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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Lamentations

Introduction to Lamentations

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of Lamentations

First lament: Yahweh and his people have abandoned Jerusalem (1:1–22)

Second lament: Yahweh was angry with Jerusalem and caused it to be destroyed (2:1–22)

Third lament (3:1–66)

- The people grieve (3:1–20)
- Yahweh comforts those who turn back to him (3:21–39)
- Judah is learning to return to Yahweh (3:40–54)
- Judah cries out to be avenged of its enemies (3:55–66)

Fourth lament: The terrors of the siege of Jerusalem (4:1–4:22)

- The people's sin caused Jerusalem to be punished (4:1–20)
- Their being punished satisfied Yahweh's wrath for their sin (4:21–22a)
- Edom will be punished also (4:22b)

Fifth lament: The broken nation cries out to Yahweh (5:1–22)

What is the Book of Lamentations about?

The Babylonians captured the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. In the Book of Lamentations, the writer grieves over Jerusalem being destroyed.

The Book of Lamentations is organized into five poems. The writer describes how God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed because the people sinned against him. However, the writer also states that God is always loving and faithful to his people. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/faith\]\]](#))

Who wrote the Book of Lamentations?

The text of Lamentations does not give the name of the author. The traditional view is that Jeremiah wrote it. The writer seems to have personally seen Jerusalem destroyed. The serious and grieving words in the Book of Jeremiah are similar to those in the Book of Lamentations.

How should the title of this book be translated?

Translators may use the traditional title of “Lamentations.” Or they may call the book “Poems of Sadness.” If translators want to take the view that the prophet Jeremiah wrote this book, they might decide on a title such as “The Sad Sayings of Jeremiah.” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.191)**)

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

Did God abandon Israel?

The author of Lamentations often speaks of God abandoning Israel. But this did not mean that God had completely given up on Israel. He rejected Israel for a period of time as the special place where he would be present. However, God remained faithful to what he promised Israel in his covenant.

While it was common in the ancient Near East to think that a god might leave its city, it usually did so because it was too weak to defend the city. In Lamentations, Yahweh abandons Jerusalem because the people sinned against him, not because he was too weak to defend the city. (See: **god, false god, goddess, idol, idolater, idolatrous, idolatry (p.238)**)

What is a funeral song?

People groups commonly sing songs after someone dies or during a funeral. Depending on the culture, these songs can sound either happy or sad. The Book of Lamentations is like a sad song, called a “lament,” sung at a funeral. Some scholars think the rhythm of the laments in Hebrew makes them sound slow like a funeral procession.

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

What style of writing is Lamentations?

Lamentations is a collection of five poems. The Jewish exiles living in captivity in Babylon may have sung or chanted these laments. The Jews who remained in Jerusalem after the Babylonians conquered it may also have sung them. In Chapters 1, 2, and 4, each line of the poem begins with a different Hebrew letter, in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The third chapter repeats three lines starting with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The next three lines begin with next letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Who are the woman and the man in Lamentations?

The author uses the image of an abandoned woman and a persecuted man to represent Judah and Jerusalem. He uses this type of personification to help readers understand the pain and sorrow. (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Lamentations 1

Lamentations 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Judah destroyed for her sin

Judah used to be great, but is now a slave. The temple is stripped of all its valuables. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/temple\]\]](#))

Lamentations 1:1

General Information:

General Information:

Various poetic forms are used throughout this book. (See [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.209)** (See: **Poetry (p.224)**)

is now sitting all alone

This speaks of the city of Jerusalem being empty, as if it were a woman who was sitting alone. Alternate translation: “is now empty” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

She

The writer of Lamentations writes about the city of Jerusalem as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

like a widow

This speaks of Jerusalem as being without protection, as if it were a vulnerable widow. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

She was a princess among the nations

This speaks of Jerusalem being honored as if it were a princess. Alternate translation: “She was like a princess among the nations” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

forced into slavery

“forced to become a slave.” 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: “but she is now a slave” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 1:2

She weeps and wails & and her tears cover her cheeks

The author describes Jerusalem as having emotions like a human being. The city also stands for her inhabitants. Alternate translation: “Those who live in her weep and wail ... and their tears cover their cheeks” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

weeps and wails

The word “wails” refers to the sounds that a person makes when they “weep” loudly. Alternate translation: “weeps loudly” (See: **Doublet (p.184)**) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

None of her lovers comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her

This speaks of the people groups that had been faithful to Jerusalem betraying Jerusalem, as if the people groups were Jerusalem’s lovers and friends. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 1:3

General Information:

General Information:

In these verses, Jerusalem and Judah are spoken of as if they were women. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

After poverty and affliction

Alternate translation: "After suffering poverty and affliction"

Judah has gone into exile

Here Judah refers to its inhabitants. Alternate translation: "the people of Judah have gone into exile" or "the people of Judah have been taken into a foreign land" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

She lives & finds

Here the kingdom of Judah is described as a woman. "She" also stands for the citizens of Judah. Alternate translation: "Her people live ... they find" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

finds no rest

Alternate translation: "does not find rest" or "is always afraid"

All her pursuers overtook her in her desperation

This speaks of the people of Judah being captured by their enemies as if they were a woman who was captured by those pursuing her. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

All her pursuers overtook her

Alternate translation: "Everyone who was chasing her managed to capture her" or "Everyone who was hunting for her found her"

in her desperation

The word "desperation" can be expressed as an adjective. Alternate translation: "when she was desperate" or "when she was distressed" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 1:4

General Information:

General Information:

The city of Zion is spoken of as if it were a woman. In Lamentations, Zion and Jerusalem are names used to refer to the same city. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

The roads of Zion mourn

The author speaks of the roads that lead to Zion mourning as if they were human beings. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

the appointed feasts

Alternate translation: "the feasts that God told them to celebrate"

All her gates are desolate

The word "her" refers to Zion. Alternate translation: "All of Zion's gates are empty" (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Her virgins are sorrowful and she herself is in complete distress

Here the people of Zion being distressed are spoken of as if they were a woman in distress. Alternate translation: "Zion's virgins are sorrowful, and its people despairing" (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Lamentations 1:5

Her adversaries have become her master; her enemies prosper

Alternate translation: "Zion's adversaries rule over it; its enemies prosper"

Yahweh has afflicted her for her many sins

This speaks of Yahweh punishing the people of Zion for their sins as if they were a woman that Yahweh was punishing. Alternate translation: "Yahweh has afflicted her people because of the sins they have committed" (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Her little children go into captivity to her adversary

The word "captivity" can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: "Her enemy captures her little children" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 1:6

General Information:

General Information:

The city of Zion is spoken of as if it were a woman. In Lamentations, Zion and Jerusalem are names used to refer to the same city. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Beauty has left the daughter of Zion

This speaks of everything beautiful in Zion being destroyed as if “beauty” were a person that left Zion. Alternate translation: “Everything that was beautiful about the daughter of Zion is destroyed”

daughter of Zion

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Her princes have become like deer that cannot find pasture

This speaks of Zion’s princes having nothing to eat like deer that cannot find grass to eat. Alternate translation: “Her princes are starving, they are like deer that cannot find grass to eat” (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

deer

A deer is a medium-sized, grass-eating animal that is often hunted by humans for food. It is also a beautiful animal to look at.

they go without strength before

Alternate translation: “they are not strong enough to run away from” or “they are very weak before”

their pursuer

Alternate translation: “the person that is pursuing them”

Lamentations 1:7

In the days of her affliction and her homelessness

Alternate translation: "During the time of her affliction and her homelessness"

Jerusalem will call to mind

Here "Jerusalem" refers to the people who live there. The phrase "call to mind" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "the people of Jerusalem will remember" or "Jerusalem will remember" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

precious treasures

This refers to their valuable possessions.

