercy boasts against judgment” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

Mercy boasts against judgment (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **mercy** and **judgment** as if they were living things that could fight a contest against one another. He is also speaking figuratively of **mercy** as if it could boast after defeating **judgment** in such a contest. James is continuing to describe how God will judge people. Alternate translation: “However, God will show mercy when he judges people who have acted compassionately towards others” (See: [Personification](#))

James 2:14

What {would be} the profit, my brothers, if someone said he had faith, but he did not have works (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: "It does no good, my brothers, for someone to say he has faith if he does not have works." (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

¹⁴ What {would be} the profit, my brothers, if someone said he had faith, but he did not have works? Faith is not able to save him, is it?

What {would be} the profit (ULT)

This is an idiom. Your language may have a comparable expression that you can use here. Alternate translation: "What good would it do" (See: [Idiom](#))

my brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

if someone said he had faith, but he did not have works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "if someone said he believed in God but he did not do what God wanted him to do" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

Faith is not able to save him, is it (ULT)

In context, James is clearly asking not about **faith** in general, but about faith that is not demonstrated in **works**. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that explicitly. Alternate translation: "That kind of faith is not able to save him, is it" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Faith is not able to save him, is it (ULT)

The first word of this sentence in Greek is a negative word that can be used to turn a statement into a question that expects a negative answer. ULT shows this by adding "is it?" Your language may have other ways of asking a question that expects a negative answer, for example, by changing the word order of a positive statement. Alternate translation: "Is that kind of faith able to save him" (See: [Double Negatives](#))

Faith is not able to save him, is it (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "That kind of faith is certainly not able to save him!" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

Faith is not able to save him, is it (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **faith**, you could express the ideas behind it with a verb such as "believe." Alternate translation: "Will merely believing in God save him?" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

to save him (ULT)

Your language may require you to specify what this kind of faith cannot **save** a person from. Alternate translation: "save him from God's judgment"

James 2:15

If (ULT)

James is using a hypothetical situation to teach. He begins to describe the condition in this verse. He describes the rest of the condition and the result in the next verse. Alternate translation: "Suppose" (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

ULT

15 If a brother or sister were unclothed and lacking daily food,

a brother or sister (ULT)

As everywhere else in the book, the term **brother** refers to a fellow believer. In every other instance, the term can mean either a man or a woman. But in this verse James uses **brother** to mean a believer who is a man and **sister** to mean a believer who is a woman. If your language has both masculine and the feminine forms of the word you have been using to translate "brother," you can use them both here. Otherwise, you can use an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: "another man or woman who believes in Jesus" (See: [Metaphor](#))

unclothed (ULT)

Unclothed can mean "naked," and if a Bible translation already exists in your area, it may say that. But in this context, the word actually refers to lacking adequate clothes. Alternate translation: "badly clothed"

James 2:16

and (ULT)

James is continuing to describe the condition of the hypothetical situation that he is using to teach. Alternate translation: “and suppose that” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

to them...them (ULT)

Even though in the previous verse James spoke in the singular of “a brother or sister,” he now speaks of needy people generally in the plural, saying **them**. If this might be confusing for your readers, you could use the singular in this verse as well. Alternate translation: “to him or her ... him or her” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

ULT

16 and one of you said to them, “Go in peace, warm yourself and be satisfied,” but you did not give them the necessary things for the body, what {would be} the profit?

warm yourself and be satisfied (ULT)

The person who would say this to people in need would be speaking figuratively of clothing by association with the way it keeps people warm and figuratively of food by association with the way it satisfies people. Alternate translation: “have adequate clothing and enough food” (See: [Metonymy](#))

warm yourself (ULT)

Alternate translation: “stay warm”

be satisfied (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an equivalent expression that uses an active verbal form. Alternate translation: “have enough food to satisfy you” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

but (ULT)

James is continuing to describe the hypothetical situation that he is using to teach. Alternate translation: “but also suppose that” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

you did not give (ULT)

At the beginning of this verse, James speaks in the third-person singular of **one of you**. But he now speaks of believers generally in the second-person plural, saying **you**, to indicate how the community as a whole might respond to this situation. If this might be confusing for your readers, you could use the third-person singular here as well. Alternate translation: “he does not give” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

the necessary things (ULT)

James is using the adjective **necessary** in the plural as a noun. (ULT adds **things** to show this.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate the term with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “the things that are necessary” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

for the body (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of meeting physical needs that also have an emotional and spiritual dimension by association with the way that these are needs of the human **body**. Alternate translation: “for people to be warm and well-fed” (See: [Metonymy](#))

what {would be} the profit (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. See how you translated the similar expression in [2:14](#). Alternate translation: “that does no good!” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

what {would be} the profit (ULT)

This is the result of the hypothetical situation that James has been using to teach. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “Then that does no good!” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

James 2:17

faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **faith** as if it would be a living thing if it had works but not be alive if it did not have them. Alternate translation: “a person’s faith is not genuine by itself; he must express it through works” (See: [Personification](#))

ULT

¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “if a person says he believes in God but he does not do what God wants him to do, then he does not really believe in God” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 2:18

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works (ULT)

See the discussion of this sentence in the General Notes to this chapter. You may want to turn the direct quotation into an indirect quotation to help your readers understand that the **you** who is being addressed is the same “one of you” as in [2:16](#) and that when James says **I**, he is referring to himself. Alternate translation: “But someone may tell you that you have faith and I have works” (See: [Direct and Indirect Quotations](#))

ULT

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from works.

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works (ULT)

See the discussion of this sentence in the General Notes to this chapter. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate more explicitly what this statement means. (UST explains the implications even further than is suggested here.) Alternate translation: “But someone may try to reassure you that you nevertheless have faith, while I, James, have works” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

But someone will say (ULT)

James is using a hypothetical situation to teach. This expression introduces the condition of the hypothetical situation. (As Part 1 of the General Introduction to James explains, in the style of speakers of this time, James is anticipating an objection that someone might make and saying how he would respond to it.) Alternate translation: “But suppose someone said to you” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

You have faith (ULT)

Here, **you** is singular because James is illustrating how someone might address one individual. James himself then addresses that same individual in the rest of this verse and in verses [19-22](#). So if your language marks the distinction, use the singular form of “you” in your translation from here through verse 22. (See: [Forms of ‘You’ — Singular](#))

Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from works (ULT)

It may be helpful to make this sentence a direct quotation after an introduction to show that it is what James would say in response to the hypothetical objection. Alternate translation: “Then I would say to you, ‘Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from works’” (See: [Direct and Indirect Quotations](#))

Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from works (ULT)

This is the result of the hypothetical situation that James has been describing. Alternate translation: “Then I would say to you, ‘Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith from works’” (See: [Hypothetical Situations](#))

Show me your faith without works (ULT)

James is using the imperative **show me** to challenge the hypothetical “you” and make him realize that he really cannot do what James is telling him to do. Alternate translation: “You cannot show me your faith without works” (See: [Imperatives — Other Uses](#))

Show me your faith without works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “You cannot show me that you truly believe in God if you are not doing what God wants you to do” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

and I will show you my faith from works (ULT)

James is using a future statement to indicate something he is capable of doing. Alternate translation: “but I can show you my faith from works” (See: [Statements — Other Uses](#))

and I will show you my faith from works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “but by doing what God wants me to do, I can show you that I truly believe in God” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 2:19

You believe that God is one (ULT)

The verb translated **believe** comes from the same root as the word translated “faith.” It may be helpful to your readers to show in your translation that James is continuing to speak to the same person as in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “You have faith that God is one”

ULT

19 You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and they tremble.

You believe that God is one (ULT)

As Part 1 of the General Introduction to James explains, the people to whom James was writing were believers in Jesus who had a Jewish background. As a result, they would have known that he was referring here to the essential Jewish affirmation, “Listen, Israel, Yahweh our God is one.” Moses says this in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#). If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: “You believe the essential teaching of Moses that there is one God”

You do well. The demons also believe, and they tremble (ULT)

When James says **you do well**, he is saying the opposite of what he really means. He grants that believing in one God is a good thing in itself, but he is actually saying that by itself, it is the kind of faith without works that cannot save a person. He proves this by observing that the demons, who are not saved, also believe that there is one God, and this makes them tremble. Alternate translation: “You may think that is a good thing to do. But the demons also believe in one God, and they tremble” (See: [Irony](#))

The demons also believe, and they tremble (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly why the demons **tremble** at the thought of God. Alternate translation: “The demons also believe in one God, and they tremble, knowing that God is going to punish them” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:20

But do you wish to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is idle (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: "But I can show you, O foolish man, that faith without works is idle." (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

²⁰ But do you wish to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is idle? ^[1]

do you wish...to know (ULT)

This is an idiom. It means "I can show you" by suggesting implicitly, "If you really want to know, I can show you." Alternate translation as a statement: "I can show you" (See: [Idiom](#))

O foolish man (ULT)

James is addressing this hypothetical **man** in the vocative after an exclamation. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: "you foolish man"

O foolish man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that could mean any person, male or female. Alternate translation: "you foolish person" (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

faith without works is idle (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **faith** as if it were a living thing that would be lazily doing nothing if it did not have works. Alternate translation: "a person's faith is useless if he does not express it through works" or "a person's faith is unproductive if he does not express it through works" (See: [Personification](#))

faith without works is idle (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "it is useless for a person to say that he believes in God if he does not do what God wants him to do" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

faith without works is idle (ULT)

See the discussion of textual issues at the end of the General Notes to this chapter to decide whether to use this reading in your translation or a different reading, "faith without works is dead." The note below discusses a translation issue in that reading, for those who decide to use it. (See: [Textual Variants](#))

faith without works is idle (ULT)

If the reading "faith without works is dead" is accurate, then James is speaking figuratively of **faith** as if it would be alive if it had works but it would not be alive if it did not have them. Alternate translation: "a person's faith is not genuine if he does not express it through works" (See: [Personification](#))

James 2:21

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: "Abraham our father was justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar." (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that he is referring to a story recorded in the book of Genesis. In that story, God tells Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, but God does not really want Abraham to do that. Rather, God wants Abraham to demonstrate his faith and obedience by showing that he is willing to do it. God ultimately stops Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac. You could indicate this explicitly if it would be helpful to your readers, particularly if they would not know the story and if they would think that Abraham actually did offer his son as a sacrifice. Alternate translation, as a statement: "Abraham our father was justified by works when he demonstrated that he was willing to obey God even if that meant offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice, although God did not actually want him to do that and God stopped him from doing it" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Was not Abraham our father justified by works (ULT)

See the discussion in Part 2 of the General Introduction to James about how a person is justified before God. James is not saying that Abraham did something that made God consider him righteous. Rather, as James will explain in more detail in the next two verses, God had previously declared Abraham to be righteous because Abraham believed in him. What Abraham did subsequently, when he proved that he was willing to obey God, demonstrated that his faith was genuine. You could indicate this explicitly if it would be helpful to your readers, particularly if they might misunderstand and think that Abraham did something that made God consider him righteous. Alternate translation, as a statement: "God declared Abraham our father to be righteous because what he did demonstrated that he genuinely believed in God" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

not Abraham our father...Was...justified (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who did the action. Alternate translation, as a statement: "God justified Abraham our father" or "God declared Abraham our father to be righteous" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

Abraham...Isaac (ULT)

These are the names of two men. (See: [How to Translate Names](#))

our father (ULT)

James is using the term **father** figuratively to mean "ancestor." Alternate translation: "Abraham our ancestor" (See: [Metaphor](#))

our father (ULT)

James is Jewish, descended from Abraham, and the people to whom he is writing also come from a Jewish background, so the word **our** would be inclusive, if your language marks that distinction. (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'](#))

James 2:22

You see (ULT)

Here, to **see** figuratively represents to understand. Alternate translation: "So you should understand" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

22 You see that faith was working with his works and faith was perfected from works.

faith was working with his works and faith was perfected from works (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **faith** and **works** as if they were living things that could work together and help each other. Alternate translation: "Abraham was strengthened to do these works by his faith, and doing these works made his faith even stronger" (See: [Personification](#))

faith was working with his works and faith was perfected from works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "Abraham did these things because he believed in God, and because he did these things, he believed in God even more" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

faith was perfected from works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "his works perfected his faith" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

faith was perfected from works (ULT)

The verb **perfected** comes from the same root as the adjective "perfect" that James uses several times earlier in this letter. The verb refers similarly to something developing to the point where it is fully suited to its purpose. Alternate translation: "what he did helped his faith become fully mature"

James 2:23

the scripture was fulfilled (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “this fulfilled the scripture” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (ULT)

This is a quotation from [Genesis 15:6](#). James assumes that his readers will know that it refers to how Abraham responded to God’s promise that even though he and his wife were old and had no children, he would have as many descendants as the stars in the sky. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could give an explicit indication of this. Alternate translation: “Abraham believed God’s promise that he would have many descendants, and so God considered Abraham to be in a right relationship with him” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

he was called a friend of God (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that in [Isaiah 41:8](#), God refers to the Israelites as “the offspring of Abraham my friend” and that in [2 Chronicles 20:7](#), in a prayer to God, King Jehoshaphat refers to the Israelites as “the descendants of Abraham your friend.” If it would be helpful to your readers, you could give an explicit indication of this. Alternate translation: “he was called a friend of God in later scriptures” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

he was called a friend of God (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you can say who did the action. Alternate translation: “God, speaking through Isaiah, later called him his friend, and in prayer King Jehoshaphat also described him as God’s friend” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

ULT

²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness,” and he was called a friend of God.

James 2:24

You see (ULT)

Here, to **see** figuratively represents to understand. Alternate translation: “So you should understand” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

24 You see that a man is justified from works and not from faith alone.

You see (ULT)

James returns here to the plural usage that he follows in most of the letter. So in your translation, use the plural form of “you” if your language marks that distinction. Other languages may have other ways of indicating the shift back to plural here. Alternate translation: “So all of you should understand” (See: [Forms of You](#))

a man (ULT)

James is using the term **man** in a generic sense that could mean any person, male or female. Alternate translation: “a person” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

is justified (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “becomes right with God” or “comes to have a right relationship with God” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

from works...and not from faith alone (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “by what he does and not just by what he believes” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

from works...and not from faith alone (ULT)

See the discussion in Part 2 of the General Introduction to James about how a person is justified before God. James is not saying that we need to add works to our faith in order to be justified. Rather, James is speaking of works that are an expression and proof of the saving faith that a person already has. You could indicate this explicitly if it would be helpful to your readers, particularly if they might misunderstand and think that James is saying that we have to add works to our faith in order for God to consider us righteous. Alternate translation: “by what he does as an expression of what he believes, and not just by what he believes” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 2:25

And similarly was not Rahab the prostitute also justified from works, having welcomed the messengers and having sent them away by another road (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: “Rahab the prostitute was also justified similarly from works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them away by another road.” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

²⁵ And similarly was not Rahab the prostitute also justified from works, having welcomed the messengers and having sent them away by another road?

similarly...not Rahab the prostitute also...was...justified (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who did the action. Alternate translation: “did not God similarly justify Rahab the prostitute” or “did not God similarly declare Rahab the prostitute to be righteous” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

similarly (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what **similarly** means in this context. Alternate translation: “in the same way as Abraham,” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Rahab (ULT)

Rahab is the name of a woman. (See: [How to Translate Names](#))

from works (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **works**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “by what she did” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

having welcomed the messengers and having sent them away by another road (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that he is referring to the episode recorded in the book of Joshua in which Joshua sent two spies to explore the land of Canaan. Rahab provided safety and shelter for these spies in her home, and she then sent them away safely by a route that their pursuers would not have expected them to take. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could give an explicit indication of this. Alternate translation: “when she provided shelter and safety in her home for the spies whom Joshua sent to explore the land of Canaan and when she sent these spies safely away by a route that their pursuers would not have expected them to take” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

having sent them away (ULT)

Since there were two **messengers**, the pronoun **them** would be in the dual, if your language uses that form. (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

James 2:26

For (ULT)

James is using this word to introduce a general principle that can be deduced from the argument he has been making since [2:14](#) that **faith** needs to be expressed in **works**. He does not say **For**, which often means “because,” to indicate that God justified Abraham and Rahab for this reason. Rather, he is using the word **For** in order to bring his argument to its conclusion. Alternate translation: “These specific cases confirm the general principle that” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, thus also faith without works is dead.

the body without the spirit is dead (ULT)

The word translated **spirit** can also mean “breath.” Alternate translation: “a body that does not have the breath of life in it is dead”

faith without works is dead (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **faith** as if it would be a living thing if it had works but not be alive if it did not have them. Alternate translation: “a person’s faith is not genuine if he does not express it through works” (See: [Personification](#))

faith without works is dead (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **faith** and **works**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “if a person says he believes in God but he does not do what God wants him to do, then he does not really believe in God” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 3

James 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

The need for self-control in speech (3:1-12)

Worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom contrasted (3:13-18)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

In this chapter, James uses many illustrations from everyday life to teach his readers how to live in a way that pleases God. He speaks about horses in [3:3](#), ships in [3:4](#), forest fires in [3:5](#), animal taming in [3:7](#), springs of water in [3:11](#), and fruit trees in [3:12](#). (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 3:1

Do not become many teachers (ULT)

Alternate translation: "Not many of you should become teachers"

my brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

knowing that (ULT)

Alternate translation: "since you know that"

we will receive greater judgment (ULT)

James is speaking of himself and other teachers but not of his readers, so the pronoun **we** is exclusive here.

Alternate translation: "we who teach will receive greater judgment" (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'](#))

we will receive greater judgment (ULT)

By **greater judgment**, James means that God will judge people who teach his word more strictly than he will judge other people. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate explicitly why that is true. Alternate translation: "God will judge us who teach his word more strictly than he will judge other people, because our teaching greatly influences what other people believe and how they live" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

¹ Do not become many teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment.

James 3:2

For (ULT)

James is using **For** to introduce the reason why most of his readers should not become teachers, not the reason why God will judge teachers more strictly. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could explain this reason more fully as a separate sentence, as UST does. (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

² For we all stumble much. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle even the whole body.

much...we all stumble (ULT)

James is using the adjective **much** as an adverb. Alternate translation: “we all stumble in many ways”

much...we all stumble (ULT)

James is now speaking of himself and other teachers and also of his readers and people in general, so the pronoun **we** is inclusive here. Alternate translation: “everyone stumbles in many ways” (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’](#))

much...we all stumble...does not stumble in word (ULT)

As in [2:10](#), James is speaking figuratively of people sinning as if they would **stumble**, that is, trip and lose their balance while walking. Alternate translation: “we all sin in many ways ... does not sin in word” (See: [Metaphor](#))

If anyone does not stumble in word (ULT)

James is using the term **word** figuratively to mean what people say by using words. Alternate translation: “If anyone does not sin in what he says” or “If anyone does not say things that are wrong” (See: [Metonymy](#))

he is a perfect man (ULT)

As in [1:4](#) and several other places earlier in this letter, the term **perfect** refers to something that has developed to the point where it is fully suited to its purpose. Alternate translation: “he is a spiritually mature person”

able to bridle even the whole body (ULT)

As in [1:26](#), James speaks figuratively of a person being able to **bridle** himself as if that person were controlling a horse with a bridle. Alternate translation: “able to control his whole body” (See: [Metaphor](#))

able to bridle even the whole body (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of a person’s **body** to mean all of that person, including his actions and behavior. Alternate translation: “able to control everything he does” (See: [Synecdoche](#))

James 3:3

Now (ULT)

James uses **Now** to introduce background information in the form of an illustration that will help his readers understand what he wants to teach them. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could translate the word with a phrase that shows that James is going to offer an illustration, as UST does. (See: [Connect — Background Information](#))

ULT

³ Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses for them to obey us, we also turn their whole body.

we put bits into the mouths of horses (ULT)

Horses are large animals that are used in many cultures to transport people and goods. **Bits** are small pieces of metal that are placed into horses' mouths to control where they go. If your readers would not be familiar with **horses** and **bits**, in your translation you could use the name of another animal and a different device, or you could use a general expression. Alternate translation: "we put pegs into the noses of camels" or "we use small devices on the bodies of large animals" (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

into...for them...to obey...us (ULT)

Alternate translation: "so that they will obey us"

we also turn their whole body (ULT)

James means that by using a bit, people can **turn** the body of a horse in whatever direction they want. James is figuratively using the action of turning a horse to mean guiding or controlling it in general. Alternate translation: "this enables us to guide their whole body" or "this enables us to control their whole body" (See: [Metonymy](#))

to obey...their whole...body (ULT)

Since James speaks of **horses** in the plural, it might be more natural in your language to use the plural form of **body**. Alternate translation: "their whole bodies"

James 3:4

Behold also the ships (ULT)

The term **behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. Though it literally means “look” or “see,” the term can be used figuratively to mean giving notice and attention, and that is how James is using it here. Alternate translation: “Also consider the case of ships” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁴ Behold also the ships, being so large and driven by strong winds, it is turned by the smallest rudder where the inclination of the one steering desires.

ships...the...rudder (ULT)

Ships are large vessels that are used to transport people or goods by water. A **rudder** is a flat device attached to the back of a ship that is used to steer it. If your readers would not be familiar with what **ships** are and what a **rudder** is, in your translation you could use the name of another transportation vehicle and a different device, or you could use a general expression. Alternate translation: “trucks ... steering wheel” or “large vehicles ... steering device” (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

being so large and driven by strong winds (ULT)

It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “Even though they are so large and driven by strong winds”

being so large and driven by strong winds (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “Even though they are so large and strong winds drive them” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

it is turned by the smallest rudder (ULT)

James is figuratively using the action of turning a ship to mean guiding or controlling the ship in general. (For example, a person might turn a ship in order to keep it upright, not just to direct it to a certain place.) Alternate translation: “it is controlled by the smallest rudder” or “it is guided by the smallest rudder” (See: [Metonymy](#))

it is turned by the smallest rudder (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “the smallest rudder turns it” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

it is turned by the smallest rudder (ULT)

Since James speaks of **ships** in the plural, it might be more natural in your language to use the plural in this clause as well. Alternate translation: “they are turned by the smallest rudders” or “the smallest rudders turn them”

the smallest rudder (ULT)

James says **smallest**, using the superlative form of the adjective “small,” to express a meaning of the adjective in its positive form. Your language may use superlative forms in the same way. If not, you can translate this using the positive form. Alternate translation: “a very small rudder”

where the inclination of the one steering desires (ULT)

James speaks of the **inclination** of the person steering a boat as if it were a living thing that desired to go in one direction or another. Alternate translation: “in whatever direction the one steering the boat wants it to go” (See: [Personification](#))

of the one steering (ULT)

James is using the participle **steering**, which functions as an adjective, as a noun to indicate a particular crew member of a ship. Your language may have a particular term for this crew member. Alternate translation: “of the helmsman” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

James 3:5

Thus also (ULT)

James uses the words **thus also** to introduce a simile or comparison between the human tongue and the small items he discussed in the previous two verses, a horse's bit and a ship's rudder. Alternate translation: "In the same way" or "Likewise" (See: [Simile](#))

ULT

⁵ Thus also the tongue is a small member, but it boasts great things. Behold how small a fire kindles so large a forest.

a small member (ULT)

Alternate translation: "a part of the body"

but (ULT)

Here, **but** introduces a contrast between the small size of the tongue and the great things that people use their tongues in speech to boast about. (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

it boasts great things (ULT)

James is saying figuratively that the **tongue** is a living thing that **boasts**. Alternate translation: "with it people boast great things" (See: [Personification](#))

it boasts great things (ULT)

James is using the adjective **great** in the plural as a noun. (ULT adds **things** to show this.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate the term with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: "with it people boast that they have done great things" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

Behold (ULT)

The term **Behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. Alternate translation: "Consider" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Behold (ULT)

The implication is that James is offering his readers a further analogy. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: "Consider as a further example" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

how small a fire kindles so large a forest (ULT)

A **forest** is a place where there are many trees. If your readers would not be familiar with what a **forest** is, you could use a different illustration that would be familiar to them of an area that could be destroyed by fire, or you could use a general expression. Alternate translation: "how a small fire can quickly spread and burn much grassland" or "how a small fire can quickly spread and burn everything in a large area" (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

James 3:6

The tongue is also a fire (ULT)

James is using the **tongue** figuratively to represent what people say, by association with the way the tongue is used for speech. Alternate translation: "What we say is also a fire" (See: [Metonymy](#))

The tongue is also a fire (ULT)

James is using **fire** as an analogy for the destructive effects of what people say. Alternate translation: "What we say can also be very destructive" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁶ The tongue is also a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is placed among our members, the thing staining the whole body and setting the course of existence on fire, and it is set on fire by Gehenna.

a world of unrighteousness (ULT)

This is an idiom. The sense is that all the **unrighteousness** in the **world** could be expressed in what someone said. Alternate translation: "a vast source of unrighteousness" (See: [Idiom](#))

of unrighteousness (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **unrighteousness**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent expression. In this context, the term refers to wrong things that people say. Alternate translation: "of sinful sayings" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

is placed among (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this phrase, you could say this with an active verbal form. Alternate translation: "is in the middle of" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

our members (ULT)

Alternate translation: "the other parts of our body"

the thing staining (ULT)

James is using the participle **staining**, which functions as an adjective, with the definite article as a noun. (ULT indicates this by adding **thing**.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Some languages may be able to use the participle by itself. Alternate translation: "staining" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

staining the whole body (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of the effects of speech as if a person's tongue were **staining** his **body**. Alternate translation: "making the whole body impure" (See: [Metaphor](#))

staining the whole body (ULT)

James is figuratively using the **body** to represent the entire person, since he is saying in this verse that bad speech has morally corrupting effects. Alternate translation: "making the whole person morally corrupt" (See: [Metaphor](#))

setting the course of existence on fire (ULT)

The **course of existence** is an idiom that could refer to: (1) a person's entire life, from birth to death. Alternate translation: "setting a person's entire life on fire" (2) succeeding generations. Alternate translation: "setting on fire one generation of people after another" (See: [Idiom](#))

setting the course of existence on fire (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the destructive effects of bad speech as if they were **setting** a person's life **on fire**. Alternate translation: "causing destruction throughout a person's entire life" (See: [Metaphor](#))

it is set on fire by Gehenna (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this phrase, you could say this with an active verbal form. Alternate translation: "Gehenna sets it on fire" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

it is set on fire by Gehenna (ULT)

James continues to speak figuratively of the destructive effects of bad speech as if they were **fire**. Alternate translation: "its destructive effects come from Gehenna" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Gehenna (ULT)

Gehenna is the Greek name for a place, the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem. (See: [How to Translate Names](#))

Gehenna (ULT)

James is figuratively using the name of this place, where refuse was thrown and fires burned continually, to mean hell. Alternate translation: "hell" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Gehenna (ULT)

Since hell, as a location, would not be able to influence people's speech and conduct, James is likely using the name **Gehenna** figuratively to mean the devil by association. Alternate translation: "the devil" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 3:7

For (ULT)

James uses **For** to introduce background information in the form of an illustration that will help his readers understand what he wants to teach them. Alternate translation: “Now” (See: [Connect — Background Information](#))

ULT

⁷ For every kind, both of beasts and birds, both of reptiles and marine animals, is being tamed and has been tamed by the human kind.

every...kind, both of beasts and birds, both of reptiles and marine animals, is being tamed and has been tamed (ULT)

Here, **every** is a generalization for emphasis. Alternate translation: “many different kinds of beasts, birds, reptiles, and marine animals are being tamed and have been tamed” (See: [Hyperbole](#))

For every kind, both of beasts and birds, both of reptiles and marine animals (ULT)

If you retain the generalization in your translation, it might be more natural in your language to use the singular for the creatures on this list. Alternate translation: “every kind of beast, bird, reptile, and marine animal”

For every kind, both of beasts and birds, both of reptiles and marine animals (ULT)

James is figuratively using various categories of creatures to mean every creature. Alternate translation: “every kind of creature that exists” (See: [Merism](#))

marine animals (ULT)

James is using the adjective **marine** in the plural as a noun. (ULT adds **animals** to show this.) Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate the term with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “sea creatures” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

is being tamed and has been tamed by the human kind (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation (place the phrase right after “For”): “the human kind is taming and has tamed” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

is being tamed and has been tamed by the human kind (ULT)

James says both **is being tamed** and **has been tamed** for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand these phrases, you could combine them. Alternate translation (place the phrase right after “For”): “the human kind is in the process of taming” (See: [Doublet](#))

by the human kind

Alternate translation: “by people”

James 3:8

none...of men (ULT)

James is using the term **men** in a generic sense that includes all people. Alternate translation: “no human being” (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

ULT

⁸ But none of men is able to tame the tongue, an unsettled evil, full of deadly poison.

to tame (ULT)

By analogy with the animals he discussed in the previous verse, James is using the word **tame** to mean “control.” Alternate translation: “to control” (See: [Metaphor](#))

the...tongue (ULT)

James is using the **tongue** figuratively to represent what people say, by association with the way the tongue is used for speech. Alternate translation: “what he says” (See: [Metonymy](#))

an unsettled evil (ULT)

James is using the adjective **evil** as a noun. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “an unsettled evil thing” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

an unsettled evil (ULT)

In this context, the word **unsettled** means “restless.” James is speaking figuratively of the **tongue** as if it were a living thing that could never rest because it always had to be saying bad things. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “We are constantly saying evil things” (See: [Personification](#))

full of deadly poison (ULT)

James is using **deadly poison** as an analogy for the destructive effects of what people say. Alternate translation (continuing a new sentence): “and what we say has very destructive effects” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 3:9

With it we bless...and with it we curse (ULT)

The pronoun **it** refers to the tongue. Alternate translation: "With our tongue we bless ... and with our tongue we curse" (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

ULT

⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have come into being according to the likeness of God.

With it we bless...and with it we curse (ULT)

James is using the **tongue** figuratively to represent what people say, by association with the way the tongue is used for speech. Alternate translation: "We use our tongue in speech to bless ... and we use our tongue in speech to curse" or "By what we say, we bless ... and by what we say, we curse" (See: [Metonymy](#))

we bless (ULT)

In this context, **bless** does not mean to confer a blessing on someone, as a superior would to an inferior. Rather, it means to say good things about someone. Alternate translation: "we say good things about"

the Lord and Father (ULT)

James is not talking about two different people. He is expressing a single idea by using two nouns connected with **and**. The noun **Father** further identifies **the Lord**. Alternate translation: "the Lord our Father" (See: [Hendiadys](#))

Father (ULT)

Father is an important title for God. (See: [Translating Son and Father](#))

men (ULT)

James is using the term **men** in a generic sense that includes all people. Alternate translation: "people" (See: [When Masculine Words Include Women](#))

who have come into being according to the likeness of God (ULT)

James means implicitly that God created people in his own **likeness**. Alternate translation: "whom God made according to his own likeness" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 3:10

Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing (ULT)

James is using the **mouth** figuratively to represent what people say, by association with the way the mouth is used for speech. Alternate translation: "The same person speaks blessing and cursing" (See: [Metonymy](#))

ULT

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. It is not necessary, my brothers, for these things to happen thus.

Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **blessing** and **cursing**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "The same person says things to bless God and to curse people" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

blessing (ULT)

See how you translated the word "bless" in [3:9](#). You may wish to use a similar translation here. Alternate translation: "good sayings"

It is not necessary, my brothers, for these things to happen thus (ULT)

James is speaking idiomatically here. Alternate translation: "My brothers, things like this should not happen" (See: [Idiom](#))

my brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 3:11

A spring does not gush the sweet and the bitter from the same opening, does it (ULT)

The first word of this sentence in Greek is a negative word that can be used to turn a statement into a question that expects a negative answer. ULT shows this by adding “does it?” Your language may have other ways of asking a question that expects a negative answer, for example, by changing the word order of a positive statement. Alternate translation: “Does a spring gush the sweet and the bitter from the same opening” (See: [Double Negatives](#))

ULT

¹¹ A spring does not gush the sweet and the bitter from the same opening, does it?

