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Table of Contents

unfoldingWord® Translation Notes	6
Amos	6
Introduction to Amos	7
Amos 1	9
Amos 2	25
Amos 3	42
Amos 4	58
Amos 5	72
Amos 6	100
Amos 7	115
Amos 8	133
Amos 9	148
 unfoldingWord® Translation Academy	 164
Abstract Nouns	165
Active or Passive	167
Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information	170
Direct and Indirect Quotations	173
Double Negatives	175
Doublet	178
Ellipsis	180
Euphemism	182
First, Second or Third Person	184
Generic Noun Phrases	186
Go and Come	188
How to Translate Names	190
Hyperbole	194
Hypothetical Situations	198
Idiom	201
Irony	203
Litotes	206
Merism	208
Metaphor	210
Metonymy	216
Nominal Adjectives	218
Parallelism	220
Personification	223
Poetry	225
Rhetorical Question	228
Simile	231
Symbolic Action	234
Synecdoche	236
Translate Unknowns	238
 unfoldingWord® Translation Words	 241
evil, wicked, unpleasant	242
Israel, Israelites	244
prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess	246

Contributors	248
unfoldingWord® Translation Notes Contributors	248
unfoldingWord® Literal Text Contributors	254
unfoldingWord® Simplified Text Contributors	255
unfoldingWord® Translation Academy Contributors	256
unfoldingWord® Translation Words Contributors	256
unfoldingWord® Translation Words Links Contributors	257



unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Amos

Introduction to Amos

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of Amos

Amos introduced (1:1)

Yahweh judges the nations (1:2-2:16)

- The surrounding nations (1:2-2:3)
- The southern kingdom (2:4-5)
- The northern kingdom (2:6-16)

Amos prophesies against the people of Israel (3:1-6:14)

Yahweh shows Amos several visions (7:1-9:10)

Israel is to be restored (9:11-15)

What is the Book of Amos about?

The Book of Amos contains the words of Amos, a shepherd of Tekoa. Amos began to prophesy about 760 BC. He spoke Yahweh's messages against God's people behaving wickedly. He spoke messages to both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. (See: **evil, wicked, unpleasant (p.242)**)

Yahweh gave Amos prophecies of judgment (Chapters 1-6) to proclaim to the people. Each of them begins with the phrase "This is what Yahweh says" (ULT).

Three visions of Yahweh coming to judge the people are in the last part of the book (7:1-9:10). A final vision promises that Yahweh will restore Israel (9:11-15). He will restore the "tent of David." This means a descendant of David would once again be king over Israel.

How should the title of this book be translated?

The traditional title of this book is "The Book of Amos" or just "Amos." Translators may also call it the "The Book of the Sayings of Amos." (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Who wrote the Book of Amos?

The prophet Amos probably wrote this book. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah. Amos came from a poor family. They grew sycamore trees (7:14, 15) and were shepherds (Amos 1:1). Though Amos was not trained as a prophet, he knew and understood the law of Moses. Also, Amos skillfully used expressive and meaningful words.

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

How is justice described in Amos?

Justice is an important theme in the Book of Amos. Justice means people treating others fairly according to the law of Yahweh. People in Israel were oppressing and taking advantage of poor people, orphans, and widows. Amos explained that Yahweh would prefer that the people act justly rather than sacrifice to him. Truly obeying the law of Moses meant being just to other people. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/lawofmoses\]\]](#))

What is a lawsuit?

Many cultures have a process for resolving disputes through the use of courts. These legal disputes are called lawsuits. Amos uses various legal terms. Part of the book presents events in a courtroom. The people are introduced, the problem is explained, the people are examined, witnesses speak, and a verdict is given.

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

What is the meaning of the term “Israel”?

The name “Israel” is used in many different ways in the Bible. Jacob was a son of Isaac. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel. The descendants of Jacob became a nation also called Israel. Eventually, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom was named Israel. The southern kingdom was named Judah. In Amos, “Israel” almost always refers to the northern kingdom of Israel. (See: **Israel, Israelites (p.244)**)

Where do the various narratives begin and end?

The structure of the Book of Amos may make it difficult to understand where Amos ends one thought and begins another. It may be helpful to solve these issues with carefully divided lines or paragraphs.

Amos 1

Amos 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This book is written in a poetic form. Because it was written by a farmer, it includes many references to agricultural concepts.

“For three sins of Judah, even for four”

The phrase “For three sins of Judah, even for four,” is used to begin each oracle. This is not intended to be a literal count but is an idiom indicating a large number of sins. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#))

Amos 1:1

General Information:

General Information:

God speaks through Amos using poetic language. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Poetry (p.225)**)

These are the things concerning Israel that Amos, one of the shepherds in Tekoa, received in revelation

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "These are the things concerning Israel that God revealed to Amos, one of the shepherds in Tekoa" (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

These are the things

Alternate translation: "This is the message"

in Tekoa

"Tekoa" is the name of a town or village. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

He received these things

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "God gave him these things" (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and also in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel

The words "in the days of" is an idiom and refers to the time when each king reigned. Alternate translation: "when Uzziah was king of Judah, and also when Jeroboam son of Joash was king of Israel" (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

two years before the earthquake

The assumed knowledge is that the original hearers would be aware of when a large earthquake had affected the area. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 1:2

Yahweh will roar from Zion; he will raise his voice from Jerusalem

These two phrases share similar meanings. Together they emphasize that Yahweh shouts loudly as he prepares to judge the nation. (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

Yahweh will roar

The author speaks of the voice of Yahweh as if it sounded like the roar of a lion or the roar of thunder. (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Yahweh

This is the name of God that he revealed to his people in the Old Testament. See the translationWord page about Yahweh concerning how to translate this.

Amos 1:3

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but it indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment.

Damascus

Here "Damascus" represents the people of the city of Damascus. Alternate translation: "the people of Damascus" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. Alternate translation: "I will certainly punish those people" (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

they threshed Gilead with instruments of iron

Yahweh speaks of how Damascus treated Gilead as if they had threshed grain with iron tools or weapons. (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

Gilead

Here "Gilead" represents the people of the region of Gilead. Alternate translation: "the people of Gilead" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 1:4

I will send a fire into the house of Hazael

Here Yahweh speaks of his judgment against the house of Hazael as if it were a consuming fire. (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

the house of Hazael

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Hazael's descendants, who were rulers of the country where Damascus was located. (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

it will devour the fortresses of Ben Hadad

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the fortresses. (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Hazael & Ben Hadad

These are the names of men. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Amos 1:5

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on Damascus.

cut off the man

Here to “cut off” means either to destroy or to drive away, as one would cut a piece of cloth or cut a branch from a tree. Alternate translation: “destroy the man” or “drive away the man” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Valley of Aven

This is the name of a place that means “valley of wickedness.” This could mean: (1) this is the name of an actual place in that region or (2) this is a metonym for Damascus or the surrounding region. Alternate translation: “the valley of wickedness” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-names\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

the man who holds the scepter in

This is a metonym for the ruler of that city or region. Alternate translation: “the ruler of” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Beth Eden

This is the name of a place that means “house of pleasure.” This could mean: (1) this is the name of an actual place in that region or (2) this is another metonym for Damascus or the surrounding region. Alternate translation: “the house of pleasure” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-names\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Kir

This is the name of a region from which the people of Aram originally came. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Amos 1:6

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but it indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Gaza

Here "Gaza" represents the people of the region of Gaza. Alternate translation: "the people of Gaza" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

hand them over to

Alternate translation: "deliver them up to" or "sell them to"

Edom

Here "Edom" represents the people of the country of Edom. Alternate translation: "the people of Edom" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 1:7

it will devour her fortresses

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the fortresses. (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 1:8

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on Gaza.

cut off the man

Here to “cut off” means either to destroy or to drive away, as one would cut a piece of cloth or cut a branch from a tree. Alternate translation: “destroy the man” or “drive away the man” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

the man who holds the scepter

This is a metonym for the ruler of that city or region. Alternate translation: “the ruler” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will turn my hand against Ekron

Here “hand” represents Yahweh’s power that he would use against Ekron. Alternate translation: “I will strike Ekron” or “I will destroy Ekron” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Ekron

Here “Ekron” represents the people of the city of Ekron. Alternate translation: “the people of Ekron” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 1:9

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Tyre

Here "Tyre" represents the people of the city of Tyre. Alternate translation: "the people of Tyre" (See: **Metonymy (p. 216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

their covenant of brotherhood

Alternate translation: "the agreement they made to treat you as brothers"

Amos 1:10

it will devour her fortresses

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the fortresses. (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 1:11

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Edom

Here "Edom" represents the people of the country of Edom. Alternate translation: "the people of Edom" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

he pursued his brother

The assumed knowledge is that Esau, from whom the people of Edom were descended, was the brother of Jacob, from whom the people of Israel were descended. Here "his brother" represents the people of Israel. Alternate translation: "he pursued the people of Israel" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

cast off all pity

Alternate translation: "showed them no mercy"

His anger raged continually, and his wrath lasted forever

These two phrases mean the same thing and are repeated to emphasize his continued anger. The abstract nouns "anger" and "wrath" can be translated using the adjectives "angry" and "furious." Alternate translation: "He was continually angry and always furious" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

his wrath lasted forever

This is an exaggeration that is meant to express the ongoing nature of his wrath. (See: **Hyperbole (p.194)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.194)**)

Amos 1:12

Teman & Bozrah

These are names of places. See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)** (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

it will devour the palaces of Bozrah

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the palaces. (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)
(See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 1:13

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

enlarge their borders

Alternate translation: "extend their boundaries" or "expand their territory"

Amos 1:14

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Ammon.

it will devour the palaces

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the palaces. (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind

The fighting against the people of Ammon is spoken of as if it were a violent storm. Alternate translation: "and the fighting will be like a great storm" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

tempest & whirlwind

These are two kinds of violent storms.

whirlwind

a strong wind that spins very quickly as it moves and can cause damage

Amos 1:15

Their king will go into captivity

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **captivity**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “capture.” This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “Their enemies will capture their king and take him away as a prisoner” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**)

Amos 2

Amos 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter consists of oracles against Moab and Judah by using poetic language and imagery. But the UST translates it using prose. If possible, translate this chapter as poetry, but you may translate as narrative.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Idiom

You will notice that the phrase “For three sins of Judah, even for four,” is used to begin each of these oracles. This is not intended to be a literal count but is an idiom indicating a large number of sins. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#))

Amos 2:1

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Moab

This represents the Moabite people. Alternate translation: "the people of Moab" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

he burned the bones

The word "he" refers to Moab. Alternate translation: "the people of Moab burned the bones"

to lime

Alternate translation: "to ashes"

Amos 2:2

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Moab.

Kerioth

This is the name of a city or town. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Moab will die

Here “Moab” represents the people of Moab. Alternate translation: “The people of Moab will die” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

in an uproar

An uproar is a very loud noise.

Amos 2:3

the judge in her

Alternate translation: "the ruler of Moab"

all the princes

Alternate translation: "all the officials" or "all the leaders"

Amos 2:4

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Judah

This represents the people of Judah. Alternate translation: "the people of Judah" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he will punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

Their lies

This expression here probably refers to worshiping false gods or idols. Alternate translation: "Their worship of idols" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

go astray & walked

Worshiping false gods is spoken of as if people were walking behind them. (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 2:5

it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem

Here Yahweh's judgment is spoken of as if it were a fire that was consuming the fortresses. (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 2:6

For three sins of & even for four

This is a poetic device. It does not mean that a specific number of sins had been committed, but indicates that many of sins had led to God's judgment. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#).

Israel

This represents the Israelite people. Alternate translation: "the people of Israel" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will not turn away punishment

Yahweh uses two negatives here to emphasize that he would punish them. See how you translated these words in [Amos 1:3](#). (See: **Litotes (p.206)**) (See: **Litotes (p.206)**)

the innocent

This refers to innocent people in general. Alternate translation: "innocent people" (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

the needy

This refers to needy people in general. Alternate translation: "needy people" (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

Amos 2:7

General Information:

General Information:

The word “they” in these verses refers to the people of Israel.

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Israel.

They trample on the heads of the poor as people trample on dust on the ground

How the people of Israel treated the poor is compared to how people step heavily on the ground (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

trample

repeatedly step heavily or roughly

the poor

This refers to poor people in general. Alternate translation: “poor people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

they push the oppressed away

This idiom means they refused to listen when the oppressed people said they were being treated unfairly (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

the oppressed

This refers to oppressed people in general. Alternate translation: “oppressed people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

go in to the same girl

This is a euphemism. Alternate translation: “hav sexual relations with the same girl” (See: **Euphemism (p.182)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.182)**)

Amos 2:8

those who were fined

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “those who they made to pay a penalty” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

Amos 2:9

General Information:

General Information:

The words “them” and “you” in these verses both refer to the people of Israel.

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Israel.

whose height was like the height of cedars; he was strong as the oaks

This is an exaggeration. It describes how tall and strong the Amorite people were and compares them to the tallest and strongest trees in that region. Alternate translation: “who were tall and strong like great trees” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Hyperbole (p.194)**)

cedars

cedar trees

oaks

oak trees

Yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots below

How Yahweh completely destroyed the Amorites is pictured as a tree being destroyed from top to bottom. Alternate translation: “Yet I destroyed them completely” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#)) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

Amos 2:10

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 2:11

General Information:

General Information:

The words “your” and “you” in these verses refer to the people of Israel.

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Israel.

raised up

Alternate translation: “appointed”

Is it not so, people of Israel?

Yahweh asks this question to emphasize what he has said. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “You people of Israel certainly know that what I have said is true!” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 2:12

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 2:13

General Information:

General Information:

The word “you” in these verses refers to the people of Israel.