in former days

"in the past." This refers to the time before the people of Jerusalem were captured. Alternate translation: "before this disaster happened" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

When her people fell into the hand of the adversary

Here the word "hand" refers the control of the enemy army. Alternate translation: "When the adversary conquered and captured her people" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

saw her and laughed at her destruction

This means that they were glad and mocked Jerusalem when it was destroyed.

at her destruction

This word "destruction" can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: "because she was destroyed" or "while they destroyed her" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 1:8

General Information:

General Information:

The city of Jerusalem is spoken of as if it were a woman. In Lamentations, Zion and Jerusalem are names used to refer to the same city. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Jerusalem sinned greatly, therefore, she has become scorned as something that is filthy

This speaks of Jerusalem being scorned in the same way that a woman is scorned when she is unclean. According to the law of Moses, a woman was considered unclean during her monthly bleeding. Alternate translation: "Jerusalem's sins have made her filthy and unclean, and therefore she was unacceptable before God" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

Jerusalem sinned greatly

This describes Jerusalem as a woman who sinned, while it also stands for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "The people of Jerusalem sinned greatly" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

has become scorned

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: "has become an object of scorn" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

her nakedness

"her naked." Jerusalem is described as a woman whose private parts have been exposed to everyone to shame her. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Lamentations 1:9

She has become unclean beneath her skirts

According to the law of Moses, a woman was considered unclean during her monthly bleeding. This speaks of Jerusalem being unclean, as if it were a menstruating woman. Alternate translation: "Jerusalem has become unclean, as when a woman is unclean beneath her skirts" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

unclean

A person who God considers to be spiritually unacceptable or defiled is spoken of as if the person were physically unclean. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Her fall was terrible

The phrase "her fall" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "Her downfall was astonishing" or "Those who saw her destruction were surprised" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Look at my affliction, Yahweh

This could mean that: (1) the author of Lamentations now talks directly to Yahweh or (2) Jerusalem is described as talking to Yahweh like a person. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Look at

Alternate translation: "Pay attention to"

the enemy has become too great

This means that the enemy army has become too large and powerful and has defeated Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "the enemy army has defeated me" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 1:10

has put his hand on

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “has taken possession of” or “has stolen” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

precious treasures

This refers to their valuable possessions.

She has seen

The word “She” refers to Jerusalem. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

the nations

This refers to people from various nations, not the entire population of those nations. Alternate translation: “people from the nations” (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

you had commanded

The word “you” refers to Yahweh.

Lamentations 1:11

her people

The word “her” refers to Jerusalem which is described as if it were a woman. Alternate translation: “her inhabitants” or “the people of the city” (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

bread

This refers to food in general. Alternate translation: “food” (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

They have given their precious treasures for food

This means they traded their wealth and their valuables in exchange for food. Alternate translation: “They have traded their precious treasures in exchange for food” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

precious treasures

This refers to their valuable possessions.

to restore their lives

Alternate translation: “to save their lives” or “to restore their strength”

Look, Yahweh, and consider me

Here Jerusalem speaks directly to Yahweh. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Lamentations 1:12

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

This rhetorical question is an accusation against the people who walk past Jerusalem and do not care about its well-being. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "All you who pass by should care more for my affliction!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

Is it nothing to you

Here Jerusalem continues to speak, but now to people who pass by instead of to Yahweh. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Look and see

These words share similar meanings. Together they invite the reader to understand by seeing that no one has suffered so much. (See: **Doublet (p.184)**) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

the sorrow that is being inflicted on me

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 sorrow that Yahweh is inflicting upon me" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

on the day of his fierce anger

Here the word "day" is used as an idiom. Alternate translation: "when he was fiercely angry" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 1:13

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

on high

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “heaven” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

he has sent fire into my bones, and it has conquered them

This speaks of Yahweh punishing Jerusalem as if Jerusalem were a person that Yahweh were punishing with fire. Alternate translation: “he has sent a painful punishment into my inner being, and it has destroyed me” or “he has sent a destructive punishment into the middle of Jerusalem, and it has destroyed the city” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

has sent fire into my bones

Here “fire” represents pain and “bones” represents one’s inner being. Alternate translation: “has sent pain into my bones” or “has sent pain into my inner being” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

He has spread a net for my feet

This speaks of Yahweh punishing Jerusalem as if Jerusalem were a person that Yahweh had set a trap for. This refers to a type of trap usually used to catch an animal. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

turned me back

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “prevented my from walking any further” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 1:14

The yoke of my transgressions & They are knit together and placed upon my neck

This speaks of the people of Jerusalem's sins as if they were a yoke bearing a heavy burden that Yahweh had placed on their necks. Also, 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: "My transgressions are like a yoke that he has bound together with his hands and placed upon my neck" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

given me over into their hands

"given me over into the hands of my enemies." Here their enemies' control is represented by their "hands." Alternate translation: "given my over to the control of my enemies" or "let my enemies defeat me" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

I am not able to stand

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "I cannot resist them" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 1:15

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

mighty men

Alternate translation: "strongest soldiers"

an assembly

Here the enemy army attacking Jerusalem is spoken of as if it were a meeting of people who have come together in order to accuse and condemn someone. Alternate translation: "a great army" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

to crush my vigorous men

This speaks of the enemy army defeating the soldiers of Jerusalem as if they crushed them. Alternate translation: "to defeat my vigorous men"

vigorous men

This refers to men at the strongest time of their lives.

The Lord has trampled & in the winepress

Here the judgment of God is described as if Jerusalem were grapes on which he had trampled in order to squeeze out the juice. Alternate translation: "It is as though the Lord has trampled upon the virgin daughter of Judah in a winepress" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

the virgin daughter of Judah

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. The word "virgin" suggests that this woman is pure. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 1:16

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. In Lamentations, Zion and Jerusalem are names used to refer to the same city. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

for a comforter is far from me, one who restores my life

This speaks of Jerusalem having no one to comfort her as if she did have a comforter, but that he was far away. The word "comforter" can be expressed as a verb. Alternate translation: "for there is no one to comfort me and restore my life" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

restores my life

Alternate translation: "revives me"

Lamentations 1:17

Zion has spread her hands wide

Here Jerusalem no longer speaks about herself; instead the author describes Jerusalem. He speaks of Zion as if it were a woman that lifts up her hands to ask for help. Alternate translation: "Zion has reached out for help" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-symaction\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

those around Jacob

Alternate translation: "the people around Jacob" or "the nations surrounding Jacob"

around Jacob should be his adversaries

Here "Jacob" refers to his descendants, that is Israel. Alternate translation: "around Jacob's descendants should be their adversaries" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

unclean

A person who God considers spiritually unacceptable or defiled is spoken of as if the person were physically unclean. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 1:18

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Yahweh is righteous

This implies that what Yahweh has done, he has done because he is righteous. Alternate translation: “Yahweh has acted out of his righteousness” or “What Yahweh has done is right”

see my sorrow

The word “sorrow” can be expressed as a “sad.” Alternate translation: “see how extremely sad I am” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

My virgins and my vigorous men have gone into captivity

Here all of the people of Jerusalem who were taken into captivity are represented by the “virgins” and the “vigorous men” who were taken. Alternate translation: “Many of my people, including my virgins and vigorous men, have gone into captivity” (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

vigorous men

This refers to men at the strongest time of their lives. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 1:15](#).