A spring does not gush the sweet and the bitter from the same opening, does it (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: “A spring does not gush the sweet and the bitter from the same opening!” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

A spring (ULT)

In this context, the term **spring** refers to a spring of water, that is, a source of water that comes up from the ground. Alternate translation: “A spring of water”

the sweet and the bitter (ULT)

James is using the adjectives **sweet** and **bitter** as nouns to refer to types of water. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate these with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “sweet water and bitter water” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

James 3:12

A fig tree is not able to make olives, is it, my brothers (ULT)

The first word of this sentence in Greek is a negative word that can be used to turn a statement into a question that expects a negative answer. ULT shows this by adding “is it?” Your language may have other ways of asking a question that expects a negative answer, for example, by changing the word order of a positive statement. Alternate translation: “Is a fig tree able to make olives” (See: [Double Negatives](#))

ULT

¹² A fig tree is not able to make olives, is it, my brothers, or a grapevine, figs? Nor salty to make sweet water.

A fig tree is not able to make olives, is it, my brothers (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: “A fig tree is not able to make olives” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

A fig tree is not able to make olives, is it, my brothers (ULT)

A **fig tree** is a tree that produces small, sweet fruit. **Olives** also grow on trees, so they are technically fruit, but they are oily and pungent. If your readers would not be familiar with these kinds of fruit, you could use two other contrasting kinds of fruit as examples, or you could use a general expression. Alternate translation (as a statement): “One kind of tree is not able to produce fruit that would grow on a different kind of tree” (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

my brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: “my fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

or a grapevine, figs (ULT)

James is leaving out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from earlier in the sentence. Alternate translation: “or is a grapevine able to make figs” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

or a grapevine, figs (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement if you also translated the question in the earlier part of the sentence as a statement. Alternate translation: “and a grapevine is not able to make figs” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

or a grapevine, figs (ULT)

A **grapevine** is a woody vine that produces small, juicy fruit. This fruit is quite different from **figs**. If your readers would not be familiar with these kinds of fruit, you could use two other contrasting kinds of fruit as examples, or you could use a general expression. If you already used a general expression earlier in the verse, you could restate it here as a separate sentence for emphasis. Alternate translation: “No, a tree is not able to do that” (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

Nor salty to make sweet water (ULT)

James concludes his teaching about speech with this final example. It may be helpful after this example to restate the implications of all the examples that James has given in this verse and in the previous verse, as UST does. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Nor salty to make sweet water (ULT)

James is leaving out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from earlier in the verse. Alternate translation: “And something that is salty is not able to produce sweet water” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

salty (ULT)

James is using the adjective **salty** as a noun. Since James is speaking of something that can **make** or produce **water**, he is likely speaking of a spring. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “a saline spring” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

James 3:13

Who {is} wise and understanding among you? Let him show (ULT)

James is not looking for information. He is using the question form to express a condition. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate this as a conditional statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone is wise and understanding among you, let him show" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

¹³ Who {is} wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works from good conduct in the humility of wisdom.

wise and understanding (ULT)

The words **wise** and **understanding** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could translate them with a single expression. Alternate translation: "truly wise" (See: [Doublet](#))

Let him show his works from good conduct in the humility of wisdom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **works**, **conduct**, **humility**, and **wisdom**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "Let him show by conducting himself well, and by being humble as a wise person should be, that he does what God wants him to do" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

in the humility of wisdom (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe **humility** that comes from **wisdom**. Alternate translation: "in the humility that comes from wisdom" or "with the humble attitude that comes from being wise" (See: [Possession](#))

James 3:14

you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your heart (ULT)

James is using the **heart** figuratively to represent the thoughts and emotions. Alternate translation: “you have bitterly envious and ambitious thoughts and feelings” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie against the truth.

you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your heart (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **jealousy** and **ambition**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “in your heart you resent what other people have and you want to be more successful than anyone else” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

your heart (ULT)

Since **you** and **your** are plural in this verse, if you retain the metaphor **heart** in your translation, it might be more natural in your language to use the plural form of that word. Alternate translation: “your hearts”

do not boast and lie against the truth (ULT)

Since James says in the previous verse that someone who is truly wise will be humble, he could be saying here that if someone claims to be wise but is jealous and ambitious, he is showing that he is actually not wise. Alternate translation: “then do not boast that you are wise, because that would not be true” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

lie against the truth (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **truth**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as “true.” Alternate translation: “tell lies that are not true” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

lie against the truth (ULT)

In your language, it might seem that this phrase expresses unnecessary extra information. If so, you could express the same meaning in a different way. Alternate translation: “say things that are not true” (See: [Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit](#))

James 3:15

This (ULT)

This refers to the “bitter jealousy and ambition” that James describes in the previous verse. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: “This bitter jealousy and ambition” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but {it is} earthly, soulish, demonic.

the wisdom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **wisdom**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as “wise.” Alternate translation: “the wise way of living” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

that comes down from above (ULT)

James says **from above**, meaning “from heaven,” as a spatial metaphor that means “from God.” Alternate translation: “that comes from God” or “that God teaches” (See: [Metaphor](#))

earthly (ULT)

The word **earthly** refers to the values and behavior of people who do not honor God. James uses the word by association with the way such people live on earth without regard for the values and behavior that are characteristic of heaven. Alternate translation: “not honoring to God” (See: [Metonymy](#))

soulish (ULT)

James is figuratively using one part of the human being, the soul, as opposed to another part, the spirit, to mean “unspiritual.” The sense could be either that this behavior has no regard for spiritual things or that it does not come from the Holy Spirit. Alternate translation: “unspiritual” (See: [Metonymy](#))

demonic (ULT)

Alternate translation: “from demons” or “like the behavior of demons”

James 3:16

For (ULT)

James is giving the reason for the statement he made in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “It is clear that this is not godly wisdom, because” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

16 For where {there is} jealousy and ambition, there {is} unsettledness and every wicked deed.

where {there is...jealousy and ambition, there {is} unsettledness and every wicked deed (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **envy**, **ambition**, and **unsettledness**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “when people are envious and ambitious, this causes them to act in disorderly and evil ways” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

every wicked deed (ULT)

Here, **every** is a generalization for emphasis. Alternate translation: “many kinds of wicked deeds” (See: [Hyperbole](#))

James 3:17

the...wisdom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **wisdom**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as “wise.” Alternate translation: “the wise way of living” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

from above (ULT)

See how you translated this in [3:15](#). Alternate translation: “that comes from God” or “that God teaches” (See: [Metaphor](#))

good fruits (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of **good fruits** to mean kind things that people do for others as a result of having wisdom from God. Alternate translation: “good deeds” (See: [Metaphor](#))

sincere (ULT)

Alternate translation: “not hypocritical” or “honest” or “truthful”

ULT

17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, cooperative, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere.

James 3:18

the fruit...of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (ULT)

James speaks figuratively of those who **make peace** as if they were sowing seeds, and of righteousness as if it were **fruit** that grew from those seeds. Alternate translation: “those who work in peace to make peace produce righteousness” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

the fruit...of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **righteousness** and **peace**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “those who work peacefully to help people live together peacefully are helping those people to live in the right way” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

the fruit...of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (ULT)

If you decide to retain the metaphor of sowing, you could express it with an active verbal form, if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “those who make peace sow the fruit of righteousness in peace” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

James 4

James 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Worldly desires and the sin and conflict they cause (4:1-12)

A warning against boasting about tomorrow (4:13-17)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Adultery

Writers in the Bible often speak of adultery as a metaphor for people who say they love God but do things that God hates. James uses the same metaphor in 4:4. (See: [Metaphor](#) and [godly](#), [godliness](#), [ungodly](#), [godless](#), [ungodliness](#), [godlessness](#))

James 4:1

From where {are} wars and from where {are} battles among you (ULT)

The word translated **whence** means “from where.” Your language may have a similar word that you can use in your translation. Otherwise, you can express the same meaning in a way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: “Where do wars and battles among you come from”

ULT

¹ From where {are} wars and from where {are} battles among you? {Are they} not from there, from your lusts, which fight in your members?

From where {are} wars and from where {are} battles among you (ULT)

James is using the terms **wars** and **battles** figuratively. Alternate translation: “Where do the conflicts and disputes that you are having come from” (See: [Metaphor](#))

From where {are} wars and from where {are} battles among you (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: “I will tell you where the conflicts and disputes that you are having come from.” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

From where {are} wars and from where {are} battles among you (ULT)

The words **wars** and **battles** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could translate them with a single expression. Alternate translation (as a statement): “I will tell you where the continual conflicts that you are having come from.” (See: [Doublet](#))

Are they} not from there, from your lusts, which fight in your members (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. Alternate translation: “This is where they come from: from your lusts, which fight in your members.” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

Are they} not from there (ULT)

The word translated **hence** means “from here.” Your language may have a similar word that you can use in your translation. Otherwise, you can express the same meaning in a way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: “Do they not come from here”

your lusts, which fight in your members (ULT)

As in [3:6](#), **members** means “parts of the body.” This could mean: (1) the phrase **in your members** indicates the location of the **lusts** that James is describing. He could be saying that the outward fights between members of the community have their origin in inward lusts that lead people to fight for what they want, as he describes in the next verse. If so, he is using the parts of the body figuratively to represent a person’s thoughts and emotions. Alternate translation: “the lusts inside of you that fight” (2) the word translated **in** means “among.” The sense would then be that these **lusts** fight against one part of the person after another, seeking to gain control of the whole person. Since the **lusts** would actually be gaining control over non-physical aspects of a person, such as his will and values, James would once again be using the physical parts of the body figuratively to express his

meaning. Alternate translation: “your lusts, which fight to control you” (3) James is speaking figuratively of the community of believers as if it were a body and of individual believers as if they were parts of that body. Alternate translation: “your lusts, which fight against other believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

your lusts, which fight in your members (ULT)

In all of the cases that the previous note discusses, James would be speaking figuratively of **lusts** as if they were living things that could **fight**. Alternate translation: “the lusts inside of you that cause you to fight to get what you want” or “your lusts, which cause you to value and choose certain things in order to gratify them” or “your lusts, which cause you to fight against other believers” (See: [Personification](#))

James 4:2

You covet, and you do not have. You kill and envy, and you are not able to obtain (ULT)

In both of these sentences, James is using the word translated **and** to introduce a contrast between the first and second clauses. Alternate translation: “You covet, but you do not have. You kill and envy, but you are not able to obtain” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

ULT

² You covet, and you do not have. You kill and envy, and you are not able to obtain. You battle and war. You do not have because you do not ask.

You covet, and you do not have. You kill and envy, and you are not able to obtain (ULT)

Your language may require you to specify the objects of **have** and **obtain**. Alternate translation: “You covet, but you do not have what you covet. You kill and envy, but you are not able to obtain the things that you envy”

You covet, and you do not have. You kill and envy, and you are not able to obtain (ULT)

These two sentences mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could combine them. Alternate translation: “You desperately want things that other people have, but you cannot get them” (See: [Parallelism](#))

You kill and envy (ULT)

James probably does not mean the word **kill** literally. Rather, this could mean: (1) James is using the word in a figurative and spiritual sense to mean “hate.” This usage would reflect the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus said that the meaning of the commandment “do not kill” also applied to being angry with others and insulting them ([Matthew 5:21-22](#)). The apostle John wrote that “everyone who hates his brother is a murderer” ([1 John 3:15](#)). Alternate translation: “You hate and envy” (2) James is describing someone wanting something so badly that he would almost kill to get it. Alternate translation: “You envy almost to the point of murder” (See: [Metaphor](#))

You kill and envy (ULT)

James is expressing a single idea by using two words connected with **and**. The word **kill** describes how his readers **envy** what others have. Alternate translation: “you envy hatefully” of “you envy murderously” (See: [Hendiadys](#))

You battle and war (ULT)

As in [4:1](#), James is using the terms **battle** and **war** figuratively. Alternate translation: “You engage in disputes and conflicts” (See: [Metaphor](#))

You battle and war (ULT)

The words **battle** and **war** mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could translate them with a single expression. Alternate translation: “You have continual conflicts” (See: [Doublet](#))

You do not have because you do not ask (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say more fully what this means. Alternate translation: “You do not get what you want because you do not ask God for it” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 4:3

You ask and you do not receive (ULT)

James is using the word translated **and** to introduce a contrast between these two clauses. Alternate translation: “You ask but you do not receive” (See: [Connect — Contrast Relationship](#))

ULT

³ You ask and you do not receive, because you ask badly, so that you may spend on your lusts.

you ask badly (ULT)

James does not mean that his readers are asking for things in the wrong way. He means that they are asking for the wrong reason. Alternate translation: “you are asking for the wrong reason”

so that you may spend on your lusts (ULT)

James says figuratively that his readers would **spend** what they acquired on their lusts. Alternate translation: “so that you can gratify your sinful desires” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:4

Adulteresses (ULT)

James is addressing his readers in the vocative. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: "You adulteresses"

Adulteresses (ULT)

James is figuratively describing his readers as married women who have sexual relations with men who are not their husbands. This metaphor is used many places in the Bible to represent unfaithfulness to God. Alternate translation: "You are not being faithful to God" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁴ Adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wants to be a friend of the world is made an enemy of God.

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God (ULT)

James is using the question form for emphasis and as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "Certainly you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God!" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

friendship with the world is enmity with God (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **friendship** and **enmity**, you could express the ideas behind them with the concrete nouns "friend" and "enemy." Alternate translation: "if you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

friendship with the world (ULT)

As in [1:27](#), James is using the term **world** figuratively to mean the system of values shared by people who do not honor God. Alternate translation: "friendship with an ungodly value system" (See: [Metonymy](#))

friendship with the world (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of this ungodly value system as if it were a person with whom someone could be friends. Alternate translation: "living by an ungodly value system" (See: [Personification](#))

is enmity with God (ULT)

James probably does not consider that his readers have literally become sworn enemies of God. He is using the term **enmity** figuratively to describe how opposed the worldly value system is to the way God wants people to live. Alternate translation: "is contrary to what God wants" (See: [Metaphor](#))

to be a friend of the world (ULT)

See how you translated the term **world** earlier in this verse. Alternate translation: "to be a friend of an ungodly value system" (See: [Metonymy](#))

to be a friend of the world (ULT)

James speaks figuratively again of the ungodly value system as if it were a person with whom someone could be friends. Alternate translation: “to live by an ungodly value system” (See: [Personification](#))

is made (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive verb, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “makes himself” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

an enemy of God (ULT)

See how you translated the similar expression earlier in this verse. Alternate translation: “someone who lives in a way contrary to what God wants” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:5

Or do you think that the scripture says vainly (ULT)

James is using the question form as a teaching tool. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement. (In this context, the term **vainly** means “for no good reason,” not “in a conceited way.”) Alternate translation: “There is a good reason why the Scripture says” (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

⁵ Or do you think that the scripture says vainly, “The Spirit whom he caused to live in us longs with jealousy”?

the scripture says (ULT)

James is describing the general teaching of the Bible, not referring to a specific passage. In cases like this, your language might use the plural instead of the singular. Alternate translation: “the Scriptures say”

the scripture says (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the Bible as if it could speak on its own. Alternate translation: “it is written in the Scriptures” or “we can read in the Scriptures” (See: [Personification](#))

The Spirit whom he caused to live in us longs with jealousy (ULT)

Here, **Spirit** could mean: (1) the Holy Spirit, who could be the subject of the verb **longs**. The idea of the Spirit being jealous would fit with the adultery metaphor in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “The Spirit whom God has caused to live in us longs for us to live faithfully to God” (2) the Holy Spirit, who could be the object of the verb **longs**, in which case God would be the subject of that verb. This interpretation would also fit with the adultery metaphor. Alternate translation: “God longs jealously for us to live by the Spirit whom he has caused to live in us” (3) the human spirit, in which case the statement would be repeating what James said in [4:2](#) about people coveting and envying. Alternate translation: “The spirit that God has caused to live in us longs jealously for things that it does not have”

whom he caused to live in us (ULT)

Whatever the interpretation of the entire sentence, the pronoun **he** in this clause refers to God. Alternate translation: “whom God caused to live in us” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

James 4:6

But he gives greater grace (ULT)

In light of what he says in the previous two verses, James is drawing a contrast between what God might be expected to do and what God actually does. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could state the contrast more explicitly. Alternate translation: “But even though God is jealous if we are friends with the world, he does not reject us. Instead, he gives us even more grace to be friends with him” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

⁶ But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.”

But he gives greater grace (ULT)

The pronoun **he** refers to God. Alternate translation: “But God gives greater grace” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

greater...grace (ULT)

The comparative **greater** refers to quantity rather than to size. Alternate translation: “even more grace”

Therefore it says (ULT)

The pronoun **it** refers to the Scripture, the antecedent from the previous verse. Even though James is now quoting a specific passage, [Proverbs 3:34](#), rather than a general teaching, the reference is to the Bible as a whole. Alternate translation: “Therefore the Scripture says” or “Therefore the Scriptures say” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

it says (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the Bible as if it could speak on its own. Alternate translation: “it is written in the Scriptures” or “we can read in the Scriptures” (See: [Personification](#))

the proud...to the humble (ULT)

James is using the adjectives **proud** and **humble** as nouns to refer to types of people. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate these with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “proud people ... humble people” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

James 4:7

Be submitted, therefore (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “Submit, therefore” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

ULT

⁷ Be submitted, therefore, to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Be submitted, therefore (ULT)

James is giving the reason for the result he described in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “Because God gives grace to the humble, be submitted” or “Because God gives grace to the humble, submit” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

But resist the devil, and he will flee from you (ULT)

James is using the word translated **and** to describe a result. Alternate translation: “But resist the devil. If you do, then he will flee from you” (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

resist...to God...devil (ULT)

Alternate translation: “resolve not to do what the devil wants”

he will flee from you (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the devil as if he would run away from a believer who resisted him after humbling himself before God. Alternate translation: “he will stop trying to get you to do what he wants” (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:8

Come near to God and he will come near to you (ULT)

James is using the word translated **and** to describe a result. Alternate translation: "If you come near to God, then he will come near to you" (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Cleanse {your} hands, sinners, and purify {your} hearts, double-minded.

Come near to God and he will come near to you (ULT)

James is using a spatial metaphor to describe two people in a good relationship as if they were **near** to one another. Alternate translation: "Do your part to have a good relationship with God, and you will find that God also wants to have a good relationship with you" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Cleanse {your} hands (ULT)

James is using the image of washing hands to describe a person removing sin from his life. Alternate translation: "Stop sinning" (See: [Metaphor](#))

Cleanse {your} hands (ULT)

James is using the word **hands** figuratively to mean actions, by association with the way people use their hands to do things. Alternate translation: "Stop doing things that are wrong" (See: [Metonymy](#))

sinners (ULT)

James is addressing his readers in the vocative. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: "you sinners"

purify {your} hearts (ULT)

James says **hearts** figuratively to mean people's thoughts and desires. Alternate translation: "purify your thoughts and desires" (See: [Metaphor](#))

purify {your} hearts (ULT)

The term **purify** refers to a ceremonial cleansing that allows a person to participate in religious activities. James is speaking figuratively as if his readers' **hearts** could be cleansed in this way. Alternate translation: "make sure you are not thinking or desiring anything wrong" (See: [Metaphor](#))

double-minded (ULT)

James is using the adjective **double-minded** as a noun to refer to a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: "double-minded people" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

double-minded (ULT)

James is addressing his readers in the vocative. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. Alternate translation: "you double-minded people"

double-minded (ULT)

See how you translated the same expression in [1:8](#). James is speaking figuratively of his readers as if they had two minds, with one mind deciding to do one thing and the other mind deciding to do something else. Alternate translation: "you people who cannot decide whether to obey God or not" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:9

Be miserable and mourn and weep (ULT)

These three verbs have similar meanings. James is using them together to emphasize how sorry his readers should be. Alternate translation: “Be extremely sorry” (See: [Doublet](#))

ULT

⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep!
Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom.

Be miserable and mourn and weep (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what James is telling his readers to be sorry for. Alternate translation: “Be extremely sorry for not obeying God” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom (ULT)

In the second part of this sentence, James leaves out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from the first part of the sentence. Alternate translation: “Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and let your joy be changed into gloom” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this sentence, you could say this with active verbal forms. Alternate translation: “Let your laughter become mourning, and let your joy become gloom” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **laughter**, **mourning**, **joy**, and **gloom**, you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “Stop laughing and be sad. Stop being joyful and be gloomy” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom (ULT)

These two clauses mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could combine them. Alternate translation: “Stop being so carefree and show genuine sorrow” (See: [Parallelism](#))

Let your laughter be changed into mourning, and {your} joy into gloom (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly why James is telling his readers to show such sorrow. Alternate translation: “Stop being so carefree and show genuine sorrow for your sin” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 4:10

Be humbled before the Lord, and he will lift you up (ULT)

James is using the word translated **and** to describe a result. Alternate translation: "If you are humbled before the Lord, then he will lift you up" (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

¹⁰ Be humbled before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Be humbled (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive verb, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "Humble yourselves" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

before the Lord (ULT)

The word **before** means "in front of" or "in the presence of" another person. While in one sense God is present everywhere, the believers to whom James is writing are not in the direct physical presence of God, so he likely means this expression in a figurative sense. He is referring to the attitude they should have towards God. Alternate translation: "in your attitude towards God" (See: [Metaphor](#))

he will lift you up (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively as if his readers would humbly kneel down or bow down in front of God to show their repentance and as if God would have them stand up to show that he accepted them. Alternate translation: "he will show that he accepts you" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:11

Do not speak against one another (ULT)

Alternate translation: "Do not say bad things about one another"

brothers...a brother...his brother (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers ... a fellow believer ... his fellow believer" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

11 Do not speak against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

speaks against the law and judges the law (ULT)

By **the law**, James means the same thing that he calls the "royal law" in [2:8](#) and the "law of freedom" in [1:25](#) and [2:12](#). That is, he means the commandment "you will love your neighbor as yourself." James is teaching his readers that by saying or assuming that their fellow believers were doing wrong things, they were not following this commandment and they were treating the commandment as if it were not important to follow. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that explicitly. See how you translated the term "neighbor" in [2:8](#). Alternate translation: "contradicts the law that says to love other people as oneself and judges that law to be unimportant" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

if...you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law (ULT)

The word **you** is singular in these two cases because even though James is addressing a group of people, he is describing an individual situation. (See: [Singular Pronouns that refer to Groups](#))

you are not a doer of the law, but a judge (ULT)

In the second phrase, James is leaving out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from the first phrase. Alternate translation: "you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of the law" (See: [Ellipsis](#))

you are not a doer of the law, but a judge (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say more explicitly what this means. See how you translated the similar phrase at the end of the previous sentence. Alternate translation: "instead of loving other people, you are saying that it is not important to love them" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 4:12

The lawgiver and judge is one (ULT)

Alternate translation: "The lawgiver and judge are the same person"

the one who is able to save and to destroy (ULT)

ULT

¹² The lawgiver and judge is one, the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you, the one judging a neighbor?

James uses this phrase, which identifies God by two of his attributes, to clarify whom he means by **the lawgiver and judge**. Alternate translation: "God, who is able to save and to destroy" (See: [Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding](#))

But who are you, the one judging a neighbor (ULT)

James is using the question form to challenge and teach his readers. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "But you have no right to judge a neighbor!" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

But who are you (ULT)

For emphasis, James includes the pronoun **you** even though it is not required with the verb. If your language does not ordinarily require pronouns with verbs but it can include them for emphasis, it would be appropriate to use that construction here in your translation. Other languages may be able to convey this emphasis in other ways, such as by repeating the pronoun. Alternate translation: "But you, who are you" (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

you...who are (ULT)

As in the previous verse, James is using the singular form of **you** because even though he is addressing a group of people, he is describing an individual situation. (See: [Singular Pronouns that refer to Groups](#))

a neighbor (ULT)

See how you translated the term "neighbor" in [2:8](#). Alternate translation: "another person"

James 4:13

Come now (ULT)

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “Now listen” (See: [Idiom](#))

the ones saying (ULT)

James is addressing his readers in the vocative. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. (If you use the word “you,” it would be plural, since James is addressing a group of people.) Alternate translation: “you who say”

ULT

¹³ Come now, the ones saying, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to this city and do a year there and trade and gain.”

we will travel (ULT)

These people are speaking only of themselves, so the pronoun **we** is exclusive here. (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’](#))

this city (ULT)

This is an idiom. No specific city is intended. Your language may have a comparable idiom that you can use in your translation. Alternate translation: “such-and-such a city” (See: [Idiom](#))

do a year there (ULT)

This is another idiom. Alternate translation: “stay there for a year” (See: [Idiom](#))

gain (ULT)

Alternate translation: “make a profit”

James 4:14

You who do not know the thing of tomorrow, what {is} your life (ULT)

James is using the question form to challenge and teach his readers. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate his words as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "You do not know what will happen tomorrow, and you may not even be alive then!" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

¹⁴ You who do not know the thing of tomorrow, what {is} your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little and then disappears.

For you are a mist that appears for a little and then disappears (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of his readers as if they were a **mist** that forms briefly in the morning but then quickly dissipates when the sun rises. In your translation you could explain the meaning of this image, or you could represent it as a simile, as UST does. Alternate translation: "For you will only be alive for a short time, and then you will die" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 4:15

we will both live and do (ULT)

James is using a construction that puts the word “and” before two things that would both be the case, more literally “and we will live and we will do.” Your language may have a similar construction that you can use here. If not, it may not be necessary for you to translate the first occurrence of “and,” which ULT represents as **both**. (The term **both** in ULT does not mean “the two of us.”) Alternate translation: “we will live and we will do”

ULT

¹⁵ Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wishes, we will both live and do this or that.”

we will both live and do (ULT)

These people would be speaking only of themselves, so the pronoun **we** is exclusive. (See: [Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’](#))

this or that (ULT)

This is an idiom. No specific actions are intended. Your language may have a comparable idiom that you can use in your translation. Alternate translation: “such-and-such” (See: [Idiom](#))

James 4:16

you are boasting in your pretensions. All such boasting is evil (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract nouns **pretensions** and **boasting** (the second occurrence of the word in ULT), you could express the ideas behind them with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: “you are boasting about what you presume you will be able to do. It is always wrong to boast like that” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

ULT

¹⁶ But now you are boasting in your pretensions. All such boasting is evil.

James 4:17

Therefore to the one having known to do good and not doing it, to him it is sin (ULT)

James is using the word **therefore** to describe a further inference rather than a conclusion. He is saying that if it is wrong to plan to do things without knowing whether God wants you to do them, then it is also wrong not to do things that you do know God wants. Alternate translation: "From this we can also recognize that if someone does know what God wants him to do but he does not do it, then he is also sinning"

ULT

¹⁷ Therefore to the one having known to do good and not doing it, to him it is sin.

James 5

James 5 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Rebuke of rich people (5:1-6)

Waiting patiently for the Lord's return (5:7-11)

Oaths forbidden (5:12)

Prayer, forgiveness, and healing (5:13-18)

Restoration of a sinner (5:19-20)

Special concepts in this chapter

Living for eternity

The first section of this chapter, which is a warning to rich people, contrasts living for things of this world, which will not last, with living for things that will last for eternity. The second section of the chapter is related to that first section. In it, James stresses that it is important to live with the expectation that Jesus will return soon. (See: [eternity](#), [everlasting](#), [eternal](#), [forever](#))

Oaths

In [5:12](#), James tells his readers not to swear any oaths. However, biblical scholars are divided over whether James intends to teach literally that all oaths are wrong. Some scholars believe that some oaths are permissible and that James is emphasizing how Christians should have integrity in what they say.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Elijah

The illustration that James gives from the life of the prophet Elijah in [5:17-18](#) may be difficult for your readers to appreciate if the books of 1 and 2 Kings have not yet been translated. See the first note to 5:17 for a suggestion about how to help your readers understand this illustration better.

James 5:1

Come now (ULT)

This is an idiom. See how you translated it in [4:13](#). Alternate translation: “Now listen” (See: [Idiom](#))

ULT

¹ Come now, the rich, weep, wailing because of your coming miseries.

the rich (ULT)

James is addressing these people in the vocative. If your language has a vocative case, it would be appropriate to use it here. If not, you could express the meaning in another way that would be natural in your language. (If you use the word “you,” it would be plural, since James is addressing a group of people.) Alternate translation: “you who are rich”

the rich (ULT)

James is using the adjective **rich** as a noun to refer to a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “you people who are rich” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

the rich (ULT)

James is most likely addressing believers who are rich, or at least rich people who were attending assemblies of believers, rather than unbelievers who are rich or rich people in general. (This letter was meant to be read aloud in those assemblies, and James notes in [1:10](#) that some of the believers were rich.) If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that explicitly. Alternate translation: “you believers who are rich” or “you rich people who say you want to follow Jesus” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

because of your coming miseries (ULT)

Your language may similarly speak of something that is going to happen in the future as if it were **coming**. If it does not, you can express this in another way. Alternate translation: “because of the miseries you will soon experience”

because of your coming miseries (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **miseries**, you could express the idea behind it with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “because many bad things are going to happen to you soon” (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

James 5:2

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine [5:2](#) and [5:3](#) into a verse bridge. You could put the last sentence of [5:3](#) first, followed by all of [5:2](#) and then the rest of [5:3](#). This would allow you to address several translation issues that are discussed in the notes to this verse and the next verse. (See: [Verse Bridges](#))

ULT

² Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten.

Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten (ULT)

James is using the past tense to refer to things that will happen in the future. If your readers would misunderstand this sentence, you could use the future tense in your translation. Alternate translation: “Your wealth is going to rot and your clothes are going to be eaten by moths” (See: [Predictive Past](#))

Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten (ULT)

In these two clauses and in the first clause in the next verse (“your gold and silver have been tarnished”), James is figuratively using certain things that these rich people own to mean everything that they own. If you create a verse bridge, you can combine all of these clauses into a single sentence that expresses this meaning. (You would need to begin a new sentence right afterwards.) Alternate translation: “Everything of value that you own is going to be ruined” (See: [Synecdoche](#))

Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten (ULT)

Depending on the meaning of the statement “you have stored up in the last days” in the next verse (see the note to that statement), James may be saying figuratively that the wealth and expensive clothing of the rich have become worthless. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that explicitly, as UST does. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten (ULT)

If you decide to indicate explicitly that James is saying that the wealth and expensive clothing of the rich have become worthless, you could do that by expressing his past-for-future statement as a simile, as UST does. (See: [Simile](#))

James 5:3

Your gold and silver have been tarnished (ULT)

James is using the past tense to refer to something that will happen in the future. If your readers would misunderstand this phrase, you could use the future tense in your translation. Alternate translation: “Your gold and silver are going to be tarnished” (See: [Predictive Past](#))

ULT

³ Your gold and silver have been tarnished, and their rust will be for a testimony against you and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up in the last days.