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Israel.

Look

This alerts the reader to pay attention to what follows. Alternate translation: “Listen” or “Pay attention to what I am about to tell you”

I will crush you as a cart that is full of grain can crush someone

Yahweh compares his judgment on the people of Israel to crushing them with something very heavy. (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

Amos 2:14

The swift & the strong & the mighty

These adjectives refer to people in general. Alternate translation: “Swift people ... strong people ... mighty people” or “The strong person ... the strong person ... the mighty person” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

Amos 2:15

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Yahweh continues his message of judgment on the people of Israel.

The archer will not stand

Here “stand” means to keep one’s place in battle.

the fast runner will not escape

The implied information is that the fast runner will not escape from his enemies. Alternate translation: “the fast runner will be captured” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 2:16

flee naked

This could mean: (1) this is a metonym for “run away without his weapons” or (2) this is meant literally as “run away wearing no clothes” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

in that day

Alternate translation: “at that time”

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated this in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 3

Amos 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Amos continues to use poetic form in this chapter to prophesy the disaster coming to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.246)**)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Rhetorical Questions

This chapter begins with a number of rhetorical questions. The last question provides the reader with some answers: "Yahweh has certainly spoken through his prophets. So listen to them." The answer to these rhetorical questions have the expected response of "no" because they are things that are not expected to happen. The writer is helping the reader to conclude that God uses the prophets to speak his message.

Amos 3:1

Hear this word

Alternate translation: "Hear this message" or "Listen to this message"

that Yahweh has spoken against you & against the whole family

Alternate translation: "this word that Yahweh has spoken about you ... about the whole family" or "Yahweh's message about you ... about the whole family"

you, people of Israel & the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt

These two phrases refer to the same group of people. The people God is speaking to are the descendants of those he had taken out of Egypt.

the whole family

Here "the whole family" represents to the whole nation. The people of Israel were all descendants of Jacob.

Alternate translation: "the whole nation" or "the whole clan" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 3:2

I have chosen only you from all the families of the earth

This implies that they should have obeyed him. This can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: “I have chosen only you from all the families of the earth, so you should have obeyed me” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

all the families of the earth

Here “families” represents nations or people groups. Alternate translation: “all the nations of the earth” or “all the clans on the earth” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Therefore I will punish you for all your sins

It can be stated clearly that they did not obey God. Alternate translation: “But you did not obey me. Therefore I will punish you for all your sins” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 3:3

General Information:

General Information:

Amos uses the questions in verses 3-6 to present examples of things that people already know about what causes things to happen and what are the results of things that happen. (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Will two walk together unless they have agreed?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what must happen in order for two people to walk together. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Two people will walk together only if they have first agreed to walk together." or "You know that two people will walk together only if they have agreed to do that." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 3:4

Will a lion roar in the forest when he has no victim?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what causes a lion to roar. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "A lion will roar in the forest only when he has a victim." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Will a young lion growl from his den if he has caught nothing?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what causes a lion to growl. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "A young lion will growl from his den only if he has caught something." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 3:5

General Information:

General Information:

Amos uses the questions in verses 3-6 to present examples of things that people already know about what causes things to happen and what are the results of things that happen. (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Can a bird fall in a trap on the ground when no bait is set for him?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what causes a bird to fall into a trap. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "A bird can fall into a trap on the ground only when bait has been set for him." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Will a trap spring up from the ground when it has not caught anything?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what causes a trap to spring up. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "A trap will spring up from the ground only when it has caught something." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Will a trap spring up from the ground

This refers to a trap closing. When an animal steps on a trap, the trap closes and the animal cannot get out of it. Alternate translation: "Will a trap close"

Amos 3:6

If a trumpet sounds in a city, will the people not tremble?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what they already know about what happens when a trumpet sounds. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “When the trumpet sounds in the city, the people will tremble.” or “When the trumpet sounds in the city, we expect that people will tremble.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

If a trumpet sounds in a city

The purpose of sounding the trumpet is to warn people that enemies are about to attack the city. Alternate translation: “If someone blows the trumpet in the city to warn the people about an enemy attack” or “If the warning trumpet is blown in the city” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

tremble

The reason for trembling can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: “tremble because they are afraid” or “be afraid of the enemy and tremble” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

If disaster overtakes a city, has Yahweh not sent it?

Amos uses this question to remind the people of what they should already know about what causes a disaster. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “If disaster overtakes a city, Yahweh has sent it.” or “If disaster overtakes a city, we know that Yahweh has sent it.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

If disaster overtakes a city,

Something terrible happening to a city is spoken of as if disaster overtakes it. (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 3:7

Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing unless & the prophets

The relationship between this sentence and the rhetorical questions in [Amos 3:3](#) to [Amos 3:6](#) can be shown with the words "So also." Alternate translation: "So also, the Lord Yahweh will do nothing unless ... the prophets" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing unless he reveals & prophets

This can be stated positively. Alternate translation: "Surely the Lord Yahweh will reveal ... prophets before he does anything" or "So also, the Lord will punish people only if he has revealed his plan to his servants the prophets" (See: **Double Negatives (p.175)**) (See: **Double Negatives (p.175)**)

Amos 3:8

The lion has roared; who will not fear?

Amos uses this question to remind people of what people do when a lion roars. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “The lion has roared; so we know that everyone will be afraid.” or “The lion has roared; so of course everyone will be afraid.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

The Lord Yahweh has spoken; who will not prophesy?

Amos uses this question to emphasize what people should already know about what prophets do when God speaks. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “The Lord Yahweh has spoken; so we know that the prophets will prophesy.” or “The Lord Yahweh has spoken; so of course the prophets will prophesy.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 3:9

Assemble yourselves

This command is to Israel's enemies in Ashdod and Egypt.

see what great confusion is in her

The word “her” refers to the city of Samaria. Cities were often spoken of as if they were women. (See: **Personification (p.223)**) (See: **Personification (p.223)**)

what great confusion is in her

Here “great confusion is in her” refers to people’s fear because of the fighting and rioting there. The word “confusion” can be translated with a verbal phrase to make this meaning explicit. Alternate translation: “how the people in Samaria riot” or “how the people in Samaria fight against one another” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

what oppression is in her

Here “oppression is in her” refers to leaders in Samaria oppressing the people. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **oppress**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “oppress” or “cause to suffer.” Alternate translation: “how the leaders oppress people” or “and how they cause people to suffer” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**)

Amos 3:10

For they do not know how to do right

The word “they” refers to the people of Samaria.

They store up violence and destruction

Here “violence and destruction” represent things they have taken by being violent and destructive. Alternate translation: “They store up things that they have violently stolen from others” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 3:11

Therefore, this is what the Lord Yahweh says

It can be stated clearly who God was saying this to. Alternate translation: "Therefore, this is what the Lord Yahweh says to the people of Israel living in Samaria" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

An enemy will surround the land

Alternate translation: "An enemy army will surround the land"

plunder your fortresses

Alternate translation: "steal all the things in your fortresses"

Amos 3:12

As the shepherd rescues & so will the people of Israel & be rescued

The Lord compares the people of Israel being rescued with an unsuccessful attempt to rescue an animal from a lion. They will not be completely rescued. (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs only, or a piece of an ear

It can be stated clearly that the shepherd tries to rescue the whole animal. Alternate translation: "As the shepherd tries to rescue an animal from the lion's mouth, but is able to save only two legs or a piece of an ear" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

As the shepherd & the lion

Here the phrases "the shepherd" and "the lion" refer to any shepherd or lion. Alternate translation: "As a shepherd ... a lion" (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**) (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**)

they will be left with only the corner of a couch or a piece of a bed

This phrase shows that they will not be completely rescued. Almost all of their possessions will be stolen. This passage in Hebrew is difficult to understand, and some modern versions interpret it differently.

couch

This is a soft chair big enough to lie down on.

Amos 3:13

the house of Jacob

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Jacob’s descendants. They were the people of Israel. Alternate translation: “the descendants of Jacob” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

this is the declaration of the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated the similar phrase “this is Yahweh’s declaration” in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, has declared” or “this is what I, the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 3:14

in the day that I punish the sins of Israel

Alternate translation: “when I punish the sins of Israel”

I will also punish the altars of Bethel

People sinned against God by worshiping false gods at their altars. Here “punish the altars” represents punishing the people by destroying their altars. Alternate translation: “I will also destroy the altars at Bethel” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

The horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “Your enemies will cut off the horns of the altars, and the horns will fall to the ground” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

horns of the altar

People worshiped false gods at their altars. At the top corners of the altars there were pieces of metal shaped like bull horns. These horns were a symbol of the strength of their gods.

Amos 3:15

the winter house with the summer house

Some of the wealthy people had two houses: one that they lived in during the winter and one that they lived in during the summer. This refers to any winter and summer houses. Alternate translation: “the houses they live in during the winter and the houses they live in during the summer” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**) (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**)

The houses of ivory will perish

God speaks of the houses being destroyed as if they were alive and would die. Alternate translation: “The houses of ivory will be destroyed” or “The houses of ivory will collapse” (See: **Personification (p.223)**) (See: **Personification (p.223)**)

The houses of ivory

“the houses that are decorated with ivory.” This refers to houses that had decorations made of ivory on the walls and furniture. Ivory was very expensive, so only the wealthy people had things decorated with ivory.

ivory

the teeth and horns of large animals

the large houses will vanish

“the large houses will exist no more.” Here “vanish” represents being destroyed. Alternate translation: “the large houses will be destroyed” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated this in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4

Amos 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is written in poetic form and is about the people's refusal to listen to Yahweh even as he tries to point them back to himself.

Special concepts in this chapter

Repetition

This chapter contains a repeated sentence: "Yet you have not returned to me —this is Yahweh's declaration." Please make sure this sentence is translated the same way each time to show the repetition. This repetition produces a list of sins Yahweh is mounting against his people. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/peopleofgod\]\]](#))

Amos 4:1

you cows of Bashan, you who are in the mountain of Samaria

Amos speaks to the women of Israel who live in Samaria as if they were well-fed cows. Alternate translation: “you wealthy women who live in the mountains of Samaria, you who are like the well-fed cows of Bashan” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

you who oppress the poor

The phrase “the poor” refers to poor people. Alternate translation: “you who oppress poor people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

you who crush the needy

Hear “crush” is a metaphor that represents treating people badly. The phrase “the needy” refers to people who need help. Alternate translation: “you who treat needy people badly” or “you who hurt needy people” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 4:2

The Lord Yahweh has sworn by his holiness

This means that Yahweh promised that he would do something, and he assured people that he would do what he promised because he is holy.

the days will come on you

The word “you” refers to the wealthy women of Israel who lived in Samaria, but also includes men.

the days will come on you when they will take you away with hooks

A time in the future when bad things will happen to the people is spoken of as if those days will attack the people. The word “they” refers to their enemies. Alternate translation: “There will be a time when your enemies will take you away with hooks” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

they will take you away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and emphasize that the enemy will capture the people like people catch fish. Alternate translation: “they will capture you as people capture animals, and they take you away” or “they will defeat you and cruelly force you to go away with them” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

Amos 4:3

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

God continues to speak to the people of Israel.

breaks in the city wall

places where the enemy had broken down the city wall to enter

you will be thrown out toward Harmon

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “they will throw you out toward Harmon” or “your enemies will force you to leave the city and go toward Harmon” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

Harmon

This is either the name of a place that we do not know, or it refers to Mount Hermon. Some modern versions interpret it in that way. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated these words in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:4

General Information:

General Information:

God gives several commands in verse 4, but he does so to show that he is angry

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

God continues to speak to the people of Israel.

Go to Bethel and sin, to Gilgal and multiply sin

People would go to Bethel and Gilgal to make sacrifices to God, but they kept sinning anyway. God makes these commands to show that he is angry with them for doing these things. These commands can be expressed as statements. Alternate translation: "You go to Bethel to worship, but you sin. You go to Gilgal to worship, but you sin even more" (See: **Irony (p.203)**) (See: **Irony (p.203)**)

bring your sacrifices & every three days

God makes these commands in order to show the people that he is angry that even though they do these things, they continue to sin against him in other ways. These commands can be expressed as statements. Alternate translation: "You bring your sacrifices ... every three days, but it does you no good." (See: **Irony (p.203)**) (See: **Irony (p.203)**)

every three days

This could mean: (1) on the third day or (2) every third day. Some versions have "every three years," because the Israelites were supposed to bring their tithes to God once every three years.

Amos 4:5

Offer a thanksgiving sacrifice & proclaim freewill offerings; announce them, for this pleases

God makes these commands in order to show the people that even though they do these things, he is angry because they continue to sin against him in other ways. Use the form in your language that shows that they will do these things no matter what Yahweh says, but these things will do them no good. (See: **Irony (p.203)**) (See: **Irony (p.203)**)

announce them

Alternate translation: "boast about them"

for this pleases you, you people of Israel

Yahweh rebukes them for being proud about their offerings and sacrifices. They think that God should be pleased with them, but he is not. Alternate translation: "for this pleases you, you people of Israel. But it does not please me" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

this is the declaration of the Lord Yahweh

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated the similar phrase "this is Yahweh's declaration" in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: "this is what the Lord Yahweh declares" or "this is what I, the Lord Yahweh, have declared" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:6

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

God continues to speak to the people of Israel.