Lamentations 1:19

I called for my friends

Alternate translation: "I called for my friends to help me" or "I called for my allies to help me"

they were treacherous toward me

This means that they betrayed him. Alternate translation: "they betrayed me" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

to restore their lives

Alternate translation: "to save their lives" or "to restore their strength"

Lamentations 1:20

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Look, Yahweh, for I am in distress

Jerusalem continues to talk about herself as if she were a woman, but now talks directly to Yahweh. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

my stomach churns

The word “churn” means to move around violently, normally in a circular rotation. This does not mean the stomach is literally churning, but describes how the woman, representing Jerusalem, feels. Alternate translation: “my insides ache” or “my stomach hurts” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

my heart is disturbed within me

Here the woman, representing Jerusalem, refers to her “heart” to emphasize her feelings. Alternate translation: “my heart is broken” or “I am extremely sad” (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

the sword bereaves a mother

The “sword” represents the enemy. Alternate translation: “the enemy kills a mother’s children” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

inside the house there is only death

This could mean: (1) “inside the house, everyone is dying” or (2) “and inside the house the dead people are kept” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 1:21

General Information:

General Information:

In this section Jerusalem is portrayed as a woman speaking about herself. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

They have heard my groaning

"People have heard my groaning." Jerusalem continues to speak as if she were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

you have done it

Here the word "you" refers to Yahweh.

You have brought the day you promised

The phrase "the day" is an idiom that refers to a specific event happening. Alternate translation: "You have done what you have promised" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

now let them become like me

This is a request for Jerusalem's enemies to suffer as the people of Jerusalem have. Alternate translation: "now let them suffer like me" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 1:22

Let all their wickedness come before you

This is a request for Yahweh to judge Jerusalem's enemies for their wickedness. The phrase "come before you" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "Pay attention to all of the wickedness they have committed" or "Judge them for all of their wickedness" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

deal with them as you have dealt with me

This is a request for Yahweh to punish Jerusalem's enemies as he punished the people of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "punish them as you have punished me" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

my heart is faint

Here the "heart" represents the whole person. Alternate translation: "I am faint" (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

Lamentations 2

Lamentations 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

God has become Judah's enemy. He is determined to destroy them.

Lamentations 2:1

General Information:

General Information:

A new poem begins. The writer of Lamentations uses many different ways to express that the people of Israel have lost God's favor. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Poetry (p.224)**)

The Lord has covered the daughter of Zion under the cloud of his anger

This speaks of the Lord's anger against Jerusalem (Zion) as if it were a dark cloud. This could mean: (1) God is threatening to harm the people of Jerusalem or (2) God has already harmed the people. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

the daughter of Zion

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. Translate as you did in [Lamentations 1:6](#). (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

He has thrown the splendor of Israel down from heaven to earth

The phrase "the splendor of Israel" refers to Jerusalem. This passage speaks of the people of Jerusalem losing favor with the Lord as if he threw them out of his presence. The phrase "from heaven to earth" is a great distance used to represent how much they lost favor with the Lord. Alternate translation: "Jerusalem, the splendor of Israel, has lost all favor with the Lord" or "Jerusalem has lost all favor with the Lord" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

He has not remembered his footstool

This is a reference to the Lord having considered Jerusalem his "footstool" in the past, which symbolized that he had authority over them and that they were submissive to him. This speaks of the Lord disregarding Jerusalem as his footstool as if he did not remember them. Alternate translation: "He disregarded Jerusalem as his footstool" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

not remembered

This speaks of the Lord not paying attention to Jerusalem as if he did not remember them. Alternate translation: "disregarded" or "paid no attention to" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

on the day of his anger

Here "day" is used as an idiom that refers to a general period of time. Alternate translation: "at the time when he displays his anger" or "at the time he acts in his anger" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 2:2

the daughter of Judah

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

the days of his anger

Here “day” is used as an idiom that refers to a general period of time. Alternate translation: “the time of his anger” or “the time of his anger” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

swallowed up

This speaks of the Lord completely destroying the towns as if he were an animal who ate them. Alternate translation: “completely destroyed” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

all the towns of Jacob

Here “the towns of Jacob” refers to the towns where his descendants lived. Alternate translation: “all the towns of Israel” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

the fortified cities of the daughter of Judah

This could mean: (1) the fortified cities throughout Judah or (2) the fortified walls of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 2:3

he has cut off every horn of Israel

This speaks of the Lord taking away Israel's strength as if he were cutting off its horns. The word "horn" refers to an animal horn, not a musical instrument. Alternate translation: "he has taken away all of Israel's strength" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

withdrawn his right hand from before the enemy

Here the Lord's protection is represented by his "right hand." Alternate translation: "stopped protecting us from our enemies" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

He has burned up Jacob like a blazing fire that devours everything around it

This speaks of how the Lord has destroyed Jacob as if a fire has completely burned it. Alternate translation: "He has destroyed Jacob like a blazing fire destroys everything"

Jacob

Here "Jacob" refers to the places where his descendants lived. Alternate translation: "Israel" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 2:4

Like an enemy he has bent his bow toward us, with his right is ready to shoot

A soldier has to bend his bow in order to shoot an arrow from it. This speaks of the Lord preparing to attack Israel as if he were an enemy about to shoot them with a bow and arrow. Alternate translation: "He has prepared to kill us, like an enemy who has made his bow ready to shoot us" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

in the tent of the daughter of Zion

The "daughter of Zion" is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. The phrase "tent of the daughter of Zion" speaks of Jerusalem as a "tent" emphasizing that it is the home of those who live there. Alternate translation: "who live in Jerusalem" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

he has poured out his wrath like fire

This speaks of the Lord's wrath as if it were a liquid that he were pouring out on the people. His wrath is also compared to a "fire" to emphasize how destructive it is. Alternate translation: "in his anger he has destroyed everything like a blazing fire" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 2:5

swallowed up

This speaks of the Lord completely destroying Israel as if he were animal who ate them. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 2:2](#). Alternate translation: “completely destroyed” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

her palaces & her strongholds

Israel is spoken of as if it were female.

He has increased mourning and lamentation within the daughter of Judah

The words “mourning” and “lamentation” can be expressed as verbs. Alternate translation: “He has caused more and more people within the daughter of Judah to mourn and lament” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

daughter of Judah

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. Alternate translation: “Judah” (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Lamentations 2:6

He has attacked his tabernacle like a garden hut

This speaks of the tabernacle being easily destroyed, as if it were a garden hut. The Lord caused Israel's enemies to destroy it. He did not destroy it himself. Alternate translation: "He has caused their enemies to attack his tabernacle as easily as if it were a garden hut" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

a garden hut

a very small building for holding farming tools or for sheltering someone who is guarding a garden

He has destroyed the place of the solemn assembly

The Lord caused Israel's enemies to destroy it. He did not destroy it himself. Alternate translation: "He has caused the place of the solemn assembly to be destroyed" or "He has caused their enemies to destroy the place of the solemn assembly" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

caused both solemn assembly and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion

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: "caused the people in Zion to forget both solemn assembly and Sabbath" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

in the indignation of his anger

Alternate translation: "because he was extremely angry with them"

Lamentations 2:7

He has given over the walls of her palaces into the hand of the enemy

Here the enemy's "hand" refers to the enemy's control. Alternate translation: "He has allowed the enemy to capture the walls of her palaces" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

the walls of her palaces

Here, the word **her** may refer either to the temple or to Jerusalem. Possible translations are: (1) "the walls of the temple" or (2) "the walls of Jerusalem's palaces." The word "walls" is a synecdoche for the whole building, and the building is a synecdoche for all of Jerusalem. (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

They have raised a shout in the house of Yahweh, as on the day of an appointed feast

This is an ironic comparison between the happy, noisy festivals of Israel and the loud shouts of victory of the Babylonians. Alternate translation: "They have raised a shout in the house of Yahweh, as the Israelites would during an appointed feast" (See: **Irony (p.204)**) (See: **Irony (p.204)**)

have raised a shout

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "have shouted victoriously" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 2:8

Yahweh decided to destroy the city wall

Yahweh chose to have the wall destroyed and caused Jerusalem's enemy to destroy it. He did not destroy it himself. (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

daughter of Zion

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

He has stretched out the measuring line

This speaks of preparing to destroy the wall as if he measured it before he destroyed it, so that he knew how much to destroy. Alternate translation: "It is as though he has measured the wall" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

has not withheld his hand from destroying

This can be stated without the double negatives. Also, here the Lord is referred to by his "hand." Alternate translation: "with his hand he has destroyed the wall" or "he has destroyed the wall" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-doublenegatives\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Double Negatives (p.181)**)

He has made the ramparts and wall to lament; together they wasted away

The walls and ramparts are spoken of as if they were people who lamented and died. Alternate translation: "Because he has destroyed the ramparts and walls, they are like people who lament and have lost their strength" (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

ramparts

Ancient cities had a main "wall" to keep attackers out, and an outer line of "ramparts" to keep attackers from the wall.