Your gold and silver have been tarnished (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: “Your gold and silver have tarnished” or “Your gold and silver are going to tarnish” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

Your gold and silver have been tarnished (ULT)

Depending on the meaning of the statement “you have stored up in the last days” (see the first note to that statement below), James may be saying figuratively that the gold and silver of the rich have become worthless. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that explicitly, as UST does. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

Your gold and silver have been tarnished (ULT)

If you decide to indicate explicitly that James is saying that the gold and silver of the rich have become worthless, you could do that by expressing his past-for-future statement as a simile, as UST does. (See: [Simile](#))

gold and...their...rust...will be for a testimony against you (ULT)

If you created a verse bridge and you also combined the statement “your gold and silver have been tarnished” with the two clauses in 5:2, it would be helpful to begin a new sentence here and to use a general expression that would apply to everything that these rich people own. Alternate translation: “The ruins of your possessions will be for a testimony against you” or “The ruins of your possessions will testify against you”

their rust will be for a testimony against you (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of this **rust** as if it would be presented as evidence in a case against the rich people. Alternate translation: “the rust on your gold and silver will show that you did the wrong thing” (See: [Metaphor](#))

their rust will be for a testimony against you (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what wrong thing these rich people have done, as evidenced by this **rust**. Alternate translation: “the rust of your gold and silver will show that you have done the wrong thing by devoting yourselves to accumulating wealth rather than to helping other people” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

it will eat your flesh like fire (ULT)

James is using the word **flesh** to mean the human body, by association with the way the body is made of flesh. Alternate translation: “it will eat your bodies” (See: [Metonymy](#))

it will eat your flesh like fire (ULT)

James is saying figuratively that this rust will corrode and consume the owners of the gold and silver that it is also corroding. Alternate translation: “it will consume you” or “it will ruin you” (See: [Metaphor](#))

like fire (ULT)

It may be helpful to express the meaning of this simile more fully. Alternate translation: “just as fire consumes everything that it burns” or “just as fire ruins everything that it burns” (See: [Simile](#))

You have stored up in the last days (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say explicitly what these rich people have **stored up** and why it was wrong for them to do that. This could mean: (1) they have accumulated riches in the **last days**, that is, in the time just before Jesus returns. That would be wrong because once Jesus returns, earthly riches will no longer have any value. Instead of trying to get more and more wealth, these people should have been helping others with what they had. Alternate translation: “Instead of helping others, you have wrongly stored up wealth at a time when earthly riches are about to lose all of their value” (2) by their wrongdoing, such as he describes in [5:4-6](#), these rich people have **stored up** punishment for themselves. Alternate translation: “God is just about to punish wrongdoers, and you have given God many reasons to punish you” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

You have stored up in the last days (ULT)

If the first interpretation of this statement in the note just above is correct, then James is giving the reason for the results that he describes in the previous verse and in the earlier part of this verse. If you created a verse bridge as described in the first note to [5:2](#), you could put this reason before the result by placing this statement first in that bridge. (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

the last days (ULT)

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “the time just before Jesus returns” (See: [Idiom](#))

James 5:4

Behold, the pay of the workers (ULT)

The term **Behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. It may be helpful to express its meaning as a separate sentence here. Alternate translation: "Consider this! The pay of the workers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

the pay of the workers who have reaped your fields, which has been withheld from you, is crying out (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say it with an active form. When James says **from you**, he does not mean that this payment has been withheld from the rich owners of these fields. He is saying that it was due from them, but they have not paid it to their workers. Alternate translation: "the pay that you have withheld from the workers who reaped your fields is crying out" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

is crying out (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of this **pay** as if it were a living thing that could cry out. Alternate translation: "is obvious evidence that you have done wrong" (See: [Personification](#))

the cries of the ones harvesting have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the **ears** of the Lord to mean his hearing. Alternate translation: "the Lord of Sabaoth has heard the cries of the harvesting ones" (See: [Metonymy](#))

of the Lord of Sabaoth (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know that he is speaking of God by a name by which he is often known in the Old Testament. The Hebrew term **Sabaoth** means "military forces." Alternate translation: "God, the Lord of the Heavenly Armies" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

of the Lord of Sabaoth (ULT)

James may be speaking figuratively of God's almighty power by association with the way that God has all the armies of heaven at his command. Alternate translation: "God, the Lord Almighty" (See: [Metonymy](#))

ULT

⁴ Behold, the pay of the workers who have reaped your fields, which has been withheld from you, is crying out, and the cries of the ones harvesting have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

James 5:5

You have lived luxuriously on the earth and have lived self-indulgently (ULT)

These two phrases mean similar things. James is using them together for emphasis. If your readers would misunderstand this connection, you could combine them. Alternate translation: "You have indulged yourselves with earthly luxuries" (See: [Parallelism](#))

ULT

⁵ You have lived luxuriously on the earth and have lived self-indulgently. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of these rich people as if they were cattle that had been fed luxuriously on grain so they would become fattened for slaughter as banqueting food. In this case the banquet is not a positive image, as it often is elsewhere when it describes God's future reign. Alternate translation: "Your self-indulgence has made you subject to harsh judgment" (See: [Metaphor](#))

You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the heart as the center of human desire. Alternate translation: "You have indulged your desires" (See: [Metaphor](#))

in a day (ULT)

James is using the term **day** figuratively to refer to a particular time. Alternate translation: "at a time" (See: [Idiom](#))

in a day of slaughter (ULT)

James is using the idea of **slaughter** figuratively to refer to God's judgment. Alternate translation: "at a time when God is about to judge everyone for what they have done" (See: [Metaphor](#))

James 5:6

You have condemned, you have killed the righteous (ULT)

James probably does not mean that these rich people have done these things personally. He is likely referring to the kind of actions he described in [2:6](#), where he told how rich people “overpower” the poor by taking them to court. He may mean that the rich people have gotten the courts to condemn innocent people and in some cases even to execute them. He could also mean that the rich people have gotten the courts to decide lawsuits in their favor and that as a result, some poor people have died because of the great poverty this caused them. James would be speaking figuratively of the rich people as the ones who did these actions, using them to represent all the people who were involved. Alternate translation: “You have gotten the courts to condemn and even execute innocent people” or “You have gotten the courts to decide lawsuits in your favor and, as a result, innocent people have died from poverty” (See: [Synecdoche](#))

ULT

⁶ You have condemned, you have killed the righteous. He does not resist you.

the righteous (ULT)

James is using the adjective **righteous** as a noun to refer to a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “the righteous person” or “the innocent person” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

the righteous (ULT)

The expression **the righteous** refers to righteous people in general, not to one specific person. Alternate translation: “righteous people” or “innocent people” (See: [Generic Noun Phrases](#))

He does not resist you (ULT)

This could mean: (1) the innocent people are not able to resist what the rich people are doing. Alternate translation: “He is not able to resist you” (2) the innocent people wanted a peaceful resolution and were not fighting back. Alternate translation: “You have done this even though the innocent person wanted a peaceful resolution” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

He does not resist you (ULT)

In light of everything that James says in [5:1-6](#), the implications are that even though these innocent people are not able to defend themselves, God will defend them by judging and punishing these rich people. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly, as UST does. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 5:7

Therefore (ULT)

James uses **Therefore** to introduce a description of what his readers should do as a result of what he has just said about rich people. He is referring specifically to what he said about God's judgment being imminent. Alternate translation: "Because you know that God will soon judge the people who are oppressing you" (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

⁷ Therefore, wait patiently, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer awaits the valuable fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and the late.

brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

until the coming of the Lord (ULT)

James is referring to Jesus by a respectful title. Alternate translation: "until Jesus returns" or "until the Lord Jesus returns"

Behold (ULT)

The term **Behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. James is using the word here to introduce an analogy, as he makes clear at the start of the next verse. So it may be helpful to express the meaning of **behold** as a separate sentence. Alternate translation: "Consider this." (See: [Metaphor](#))

the farmer awaits (ULT)

The expression **the farmer** refers to farmers in general, not to one specific farmer. Alternate translation: "a farmer awaits" or "farmers await" (See: [Generic Noun Phrases](#))

the...the valuable fruit of...earth (ULT)

James uses the word **fruit** in a broad sense to mean things that plants produce that are good for food. He does not mean only the kind of fruit that grows on trees and vines. Alternate translation: "the valuable crops that grow from the earth"

waiting patiently for it until it receives (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could specify what the pronoun **it** refers to in each of these cases. Alternate translation: "waiting patiently for this fruit until the earth receives" (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

the early and the late (ULT)

James is using the adjectives **early** and **late** as nouns to refer to types of rain. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate these with equivalent expressions. Alternate translation: "the rain that comes early in the growing season and the rain that comes late in the growing season" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

the early and the late (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, particularly if they would not be familiar with rainfed agriculture, you could say why these farmers needed to wait for rain to fall on their crops. UST models one way to do this. (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

James 5:8

You also wait patiently (ULT)

Here James makes clear that what he said about farmers in the previous verse was an analogy for his readers. Alternate translation: "You should also wait patiently, just as a farmer does"

ULT

⁸ You also wait patiently. Strengthen your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has come near.

Strengthen your hearts (ULT)

James is using the **heart** figuratively to represent the will. Alternate translation: "Stay committed" (See: [Metaphor](#))

the coming of the Lord has come near (ULT)

James is referring to Jesus by a respectful title. (By **near** he means near in time. This is not a spatial metaphor.) Alternate translation: "Jesus will return soon" or "the Lord Jesus will return soon"

James 5:9

brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in 1:2. Alternate translation: “my fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

you may be not judged (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who would do the action. Alternate translation: “God may not judge you” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

Behold, the judge (ULT)

The term **Behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. Alternate translation: “Be aware that the judge” (See: [Metaphor](#))

the judge is standing at the door (ULT)

James is figuratively comparing Jesus to a judge who is just about to walk into a courtroom. Alternate translation: “Jesus will soon return and judge everyone for what they have done” (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

⁹ Do not complain, brothers, against one another, so that you may be not judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door.

James 5:10

Take an example, brothers, of the suffering (ULT)

Alternate translation: "Take as your example, brothers, the suffering"

brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "my fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

of the suffering and the patience of the prophets (ULT)

James is expressing a single idea by using two words connected with **and**. The word **patience** describes how the prophets endured **suffering**. Alternate translation: "of the patient suffering of the prophets" or "of how patiently the prophets suffered" (See: [Hendiadys](#))

in the name of the Lord (ULT)

James is figuratively using the **name** of the Lord to mean his person and authority. Alternate translation: "on behalf of the Lord" or "with the authority of the Lord" (See: [Metonymy](#))

ULT

¹⁰ Take an example, brothers, of the suffering and the patience of the prophets, those who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James 5:11

Behold (ULT)

The term **Behold** focuses the attention of a listener or reader on what a speaker or writer is about to say. Alternate translation: "Indeed" (See: [Metaphor](#))

You have heard of the endurance of Job (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know the story of Job from the Scriptures. If your readers might not be familiar with his story, you could describe it in more detail. Alternate translation: "You know from the Scriptures how a man named Job who lived long ago patiently endured great suffering" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

you have seen the end of the Lord (ULT)

James is continuing to refer to the story of Job. Here, **end** could mean: (1) purpose. In that case, James would be using the term **seen** figuratively to mean "recognized." Alternate translation: "you have recognized the purpose that the Lord had for Job's sufferings" (2) final result. In that case, James would be using the term **seen** figuratively to mean "learned." Alternate translation: "you have learned from the Scriptures how the Lord helped Job in the end" (See: [Metaphor](#))

that the Lord is greatly compassionate and merciful (ULT)

Here, **that** could mean: (1) "for" and introduce a reason. James may be giving the reason why God was pursuing a good purpose even in Job's sufferings or why God helped Job in the end. Alternate translation: "for the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (2) something further that James' readers would have learned from the story of Job. Alternate translation: "and you have realized from this story that the Lord is greatly compassionate and merciful" (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

11 Behold, we call blessed those who have endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is greatly compassionate and merciful.

James 5:12

before all (ULT)

James is using a spatial metaphor to emphasize the importance of what he is about to say. Your language may use a different spatial metaphor. Alternate translation: “above all” (See: [Metaphor](#))

my brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: “my fellow believers” (See: [Metaphor](#))

do not swear (ULT)

Here, to **swear** means to guarantee, by appealing to something that is considered to be certain and reliable, that a statement is true or that an action will be performed. Alternate translation: “do not make an oath” or “do not make a vow”

let...be...your “Yes...Yes” and “No,” “No (ULT)

In the second phrase, James is leaving out some of the words that a sentence would need in many languages in order to be complete. These words can be supplied from the first phrase. Alternate translation: “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and let your ‘No’ be ‘No’” (See: [Ellipsis](#))

let...be...your “Yes...Yes” and “No,” “No (ULT)

Alternate translation: “simply give your word, without making an oath”

so that you may not fall under judgment (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **judgment** as something that a person might **fall under**. Alternate translation: “so that you will not be judged” (See: [Metaphor](#))

so that you may not fall under judgment (ULT)

If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say more explicitly what this means. Alternate translation: “so that God will not have to judge and punish you for breaking your oath” (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

¹² But before all, my brothers, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by the earth, nor by any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes” and “No,” “No,” so that you may not fall under judgment.

James 5:13

Is anyone among you suffering hardship? Let him pray (ULT)

James is not looking for information. He is using the question form to state a condition, and he describes the result in a short sentence right after the question. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate the question and that sentence together as a single statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone among you is suffering hardship, then he should pray" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering hardship? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise (ULT)

James is again using the question form to state a condition and describing the result in a following sentence. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate the question and that sentence together as a single statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone is cheerful, then he should sing praise" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Let him summon the elders of the church, and let them pray (ULT)

Once again James is using the question form to state a condition and describing the result in a following sentence. If your readers would misunderstand this question, you could translate the question and that sentence together as a single statement. Alternate translation: "If anyone among you sick, then he should summon the elders of the church and they should pray" (See: [Rhetorical Question](#))

ULT

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him summon the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord.

let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord

It is unclear whether James means that the prayer or the anointing is to be done in the name of the Lord. Alternate translation: "let them pray over him in the name of the Lord after they have anointed him with oil" or "let them anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and then pray for him"

let them pray over him (ULT)

James is using a spatial metaphor to indicate that the sick person is the beneficiary of the elders' prayers. Alternate translation: "pray for him" (See: [Metaphor](#))

having anointed him with oil (ULT)

In the biblical culture, anointing people with **oil** was a way of consecrating them to God, but it was also a medical treatment. Since James is talking about a person who is **sick**, he seems to speak of the oil at least in part for its medical value. So he may be telling believers to do what they can practically to help the sick person recover, in addition to praying for him. If your readers would not recognize that the medical benefits were one reason why James says to anoint the sick person with oil, you could include an explanation in your translation or in a note, or you could translate this with a general expression. Alternate translation: "having done what they can to help him practically" (See: [Translate Unknowns](#))

in the name of the Lord (ULT)

James is figuratively using the **name** of the Lord to mean his person and authority. Alternate translation: "on behalf of the Lord" or "with the authority of the Lord" (See: [Metonymy](#))

James 5:15

the prayer of faith will save the sick (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe **prayer** that is characterized by **faith**. Alternate translation: “the prayer that is offered in faith will save the sick” (See: [Possession](#))

ULT

15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he may have committed sins, it will be forgiven to him.

the prayer of faith will save the sick (ULT)

James is using the word translated **save** in one of its senses to mean “heal.” (He uses a more specific word to mean “healed” in the next verse.) Alternate translation: “the prayer that is offered in faith will heal the sick” (See: [Possession](#))

the prayer of faith will save the sick (ULT)

James is using the adjective **sick** as a noun in order to indicate a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: “the prayer that is offered in faith will heal the sick person” (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

the prayer of faith will save the sick (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of this **prayer** as if it would heal the sick person itself. Alternate translation: “in answer to this prayer that is offered in faith, God will heal the sick person” (See: [Personification](#))

the Lord will raise him up (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the sick person’s restoration to health by association with the way that the person will get **up** out of bed when he recovers. Alternate translation: “the Lord will make him well” or “the Lord will enable him to resume his regular activities” (See: [Metonymy](#))

it will be forgiven to him (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who will do the action. Alternate translation: “God will forgive him” (See: [Active or Passive](#))

James 5:16

Therefore (ULT)

James uses **Therefore** to introduce something that believers should do as a result of what he said in the previous verse. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could explain in more detail what he means, as UST does. (See: [Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship](#))

ULT

16 Therefore, confess {your} sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The working prayer of the righteous {is} very strong.

you may be healed (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive verb, you could say this with an active form, and you could say who would do the action. Alternate translation: "God may heal you" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

The working prayer of the righteous {is} very strong (ULT)

The term **working** has the sense of an adverb rather than an adjective. Alternate translation: "The prayer of the righteous is very strong as it is working" or "The prayer of the righteous is very strong in its effects"

The working prayer of the righteous {is} very strong (ULT)

James is using the adjective **righteous** as a noun in order to indicate a type of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this with an equivalent expression. Alternate translation: "The working prayer of a person who is righteous is very strong" (See: [Nominal Adjectives](#))

The working prayer of the righteous {is} very strong (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of **prayer** as if it were a living thing that was **very strong** by itself. Alternate translation: "When a person who is righteous prays, God does very powerful things in response" (See: [Personification](#))

James 5:17

Elijah (ULT)

James assumes that his readers will know from the Scriptures about this episode in Elijah's life. If your readers might not be familiar with it, you could describe it in more detail. Alternate translation: "You know from the Scriptures how a prophet named Elijah who lived long ago" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

ULT

¹⁷ Elijah was a man of similar passions to us, and he prayed with prayer for it not to rain, and it did not rain upon the land for three years and six months.

of similar passions to us (ULT)

This expression means that Elijah had the same feelings as any other human being. In context, James is indicating specifically that he too had the kind of feelings that make it difficult for people to pray. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say that explicitly. Alternate translation: "who had the same doubts and fears that we all do" (See: [Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#))

he prayed with prayer (ULT)

To indicate that Elijah prayed intensely, James is using an indirect object with a verb that comes from the same root. If your language uses a similar construction, it would be appropriate to have it here in your translation. But if this construction would seem to express unnecessary extra information in your language, you could express this emphasis in another way. Alternate translation: "he prayed intensely" (See: [Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit](#))

James 5:18

he prayed again (ULT)

The pronoun **he** refers to Elijah. Alternate translation: “Elijah prayed again” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

the heaven gave rain (ULT)

In this context, **the heaven** means “the sky.” James is speaking figuratively of the sky as if it were a living thing that **gave rain**. Alternate translation: “rain fell from the sky” (See: [Personification](#))

the earth produced its fruit (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of the **earth** as if it were a living thing that **produced fruit**. As in [5:7](#), James is using the word **fruit** in a broad sense to mean things that plants produce that are good for food. He does not mean only the kind of fruit that grows on trees and vines. Alternate translation: “crops grew from the ground” (See: [Personification](#))

ULT

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:19

My brothers (ULT)

See how you translated the term **brothers** in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "My fellow believers" (See: [Metaphor](#))

if anyone among you may have been led astray from the truth (ULT)

As in [1:16](#), James is speaking figuratively as if a deceptive guide may have led one of his readers in the wrong direction. Alternate translation: "if anyone among you may have been deceived regarding the truth" (See: [Metaphor](#))

if anyone among you may have been led astray from the truth (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand this passive phrase, you could say this with an active form. Alternate translation: "if someone may have deceived anyone among you regarding the truth" (See: [Active or Passive](#))

the truth (ULT)

If your readers would misunderstand the abstract noun **truth**, you could express the idea behind it with an adjective such as "true." Alternate translation: "what is true" (See: [Abstract Nouns](#))

someone turns him back (ULT)

James is continuing the metaphor of someone guiding a person in the right direction. Alternate translation: "someone corrects him" or "someone shows him what is actually true" (See: [Metaphor](#))

ULT

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you may have been led astray from the truth and someone turns him back,

James 5:20

let him know (ULT)

The pronoun **him** refers to the person who corrects another believer who has been deceived. Alternate translation: “the person who corrects the deceived believer should know” (See: [Pronouns — When to Use Them](#))

ULT

20 let him know that the one who turns back a sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

the one who turns back a sinner from the wandering of his way (ULT)

James is using the possessive form to describe a **way** or path that is characterized by **wandering**. Alternate translation: “the one who turns back a sinner who has wandered away” (See: [Possession](#))

the one who turns back a sinner from the wandering of his way (ULT)

The expressions **turns back** and **wandering** continue the metaphor of someone guiding a person in the right direction. Alternate translation: “anyone who corrects a sinner who has stopped doing what God wants” (See: [Metaphor](#))

will save his soul from death (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively as if this person’s actions would save the sinner’s soul from death. But James means by association that God will use those actions to persuade the sinner to repent and be saved. Alternate translation: “will be an instrument of God’s work to save the sinner’s soul from death” (See: [Metonymy](#))

will save his soul from death (ULT)

James seems to be speaking not of literal, physical death but of spiritual death, that is, of eternal separation from God. Alternate translation: “from spiritual death” (as in UST) or “from eternal separation from God” (See: [Metaphor](#))

will save his soul from death (ULT)

However, some interpreters believe that James actually is speaking of literal, physical death. They believe he is saying that a person who stops his sinful lifestyle will not experience physical death as a consequence of his sin. In that case, James would be using one part of a person, his **soul**, to mean all of the person. Alternate translation: “will keep him from dying” (See: [Synecdoche](#))

will cover a multitude of sins (ULT)

James is speaking figuratively of one person’s sins as if they were objects that another person could cover so that God would not see them. He means that by helping a sinner to repent, another believer can help that sinner to be forgiven. Alternate translation: “will help him to be forgiven” (See: [Metaphor](#))



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Abstract Nouns

Description

Abstract nouns are nouns that refer to attitudes, qualities, events, or situations. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as happiness, weight, unity, friendship, health, and reason. This is a translation issue because some languages may express a certain idea with an abstract noun, while others would need a different way to express it.

This page answers the question: *What are abstract nouns and how do I deal with them in my translation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech]]
[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences]]

Remember that nouns are words that refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. Abstract nouns are the nouns that refer to ideas. These can be attitudes, qualities, events, situations, or even relationships between those ideas. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as joy, peace, creation, goodness, contentment, justice, truth, freedom, vengeance, slowness, length, weight, and many, many more.

Some languages, such as Biblical Greek and English, use abstract nouns a lot. They provide a way of giving names to actions or qualities. With names, people who speak these languages can talk about the concepts as though they were things. For example, in languages that use abstract nouns, people can say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin."

But some languages do not use abstract nouns very much. In these languages, speakers may not have the two abstract nouns "forgiveness" and "sin," but they would express the same meaning in other ways. For example, they would express, "I believe that God is willing to forgive people after they have sinned," by using verb phrases instead of nouns for those ideas.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible that you translate from may use abstract nouns to express certain ideas. Your language might not use abstract nouns for some of those ideas. Instead, it might use phrases to express those ideas. Those phrases will use other kinds of words such as adjectives, verbs, or adverbs to express the meaning of the abstract noun. For example, "What is its **weight**?" could be expressed as "How much does it **weigh**?" or "How **heavy** is it?"

Examples From the Bible

From **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

The abstract noun "childhood" refers to when someone was a child.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

The abstract nouns "godliness" and "contentment" refer to being godly and content. The abstract noun "gain" refers to something that benefits or helps someone.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

The abstract noun "salvation" here refers to being saved.

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The abstract noun "slowness" refers to the lack of speed with which something is done.

He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

The abstract noun “purposes” refers to the things that people want to do and the reasons they want to do them.

Translation Strategies

If an abstract noun would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun. Alternative translations are indented below the Scripture example.

... from **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

Ever since **you were a child** you have known the sacred writings.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

But **being godly** and **content** is very **beneficial**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **are godly** and **content**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **honor and obey God** and when we are **happy with what we have**.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

Today the people in this house **have been saved** ... Today God **has saved** the people in this house ...

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be. (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **moving slowly** to be.

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal **the things that people want to do and the reasons that they want to do them**.

(Go back to: [James 1:1](#); [1:2](#); [1:3](#); [1:5](#); [1:6](#); [1:9](#); [1:10](#); [1:11](#); [1:18](#); [1:20](#); [1:21](#); [1:25](#); [2:1](#); [2:5](#); [2:12](#); [2:14](#); [2:17](#); [2:18](#); [2:20](#); [2:22](#); [2:24](#); [2:25](#); [2:26](#); [3:6](#); [3:10](#); [3:13](#); [3:14](#); [3:15](#); [3:16](#); [3:17](#); [3:18](#); [4:4](#); [4:9](#); [4:16](#); [5:1](#); [5:19](#))

Active or Passive

Some languages use both active and passive sentences. In active sentences, the subject does the action. In passive sentences, the subject is the one that receives the action. Here are some examples with their subjects bolded:

- Active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- Passive: **The house** was built in 2010.

Translators whose languages do not use passive sentences will need to know how they can translate passive sentences that they find in the Bible. Other translators will need to decide when to use a passive sentence and when to use the active form.

This page answers the question: *What do active and passive mean, and how do I translate passive sentences?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-verbs\]\]](#)

Description

Some languages have both active and passive forms of sentences.

- In the active form, the subject does the action and is always mentioned.
- In the passive form, the action is done to the subject, and the one who does the action is not always mentioned.

In the examples of active and passive sentences below, we have bolded the subject.

- active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built by my father in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built in 2010. (This does not tell who did the action.)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All languages use active forms. Some languages use passive forms, and some do not. Some languages use passive forms only for certain purposes, and the passive form is not used for the same purposes in all of the languages that use it.

Purposes for the Passive

- The speaker is talking about the person or thing the action was done to, not about the person who did the action.
- The speaker does not want to tell who did the action.
- The speaker does not know who did the action.

Translation Principles Regarding the Passive

- Translators whose language does not use passive forms will need to find another way to express the idea.
- Translators whose language has passive forms will need to understand why the passive is used in a particular sentence in the Bible and decide whether or not to use a passive form for that purpose in his translation of the sentence.

Examples From the Bible

Then their shooters shot at your soldiers from off the wall, and some of the king's servants **were killed**, and your servant Uriah the Hittite **was killed** too. (2 Samuel 11:24 ULT)

This means that the enemy's shooters shot and killed some of the king's servants, including Uriah. The point is what happened to the king's servants and Uriah, not who shot them. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on the king's servants and Uriah.

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal **was torn down**. (Judges 6:28a ULT)

The men of the town saw what had happened to the altar of Baal, but they did not know who broke it down. The purpose of the passive form here is to communicate this event from the perspective of the men of the town.

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

This describes a situation in which a person ends up in the sea with a millstone around his neck. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on what happens to this person. Who does these things to the person is not important.

Translation Strategies

If your language would use a passive form for the same purpose as in the passage that you are translating, then use a passive form. If you decide that it is better to translate without a passive form, here are some strategies that you might consider.

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who or what did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.
- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who or what did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."
- (3) Use a different verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21b ULT)

The king's servants gave Jeremiah a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

It would be better for him if **they were to put** a millstone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

It would be better for him if **someone were to put** a heavy stone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

- (3) Use a different verb in an active sentence.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21 ULT)

He **received** a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Abstract Nouns](#)

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-order]]

(Go back to: [James 1:5](#); [1:6](#); [1:13](#); [1:14](#); [1:16](#); [1:25](#); [2:7](#); [2:9](#); [2:12](#); [2:16](#); [2:21](#); [2:22](#); [2:23](#); [2:24](#); [2:25](#); [3:4](#); [3:6](#); [3:7](#); [3:18](#); [4:4](#); [4:7](#); [4:9](#); [4:10](#); [5:3](#); [5:4](#); [5:9](#); [5:15](#); [5:16](#); [5:19](#))

Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Assumed knowledge is whatever a speaker assumes his audience knows before he speaks and gives them some kind of information. The speaker does not give the audience this information because he believes that they already know it.

This page answers the question: *How can I be sure that my translation communicates the assumed knowledge and implicit information along with the explicit information of the original message?*

When the speaker does give the audience information, he can do so in two ways. The speaker gives explicit information in what he states directly. Implicit Information is what the speaker does not state directly because he expects his audience to be able to learn it from other things he says.

Description

When someone speaks or writes, he has something specific that he wants people to know or do or think about. He normally states this directly. This is explicit information.

The speaker assumes that his audience already knows certain things that they will need to think about in order to understand this information. Normally he does not tell people these things, because they already know them. This is called assumed knowledge.

The speaker does not always directly state everything that he expects his audience to learn from what he says. Implicit information is information that he expects people to learn from what he says even though he does not state it directly.

Often, the audience understands this implicit information by combining what they already know (assumed knowledge) with the explicit information that the speaker tells them directly.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All three kinds of information are part of the speaker's message. If one of these kinds of information is missing, then the audience will not understand the message. Because the target translation is in a language that is very different from the biblical languages and is made for an audience that lives in a very different time and place than the people in the Bible, many times the assumed knowledge or the implicit information is missing from the message. In other words, modern readers do not know everything that the original speakers and hearers in the Bible knew. When these things are important for understanding the message, it is helpful if you include this information in the text or in a footnote.

Examples From the Bible

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

Jesus did not say what foxes and birds use holes and nests for, because he assumed that the scribe would have known that foxes sleep in holes in the ground and birds sleep in their nests. This is **assumed knowledge**.

Jesus did not directly say here "I am the Son of Man" but, if the scribe did not already know it, then that fact would be **implicit information** that he could learn because Jesus referred to himself that way. Also, Jesus did not state explicitly that he travelled a lot and did not have a house that he slept in every night. That is **implicit information** that the scribe could learn when Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty deeds had been done in **Tyre and Sidon** which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the **day of judgment** than for you.
(Matthew 11:21-22 ULT)

Jesus assumed that the people he was speaking to knew that Tyre and Sidon were very wicked, and that the day of judgment is a time when God will judge every person. Jesus also knew that the people he was talking to believed that they were good and did not need to repent. Jesus did not need to tell them these things. This is all **assumed knowledge**.

An important piece of **implicit information** here is that the people he was speaking to would be judged more severely than the people of Tyre and Sidon would be judged **because** they did not repent.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands when they eat bread**. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

One of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating. People thought that in order to be righteous, they had to follow all the traditions of the elders. This was **assumed knowledge** that the Pharisees who were speaking to Jesus expected him to know. By saying this, they were accusing his disciples of not following the traditions, and thus not being righteous. This is **implicit information** that they wanted him to understand from what they said.

Translation Strategies

If readers have enough assumed knowledge to be able to understand the message, along with any important implicit information that goes with the explicit information, then it is good to leave that knowledge unstated and leave the implicit information implicit. If the readers do not understand the message because one of these is missing for them, then follow these strategies:

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.
- (2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the foxes slept in their holes and birds slept in their nests.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes to live in**, and the birds of the sky **have nests to live in**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head and sleep."

It will be more tolerable for **Tyre and Sidon** at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the people of Tyre and Sidon were very, very wicked. This can be stated explicitly.

>

At the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for **those cities of Tyre and Sidon, whose people were very wicked**, than it will be for you. or At

the day of judgment, It will be more tolerable for those **wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon**, than for you.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands** when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that one of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating, which they must do to be righteous. It was not to remove germs from their hands to avoid sickness, as a modern reader might think.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not go through the ceremonial handwashing ritual of righteousness** when they eat bread.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

The implicit information is that Jesus himself is the Son of Man. Other implicit information is that if the scribe wanted to follow Jesus, then, like Jesus, he would have to live without a house.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but **I, the Son of Man**, have **no home to rest in. If you want to follow me, you will live as I live.**"

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The implicit information is that God would not only judge the people; he would punish them. This can be made explicit.

At the day of judgment, God will **punish Tyre and Sidon**, cities whose people were very wicked, **less severely than he will punish you.**
or:

At the day of judgment, God will **punish you more severely** than Tyre and Sidon, cities whose people were very wicked.

Modern readers may not know some of the things that the people in the Bible and the people who first read it knew. This can make it hard for them to understand what a speaker or writer says, and to learn things that the speaker left implicit. Translators may need to state some things explicitly in the translation that the original speaker or writer left unstated or implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[*Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit*](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:10](#); [1:16](#); [1:17](#); [1:18](#); [1:24](#); [1:25](#); [1:27](#); [Notes](#); [2:2](#); [2:3](#); [2:4](#); [2:5](#); [2:6](#); [2:9](#); [2:10](#); [2:11](#); [2:12](#); [2:14](#); [2:18](#); [2:19](#); [2:21](#); [2:23](#); [2:24](#); [2:25](#); [3:1](#); [3:5](#); [3:9](#); [3:12](#); [3:14](#); [3:15](#); [4:2](#); [4:6](#); [4:9](#); [4:11](#); [5:1](#); [5:2](#); [5:3](#); [5:4](#); [5:6](#); [5:7](#); [5:11](#); [5:12](#); [5:17](#))

Connect — Background Information

Time Relationship

Some connectors establish time relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate clauses that give background information?*

Background Clause

Description

A background clause is one that describes something that is ongoing. Then, in the same sentence, another clause indicates an event that begins to happen during that time. These events are also simultaneous events, but they have the further relationship of background event and main event because the event that is already happening serves as the background for the other event, the one that is in focus. The background event simply provides the time frame or other context for the main event or events.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Languages indicate a shift in time in different ways. You (the translator) need to understand how these shifts in time are indicated in the original languages in order to communicate them clearly in your own language. Background clauses often indicate a time that began long before the event that is in focus. Translators need to understand how both the source language and the target language communicate background events. Some English words that indicate background events are “now,” “when,” “while,” and “during.” Those words can also indicate simultaneous events. To tell the difference, ask yourself if all of the events seem to be equal in importance and started at about the same time. If so, they are probably simultaneous events. But if an event(s) is ongoing and another event(s) just started, then the ongoing event(s) is probably background to the other event(s). Some common phrases that indicate background events are “in those days” and “at that time.”