I gave you cleanness of teeth

Here having clean teeth represents having no food in the mouth to make the teeth dirty. Alternate translation: "I caused you to starve" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

lack of bread

Giving them "lack of bread" represents causing them to lack bread, and "bread" represents food in general. Alternate translation: "I caused you not to have enough food" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

you have not returned to me

Returning to God represents submitting again to him. Alternate translation: "you have not submitted again to me" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

this is Yahweh's declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated these words in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: "this is what Yahweh has declared" or "this is what I, Yahweh, have declared" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:7

I also withheld rain from you

Alternate translation: "I prevented the rain from falling on your crops"

when there were still three months to the harvest

It can be stated clearly that the people needed the rain. Alternate translation: "when there were still three months to the harvest and your crops needed the rain" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

One piece of land was rained on

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. The phrase "One piece of land" represents any piece of land." Alternate translation: "It rained on one piece of land" or "It rained on some pieces of land" (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

the piece of land where it did not rain

This refers to any piece of land where it did not rain. Alternate translation: "the pieces of land where it did not rain" (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**) (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**)

Amos 4:8

Two or three cities staggered

Here “cities” represents the people of those cities. Alternate translation: “The people of two or three cities staggered” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

you have not returned to me

Returning to God represents submitting again to him. See how you translated this in [Amos 4:6](#). Alternate translation: “you have not submitted again to me” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated these words in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:9

I afflicted you with blight and mildew

Here “afflicted you” represents afflicting their crops. Alternate translation: “I afflicted your crops with blight and mildew” or “I destroyed your crops with blight and mildew” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

blight

This is a disease that dries and kills plants. It is caused by the hot wind from the desert.

mildew

This is another disease that kills plants.

Amos 4:10

I sent a plague on you as on Egypt

Alternate translation: "I sent a plague on you as I did on Egypt" or "I sent a plague on you as I sent plagues on Egypt"

I sent a plague on you

Alternate translation: "I caused terrible things to happen to you"

I killed your young men with the sword

Here "the sword" represents battle. God killed them by sending enemies to fight against them. Alternate translation: "I made your enemies kill your men in battle" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

carried away your horses

God speaks of causing the enemies to steal their horses as if he carried the horses away. Alternate translation: "I made your enemies take away your horses" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

made the stench of your camp come up to your nostrils

A stench is a bad smell. The stench coming up to their nostrils represents them smelling something terrible. It can be stated clearly that the smell was from the dead bodies of those who were killed. Alternate translation: "I made you smell the terrible odor of the dead bodies in your camp" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

you have not returned to me

Returning to God represents submitting again to him. See how you translated this in [Amos 4:6](#). Alternate translation: "you have not submitted again to me" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

this is Yahweh's declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated these words in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: "this is what Yahweh has declared" or "this is what I, Yahweh, have declared" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:11

You were like a burning stick snatched out of the fire

God speaks of those who survived the plague and war as if they were a burning stick that someone pulled out of a fire. Alternate translation: "Some of you survived, like a burning stick that someone pulls out of a fire" (See: [[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor]] and [[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive]]) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 4:12

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

God continues to speak to the people of Israel.

prepare to meet your God

God says this to warn the people of Israel that he will judge them. Alternate translation: “prepare to meet me, your God” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-123person\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 4:13

he who forms the mountains & reveals his thoughts & is his name

It is not clear whether Amos is speaking about God, or God is speaking about himself. If God is speaking about himself, it can be translated with the words "I" and "me." Alternate translation: "I who form the mountains ... reveal my thoughts ... is my name" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

makes the morning darkness

This could mean: (1) God causes the day to be very dark with thick clouds. Alternate translation: "makes the morning dark" or (2) God causes time to pass, so every day becomes night. Alternate translation: "makes morning and evening"

treads on the high places of the earth

God ruling over all the earth is spoken of as if he walks on the highest places of the earth. Alternate translation: "rules over all the earth" or "rules over even the highest places of the earth" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Yahweh, God of hosts, is his name

By declaring his full name, Yahweh is declaring his power and authority to do these things. Your language may have a way for people to do this.

Amos 5

Amos 5 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter continues to be written in a poetic format and foretells the destruction of the kingdom of Israel.

Special concepts in this chapter

Place Names

This chapter refers to various places in land of Israel (i.e. Gilgal, Bethel, Beersheba). Normally these places have good connotations, but here they are referred to negatively. This is most likely because these cities became known for their idol worship. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

City gate

The “city gate” is mentioned several times. This was a place where people would go with legal and financial issues. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 5:1

house of Israel

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Israel's descendants.
Alternate translation: “you people of Israel” or “you Israelite people group” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 5:2

The virgin Israel has fallen & no one to raise her up

The phrase “The virgin Israel” represents the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel being destroyed and having no other nation to help them become strong again is spoken of as if it were a young woman who has fallen and has no one to raise her up. Alternate translation: “The nation of Israel is like a woman who has fallen ... no one to help her get up” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

she is forsaken on her land

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “People have forsaken her” or “they have abandoned her” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

Amos 5:3

The city that went out with a thousand & the one that went out with a hundred

These phrases refer to any cities that sent out large numbers of soldiers. Alternate translation: “Cities that went out with a thousand ... cities that went out with a hundred” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**) (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.186)**)

The city that went out with a thousand will have a hundred left

The phrases “a thousand” and “a hundred” refer to a thousand soldiers and a hundred soldiers. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

The city that went out with a thousand

“The city that went out” represents the soldiers of that city going out. It can be stated clearly why they went out. Alternate translation: “The city out of which a thousand soldiers went to fight” or “The city that sent out a thousand soldiers to fight” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

will have a hundred left

“will have a hundred soldiers who have not been killed” or “will have only a hundred soldiers still alive.” Here being “left” refers to not being killed by the enemy.

Amos 5:4

Seek me

Here "Seek me" represents asking God for help. Alternate translation: "Ask me for help" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 5:5

Do not seek Bethel

Here “seek Bethel” represents going to Bethel to ask for help. Alternate translation: “Do not go to Bethel to ask for help” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

nor enter Gilgal

Alternate translation: “and do not enter Gilgal”

For Gilgal will surely go into captivity

Here “Gilgal” represents the people of Gilgal, and going into captivity refers to being captured and taken away. Alternate translation: “For the people of Gilgal will surely be captured and taken away” or “For your enemies will surely capture the people of Gilgal and take them away” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Bethel will become nothing

Here “become nothing” represents being destroyed. Alternate translation: “Bethel will be completely destroyed” or “enemies will completely destroy Bethel” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 5:6

Seek Yahweh

Here “Seek Yahweh” represents asking him for help. Alternate translation: “Ask Yahweh for help” or “Ask me, Yahweh, for help” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

he will break out like fire

Here “break out like a fire” represents destroying things as fire destroys things. Alternate translation: “he will become like a fire that breaks out suddenly and destroys everything” or “he will destroy everything like a fire” (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

the house of Joseph

This phrase is a metonym for the descendants of Joseph. Here it represents the northern kingdom of Israel, whose two largest tribes were the descendants of Joseph. Alternate translation: “the descendants of Joseph” or “Israel” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

It will devour

The word “it” refers to the fire, and “devour” represents destroying everything. God destroying everything is spoken of as if a fire were to destroy everything. Alternate translation: “It will destroy everything” or “He will destroy everything” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

there will be no one to quench it

Alternate translation: “there will no one to stop it” or “there will be no one to stop him from destroying everything”

Amos 5:7

turn justice into a bitter thing

Here “a bitter thing” represents actions that harm people, and “turn justice into a bitter thing” represents harming people rather than doing for them what is just. Alternate translation: “say that they are doing what is just, but instead they harm people” or “refuse to do what is just and harm people instead” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

throw righteousness down to the ground

This represents treating righteousness as if it were worthless. Alternate translation: “treat righteousness as though it were as unimportant as dirt” or “you despise what is righteous” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 5:8

the Pleiades and Orion

People saw patterns in the stars in the sky and gave names to them. These are two of those patterns. Alternate translation: “the stars” or “the groups of stars” (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**)

he turns darkness into the morning & day dark with night

“he makes the night become morning, and he makes the day become night.” This refers to causing the times of the day.

calls for the waters & on the surface of the earth

This represents God causing the sea water to fall on the earth as rain. Alternate translation: “he takes the waters of the sea and makes them rain down on the surface of the earth” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Yahweh is his name!

By declaring his name, Yahweh is declaring his power and authority to do these things.

Amos 5:9

He brings sudden destruction on the strong

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **destruction**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “destroy.” The phrase “the strong” refers to strong people, specifically soldiers. Alternate translation: “He suddenly destroys the strong people” or “He suddenly destroys the soldiers” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**)

so that destruction comes on the fortresses

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **destruction**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “destroy.” Alternate translation: “so that the fortresses are destroyed” or “and he destroys the fortresses” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.165)**)

Amos 5:10

They hate anyone

Alternate translation: "The people of Israel hate anyone"

Amos 5:11

worked stone

Alternate translation: "cut stones" or "stones that people have cut"

you will not drink their wine

The word "their" refers to the vineyards. This may imply that no one will make the wine, or even that there will not be enough good grapes to make wine. Alternate translation: "you will not drink the wine that is made from the grapes in your vineyards" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 5:12

afflict the just, take bribes, and turn aside the needy in the city gate

This is a list of some of their sins.

the just

The word “just” is a nominal adjective that refers to just people. Alternate translation: “just people” or “righteous people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

take bribes

Alternate translation: “let people pay you to do bad things” or “let people pay you to lie about people”

turn aside the needy in the city gate

Here “turn aside the needy” represents telling the needy people to leave. It can be made clear why the needy were at the city gate. Alternate translation: “do not allow poor people to bring their cases to the judges in the city gate” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

the needy

The word “needy” is a nominal adjective that refers to people who are in need. Alternate translation: “people in need” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

Amos 5:13

any prudent person is silent

Those who do not want the evil people to harm them will not speak out against the evil deeds. Alternate translation: “wise people do not speak about the evil things people are doing”

for it is an evil time

Here “an evil time” represents a time when people are evil and do evil deeds. Alternate translation: “for it is a time when people are evil” or “for people do evil things” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 5:14

Seek good and not evil

Here “Seek good” represents choosing to do what good. “Good” and “evil” represent good actions and evil actions. Alternate translation: “Choose to do what is good and not what is evil” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p. 210)**)

Amos 5:15

Hate evil, love good

"Hate evil actions, and love good actions." Here "good" and "evil" represent good actions and evil actions.

establish justice in the city gate

Here "establish justice" represents making sure that justice is done. Alternate translation: "make sure that justice is done in the city gates" or "make sure that the judges make just decisions in the city gates" (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

in the city gate

City gates were where business transactions occurred and judgments were made, because city walls were thick enough to have gateways that produced cool shade from the hot sun Alternate translation: "in your courts" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

the remnant of Joseph

Here "remnant" refers to people who are still living in Israel after the others are killed or taken away as captives. Here "Joseph" represents the northern kingdom of Israel, whose two largest tribes were the descendants of Joseph. See how you translated "house of Joseph" in [Amos 5:6](#). Alternate translation: "the descendants of Joseph who are still alive" or "those of Israel who survive" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 5:16

this is what Yahweh says, the God of hosts, the Lord

Alternate translation: "this is what Yahweh, the God of hosts, the Lord says"

Wailing will be in all the squares

Alternate translation: "People will wail in all the town squares"

Wailing

long, loud, sad cries

the squares

broad open places in the town where people gather

the mourners to wail

The phrase "they will call" is understood from the beginning of the sentence. Alternate translation: "they will call the mourners to wail" (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**)

Amos 5:17

I will pass through your midst

God speaks of punishing the people as if he were to come and punish them while walking through the group of them. Alternate translation: "I will come and punish you" or "I will punish you"

Amos 5:18

Why do you long for the day of Yahweh?

God uses this question to rebuke the people for saying that they want the day of Yahweh to be soon. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "You long for the day of Yahweh." or "You should not long for the day of Yahweh!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

It will be darkness and not light

Here "darkness" represents a time when disasters happen, and "light" represents a time when good things happen. Alternate translation: "It will be a time of darkness and disaster, not of light and blessing" or "On that day there will be disasters, not blessings" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 5:19

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 5:20

Will not the day of Yahweh be darkness and not light?

This question emphasizes that bad things will happen then. It can be expressed as a statement. Alternate translation: "The day of Yahweh will certainly be darkness and not light!" or "Bad things, not good things, will certainly happen on the day of Yahweh!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Gloom and no brightness?

The words "Will not the day of Yahweh be" is understood from the previous sentence. Like the previous question, it emphasizes that terrible things, not good things, will happen on the day of Yahweh. It can be expressed as a statement. Alternate translation: "It will be a time of when terrible things, not good things, will happen. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 5:21

I hate, I despise your festivals

The word “despise” is a strong word for “hate.” Together the two words emphasize the intensity of Yahweh’s hatred for their religious festivals. Alternate translation: “I hate your festivals very much” (See: **Doublet (p.178)**) (See: **Doublet (p.178)**)

I take no delight in your solemn assemblies

Alternate translation: “Your solemn assemblies do not please me at all”

Amos 5:22

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 5:23

Remove from me the noise of your songs

This speaks of the noise of songs as if it could be put somewhere else. It represents stopping singing. Alternate translation: "Stop singing your noisy songs" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

noise

unpleasant sounds

Amos 5:24

let justice flow like water, and righteousness like a constantly flowing stream

This represents causing there to be much justice and righteous. Alternate translation: "let there be so much justice that it is like flowing water, and let there be so much righteousness that it is like a constantly flowing stream" or "let justice abound like a flood, and let righteousness abound like a stream that never stops" (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

Amos 5:25

Did you bring me sacrifices & Israel?