Lamentations 2:9

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 2:10

daughter of Zion

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

sit on the ground in silence

Often people would sit on the ground to show they were mourning. Alternate translation: “sit on the ground, mourning in silence” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

They have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth

These are actions of mourning. Alternate translation: “To show their mourning, they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

have bowed their heads to the ground

This is an action of mourning. Alternate translation: “have sorrowfully bowed their heads to the ground” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

Lamentations 2:11

General Information:

General Information:

The author shifts from describing Jerusalem to describing his own experience.

My eyes have failed from their tears

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “I have cried until I cannot cry anymore” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

my stomach churns

The word “churn” means to move around violently, normally in a circular rotation. This does not mean the stomach is literally churning, but describes how the author feels. Alternate translation: “my insides ache” or “my stomach hurts” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

my inner parts are poured out to the ground

The author speaks of feeling grief in his inner being as if his inner body parts had fallen out of his body onto the ground. Alternate translation: “my entire inner being is in grief” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

the daughter of my people

This is a poetic name of Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. Alternate translation: “my people” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 2:12

Where is grain and wine?

This rhetorical question is used as a request for something to eat. The children are telling their mother that they are hungry. The phrase "grain and wine" represents food and drink. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Give us something to eat and drink." (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

as they faint like a wounded man

This speaks of the children fainting from hunger and thirst in the same way that a wounded man faints. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

their lives are poured out on the bosom of their mothers

This speaks of the children dying as if their lives were a liquid that was being poured out. Alternate translation: "they slowly die in the arms of their mothers" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 2:13

General Information:

General Information:

The author begins to address Jerusalem.

What can I say & Jerusalem?

The author uses this rhetorical question to express that he does not know what to say to help Jerusalem. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "There is nothing that I can say ... Jerusalem." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

daughter of Jerusalem & virgin daughter of Zion

These are poetic names for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. "Zion" is another name for Jerusalem. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

To what can I compare to you & Zion?

The author uses this rhetorical question to express that he does not know how to give comfort to Jerusalem. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "There is nothing to which I can compare you ... Zion." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

Your wound is as great as the sea

This speaks of Jerusalem's great suffering as if it were as terrible as the sea is great. Alternate translation: "Your suffering is as terrible as the sea is large" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

Who can heal you?

"Who can restore you?" The author uses this rhetorical question to express that there is no one who can restore Jerusalem to the way it was before. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "No one can heal you." or "No one can restore you." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

Lamentations 2:14

They have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes

“They did not tell you about your sins to restore your fortunes.” The word “fortune” refers to a person’s wealth and prosperity.

for you they gave utterances

The word “utterances” can be expressed with the verb “spoke.” Alternate translation: “they spoke things to you” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 2:15

clap their hands & hiss and shake their heads

These actions are used to mock and insult others. Alternate translation: "mock you by clapping their hands ... hiss and shake their heads" (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

the daughter of Jerusalem

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Is this the city that they called 'The Perfection of Beauty,' 'The Joy for All of Earth'?

This rhetorical question is used to express sarcasm. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "This city that they called 'The Perfection of Beauty,' 'The Joy for All of Earth,' is not so beautiful or joyful anymore!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

The Perfection of Beauty

Alternate translation: "Perfectly Beautiful"

Lamentations 2:16

grind their teeth

This action shows a person's anger and that they are mocking others. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

We have swallowed her up

Here the people speak of destroying Jerusalem as if they were an animal swallowing its food. Alternate translation: "We have completely destroyed Jerusalem" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

We have lived to see it

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: "We have greatly desired to see it happen" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 2:17

He has overthrown

Alternate translation: "He has destroyed"

to rejoice over you

This means that the enemy rejoiced because they defeated them. Alternate translation: "to rejoice over defeating you"

he has lifted up the horn of your enemies

Here **horn** (that is, an animal horn) represents strength. Alternate translation: "he has increased the power of your enemies" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 2:18

Their heart cried out to the Lord

Here the word **heart** represents the whole person emphasizing one's innermost being. Possible meanings of who cried out are: (1) the people of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "The people of Jerusalem shouted to the Lord from their innermost being" or (2) the walls are being personified. Alternate translation: "You walls, cry out to the Lord from your innermost being" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

walls of the daughter of Zion! Make your tears flow & no relief

The writer speaks to the walls of Jerusalem. He wants the people of Jerusalem to do what he is telling the walls to do. Some translations take this whole section to be spoken to the "walls," though this can be written with the first phrase "walls of the daughter of Zion!" spoken to the "walls," and the rest of the section spoken directly to the people. (See: **Apostrophe (p.173)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.173)**)

the daughter of Zion

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

Make your tears flow down like a river

This speaks of the people crying so much that their tears would flow like a river. Alternate translation: "Cry many, many tears" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

day and night

These two opposite times of day refer to all the time. Alternate translation: "all of the time" (See: **Merism (p.207)**) (See: **Merism (p.207)**)

Give yourself no relief, your eyes no relief

Alternate translation: "Do not allow yourself and your eyes to rest from crying"

Lamentations 2:19

Arise, cry out & of every street

The writer continues speaking to the walls of Jerusalem. He wants the people of Jerusalem to do what he is telling the walls to do. Some translations take this whole section to be spoken to the “walls,” though this can be written with the first phrase “walls of the daughter of Zion!” spoken to the “walls,” and the rest of the section spoken directly to the people. (See: **Apostrophe (p.173)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.173)**)

at the beginning of the night watches

“many times during the night.” This refers to every time a watchman came on duty.

Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord

The phrase “pour out your heart like water” is an idiom. Here the Lord is represented by his “face” to emphasize his presence. Alternate translation: “Tell the Lord how you feel in your inner being” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lift up your hands to him

This was an action often performed while praying. Alternate translation: “Lift up your hands to him in prayer” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.233)**)

for the lives of your children

This means for them to request that the Lord save their children. Alternate translation: “to save the lives of your children” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

at the corner of every street

The word “every” here is an exaggeration for “many.” Alternate translation: “where the streets come together” or “by the roads” (See: **Hyperbole (p.195)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.195)**)

Lamentations 2:20

Should women eat the fruit of their wombs & for?

This rhetorical question is asked to emphasize that it is not right for women to eat their children. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Woman should not eat their own children ... for!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

the fruit of their wombs

This speaks of children having come from their mother as if they were fruit that came from her womb. Alternate translation: "their children that they have given birth to" or "their own children" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Should priest and prophet be slaughtered in the sanctuary of the Lord?