Examples From OBS and the Bible

When Solomon was old, he also worshiped their gods. (OBS Story 18 Frame 3)

Solomon began to worship foreign gods at a time when he was old. Being old is the background event. Worshiping other gods is the main event.

And his parents went **every year** to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover. And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom of the feast. (Luke 2:41-42 ULT)

The first event—going to Jerusalem—is ongoing and started long ago. We know this because of the words “every year.” Going to Jerusalem is the background event. Then an event begins that started during the time “when he was twelve years old.” So the main event is the specific time Jesus and his family traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover festival **when he was twelve years old**.

And it came about that, **while** they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. (Luke 2:6 ULT)

Being in Bethlehem is the background event. The birth of the baby is the main event.

And in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—**while** Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **during** the high priesthood of

Annas and Caiaphas—the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.
(Luke 3:1-2 ULT)

This example begins with five background clauses (marked by commas), signalled as background by the words “while” and “during.” Then the main event happens: “the word of God came to John.”

Translation Strategies

If the way that the Background Clauses are marked is also clear in your language, then translate the Background Clauses as they are.

(1) If the connecting word does not make it clear that what follows is a Background Clause, use a connecting word that communicates this more clearly.

(2) If your language marks Background Clauses in a different way than using connecting words (such as by using different verb forms), then use that way.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

And in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—**while** Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **during** the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.
(Luke 3:1-2 ULT)

(1) If the connecting word does not make it clear that what follows is a background clause, use a connecting word that communicates this more clearly.

It happened during the time that Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, **and during the time that** Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, **and during the time that** his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, **and during the time that** Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **and also during the time that** Annas and Caiaphas were high priests—**that** the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

(2) If your language marks background clauses in a different way than using connecting words, such as with different verb forms, then use that way.

Pontius Pilate **was governing** Judea, and Herod **was ruling over** Galilee, and his brother Philip **was ruling over** the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias **was ruling over** Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas **were being** high priests—the word of God **came** to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

Example of Differences in Time Relationship Connecting Words:

Category	Example
Background setting	Yahweh's word was rare in those days ;
Background repeated	there was no frequent prophetic vision.
Introduction of main event	At that time, when Eli
Background	whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see well,
Simultaneous background	was lying down in his own bed.
Simultaneous background	The lamp of God had not yet gone out,
Simultaneous background	and Samuel was lying down to sleep in the temple of Yahweh,
Simultaneous background	where the ark of God was.
Main event	Yahweh called to Samuel,
Sequential event	who said, "Here I am." (1 Sam 3:1-4 ULT)

In the above example, the first two lines talk about a condition that was going on for a long time. This is the general, long-term background. We know this from the phrase "in those days." After the introduction of the main event ("At that time,"), there are several lines of simultaneous background. The first one is introduced by "when," and then three more follow, with the last connected by "and." The background clause introduced by "where" explains a little more about the background clause before it. Then the main event happens, followed by more events. Translators will need to think about the best way to show these relationships in their language.

(Go back to: [James 3:3](#); [3:7](#))

Connect — Contrast Relationship

Logical Relationships

Some connectors establish logical relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate a contrast relationship?*

Contrast Relationship

Description

A contrast relationship is a logical relationship in which one event or item is in contrast or opposition to another.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In Scripture, many events did not happen as the people involved intended or expected them to happen. Sometimes people acted in ways that were not expected, whether good or bad. Often it was God at work, changing the events. These events were often pivotal. It is important that translators understand and communicate these contrasts. In English, contrast relationships are often indicated by the words “but,” “although,” “even though,” “though,” “yet,” or “however.”

Examples From OBS and the Bible

You tried to do evil when you sold me as a slave, **but** God used the evil for good! (Story 8 Frame 12 OBS)

Joseph’s brothers’ evil plan to sell Joseph is contrasted with God’s good plan to save many people. The word “but” marks the contrast.

For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? **Yet** I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:27 ULT)

Jesus contrasts the proud way that human leaders behave with the humble way that he behaves. The contrast is marked by the word “yet.”

The hill country will also be yours. **Though** it is a forest, you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders, for you will drive out the Canaanites, even **though** they have chariots of iron, and even **though** they are strong. (Joshua 17:18 ULT)

It was unexpected that the Israelites, who had been slaves in Egypt, would be able to conquer and lay claim to the promised land.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses contrast relationships in the same way as in the text, then use them as they are.

(1) If the contrast relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a connecting word or phrase that is more specific or more clear.

(2) If it is more clear in your language to mark the other clause of the contrast relationship, then use a connecting word on the other clause.

(3) If your language shows a contrast relationship in a different way, then use that way.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the contrast relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a connecting word or phrase that is more specific or more clear.

For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? **Yet** I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:27 ULT)

For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? **Unlike that person**, I am among you as one who serves.

(2) If it is more clear in your language to mark the other clause of the contrast relationship, then use a connecting word on the other clause.

The hill country will also be yours. **Though** it is a forest, you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders, for you will drive out the Canaanites, even **though** they have chariots of iron, and even **though** they are strong. (Joshua 17:18 ULT)

The hill country will also be yours. It is a forest, **but** you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders. They have chariots of iron, and they are strong, **but** you will drive out the Canaanites.

(3) If your language shows a contrast relationship in a different way, then use that way.

[David] found favor in the sight of God, and he asked if he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. **However**, Solomon built the house for him. **But** the Most High does not live in houses made with hands. (Acts 7:46-48a ULT)

[David] found favor in the sight of God, and he asked if he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. **But** it was, Solomon, **not David**, who built the house for God. **Even though Solomon built him a house**, the Most High does not live in houses made with hands.

(Go back to: [James 1:14](#); [1:19](#); [1:22](#); [2:3](#); [2:8](#); [2:13](#); [3:5](#); [4:2](#); [4:3](#))

Connect — Goal (Purpose) Relationship

Logical Relationships

Some connectors establish logical relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate a goal (purpose) relationship?*

Goal (or Purpose) Relationship

Description

A Goal Relationship is a logical relationship in which the second event is the purpose or goal of the first event. In order for something to be a goal relationship, someone must do the first event with the intention that it will cause the second event.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In Scripture, the goal or purpose may be stated either first or second. But in some languages, the goal or purpose must always occur in the same position (either first or second) in order for that logical relationship to be understood. You (the translator) need to understand the relationship between the two parts and communicate those accurately in your language. This may require changing the order of the two events. It may also require specific words to indicate that one is the goal or purpose of the other. Words commonly used to indicate a goal relationship in English are “in order to,” “in order that” or “so that.” It is important that the translator recognize the words that signal a goal relationship and translate that relationship in a natural way.

Examples From OBS and the Bible

She became angry and falsely accused Joseph **so that he was arrested and sent to prison.**
(Story 8 Frame 5 OBS)

The goal or purpose of the woman’s false accusation was to get Joseph arrested and sent to prison.

Meanwhile Gideon, his son, was threshing out wheat at the winepress **in order to hide from the presence of Midian.** (Judges 6:11b ULT)

Here the prepositional phrase begins with “in order to.”

Now if I have found favor in your eyes, show me your ways **so that I may know you and continue to find favor in your eyes.** Remember that this nation is your people. (Exodus 33:13 ULT)

Moses wants God to show him God’s ways for the goal or purpose of Moses knowing God and continuing to find favor with God.

Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **for her to glean,** and do not rebuke her! (Ruth 2:16 ULT)

The goal or purpose of Boaz instructing the men to pull out the grain from their bundles and leave it was for Ruth to gather (glean) it.

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem, **and let us see this thing that has happened,** which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15 ULT)

The purpose of going to Bethlehem was to see the thing that had happened. Here the purpose is not marked and might be misunderstood.

“... if you want **to enter into life**, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17b ULT)

The goal of keeping the commandments is to enter into life.

Do not turn from it to the right or to the left **so that you may be wise** in everything in which you walk. (Joshua 1:7c ULT)

The purpose of not turning away from the instructions that Moses gave to the Israelites was so that they would be wise.

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance**.’ So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

The purpose of the vine growers killing the heir was so they could take his inheritance. They state both events as a plan, joining them only with “and.” Then the word “so” marks the reporting of the first event, but the second event (the goal or purpose) is not stated.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses Goal or Purpose relationships in the same way as in the text, then use them as they are.

- (1) If the construction of the Goal statement is unclear, change it to one that is more clear.
- (2) If the order of the statements makes the Goal statement unclear or confusing for the reader, then change the order.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the construction of the goal statement is unclear, change it to one that is more clear.

“Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **for her to glean**, and do not rebuke her!” (Ruth 2:16 ULT)

“Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **so that she can glean it**, and do not rebuke her!”

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem, **and let us see this thing that has happened**, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15 ULT)

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem **so that we can see this thing that has happened**, which the Lord has made known to us.”

- (2) If the order of the statements makes the goal statement unclear or confusing for the reader, then change the order.

“... if you want **to enter into life**, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17b ULT)

“... keep the commandments if you want **to enter into life**.” or: “... keep the commandments **so that you can enter into life**.”

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance.**' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

(1) and (2)

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance.**' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **so that we can take over his inheritance.**' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him **so that they could take over his inheritance.**

(Go back to: [James 1:18](#))

Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

Logical Relationships

Some connectors establish logical relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate the reason-result relationship?*

Reason-and-Result Relationships

Description

A reason-and-result relationship is a logical relationship in which one event is the **reason** or cause for another event. The second event, then, is the **result** of the first event.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

A reason-and-result relationship can look forward — “I did Y because I wanted X to happen.” But usually it is looking backward — “X happened, and so I did Y.” Also, it is possible to state the reason either before or after the result. Many languages have a preferred order for the reason and the result, and it will be confusing for the reader if they are in the opposite order. Common words used to indicate a reason-and-result relationship in English are “because,” “so,” “therefore,” and “for.” Some of these words can also be used to indicate a goal relationship, so translators need to be aware of the difference between a goal relationship and a reason-and-result relationship. It is necessary for translators to understand how the two events are connected, and then communicate them clearly in their language.

If the reason and result are stated in different verses, it is still possible to put them in a different order. If you change the order of the verses, then put the verse numbers together at the beginning of the group of verses that were rearranged like this: 1-2. This is called a [Verse Bridge](#).

Examples From OBS and the Bible

The Jews were amazed, **because** Saul had tried to kill believers, and now he believed in Jesus!
(Story 46 Frame 6 OBS)

The **reason** is the change in Saul — that he had tried to kill people who believed in Jesus, and now he himself believed in Jesus. The **result** is that the Jews were amazed. “Because” connects the two ideas and indicates that what follows it is a reason.

Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **so that** the boat was covered with the waves.
(Matthew 8:24a ULT)

The **reason** is the great storm, and the **result** is that the boat was covered with the waves. The two events are connected by “so that.” Notice that the term “so that” often indicates a goal relationship, but here the relationship is reason-and-result. This is because the sea cannot think and therefore does not have a goal.

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, **because** in it he rested from all his work which he had done in his creation. (Genesis 2:3 ULT)

The **result** is that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. The **reason** is because he rested on the seventh day from his work.

“Blessed are the poor, **for** yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20b ULT)

The **result** is that the poor are blessed. The **reason** is that the kingdom of God is theirs.

But he raised up in their place their sons that Joshua circumcised, being uncircumcised, **because** they had not been circumcised on the way. (Joshua 5:7 ULT)

The **result** is that Joshua circumcised the boys and men who had been born in the wilderness. The **reason** was that they had not been circumcised while they were journeying.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses reason-and-result relationships in the same way as in the text, then use them as they are.

- (1) If the order of the clauses is confusing for the reader, then change the order.
- (2) If the relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a more clear connecting word.
- (3) If it is more clear to put a connecting word in the clause that does not have one, then do so.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, **because** in it he rested from all his work which he had done in his creation. (Genesis 2:3 ULT)

(1) God rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done in his creation. **That is why** he blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

Blessed are the poor, **for** yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20 ULT)

- (1) The kingdom of God belongs to you who are poor. **Therefore**, the poor are blessed.
- (2) Blessed are the poor, **because** yours is the kingdom of God.
- (3) **The reason that** the poor are blessed **is because** yours is the kingdom of God.

Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **so that** the boat was covered with the waves. (Matthew 8:24a ULT)

- (1) Behold, the boat was covered with the waves **because** a great storm arose on the sea.
- (2) Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **with the result that** the boat was covered with the waves.
- (3) Behold, **because** a great storm arose on the sea, the boat was covered with the waves.

Since he was not able to find out anything for certain because of the noise, he ordered that he be brought into the fortress. (Acts 21:34b ULT)

- (1) The captain ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress, **because** he could not tell anything because of all the noise.
- (2) **Because** the captain could not tell anything because of all the noise, he ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress.
- (3) The captain could not tell anything because of all the noise, **so** he ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress.

(Go back to: [James 1:11](#); [1:20](#); [1:21](#); [2:4](#); [2:10](#); [2:11](#); [2:13](#); [2:26](#); [3:2](#); [3:16](#); [4:7](#); [4:8](#); [4:10](#); [5:3](#); [5:7](#); [5:11](#); [5:16](#))

Connect — Sequential Time Relationship

Time Relationships

Some connectors establish time relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate clauses with a sequential time relationship?*

Sequential Clause

Description

A sequential clause is a time relation that connects two events in which one happens and then the other happens.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Languages indicate sequences of events in different ways; some use ordering, some use connecting words, some even use relative tense (Relative tense is a tense that refers to a time in relation to a reference point in the context.) Connecting words that may indicate sequence are words such as “then,” “later,” “after,” “afterward,” “before,” “first,” and “when.” Translators need to be certain that they communicate the order of the events in a way that is natural in their language. This may require ordering clauses differently than in the original languages.

Examples From OBS and the Bible

When Joseph came to his brothers, they kidnapped him and sold him to some slave traders.
(OBS Story 8 Frame 2)

First Joseph came to his brothers, and then they kidnapped and sold him. We know this because of the connecting word “**when**.” The translator needs to decide the best way to communicate this sequence clearly and correctly.

It was as sweet as honey in my mouth, but **after** I ate it, my stomach became bitter.
(Revelation 10:10b ULT)

The event of the first clause occurs first, and the event of the last clause occurs later. We know this because of the connecting word “**after**.” The translator needs to decide the best way to communicate this sequence clearly and correctly.

For **before** the child knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be desolate (Isaiah 7:16 ULT)

The event of the first clause occurs after the event of the second clause. First the land they dread will be desolate, and then the child will know to refuse evil and choose good. We know this because of the connecting word “**before**.” However, stating the clauses in this order may communicate the wrong order of events in your language. The translator may have to change the order so that the clauses come in the order that they happen. Or it may be possible to keep the order of the original language text and mark the ordering of sequence so that it is clear to the readers. You (the translator) need to decide the best way to communicate this sequence clearly and correctly.

Then Mary arose in those days **and** quickly went into the hill country, to a city of Judah, **and** she entered into the house of Zechariah **and** greeted Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39-40 ULT)

Here the general connector “**and**” connects four events. These are sequential events—each happens after the one before it. We know this because that is the only way that these events would happen. So in English, the general

connector “and” is enough to make the sequence clear for events such as these. You will need to decide if this also communicates this sequence clearly and correctly in your language.

Translation Strategies

If the sequence of events is clear in your language, then translate the sequence as it is.

- (1) If the connecting word is not clear, use a connecting word that communicates the sequence more clearly.
- (2) If the clauses are in an order that makes the sequence unclear, put the clauses in an order that is more clear.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the connecting word is not clear, use a connecting word that communicates the sequence more clearly.

Then Mary arose in those days **and** quickly went into the hill country, to a city of Judah, **and** she entered into the house of Zechariah **and** greeted Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39-40 ULT)

Then Mary arose in those days. **Then** she quickly went into the hill country, to a city of Judah. **Then** she entered into the house of Zechariah, **and then** she greeted Elizabeth.

For **before** the child knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be desolate (Isaiah 7:16 ULT)

For the time will come when the child knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, **but even before that time**, the land whose two kings you dread will be desolate.

- (2) If the clauses are in an order that makes the sequence unclear, put the clauses in an order that is more clear.

For the land whose two kings you dread will be desolate **before** the child knows to refuse the evil and choose the good.

For more about sequences of events, see [Sequence of Events](#).

(Go back to: [James 1:15](#))

Direct and Indirect Quotations

Description

There are two kinds of quotations: direct quotations and indirect quotations.

A direct quotation occurs when someone reports what another person said from the viewpoint of that original speaker. People usually expect that this kind of quotation will represent the original speaker's exact words. In the example below, John would have said "I" when referring to himself, so the narrator, who is reporting John's words, uses the word "I" in the quotation to refer to John. To show that these are John's exact words, many languages put the words between quotation marks: "".

- John said, "I do not know at what time I will arrive."

An indirect quotation occurs when a speaker reports what someone else said, but in this case, the speaker is reporting it from his own point of view instead and not from the original person's point of view. This kind of quotation usually contains changes in pronouns, and it often includes changes in time, in word choices, and in length. In the example below, the narrator refers to John as "he" in the quotation and uses the word "would" to replace the future tense, indicated by "will."

- John said that **he** did not know at what time **he** would arrive.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages, reported speech can be expressed by either direct or indirect quotations. In other languages, it is more natural to use one than the other. There may be a certain meaning implied by using one rather than the other. So for each quotation, translators need to decide whether it is best to translate it as a direct quotation or as an indirect quotation.

Examples From the Bible

The verses in the examples below contain both direct and indirect quotations. In the explanation below the verse, we have marked in bold the words that are quoted.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."
(Luke 5:14 ULT)

- Indirect quote: He commanded him **to tell no one**,
- Direct quote: but told him, "**Go, show yourself to the priest ...**"

And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21 ULT)

- Indirect quote: Being asked by the Pharisees **when the kingdom of God was coming**,
- Direct quote: he answered them and said, "**The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you.**"
- Direct quotes: Neither will they say, '**Look, here it is!**' or, '**There it is!**'

This page answers the question: *What are direct and indirect quotations?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-verbs\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/writing-quotations\]\]](#)

Translation Strategies

If the kind of quote used in the source text would work well in your language, consider using it. If the kind of quote used in that context is not natural for your language, follow these strategies.

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.
- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, **“Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”** (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him to tell no one, but **to go and show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for his cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.**

- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

And he commanded him **to tell no one**, but, “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him, **“Tell no one.** But go and show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_quotations.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-quotesinquotes\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 2:18](#))

Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding

Description

In some languages, phrases that modify a noun can be used with the noun for two different purposes. They can either (1) distinguish the noun from other similar items, or (2) they can give more information about the noun. That information could be new to the reader, or a reminder about something the reader might already know. Other languages use modifying phrases with a noun only for distinguishing the noun from other similar things. When people who speak these languages hear a modifying phrase along with a noun, they assume that its function is to distinguish one item from another similar item.

This page answers the question: *When a phrase is used with a noun, what is the difference between phrases that distinguish the noun from others and phrases that simply inform or remind?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences\]\]](#)

Some languages use a comma to mark the difference between (1) making a distinction between similar items and (2) giving more information about an item. Without the comma, the sentence below communicates that it is making a distinction:

- Mary gave some of the food to **her sister who was very thankful**.
 - If her sister was usually thankful, the phrase “who was thankful” could distinguish this sister of Mary’s from another sister who was not usually thankful.

With the comma, the sentence is giving more information:

- Mary gave some of the food to **her sister, who was very thankful**.
 - This same phrase can be used to give us more information about Mary’s sister. It tells us about how Mary’s sister responded when Mary gave her the food. In this case it does not distinguish one sister from another sister.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Many source languages of the Bible use phrases that modify a noun both for distinguishing the noun from another similar item and also for giving more information about the noun. You (the translator) must be careful to understand which meaning the author intended in each case.
- Some languages use phrases that modify a noun only for distinguishing the noun from another similar item. When translating a phrase that is used for giving more information, translators who speak these languages will need to separate the phrase from the noun. Otherwise, people who read it or hear it will think that the phrase is meant to distinguish the noun from other similar items.

Examples From the Bible

Examples of words and phrases that are used to distinguish one item from other possible items:

(These usually do not cause any problem in translation.)

■ The curtain is to separate **the holy place** from **the most holy place**. (Exodus 26:33b ULT)

The words “holy” and “most holy” distinguish two different places from each other and from any other place.

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to **the woman who bore him**. (Proverbs 17:25 ULT)

The phrase “who bore him” distinguishes which woman the son is bitterness to. He is not bitterness to all women, but to his mother.

Examples of words and phrases that are used to give added information or a reminder about an item:

(These are a translation issue for languages that do not use these.)

... for **your righteous judgments** are good. (Psalm 119:39b ULT)

The word “righteous” simply reminds us that God’s judgments are righteous. It does not distinguish his righteous judgments from his unrighteous judgments, because all of his judgments are righteous.

How can Sarah, **who is 90 years old**, bear a son? (Genesis 17:17b ULT)

The phrase “who is 90 years old” is the reason that Abraham did not think that Sarah could bear a son. He was not distinguishing one woman named Sarah from another woman named Sarah who was a different age, and he was not telling anyone something new about her age. He simply did not think that a woman who was that old could bear a child.

I will wipe away mankind **whom I have created** from the surface of the earth. (Genesis 6:7 ULT)

The phrase “whom I have created” is a reminder of the relationship between God and mankind. It is the reason God had the right to wipe away mankind. There is not another mankind that God did not create.

Translation Strategies

If readers would understand the purpose of a phrase with a noun, then consider keeping the phrase and the noun together. For languages that use words or phrases with a noun only to distinguish one item from another, here are some strategies for translating phrases that are used to inform or remind.

- (1) Put the information in another part of the sentence and add words that show its purpose.
- (2) Use one of your language’s ways for expressing that this is just added information. It may be by adding a small word, or by changing the way the voice sounds. Sometimes changes in the voice can be shown with punctuation marks, such as parentheses or commas.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Put the information in another part of the sentence and add words that show its purpose.

I hate those who serve **worthless** idols (Psalm 31:6 ULT)

By saying “worthless idols,” David was commenting about all idols and giving his reason for hating those who serve them. He was not distinguishing worthless idols from valuable idols.

>

Because idols are worthless, I hate those who serve them.

... for your **righteous** judgments are good. (Psalm 119:39b ULT)

... for your judgments are good **because they are righteous**.

Can Sarah, **who is 90 years old**, bear a son? (Genesis 17:17b ULT)

The phrase “who is 90 years old” is a reminder of Sarah’s age. It tells why Abraham was asking the question. He did not expect that a woman who was that old could bear a child.

>

Can Sarah bear a son **even when she is 90 years old**?

I will call on Yahweh, **who is worthy to be praised**. (2 Samuel 22:4a ULT) There is only one Yahweh. The phrase “who is worthy to be praised” gives a reason for calling on Yahweh.

I will call on Yahweh, because **he is worthy to be praised**

(2) Use one of your language’s ways for expressing that this is just added information.

You are my Son, **whom I love**. I am pleased with you. (Luke 3:22 ULT)

You are my Son. **I love you** and I am pleased with you.

Receiving my love, you are my Son. I am pleased with you.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Double Negatives](#)

(Go back to: [James 4:12](#))

Double Negatives

A double negative occurs when a clause has two words that each express the meaning of “not.” Double negatives mean very different things in different languages. To translate sentences that have double negatives accurately and clearly, you need to know what a double negative means in the Bible and how to express this idea in your language.

This page answers the question: *What are double negatives?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences\]\]](#)

Description

Negative words are words that have in them the meaning “not.” Examples in English are “no,” “not,” “none,” “no one,” “nothing,” “nowhere,” “never,” “nor,” “neither,” and “without.” Also, some words have prefixes or suffixes that mean “not,” such as the bolded parts of these words: “**un**happy,” “**im**possible,” and “**useless**.” Some other kinds of words also have a negative meaning, such as “lack” or “reject,” or even “fight” or “evil.”

A double negative occurs when a clause has two words that each have a negative meaning.

We did this **not** because we have **no** authority ... (2 Thessalonians 3:9a ULT)

And this was **not** done **without** an oath! (Hebrews 7:20a ULT)

Be sure of this—the wicked person will **not** go **un**punished. (Proverbs 11:21a ULT)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Double negatives mean very different things in different languages.

- In some languages, such as Spanish, a double negative emphasizes the negative. The Spanish sentence, “No vi a nadie,” literally says “I did not see no one.” It has both the word ‘no’ next to the verb and ‘nadie,’ which means “no one.” The two negatives are seen as in agreement with each other, and the sentence means, “I did not see anyone.”
- In some languages, a second negative cancels the first one, creating a positive sentence. So, “He is not unintelligent” means “He is intelligent.”
- In some languages the double negative creates a positive sentence, but it is a weak statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” means, “He is somewhat intelligent.”
- In some languages, such as the languages of the Bible, the double negative can create a positive sentence, and often strengthens the statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” can mean “He is intelligent” or “He is very intelligent.”

To translate sentences with double negatives accurately and clearly in your language, you need to know what a double negative means in the Bible and how to express the same idea in your language.

Examples From the Bible

... in order **not** to be **un**fruitful. (Titus 3:14b ULT)

This means “so that they will be fruitful.”

All things were made through him and **without** him there was **not** one thing made that has been made. (John 1:3 ULT)

By using a double negative, John emphasized that the Son of God created absolutely everything. The double negative makes a stronger statement than the simple positive.

Translation Strategies

If double negatives are natural and are used to express the positive in your language, consider using them. Otherwise, you could consider these strategies:

- (1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is simply to make a positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives so that it is positive.
- (2) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a strong positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives and put in a strengthening word or phrase such as “very” or “surely” or “absolutely.”

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is simply to make a positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives so that it is positive.

For we do **not** have a high priest who **cannot** feel sympathy for our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15a ULT)

“For we have a high priest who can feel sympathy for our weaknesses.”

... in order **not** to be **unfruitful**. (Titus 3:14b ULT)

“... so that they may be fruitful.”

- (2) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a strong positive statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove the two negatives and put in a strengthening word or phrase such as “very” or “surely” or “absolutely.”

Be sure of this—the wicked person will **not** go **unpunished**. (Proverbs 11:21a ULT)

“Be sure of this—wicked people will **certainly** be punished.”

All things were made through him and **without** him there was **not** one thing made that has been made. (John 1:3 ULT)

“All things were made through him. He made **absolutely** everything that has been made.”

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-verbs\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:6](#); [2:14](#); [3:11](#); [3:12](#))

Doublet

Description

We are using the word “doublet” to refer to two words or phrases that are used together and either mean the same thing or mean very close to the same thing. Often they are joined with the word “and.” Unlike [Hendiadys](#), in which one of the words modifies the other, in a doublet the two words or phrases are equal and are used to emphasize or intensify the one idea that is expressed by the two words or phrases.

This page answers the question: *What are doublets and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

A very similar issue is the repetition of the same word or phrase for emphasis, usually with no other words between them. Because these figures of speech are so similar and have the same effect, we will treat them here together.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages people do not use doublets. Or they may use doublets, but only in certain situations, so a doublet might not make sense in their language in some verses. People might think that the verse is describing two ideas or actions, when it is only describing one. In this case, translators may need to find some other way to express the meaning expressed by the doublet.

Examples From the Bible

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

The bolded words mean the same thing. Together they mean the people were spread out.

He attacked two men **more righteous** and **better** than himself. (1 Kings 2:32b ULT)

This means that they were “much more righteous” than he was.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

This means that they had decided to lie, which is another way of saying that they intended to deceive people.

... like of a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

This means that he was like a lamb that did not have any defect—not even one.

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, “**Master! Master!** We are perishing!” (Luke 8:24 ULT)

The repetition of “Master” means that the disciples called to Jesus urgently and continually.

Translation Strategies

If a doublet would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, consider these strategies.

(1) Translate only one of the words or phrases.

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words or phrases and add a word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Translate only one of the words.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

"You have decided to prepare **false** things to say."

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words and add a word that intensifies it such as "very" or "great" or "many."

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

"He has one people **very spread out**."

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

... like a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

• English can emphasize this with "any" and "at all."

"... like a lamb **without any blemish at all**."

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, "**Master! Master!** We are perishing!" (Luke 8:24 ULT)

Then they approached {and} woke him up, **urgently shouting, "Master!**
We are perishing!"

(Go back to: [James 1:4](#); [1:17](#); [1:21](#); [1:27](#); [3:7](#); [3:13](#); [4:1](#); [4:2](#); [4:9](#))

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis¹ occurs when a speaker or writer leaves out one or more words that normally should be in the sentence. The speaker or writer does this because he knows that the hearer or reader will understand the meaning of the sentence and supply the words in his mind when he hears or reads the words that are there. For example:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, **nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**
(Psalm 1:5 ULT)

There is ellipsis in the second part because “nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” is not a complete sentence. The speaker assumes that the hearer will understand what it is that sinners will not do in the assembly of the righteous by filling in the action from the previous clause. With the action filled in, the complete sentence would read:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **will** sinners **stand** in the assembly of the righteous.

[¹] English has a punctuation symbol which is also called an ellipsis. It is a series of three dots (...) used to indicate an intentional omission of a word, phrase, sentence or more from text without altering its original meaning. This translationAcademy article is not about the punctuation mark, but about the concept of omission of words that normally should be in the sentence.

Two Types of Ellipsis

A Relative Ellipsis happens when the reader has to supply the omitted word or words from the context. Usually the word is in the previous sentence, as in the example above.

An Absolute Ellipsis happens when the omitted word or words are not in the context, but the phrases are common enough in the language that the reader is expected to supply what is missing from this common usage or from the nature of the situation.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers who see incomplete sentences or phrases may not know that there is information missing that the writer expects them to fill in. Or readers may understand that there is information missing, but they may not know what information is missing because they do not know the original biblical language, culture, or situation as the original readers did. In this case, they may fill in the wrong information. Or readers may misunderstand the ellipsis if they do not use ellipsis in the same way in their language.

Examples From the Bible

Relative Ellipsis

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox.** (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

The writer wants his words to be few and to make good poetry. The full sentence with the information filled in would be:

This page answers the question: *What is ellipsis ?* ([^1])

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences]]

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**not as unwise but as wise**. (Ephesians 5:15b ULT)

The information that the reader must understand in the second parts of these sentences can be filled in from the first parts:

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**walk** not as unwise but **walk** as wise,

Absolute Ellipsis

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight**.” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

It seems that the man answered in an incomplete sentence because he wanted to be polite and not directly ask Jesus for healing. He knew that Jesus would understand that the only way he could receive his sight would be for Jesus to heal him. The complete sentence would be:

“Lord, **I want you to heal me so** that I might receive my sight.”

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. (Titus 1:4 ULT)

The writer assumes that the reader will recognize this common form of a blessing or wish, so he does not need to include the full sentence, which would be:

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. **May you receive** grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Translation Strategies

If ellipsis would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **sinner in the assembly** of the righteous. (Psalm 1:5 ULT)

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, and **sinner will not stand in the assembly** of the righteous.

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight**.” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

Then when the man was near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, **I want you to heal me** that I might receive my sight.”

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox**. (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

(Go back to: [James 1:10](#); [1:22](#); [1:23](#); [1:25](#); [3:12](#); [4:9](#); [4:11](#); [5:12](#))

Euphemism

Description

A euphemism is a mild or polite way of referring to something that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable, such as death or activities usually done in private.

This page answers the question: *What is a euphemism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

... they found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa.
(1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

This means that Saul and his sons “were dead.” It is a euphemism because the important thing was not that Saul and his sons had fallen but that they were dead. Sometimes people do not like to speak directly about death because it is unpleasant.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages use different euphemisms. If the target language does not use the same euphemism as in the source language, readers may not understand what it means and they may think that the writer means only what the words literally say.