This could mean: (1) God uses this question to rebuke them because they did not offer sacrifices. Alternate translation: "You did not bring me sacrifices ... Israel." or (2) God uses this question to remind them that the sacrifices were not the most important part about their relationship. Alternate translation: "You did not have to bring me sacrifices ... Israel." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Did you bring

God speaks as though the Israelites he is speaking to were part of the group that wandered in the wilderness. Alternate translation: "Did your ancestors bring" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

house of Israel

The word "house" is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Israel's descendants. See how you translated it in [Amos 5:1](#). Alternate translation: "you people of Israel" or "you Israelite people group" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 5:26

You have lifted up the images of Sikkuth & and Kaiwan

Here “lifted up the images” represents worshiping them. Alternate translation: “You have worshiped the images of Sikkuth ... and Kaiwan” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Sikkuth & Kaiwan

These are the names of two false gods. The people had made images to represent them. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Kaiwan

Some versions write this as “Kiyyun.”

Amos 5:27

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 6

Amos 6 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter continues to be written in poetic style except for verses 9-10, which are in prose. These two verses contain many interesting features.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Verses 9-10 will probably be difficult to translate because the situation is vague and details don't appear to align easily. It is appropriate to translate these verses with some ambiguity remaining. It may be helpful to read many different versions prior to translating these verses.

Amos 6:1

who are at ease

“who feel safe.” The people are comfortable and not concerned that God will judge them.

the notable men of the best of the nations

“the most important men of this great nation.” Yahweh may be using irony to describe how these men think of themselves. Alternate translation: “the men who think they are the most important people in the best nation” (See: **Irony (p.203)**) (See: **Irony (p.203)**)

the house of Israel comes

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Israel's descendants. Alternate translation: “the Israelites come” or “the Israelite people group comes” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

comes for help

Here “comes” can be stated as “goes.” Alternate translation: “goes for help” (See: **Go and Come (p.188)**) (See: **Go and Come (p.188)**)

Amos 6:2

Kalneh

This is the name of a city. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Are they better than your two kingdoms?

The notable men use this question to emphasize that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are better than those other kingdoms. Alternate translation: "Your two kingdoms are better than they are." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Is their border larger than your border?

The notable men use this question to emphasize that their kingdoms are larger than those other kingdoms. Alternate translation: "Their border is smaller than yours." or "Those countries are smaller than Judah and Samaria." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 6:3

to those who put off the day of disaster

Refusing to believe that Yahweh will cause disaster is spoken of as if the “day of disaster” were an object the people could put far from themselves. Alternate translation: “to those who refuse to believe that I will cause them to experience disaster” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

and make the throne of violence come near

Here “throne” is a metonym that represents reign or rule. The people doing evil things, which causes Yahweh to bring disaster on them, is spoken of as if they were causing “violence” to rule them. Alternate translation: “but who are actually causing me to send violent people to destroy you” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 6:4

lie & lounge

Israelites at that time usually ate while sitting on a floor cloth or a simple seat.

beds of ivory

Alternate translation: “beds decorated with ivory” or “costly beds”

ivory

a white substance made from the teeth and horns of large animals (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**)

lounge

lie around like lazy people

couches

soft seats large enough to lie down on

Amos 6:5

they improvise on instruments

This could mean: (1) they invent new songs and ways of playing the instruments or (2) they invent new instruments.

Amos 6:6

drink wine from bowls

This implies that they drink a lot of wine because they drink it from a large bowl rather than a regular wine cup. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

they do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph

Here “Joseph” represents his descendants. Alternate translation: “they do not grieve about the descendants of Joseph whom enemies will soon destroy” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 6:7

they will now go into exile with the first exiles

Alternate translation: "they will be among the first ones to go into exile" or "I will send them into exile first"

the feasts of those who lounge about will pass away

Alternate translation: "there will be no more feasts for people to lie around at ease"

Amos 6:8

this is the declaration of the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated this in [Amos 3:13](#). Alternate translation: “this is what the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, has declared” or “this is what I, the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

I detest the pride of Jacob

Here “Jacob” represents his descendants. Alternate translation: “I hate the descendants of Jacob because they have become arrogant” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I hate his fortresses

It is implied that Yahweh hates the fortresses because the people believed the fortresses would keep them safe. Alternate translation: “I hate the people of Israel because they trust in their fortresses, not in me, to protect them” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 6:9

General Information:

General Information:

In 6:9-10 Amos describes a hypothetical situation of what it will be like when Yahweh hands the people of Israel over to their enemies. (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.198)**) (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.198)**)

if there are ten men left in one house, they will all die

This seems to imply that something terrible is happening, and these ten men go into the house to hide. Alternate translation: "if ten men are hiding inside of a house, they will all still die" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 6:10

a man's relative comes to take their bodies up—the one who is to cremate them after bringing the corpses out of the house—if he says to the person in the house, "Is & you?"

The meaning of these words is not clear. This could mean: (1) the "man's relative" is the one who will "take their bodies up" and "cremate ... the corpses," and he speaks to a person who hid in the house after the ten family members died or (2) the "man's relative" who "comes to take their bodies up" is a different person from "the one who is to cremate ... the corpses," and they talk to each other in the house. Alternate translation: "a man's relative comes to take their bodies up, and the one who will burn the corpses after they have been brought out of the house is with him—if while they are in the house the relative says to the burner of the corpses, 'Is ... you?'"

cremate

to burn a dead body

bringing the corpses

Alternate translation: "bringing the dead bodies"

Then he will say, "Be quiet, for we must not mention Yahweh's name."

The meaning of this is not clear. It seems to imply that the one who asked the question is afraid the one answering will mention Yahweh's name carelessly. If he does this, it may draw Yahweh's attention to them, and he may kill them too. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 6:11

look

Alternate translation: “listen” or “pay attention”

the big house will be smashed to pieces, and the little house to bits

These two phrases share similar meanings. The contrast between “the big house” and “the little house” means that this refers to all houses. Alternate translation: “all the houses will be smashed into small pieces” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

the big house will be smashed to pieces

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the enemy will smash the big house to pieces” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

to pieces & to bits

You can use the same word for both of these phrases.

the little house to bits

This can be stated with the understood information included. Alternate translation: “enemies will smash the little house to bits” (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**)

Amos 6:12

General Information:

General Information:

Amos uses two rhetorical questions to draw attention to the rebuke that follows.

Do horses run on the rocky cliffs?

It is impossible for a horse to run on rocky cliffs without getting hurt. Amos uses this rhetorical question to rebuke them for their actions. Alternate translation: "Horses do not run on rocky cliffs." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Does one plow there with oxen?

One does not plow on rocky ground. Amos uses this rhetorical question to rebuke them for their actions. Alternate translation: "A person does not plow with oxen on rocky ground." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Yet you have turned justice into poison

Distorting what is just is spoken of as if the leaders "turned justice into poison." Alternate translation: "Yet you distort what is just" or "But you make laws that hurt innocent people" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

the fruit of righteousness into bitterness

This means basically the same thing as the first part of the sentence. Distorting what is right is spoken of as if righteousness were a sweet fruit that the people made bitter tasting. Alternate translation: "you distort what is right" or "you punish those who do what is right" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

Amos 6:13

Lo Debar & Karnaim

These are names of towns. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Have we not taken Karnaim by our own strength?

The people use a question to emphasize that they believe they captured a city because of their own power.
Alternate translation: "We captured Karnaim by our own power!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 6:14

look

Alternate translation: “listen” or “pay attention”

this is the declaration of the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated this in [Amos 3:13](#). Alternate translation: “this is what the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, has declared” or “this is what I, the Lord Yahweh, the God of hosts, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

from Lebo Hamath to the brook of the Arabah

Here “Lebo Hamath” represents the northern border of Israel, and “brook of the Arabah” represents the southern border. Alternate translation: “from the northern border of your nation to the southern border” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

brook

a small river that flows only during the wet season

Amos 7

Amos 7 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is mainly written as a narrative about the prophet Amos interacting with Yahweh. Yahweh presents three different scenarios of judgment before Amos who pleads with God and he does not carry out His judgment. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/judge\]\]](#))

Special concepts in this chapter

Reported speech

In the latter part of the chapter, it is important to follow the conversation carefully to understand who is speaking. There are some instances of “reported speech.” (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.173)**)

Amos 7:1

Look & look

The writer is telling the reader that he is about to say something surprising. Your language may have a way of doing this.

locust

See how you translated this in [Amos 4:9](#).

after the king's harvest

Alternate translation: "after the king takes his share from the harvest"

Amos 7:2

please forgive

The words “your people” or “us” are understood. Alternate translation: “please forgive your people” or “please forgive us” (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**)

how will Jacob survive? For he is so small.

Here “Jacob” represents his descendants the Israelites. Alternate translation: “how will we Israelites survive? We are so small and weak!” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:3

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 7:4

Look

The writer is telling the reader that something surprising is about to happen. Your language may have a way of doing this.

the Lord Yahweh called on fire to judge

Alternate translation: “the Lord Yahweh used burning fire to punish the people”

Amos 7:5

how will Jacob survive? For he is so small.

Here “Jacob” represents his descendants the Israelites. See how you translated this in [Amos 7:2](#). Alternate translation: “how will the Israelites survive? We are so small and weak!” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:6

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 7:7

plumb line

thin rope with a weight at one end used in building to make sure walls stand straight up and down

Amos 7:8

what do you see?

Yahweh uses a question to teach Amos. Alternate translation: “tell me what you see.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p. 228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

I will put a plumb line among my people Israel

Judging the people and determining they are wicked is spoken of as if the Israelites were a wall, and Yahweh determines the wall is not straight by using a plumb line. Alternate translation: “my people Israel are wicked. They are like a wall that is not straight up and down” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 7:9

The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword

Here “sword” represents an army. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “I will send an army to attack the house of Jeroboam, and the army will destroy the high places of Isaac and the sanctuaries of Israel” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Isaac & Israel

Both of these represent the people of Israel. Alternate translation: “the descendants of Isaac ... the people of Israel” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

the house of Jeroboam

Here “house” represents “family.” Translate “Jeroboam” as you did in [Amos 1:1](#). Alternate translation: “Jeroboam and his family” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:10

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel

This could mean: (1) Amaziah was the only priest at Bethel or (2) Amaziah was the leader of the priests at Bethel.

Amaziah

This is the name of a man. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.190)**)

Amos has conspired against you in the middle of the house of Israel

Here “house” represents “people.” Alternate translation: “Amos is right here among the Israelites, and he is planning to do bad things to you” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

The land cannot bear all his words

Here “land” represents “people.” Disrupting the peace is spoken of as if Amos’s words were a heavy object that the land could not carry. Alternate translation: “What he is saying disturb the peace among the people” or “His message will cause trouble among the people” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:11

Jeroboam will die by the sword

Here "sword" represents the enemies. Alternate translation: "Enemies will kill Jeroboam" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)
(See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:12

there eat bread and prophesy

Here "eat bread" is an idiom that means to earn money or make a living for doing something. Alternate translation: "see if you can get the people there to pay you for prophesying" or "prophesy there and let them provide you with food" (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

Amos 7:13

for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal house

Here "king's sanctuary" and "royal house" refer to the same place. Alternate translation: "this is where the national temple is, the place where the king worships" (See: **Doublet (p.178)**) (See: **Doublet (p.178)**)

Amos 7:14

herdsman

This here probably means “one who takes care of sheep” since he is called a “shepherd” in [Amos 1:1](#).

sycamore fig trees

Sycamores are broad trees that grow up to 15 meters tall. Alternate translation: “fig trees” (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.238)**)

Amos 7:15

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 7:16

Now

Here the word “now” is used to draw attention to the important point that follows.

do not speak against the house of Isaac

Here “house” represents the family or descendants of Isaac. Alternate translation: “do not speak against the descendants of Isaac” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 7:17

your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword

Here “sword” represents enemies. Alternate translation: “enemies will kill your sons and daughters” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

your land will be measured and divided up

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “other people will take your land and divide it up among themselves” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

an unclean land

A land full of people that are unacceptable to God is spoken of as if the land were physically unclean. Here it means a land other than Israel. Alternate translation: “a foreign land” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 8

Amos 8 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is written in poetic form and it shows the way Yahweh's people are sinning and how he is going to respond. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/peopleofgod\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#))

Important figures of speech in this chapter

“This is the declaration of Yahweh”

This phrase is used to introduce prophecy. It highlights what God is proclaiming. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.246)**)

Amos 8:1

Look, a basket of summer fruit!

The word “look” here shows that Amos saw something interesting. Alternate translation: “I saw a basket of summer fruit!”

summer fruit

Alternate translation: “ripe fruit”

Amos 8:2

What do you see, Amos?

Yahweh uses a question to teach Amos. Alternate translation: "Tell me what you see, Amos." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

Amos 8:3

in that day

Alternate translation: "at that time"

Silence!

This could mean: (1) Yahweh is to telling the people to be silent as they hear about the severity of his punishment or (2) the people will be silent because of their grief after Yahweh's punishment.

Amos 8:4

Listen to this

Amos is speaking to the wealthy merchants who harm those who are poor.

you who trample the needy and remove the poor of the land

This can be restated to remove the nominal adjectives “the needy” and “the poor.” Alternate translation: “you who trample those who are in need and remove those in the land that are poor” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.218)**)

you who trample

Harming people is spoken of as if it were stomping on people. Alternate translation: “you who harm” or “you who oppress” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 8:5

They say, “When will the new moon be over, so we can sell grain again? When will the Sabbath day be over, so that we can sell wheat?”

The merchants use these questions to emphasize that they want to start selling their items again. This can be stated as an indirect quotation. Alternate translation: “They are always asking when the new moon will be over or when the Sabbath will be over so that they can sell their grain and wheat again.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-quotations\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

We will make the measure small and increase the price, as we cheat with false scales

The merchants would use false scales that showed that the amount of grain they were giving was greater than it really was and that the weight of the payment was less than it really was.