This rhetorical question is used to emphasize that the prophets and priests should not be killed. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "The prophets and priests should not be slaughtered in the sanctuary of the Lord!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

Should priest and prophet be slaughtered

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: "Should our enemies slaughter priests and prophets" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 2:21

Both the young and the old lie on the dust

It is implied here that this refers to dead people. Alternate translation: "The corpses of both the young and the old lie on the dust" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Both the young and the old

These phrases refer to people. These two opposites are used to refer to all ages of people. Alternate translation: "Both young people and old people" or "People of all ages" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#)) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.217)**)

My young women and my young men have fallen by the sword

Here the "sword" refers to their enemies. This is a euphemism that means that they were murdered by their enemies. Alternate translation: "My young women and my young men have been murdered by their enemies" or "My enemies have murdered my young women and my young men" (See: **Euphemism (p.186)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.186)**)

you have slaughtered them

This speaks of Yahweh allowing the people to be slaughtered as if he killed them himself. Alternate translation: "you allowed them to be slaughtered" or "you allowed this to happen" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 2:22

as you would call the people to a feast day

“as if they were coming to a feast.” This speaks of how Yahweh summoned his enemies as if he were inviting them to a feast. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

my terrors

Here the people the author fears are referred to as his “terrors.” Alternate translation: “the attackers I was afraid of” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

on every side

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “to attack from every direction” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

on the day of the anger of Yahweh

Here “day” is used as an idiom that refers to a general period of time. Alternate translation: “at the time when Yahweh acted in his anger” or “during the time that Yahweh displayed his anger” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Troubles

Here the author speaks of the suffering experienced by the people of Jerusalem during the Babylonian siege and after the city's fall. He speaks of these sufferings as if they had been directed against him personally, as if God had personally attacked him. However, we should understand the writer's feelings as having been shared by everyone in the city.

In verse 19, the writer begins to think about the lessons that he and his fellow citizens should learn about God and his anger and his mercy. He also thinks about what it means to repent and to trust in God.

In verse 43, the writer speaks again about the suffering that God has caused to Jerusalem, but here the writer speaks of "we" and "us," not "I" and "me." But in verse 48, he begins to speak about how he himself will continually mourn over what has happened.

In verse 52, the writer begins to think about his personal enemies in Jerusalem, those who persecuted him for bringing Yahweh's messages to the city. He asks for God to show his enemies that he was doing right, and to take revenge on them for their crimes against him.

Lamentations 3:1

A new poem begins. Here the author speaks of the sufferings that his people experienced. He speaks about them as if God had personally attacked only him. However, the writer intends to speak for everyone in the city. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Poetry (p.224)**)

who has seen misery

Here “has seen” represents has experienced. Alternate translation: “who has experienced misery” or “who has suffered” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

under the rod of Yahweh’s fury

Being “under the rod” represents being beaten with a rod. The author speaks of God’s punishment as if God had beaten him with a rod. Alternate translation: “because Yahweh was very angry and has beaten me with a rod” or “because Yahweh was very angry and has punished me severely” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:2

He drove me away

Alternate translation: "He forced me to go away"

caused me to walk in darkness rather than light

Here "darkness" represents suffering. Alternate translation: "caused me to suffer terribly with no hope, like a person walking in darkness rather than light" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:3

he turned his hand against me

Here “turned his hand against me” represents attacking him. The author speaks of God causing bad things to happen to him as if God had attacked him. Alternate translation: “he has attacked me” or “he has caused many bad things to happen to me, like someone who attacks a person” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:4

He made my flesh and my skin waste away; he broke my bones

This could mean: (1) these things are a result of being beaten or (2) these are more ways that God punished the man.

Lamentations 3:5

He built up siege works against me

Siege works are ramps that an army builds around a city to enable them to climb over the city walls and invade the city.

He built up siege works against me

This could mean: (1) the author speaks of God causing bad things to happen to him as if he were a city and God was an enemy that built up siege works against him. Alternate translation: "God attacked me like an enemy army that sets up siege works around a city" or (2) the author speaks of God causing the enemy army to attack Jerusalem as if God were the enemy. Alternate translation: "God caused the enemy army to build up siege works against me" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

surrounded me with bitterness and hardship

This represents God causing him to experience much bitterness and hardship. Alternate translation: "caused me to experience much bitterness and hardship" or "caused me to suffer and have many problems" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

bitterness

Here "bitterness" represents suffering. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:6

He made me live in dark places, like those who died long ago

Here “dark places” is a metaphor for suffering. The author compares the intensity of his suffering to the intensity of the darkness that those who died long ago experience. Alternate translation: “The suffering that he causes me is intense like the darkness of the grave” or “He makes me suffer terribly, as if I were in the darkness of those who died long ago” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:7

He built a wall around me and I cannot escape. He made my chains heavy

This represents the continuing suffering. Like a person who cannot escape from prison, the author cannot make his suffering stop. Alternate translation: "My suffering continues. It is as though he has built a wall around me and put heavy chains on me, and I cannot escape" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:8

he shut out my prayer

The author speaks about God refusing to listen to his prayers as though God was shutting his ears so that the author's prayers could not go into them. Alternate translation: "he refuses to hear my prayer" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 3:9

He blocked my path

The author speaks of God causing him to continue to suffer as if God was preventing him from escaping the suffering by blocking his path. Alternate translation: "It is as though he blocked my path" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

a wall of hewn stone

"a wall of cut stones." People would cut stones into regular shapes that could fit together well in order to build a strong wall.

he made my paths crooked

Crooked paths do not lead people to where they want to go. Here they represent unsuccessful ways of escaping suffering. Alternate translation: "it is as though he has made my paths crooked" or "I have tried to make the suffering stop, but God has prevented me, like one who prevents another from escaping by making his paths crooked" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:10

He is like a bear waiting to ambush me, a lion in hiding

The author speaks of God being ready to cause him to suffer more, as if God were a wild animal waiting to attack him. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

Lamentations 3:11

he turned aside my paths

This could mean: (1) "he dragged me off the path" or (2) "he caused my path to turn in the wrong direction"

he has made me desolate

Alternate translation: "he has made me hopeless" or "he has not allowed me to have any help"

Lamentations 3:12

General Information:

General Information:

God is often spoken of as if he were a warrior.

He bent his bow

A soldier has to bend his bow in order to shoot an arrow from it. The author speaks of God deciding to cause him trouble as if God were a warrior ready to shoot him with an arrow. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 2:4](#). Alternate translation: "It was as if God made his bow ready to shoot"

Lamentations 3:13

He pierced my kidneys with the arrows of his quiver

The author speaks of the deep grief he feels as if God had shot his kidneys with an arrow. Alternate translation: "My grief is great. It is as if he pierced my kidneys with the arrows of his quiver" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

my kidneys

The kidneys are abdominal organs that move urine into the bladder. They are a metaphor for a person's emotions. Alternate translation: "deep into my body" or "my heart" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

quiver

a bag worn on the back in which to store arrows

Lamentations 3:14

a laughingstock to all my people

The word "all" is a generalization, meaning "most." Alternate translation: "a laughingstock to most of my people" or "someone whom all my people mock" (See: **Hyperbole (p.195)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.195)**)

laughingstock

someone whom many people mock

Lamentations 3:15

He filled me with bitterness

Here “bitterness” represents suffering. It is referred to as if it were something that could fill the speaker. Alternate translation: “He has caused me to suffer very much” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

forced me to drink wormwood

Wormwood is the bitter juice from the leaves and flowers of a certain plant. Drinking that bitter juice represents suffering. Alternate translation: “it is as though he forced me to drink something very bitter” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:16

He has made my teeth grind with gravel

This could mean: (1) the author speaks of God humiliating him as if God had forced him to chew gravel. Alternate translation: "He has humiliated me, like someone who forces another to chew gravel" or (2) the author speaks of God humiliating him as if God had pushed his face down into the gravel on the ground. Alternate translation: "He has humiliated me, like someone who pushes another man's face down into the gravel" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

he made me cower in the ashes

The author speaks of God humiliating him as if God had pushed him down into the ashes of a fire on the ground. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

cower

make oneself as small as possible because of fear of something one cannot fight against

Lamentations 3:17

My soul is deprived of peace

This could mean: (1) the author's experiences are not peaceful. Alternate translation: "I have no peace in my life" or (2) the author does not feel peace. Alternate translation: "I feel no peace in my soul"

Lamentations 3:18

My endurance has perished and so has my hope in Yahweh

The author speaks as if his ability to endure more suffering and his hope that Yahweh will help him were living beings that have died. Alternate translation: "I cannot endure anymore suffering and I can no longer hope that Yahweh will help me" (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

endurance

Some versions translate this as "glory" or "splendor."