Examples From the Bible

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT)

The original hearers would have understood that Saul went into the cave to use it as a toilet, but the writer wanted to avoid offending or distracting them, so **he did not say specifically** what Saul did or what he left in the cave.

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

In order **to be polite**, Mary uses a euphemism to say that she has never had sexual intercourse with a man.

Translation Strategies

If euphemism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.
- (2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT) — Some languages might use euphemisms like these:

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **dig a hole**”

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **have some time alone**”

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **slept with a man?**”

(2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

They found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa. (1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

“They found Saul and his sons **dead** on Mount Gilboa.”

(Go back to: [James 1:10](#))

Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'

Description

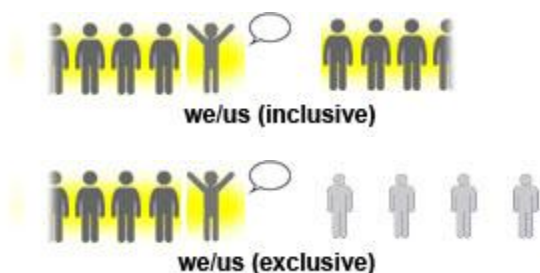
Some languages have more than one form of "we": an inclusive form that means "I and you" and an exclusive form that means "I and someone else but not you." The exclusive form excludes the person being spoken to. The inclusive form includes the person being spoken to and possibly others. This is also true for "us," "our," "ours," and "ourselves." Some languages have inclusive forms and exclusive forms for each of these. Translators whose language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms for these words will need to understand what the speaker meant so that they can decide which form to use.

This page answers the question: *What are the exclusive and inclusive forms of "we"?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

See the pictures. The people on the right are the people that the speaker is talking to. The yellow highlight shows who the inclusive "we" and the exclusive "we" refer to.



Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible was first written in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Like English, these languages do not have separate exclusive and inclusive forms for "we." If your language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms of "we," then you will need to understand what the speaker meant so that you can decide which form of "we" to use.

Examples From the Bible

Exclusive

They said, "There are not more than five loaves of bread and two fish with **us**—unless **we** go and buy food for all these people." (Luke 9:13 ULT)

In the second clause, the disciples are talking about some of them going to buy food. They were speaking to Jesus, but Jesus was not going to buy food. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" would use the **exclusive** form there.

We have seen it, and **we** bear witness to it. **We** are announcing to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and which has been made known to **us**. (1 John 1:2 ULT)

John is telling people who have not seen Jesus what he and the other apostles have seen. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **exclusive** forms in this verse.

Inclusive

The shepherds said one to each other, "Let **us** now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to **us**." (Luke 2:15b ULT)

The shepherds were speaking to one another. When they said "us," they were including the people they were speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Now it happened that on one of those days, he indeed got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let **us** go over to the other side of the lake." So they set sail. (Luke 8:22 ULT)

When Jesus said "us," he was referring to himself and to the disciples he was speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[When Masculine Words Include Women](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:18](#); [2:21](#); [3:1](#); [3:2](#); [4:13](#); [4:15](#))

First, Second or Third Person

Normally a speaker refers to himself as “I” and the person he is speaking to as “you.” Sometimes in the Bible a speaker refers to himself or to the person he is speaking to with terms other than “I” or “you.”

Description

- First person — This is how a speaker normally refers to himself. English uses the pronouns “I” and “we.” (Also: me, my, mine; us, our, ours)
- Second person — This is how a speaker normally refers to the person or people he is speaking to. English uses the pronoun “you.” (Also: your, yours)
- Third person — This is how a speaker refers to someone else. English uses the pronouns “he,” “she,” “it,” and “they.” (Also: him, his, her, hers, its; them, their, theirs) Noun phrases like “the man” or “the woman” are also third person.

This page answers the question: *What are first, second, and third person, and how do I translate when a third person form does not refer to the third person?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses the third person to refer to himself or to the people he is speaking to. Readers might think that the speaker was referring to someone else. They might not understand that he meant “I” or “you.”

Examples From the Bible

Sometimes people used the third person instead of “I” or “me” to refer to themselves.

But David said to Saul, “**Your servant** used to keep **his** father’s sheep.” (1 Samuel 17:34 ULT)

David referred to himself in the third person as “your servant” and used “his.” He was calling himself Saul’s servant in order to show his humility before Saul.

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said,
“... Do you have an arm like **God’s**? Can you thunder with a voice like **his**?” (Job 40:6, 9 ULT)

God referred to himself in the third person with the words “God’s” and “his.” He did this to emphasize that he is God, and he is powerful.

Sometimes people use the third person instead of “you” or “your” to refer to the person or people they are speaking to.

Abraham answered and said, “Look, I have undertaken to speak to my Lord, even though I am only dust and ashes!” (Genesis 18:27 ULT)

Abraham was speaking to the Lord, and referred to the Lord as “My Lord” rather than as “you.” He did this to show his humility before God.

So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if **each of you** does not forgive **his** brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:35 ULT)

After saying “each of you,” Jesus used the third person “his” instead of “your.”

Translation Strategies

If using the third person to mean “I” or “you” would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Use the third person phrase along with the pronoun “I” or “you.”
- (2) Simply use the first person (“I”) or second person (“you”) instead of the third person.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the third person phrase along with the pronoun “I” or “you.”

But David said to Saul, “**Your servant** used to keep **his** father’s sheep.” (1 Samuel 17:34)

But David said to Saul, “**I, your servant**, used to keep **my** father’s sheep.”

- (2) Simply use the first person (“I”) or second person (“you”) instead of the third person.

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said, “... Do you have an arm like **God’s**? Can you thunder with a voice like **his**?” (Job 40:6, 9 ULT)

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said, “... Do you have an arm like **mine**? Can you thunder with a voice like **mine**?”

So also my heavenly Father will do to you if **each of you** does not forgive **his** brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:35 ULT)

So also my heavenly Father will do to you if **each of you** does not forgive **your** brother from your heart.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Forms of You](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:1](#))

Forms of You

Singular, Dual, and Plural

Some languages have more than one word for “you” based on how many people the word “you” refers to. The **singular** form refers to one person, and the **plural** form refers to more than one person. Some languages also have a **dual** form which refers to two people, and some languages have other forms that refer to three or four people.

This page answers the question: *What are the different forms of you?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Forms of ‘You’ — Singular](#)

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-youdual]]

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_younum.

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses a singular form of “you” even though he is speaking to a crowd.

- [Singular Pronouns that Refer to Groups](#)

Formal and Informal

Some languages have more than one form of “you” based on the relationship between the speaker and the person he is talking to. People use the **formal** form of “you” when speaking to someone who is older, or has higher authority, or is someone they do not know very well. People use the **informal** form when speaking to someone who is not older, or does not have higher authority, or is a family member or close friend.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_youform.

For help with translating these, we suggest you read:

- Forms of “You” — Formal or Informal

(Go back to: [James 1:2](#); [2:3](#); [2:12](#); [2:24](#))

Forms of 'You' — Singular

Description

Some languages have a singular form of “you” for when the word “you” refers to just one person, and a **plural** form for when the word “you” refers to more than one person. Translators who speak one of these languages will always need to know what the speaker meant so they can choose the right word for “you” in their language. Other languages, such as English, have only one form, which people use regardless of how many people it refers to.

This page answers the question: *How do I know if the word 'you' is singular?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech\]\]](#)

[Forms of You](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

The Bible was first written in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. These languages all have both a singular form of “you” and a plural form of “you.” When we read the Bible in those languages, the pronouns and verb forms show us whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one. When we read the Bible in a language that does not have different forms of you, we need to look at the context to see how many people the speaker was speaking to.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators who speak a language that has distinct singular and plural forms of “you” will always need to know what the speaker meant so they can choose the right word for “you” in their language.
- Many languages also have different forms of the verb depending on whether the subject is singular or plural. So even if there is no pronoun meaning “you,” translators of these languages will need to know if the speaker was referring to one person or more than one.

Often the context will make it clear whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one. If you look at the other pronouns in the sentence, they will help you know the number of people the speaker was speaking to. Sometimes Greek and Hebrew speakers used the singular form of “you” even though they were speaking to a group of people. (See [Forms of 'You' — Singular to a Crowd](#).)

Examples From the Bible

But he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” But when he heard this, Jesus said to him, “One thing is still lacking to **you**. All things, as much as **you** have, sell all and distribute to the poor, and **you** will have treasure in heaven—and come, follow me.” (Luke 18:21-22 ULT)

The ruler was speaking about just himself when he said “I.” This shows us that when Jesus said “you” he was referring only to the ruler. So languages that have singular and plural forms of “you” need the singular form here.

The angel said to him, “Dress **yourself** and put on **your** sandals.” So he did that. He said to him, “Put on **your** outer garment and follow me.” (Acts 12:8 ULT)

The context makes it clear that the angel was speaking to one person and that only one person did what the the angel commanded. So languages that have singular and plural forms of “you” would need the singular form here for “yourself” and “your.” Also, if verbs have different forms for singular and plural subjects, then the verbs “dress” and “put on” need the form that indicates a singular subject.

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. For this purpose I left **you** in Crete, that **you** might set in order things not yet complete and ordain elders in every city as I directed **you**. But **you**, say what fits with sound teaching. (Titus 1:4a, 5; 2:1 ULT)

Paul wrote this letter to one person, Titus. Most of the time the word “you” in this letter refers only to Titus.

Strategies for finding out how many people “you” refers to

- (1) Look at the notes to see if they tell whether “you” refers to one person or more than one person.
- (2) Look at the UST to see if it says anything that would show you whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one person.
- (3) If you have a Bible that is written in a language that distinguishes “you” singular from “you” plural, see which form of “you” that Bible has in that sentence.
- (4) Look at the context to see how many people the speaker was talking to and who responded.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_younum.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-youdual]]

(Go back to: [James 2:3](#); [2:18](#))

Generic Noun Phrases

Description

Generic noun phrases refer to people or things in general rather than to specific individuals or things. This happens frequently in proverbs, because proverbs tell about things that are true about people in general.

This page answers the question: *What are generic noun phrases and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech]]

Can **a man** walk on hot coals without scorching his feet?
So is **the man who goes in to his neighbor's wife;**
the one who touches her will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 6:28-29 ULT)

The phrases in bold above do not refer to a specific man. They refer to any man who does these things.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages have different ways of showing that noun phrases refer to something in general. You (the translator) should refer to these general ideas in ways that are natural in your language.

Examples From the Bible

The **righteous person** is kept away from trouble and it comes upon **the wicked** instead. (Proverbs 11:8 ULT)

The bold phrases above do not refer to a specific person but to anyone who does what is right or anyone who is wicked.

People curse **the man who refuses to sell grain**. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

This does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who refuses to sell grain.

Yahweh gives favor to **a good man**, but he condemns **a man who makes evil plans**. (Proverbs 12:2 ULT)

The phrase "a good man" does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who is good. The phrase "a man who makes evil plans" does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who makes evil plans.

Translation Strategies

If your language can use the same wording as in the ULT to refer to people or things in general rather than to specific individuals or things, consider using the same wording. If not, here are some strategies you might use.

- (1) Use the word "the" in the noun phrase.
- (2) Use the word "a" in the noun phrase.
- (3) Use the word "any," as in "any person" or "anyone."
- (4) Use the plural form, as in "people."

(5) Use any other way that is natural in your language.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the word “the” in the noun phrase.

Yahweh gives favor to **a good man**, but he condemns **a man who makes evil plans**. (Proverbs 12:2 ULT)

“Yahweh gives favor to **the good man**, but he condemns **the man who makes evil plans**.” (Proverbs 12:2)

(2) Use the word “a” in the noun phrase.

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

“People curse **a man** who refuses to sell grain.”

(3) Use the word “any,” as in “any person” or “anyone.”

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

“People curse **any man** who refuses to sell grain.”

(4) Use the plural form, as in “people” (or in this sentence, “men”).

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

“People curse **men** who refuse to sell grain”

(5) Use any other way that is natural in your language.

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

“People curse **whoever** refuses to sell grain.”

Next we recommend you learn about:

[When Masculine Words Include Women](#)

(Go back to: [James 5:6](#); [5:7](#))

Hendiadys

Description

When a speaker expresses a single idea by using two words that are connected with “and,” it is called a hendiadys. In a hendiadys, the two words work together. Usually one of the words is the primary idea and the other word further describes the primary one.

This page answers the question: *What is hendiadys and how can I translate phrases that have it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech\]\]](#)

... his own **kingdom and glory**. (1 Thessalonians 2:12b ULT)

Though “kingdom” and “glory” are both nouns, “glory” actually tells what kind of kingdom it is: it is a **kingdom of glory** or **a glorious kingdom**.

Two phrases connected by “and” can also be a hendiadys when they refer to a single person, thing, or event.

while we look forward to receiving **the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**. (Titus 2:13b ULT)

Titus 2:13 contains two hendiadyses. “The blessed hope” and “appearing of the glory” refer to the same thing and serve to strengthen the idea that the return of Jesus Christ is greatly anticipated and wonderful. Also, “our great God” and “Savior Jesus Christ” refer to one person, not two.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Often a hendiadys contains an abstract noun. Some languages may not have a noun with the same meaning.
- Many languages do not use the hendiadys, so people may not understand that the second word is further describing the first one.
- Many languages do not use the hendiadys, so people may not understand that only one person or thing is meant, not two.

Examples From the Bible

For I will give you **a mouth and wisdom** ... (Luke 21:15a ULT)

“A mouth” and “wisdom” are nouns, but in this figure of speech “wisdom” describes what comes from the mouth.

If you are willing and obedient ... (Isaiah 1:19a ULT)

“Willing” and “obedient” are adjectives, but “willing” describes “obedient.”

Translation Strategies

If the hendiadys would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Substitute the describing noun with an adjective that means the same thing.
- (2) Substitute the describing noun with a phrase that means the same thing.
- (3) Substitute the describing adjective with an adverb that means the same thing.

(4) Substitute other parts of speech that mean the same thing and show that one word or phrase describes the other.

(5) If it is unclear that only one thing is meant, change the phrase so that this is clear.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Substitute the describing noun with an adjective that means the same thing.

For I will give you **a mouth and wisdom** ... (Luke 21:15a ULT)

For I will give you **wise words** ...

Walk in a manner that is worthy of God, who calls you into **his own kingdom and glory**. (1 Thessalonians 2:12b ULT)

You should walk in a manner that is worthy of God, who calls you to **his own glorious kingdom**.

(2) Substitute the describing noun with a phrase that means the same thing.

For I will give you **a mouth and wisdom** ... (Luke 21:15a ULT)

for I will give you **words of wisdom**.

You should walk in a manner that is worthy of God, who calls you into **his own kingdom and glory**. (1 Thessalonians 2:12b ULT)

You should walk in a manner that is worthy of God, who calls you to **his own kingdom of glory**.

(3) Substitute the describing adjective with an adverb that means the same thing.

If you are willing and obedient ... (Isaiah 1:19a ULT)

If you are **willingly obedient** ...

(4) Substitute other parts of speech that mean the same thing and show that one word or phrase describes the other.

If you are willing and obedient ... (Isaiah 1:19a ULT)

The adjective “obedient” can be substituted with the verb “obey.”

if you **obey willingly** ...

(4) and (5) If it is unclear that only one thing is meant, change the phrase so that this is clear.

We look forward to receiving **the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**. (Titus 2:13b ULT)

The noun “glory” can be changed to the adjective “glorious” to make it clear that Jesus’ appearing is what we hope for. Also, “Jesus Christ” can be moved to the front of the phrase and “great God and Savior” put into a relative clause that describes the one person, Jesus Christ.

We look forward to receiving **what we are longing for, the blessed and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, who is our great God and Savior**.

(Go back to: [James 1:27](#); [3:9](#); [4:2](#); [5:10](#))

How to Translate Names

Description

The Bible contains the names of many people, groups of people, and places. Some of these names may sound strange and be hard to say. Sometimes readers may not know what a name refers to, and sometimes they may need to understand what a name means. This page will help you see how you can translate these names and how you can help people understand what they need to know about them.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate names that are new to my culture?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Translate Unknowns](#)

Meaning of names

Most names in the Bible have meaning. Most of the time, names in the Bible are used simply to identify the people and places they refer to, but sometimes the meaning of a name is especially important.

For this **Melchizedek**, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, was the one who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him. (Hebrews 7:1 ULT)

Here the writer uses the name “Melchizedek” primarily to refer to a man who had that name, and the title “king of Salem” tells us that he ruled over a certain city.

His name first indeed means “king of righteousness,” and then also “king of Salem,” that is, “king of peace.” (Hebrews 7:2b ULT)

Here the writer explains the meanings of Melchizedek’s name and title because those things tell us more about the person. Other times, the writer does not explain the meaning of a name because he expects the reader to already know the meaning. If the meaning of the name is important to understand the passage, you can include the meaning in the text or in a footnote.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the names in the Bible. They may not know whether a name refers to a person or place or something else.
- Readers may need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand the passage.
- Some names may have different sounds or combinations of sounds that are not used in your language or are unpleasant to say in your language. For strategies to address this problem, see Borrow Words.
- Some people and places in the Bible have two names. Readers may not realize that two names refer to the same person or place.

Examples From the Bible

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

Readers might not know that “Jordan” is the name of a river, “Jericho” is the name of a city, and “Amorites” is the name of a group of people.

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?” Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

Readers may not understand the second sentence if they do not know that “Beer Lahai Roi” means “Well of the Living One who sees me.”

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, “For out of the water I drew him.” (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

Readers may not understand why she said this if they do not know that the name Moses sounds like the Hebrew words “pull out.”

Saul was in agreement with his execution. (Acts 8:1a ULT)

But when the apostles, Barnabas and **Paul**, heard of it, they tore their clothing. (Acts 14:14a ULT)

Readers may not know that the names Saul and Paul refer to the same person.

Translation Strategies

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.
- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.
- (3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.
- (4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently.
- (5) Or if a person or place has two different names, then use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

You went over the **Jordan River** and came to the **city of Jericho**. The men of Jericho fought against you, along with **the tribe of the Amorites**.

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Leave and go away from here, because **Herod** wants to kill you.” (Luke 13:31 ULT)

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Go and leave here, because **King Herod** wants to kill you.”

- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, "For out of the water I drew him." (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

She called his name **Moses (which sounds like 'drawn out')**, and she said, "For out of the water I drew him."

(3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.

She said, "Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?" Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

She said, "Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?"
Therefore, the well was called **Well of the Living One who sees me**.

(4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently. For example, Paul is called "Saul" before Acts 13 and "Paul" after Acts 13. You could translate his name as "Paul" all of the time, except in Acts 13:9 where it talks about him having both names.

... a young man named **Saul**. (Acts 7:58b ULT)

... a young man named **Paul** ¹

The footnote would look like:

^[1] Most versions say "Saul" here, but most of the time in the Bible he is called "Paul."

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

(5) Or if a person or place has two names, use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name. For example, you could write "Saul" where the source text has "Saul" and "Paul" where the source text has "Paul."

a young man named **Saul** (Acts 7:58 ULT)

a young man named **Saul**

The footnote would look like:

^[1] This is the same man who is called Paul beginning in Acts 13.

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

Then after the story has explained the name change, you could translate this way.

It came about in Iconium that **Paul** and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue (Acts 14:1 ULT)

It came about in Iconium that **Paul**¹ and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue

The footnote would look like:

^[1] This is the same man who was called Saul before Acts 13.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-transliterate]]

(Go back to: [Introduction to James](#); [James 1:1](#); [2:21](#); [2:25](#); [3:6](#))

Hyperbole

Description

A speaker or writer can use exactly the same words to say something that he means as completely true, or as generally true, or as a hyperbole. This is why it can be hard to decide how to understand a statement. For example, the sentence below could mean three different things.

It rains here every night.

The speaker means this as literally true if he means that it really does rain here every night.

The speaker means this as a **generalization** if he means that it rains here most nights.

The speaker means this as a **hyperbole** if he wants to say that it rains more than it actually does, usually in order to express a strong attitude toward the amount or frequency of rain, such as being annoyed or being happy about it.

This page answers the question: *What are hyperboles? What are generalizations? How can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

Hyperbole

In hyperbole, a figure of speech that uses exaggeration, a speaker deliberately describes something with an extreme or even unreal statement, usually to show his strong feeling or opinion about it. He expects people to understand that he is exaggerating.

They will not leave **stone upon stone in you**. (Luke 19:44b ULT)

This is an exaggeration. It means that the enemies will completely destroy Jerusalem.

Moses was educated in **all the wisdom of the Egyptians**. (Acts 7:22a ULT)

This hyperbole means that he had learned everything an Egyptian education could offer.

Generalization

This is a statement that is true most of the time or in most situations that it could apply to.

The one who ignores instruction **will have poverty and shame**, but **honor will come** to him who learns from correction. (Proverbs 13:18)

These generalizations tell about what normally happens to people who ignore instruction and what normally happens to people who learn from correction. There may be some exceptions to these statements, but they are generally true.

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as **the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words**. (Matthew 6:7)

This generalization tells about what Gentiles were known for doing. Many Gentiles did this. It does not matter if a few did not. The point was that the hearers should not join in this well-known practice.

Even though a hyperbole or a generalization may have a strong-sounding word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” it does not necessarily mean **exactly** “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never.” It simply means “most,” “most of the time,” “hardly any,” or “rarely.”

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers need to be able to understand whether or not a statement is literally true.

If readers realize that a statement is not literally true, they need to be able to understand whether it is a hyperbole, a generalization, or a lie. (Though the Bible is completely true, it tells about people who did not always tell the truth.)

Examples From the Bible

Examples of Hyperbole

If your hand causes you to stumble, **cut it off**. It is better for you to enter into life maimed ... (Mark 9:43a ULT)

When Jesus said to cut off your hand, he meant that we should **do whatever extreme things** we need to do in order not to sin. He used this hyperbole to show how extremely important it is to try to stop sinning.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The bolded phrase is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that the Philistine army was overwhelming in number. It means that there were **many, many** soldiers in the Philistine army.

But as his anointing teaches you **everything** and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:27b ULT)

This is a hyperbole. It expresses the assurance that God's Spirit teaches us about **all things that we need to know**. God's Spirit does not teach us about everything that it is possible to know.

When they found him, they also said to him, "**Everyone** is looking for you." (Mark 1:37 ULT)

The disciples probably did not mean that everyone in the city was looking for Jesus, but that **many people** were looking for him, or that all of Jesus' closest friends there were looking for him. This is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that they and many others were worried about him.

Examples of Generalization

Can **any good thing** come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46b ULT)

This rhetorical question is meant to express the generalization that there is nothing good in Nazareth. The people there had a reputation for being uneducated and not strictly religious. Of course, there were exceptions.

One of them, of their own prophets, has said, "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies**." (Titus 1:12 ULT)

This is a generalization that means that Cretans had a reputation to be like this because, in general, this is how Cretans behaved. It is possible that there were exceptions.

A lazy hand causes a person to be poor, but the hand of the diligent person gains riches. (Proverbs 10:4 ULT)

This is generally true, and it reflects the experience of most people. It is possible that there are exceptions in some circumstances.

Caution

- Do not assume that something is an exaggeration just because it seems to be impossible. God does miraculous things.

They saw Jesus **walking on the sea** and coming near the boat. (John 6:19b ULT)

This is not hyperbole. Jesus really walked on the water. It is a literal statement.

- Do not assume that the word “all” is always a generalization that means “most.”
 - > Yahweh is righteous in **all** his ways
 - > and gracious in **all** he does. (Psalms 145:17 ULT)

Yahweh is always righteous. This is a completely true statement.

Translation Strategies

If the hyperbole or generalization would be natural and people would understand it and not think that it is a lie, consider using it. If not, here are other options.

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.
- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”
- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.
- (4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and **a great number of troops**.

- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”

The one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame. (Proverbs 13:18a ULT)

In general, the one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame

When you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the **Gentiles do**, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6:7 ULT)

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the Gentiles **generally** do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

Almost all the country of Judea and **almost all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him.
or:

Many of the country of Judea and **many** of the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

(4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

The country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

(Go back to: [James 1:2](#); [1:26](#); [3:7](#); [3:16](#))

Hypothetical Situations

Consider these phrases: “If the sun stopped shining ...” “What if the sun stopped shining ...” “Suppose the sun stopped shining ...” and “If only the sun had not stopped shining.” We use such expressions to set up hypothetical situations, imagining what might have happened or what could happen in the future but probably will not. We also use them to express regret or wishes. Hypothetical expressions occur often in the Bible. You (the translator) need to translate them in a way that people will know that the event did not actually happen and so that they will understand why the event was imagined.

This page answers the question: *What is a hypothetical situation?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/writing-intro\]\]](#)

Description

Hypothetical situations are situations that are not real. They can be in the past, present, or future. Hypothetical situations in the past and present have not happened, are not happening now, and ones in the future are not expected to happen.

People sometimes tell about conditions and what would happen if those conditions were met, but they know that these things have not happened or probably will not happen. (The conditions comprise a phrase that starts with “if.”)

- If he had lived to be 100 years old, he would have seen his grandson’s grandson. (But he did not.)
- If he lived to be 100 years old, he would still be alive today. (But he is not.)
- If he lives to be 100 years old, he will see his grandson’s grandson. (But he probably will not.)

People sometimes express wishes about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- I wish he had come.
- I wish he were here.
- I wish he would come.

People sometimes express regrets about things that have not happened or that are not expected to happen.

- If only he had come.
- If only he were here.
- If only he would come.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators need to recognize the different kinds of hypothetical situations in the Bible and understand that they are unreal.
- Translators need to know their own language’s ways of talking about different kinds of hypothetical situations.

Examples From the Bible

Hypothetical Situations in the Past

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! **If the mighty deeds had been done** in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, **they would have repented** long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Matthew 11:21 ULT)

Here in Matthew 11:21, Jesus said that **if** the people living in the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon had been able to see the miracles that he performed, they would have repented long ago. The people of Tyre and Sidon did not actually see his miracles, and they did not repent. He said this to rebuke the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida who had seen his miracles and yet did not repent.

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, **if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” (John 11:21 ULT)

Martha said this to express her wish that Jesus would have come sooner so that her brother would not have died. But Jesus did not come sooner and her brother did die.

Hypothetical Situations in the Present

And no man puts new wine into old wineskins. **But if he did do that, the new wine would burst the wineskins, and it would be spilled out, and the wineskins would be destroyed.** (Luke 5:37 ULT)

Jesus told about what would happen if a person were to put new wine into old wineskins. But no one would do that. He used this imaginary situation as an example to show that there are times when it is unwise to mix new things with old things. He did this so that people could understand why his disciples were not fasting as people traditionally did.

Jesus said to them, “What man would there be among you, who, **if he had just one sheep, and if this sheep fell into a deep hole on the Sabbath, would not grasp hold of it and lift it out?**” (Matthew 12:11 ULT)

Jesus asked the religious leaders what they would do on the Sabbath if one of their sheep fell into a hole. He was not saying that their sheep would fall into a hole. He used this imaginary situation to show them that they were wrong to judge him for healing people on the Sabbath.

Hypothetical Situation in the Future

Unless those days are shortened, no flesh would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24:22 ULT)

Jesus was talking about a future time when very bad things would happen. He told what would happen if those days of trouble were to last a long time. He did this to show how bad those days will be—so bad that if they lasted a long time, no one would be saved. But then he clarified that God will shorten those days of trouble so that the elect (those he has chosen) will be saved.

Expressing Emotion About a Hypothetical Situation

People sometimes talk about hypothetical situations in order to express regrets and wishes. Regrets are about the past and wishes are about the present and future.

The Israelites said to them, “**If only we had died by Yahweh’s hand in the land of Egypt when we were sitting by the pots of meat and were eating bread to the full.** For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill our whole community with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3 ULT)

Here the Israelites were afraid that they would have to suffer and die of hunger in the wilderness, and so they wished that they had stayed in Egypt and died there with full stomachs. They were complaining, expressing regret that this had not happened.

I know what you have done, and that you are neither cold nor hot. **I wish that you were either cold or hot!** (Revelation 3:15 ULT)

Jesus wished that the people were either hot or cold, but they are neither. He was rebuking them, expressing anger at this.

Translation Strategies

Find out how people speaking your language show:

- that something could have happened, but did not.
- that something could be true now, but is not.
- that something could happen in the future, but will not unless something changes.
- that they wish for something, but it does not happen.
- that they regret that something did not happen.

Use your language's ways of showing these kinds of things.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_hypo.

(Go back to: [James 1:23](#); [1:25](#); [1:26](#); [2:2](#); [2:3](#); [2:4](#); [2:15](#); [2:16](#); [2:18](#))

Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech made up of a group of words that, as a whole, has a meaning that is different from what one would understand from the meanings of the individual words. Someone from outside of the culture usually cannot understand an idiom without someone inside the culture explaining its true meaning. Every language uses idioms. Some English examples are:

- You are pulling my leg. (This means, “You are teasing me by telling me something that is not true.”)
- Do not push the envelope. (This means, “Do not take a matter to its extreme.”)
- This house is under water. (This means, “The debt owed for this house is greater than its actual value.”)
- We are painting the town red. (This means, “We are going around town tonight celebrating very intensely.”)

This page answers the question: *What are idioms and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

Description

An idiom is a phrase that has a special meaning to the people of the language or culture who use it. Its meaning is different than what a person would understand from the meanings of the individual words that form the phrase.

He **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

The words “set his face” is an idiom that means “decided.”

Sometimes people may be able to understand an idiom from another culture, but it might sound like a strange way to express the meaning.

I am not worthy that you would **come under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

The phrase “come under my roof” is an idiom that means “enter my house.”

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

This idiom means “Listen carefully and remember what I say.”

Purpose: An idiom is probably created in a culture somewhat by accident when someone describes something in an unusual way. But, when that unusual way communicates the message powerfully and people understand it clearly, other people start to use it. After a while, it becomes a normal way of talking in that language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People can easily misunderstand idioms in the original languages of the Bible if they do not know the cultures that produced the Bible.
- People can easily misunderstand idioms that are in the source language Bibles if they do not know the cultures that made those translations.
- It is useless to translate idioms literally (according to the meaning of each word) when the target language audience will not understand what they mean.

Examples From the Bible

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Look, we are your **flesh and bone**.” (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

This means, “We and you belong to the same race, the same family.”

■ The children of Israel went out **with a high hand**. (Exodus 14:8b ASV)

This means, "The Israelites went out defiantly."

■ the one who **lifts up my head** (Psalm 3:3b ULT)

This means, "the one who helps me."

Translation Strategies

If the idiom would be clearly understood in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.
- (2) Use a different idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.

■ Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Look, we are your **flesh and bone**." (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

■ Look, we all **belong to the same nation**.

■ Then he **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

■ He started to travel to Jerusalem, **determined to reach it**.

■ I am not worthy that you would come **under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

■ I am not worthy that you should enter **my house**.

- (2) Use an idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

■ Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

■ **Be all ears** when I say these words to you.

■ My **eyes grow dim** from grief. (Psalm 6:7a ULT)

■ I am crying my **eyes out**

(Go back to: [James 1:1](#); [1:12](#); [1:19](#); [1:22](#); [1:23](#); [1:27](#); [2:3](#); [2:5](#); [2:7](#); [2:8](#); [2:10](#); [2:14](#); [2:20](#); [3:6](#); [3:10](#); [4:13](#); [4:15](#); [5:1](#); [5:3](#); [5:5](#))

Imperatives — Other Uses

Description

Imperative sentences are mainly used to express a desire or requirement that someone do something. In the Bible, sometimes imperative sentences have other uses.

This page answers the question: *What other uses are there for imperative sentences in the Bible?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Sentence Types](#)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use an imperative sentence for some of the functions that they are used for in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Speakers often use imperative sentences to tell or ask their listeners to do something. In Genesis 26, God spoke to Isaac and told him not to go to Egypt but to live where God would tell him to live.