Amos 8:6

the needy for a pair of sandals

The words “and buy” are understood. Alternate translation: “buy the needy for a pair of sandals” (See: **Ellipsis (p. 180)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**)

Amos 8:7

Yahweh has sworn by the pride of Jacob

Here “pride of Jacob” is a title for Yahweh. Also “Jacob” represents his descendants, the Israelites. Alternate translation: “Yahweh has sworn by himself, saying” or “Yahweh, of whom the Israelites are so proud, has sworn” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 8:8

Will not the land quake for this, and every one who lives in it mourn?

Amos uses a question to emphasize that these things will certainly happen. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will cause the land to shake, and every one who lives in it will mourn." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

All of it will rise up like the Nile River & like the river of Egypt

Amos compares the rising and sinking of the waters of the Nile River to how Yahweh will cause the land to shake when he judges the people. (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

river of Egypt

This is another name for the Nile River.

Amos 8:9

It will come in that day

Alternate translation: "It will happen at that time"

Amos 8:10

have baldness on every head

A person shaves his head to show that he is grieving. Alternate translation: “cause you all to shave your heads” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.234)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.234)**)

like mourning for an only son

It is understood that the only son has died. Alternate translation: “like mourning for an only son who has died” (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.180)**)

a bitter day to its end

Terrible and sad things happening during a day is spoken of as if the day had a bitter taste. Alternate translation: “everything that happens at that time will cause you great sorrow” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 8:11

the days are coming

This speaks of a future time as if “days are coming.” Alternate translation: “there will be a time” or “in the future” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

when I will send a famine in the land & but for hearing the words of Yahweh

Yahweh refusing to give messages when the people want to hear from him is spoken of as if there would be a famine of his words. Alternate translation: “when I will cause something like a famine in the land ... but for hearing the words of Yahweh” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

the words of Yahweh

This can be stated in first person. Alternate translation: “words from me, Yahweh” or “my messages” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Amos 8:12

They will stagger from sea to sea; they will run from the north to the east to seek the word of Yahweh

Here "sea to sea" and "the north to the east" represent all of the land of Israel. Alternate translation: "They will wander here and there and search all over for the word of Yahweh" (See: **Merism (p.208)**) (See: **Merism (p.208)**)

from sea to sea

This implies the Dead Sea in the south and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

Amos 8:13

In that day

Alternate translation: "At that time"

faint

to lose all strength

Amos 8:14

by the sin of Samaria

Here "sin" represents the false god the people worship in Samaria. Alternate translation: "by the false god of Samaria" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

As your god lives, Dan

This is a way of making a solemn oath. The people declare that they believe the god of Dan is certainly alive to emphasize that they will certainly do what they promise to do.

As the way to Beersheba exists

This is probably a reference to the roads that pilgrims would take to Beersheba in order to worship idols there. Again, this is a way of making a solemn oath. They state that the way to Beersheba certainly exists in order to emphasize that they will certainly do what they promise to do.

they will fall

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "they will die" (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

Amos 9

Amos 9 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is written in poetic form and continues to show the awesome and terrible judgment of Yahweh on his people. In verse 11, the writer writes about the forgiveness and mercy of God on the kingdom of Israel. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/judge\]\]](#), [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/peopleofgod\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/forgive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/mercy\]\]](#))

Special concepts in this chapter

“The declaration of Yahweh”

This phrase is used to introduce prophecy. It highlights what God is proclaiming. Try to remain consistent in translating this phrase throughout the book. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.246)**)

Amos 9:1

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh shows Amos another vision.

Strike the tops & Break them

It is uncertain to whom Yahweh is speaking these commands.

Strike the tops of the pillars so that the foundations will shake

It is implied that Yahweh is speaking about the pillars and foundations of a temple. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

so that the foundations will shake

Here “foundations” represents the whole temple. Alternate translation: “so that the whole temple will shake” (See: **Synecdoche (p.236)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.236)**)

Break them in pieces on all of their heads

Here “heads” represents the whole person. Alternate translation: “Break the pillars so that the temple falls on all of the people and kills them” (See: **Synecdoche (p.236)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.236)**)

I will kill the last of them with the sword

Here “sword” represents an army attacking with their weapons. Alternate translation: “I will send an enemy army to kill the rest of them” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 9:2

Though they dig into Sheol, there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to heaven, there I will bring them down

Yahweh uses an exaggerated image of people fleeing to Sheol or heaven to try to escape being killed. Here “Sheol” and “heaven” are a merism that represents all places. Alternate translation: “Even if they were to flee to Sheol or to heaven, they would not be able to escape me” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#)) (See: **Hyperbole (p.194)**)

there my hand will take them

Here “hand” represents Yahweh’s power. Alternate translation: “I will pull them up from there” (See: **Metonymy (p. 216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 9:3

Though they hide on the top of Carmel & Though they are hidden from my sight in the bottom of the sea

Yahweh gives an exaggerated image of the people fleeing to the top of mount Carmel or to the bottom of the sea to escape being killed. Here "top of Carmel" and "bottom of the sea" are a merism that represents all places. Alternate translation: "Even if they were to hide on the top of Carmel ... Even if they tried to go the bottom sea, thinking that I could not see them" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#)) (See: **Hyperbole (p.194)**)

serpent

an unknown fierce sea animal, not the snake in the garden of Eden and not a common snake

Amos 9:4

Though they go into captivity, driven by their enemies before them

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “Though enemies capture them and force them to go to a foreign land” (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

there will I give orders to the sword, and it will kill them

Here “sword” represents their enemies. Alternate translation: “there I will cause their enemies to kill them” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will keep my eyes on them for harm and not for good

Here “eyes” represents seeing. The phrase “keep my eyes on them” is an idiom that means to watch closely. Alternate translation: “I will watch closely and make sure only bad things happen to them and not good things” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 9:5

all of it will rise up like the River, and sink again like the river of Egypt

Here “the River” and “river of Egypt” both refer to the Nile river. Yahweh causing the land to shake violently is compared to the waters of the Nile river rising and sinking. (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

Amos 9:6

he who builds his steps in the heavens

These are probably the steps that ancient people imagined led up to God's palace in the heavens. However, some modern versions wish to read a different Hebrew word meaning "palace" or "rooms." Here "his steps" probably is a metonym for God's palace. (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

has established his vault over the earth

Here "vault" refers to the sky which biblical writers described as being a dome over the earth. Alternate translation: "he sets the sky over the earth" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)**)

He calls for the waters of the sea & on the surface of the earth

This represents God causing the sea water to fall on the earth as rain. See how you translated this in [Amos 5:8](#). Alternate translation: "He takes the waters of the sea and makes them rain down on the surface of the earth" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Yahweh is his name

By declaring his name, Yahweh is declaring his power and authority to do these things. See how you translated this in [Amos 5:8](#).

Amos 9:7

Are you not like the people of Cush to me, & Israel—this & declaration—did I not bring up Israel & the Philistines & the Arameans from Kir?

Yahweh uses a question to emphasize that the people of Israel are no more special to him than the people of Cush, the Philistines, and the Arameans. Alternate translation: "You people of Israel, you are certainly no more important to me than the people of Cush—this ... declaration—I brought up Israel ... the Philistines ... the Arameans from Kir." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.228)**)

this is Yahweh's declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated these words in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: "this is what Yahweh has declared" or "this is what I, Yahweh, have declared" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

Kir

See how you translated the name of this place in [Amos 1:5](#).

Amos 9:8

the eyes of the Lord Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom

Here “eyes” represents seeing. Also, Yahweh speaks of himself in third person. Alternate translation: “I, the Lord Yahweh, see that the people of this kingdom are very sinful” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-123person\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will destroy it from the face of the earth

The idiom “from the face of the earth” means “completely.” Alternate translation: “I will completely destroy this kingdom” (See: **Idiom (p.201)**) (See: **Idiom (p.201)**)

the house of Jacob

Here “house” represents a family. And, “Jacob” represents his descendants. Alternate translation: “the descendants of Jacob” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 9:9

the house of Israel

Here “house” represents the people. Alternate translation: “the people of Israel” (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

I will shake the house of Israel & as one shakes grain in a sieve, so that not the smallest stone will fall to the ground

The picture here is of grain falling through the sieve and stones being kept out. The idea is that Yahweh will remove all of the sinful people from Israel. (See: **Simile (p.231)**) (See: **Simile (p.231)**)

sieve

a surface with many small holes that allow small things to pass through and keep larger things from passing through

Amos 9:10

All the sinners of my people will die by the sword

Here "sword" represents their enemies. Alternate translation: "Enemies will kill all the sinners of my people" (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Disaster will not overtake or meet us

Experiencing disaster is spoken of as disaster could overtake or meet someone. Alternate translation: "We will not experience disaster" or "Bad things will not happen to us" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

Amos 9:11

In that day

Alternate translation: "At that time"

I will raise up the tent of David that has fallen

Causing the people of Israel to be great again is spoken of as if David's kingdom were a tent that fell down and Yahweh will set it back up. Alternate translation: "David's kingdom will be like tent that has fallen down, but I will raise it back up again" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

close up its breaches

Alternate translation: "I will repair its walls"

I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old

Alternate translation: "I will rebuild its ruins and make it strong like it was long ago"

breaches

parts of a wall that have fallen down

Amos 9:12

the remnant of Edom

Alternate translation: "the remaining part of Edom's territory"

all the nations that are called by my name

Here "name" represents Yahweh. The idiom "called by my name" means they once belonged to Yahweh. This means that in the past the people had conquered and taken control of these territories. Alternate translation: "all the nations that once belonged to me" or "all the nations that I caused the people of Israel to conquer in the past" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.170)** (See: **Metonymy (p.216)**)

Amos 9:13

Look

The writer is telling the reader that he is going to say something surprising. Your language may have a way of doing this.

the days will come & when the plowman

A future time is spoken of as if “days will come.” Alternate translation: “there will be a time ... when the plowman” or “in the future ... the plowman” (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

when the plowman & him who plants seed

These are two images of Yahweh restoring prosperity in Israel. This means grain will grow faster than the people can harvest it, and there will be so many grapes, those crushing the grapes will still be working when farmers start planting more vineyards.

this is Yahweh’s declaration

Yahweh speaks of himself by name to express the certainty of what he is declaring. See how you translated this in [Amos 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “this is what Yahweh has declared” or “this is what I, Yahweh, have declared” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.184)**)

The mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it

These two lines mean basically the same thing. The huge amount of grapes and wine in Israel is spoken of as if wine flows down the hills and mountains. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.220)**)

Amos 9:14

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Amos 9:15

I will plant them upon their land, and they will never again be uprooted from the land

Bringing the people back to their land and keeping them safe from enemies is spoken of as if Israel were a plant that Yahweh would put in the ground and not let anyone pull the plant up from the ground. Alternate translation: "I will cause them to live in the land forever like a plant that is never uprooted" (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.210)**)

they will never again be uprooted from the land

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "no one will ever again uproot them from the land" (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.167)**)

uprooted

for a plant and its roots to be pulled out of the ground



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Version 36

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:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

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**.

”

Referenced in: [Amos 1:15](#); [Amos 3:9](#); [Amos 5:9](#)

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:

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

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.

Referenced in: [Amos 1:1](#); [Amos 2:8](#); [Amos 2:11](#); [Amos 3:14](#); [Amos 4:3](#); [Amos 4:7](#); [Amos 5:2](#); [Amos 6:11](#); [Amos 7:17](#);
[Amos 9:4](#); [Amos 9:15](#)

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 1:1](#); [Amos 1:11](#); [Amos 2:15](#); [Amos 3:2](#); [Amos 3:6](#); [Amos 3:7](#); [Amos 3:9](#); [Amos 3:11](#); [Amos 3:12](#); [Amos 4:5](#); [Amos 4:7](#); [Amos 5 General Notes](#); [Amos 5:3](#); [Amos 5:11](#); [Amos 5:12](#); [Amos 5:15](#); [Amos 6:6](#); [Amos 6:8](#); [Amos 6:9](#); [Amos 6:10](#); [Amos 8:12](#); [Amos 9:1](#); [Amos 9:6](#); [Amos 9:12](#)

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:

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Quotations and Quote Margins ([UTA PDF](#))

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:

Quotes within Quotes ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 7 General Notes](#)

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:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

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 English, a second negative in a clause cancels the first one, creating a positive sentence. So, “He is not unintelligent” means “He is intelligent.”
- In some languages, such as French and Spanish, two negative words in a clause do not cancel each other to become a positive. 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 double negative creates a stronger negative statement.
- In some languages, a 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, including the languages of the Bible, a double negative can produce a stronger positive meaning than a simple positive statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” can mean “He is very intelligent.” In this case, the double negative is actually the figure of speech called [litotes](#).

Biblical Greek can do all of the above. So to translate sentences with double negatives accurately and clearly in your language, you need to know what each double negative means in the Bible and how to express the same idea in your language.

Examples From the Bible

The Greek of John 15:5 says:

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν

Without me **not** you can do **nothing**

We cannot reproduce this double negative in the English ULT because in English, a second negative in a clause cancels the first one. In English, and perhaps in your language, we need to choose only one of the negatives and say either:

Without me, you can do **nothing**.

or:

Without me, you **cannot** do anything.

... in order **not** to be **unfruitful**. (Titus 3:14b ULT)

This means "in order to be fruitful."

A prophet is **not without** honor (Mark 6:4 ULT)

This means "a prophet is honored."

I do **not** want you to be **ignorant**. (1 Corinthians 12:1)

This means "I want you to be knowledgeable."