Lamentations 3:19

General Information:

General Information:

In verses 19 to 42, the writer thinks about the lessons that he and his fellow citizens should learn about God and his anger and mercy.

wormwood and bitterness

Wormwood is a plant that gives a liquid which is very bitter to drink. Together “wormwood” and “bitterness” represent severe suffering. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-doublet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

Lamentations 3:20

my soul is bowed down within me

Alternate translation: "I am depressed" or "I am discouraged"

Lamentations 3:21

But I call this to mind

This means to intentionally think about something. The word “this” refers to something that the author will start to speak about in the next verse. Alternate translation: “But I choose to think about this” or “But I remember this”

I have hope

Alternate translation: “I hope”

Lamentations 3:22

The steadfast love of Yahweh never ceases

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **steadfast love**, you can express the same idea with the phrase “love faithfully.” Alternate translation: “Yahweh never stops loving his people faithfully” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

his compassions never end

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **compassions**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “care.” Alternate translation: “he never stops caring for those who suffer” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 3:23

they are new every morning

The word “they” refers to God’s steadfast love and compassions. Their being new represents God continuing to act according to them. Alternate translation: “every morning he treats us again with steadfast love and compassion” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

your faithfulness

The word “your” refers to Yahweh.

Lamentations 3:24

Yahweh is my inheritance

When God gave each tribe of Israel their land, he called it an inheritance. The author speaks of Yahweh being all he needs as if Yahweh were the inheritance that he had received. Alternate translation: "Because Yahweh is with me, I have everything I need" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:25

Yahweh is good to those who wait for him

Here "good" refers to kindness. Alternate translation: "Yahweh is kind to those who wait for him" or "Yahweh does good things for those who wait for him"

those who wait for him

This could mean: (1) "all those who depend on him" or (2) "the one who waits patiently for him to act."

the one who seeks him

Here, **seeks him** could mean: (1) asking God for help or (2) wanting to know God. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:26

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 3:27

that he bear the yoke in his youth

Here “bear the yoke” represents suffering. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **his youth**, you can express the same idea with another word such as “young.” Alternate translation: “that he suffer while he is young” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:28

Let him sit alone in silence

The phrase “in silence” refers to not speaking. Here it may refer specifically to not complaining. Alternate translation: “Let him sit alone without speaking” or “Let him sit alone and not complain”

when it is laid upon him

“when the yoke is laid upon him.” Here the yoke represents suffering. Alternate translation: “when he suffers” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:29

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 3:30

General Information:

General Information:

The writer speaks of the one who waits for Yahweh ([Lamentations 3:25](#)).

Let him offer his cheek to the one who strikes him

The word “him” refers to anyone who is suffering and who waits for Yahweh. Here “offer his cheek” represents allowing someone to strike his cheek. Alternate translation: “Let him allow people to hit him on the face” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

let him be filled to the full with reproach

The author speaks of a person as if he were a container and reproach were a liquid. Being filled with reproach represents being reproached much. The implication is that he should be patient when this happens. Alternate translation: “let him be insulted much” or “let him be patient when people reproach him” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:31

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 3:32

though he causes grief

Alternate translation: “though the Lord causes people to suffer” or “though he afflicts people”

he will have compassion

Alternate translation: “he will be compassionate to them”

Lamentations 3:33

For he does not afflict from his heart

Here the heart represents desire or pleasure, and afflicting from the heart represents afflicting with pleasure. Alternate translation: “For it does not make him happy to afflict people” or “He does not take pleasure in afflicting people” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

the children of mankind

This refers to people in general. Alternate translation: “human beings” or “people” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 3:34

General Information:

General Information:

The author wrote in general terms about what is true for all people, but it shows God's concern for his people, the people of Israel, who were being mistreated by their enemies.

To crush underfoot

Here "crush underfoot" represents abusing and mistreating people. Alternate translation: "To abuse" or "To mistreat" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)- (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

To crush

Alternate translation: "If people crush"

Lamentations 3:35

to deny a man justice

This refers to not allowing a person to have what he deserves. Alternate translation: “to deny a person his rights” or “to keep a person from having what he deserves”

in the presence of the Most High

Doing something “in the presence of the Most High” represents doing it while knowing that God sees it. Alternate translation: “knowing that the Most High sees it” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:36

to deny justice to a person

Here “deny justice” refers to not making a just decision for a person in a legal concern. Alternate translation: “to judge a person wrongly in court” or “to keep a person who goes to a judge from getting what is right”

to deny justice

Alternate translation: “if they deny justice”

Lamentations 3:37

Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord decreed it?

The author uses this rhetorical question to teach that when someone commands something to happen, it will happen only if God has already decreed that it should happen. Alternate translation: "No one has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord decreed it." or "What someone has commanded to happen has never happened unless the Lord decreed it." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

has spoken

It can be expressed clearly that this refers to commanding something to happen. Alternate translation: "has commanded that something should happen" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

it came to pass

Alternate translation: "what he said happened"

Lamentations 3:38

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and the good come?

The author uses this rhetorical question to teach that both calamities and good things happen only because God has commanded them to happen. Alternate translation: "It is only from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and the good come." or "It is only because the Most High has commanded it that both calamities and good things happen." (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

from the mouth of the Most High

Here "mouth" represents what God says or commands. Alternate translation: "from the command of the Most High" or "because the Most High has commanded it" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

both calamities and the good come

Here "come" represents happening. Also, the nominal adjective "the good" can be stated as "good things." Alternate translation: "both calamities and good things happen" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:39

How can any person alive complain? How can a person complain about the punishment for his sins?

The author uses these rhetorical questions to teach that people should not complain when God punishes them. Alternate translation: "A person should not complain when God punishes him for his sins." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

How can any person alive complain

This could mean: (1) it is implied that mere people cannot fully understand God's actions. Alternate translation: "How can a mere person complain" or (2) it is implied that being alive is a gift from God. Alternate translation: "How can a person who is blessed to be alive complain" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 3:40

General Information:

General Information:

The writer speaks again about the suffering that God has caused to Jerusalem, but here he speaks of “we” and “us,” not “I” and “me.” In verse 42 the author starts a prayer that he and the people of Israel should pray.

let us return to Yahweh

Here “return to Yahweh” represents submitting to him again. Alternate translation: “let us submit to Yahweh again” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:41

Let us lift up our hearts and our hands

Here “lift up our hearts” represents praying sincerely. It was customary for the Israelites to raise their hands when praying to God. Alternate translation: “Let us pray sincerely with lifted hands” or “Let us lift up our hands and pray sincerely” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:42

We have transgressed and rebelled

The words “transgressed” and “rebelled” share similar meanings. Together they indicate that transgression is the same as rebelling against Yahweh. (See: **Doublet (p.184)**) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

Lamentations 3:43

You have covered yourself with anger

Here anger is spoken of as if it were a garment that God has put on. Hebrew often spoke of emotions as if they were clothing. Alternate translation: "You have been angry" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

you have killed

Alternate translation: "you have killed many of us"

you have not spared

Here "spared" represents having pity. Alternate translation: "you have not had pity on us" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:44

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

The prayer that began in [Lamentations 3:42](#) continues.