Now Yahweh appeared to him and said, “**Do not go down** to Egypt; **live** in the land that I tell you to live in.” (Genesis 26:2 ULT)

Sometimes imperative sentences in the Bible have other uses.

Imperatives that make things happen

God can make things happen by commanding that they happen. Jesus healed a man by commanding that the man be healed. The man could not do anything to obey the command, but Jesus caused him to be healed by commanding it. (In this context, the command “Be clean” means to “be healed” so that others around would know that it was safe to touch the man again.)

“I am willing. **Be clean.**” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:3b ULT)

In Genesis 1, God commanded that there should be light, and by commanding it, he caused it to exist. Some languages, such as the Hebrew of the Bible, have commands that are in the third person. English does not do that, and so it must turn the third-person command into a general, second-person command, as in the ULT:

God said, “**Let there be** light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

Languages that have third-person commands can follow the original Hebrew, which translates into English as something like “light must be.”

Imperatives that function as blessings

In the Bible, God blesses people by using imperatives. This indicates what his will is for them.

God blessed them and said to them, “**Be fruitful**, and **multiply**. **Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **Have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28 ULT)

Imperatives that function as conditions

An imperative sentence can also be used to tell the **condition** under which something will happen. The proverbs mainly tell about life and things that often happen. The purpose of Proverbs 4:6 below is not primarily to give a command, but to teach what people can expect to happen **if** they love wisdom.

Do not abandon wisdom and she will watch over you;
love her and she will keep you safe. (Proverbs 4:6 ULT)

The purpose of Proverbs 22:6, below, is to teach what people can expect to happen if they teach their children the way they should go.

Teach a child the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction. (Proverbs 22:6 ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If people would not use an imperative sentence for one of the functions in the Bible, try using a statement instead.
- (2) If people would not understand that a sentence is used to cause something to happen, add a connecting word like “so” to show that what happened was a result of what was said.
- (3) If people would not use a command as a condition, translate it as a statement with the words “if” and “then.”

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If people would not use an imperative sentence for one of the functions in the Bible, try using a statement instead.

Be clean. (Matthew 8:3b ULT)

“You are now clean.”
“I now cleanse you.”

God said, “**Let there be** light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

God said, “**There is now light**” and there was light.

God blessed them and said to them, “**Be fruitful**, and **multiply**. **Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **Have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28 ULT)

God blessed them and said to them, “**My will for you is that you be fruitful**, and **multiply**. **Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **I want you to have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

- (2) If people would not understand that a sentence is used to cause something to happen, add a connecting word like “so” to show that what happened was a result of what was said.

God said, “**Let there be** light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

God said, ‘Let there be light,’ **so** there was light.
God said, “Light must be;” **as a result**, there was light.

(3) If people would not use a command as a condition, translate it as a statement with the words “if” and “then.”

Teach a child the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction. (Proverbs 22:6 ULT)

Translated as:

“If you teach a child the way he should go,
then when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction.”

(Go back to: [James 2:3](#); [2:18](#))

Irony

Description

Irony is a figure of speech in which the sense that the speaker intends to communicate is actually the opposite of the literal meaning of the words. Sometimes a person does this by using someone else's words, but in a way that communicates that he does not agree with them. People do this to emphasize how different something is from what it should be, or how someone else's belief about something is wrong or foolish. It is often humorous.

This page answers the question: *What is irony and how can I translate it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "People who are well do not have need of a physician, but those who have sickness. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
(Luke 5:31-32 ULT)

When Jesus spoke of "righteous people," he was not referring to people who were truly righteous, but to people who wrongly believed that they were righteous. By using irony, Jesus communicated that they were wrong to think that they were better than others and did not need to repent.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

If someone does not realize that a speaker is using irony, he will think that the speaker actually believes what he is saying. He will understand the passage to mean the opposite of what it was intended to mean.

Examples From the Bible

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9b ULT)

Here Jesus praises the Pharisees for doing something that is obviously wrong. Through irony, he communicates the opposite of praise: He communicates that the Pharisees, who take great pride in keeping the commandments, are so far from God that they do not even recognize that their traditions are breaking God's commandments. The use of irony makes the Pharisee's sin more obvious and startling.

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

People worshiped idols as if their idols had knowledge or power, and Yahweh was angry at them for doing that. So he used irony and challenged their idols to tell what would happen in the future. He knew that the idols could not do this, but by speaking as if they could, he mocked the idols, making their inability more obvious, and rebuked the people for worshiping them.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work?
Can you find the way back to their houses for them?
Undoubtedly you know, for you were born then; "the number of your days is so large!" (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Job thought that he was wise. Yahweh used irony to show Job that he was not so wise. The two phrases in bold above are irony. They emphasize the opposite of what they say, because they are so obviously false. They

emphasize that Job could not possibly answer God's questions about the creation of light because Job was not born until many, many years later.

Already you are satisfied! Already you have become rich! **You began to reign** apart from us, and I wish you really did reign, so that we also might reign with you. (1 Corinthians 4:8 ULT)

The Corinthians considered themselves to be very wise, self-sufficient, and not in need of any instruction from the Apostle Paul. Paul used irony, speaking as if he agreed with them, to show how proudly they were acting and how far from being wise they really were.

Translation Strategies

If the irony would be understood correctly in your language, translate it as it is stated. If not, here are some other strategies.

- (1) Translate it in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.
- (2) The irony is **not** found in the literal words of the speaker, but instead the true meaning is found in the opposite of the literal meaning of the speaker's words.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate it in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You think that you are doing well when you reject God's commandment so you may keep your tradition!
You act like it is good to reject God's commandment so you may keep your tradition!

I did not come to call **the righteous**, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32 ULT)

I did not come to call **people who think that they are righteous** to repentance, but to call sinners to repentance.

- (2) Translate the actual, intended meaning of the statement of irony.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You are doing a terrible thing when you reject the commandment of God so you may keep your tradition!

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

'Present your case,' says Yahweh; 'present your best arguments for your idols,' says the King of Jacob. Your idols **cannot bring us their own arguments or come forward to declare to us what will happen** so we may know these things well. We cannot hear them because **they cannot speak** to tell us their earlier predictive declarations, so we cannot reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work?

Can you find the way back to their houses for them?

**Undoubtedly you know, for you were born then;
the number of your days is so large!** (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **You act like you know how light and darkness were created, as if you were there; as if you are as old as creation, but you are not!**

Next we recommend you learn about:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-litotes]]

(Go back to: [James 2:19](#))

Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit

Description

Some languages have ways of saying things that are natural for them but sound strange when translated into Other Languages. One of the reasons for this is that some languages say things explicitly that some Other Languages would leave as implicit information.

This page answers the question: *What can I do if some of the explicit information seems confusing, unnatural, or unnecessary in our language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information](#)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

If you translate all of the explicit information from the source language into the explicit information in the target language, it could sound foreign, unnatural, or perhaps even unintelligent if the target language would not make that information explicit. Instead, it is best to leave that kind of information implicit in the target language.

Examples from the Bible

And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower **to burn it with fire**. (Judges 9:52 ESV)

In Biblical Hebrew, it is normal to start most sentences with a conjunction such as “and” to show the connection between sentences. In English, it is not natural to do so, it is quite tiresome for the English reader, and it gives the impression that the author is uneducated. In English, it is best to leave the idea of connection between sentences implicit in most cases and not translate the conjunction explicitly.

In Biblical Hebrew, it is normal to say that something was burned with fire. In English, the idea of fire is included in the action of burning, and so it is unnatural to state both ideas explicitly. It is enough to say that something was burned and leave the idea of fire implicit.

But the centurion **answered and said**, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof” (Matthew 8:8a ULT)

In the biblical languages, it was normal to introduce direct speech with two verbs of speaking. One verb indicated the action, and the other introduced the words of the speaker. English speakers do not do this, so it is very unnatural and confusing to use two verbs. For the English speaker, the idea of speaking is included in the idea of answering. Using two verbs in English implies two separate speeches, rather than just one. So in English, it is better to use only one verb of speaking.

Translation Strategies

(1) If the explicit information of the source language sounds natural in the target language, then translate it as explicit information.

(2) If the explicit information does not sound natural in the target language or seems unnecessary or confusing, leave the explicit information implicit. Only do this if the reader can understand this information from the context. You can test this by asking the reader a question about the passage.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the explicit information of the source language sounds natural in the target language, then translate it as explicit information.

- There would be no change to the text using this strategy, so no examples are given here.

(2) If the explicit information does not sound natural in the target language or seems unnecessary or confusing, make the explicit information implicit. Only do this if the reader can understand this information from the context. You can test this by asking the reader a question about the passage.

And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower **to burn it with fire**. (Judges 9:52 ESV)

Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and he approached the door of the tower **to burn it**. (Or) ... **to set it on fire**.

In English, it is clear that the action of this verse follows the action of the previous verse without the use of the connector “and” at the beginning, so it was omitted. Also, the words “with fire” were left out, because this information is communicated implicitly by the word “burn.” An alternative translation for “to burn it” is “to set it on fire.” It is not natural in English to use both “burn” and “fire,” so the English translator should choose only one of them. You can test if the readers understood the implicit information by asking, “How would the door burn?” If they knew it was by fire, then they have understood the implicit information. Or, if you chose the second option, you could ask, “What happens to a door that is set on fire?” If the readers answer, “It burns,” then they have understood the implicit information.

But the centurion **answered and said**, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof” (Matthew 8:8a ULT)

The centurion **answered**, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof”

In English, the information that the centurion responded by speaking is included in the verb “answered,” so the verb “said” can be left implicit. You can test if the readers understood the implicit information by asking, “How did the centurion answer?” If they knew it was by speaking, then they have understood the implicit information.

He opened his mouth and taught them, saying, (Matthew 5:2 ULT)

He began to teach them, saying, (Or) He taught them, saying,

In English, it would be very strange to include the information that Jesus opened his mouth when he spoke. That information is included in the verbs “taught” and “saying,” so that phrase can be omitted and that information left implicit. However, “he opened his mouth” is an idiom that indicates the beginning of a speech, so that information may be included, or it may also be left implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-extrinfo\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 3:14](#); [5:17](#))

Merism

Definition

Merism is a figure of speech in which a person refers to something by speaking of two extreme parts of it. By referring to the extreme parts, the speaker intends to include also everything in between those parts.

This page answers the question: *What does the word merism mean and how can I translate phrases that have it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

"I am **the alpha and the omega**," says the Lord God,
"the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 ULT)

I am **the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**.
(Revelation 22:13, ULT)

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is a merism that includes everything from the beginning to the end. It means eternal.

... I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth** ..., (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

Heaven and earth is a merism that includes everything that exists.

Reason This is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use merism. The readers of those languages may think that the phrase only applies to the items mentioned. They may not realize that it refers to those two things and everything in between.

Examples From the Bible

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

This bolded phrase is a merism because it speaks of the east and the west and everywhere in between. It means "everywhere."

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13)

The bolded phrase is merism because it speaks of old people and young people and everyone in between. It means "everyone."

Translation Strategies

If the merism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.
- (2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything**.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

In all places, people should praise Yahweh's name.

(2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything, including both what is in heaven and what is on earth**.

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13 ULT)

He will bless **all those** who honor him, regardless of whether they are **young or old**.

(Go back to: [James 3:7](#))

Metaphor

Description

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of one thing as if it were a different thing because he wants people to think about how those two things are alike.

For example, someone might say, “The girl I love is a red rose.”

A girl and a rose are very different things, but the speaker considers that they are alike in some way. The hearer’s task is to understand in what way they are alike.

This page answers the question: *What is a metaphor and how can I translate a Bible passage that has one?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

[Simile](#)

The Parts of a Metaphor

The example above shows us that a metaphor has three parts. In this metaphor, the speaker is talking about “the girl I love.” This is the **Topic**. The speaker wants the hearer to think about what is similar between her and “a red rose.” The red rose is the **Image** to which he compares the girl. Most probably, he wants the hearer to consider that they are both beautiful. This is the **Idea** that the girl and the rose both share, and so we may also call it the **Point of Comparison**.

Every metaphor has three parts:

- The **Topic**, the item being immediately discussed by the writer/speaker.
- The **Image**, the physical item (object, event, action, etc.) which the speaker uses to describe the topic.
- The **Idea**, the abstract concept or quality that the physical **Image** brings to the mind of the hearer when he thinks of how the **Image** and the **Topic** are similar. Often, the **Idea** of a metaphor is not explicitly stated in the Bible, but it is only implied from the context. The hearer or reader usually needs to think of the **Idea** himself.

Using these terms, we can say that a metaphor is a figure of speech that uses a physical **Image** to apply an abstract **Idea** to the speaker’s **Topic**.

Usually, a writer or speaker uses a metaphor in order to express something about a **Topic**, with at least one **Point of Comparison (Idea)** between the **Topic** and the **Image**. Often in metaphors, the **Topic** and the **Image** are explicitly stated, but the **Idea** is only implied. The writer/speaker often uses a metaphor in order to invite the readers/listeners to think about the similarity between the **Topic** and the **Image** and to figure out for themselves the **Idea** that is being communicated.

Speakers often use metaphors in order to strengthen their message, to make their language more vivid, to express their feelings better, to say something that is hard to say in any other way, or to help people remember their message.

Sometimes speakers use metaphors that are very common in their language. However, sometimes speakers use metaphors that are uncommon, and even some metaphors that are unique. When a metaphor has become very common in a language, often it becomes a “passive” metaphor, in contrast to uncommon metaphors, which we describe as being “active.” Passive metaphors and active metaphors each present a different kind of translation problem, which we will discuss below.

Passive Metaphors

A passive metaphor is a metaphor that has been used so much in the language that its speakers no longer regard it as one concept standing for another. Linguists often call these “dead metaphors.” Passive metaphors are extremely common. Examples in English include the terms “table **leg**,” “family **tree**,” “book **leaf**” (meaning a page

in a book), or the word “crane” (meaning a large machine for lifting heavy loads). English speakers simply think of these words as having more than one meaning. Examples of passive metaphors in Biblical Hebrew include using the word “hand” to represent “power,” using the word “face” to represent “presence,” and speaking of emotions or moral qualities as if they were “clothing.”

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

Many ways of metaphorical speaking depend on pairs of concepts, where one underlying concept frequently stands for a different underlying concept. For example, in English, the direction “up” (the Image) often represents the concepts of “more” or “better” (the Idea). Because of this pair of underlying concepts, we can make sentences such as “The price of gasoline is going **up**,” “A **highly** intelligent man,” and also the opposite kind of idea: “The temperature is going **down**,” and “I am feeling very **low**.”

Patterned pairs of concepts are constantly used for metaphorical purposes in the world’s languages because they serve as convenient ways to organize thought. In general, people like to speak of abstract qualities (such as power, presence, emotions, and moral qualities) as if they were body parts, or as if they were objects that could be seen or held, or as if they were events that could be watched as they happened.

When these metaphors are used in normal ways, it is rare that the speaker and audience regard them as figurative speech. Examples of metaphors in English that go unrecognized are:

- “Turn the heat **up**.” More is spoken of as up.
- “Let us **go ahead** with our debate.” Doing what was planned is spoken of as walking or advancing.
- “You **defend** your theory well.” Argument is spoken of as war.
- “A **flow** of words.” Words are spoken of as liquids.

English speakers do not view these as metaphorical expressions or figures of speech, so it would be wrong to translate them into other languages in a way that would lead people to pay special attention to them as figurative speech. For a description of important patterns of this kind of metaphor in biblical languages, please see Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns and the pages it will direct you to.

When translating something that is a passive metaphor into another language, do not treat it as a metaphor. Instead, just use the best expression for that thing or concept in the target language.

Active Metaphors

These are metaphors that people recognize as one concept standing for another concept, or one thing for another thing. Metaphors make people think about how the one thing is like the other thing, because in most ways the two things are very different. People also easily recognize these metaphors as giving strength and unusual qualities to the message. For this reason, people pay attention to these metaphors. For example,

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.
(Malachi 4:2a ULT)

Here, God speaks about his salvation as if it were the sun rising in order to shine its rays on the people whom he loves. He also speaks of the sun’s rays as if they were wings. Also, he speaks of these wings as if they were bringing medicine that would heal his people. Here is another example:

And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox ...” (Luke 13:32a ULT)

Here, “that fox” refers to King Herod. The people listening to Jesus certainly understood that Jesus was intending for them to apply certain characteristics of a fox to Herod. They probably understood that Jesus intended to communicate that Herod was evil, either in a cunning way or as someone who was destructive, murderous, or who took things that did not belong to him, or all of these.

Active metaphors require the translator's special care to make a correct translation. To do so, you need to understand the parts of a metaphor and how they work together to produce meaning.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35 ULT)

In this metaphor, Jesus called himself the bread of life. The **Topic** is "I" (meaning Jesus himself) and the **Image** is "bread." Bread was the primary food that people ate in that place and time. The similarity between bread and Jesus is that people need both to live. Just as people need to eat food in order to have physical life, people need to trust in Jesus in order to have eternal life. The **Idea** of the metaphor is "life." In this case, Jesus stated the central Idea of the metaphor, but often the Idea is only implied.

Purposes of Metaphor

- One purpose of metaphor is to teach people about something that they do not know (the **Topic**) by showing that it is like something that they already do know (the **Image**).
- Another purpose is to emphasize that something (the **Topic**) has a particular quality (the **Idea**) or to show that it has that quality in an extreme way.
- Another purpose is to lead people to feel the same way about the **Topic** as they would feel about the **Image**.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not recognize that something is a metaphor. In other words, they may mistake a metaphor for a literal statement, and thus, misunderstand it.
- People may not be familiar with the thing that is used as an image, and so, not be able to understand the metaphor.
- If the topic is not stated, people may not know what the topic is.
- People may not know the points of comparison that the speaker wants them to understand. If they fail to think of these points of comparison, they will not understand the metaphor.
- People may think that they understand the metaphor, but they do not. This can happen when they apply points of comparison from their own culture, rather than from the biblical culture.

Translation Principles

- Make the meaning of a metaphor as clear to the target audience as it was to the original audience.
- Do not make the meaning of a metaphor more clear to the target audience than you think it was to the original audience.

Examples From the Bible

Listen to this word, **you cows of Bashan**, (Amos 4:1q ULT)

In this metaphor Amos speaks to the upper-class women of Samaria ("you," the Topic) as if they were cows (the Image). Amos does not say what similarity(s) he intends between these women and cows. He wants the reader to think of them, and he fully expects that readers from his culture will easily do so. From the context, we can see that he means that the women are like cows in that they are fat and interested only in feeding themselves. If we were to apply similarities from a different culture, such as that cows are sacred and should be worshiped, we would get the wrong meaning from this verse.

NOTE: Amos does not actually mean that the women are cows. He speaks to them as human beings.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; **we are the clay. You are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

The example above has two related metaphors. The Topic(s) are “we” and “you,” and the Image(s) are “clay” and “potter.” The similarity between a potter and God is the fact that both make what they wish out of their material. The potter makes what he wishes out of the clay, and God makes what he wishes out of his people. The Idea being expressed by the comparison between the potter’s clay and “us” is that **neither the clay nor God’s people have a right to complain about what they are becoming**.

Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of **the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees**.” The disciples reasoned among themselves and said, “It is because we did not take bread.” (Matthew 16:6-7 ULT)

Jesus used a metaphor here, but his disciples did not realize it. When he said “yeast,” they thought he was talking about bread, but “yeast” was the Image in his metaphor, and the Topic was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Since the disciples (the original audience) did not understand what Jesus meant, it would not be good to state clearly here what Jesus meant.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the metaphor in the same way that the original readers would have understood it, go ahead and use it. Be sure to test the translation to make sure that people do understand it in the right way.

If people do not or would not understand it, here are some other strategies.

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, it is a passive metaphor), then express the **Idea** in the simplest way preferred by your language.
- (2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.
- (3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as “like” or “as.” See [Simile](#).
- (4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.
- (5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.
- (6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the Topic was.)
- (7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity (the **Idea**) between the topic and the image, then state it clearly.
- (8) If none of these strategies is satisfactory, then simply state the **Idea** plainly without using a metaphor.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, a passive metaphor), then express the Idea in the simplest way preferred by your language.

Then, see, one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **fell at his feet**. (Mark 5:22 ULT)

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **immediately bowed down in front of him**.

(2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.

But Jesus said to them, "He wrote this commandment to you because of your **hardness of heart**." (Mark 10:5 ULT)

It was because of your **hard hearts** that he wrote you this law.

We made no change to this one, but it must be tested to make sure that the target audience correctly understands this metaphor.

(3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as "like" or "as."

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we **are the clay**. You **are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are **like** clay. You are **like** a potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

(4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14b ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to **kick against a pointed stick**.

(5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **clay**. You are our **potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

"And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **wood**. You are our **carver**; and we all are the work of your hand."

"And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **string**. You are the **weaver**; and we all are the work of your hand."

(6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the topic was.)

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; **He is my rock**. May he be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

(7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity between the Topic and the Image, then state it clearly.

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; may he be praised because he is the rock **under which I can hide from my enemies**. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14 ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? You **fight against me and hurt yourself like an ox that kicks against its owner's pointed stick**.

(8) If none of these strategies are satisfactory, then simply state the idea plainly without using a metaphor.

I will make you to become **fishers of men**. (Mark 1:17b ULT)

I will make you to become **people who gather men**.
Now you gather fish. I will make you **gather people**.

To learn more about specific metaphors, see Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns.

(Go back to: [James 1:1](#); [1:2](#); [1:8](#); [1:9](#); [1:10](#); [1:11](#); [1:12](#); [1:14](#); [1:15](#); [1:16](#); [1:17](#); [1:18](#); [1:19](#); [1:21](#); [1:25](#); [1:26](#); [1:27](#); [2:1](#); [2:5](#); [2:6](#); [2:10](#); [2:14](#); [2:15](#); [2:21](#); [2:22](#); [2:24](#); [Notes](#); [3:1](#); [3:2](#); [3:4](#); [3:5](#); [3:6](#); [3:8](#); [3:10](#); [3:12](#); [3:14](#); [3:15](#); [3:17](#); [3:18](#); [Notes](#); [4:1](#); [4:2](#); [4:3](#); [4:4](#); [4:7](#); [4:8](#); [4:10](#); [4:11](#); [4:14](#); [5:3](#); [5:4](#); [5:5](#); [5:7](#); [5:8](#); [5:9](#); [5:10](#); [5:11](#); [5:12](#); [5:14](#); [5:19](#); [5:20](#))

Metonymy

Description

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an item (either physical or abstract) is called not by its own name, but by the name of something closely associated with it. A metonym is a word or phrase used as a substitute for something that it is associated with.

This page answers the question: *What is a metonymy?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

... and **the blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin. (1 John 1:7b ULT)

The blood represents Christ's death.

And he took **the cup** in the same way after supper, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20 ULT)

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

- as a shorter way of referring to something
- to make an abstract idea more meaningful by referring to it with the name of a physical object associated with it

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible uses metonymy very often. Speakers of some languages are not familiar with metonymy and they may not recognize it when they read it in the Bible. If they do not recognize the metonymy, they will not understand the passage or, worse yet, they will get a wrong understanding of the passage. Whenever a metonym is used, people need to be able to understand what it represents.

Examples From the Bible

The Lord God will give to him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

A throne represents the authority of a king. "Throne" is a metonym for "kingly authority," "kingship," or "reign." This means that God would make him become a king who would follow King David.

Then immediately his **mouth** was opened (Luke 1:64a ULT)

The mouth here represents the power to speak. This means that he was able to talk again.

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

The word "wrath" or "anger" is a metonym for "punishment." God was extremely angry with the people and, as a result, he would punish them.

Translation Strategies

If people would easily understand the metonym, consider using it. Otherwise, here are some options.

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.
- (2) Use only the name of the thing the metonym represents.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.

And he took the cup in the same way after the supper, saying, “**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20 ULT)

He took the cup in the same way after supper, saying, “**The wine in this cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

This verse also contains a second metonym: The cup, (representing the wine it contains) also represents the new covenant made with the blood Christ shed for us.

- (2) Use the name of the thing the metonym represents.

The Lord God will give him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

“The Lord God will give him **the kingly authority** of his father, David.”

or:

“The Lord God will **make him king** like his ancestor, King David.”

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

“Who warned you to flee from God’s coming **punishment**?”

To learn about some common metonymies, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies](#).

(Go back to: [James 1:1](#); [1:18](#); [1:21](#); [1:22](#); [1:23](#); [1:25](#); [1:26](#); [1:27](#); [2:5](#); [2:7](#); [2:8](#); [2:13](#); [2:16](#); [3:2](#); [3:3](#); [3:4](#); [3:6](#); [3:8](#); [3:9](#); [3:10](#); [3:15](#); [4:4](#); [4:8](#); [5:3](#); [5:4](#); [5:10](#); [5:14](#); [5:15](#); [5:20](#))

Nominal Adjectives

Description

In some languages an adjective can be used to refer to a class of things that the adjective describes. When it does, it acts like a noun. For example, the word “rich” is an adjective. Here are two sentences that show that “rich” is an adjective.

The rich man had huge numbers of flocks and herds.
(2 Samuel 12:2 ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes before the word “man” and describes “man.”

He will not be rich; his wealth will not last. (Job 15:29a ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes after the verb “be” and describes “He.”

Here is a sentence that shows that “rich” can also function as a noun.

The rich must not give more than the half shekel, and **the poor** must not give less. (Exodus 30:15b ULT)

In Exodus 30:15, the word “rich” acts as a noun in the phrase “the rich,” and it refers to rich people. The word “poor” also acts as a noun and refers to poor people.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate adjectives that act like nouns?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech]]

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Many times in the Bible adjectives are used as nouns to describe a group of people.
- Some languages do not use adjectives in this way.
- Readers of these languages may think that the text is talking about one particular person when it is really talking about the group of people whom the adjective describes.

Examples From the Bible

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

“The righteous” here are people who are righteous, not one particular righteous person.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

“The meek” here are all people who are meek, not one particular meek person.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses adjectives as nouns to refer to a class of people, consider using the adjectives in this way. If it would sound strange, or if the meaning would be unclear or wrong, here is another option:

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **righteous people**.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

Blessed are **people who are meek**.

(Go back to: [James 1:10](#); [1:11](#); [2:2](#); [2:5](#); [2:6](#); [2:10](#); [2:16](#); [3:4](#); [3:5](#); [3:6](#); [3:7](#); [3:8](#); [3:11](#); [3:12](#); [4:6](#); [4:8](#); [5:1](#); [5:6](#); [5:7](#); [5:15](#); [5:16](#))

Order of Events

Description

In the Bible, events are not always told in the order in which they occurred. Sometimes the author wanted to discuss something that happened at an earlier time than the event that he just talked about. This can be confusing to the reader.

This page answers the question: *Why are some events not listed in the order they happened, and how do I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/writing-intro]]

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-verbs]]

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers might think that the events happened in the order that they are told. It is important to help them understand the correct order of events.

Examples From the Bible

He even added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. Now it came about, when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. (Luke 3:20-21 ULT)

This could sound like John baptized Jesus after John was locked up in prison, but John baptized Jesus before John was locked up in prison.

Just as Joshua had said to the people, the seven priests carrying seven trumpets of rams' horns before Yahweh went forward and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of Yahweh followed after them. But Joshua commanded the people, saying, "Do not shout nor let your voice be heard, nor let any word leave your mouth until the day I tell you to shout. Then you must shout." (Joshua 6:8,10 ULT)

This could sound like Joshua gave the order not to shout after the army had already started their march, but he had given that order before they started marching.

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? (Revelation 5:2b ULT)

This sounds like a person must first open the scroll and then break its seals, but the seals that lock the scroll must be broken before the scroll can be unrolled.

Translation Strategies

- (1) If your language uses phrases or time words to show that an event happened before one that was already mentioned, consider using one of them.
- (2) If your language uses verb tense or aspect to show that an event happened before one that was already mentioned, consider using that. (See the section on "Aspect" of Verbs.)
- (3) If your language prefers to tell events in the order that they occurred, consider reordering the events so they are in that order. This may require putting two or more verses together (like 5-6). (See [Verse Bridges](#).)

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If your language uses phrases, time words or tenses to show that an event happened before the one just mentioned, consider using one of them.

20 he even added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. Now it came about, when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. (Luke 3:20-21 ULT)

20 But then Herod ... had John locked up in prison. 21 **Before John was put in prison**, while all the people were being baptized by John, Jesus also was baptized.

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? (Revelation 5:2b ULT)

Who is worthy to open the scroll **after** breaking its seals?

(2) If your language uses verb tense or aspect to show that an event happened before one that was already mentioned, consider using that.

Just as Joshua had said to the people, the seven priests carrying seven trumpets of rams' horns before Yahweh went forward and blew the trumpets, But Joshua commanded the people, saying, "Do not shout nor let your voice be heard, nor let any word leave your mouth until the day I tell you to shout. Then you must shout." (Joshua 6:8,10 ULT)

8 Just as Joshua had said to the people, the seven priests carried the seven trumpets of rams' horns before Yahweh, as they advanced, they gave a blast on the trumpets 10 But Joshua **had commanded** the people, saying, "Do not shout. No sound must leave your mouths until the day I tell you to shout. Only then must you shout."

(3) If your language prefers to tell events in the order that they occur, consider reordering the events. This may require putting two or more verses together (like 5-6).

8 Just as Joshua had said to the people, the seven priests carrying seven trumpets of rams' horns before Yahweh went forward and blew the trumpets, But Joshua commanded the people, saying, "Do not shout nor let your voice be heard, nor let any word leave your mouth until the day I tell you to shout. Then you must shout." (Joshua 6:8,10 ULT)

8,10 Joshua commanded the people, saying, "Do not shout. No sound must leave your mouths until the day I tell you to shout. Only then must you shout." Then just as Joshua had said to the people, the seven priests carried the seven trumpets of rams horns before Yahweh, as they advanced, they gave a blast on the trumpets...

Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? (Revelation 5:2b ULT)

Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_events.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/writing-background\]\]](#)
[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/grammar-connect-words-phrases\]\]](#)
[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/writing-newevent\]\]](#)
[Verse Bridges](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:14](#))

Parallelism

Description

Parallelism is a poetic device in which two phrases or clauses that are similar in structure or idea are used together. The following are some of the different kinds of parallelism.

- The second clause or phrase means the same as the first. This is called synonymous parallelism.
- The second clarifies or strengthens the meaning of the first.
- The second completes what is said in the first.
- The second says something that contrasts with the first, but adds to the same idea.

Parallelism is most commonly found in Old Testament poetry, such as in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. It also occurs in Greek in the New Testament, both in the four gospels and in the apostles' letters.

This article will only discuss synonymous parallelism, the kind in which the two parallel phrases mean the same thing, because that is the kind that presents a problem for translation. Note that we use the term "synonymous parallelism" for long phrases or clauses that have the same meaning. We use the term "doublet" for words or very short phrases that mean basically the same thing and are used together.

In the poetry of the original languages, synonymous parallelism has several effects:

- It shows that something is very important by saying it more than once and in more than one way.
- It helps the hearer to think more deeply about the idea by saying it in different ways.
- It makes the language more beautiful and raises it above the ordinary way of speaking.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use synonymous parallelism. They would either think it odd that someone said the same thing twice, or, since it is in the Bible, they would think that the two phrases must have some difference in meaning. For them it would be confusing, rather than beautiful. They would not understand that the repetition of the idea in different words serves to emphasize the idea.

Examples From the Bible

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 ULT)

Both parts of the sentence are metaphors saying that God's word teaches people how to live. That is the single idea. The words "lamp" and "light" are similar in meaning because they refer to light. The words "my feet" and "my path" are related because they refer to a person walking. Walking is a metaphor for living.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:6 ULT)

Both lines say that God made man the ruler of everything. "To rule over" is the same idea as putting things "under his feet," and "the works of your [God's] hands" is the same idea as "all things."

This page answers the question: *What is parallelism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

Yahweh sees everything a person does
and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

The first phrase and the second phrase mean the same thing. There are three ideas that are the same between these two phrases. “Sees” corresponds to “watches,” “everything...does” corresponds to “all the paths...takes,” and “a person” corresponds to “he.”