Translation Strategies

If the way that the double negative is used in the Bible is natural and has the same meaning as in your language, consider using it in the same way. Otherwise, you could consider these strategies:

(1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is 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 negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives.

(3) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a stronger negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives and add a strengthening word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is 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 negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives.

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν

Without me **not** you can do **nothing** (John 15:5)

Without me, you can do **nothing**.

or:

Without me, you **cannot** do anything.

(3) If the purpose of a double negative in the Bible is to make a stronger negative statement, and if it would not do that in your language, remove one of the two negatives and add a strengthening word.

...ἰώτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία **οὐ μὴ** παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου (Matthew 5:18)

...iota one or one serif **not not** may pass away from the law

...**not even** one iota or one serif may pass away from the law

or:

...**certainly no** iota or serif may pass away from the law

Next we recommend you learn about:

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 3:7](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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!"

"

Referenced in: [Amos 5:21](#); [Amos 7:13](#)

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis^[1] 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.

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:

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:

This page answers the question: *What is ellipsis ?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

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.

”

Referenced in: [Amos 5:16](#); [Amos 6:11](#); [Amos 7:2](#); [Amos 8:6](#); [Amos 8:10](#)

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.

... 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.

This page answers the question: *What is a euphemism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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."

"

Referenced in: [Amos 2:7](#)

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 2:11](#); [Amos 2:16](#); [Amos 3:13](#); [Amos 3:15](#); [Amos 4:3](#); [Amos 4:5](#); [Amos 4:6](#); [Amos 4:8](#); [Amos 4:10](#); [Amos 4:12](#); [Amos 4:13](#); [Amos 6:8](#); [Amos 6:14](#); [Amos 8:11](#); [Amos 9:7](#); [Amos 9:13](#)

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:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 3:12](#); [Amos 3:15](#); [Amos 4:7](#); [Amos 5:3](#)

Go and Come

Description

This page answers the question: *What do I do if the word "go" or "come" is confusing in a certain sentence?*

Different languages have different ways of determining whether to use the words "go" or "come" and whether to use the words "take" or "bring" when talking about motion. For example, when saying that they are approaching a person who has called them, English speakers say "I'm coming," while Spanish speakers say "I'm going." You will need to study the context in order to understand what is meant by the words "go" and "come" (and also "take" and "bring"), and then translate those words in a way that your readers will understand which direction people are moving in.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages have different ways of talking about motion. The biblical languages or your source language may use the words "go" and "come" or "take" and "bring" differently than your language uses them. If these words are not translated in the way that is natural in your language, your readers may be confused about which direction people are moving.

Examples From the Bible

Yahweh said to Noah, "**Come**, you and all your household, into the ark." (Genesis 7:1 ULT)

In some languages, this would lead people to think that Yahweh was in the ark.

But you will be free from my oath if you **come** to my relatives and they will not give her to you.
Then you will be free from my oath. (Genesis 24:41 ULT)

Abraham was speaking to his servant. Abraham's relatives lived far away from where he and his servant were standing and he wanted his servant to **go** to them, not **come** toward Abraham.

When you have **come** to the land that Yahweh your God gives you, and when you take possession of it and begin to live in it ... (Deuteronomy 17:14a ULT)

Moses is speaking to the people in the wilderness. They had not yet gone into the land that God was giving them. In some languages, it would make more sense to say, "When you have **gone** into the land ..."

They **brought** him up to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (Luke 2:22b ULT)

In some languages, it might make more sense to say that they **took** or **carried** Jesus to the temple.

Then see, there was a man whose name was Jairus, and he was a leader of the synagogue. And falling at the feet of Jesus, he begged him to come to his house. (Luke 8:41 ULT)

The man was not at his house when he spoke to Jesus. He wanted Jesus to **go** with him to his house.

What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (Luke 7:24b ULT)

In some languages, it might make more sense to ask what did you come out to see.

Translation Strategies

If the word used in the ULT would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other strategies.

(1) Use the word “go,” “come,” “take,” or “bring” that would be natural in your language.

(2) Use another word that expresses the right meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the word “go,” “come,” “take,” or “bring” that would be natural in your language.

But you will be free from my oath if you **come** to my relatives and they will not give her to you. (Genesis 24:41 ULT)

But you will be free from my oath if you **go** to my relatives and they will not give her to you.

What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (Luke 7:24b ULT)

What did you come out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

(2) Use another word that expresses the right meaning.

When you have **come** to the land that Yahweh your God gives you, and when you take possession of it and begin to live in it ... (Deuteronomy 17:14 ULT)

“When you have **arrived** in the land that Yahweh your God gives you, and when you take possession of it and begin to live in it ...”

Yahweh said to Noah, “**Come**, you and all your household, into the ark ...” (Genesis 7:1 ULT)

Yahweh said to Noah, “**Enter**, you and all your household, into the ark ...”

What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (Luke 7:24b ULT)

What did you travel out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

”

Referenced in: [Amos 6:1](#)

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

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:

Copy or Borrow Words ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Introduction to Amos](#); [Amos 1:1](#); [Amos 1:4](#); [Amos 1:5](#); [Amos 1:12](#); [Amos 2:2](#); [Amos 4:3](#); [Amos 5 General Notes](#); [Amos 5:26](#); [Amos 6:2](#); [Amos 6:13](#); [Amos 7:10](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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.

"

Referenced in: [Amos 1:11](#); [Amos 2:9](#); [Amos 9:2](#); [Amos 9:3](#)

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:

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

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.

"

Referenced in: [Amos 6:9](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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**

"

Referenced in: [Amos 1:1](#); [Amos 1:3](#); [Amos 2:7](#); [Amos 2:9](#); [Amos 5:15](#); [Amos 7:12](#); [Amos 8:14](#); [Amos 9:8](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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:

Litotes ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 4:4](#); [Amos 4:5](#); [Amos 6:1](#)

Litotes

Description

Litotes is a figure of speech in which the speaker expresses a strong positive meaning by negating a word or phrase that means the opposite of the meaning that he intends. For example, someone could intend to communicate that something is extremely good by describing it as "not bad." The difference between a litotes and a **double negative** is that a litotes heightens the positive meaning beyond what a plain positive statement would do, and a double negative does not. In the example above, the literal meaning of "not bad," taken as a plain double negative, would be "acceptable" or even "good." But if the speaker intended it as a litotes, then the meaning is "very good" or "extremely good."

This page answers the question: *What is litotes?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use litotes. People who speak those languages might not understand that a statement using litotes actually strengthens the positive meaning. Instead, they might think that it weakens or even cancels the positive meaning.

Examples From the Bible

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was **not useless**, (1 Thessalonians 2:1 ULT)

By using litotes, Paul emphasized that his visit with them was **very** useful.

Now when it became day, there was **no small disturbance** among the soldiers over what therefore had happened to Peter. (Acts 12:18 ULT)

By using litotes, Luke emphasized that there was a **lot** of excitement or anxiety among the soldiers about what happened to Peter. (Peter had been in prison, and even though there were soldiers guarding him, he escaped when an angel let him out. So they were very agitated.)

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are **not the least** among the leaders of Judah,
for from you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel. (Matthew 2:6 ULT)

By using litotes, the prophet emphasized that Bethlehem would be a **very important city**.

Translation Strategies

If the litotes would be understood correctly, consider using it.

(1) If the meaning with the negative would not be clear, give the **positive** meaning in a strong way.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the meaning with the negative would not be clear, give the **positive** meaning in a strong way.

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was **not useless**. (1 Thessalonians 2:1 ULT)

"For you yourselves know, brothers, our visit to you **did much good**."

Now when it became day, there was **no small disturbance** among the soldiers over what therefore had happened to Peter. (Acts 12:18 ULT)

"Now when it became day, there was **great excitement** among the soldiers, regarding what had happened to Peter."

or:

"Now when it became day, the soldiers were **very concerned** because of what had happened to Peter."

"

Referenced in: [Amos 1:3](#); [Amos 1:6](#); [Amos 1:9](#); [Amos 1:11](#); [Amos 1:13](#); [Amos 2:1](#); [Amos 2:4](#); [Amos 2:6](#)

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.

"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)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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**.

"

Referenced in: [Amos 8:12](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Simile ([UTA PDF](#))

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](#).

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Referenced in: [Amos 1:2](#); [Amos 1:4](#); [Amos 1:5](#); [Amos 1:7](#); [Amos 1:8](#); [Amos 1:10](#); [Amos 1:12](#); [Amos 1:14](#); [Amos 2:4](#); [Amos 2:5](#); [Amos 3:6](#); [Amos 3:15](#); [Amos 4:1](#); [Amos 4:2](#); [Amos 4:6](#); [Amos 4:8](#); [Amos 4:10](#); [Amos 4:11](#); [Amos 4:13](#); [Amos 5:2](#); [Amos 5:4](#); [Amos 5:5](#); [Amos 5:6](#); [Amos 5:7](#); [Amos 5:8](#); [Amos 5:14](#); [Amos 5:18](#); [Amos 5:23](#); [Amos 6:3](#); [Amos 6:12](#); [Amos 7:8](#); [Amos 7:17](#); [Amos 8:4](#); [Amos 8:10](#); [Amos 8:11](#); [Amos 9:6](#); [Amos 9:10](#); [Amos 9:11](#); [Amos 9:13](#); [Amos 9:15](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

... 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](#).

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Referenced in: [Amos 1:3](#); [Amos 1:4](#); [Amos 1:5](#); [Amos 1:6](#); [Amos 1:8](#); [Amos 1:9](#); [Amos 1:11](#); [Amos 2:1](#); [Amos 2:2](#); [Amos 2:4](#); [Amos 2:6](#); [Amos 2:16](#); [Amos 3:1](#); [Amos 3:2](#); [Amos 3:10](#); [Amos 3:13](#); [Amos 3:14](#); [Amos 4:6](#); [Amos 4:8](#); [Amos 4:9](#); [Amos 4:10](#); [Amos 5:1](#); [Amos 5:5](#); [Amos 5:6](#); [Amos 5:13](#); [Amos 5:15](#); [Amos 5:25](#); [Amos 5:26](#); [Amos 6:1](#); [Amos 6:3](#); [Amos 6:6](#); [Amos 6:8](#); [Amos 6:14](#); [Amos 7:2](#); [Amos 7:5](#); [Amos 7:9](#); [Amos 7:10](#); [Amos 7:11](#); [Amos 7:16](#); [Amos 7:17](#); [Amos 8:7](#); [Amos 8:14](#); [Amos 9:1](#); [Amos 9:2](#); [Amos 9:4](#); [Amos 9:6](#); [Amos 9:8](#); [Amos 9:9](#); [Amos 9:10](#); [Amos 9:12](#)

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:

Parts of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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**.

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Referenced in: [Amos 2:6](#); [Amos 2:7](#); [Amos 2:14](#); [Amos 4:1](#); [Amos 5:12](#); [Amos 8:4](#)

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.

This page answers the question: *What is parallelism?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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."

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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 1:2](#); [Amos 1:11](#); [Amos 4:2](#); [Amos 6:11](#); [Amos 6:12](#); [Amos 9:13](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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:

Apostrophe ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 3:9](#); [Amos 3:15](#)

Poetry

Description

Poetry is one of the ways that people use the words and sounds of their language to make their speech and writing more beautiful and to express strong emotion. Through poetry, people can communicate deeper emotion than they can through simple non-poetic forms. Poetry gives more weight and elegance to statements of truth, such as proverbs, and is also easier to remember than ordinary speech.

This page answers the question: *What is poetry and how do I translate it into my language?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

In poetry we commonly find:

- many figures of speech such as [Apostrophe](#)
- arrangements of clauses into particular patterns such as:
 - parallel lines (See [Parallelism](#))
 - acrostics (beginning lines with successive letters of the alphabet)
 - chiasms (in which the first line relates to the last line, the second to the next-to-last line, etc.):
 - > You should not give what is holy to the dogs,
 - >
 - >> and should not throw your pearls in front of the pigs.
 - >>
 - >> Otherwise they will trample them under their feet,
 - >
 - > and having turned, they might tear you to pieces. (Matt 7:6 ULT)

- repetition of some or all of a line:

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. (Psalm 148:2-3 ULT)

- lines of similar length:

Listen to my call to you,
Yahweh; think about my groanings.
Listen to the sound of my call, my King and my God,
for it is to you that I pray. (Psalm 5:1-2 ULT)

- the same sound used at the end or at the beginning of two or more lines:

“Twinkle, twinkle little **star**. How I wonder what you **are**.” (from an English rhyme)

- the same sound repeated many times:

“Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater” (from an English rhyme)

We also find:

- old words and expressions
- dramatic imagery
- different use of grammar — including:
 - incomplete sentences
 - lack of connective words

Some places to look for poetry in your language

Songs, particularly old songs or songs used in children's games
Religious ceremony or chants of priests or witch doctors
Prayers, blessings, and curses
Old legends

Elegant or fancy speech

Elegant or fancy speech is similar to poetry in that it uses beautiful language, but it does not use all of the language's features of poetry, and it does not use them as much as poetry does. Popular speakers in the language often use elegant speech, and this is probably the easiest source of text to study to find out what makes speech elegant in your language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue:

- Different languages use poetry for different things. If a poetic form would not communicate the same meaning in your language, you may need to write it without the poetry.
- Different languages use different poetic devices. A poetic device that conveys elegance or emotion in a biblical language may be confusing or misunderstood in another language.
- In some languages, using poetry for a particular part of the Bible would make it much more powerful.

Examples From the Bible

The Bible uses poetry for songs, teaching, and prophecy. Almost all of the books of the Old Testament have poetry in them and many of the books are completely made up of poetry.