You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through

This represents God refusing to listen to the people's prayer. Alternate translation: "You refuse to listen to our prayers. It is as though you put a cloud between us and you so that our prayers cannot get to you" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:45

You have made us like filthy scum and refuse among the nations

The people of Israel are compared to filthy scum and refuse. This could mean: (1) God has caused the nations to think of his people as worthless. Alternate translation: "You have made the nations think of us as scum and garbage" or (2) God's forcing his people to live among the nations is like throwing them away as garbage. Alternate translation: "You have thrown us away like filthy garbage among the nations" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p. 230)**)

Lamentations 3:46

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 3:47

panic and pitfall have come upon us, ruin and destruction

The abstract nouns “panic,” “pitfall,” “ruin” and “destruction” can be expressed with verbs. Alternate translation: “we are panicking. We are trapped, and we are being ruined and destroyed” or “we are terrified and trapped. We are being completely destroyed” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

pitfall

This refers to falling into a pit. Here it represents being trapped in any way.

have come upon us

Alternate translation: “have happened to us”

ruin and destruction

These two words share similar meanings and refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: “total destruction” (See: **Doublet (p.184)**) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

Lamentations 3:48

General Information:

General Information:

The author speaks about himself again.

My eyes flow with streams of tears

Here the author speaks of the great amount of his tears as if they were streams. He uses exaggeration to show that he is very sad and has cried much. Alternate translation: "Tears flow from my eyes like water flowing in a river" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

because my people are destroyed

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "because enemies have destroyed my people" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 3:49

without ceasing, without relief

Both of these phrases means the same thing. The author speaks of his continuing to cry as if his eyes were a person and had no rest from crying. Alternate translation: “without stopping” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-doublet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

Lamentations 3:50

until Yahweh from heaven looks down and sees

What the author hopes Yahweh will see can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: “until Yahweh looks down from heaven and sees what has happened to my people” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 3:51

My eyes cause me grief

The phrase “My eyes” represents what he sees. Alternate translation: “What I see causes me to grieve” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

because of all the daughters of my city

It can be stated clearly that the “daughters of my city” are suffering. Alternate translation: “because the daughters of my city are suffering” or “because I see the daughters of my city suffering” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

all the daughters of my city

This could mean: (1) the women of Jerusalem or (2) all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 3:52

I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies

The author speaks of people looking for him in order to kill him as if he were an animal that they were hunting. 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: "My enemies have looked for me in order to kill me like people who hunt for a bird" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:53

They cast me into a pit

Alternate translation: "They threw me into a pit" or "They dropped me into a well"

threw a stone on me

This could mean: (1) "threw stones down on me" or (2) "covered the pit with a stone"

Lamentations 3:54

they caused waters to overflow, covering my head

Alternate translation: "the level of the water in the pit rose up over my head"

I have been cut off

Being "cut off" often represents being killed. Here it represents dying very soon. Alternate translation: "I am about to die" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:55

I called on your name

God's name represents his character, and here, "called on your name" represents trusting God's character and calling on him for help. Alternate translation: "I called to you for help" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

from the depths of the pit

This could mean: (1) this refers to the pit that author had been thrown into. Alternate translation: "from the bottom of the pit" or (2) the author was afraid that he would die soon, so he spoke as if he were in the place of the dead. Alternate translation: "from the pit of the dead"

Lamentations 3:56

You heard my voice

Here “voice” represents what he said. Alternate translation: “You heard my words” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Do not close your ear

Here “close your ear” represents refusing to listen. Alternate translation: “Do not refuse to listen” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:57

You came near

People often come near to a person they help. Here “came near” represents helping the man. Alternate translation: “you helped me” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:58

you defended my case, you saved my life

The author speaks of God keeping him from being killed by his enemies as if God had defended him in court as a lawyer defends someone, and kept him from being killed. Alternate translation: “you saved my life from my enemies. It is as though you defended me in court” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

you defended my case

Here “defended my case” represents arguing for him. Alternate translation: “you argued my case for me” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:59

judge my case

Here God is no longer pictured as a lawyer, but as the judge. It can be stated clearly that he wanted God to judge in his favor. Alternate translation: “make a decision about me, and show my enemies that I am right” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:60

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Lamentations 3:61

You have heard their scorn & and all their plans regarding me

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **scorn**, you can express the same idea with the verbs "taunt" or "mock." It can be stated clearly that the plans were to harm him. Alternate translation: "You heard how they have taunted me ... and all they plan to do to me" or "You have heard them mock me ... and plan ways to harm me" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 3:62

The lips and the accusations & come against me all the day

The author speaks of his enemies accusing him all day as if their accusations were soldiers that come to attack him all day. Alternate translation: "My enemies speak against me and accuse me through the whole day" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

The lips & of my enemies

Here the lips represent what his enemies say. Alternate translation: "The words ... of my enemies" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 3:63

how they sit and then rise up

These two actions together represent everything the people do. Alternate translation: "everything they do" (See: **Merism (p.207)**) (See: **Merism (p.207)**)

Lamentations 3:64

Pay back to them, Yahweh, according to what they have done

Here “Pay back to them” represents punishing them. What they have done can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: “Punish them, Yahweh, according to what they have done” or “Yahweh, they have made me suffer, so please make them suffer” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 3:65

You will let their hearts be shameless

Here the “heart” is a metonym that represents their attitudes and emotions, and being “shameless” means not feeling ashamed of their sins even though they should. Their not being ashamed would give even more reason for God to punish them. Alternate translation: “You will let them feel no shame for their sins” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

May your condemnation be upon them

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **condemnation**, you can express the same idea with the verbs “condemn” or “curse.” Alternate translation: “Condemn them” or “Curse them” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

Lamentations 3:66

from under the heavens

Here “from under the heavens” represents everywhere on earth. Alternate translation: “wherever they are on earth”
(See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4

Lamentations 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

The story of Judah being destroyed continues in this chapter. Famine destroyed the rulers and the priests. (See: **priest, priesthood (p.240)**)

Lamentations 4:1

General Information:

General Information:

A new poem begins. See [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.209)**. (See: **Poetry (p.224)**)

The gold has become tarnished; how the purest gold has changed

The people of Jerusalem are spoken of as if they were gold that is no longer shiny, and therefore no longer valuable. Alternate translation: “The people of Jerusalem are like gold that is no longer shiny. They are like pure gold that is no longer beautiful” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

how the purest gold has changed

This is an exclamation that shows the author’s sadness that this has happened. (See: **Exclamations (p.188)**) (See: **Exclamations (p.188)**)

The holy stones are scattered at the corner of every street

This may refer to the temple being destroyed and its stones scattered throughout the city. It may also be a metaphor for the people being scattered. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

at the corner of every street

Alternate translation: “wherever the streets come together” or “by all the roads”

Lamentations 4:2

sons of Zion

Here people of a city are spoken of as if they were the sons of the city. This could mean: (1) this refers to only the young men of Jerusalem or (2) this refers to all the people of Jerusalem. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

they are worth no more than clay jars, the work of the potter's hands

The author speaks of the precious sons of Zion as if they were considered to be inexpensive clay jars. Alternate translation: "people consider them to be as worthless as the clay jars that potters make" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 4:3

General Information:

General Information:

Because of the lack of food in the city, the people of Jerusalem do not give their children all they need.

the jackals offer the breast to nurse their cubs

This means that mother jackals feed their baby jackals.

jackals

fierce wild dogs

the daughter of my people & like the ostriches in the desert

The people in Jerusalem are compared to ostriches because they are cruel to their children. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

the daughter of my people has

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “my people have” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

ostriches

large birds that abandon some of their eggs

Lamentations 4:4

The tongue of the nursing baby sticks to the roof of his mouth by thirst

Alternate translation: "Nursing babies are so thirsty that their tongues stick to the top of their mouths"

Lamentations 4:5

feast on

Alternate translation: “eat much”

now starve in the streets

These people no longer have homes, so they live outside along the streets.