Praise Yahweh, all you nations;
exalt him, all you peoples! (Psalm 117:1 ULT)

Both parts of this verse tell people everywhere to praise Yahweh. The words ‘Praise’ and ‘exalt’ mean the same thing. The words ‘Yahweh’ and ‘him’ refer to the same person. The terms ‘all you nations’ and ‘all you peoples’ refer to the same people.

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people,
and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2b ULT)

The two parts of this verse say that Yahweh has a serious disagreement with his people, Israel. These are not two different disagreements or two different groups of people.

Translation Strategies

For most kinds of parallelism, it is good to translate both of the clauses or phrases. For synonymous parallelism, it is good to translate both clauses if people in your language understand that the purpose of saying something twice is to strengthen a single idea. But if your language does not use parallelism in this way, then consider using one of the following translation strategies.

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.
- (2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as “truly” or “certainly.”
- (3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like “very,” “completely,” or “all.”

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

Delilah expressed this idea twice to emphasize that she was very upset.

Until now you have deceived me with your lies.

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

The phrase “all the paths he takes” is a metaphor for “all he does.”

Yahweh pays attention to everything a person does.

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2 ULT)

This parallelism describes one serious disagreement that Yahweh had with one group of people. If this is unclear, the phrases can be combined:

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, Israel.

(2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as “truly” or “certainly.”

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh truly sees everything a person does.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet
(Psalm 8:6 ULT)

You have certainly made him to rule over everything that you have created.

(3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like “very,” “completely” or “all.”

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

All you have done is lie to me.

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh sees absolutely everything that a person does.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Personification](#)

(Go back to: [James 4:2](#); [4:9](#); [5:5](#))

Personification

Description

Personification is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of something as if it could do things that animals or people can do. People often do this because it makes it easier to talk about things that we cannot see:

Such as wisdom:

Does not Wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1a ULT)

Or sin:

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT)

People also use personification because it is sometimes easier to talk about people's relationships with non-human things such as wealth as if they were relationships between people.

You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

In each case, the purpose of the personification is to highlight a certain characteristic of the non-human thing. As in metaphor, the reader needs to think of the way that the thing is like a certain kind of person.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use personification.
- Some languages use personification only in certain situations.

Examples From the Bible

You cannot **serve** God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

Jesus speaks of wealth as if it were a master whom people might serve. Loving money and basing one's decisions on it is like serving it as a slave would serve his master.

Does not Wisdom **call** out? Does not Understanding **raise her voice**? (Proverbs 8:1 ULT)

The author speaks of wisdom and understanding as if they were woman who calls out to teach people. This means that they are not something hidden, but something obvious that people should pay attention to.

Translation Strategies

If the personification would be understood clearly, consider using it. If it would not be understood, here are some other ways for translating it.

- (1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.
- (2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as "like" or "as" to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.
- (3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

This page answers the question: *What is personification?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — God speaks of sin as if it were a wild animal that is waiting for the chance to attack. This shows how dangerous sin is. An additional phrase can be added to make this danger clear.

Sin is at your door, **waiting to attack you**.

(2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as “like” or “as” to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — This can be translated with the word “as.”

Sin is crouching at the door, **just as a wild animal does as it waits to attack a person..**

(3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

Even the **winds and the sea obey him**. (Matthew 8:27b ULT) — The men speak of the “wind and the sea” as if they are able to hear and obey Jesus, just as people can. This could also be translated without the idea of obedience by speaking of Jesus controlling them.

He even **controls the winds and the sea**.

NOTE: We have broadened our definition of “personification” to include “zoomorphism” (speaking of other things as if they had animal characteristics) and “anthropomorphism” (speaking of non-human things as if they had human characteristics) because the translation strategies for them are the same.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-apostrophe\]\]](#)
[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/bita-part1\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:4](#); [1:14](#); [1:15](#); [1:21](#); [2:9](#); [2:13](#); [2:17](#); [2:20](#); [2:22](#); [2:26](#); [3:4](#); [3:5](#); [3:8](#); [4:1](#); [4:4](#); [4:5](#); [4:6](#); [5:4](#); [5:15](#); [5:16](#); [5:18](#))

Possession

Description

In English, the grammatical form that commonly indicates possession is also used to indicate a variety of relationships between people and objects or people and other people. In English, that grammatical relationship is shown by using the word “**of**,” by using **an apostrophe and the letter “s”**, or by using a **possessive pronoun**. The following examples are different ways to indicate that my grandfather owns a house.

- the house **of** my grandfather
- my grandfather’s house
- **his** house

Possession is used in Hebrew, Greek, and English for a variety of situations. Here are a few common situations that it is used for.

- Ownership — Someone owns something.
 - My clothes — The clothes that I own
- Social Relationship — Someone has some kind of social relationship with another.
 - my mother — the woman who gave birth to me, or the woman who cared for me
 - my teacher — the person who teaches me
- Association — A particular thing is associated with a particular person, place, or thing.
 - David’s sickness — the sickness that David is experiencing
 - the fear of the Lord — the fear that is appropriate for a human being to have when relating to the Lord
- Contents — Something has something in it.
 - a bag of clothes — a bag that has clothes in it, or a bag that is full of clothes
- Part and whole: One thing is part of another.
 - my head — the head that is part of my body
 - the roof of a house — the roof that is part of a house

This page answers the question: *What is possession and how can I translate phrases that show it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-partsofspeech]]
 [[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences]]

In some languages there is a special form of possession, termed **inalienable possession**. This form of possession is used for things that cannot be removed from you, as opposed to things you could lose. In the examples above, *my head* and *my mother* are examples of inalienable possession (at least in some languages), while *my clothes* or *my teacher* would be alienably possessed. What may be considered alienable vs. inalienable may differ by language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- You (the translator) need to understand the relationship between two ideas represented by the two nouns when one is in the grammatical relationship of possessing the other.
- Some languages do not use grammatical possession for all of the situations that your source text Bible might use it for.

Examples From the Bible

Ownership — In the example below, the son owned the money.

█ The younger son ... wasted his wealth by living recklessly. (Luke 15:13b)

Social Relationship — In the example below, the disciples were people who learned from John.

█ Then **the disciples of John** came to him. (Matthew 9:14a ULT)

Association — In the example below, the gospel is the message associated with Paul because he preaches it.

█ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, from the seed of David, according to **my gospel**, (2 Timothy 2:8 ULT)

Material — In the example below, the material used for making the crowns was gold.

█ On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

Contents — In the example below, the cup has water in it.

█ For whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Part of a whole — In the example below, the door was a part of the palace.

█ But Uriah slept at **the door of the king's palace**. (2 Samuel 11:9a ULT)

Part of a group — In the example below, “us” refers to the whole group and “each one” refers to the individual members.

█ Now to **each one of us** grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Ephesians 4:7 ULT)

Events and Possession

Sometimes one or both of the nouns is an abstract noun that refers to an event or action. In the examples below, the abstract nouns are in **bold** print. These are just some of the relationships that are possible between two nouns when one of them refers to an event.

Subject — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who would do the action named by the first noun. In the example below, **John baptized people**.

█ The **baptism of John**, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. (Mark 11:30)

In the example below, **Christ loves us**.

█ Who will separate us from the **love of Christ**? (Romans 8:35)

Object — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who or what something would happen to. In the example below, **people love money**.

For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10a ULT)

Instrument — Sometimes the word after “of” tells how something would happen. In the example below, God would **punish people by sending enemies to attack them with swords**.

Then be afraid of the sword, because wrath brings **the punishment of the sword**. (Job 19:29a ULT)

Representation — In the example below, John was baptizing people who were repenting of their sins. They were being baptized to show that they were repenting. Their **baptism represented their repentance**.

John came, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching **a baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4 ULT)

Strategies for learning what the relationship is between the two nouns

- (1) Read the surrounding verses to see if they help you to understand the relationship between the two nouns.
- (2) Read the verse in the UST. Sometimes it shows the relationship clearly.
- (3) See what the notes say about it.

Translation Strategies

If possession would be a natural way to show a particular relationship between two nouns, consider using it. If it would be strange or hard to understand, consider these.

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.
- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.
- (3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.

On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

“On their heads were **gold crowns**”

- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.

Whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Whoever gives you a **cup that has water in it** to drink ... will not lose his reward.

Wealth is worthless on **the day of wrath**. (Proverbs 11:4a ULT)

Wealth is worthless on **the day when God shows his wrath**.
or:

Wealth is worthless on the **day when God punishes people because of his wrath**.

(3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb. (In the example below, there are two possession relationships, “punishment of Yahweh” and “your God.”)

Notice that I am not speaking to your children, who have not known or seen **the punishment of Yahweh your God**. (Deuteronomy 11:2a ULT)

Notice that I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen **how Yahweh, the God whom you worship, punished the people of Egypt**.

You will only observe and see the **punishment of the wicked**. (Psalms 91:8 ULT)

You will only observe and see **how Yahweh punishes the wicked**.

You will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 2:38b ULT)

You will receive the **Holy Spirit, whom God will give to you**.

(Go back to: [James 1:12](#); [1:17](#); [1:18](#); [1:25](#); [2:1](#); [2:4](#); [2:12](#); [3:13](#); [5:15](#); [5:20](#))

Predictive Past

Description

The predictive past is a figure of speech that uses the past tense to refer to things that will happen in the future. This is sometimes done in prophecy to show that the event will certainly happen. It is also called the prophetic perfect.

Therefore my people have gone into captivity for lack of understanding;
their honored leaders go hungry, and their common people have nothing to drink. (Isaiah 5:13 ULT)

This page answers the question: *What is the predictive past?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-verbs\]\]](#)

In the example above, the people of Israel had not yet gone into captivity, but God spoke of their going into captivity as if it had already happened because he had decided that they certainly would go into captivity.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue:

Readers who are not aware of the past tense being used in prophecy to refer to future events may find it confusing.

Examples From the Bible

Now Jericho was tightly closed because of the sons of Israel. No one went out and no one came in. Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:1-2 ULT)

For to us a child has been born, to us a son has been given;
and the rule will be on his shoulder. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

In the examples above, God spoke of things that would happen in the future as if they had already happened.

But even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them, saying, "Look! The Lord came with thousands and thousands of his holy ones." (Jude 1:14 ULT)

Enoch was speaking of something that would happen in the future, but he used the past tense when he said "the Lord came."

Translation Strategies

If the past tense would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.
- (2) If it refers to something in the immediate future, use a form that would show that.
- (3) Some languages may use the present tense to show that something will happen very soon.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.

For to us a child **has been born**, to us a son **has been given**. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

For to us a child **will be born**, to us a son **will be given**.

(2) If it refers to something that would happen very soon, use a form that shows that.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I **am about to deliver** over to you Jericho, its king, and its powerful soldiers."

(3) Some languages may use the present tense to show that something will happen very soon.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I **am delivering** over to you Jericho, its king, and its powerful soldiers."

(Go back to: [James 5:2](#); [5:3](#))

Pronouns — When to Use Them

Description

When we talk or write, we use pronouns to refer to people or things without always having to repeat the noun or name. Usually, the first time we refer to someone in a story, we use a descriptive phrase or a name. The next time we might refer to that person with a simple noun or by name. After that we might refer to him simply with a pronoun as long as we think that our listeners will be able to understand easily to whom the pronoun refers.

This page answers the question: *How do I decide whether or not to use a pronoun?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences\]\]](#)

Now there was **a man from the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus, a Jewish leader**. **This man** came to Jesus at night. Jesus replied and said to **him** ... (John 3:1, 2a, 3a ULT)

In John 3, Nicodemus is first referred to with noun phrases and his name. Then he is referred to with the noun phrase “this man.” Then he is referred to with the pronoun “him.”

Each language has its rules and exceptions to this usual way of referring to people and things.

- In some languages, the first time something is referred to in a paragraph or chapter, it is referred to with a noun rather than a pronoun.
- The main character is the person whom a story is about. In some languages, after a main character is introduced in a story, he is usually referred to with a pronoun. Some languages have special pronouns that refer only to the main character.
- In some languages, marking on the verb helps people know who the subject is. (See Verbs.) In some of these languages, listeners rely on this marking to help them understand who the subject is. Speakers will use a pronoun, noun phrase, or proper name only when they want either to emphasize or to clarify who the subject is.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- If translators use a pronoun at the wrong time for their language, readers might not know about whom the writer is talking.
- If translators too frequently refer to a main character by name, listeners of some languages might not realize that the person is a main character, or they might think that there is a new character with the same name.
- If translators use pronouns, nouns, or names at the wrong time, people might think that there is some special emphasis on the person or thing to which it refers.

Examples From the Bible

The example below occurs at the beginning of a chapter. In some languages it might not be clear to whom the pronouns refer.

Then Jesus entered into the synagogue again, and there was a man who had a withered hand. Some people watched **him** closely to see if **he** would heal **him** on the Sabbath so that they might accuse **him**. (Mark 3:1-2 ULT)

In the example below, two men are named in the first sentence. It might not be clear whom “he” in the second sentence refers to.

Now after some days had passed, **King Agrippa** and Bernice came down to Caesarea to pay their respects to **Festus**. After **he** had been there for many days, Festus presented to the king the things concerning Paul. (Acts 25:13-14)

Jesus is the main character of the book of Matthew, but in the verses below he is referred to four times by name. This may lead speakers of some languages to think that Jesus is not the main character. Or it might lead them to think that there is more than one person named Jesus in this story. Or it might lead them to think that there is some kind of emphasis on him, even though there is no emphasis.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.
- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.

Again **he** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **him** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath. (Mark 3:1-2)

Again **Jesus** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **Jesus** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath.

- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

This may be translated as:

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **him**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **he** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **he** left from there and went into their synagogue.

(Go back to: [James 1:12](#); [1:24](#); [2:6](#); [2:16](#); [2:25](#); [3:9](#); [4:5](#); [4:6](#); [4:12](#); [5:7](#); [5:18](#); [5:20](#))

Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a question that a speaker asks when he is more interested in expressing his attitude about something than in getting information about it. Speakers use rhetorical questions to express deep emotion or to encourage hearers to think deeply about something. The Bible contains many rhetorical questions, often to express surprise, to rebuke or scold the hearer, or to teach. Speakers of some languages use rhetorical questions for other purposes as well.

This page answers the question: *What are rhetorical questions and how can I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

[Sentence Types](#)

Description

A rhetorical question is a question that strongly expresses the speaker's attitude toward something. Often the speaker is not looking for information at all. Or, if he is asking for information, it is not usually the information that the question appears to ask for. The speaker is more interested in expressing his attitude than in getting information.

But those who stood by said, **“Are you insulting the high priest of God?”** (Acts 23:4 ULT)

The people who asked Paul this question were not asking if he was insulting God's high priest. Rather, they used this question to accuse Paul of insulting the high priest.

The Bible contains many rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions might be used for the purposes: of expressing attitudes or feelings, rebuking people, teaching something by reminding people of something they know and encouraging them to apply it to something new, or introducing something they want to talk about.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use rhetorical questions; for them a question is always a request for information.
- Some languages use rhetorical questions, but for purposes that are different or more limited than in the Bible.
- Because of these differences between languages, some readers might misunderstand the purpose of a rhetorical question in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

Jezebel used the question above to remind King Ahab of something he already knew: he still ruled the kingdom of Israel. The rhetorical question made her point more strongly than if she had merely stated it, because it forced Ahab to admit the point himself. She did this in order to rebuke him for being unwilling to take over a poor man's property. She was implying that, since he was the king of Israel, he had the power to take the man's property.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

God used the question above to remind his people of something they already knew: a young woman would never forget her jewelry or a bride forget her veils. He then rebuked his people for forgetting him who is so much greater than those things.

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

Job used the question above to show deep emotion. This rhetorical question expresses how sad he was that he did not die as soon as he was born. He wished that he had not lived.

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

Elizabeth used the question above to show how surprised and happy she was that the mother of her Lord came to her.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Jesus used the question above to remind the people of something they already knew: a good father would never give his son something bad to eat. By introducing this point, Jesus could go on to teach them about God with his next rhetorical question:

Therefore, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:11 ULT)

Jesus used this question to teach the people in an emphatic way that God gives good things to those who ask him.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and threw into his garden ... (Luke 13:18b-19a ULT)

Jesus used the question above to introduce what he was going to talk about. He was about to compare the kingdom of God to something. In this case, he compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

Translation Strategies

In order to translate a rhetorical question accurately, first be sure that the question you are translating truly is a rhetorical question and is not an information question. Ask yourself, "Does the person asking the question already know the answer to the question?" If so, it is a rhetorical question. Or, if no one answers the question, did the person who asked it expect to receive an answer? If not, it is a rhetorical question.

When you are sure that the question is rhetorical, then be sure that you understand the purpose for the rhetorical question. Is it to encourage or rebuke or shame the hearer? Is it to bring up a new topic? Is it to do something else?

When you know the purpose of the rhetorical question, then think of the most natural way to express that purpose in the target language. It might be as a question, or a statement, or an exclamation.

If using the rhetorical question would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider doing so. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Add the answer after the question.
- (2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.
- (3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.
- (4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Add the answer after the question.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? **Of course not!** Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number!

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? **None of you would do that!**

(2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. (Luke 13:18-19a ULT)

This is what the kingdom of God is like. It is like a mustard seed ...

Are you insulting the high priest of God? (Acts 23:4b ULT) (Acts 23:4 ULT)

You should not insult God's high priest!

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

I wish I had died when I came out from the womb!

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

How wonderful it is that the mother of my Lord has come to me!

(3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

You still rule the kingdom of Israel, **do you not?**

(4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

If your son asks you for a loaf of bread, **would you give him a stone?**

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

What virgin would forget her jewelry, and what bride would forget her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number

(Go back to: [James 2:4](#); [2:5](#); [2:6](#); [2:7](#); [2:14](#); [2:16](#); [2:20](#); [2:21](#); [2:25](#); [3:11](#); [3:12](#); [3:13](#); [4:1](#); [4:4](#); [4:5](#); [4:12](#); [4:14](#); [5:13](#); [5:14](#))

Sentence Types

Description

This page answers the question: *What are the different types of sentences and what are they used for?*

A **sentence** is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. The basic types of sentences are listed below with the functions they are mainly used for.

- **Statements** — These are mainly used to give information. ‘This is a fact.’
- **Questions** — These are mainly used to ask for information. ‘Do you know him?’
- **Imperative Sentences** — These are mainly used to express a desire or requirement that someone do something. ‘Pick that up.’
- **Exclamations** — These are mainly used to express a strong feeling. ‘Ouch, that hurt!’

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Languages have different ways of using sentence types to express particular functions.
- Most languages use these sentence types for more than one function.
- Each sentence in the Bible belongs to a certain sentence type and has a certain function, but some languages would not use that type of sentence for that function.

Examples From the Bible

The examples below show each of these types used for their main functions.

Statements

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ULT)

Statements can also have other functions. (See [Statements — Other Uses](#).)

Questions

The speakers below used these questions to get information, and the people they were speaking to answered their questions.

Jesus said to them, “**Do you believe that I can do this?**” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” (Matthew 9:28b ULT)

He ... said, “Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?**” They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:29-31 ULT)

Questions can also have other functions. (See [Rhetorical Question](#).)

Imperative Sentences

There are different kinds of imperative sentences: commands, instructions, suggestions, invitations, requests, and wishes.

With a command, the speaker uses his authority and tells someone to do something.

Rise up, Balak, and **hear**. **Listen** to me, you son of Zippor. (Numbers 23:1b8 ULT)

With an instruction, the speaker tells someone how to do something.

... but if you want to enter into life, **keep the commandments**. ... if you wish to be perfect, **go, sell** what you have, and **give** to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven ... (Matthew 19:17b, 21b ULT)

With a suggestion, the speaker tells someone something to do or not do that he thinks might help that person. In the example below, it is best for both blind men if they do not try to lead each other.

A blind man is not able to guide a blind man, is he? Would not both fall into a pit? (Luke 6:39b UST)

Speakers may intend to be part of the group that does what is suggested. In Genesis 11, the people were saying that it would be good for them all to make bricks together.

They said to one another, "Come, **let us** make bricks and bake them thoroughly." (Genesis 11:3a ULT)

With an invitation, the speaker uses politeness or friendliness to suggest that someone do something if he wants. This is usually something that the speaker thinks the listener will enjoy.

Come with us and we will do you good. (Numbers 10:29b)

With a request, the speaker uses politeness to say that he wants someone to do something. This may include the word 'please' to make it clear that it is a request and not a command. This is usually something that would benefit the speaker.

Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11 ULT)

I ask you to consider me excused. (Luke 14:18 ULT)

With a wish, a person expresses what they want to happen. In English they often start with the word "may" or "let."

In Genesis 28, Isaac told Jacob what he wanted God to do for him.

May God Almighty bless you, make you fruitful and multiply you. (Genesis 28:3a ULT)

In Genesis 9, Noah said what he wanted to happen to Canaan.

Cursed be Canaan. **May he be** a servant to his brothers' servants. (Genesis 9:25b ULT)

In Genesis 21, Hagar expressed her strong desire not to see her son die, and then she moved away so that she would not see him die.

Let me not look upon the death of the child. (Genesis 21:16b ULT)

Imperative sentences can have other functions also. (See [Imperatives — Other Uses](#).)

Exclamations

Exclamations express strong feeling. In the ULT and UST, they usually have an exclamation mark (!) at the end.

Save us, Lord; we are about to die! (Matthew 8:25b ULT)

(See Exclamations for other ways that exclamations are shown and ways to translate them.)

Translation Strategies

(1) Use your language's ways of showing that a sentence has a particular function.

(2) When a sentence in the Bible has a sentence type that your language would not use for the sentence's function, see the pages below for translation strategies.

- [Statements — Other Uses](#)
- [Rhetorical Question](#)
- [Imperatives — Other Uses](#)
- Exclamations

(Go back to: [James 1:19](#))

Simile

Description

A simile is a comparison of two things that are not normally thought to be similar. The simile focuses on a particular trait the two items have in common, and it includes the words “like,” “as,” or “than.”

This page answers the question: *What is a simile?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were troubled and discouraged, **like sheep not having a shepherd**. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus compared the crowds of people to sheep without a shepherd. Sheep grow frightened when they do not have a good shepherd to lead them in safe places. The crowds were like that because they did not have good religious leaders.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be as wise **as the serpents** and harmless **as the doves**. (Matthew 10:16 ULT)

Jesus compared his disciples to sheep and their enemies to wolves. Wolves attack sheep; Jesus' enemies would attack his disciples.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

God's word is compared to a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a weapon that can easily cut through a person's flesh. God's word is very effective in showing what is in a person's heart and thoughts.

Purposes of Simile

- A simile can teach about something that is unknown by showing how it is similar to something that is known.
- A simile can emphasize a particular trait, sometimes in a way that gets people's attention.
- Similes help form a picture in the mind or help the reader experience what he is reading about more fully.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not know how the two items are similar.
- People may not be familiar with both of the items being compared.

Examples From the Bible

Suffer hardship with me, **as a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 ULT)

In this simile, Paul compares suffering with what soldiers endure, and he encourages Timothy to follow their example.

Just as the lightning flashing from a place under the sky shines to another place under the sky, so will the Son of Man be. (Luke 17:24b ULT)

This verse does not tell how the Son of Man will be like the lightning. But in context we can understand from the verses before it that just as lighting flashes suddenly and everyone can see it, the Son of Man will come suddenly and everyone will be able to see him. No one will have to be told about it.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the correct meaning of a simile, consider using it. If they would not, here are some strategies you can use:

- (1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.
- (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.
- (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — This compares the danger that Jesus' disciples would be in with the danger that sheep are in when they are surrounded by wolves.

See, I send **you out among wicked people** and you will be in danger from them **as sheep are in danger when they are among wolves**.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

For the word of God is living and active and **more powerful than a very sharp two-edged sword**.

- (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — If people do not know what sheep and wolves are, or that wolves kill and eat sheep, you could use some other animal that kills another.

See, I send you out **as chickens in the midst of wild dogs**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, **as a mother closely watches over her infants**, but you refused!

If you have faith **as a grain of mustard** ... (Matthew 17:20)

If you have faith even as small **as a tiny seed**,

- (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT)

See, I send you out among **people who will want to harm you**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to **protect you**, but you refused!

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Metaphor](#)

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/bita-part1]]

(Go back to: [James 1:6](#); [1:10](#); [1:11](#); [1:18](#); [1:23](#); [3:5](#); [5:2](#); [5:3](#))

Singular Pronouns that refer to Groups

Description

The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. These languages have a singular form of “you” for when the word “you” refers to just one person, and a plural form for when the word “you” refers to more than one person. However, sometimes speakers in the Bible used the singular form of “you” even though they were speaking to a group of people. This is not obvious when you read the Bible in English because English does not have different forms that indicate where “you” is singular and where “you” is plural. But you may see this if you read a Bible in a language that does have distinct forms.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate singular pronouns that refer to groups of people?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Forms of You](#)

[Forms of ‘You’ — Singular](#)

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns]]

Also, speakers and writers of the Old Testament often referred to groups of people with the singular pronoun “he,” rather than with the plural pronoun “they.”

Finally, Old Testament speakers and writers also refer to actions that they performed as part of a group by saying ‘I’ did it when, really, the whole group was involved.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- For many languages, a translator who reads a Bible with a general form of “you” will need to know whether the speaker was speaking to one person or to more than one.
- In some languages, it might be confusing if a speaker uses a singular pronoun when speaking to or about more than one person.

Examples From the Bible

1 Now take heed that **you** do not do **your** acts of righteousness before people to be seen by them, otherwise **you** will not have a reward with **your** Father who is in heaven. 2 So when **you** give alms, do not sound a trumpet before **yourself** as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may have the praise of people. Truly I say to **you**, they have received their reward. (Matthew 6:1-2 ULT)

Jesus said this to a crowd. He used “you” plural in verse 1, and “you” singular in the first sentence of verse 2. Then, in the last sentence, he used the plural again.

God spoke all these words: “I am Yahweh, **your** God, who brought **you** out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **You** must have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:1-3 ULT)

God said this to all the people of Israel. He had taken them all out of Egypt and he wanted them all to obey him, but he used the singular form of you here when speaking to them.

This is what Yahweh says,
“For three sins of Edom,
even for four,
I will not turn away punishment,
because **he** pursued **his** brother with the sword
and cast off all pity.
His anger raged continually,
and **his** wrath lasted forever.” (Amos 1:11 ULT)

Yahweh said these things about the nation of Edom, not about only one person.

And I arose in the night, myself and a few men with me. And I was going up by the wadi at night, and I was looking intently at the wall. And I turned back, and I entered by the gate of the valley, and I returned. (Nehemiah 2:12a,15 ULT)

Nehemiah makes clear that he brought other people with him on his inspection tour of the wall of Jerusalem. But as he describes the tour, he just says “I” did this and that.

Translation Strategies

(1) If the singular form of the pronoun would be natural when referring to a group of people, consider using it.

- Whether you can use it may depend on who the speaker is and who the people are that he is talking about or talking to.
- It may also depend on what the speaker is saying.

Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the singular form of the pronoun would not be natural when referring to a group of people, or if the readers would be confused by it, use the plural form of the pronoun.

This is what Yahweh says,
 “For three sins of Edom,
 even for four,
 I will not turn away punishment,
 because **he** pursued **his** brother with the sword
 and cast off all pity.
His anger raged continually,
 and **his** wrath lasted forever.” (Amos 1:11 ULT)

This is what Yahweh says,
 “For three sins of Edom,
 even for four,
 I will not turn away punishment,
 because **they** pursued **their brothers** with the sword
 and cast off all pity.
Their anger raged continually,
 and **their** wrath lasted forever.”

And I arose in the night, myself and a few men with me. And **I** was going up by the wadi at night, and **I** was looking intently at the wall. And **I** turned back, and **I** entered by the gate of the valley, and **I** returned. (Nehemiah 2:12a,15 ULT)

And I arose in the night, myself and a few men with me. ... And **we** were going up by the wadi at night and **we** were looking intently at the wall. And **we** turned back and **we** entered by the gate of the valley, and **we** returned.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-youduall]]

(Go back to: [James 2:8](#); [2:11](#); [4:11](#); [4:12](#))

Statements — Other Uses

Description

Normally statements are used to give information. Sometimes they are used in the Bible for other functions.

This page answers the question: *What other uses are there for statements?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[Sentence Types](#)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use a statement for some of the functions that statements are used for in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Statements are normally used to give **information**. All of the sentences in John 1:6-8 below are statements, and their function is to give information.

There was a man who was sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness in order to testify about the light, that all might believe through him. John was not the light, but came that he might testify about the light. (John 1:6-8 ULT)

A statement can also be used as a **command** to tell someone what to do. In the examples below, the high priest used statements with the verb “will” to tell people what to do.

He commanded them, saying, “This is what you **must** do. A third of you who come on the Sabbath **will** keep watch over the king’s house, and a third **will** be at the Sur Gate, and a third at the gate behind the guardhouse.” (2 Kings 11:5 ULT)

A statement can also be used to give **instructions**. The speaker below was not just telling Joseph about something Joseph would do in the future; he was telling Joseph what he needed to do.

She will give birth to a son, and **you will call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21 ULT)

A statement can also be used to make a **request**. The man with leprosy was not just saying what Jesus was able to do. He was also asking Jesus to heal him.

Behold, a leper came to him and bowed before him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, **you can make me clean.**” (Matthew 8:2 ULT)

A statement can also be used to **perform** something. By telling Adam that the ground was cursed because of him, God actually cursed it.

... **cursed is the ground** because of you; (Genesis 3:17b ULT)

By telling a man that his sins were forgiven, **Jesus forgave** the man’s sins.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**” (Mark 2:5 ULT)

Translation Strategies

(1) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, **use a sentence type** that would express that function.

(2) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, **add a sentence type** that would express that function.

(3) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, **use a verb form** that would express that function.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, use a sentence type that would express that function.

She will give birth to a son, and **you will call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21 ULT)

The phrase “you will call his name Jesus” is an instruction. It can be translated using the sentence type of a normal instruction.

She will give birth to a son. **Name him Jesus**, because he will save his people from their sins.

(2) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, add a sentence type that would express that function.

Lord, **please heal me**, because I know you are able to heal me if you are willing to. (Matthew 8:2 ULT)

The function of “I know you can” is to make a request. In addition to the statement, a request can be added.

Lord, **I know you can heal me**. If you are willing, please do so.

Lord, if you are willing, please heal me. **I know you can do so**.

(3) If the function of a statement would not be understood correctly in your language, use a verb form that would express that function.

She will give birth to a son, and **you will call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21 ULT)

She will give birth to a son, and **you must call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins.

Son, your sins are forgiven. (Mark 2:5 ULT)

Son, I forgive your sins.

Son, God has forgiven your sins.

(Go back to: [James 2:8](#); [2:18](#))

Synecdoche

Description

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a speaker uses a part of something to refer to the whole thing, or uses the whole to refer to a part.

■ **My soul** magnifies the Lord. (Luke 1:46b ULT)

Mary was very happy about what the Lord was doing, so she said “my soul,” which means the inner, emotional part of herself, to refer to her whole self.

■ So **the Pharisees** said to him, “Look, why are they doing that which is not lawful?” (Mark 2:24a ULT)

The Pharisees who were standing there did not all say the same words at the same time. Instead, it is more likely that one man representing the group said those words.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some readers may not recognize the synecdoche and thus misunderstand the words as a literal statement.
- Some readers may realize that they are not to understand the words literally, but they may not know what the meaning is.

Example From the Bible

■ Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

“My hands” is a synecdoche for the whole person because clearly the arms and the rest of the body and the mind were also involved in the person’s accomplishments. The hands are chosen to represent the person because they are the parts of the body most directly involved in the work.

Translation Strategies

If the synecdoche would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

■ **“My soul** magnifies the Lord.” (Luke 1:46b ULT)

■ **“I** magnify the Lord.”

So **the Pharisees** said to him ... (Mark 2:24a ULT)

■ **A representative of the Pharisees** said to him ...

Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

This page answers the question: *What is a synecdoche, and how can I translate such a thing into my language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-intro]]

I looked on all the deeds that I had accomplished

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Metonymy](#)

[[rc://en/ta/man/translate/bita-part2]]

(Go back to: [James 1:21](#); [1:26](#); [3:2](#); [5:2](#); [5:6](#); [5:20](#))

Textual Variants

Description

Thousands of years ago, people wrote the books of the Bible. Other people then copied them by hand and translated them. They did this work very carefully, and over the years many people made thousands of copies. However, people who looked at them later saw that there were small differences between them. Some copiers accidentally left out some words, or some mistook one word for another that looked like it. Occasionally, they added words or even whole sentences, either by accident or because they wanted to explain something. Modern Bibles are translations of the old copies. Some modern Bibles include some of these sentences that were added. In the ULT, these added sentences are usually written in footnotes.

Bible scholars have read many old copies and compared them with each other. For each place in the Bible where there was a difference, they have figured out which wordings are most likely correct. The translators of the ULT based the ULT on wordings that scholars say are most likely correct. Because people who use the ULT may have access to Bibles that are based on other copies, the ULT translators have sometimes included information about some of the differences between them, either in the ULT footnotes or in the unfoldingWord® Translation Notes.

Translators are encouraged to translate the text in the ULT and to write about added sentences in footnotes, as is done in the ULT. However, if the local church really wants those sentences to be included in the main text, translators may put them in the text and include a footnote about them.

This page answers the question: *Why does the ULT have missing or added verses, and should I translate them?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-source-text\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-manuscripts\]\]](#)

Examples From the Bible

Matthew 18:10-11 ULT has a footnote about verse 11.

¹⁰ See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that in heaven their angels always look on the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹¹ ^[1]

[1] Many authorities, some ancient, insert v. 11: **For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost.**

John 7:53-8:11 is not in the best earliest manuscripts. It has been included in the ULT, but it is marked off with square brackets ([]) at the beginning and end, and there is a footnote after verse 11.

53 [Then everyone went to his own house ... 11 She said, "No one, Lord." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."] ^[2]

[2] Some ancient manuscripts include John 7:53-8:11

Translation Strategies

When there is a textual variant, you may choose to follow the ULT or another version that you have access to.

- (1) Translate the verses as they are in the ULT and include the footnote that the ULT provides.
- (2) Translate the verses as another version has them, and change the footnote so that it fits this situation.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

The translation strategies are applied to Mark 7:14-16 ULT, which has a footnote about verse 16.

¹⁴ He called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing from outside the man that can defile him when it enters into him. But the things that come out of the man are the things that defile the man." ¹⁶ ^[1]

^[1] Some ancient manuscripts include verse 16: **If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.**

(1) Translate the verses as they are in the ULT and include the footnote that the ULT provides.

¹⁴ He called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing from outside the man that can defile him when it enters into him. But the things that come out of the man are the things that defile the man." ¹⁶ ^[1]

^[1] Some ancient manuscripts include verse 16: **If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.**

(2) Translate the verses as another version has them, and change the footnote so that it fits this situation.

¹⁴ He called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵ There is nothing from outside the man that can defile him when it enters into him. But the things that come out of the man are the things that defile the man. ¹⁶ If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." ^[1]

^[1] Some ancient manuscripts do not include verse 16.

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-chapverse\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-manuscripts\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-terms\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-original\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 2 General Notes; 2:20](#))

Translate Unknowns

While working to translate the Bible, you (the translator) might find yourself asking: “How do I translate words like lion, fig tree, mountain, priest, or temple when people in my culture have never seen these things and we do not have a word for them?”

This page answers the question: *How can I translate ideas that my readers are not familiar with?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-sentences\]\]](#)

Description

Unknowns are things that occur in the source text that are not known to the people of your culture. The unfoldingWord® Translation Words pages and the unfoldingWord® Translation Notes will help you understand what they are. After you understand them, you will need to find ways to refer to those things so that people who read your translation will understand what they are.

They said to him, “We have nothing here except five loaves of **bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

Bread is a particular food made by mixing finely crushed grains with oil, and then cooking the mixture so that it is dry. (Grains are the seeds of a kind of grass.) In some cultures people do not have bread and do not know what it is.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the things that are in the Bible because those things are not part of their own culture.
- Readers may have difficulty understanding a text if they do not know some of the things that are mentioned in it.

Translation Principles

- Use words that are already part of your language if possible.
- Keep expressions short if possible.
- Represent God’s commands and historical facts accurately.

Examples From the Bible

So I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals**. (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

Jackals are wild animals like dogs that live in only a few parts of the world. So they are not known in many places.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous **wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

If wolves do not live where the translation will be read, the readers may not understand that they are fierce, wild animals like dogs that attack and eat sheep.

They offered him wine mixed with **myrrh**, but he did not drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT)

People may not know what myrrh is and that it was used as a medicine.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

Some languages have terms for things that give light, like the sun and fire, but they have no general term for lights.

■ Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT)

People in many parts of the world have not seen snow, but they may have seen it in pictures.

Translation Strategies

Here are ways you might translate a term that is not known in your language:

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.
- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.
- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.
- (4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.
- (5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.

■ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

■ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but **inwardly they are very hungry and dangerous animals**.

"Ravenous wolves" is part of a metaphor here, so the reader needs to know that they are very dangerous to sheep in order to understand this metaphor. (If sheep are also unknown, then you will need to also use one of the translation strategies to translate sheep, or change the metaphor to something else, using a translation strategy for metaphors. See [Translating Metaphors](#).)

■ "We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

■ We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked grain seeds** and two fish.

- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.

■ Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT) This verse is not about snow. It uses snow in a figure of speech to help people understand how white something will be.

■ Your sins ... will be white like **milk**.

■ Your sins ... will be white like **the moon**.

- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **myrrh**. But he refused to drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT) — People may understand better what myrrh is if it is used with the general word “medicine.”

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **a medicine called myrrh**. But he refused to drink it.

“We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT) — People may understand better what bread is if it is used with a phrase that tells what it is made of (seeds) and how it is prepared (crushed and baked).

We have nothing here except five loaves of **baked crushed seed bread** and two fish.

(4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals** (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **wild dogs**

“We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked food** and two fish.

(5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

to him who made **the sun and the moon**

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-transliterate\]\]](#)

[How to Translate Names](#)

(Go back to: [James 1:6](#); [1:10](#); [1:23](#); [1:26](#); [2:2](#); [3:3](#); [3:4](#); [3:5](#); [3:12](#); [5:14](#))

Translating Son and Father

Door43 supports Bible translations that represent these concepts when they refer to God.

Biblical Witness

“Father” and “Son” are names that God calls himself in the Bible.

The Bible shows that God called Jesus his Son:

After he was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and ... a voice came out of the heavens saying, **“This is my beloved Son.** I am very pleased with him.” (Matthew 3:16-17 ULT)

The Bible shows that Jesus called God his Father:

Jesus ... said, “I praise you **Father**, Lord of heaven and earth ... no one knows the **Son** except the **Father**, and no one knows the **Father** except the **Son**.” (Matthew 11:25a, 27b ULT) (See also: John 6:26-57)

Christians have found that “Father” and “Son” are the ideas that most essentially describe the eternal relationship of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity to each other. The Bible indeed refers to them in various ways, but no other terms reflect the eternal love and intimacy between these Persons, nor the interdependent eternal relationship between them.

Jesus referred to God in the following terms:

Baptize them into **the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.** (Matthew 28:19b ULT)

The intimate, loving relationship between the Father and the Son is eternal, just as they are eternal. The Father **loves** the Son. (See John 3:35-36; 5:19-20 ULT)

I love the Father, and just as the Father commanded me, thus I do. (John 14:31 ULT)

No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son. (Luke 10:22b ULT)

The terms “Father” and “Son” also communicate that the Father and the Son are of the same essence; they are both eternal God.

Jesus said, “Father, ... glorify your Son so that the Son will glorify you ... I glorified you on the earth ... Now Father, glorify me ... with the glory that **I had with you before the world was made.**” (John 17:1, 4a, 5 ULT)

But in these last days, he [God the Father] has spoken to us through a Son, whom he appointed to be the heir of all things. Through him, he also made the universe. He is the brightness of God’s glory and **the very exact representation of his being.** He holds everything together by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:2-3a ULT)

Jesus said to him, “I have been with you for so long and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9 ULT)

This page answers the question: *Why are these concepts important in referring to God?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/guidelines-faithful\]\]](#)

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/guidelines-sonofgod\]\]](#)

Human Relationships

Human fathers and sons are not perfect, but the Bible still uses those terms for the Father and Son, who are perfect.

Just as today, human father-son relationships during Bible times were never as loving or perfect as the relationship between Jesus and his Father. But this does not mean that the translator should avoid the concepts of father and son. The Scriptures use these terms to refer to God, the perfect Father and Son, as well as to sinful human fathers and sons. In referring to God as Father and Son, choose words in your language that are widely used to refer to a human “father” and “son.” In this way you will communicate that God the Father and God the Son are of the same divine essence (they are both God), just as a human father and son are of the same human essence (they are both human and share the same human characteristics).

Translation Strategies

(1) Think through all the possibilities within your language to translate the words “son” and “father.” Determine which words in your language best represent the divine “Son” and “Father.”

(2) If your language has more than one word for “son,” use the word that has the closest meaning to “only son” (or “first son” if necessary).

(3) If your language has more than one word for “father,” use the word that has the closest meaning to “birth father,” rather than “adoptive father.”

(See *God the Father* and *Son of God* pages in [unfoldingWord® Translation Words](#) for help translating “Father” and “Son.”)

(Go back to: [James 1:27](#); [3:9](#))

Verse Bridges

Description

In some cases, you will see in the unfoldingWord® Simplified Text (UST) that two or more verse numbers are combined, such as 17-18. This is called a verse bridge. This means that the information in the verses was rearranged so that the story or message could be more easily understood.

This page answers the question: *Why are some verse numbers combined in the UST, such as "3-5" or "17-18"?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-bibleorg\]\]](https://www.unfoldingword.com/en/ta/man/translate/translate-bibleorg/)

29 These were the clans of the Horites: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, and Anah, 30 Dishon, Ezer, Dishan: these are clans of the Horites, according to their clan lists in the land of Seir. (Genesis 36:29-30 ULT)

29-30 The people groups who were descendants of Hor lived in Seir land. The names of the people groups are Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. (Genesis 36:29-30 UST)

In the ULT text, verses 29 and 30 are separate, and the information about the people living in Seir is at the end of verse 30. In the UST text, the verses are joined, and the information about them living in Seir is at the beginning. For many languages, this is a more logical order of information.

Examples From the Bible

Where the UST has a verse bridge, the ULT will have separate verses.

⁴⁻⁵ Yahweh our God will bless you in the land that he is giving to you. If you obey Yahweh our God and obey all the commandments that I am giving to you today, there will not be any poor people among you. (Deuteronomy 15:4-5 UST)

⁴ However, there should be no poor among you (for Yahweh will surely bless you in the land that he gives you as an inheritance to possess), ⁵ if only you diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep all these commandments that I am commanding you today. (Deuteronomy 15:4-5 ULT)

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ But Yahweh said to him, "I will not permit you to eat the fruit of the tree that will enable you to know what actions are good to do and what actions are evil to do. If you eat any fruit from that tree, on the day you eat it you will surely die. But I will permit you to eat the fruit of any of the other trees in the park." (Genesis 2:16-17 UST)

¹⁶ Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "From every tree in the garden you may freely eat. ¹⁷ But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for on the day that you eat from it, you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17 ULT)

Translation Strategies

Order the information in a way that will be clear to your readers. If the order of information is clear as it is in the ULT, then use that order. But if the order is confusing or gives the wrong meaning, then change the order so that it is more clear.

(1) If you put information from one verse before information from an earlier verse, then combine the verses and put a hyphen between the two verse numbers.

See how to mark verses in [translationStudio](https://www.unfoldingword.com/en/ta/man/translate/translate-bibleorg/).

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If information from one verse is put before information from an earlier verse, then combine the verses and put the verse numbers before the first verse with a hyphen between them.

2 You must select three cities for yourself in the middle of your land that Yahweh your God is giving you to possess. 3 You must build a road and divide the borders of your land into three parts, the land that Yahweh your God is causing you to inherit, so that everyone who kills another person may flee there. (Deuteronomy 19:2-3 ULT)

2-3 You must divide into three parts the land that he is giving to you. Then select a city in each part. You must make good roads in order that people can get to those cities easily. Someone who kills another person can escape to one of those cities to be safe. (Deuteronomy 19:2-3 UST)

Next we recommend you learn about:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/translate-chapverse\]\]](#)

(Go back to: [James 5:2](#))

When Masculine Words Include Women

In the Bible, sometimes the words “men,” “brothers,” and “sons” refer only to men. At other times, those words include both men and women. In those places where the writer meant both men and women, you (the translator) need to translate it in a way that does not limit the meaning to men.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate “brother” or “he” when it could refer to anyone, male or female?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

[\[\[rc://en/ta/man/translate/figs-pronouns\]\]](#)

[Generic Noun Phrases](#)

Description

In some languages a word that normally refers to men can also be used in a more general way to refer to both men and women. For example, the Bible sometimes says “brothers” when it refers to both brothers and sisters.

Also in some languages, the masculine pronouns “he” and “him” can be used in a more general way for any person if it is not important whether the person is a man or a woman. In the example below, the pronoun is “his,” but it is not limited to males.

A wise son makes **his** father rejoice
but a foolish son brings grief to **his** mother. (Proverbs 10:1 ULT)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- In some cultures words like “man,” “brother,” and “son” can only be used to refer to men. If those words are used in a translation in a more general way, people will think that what is being said does not apply to women.
- In some cultures, the masculine pronouns “he” and “him” can only refer to men. If a masculine pronoun is used, people will think that what is said does not apply to women.

Translation Principles

When a statement applies to both men and women, translate it in such a way that people will be able to understand that it applies to both.

Examples From the Bible

Now we want you to know, **brothers**, the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia. (2 Corinthians 8:1 ULT)

This verse is addressing the believers in Corinth, not only men, but **men and women**.

Then said Jesus to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, **he** must deny **himself**, take up **his** cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24 ULT)

Jesus was not speaking only of men, but of **men and women**.

Caution: Sometimes masculine words are used specifically to refer to men. Do not use words that would lead people to think that they include women. The words below are specifically about men.

Moses said, ‘If **someone** dies, not having children, **his brother** must marry **his** wife and have children for **his brother**.’ (Matthew 22:24 ULT)

Translation Strategies

If people would understand that that masculine words like “man,” “brother,” and “he” can include women, then consider using them. Otherwise, here are some ways for translating those words when they include women.

- (1) Use a noun that can be used for both men and women.
- (2) Use a word that refers to men and a word that refers to women.
- (3) Use pronouns that can be used for both men and women.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use nouns that can be used for both men and women.

The wise **man** dies just like the fool dies. (Ecclesiastes 2:16b ULT)

“The wise **person** dies just like the fool dies.”

“Wise **people** die just like fools die.”

- (2) Use a word that refers to men and a word that refers to women.

For we do not want you to be uninformed, **brothers**, about the troubles that happened to us in Asia. (2 Corinthians 1:8) — Paul was writing this letter to both men and women.

“For we do not want you to be uninformed, **brothers and sisters**, about the troubles that happened to us in Asia.”

- (3) Use pronouns that can be used for both men and women.

“If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”
(Matthew 16:24 ULT)

English speakers can change the masculine singular pronouns, “he,” “himself,” and “his” to plural pronouns that do not mark gender, “they,” “themselves,” and “their” in order to show that it applies to all people, not just men.

“If **people** want to follow me, **they** must deny **themselves**, take up **their** cross, and follow me.”

(Go back to: [James 1:2](#); [1:7](#); [1:8](#); [1:12](#); [1:19](#); [1:20](#); [1:23](#); [2:2](#); [2:20](#); [2:24](#); [3:8](#); [3:9](#))



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 28

eternity, everlasting, eternal, forever

Definition:

The terms “everlasting” and “eternal” have very similar meanings and refer to something that will always exist or that lasts forever.

- The term “eternity” refers to a state of being that has no beginning or end. It can also refer to life that never ends.
- After this present life on earth, humans will spend eternity either in heaven with God or in hell apart from God.
- The terms “eternal life” and “everlasting life” are used in the New Testament to refer to living forever with God in heaven.

The term “forever” refers to never-ending time.

- The phrase “forever and ever” has the idea of time that never ends and expresses what eternity or eternal life is like. It emphasizes that something will always happen or exist. It refers to time that never ends.
- God said that David’s throne would last “forever.” This is referred to the fact that David’s descendant Jesus will reign as king forever.

Translation Suggestions:

- Other ways to translate “eternal” or “everlasting” could include “unending” or “never stopping” or “always continuing.”
- The terms “eternal life” and “everlasting life” could also be translated as “life that never ends” or “life that continues without stopping” or “the raising up of our bodies to live forever.”
- Depending on the context, different ways to translate “eternity” could include “existing outside of time” or “unending life” or “life in heaven.”
- Also consider how this word is translated in a Bible translation in a local or national language. (See: [How to Translate Unknowns](#))
- “Forever” could also be translated by “always” or “never ending.”
- The phrase “will last forever” could also be translated as “always exist” or “will never stop” or “will always continue.”
- The emphatic phrase “forever and ever” could also be translated as “for always and always” or “not ever ending” or “which never, ever ends.”
- David’s throne lasting forever could be translated as “David’s descendant will reign forever” or “a descendant of David will always be reigning.”

(See also: David, reign, life)

Bible References:

- Genesis 17:8
- Genesis 48:4
- Exodus 15:17
- 2 Samuel 3:28-30
- 1 Kings 2:32-33
- Job 4:20-21
- Psalms 21:4
- Isaiah 9:6-7
- Isaiah 40:27-28
- Daniel 7:18

- Luke 18:18
- Acts 13:46
- Romans 5:21
- Hebrews 6:19-20
- Hebrews 10:11-14
- 1 John 1:2
- 1 John 5:12
- Revelation 1:4-6
- Revelation 22:3-5

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **27:1** One day, an expert in the Jewish law came to Jesus to test him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit **eternal life**?”
- **28:1** One day, a rich young ruler came up to Jesus and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to have **eternal life**?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good, and that is God. But if you want to have **eternal life**, obey God’s laws.”
- **28:10** Jesus answered, “Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or property for my name’s sake, will receive 100 times more and will also receive **eternal life**.”

Word Data:

- Strong’s: H3117, H4481, H5331, H5703, H5705, H5769, H5865, H5957, H6924, G01260, G01650, G01660, G13360

(Go back to: [James 5 General Notes](#))

faith

Definition:

In general, the term “faith” refers to a belief, trust or confidence in someone or something.

- To “have faith” in someone is to believe that what he says and does is true and trustworthy.
- To “have faith in Jesus” means to believe all of God’s teachings about Jesus. It especially means that people trust in Jesus and his sacrifice to cleanse them from their sin and to rescue them from the punishment they deserve because of their sin.
- True faith or belief in Jesus will cause a person to produce good spiritual fruits or behaviors because the Holy Spirit is living in him.
- Sometimes “faith” refers generally to all the teachings about Jesus, as in the expression “the truths of the faith.”
- In contexts such as “keep the faith” or “abandon the faith,” the term “faith” refers to the state or condition of believing all the teachings about Jesus.

Translation Suggestions:

- In some contexts, “faith” can be translated as “belief” or “conviction” or “confidence” or “trust.”
- For some languages these terms will be translated using forms of the verb “believe.” (See: [abstractnouns](#))
- The expression “keep the faith” could be translated by “keep believing in Jesus” or “continue to believe in Jesus.”
- The sentence “they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith” could be translated by “they must keep believing all the true things about Jesus that they have been taught.”
- The expression “my true son in the faith” could be translated by something like “who is like a son to me because I taught him to believe in Jesus” or “my true spiritual son, who believes in Jesus.”

(See also: believe, faithful)

Bible References:

- 2 Timothy 4:7
- Acts 6:7
- Galatians 2:20-21
- James 2:20

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **5:6** When Isaac was a young man, God tested Abraham’s **faith** by saying, “Take Isaac, your only son, and kill him as a sacrifice to me.”
- **31:7** Then he (Jesus) said to Peter, “You man of little **faith**, why did you doubt?”
- **32:16** Jesus said to her, “Your **faith** has healed you. Go in peace.”
- **38:9** Then Jesus said to Peter, “Satan wants to have all of you, but I have prayed for you, Peter, that your **faith** will not fail.”

Word Data:

- Strong’s: H0529, H0530, G16800, G36400, G41020, G60660

(Go back to: [Introduction to James](#); [James 2 General Notes](#))

godly, godliness, ungodly, godless, ungodliness, godlessness

Definition:

The term “godly” is used to describe a person who acts in a way that honors God and shows what God is like. “Godliness” is the character quality of honoring God by doing his will.

- A person who has godly character will show the fruits of the Holy Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self control.
- The quality of godliness shows that a person has the Holy Spirit and is obeying him.

The terms “ungodly” and “godless” describe people who are in rebellion against God. Living in an evil way, without thought of God, is called “ungodliness” or “godlessness.”

- The meanings of these words are very similar. However, “godless” and “godlessness” may describe a more extreme condition in which people or nations do not even acknowledge God or his right to rule them.
- God pronounces judgment and wrath on ungodly people, on everyone who rejects him and his ways.

Translation Suggestions:

- The phrase “the godly” could be translated as “godly people” or “people who obey God.” (See: [nominaladj](#))
- The adjective “godly” could be translated as “obedient to God” or “righteous” or “pleasing to God.”
- The phrase “in a godly manner” could be translated as “in a way that obeys God” or “with actions and words that please God.”
- Ways to translate “godliness” could include “acting in a way that pleases God” or “obeying God” or “living in a righteous manner.”
- Depending on the context, the term “ungodly” could be translated as “displeasing to God” or “immoral” or “disobeying God.”
- The terms “godless” and “godlessness” literally mean that the people are “without God” or “having no thought of God” or “acting in a way that does not acknowledge God.”
- Other ways to translate “ungodliness” or “godlessness” could be “wickedness” or “evil” or “rebellion against God”.

(See also evil, honor, obey, [righteous](#), [righteous](#))

Bible References:

- Job 27:10
- Proverbs 11:9
- Acts 3:12
- 1 Timothy 1:9-11
- 1 Timothy 4:7
- 2 Timothy 3:12
- Hebrews 12:14-17
- Hebrews 11:7
- 1 Peter 4:18
- Jude 1:16

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0430, H1100, H2623, H5760, H7563, G05160, G07630, G07640, G07650, G21240, G21500, G21520, G21530, G23160, G23170

(Go back to: [James 4 General Notes](#))

just, justice, unjust, injustice, justify, justification

Definition:

“Just” and “justice” refer to treating people fairly according to God’s laws. Human laws that reflect God’s standard of right behavior toward others are also just.

- To be “just” is to act in a fair and right way toward others. It also implies honesty and integrity to do what is morally right in God’s eyes.
- To act “justly” means to treat people in a way that is right, good, and proper according to God’s laws.
- To receive “justice” means to be treated fairly under the law, either being protected by the law or being punished for breaking the law.
- Sometimes the term “just” has the broader meaning of “righteous” or “following God’s laws.”

The terms “unjust” and “unjustly” refer to treating people in an unfair and often harmful manner.

- An “injustice” is something bad that is done to someone that the person did not deserve. It refers to treating people unfairly.
- Injustice also means that some people are treated badly while others are treated well.
- Someone who is acting in an unjust way is being “partial” or “prejudiced” because he is not treating people equally.

The terms “justify” and “justification” refer to causing a guilty person to be righteous. Only God can truly justify people.

- When God justifies people, he forgives their sins and makes it as though they have no sin. He justifies sinners who repent and trust in Jesus to save them from their sins.
- “Justification” refers to what God does when he forgives a person’s sins and declares that person to be righteous in his sight.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, other ways to translate “just” could include “morally right” or “fair.”
- The term “justice” could be translated as “fair treatment” or “deserved consequences.”
- To “act justly” could be translated as “treat fairly” or “behave in a just way.”
- In some contexts, “just” could be translated as “righteous” or “upright.”
- Depending on the context, “unjust” could also be translated as “unfair” or “partial” or “unrighteous.”
- The phrase “the unjust” could be translated as “the unjust ones” or “unjust people” or “people who treat others unfairly” or “unrighteous people” or “people who disobey God.”
- The term “unjustly” could be translated as “in an unfair manner” or “wrongly” or “unfairly.”
- Ways to translate “injustice” could include, “wrong treatment” or “unfair treatment” or “acting unfairly.” (See: [abstractnouns](#))
- Other ways to translate “justify” could include “declare (someone) to be righteous” or “cause (someone) to be righteous.”
- The term “justification” could be translated as “being declared righteous” or “becoming righteous” or “causing people to be righteous.”
- The phrase “resulting in justification” could be translated as “so that God justified many people” or “which resulted in God causing people to be righteous.”
- The phrase “for our justification” could be translated as “in order that we could be made righteous by God.”

(See also: forgive, guilt, judge, [righteous](#), [righteous](#))

Bible References:

- Genesis 44:16
- 1 Chronicles 18:14
- Isaiah 4:3-4
- Jeremiah 22:3
- Ezekiel 18:16-17
- Micah 3:8
- Matthew 5:43-45
- Matthew 11:19
- Matthew 23:23-24
- Luke 18:3
- Luke 18:8
- Luke 18:13-14
- Luke 21:20-22
- Luke 23:41
- Acts 13:38-39
- Acts 28:4
- Romans 4:1-3
- Galatians 3:6-9
- Galatians 3:11
- Galatians 5:3-4
- Titus 3:6-7
- Hebrews 6:10
- James 2:24
- Revelation 15:3-4

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **17:9** David ruled with **justice** and faithfulness for many years, and God blessed him.
- **18:13** Some of these kings (of Judah) were good men who ruled **justly** and worshiped God.
- **19:16** They (the prophets) all told the people to stop worshiping idols and to start showing **justice** and mercy to others.
- **50:17** Jesus will rule his kingdom with peace and **justice**, and he will be with his people forever.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H2555, H3477, H4941, H5765, H5766, H5767, H6662, H6663, H6664, H6666, H8003, H8264, H8636, G00910, G00930, G00940, G13420, G13440, G13450, G13460, G13470, G17380

(Go back to: [Introduction to James](#); [James 2 General Notes](#))

righteous, righteousness, unrighteous, unrighteousness, upright, uprightness

Definition:

The term “righteousness” refers to God’s absolute goodness, justice, faithfulness, and love. Having these qualities makes God “righteous.” Because God is righteous, he must condemn sin.

- These terms are also often used to describe a person who obeys God and is morally good. However, because all people have sinned, no one except God is completely righteous.
- Examples of people the Bible who were called “righteous” include Noah, Job, Abraham, Zachariah, and Elisabeth.
- When people trust in Jesus to save them, God cleanses them from their sins and declares them to be righteous because of Jesus’ righteousness.

The term “unrighteous” means to be sinful and morally corrupt. “Unrighteousness” refers to sin or the condition of being sinful.

- These terms especially refer to living in a way that disobeys God’s teachings and commands.
- Unrighteous people are immoral in their thoughts and actions.
- Sometimes “the unrighteous” refers specifically to people who do not believe in Jesus.

The terms “upright” and “uprightness” refer to acting in a way that follows God’s laws.

- The meaning of these words includes the idea of standing up straight and looking directly ahead.
- A person who is “upright” is someone who obeys God’s rules and does not do things that are against his will.
- Terms such as “integrity” and “righteous” have similar meanings and are sometimes used in parallelism constructions, such as “integrity and uprightness.” (See: [parallelism](#))

Translation Suggestions:

- When it describes God, the term “righteous” could be translated as “perfectly good and just” or “always acting rightly.”
- God’s “righteousness” could also be translated as “perfect faithfulness and goodness.”
- When it describes people who are obedient to God, the term “righteous” could also be translated as “morally good” or “just” or “living a God-pleasing life.”
- The phrase “the righteous” could also be translated as “righteous people” or “God-fearing people.”
- Depending on the context, “righteousness” could also be translated with a word or phrase that means “goodness” or “being perfect before God” or “acting in a right way by obeying God” or “doing perfectly good.”
- The term “unrighteous” could simply be translated as “not righteous.”
- Depending on the context, other ways to translate this could include “wicked” or “immoral” or “people who rebel against God” or “sinful.”
- The phrase “the unrighteous” could be translated as “unrighteous people.”
- The term “unrighteousness” could be translated as “sin” or “evil thoughts and actions” or “wickedness.”
- If possible, it is best to translate this in a way that shows its relationship to “righteous, righteousness.”
- Ways to translate “upright” could include “acting rightly” or “one who acts rightly” or “following God’s laws” or “obedient to God” or “behaving in a way that is right.”
- The term “uprightness” could be translated as “moral purity” or “good moral conduct” or “rightness.”
- The phrase “the upright” could be translated as “people who are upright” or “upright people.”

(See also: evil, faithful, good, holy, integrity, [just](#), law, law, obey, pure, [righteous](#), sin, unlawful)

Bible References:

- Deuteronomy 19:16
- Job 1:8
- Psalms 37:30
- Psalms 49:14
- Psalms 107:42
- Ecclesiastes 12:10-11
- Isaiah 48:1-2
- Ezekiel 33:13
- Malachi 2:6
- Matthew 6:1
- Acts 3:13-14
- Romans 1:29-31
- 1 Corinthians 6:9
- Galatians 3:7
- Colossians 3:25
- 2 Thessalonians 2:10
- 2 Timothy 3:16
- 1 Peter 3:18-20
- 1 John 1:9
- 1 John 5:16-17

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **3:2** But Noah found favor with God. He was a **righteous** man, living among wicked people.
- **4:8** God declared that Abram was **righteous** because he believed in God's promise.
- **17:2** David was a humble and **righteous** man who trusted and obeyed God.
- **23:1** Joseph, the man Mary was engaged to, was a **righteous** man.
- **50:10** Then the **righteous** ones will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God their Father.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H1368, H2555, H3072, H3474, H3476, H3477, H3483, H4334, H4339, H4749, H5228, H5229, H5324, H5765, H5766, H5767, H5977, H6662, H6663, H6664, H6665, H6666, H6968, H8535, H8537, H8549, H8552, G00930, G00940, G04580, G13410, G13420, G13430, G13440, G13450, G13460, G21180, G37160, G37170

(Go back to: [James 2 General Notes](#))

work, works, deeds

Definition:

The term “work” refers generally either to the action of expending effort in order to accomplish something, or to the result of that action. The term “works” refers generally to actions as a whole (that is, things that have been done or that need to be done).

- In the Bible, these terms are commonly used both in reference to God and humans.
- When used in reference to God, the term “work” in the Bible often refers to God’s action of creating the universe or saving his people (either from enemies, from sin, or both).
- God’s works refer to all the things he does or has done, including creating the world, saving sinners, providing for the needs of all creation and keeping the entire universe in place.
- The works or deeds that a person does can be either good or evil.

Translation Suggestions:

- Other ways to translate “works” could be “deeds” or “actions” or “things that are done.”
- God’s “works” or “deeds” or the “work of his hands” could also be translated as “miracles” or “mighty acts” or “things that God does.”
- The expression “the work of God” could be translated as “the things that God is doing” or “the miracles God does” or “everything that God has accomplished.”
- The term “work” can just be the singular of “works” as in “every good work” or “every good deed.”
- When work is done for God or others, it can be translated as “service” or “ministry.”

(See also: fruit, Holy Spirit, miracle)

Bible References:

- 1 John 3:12
- Acts 2:8-11
- Daniel 4:37
- Exodus 34:10-11
- Galatians 2:15-16
- James 2:17
- Matthew 16:27-28
- Micah 2:7
- Romans 3:28
- Titus 3:4-5

Word Data:

- Strong’s: H4399, H4566, H4567, H4611, H4659, H5949, G20410

(Go back to: [Introduction to James](#))

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