... for you saw my affliction; you knew the distress of my soul. (Psalm 31:7b ULT)

This example of [Parallelism](#) has two lines that mean the same thing.

Yahweh, judge the nations; vindicate me, Yahweh, because I am righteous and innocent, Most High. (Psalm 7:8 ULT)

This example of parallelism shows the contrast between what David wants God to do to him and what he wants God to do to the unrighteous nations. (See [Parallelism](#).)

Keep your servant also from arrogant sins; let them not rule over me. (Psalm 19:13a ULT)

This example of personification speaks of sins as if they could rule over a person. (See [Personification](#).)

Oh, give thanks to Yahweh; for he is good,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

(Psalm 136:1-3 ULT)

This example repeats the phrases “give thanks” and “his covenant faithfulness endures forever.”

Translation Strategies

If the style of poetry that is used in the source text would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other ways of translating it.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry.
- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.
- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

If you use poetry it may be more beautiful.

If you use ordinary speech it may be more clear.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of mockers. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ULT)

The following are examples of how people might translate Psalm 1:1-2.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry. (The style in this example has words that sound similar at the end of each line.)

“Happy is the person not encouraged **to sin**, Disrespect for God he will not **begin**, To those who laugh at God he is **no kin**. God is his constant **delight**, He does what God says **is right**, He thinks of it all day **and night**.”

- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.

This is the kind of person who is truly blessed: the one who does not follow the advice of wicked people nor stop along the road to speak with sinners nor join the gathering of those who mock God. Rather, he takes great joy in Yahweh’s law, and he meditates on it day and night.

- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

The people who do not listen to the advice of bad people are really happy. They do not spend time with people who continually do evil things or join with those who do not respect God. Instead, they love to obey Yahweh’s law, and they think about it all the time.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Symbolic Language ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 1:1](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

Sentence Types ([UTA PDF](#))

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

"

Referenced in: [Amos 3:3](#); [Amos 3:4](#); [Amos 3:5](#); [Amos 3:6](#); [Amos 3:8](#); [Amos 5:18](#); [Amos 5:20](#); [Amos 5:25](#); [Amos 6:2](#); [Amos 6:12](#); [Amos 6:13](#); [Amos 7:8](#); [Amos 8:2](#); [Amos 8:5](#); [Amos 8:8](#); [Amos 9:7](#)

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

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 lightning 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 ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 2:7](#); [Amos 2:13](#); [Amos 3:12](#); [Amos 5:6](#); [Amos 5:24](#); [Amos 8:8](#); [Amos 9:5](#); [Amos 9:9](#)

Symbolic Action

Description

A symbolic action is something that someone does in order to express a certain idea. For example, in some cultures people nod their heads up and down to mean “yes” or turn their heads from side to side to mean “no.” Symbolic actions do not mean the same things in all cultures. In the Bible, sometimes people perform symbolic actions and sometimes they only refer to the symbolic action.

This page answers the question: *What is a symbolic action and how do I translate it?*

In order to understand this topic, it would be good to read:

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Examples of symbolic actions

- In some cultures people shake hands when they meet to show that they are willing to be friendly.
- In some cultures people bow when they meet to show respect to each other.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

An action may have a meaning in one culture and a different meaning or no meaning at all in another culture. For example, in some cultures raising the eyebrows means “I am surprised” or “What did you say?” In other cultures it means “yes.”

In the Bible, people did things that had certain meanings in their culture. When we read the Bible, we might not understand what someone meant if we interpret the action based on what it means in our own culture today.

You (the translator) need to understand what people in the Bible meant when they used symbolic actions. If an action does not mean the same thing in your own culture, then you need to figure out how to translate what the action meant.

Examples From the Bible

And behold, a man came whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And **falling at the feet of Jesus**, he begged him to come to his house. (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Meaning of symbolic action: He did this to show great respect to Jesus.

Look, I am standing at the door and am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Meaning of symbolic action: When people wanted someone to welcome them into their home, they stood at the door and knocked on it.

Translation Strategies

If people would correctly understand what a symbolic action meant to the people in the Bible, consider using it. If not, here are some strategies for translating it.

- (1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.
- (2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.

(3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning. Do this only in poetry, parables, and sermons. Do not do this when there actually was a person who did a specific action.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Jairus fell down at Jesus' feet in order to show that he greatly respected him.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Look, I stand at the door and knock on it, asking you to let me in.

(2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT)

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT)

Look, I stand at the door and ask you to let me in.

(3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning.

And **falling at the feet of Jesus** (Luke 8:41 ULT) — Since Jairus actually did this, you should not substitute an action from your own culture.

Look, I am **standing at the door and am knocking**. (Revelation 3:20 ULT) — Jesus was not standing at a real door. Rather he was speaking about wanting to have a relationship with people. So in cultures where it is polite to clear one's throat when wanting to be let into a house, you could use that.

Look, I stand at the door and clear my throat.

"

Referenced in: [Amos 8:10](#)

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)

■ I looked on all the deeds that **I** had accomplished

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:

Figures of Speech ([UTA PDF](#))

"

Referenced in: [Amos 9:1](#)

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:

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

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:

Copy or Borrow Words ([UTA PDF](#))

How to Translate Names ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Amos 5:8](#); [Amos 6:4](#); [Amos 7:14](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 40

evil, wicked, unpleasant

Definition:

In the Bible, the term “evil” can refer either to the concept of moral wickedness or emotional unpleasantness. The context will usually make it clear which meaning is intended in the specific instance of the term.

- While “evil” may describe a person’s character, “wicked” may refer more to a person’s behavior. However, both terms are very similar in meaning.
- The term “wickedness” refers to the state of being that exists when people do wicked things.
- The results of evil are clearly shown in how people mistreat others by killing, stealing, slandering and being cruel and unkind.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, the terms “evil” and “wicked” can be translated as “bad” or “sinful” or “immoral.”
- Other ways to translate these could include “not good” or “not righteous” or “not moral.”
- Make sure the words or phrases that are used to translate these terms fit the context that is natural in the target language.

(See also: disobey, [sin](#), [good](#), [righteous](#), [demon](#))

Bible References:

- 1 Samuel 24:11
- 1 Timothy 6:10
- 3 John 1:10
- Genesis 2:17
- Genesis 6:5-6
- Job 1:1
- Job 8:20
- Judges 9:57
- Luke 6:22-23
- Matthew 7:11-12
- Proverbs 3:7
- Psalms 22:16-17

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **2:4** “God just knows that as soon as you eat it, you will be like God and will understand good and **evil** like he does.”
- **3:1** After a long time, many people were living in the world. They had become very **wicked** and violent.
- **3:2** But Noah found favor with God. He was a righteous man living among **wicked** people.
- **4:2** God saw that if they all kept working together to do **evil**, they could do many more sinful things.
- **8:12** “You tried to do **evil** when you sold me as a slave, but God used the **evil** for good!”
- **14:2** They (Canaanites) worshiped false gods and did many **evil** things.
- **17:1** But then he (Saul) became a **wicked** man who did not obey God, so God chose a different man who would one day be king in his place.
- **18:11** In the new kingdom of Israel, all the kings were **evil**.
- **29:8** The king was so angry that he threw the **wicked** servant into prison until he could pay back all of his debt.
- **45:2** They said, “We heard him (Stephen) speak **evil** things about Moses and God!”

- **50:17** He (Jesus) will wipe away every tear and there will be no more suffering, sadness, crying, **evil**, pain, or death.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H0605, H1100, H1681, H1942, H2154, H2162, H2254, H2617, H3399, H3415, H4209, H4849, H5753, H5766, H5767, H5999, H6001, H6090, H7451, H7455, H7489, H7561, H7562, H7563, H7564, G00920, G01130, G04590, G09320, G09870, G09880, G14260, G25490, G25510, G25540, G25550, G25560, G25570, G25590, G25600, G26350, G26360, G41510, G41890, G41900, G41910, G53370

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Amos](#)

Israel, Israelites

Facts:

The term "Israel" is the name that God gave to Jacob. Often it refers to the nation that is descended from him.

- The name Israel probably means "He struggles with God."
- The descendants of Jacob became known as the "sons of Israel" or the "people of Israel" or the "nation of Israel" or the "Israelites."
- God formed his covenant with the people of Israel. They were his chosen people.
- The nation of Israel consisted of twelve tribes.
- Soon after King Solomon died, Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom, called "Judah," and the northern kingdom, called "Israel."
- Often the term "Israel" can be translated as "the people of Israel" or "the nation of Israel," depending on the context.

(See also: [Jacob](#), [kingdom of Israel](#), [Judah](#), [nation](#), [twelve tribes of Israel](#))

Bible References:

- 1 Chronicles 10:1
- 1 Kings 8:2
- Acts 2:36
- Acts 7:24
- Acts 13:23
- John 1:49-51
- Luke 24:21
- Mark 12:29
- Matthew 2:6
- Matthew 27:9
- Philippians 3:4-5

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **8:15** The descendants of the twelve sons became the twelve tribes of **Israel**.
- **9:3** The Egyptians forced the **Israelites** to build many buildings and even whole cities.
- **9:5** A certain **Israelite** woman gave birth to a baby boy.
- **10:1** They said, "This is what the God of **Israel** says, 'Let my people go!'"
- **14:12** But despite all this, the people of *_Israel_* complained and grumbled against God and against Moses.
- **15:9** God fought for **Israel** that day. He caused the Amorites to be confused and he sent large hailstones that killed many of the Amorites.
- **15:12** After this battle, God gave each tribe of **Israel** *its own section of the Promised Land. Then God gave _Israel_ peace along all its borders.*
- **16:16** So God punished *_Israel_* again for worshipping idols.
- **43:6** "Men of **Israel**, Jesus was a man who did many mighty signs and wonders by the power of God, as you have seen and already know."

Word Data:

- Strong's: H3478, H3479, H3481, H3482, G09350, G24740, G24750

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Amos](#)

prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess

Definition:

A “prophet” is a man who speaks God’s messages to people. A woman who does this is called a “prophetess.”

- Often prophets warned people to turn away from their sins and obey God.
- A “prophecy” is the message that the prophet speaks. To “prophesy” means to speak God’s messages.
- Often the message of a prophecy was about something that would happen in the future.
- Many prophecies in the Old Testament have already been fulfilled.
- In the Bible the collection of books written by prophets are sometimes referred to as “the prophets.”
- For example the phrase, “the law and the prophets” is a way of referring to all the Hebrew scriptures, which are also known as the “Old Testament.”
- An older term for a prophet was “seer” or “someone who sees.”
- Sometimes the term “seer” refers to a false prophet or to someone who practices divination.

Translation Suggestions:

- The term “prophet” could be translated as “God’s spokesman” or “man who speaks for God” or “man who speaks God’s messages.”
- A “seer” could be translated as “person who sees visions” or “man who sees the future from God.”
- The term “prophetess” could be translated as “spokeswoman for God” or “woman who speaks for God” or “woman who speaks God’s messages.”
- Ways to translate “prophecy” could include, “message from God” or “prophet message.”
- The term “prophesy” could be translated as “speak words from God” or “tell God’s message.”
- The figurative expression, “law and the prophets” could also be translated as “the books of the law and of the prophets” or “everything written about God and his people, including God’s laws and what his prophets preached.” (See: [synecdoche](#))
- When referring to a prophet (or seer) of a false god, it may be necessary to translate this as “false prophet (seer)” or “prophet (seer) of a false god” or “prophet of Baal,” for example.

(See also: [Baal](#), [divination](#), [false god](#), [false prophet](#), [fulfill](#), [law](#), [vision](#))

Bible References:

- 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16
- Acts 3:25
- John 1:43-45
- Malachi 4:4-6
- Matthew 1:23
- Matthew 2:18
- Matthew 5:17
- Psalm 51:1

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **12:12** When the Israelites saw that the Egyptians were dead, they trusted in God and believed that Moses was a **prophet** of God.
- **17:13** God was very angry about what David had done, so he sent the **prophet** Nathan to tell David how evil his sin was.
- **19:1** Throughout the history of the Israelites, God sent them **prophets**. The **prophets** heard messages from God and then told the people God’s messages.

- **19:6** All the people of the entire kingdom of Israel, including the 450 **prophets** of Baal, came to Mount Carmel.
- **19:17** Most of the time, the people did not obey God. They often mistreated the **prophets** and sometimes even killed them.
- **21:9** The **prophet** Isaiah **prophesied** that the Messiah would be born from a virgin.
- **43:5** "This fulfills the **prophecy** made by the **prophet** Joel in which God said, 'In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit.'"
- **43:7** "This fulfills the **prophecy** which says, 'You will not let your Holy One rot in the grave.'"
- **48:12** Moses was a great **prophet** who proclaimed the word of God. But Jesus is the greatest **prophet** of all. He is the Word of God.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H2372, H2374, H4853, H5012, H5013, H5016, H5017, H5029, H5030, H5031, H5197, G24950, G43940, G43950, G43960, G43970, G43980, G55780

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Referenced in: [Amos 3 General Notes](#); [Amos 8 General Notes](#); [Amos 9 General Notes](#)

Contributors

unfoldingWord® Translation Notes Contributors

Door43 World Missions Community

Aaron Fenlason

Abner Bauman

Adam Van Goor

Alan Bird

Alan Borkenhagen

Alfred Van Dellen

Alice Wright

Allen Bair

Allyson Presswood Nance

Amanda Adams

Andrew Belcher

Andrew Johnson

Andrew Rice

Angelo Palo

Anita Moreau

April Linton

Aurora Lee

Barbara Summers

Barbara White

Becky Hancock

Beryl Carpenter

Bethany Fenlason

Betty Forbes

Bianca Elliott

Bill Cleveland

Bill Pruett

Bob Britting

Bram van den Heuvel

Brian Metzger

Bruce Bridges

Bruce Collier

Bruce Smith

Caleb Worgess

Carlyle Kilmore

Carol Pace

Carol Heim

Caroline Crawford

Caroline Fleming

Caroline S Wong

Carol Lee

Carol Moyer

Carolyn Lafferty

Catherine C Newton

Charese Jackson

Charlotte Gibson

Charlotte Hobbs

Cheryl A Chojnacki
Cheryl Stieben
Cheryl Warren
Christian Berry
Christine Harrison
Clairmene Pascal
Connie Bryan
Connie Goss
Craig Balden
Craig Lins
Craig Scott
Cynthia J Puckett
Dale Hahs
Dale Masser
Daniel Lauk
Daniel Summers
Darlene M Hopkins
Darlene Silas
David Boerschlein
David F Withee
David Glover
David J Forbes
David Mullen
David N Hanley
David Sandlin
David Shortess
David Smith
David Whisler
Debbie Nispel
Debbie Piper
Deborah Bartow
Deborah Bush
Deborah Miniard
Dennis Jackson
Dianne Forrest
Donna Borkenhagen
Donna Mullis
Douglas Hayes
Drew Curley
Ed Davis
Edgar Navera
Edward Kosky
Edward Quigley
Elaine VanRegenmorter
Elizabeth Nataly Silvestre Herbas
Ellen Lee
Emeline Thermidor
Emily Lee
Esther Roman
Esther Trew
Esther Zirk
Ethel Lynn Baker
Evangeline Puen
Evelyn Wildgust
Fletcher Coleman

Freda Dibble
Gail Spell
Gary Greer
Gary Shogren
Gay Ellen Stulp
Gene Gossman
George Arlyn Briggs
Gerald L. Naughton
Glen Tallent
Grace Balwit
Grace Bird
Greg Stoffregen
Gretchen Stencil
Hallie Miller
Harry Harriss
Heather Hicks
Helen Morse
Hendrik deVries
Henry Bult
Henry Whitney
Hilary O'Sullivan
Ibrahim Audu
Ines Gipson
Irene J Dodson
Jackie Jones
Jacqueline Bartley
James Giddens
James Pedersen
James Pohlig
James Roe
Janet O'Herron
Janice Connor
Jaqueline Rotruck
Jeanette Friesen
Jeff Graf
Jeff Kennedy
Jeff Martin
Jennifer Cunneen
Jenny Thomas
Jerry Lund
Jessica Lauk
Jim Frederick
Jim Lee
Jimmy Warren
Jim Rotruck
Jim Swartzentruber
Jody Garcia
Joe Chater
Joel Bryan
Joey Howell
John Anderson
John Geddis
John D Rogers
John Hutchins
John Luton

John Pace
John P Tornifolio
Jolene Valeu
Jon Haahr
Joseph Fithian
Joseph Greene
Joseph Wharton
Joshua Berkowitz
Joshua Calhoun
Joshua Rister
Josh Wondra
Joy Anderson
Joyce Jacobs
Joyce Pedersen
JT Crowder
Judi Brodeen
Judith Cline
Judith C Yon
Julia N Bult
Patty Li
Julie Susanto
Kahar Barat
Kannah Sellers
Kara Anderson
Karen Davie
Karen Dreesen
Karen Fabean
Karen Riecks
Karen Smith
Karen Turner
Kathleen Glover
Kathryn Hendrix
Kathy Mentink
Katrina Geurink
Kay Myers
Kelly Strong
Ken Haugh
Kim Puterbaugh
Kristin Butts Page
Kristin Rinne
Kwesi Opoku-debrah
Langston Spell
Larry Sallee
Lawrence Lipe
Lee Sipe
Leonard Smith
Lester Harper
Lia Hadley
Linda Buckman
Linda Dale Barton
Linda Havemeier
Linda Homer
Linda Lee Sebastien
Linn Peterson
Liz Dakota

Lloyd Box
Luis Keelin
Madeline Kilmore
Maggie D Paul
Marc Nelson
Mardi Welo
Margo Hoffman
Marilyn Cook
Marjean Swann
Marjorie Francis
Mark Albertini
Mark Chapman
Mark Thomas
Marselene Norton
Mary Jane Davis
Mary Jean Stout
Mary Landon
Mary Scarborough
Megan Kidwell
Melissa Roe
Merton Dibble
Meseret Abraham-Zemedede
Michael Bush
Michael Connor
Michael Francis
Michael Geurink
Mike Tisdell
Mickey White
Miel Horrilleno
Monique Greer
Morgan Mellette
Morris Anderson
Nancy C. Naughton
Nancy Neu
Nancy VanCott
Neal Snook
Nicholas Scovil
Nick Dettman
Nils Friberg
Noah Crabtree
Pamela B Johnston
Pamela Nungesser
Pamela Roberts
Pam Gullifer
Pat Ankney
Pat Giddens
Patricia Brougher
Patricia Carson
Patricia Cleveland
Patricia Foster
Patricia Middlebrooks
Paul Mellema
Paula Carlson
Paula Oestreich
Paul Holloway

Paul Nungesser
Peggy Anderson
Peggyrose Swartzentruber
Peter Polloni
Phillip Harms
Phyllis Mortensen
Priscilla Enggren
Rachel Agheyisi
Rachel Ropp
Raif Turner
Ray Puen
Reina Y Mora
Rene Bahrenfuss
Renee Triplett
Rhonda Bartels
Richard Beatty
Richard Moreau
Richard Rutter
Richard Stevens
Rick Keaton
Robby Little
Robert W Johnson
Rochelle Hook
Rodney White
Rolaine Franz
Ronald D Hook
Rosario Baria
Roxann Carey
Roxanne Pittard
Ruben Michael Garay
Russell Isham
Russ Perry
Ruth Calo
Ruth E Withee
Ruth Montgomery
Ryan Blizek
Sam Todd
Samuel Njuguna
Sandy Anderson
Sandy Blanes
Sara Giesmann
Sara Van Cott (Barnes)
Sharon Johnson
Sharon Peterson
Sharon Shortess
Shelly Harms
Sherie Nelson
Sherman Sebastien
Sherry Mosher
Stacey Swanson
Steve Gibbs
Steve Mercier
Susan Langohr
Susan Quigley
Susan Snook

Suzanne Richards
Sylvia Thomas
Sze Suze Lau
Tabitha Price
Tammy L Enns
Tammy White
Teresa Everett-Leone
Teresa Linn
Terri Collins
Theresa Baker
Thomas Jopling
Thomas Nickell
Thomas Warren
Tim Coleman
Tim Ingram
Tim Linn
Tim Lovestrand
Tim Mentink
Tom Penry
Tom William Warren
Toni Shuma
Tracie Pogue
Tricia Coffman
Vicki Ivester
Victoria G DeKraker
Victor M Prieto
Vivian Kamph
Vivian Richardson
Ward Pyles
Warren Blaisdell
Wayne Homer
Wendy Coleman
Wendy Colon
Wilbur Zirk
Wil Gipson
William Carson
William Cline
William Dickerson
William Smitherman
William Wilder
Yvonne Tallent

unfoldingWord® Literal Text Contributors

Nicholas Alsop
Scott Bayer
Larry T Brooks, M.Div., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
Matt Carlton
George "Drew" Curley, M.Div., PhD, Professor of Biblical Languages
Dan Dennison
Jamie Duguid
Paul M Fahnestock, M.Div. Reformed Theological Seminary, D.Min. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Michael Francis
Laura Glassel, MA in Bible Translation
Jesse Griffin, BA Biblical Studies, MA Biblical Languages

Jesse Harris
 C. Harry Harriss, M.Div.
 Alrick G. Headley, M.Div., Th.M.
 Bram van den Heuvel, M.A.
 John Huffman
 D. Allen Hutchison, MA in Old Testament, MA in New Testament
 Jack Messarra
 Gene Mullen
 Adam W. Nagelvoort, M.Div. Academic Ministries, Columbia International University
 Timothy Neu, Ph.D. Biblical Studies
 Kristy Nickell
 Tom Nickell
 Elizabeth Oakes, BA in Religious Studies, Linguistics
 Perry Oakes, PhD in Old Testament, MA in Linguistics
 James N. Pohlig, M.Div., MA in Linguistics, D. Litt. in Biblical Languages
 Ward Pyles, M.Div., Western Baptist Theological Seminary
 Susan Quigley, MA in Linguistics
 Dean Ropp
 Joel D. Ruark, M.A.Th., Th.M., Ph.D. in Old Testament, University of Stellenbosch
 Larry Sallee, Th.M Dallas Theological Seminary, D.Min. Columbia Biblical Seminary
 Peter Smircich, BA Philosophy
 Doug Smith, M.T.S., M.Div., Th.M., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
 Leonard Smith
 Suzanna Smith
 Tim Span
 Dave Statezni, BA Orig langs., M.Div. Fuller Theological Seminary
 Maria Tijerina
 David Trombold, M. Div.
 Aaron Valdizan, M.Div., Th.M. in Old Testament, The Masters Seminary
 James Vigen
 Hendrik "Henry" de Vries
 Thomas Warren, M.Div., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, D.Min, Reformed Theological Seminary
 Angela Westmoreland, M.A. in Theological Studies (Biblical Language track)
 Henry Whitney, BA Linguistics
 Benjamin Wright, MA Applied Linguistics, Dallas International University
 Grant Ailie, BA Biblical Studies, M.Div.
 Door43 World Missions Community

unfoldingWord® Simplified Text Contributors

Nicholas Alsop
 Larry T Brooks, M.Div., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
 Matt Carlton
 George "Drew" Curley, M.Div., PhD, Professor of Biblical Languages
 Paul M Fahnestock, M.Div. Reformed Theological Seminary, D. Min. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
 Michael Francis
 Laura Glassel, MA in Bible Translation
 Kailey Gregory
 Jesse Griffin, BA Biblical Studies, MA Biblical Languages
 C. Harry Harriss, M.Div.
 Alrick G. Headley, M.Div., Th.M.
 Bram van den Heuvel, M.A.
 John Huffman
 D. Allen Hutchison, MA in Old Testament, MA in New Testament
 Robert Hunt

Demsin Lachin
 Jack Messarra
 Gene Mullen
 Adam W. Nagelvoort, M.Div. Academic Ministries, Columbia International University
 Timothy Neu, Ph.D. Biblical Studies
 Kristy Nickell
 Tom Nickell
 Elizabeth Oakes, BA in Religious Studies, Linguistics
 Perry Oakes, PhD in Old Testament, MA in Linguistics
 James N. Pohlig, M.Div., MA in Linguistics, D. Litt. in Biblical Languages
 Ward Pyles, M.Div., Western Baptist Theological Seminary
 Susan Quigley, MA in Linguistics
 Dean Ropp
 Joel D. Ruark, M.A.Th., Th.M., Ph.D. in Old Testament, University of Stellenbosch
 Larry Saltee, Th.M Dallas Theological Seminary, D.Min. Columbia Biblical Seminary
 Peter Smircich, BA Philosophy
 Christopher Smith, M.A.T.S. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Ph.D. Boston College
 Leonard Smith
 Dave Statezni, BA Orig langs., M.Div. Fuller Theological Seminary
 David Trombold, M. Div.
 James Vigen
 Hendrik ♦ Henry ♦ de Vries
 Thomas Warren, M.Div., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, D.Min, Reformed Theological Seminary
 Angela Westmoreland, M.A. in Theological Studies (Biblical Language track)
 Henry Whitney, BA Linguistics
 Benjamin Wright, MA Applied Linguistics, Dallas International University
 Door43 World Missions Community

unfoldingWord® Translation Academy Contributors

Jesse Griffin, BA in Biblical Studies, MA in Biblical Languages
 Perry Oakes, PhD in Old Testament, MA in Linguistics, MA in Theology, BA in Biblical Studies
 Susan Quigley, MA in Linguistics
 Henry Whitney, BA in Linguistics
 James N. Pohlig, M.Div., MA in Linguistics, D. Litt. in Biblical Languages
 Ben Jore, BA Biblical Studies, M.Div.
 Joel D. Ruark, PhD in Old Testament, MA in Theology
 Todd L. Price, PhD in New Testament/Linguistics
 Bev Staley
 Carol Brinneman
 Jody Garcia
 Kara Anderson
 Kim Puterbaugh
 Lizz Carlton
 Door43 World Missions Community

unfoldingWord® Translation Words Contributors

Andrew Belcher
 David Book
 Jesse Griffin, BA Biblical Studies, MA Biblical Languages
 Henry Whitney, Bible translator, Papua New Guinea, 1982-2000
 Larry Saltee, Th.M Dallas Theological Seminary, D.Min. Columbia Biblical Seminary
 Lizz Carlton

Jan Zanutto
Matthew Latham
Perry Oakes, PhD in Old Testament, MA in Linguistics
Richard Joki
Door43 World Missions Community

unfoldingWord® Translation Words Links Contributors

Door43 World Missions Community
Jesse Griffin (BA Biblical Studies, Liberty University; MA Biblical Languages, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary)
Perry Oakes (BA Biblical Studies, Taylor University; MA Theology, Fuller Seminary; MA Linguistics, University of Texas at Arlington; PhD Old Testament, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)
Larry Sallee (Th.M Dallas Theological Seminary, D.Min. Columbia Biblical Seminary)
Joel D. Ruark (M.A.Th. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Th.M. Stellenbosch University; Ph.D. Candidate in Old Testament Studies, Stellenbosch University)