Those who were brought up wearing scarlet clothing

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 grew up wearing scarlet clothing” or “those who wore scarlet clothing when they were growing up” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

scarlet clothing

Here this phrase is a metonym for luxurious, expensive, and comfortable clothing, at least some of which was probably scarlet. Alternate translation: “luxurious clothing” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

now lie on piles of ashes

This is because they no longer have homes and soft beds.

Lamentations 4:6

The punishment of the daughter of my people is greater than that of Sodom

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **punishment**, you can express the same idea with the verb “punish.” Alternate translation: “The daughter of my people has been punished more severely than Sodom was punished”

the daughter of my people

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 2:11](#). Alternate translation: “my people” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

which was overthrown in a moment

The word “which” refers to Sodom. 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: “which God destroyed in a moment” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

no hands were wrung for her

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 wrung their hands for her” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

no hands were wrung for her

People sometimes rub and twist their hands when they are worried and cannot fix something, so wringing the hands here represents worrying. The word “her” refers to Jerusalem, which was called “the daughter of my people.” Alternate translation: “no one was worried about her” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:7

Her leaders were purer than snow, whiter than milk

This could mean: (1) Jerusalem's leaders were beautiful to look at because they were physically healthy or (2) the leaders were morally pure as new snow and milk are pure white. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Her leaders

Alternate translation: "Jerusalem's leaders"

their bodies were more ruddy than coral

"their bodies were redder than coral." This implies that they were healthy. Alternate translation: "their bodies were healthy and red" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

coral

a rock-hard red substance that comes from the ocean and was used for making decorations

sapphire

a costly blue stone used in jewelry

Lamentations 4:8

Their appearance now is darker than soot

This may be because: (1) the sun has darkened the leaders' skin or (2) the soot from the fires that burned Jerusalem has covered their faces.

they are not recognized

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 can recognize them" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Their skin has shriveled on their bones

This implies that there was not much muscle or fat under the skin. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

it has become as dry as wood

Their dry skin is compared to dry wood. (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

Lamentations 4:9

Those who have been killed by the sword

Here the “sword” represents an enemy’s attack. It can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: “Those whom enemy soldiers have killed” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

those killed by hunger

Here “hunger” represents starvation. 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 starved to death” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

who wasted away

Alternate translation: “who became extremely thin and weak”

pierced by the lack of any harvest from the field

Here “harvest from the field” is a metonym that represents food to eat. Lack of food is spoken of here as if it were a sword that pierces people. Alternate translation: “who died because there was not enough food to eat” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:10

The hands of compassionate women

Here the women are represented by their "hands." Because they were so hungry, women who had been compassionate in the past were no longer compassionate toward their children; instead they boiled them for food. Alternate translation: "Compassionate women" or "Women who had been compassionate in the past" (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

they became their food

Alternate translation: "their children became the women's food"

the daughter of my people was

This is a poetic name for Jerusalem, which is spoken of here as if it were a woman. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 2:11](#). Alternate translation: "my people were" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:11

Yahweh showed all his wrath; he poured out his fierce anger

Yahweh was very angry, and he did everything he wanted to do to show that he was angry. (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**)

he poured out his fierce anger

God's punishing his people is spoken of as if his anger were a burning hot liquid that he poured out on them. Alternate translation: "because of his fierce anger, he punished his people" or "in fierce anger he responded to his people" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

He kindled a fire in Zion

This represents God causing Israel's enemies to start a fire in Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "He caused a fire to start in Zion" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

that consumed her foundations

Here "her foundations" represents the whole city, even the part of the city that would be ruined last. Alternate translation: "that burned down the city, even its foundations" (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

Lamentations 4:12

The kings of the earth did not believe, nor did any of the inhabitants of the world believe,

Alternate translation: "The kings of the earth and the rest of the inhabitants of the world did not believe"

enemies or opponents

These two words mean basically the same thing and emphasize that these are people who desired to harm Jerusalem. Alternate translation: "any kind of enemy" or "any of Jerusalem's enemies" (See: **Doublet (p.184)**) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

Lamentations 4:13

the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests

These two lines share similar meanings and emphasize that these spiritual leaders were largely responsible for the fall of Jerusalem. Alternate translation: “the terrible sins of her prophets and priests” (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**)

who have shed the blood of the righteous

Both the priests and the prophets were guilty of murder. Here “shed the blood” represents murder. Alternate translation: “who have murdered the righteous” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:14

They wandered, blind, through the streets

The priests and prophets are spoken of as if they were blind because they wandered through the streets, not knowing where to go. Alternate translation: "They wandered through the streets like blind men" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

They were so defiled by that blood

Here "defiled" represents being unacceptable to God. Because the priests and prophets murdered people, they were ritually unclean, unable to worship God or be with ordinary people. (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

defiled by that blood

"defiled by the blood that they shed." This could mean: (1) the blood was on their clothes or (2) "blood" is a metonym for murder. (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:15

Away! Unclean

Alternate translation: "Go away! You are unclean"

Away! Away! Do not touch

Alternate translation: "Go away! Go away! Do not touch us"

Lamentations 4:16

scattered them

Alternate translation: "scattered the prophets and priests"

he does not watch over them anymore

Here "watch over them" represents being concerned about them and helping them. Alternate translation: "he does not care about them anymore" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 4:17

Our eyes failed, looking in vain for help

Their eyes failing represents their seeking and not being able to find what they were looking for. These two phrases together emphasize that they were trying hard to find help. Alternate translation: "We continued looking, but we could not find anyone to help us" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

for help

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **help**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "for people to help us" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

in vain

without succeeding

we watched for a nation that could not rescue us

Here "watched" represents hoping. It can be stated clearly that they were hoping that a nation would come and rescue them. Alternate translation: "we hoped for a nation to come and rescue us, but it could not rescue us" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 4:18

They followed our steps

Here "our steps" represents where they went. Alternate translation: "Our enemies followed us everywhere we went" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Our end was near

Here "near" is a metaphor for "soon." Alternate translation: "Our end would be soon" or "Our enemies would soon destroy us" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Our end

This could mean: (1) "Our end" refers to the end of living in their own city because their enemies would destroy the city and capture them. Alternate translation: "Our destruction" or "Our capture" or (2) "Our end" refers to the end of their lives. Alternate translation: "Our death" or "The time for us to die" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

our days were numbered

Being numbered represents being so few that they could be easily counted. Alternate translation: "we had very little time" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

our end had come

The phrase "had come" means that what they had expected was now happening. Alternate translation: "it was now the end for us" or "our enemies were attacking us" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 4:19

Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky

The author compares the speed of their pursuers to the speed of eagles flying. Eagles fly very quickly to catch other animals. Alternate translation: "Those who were chasing us were faster than eagles" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

lay in wait for us

Alternate translation: "waited to attack us"

Lamentations 4:20

he was the one who was captured in their pits

Here “pits” refers to the enemies’ plans to capture him. 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: “he was the one whom our enemies captured by their plans” or “our enemies made plans to capture our king, and they did capture him” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

of whom it was said

This phrase with the quote following it gives us more information about the king. The quote shows what the people had hoped the king would do for them before he was trapped. It can be expressed in active form. Alternate translation: “even though we had said about him” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-distinguish\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding (p.178)**)

Under his shadow we will live among the nations

Here “his shadow” represents him protecting them. Alternate translation: “Under his protection we will live among the nations” or “Though we may have to live in other nations, he will protect us” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 4:21

Rejoice and be glad

“Rejoice” and “be glad” mean basically the same thing and emphasize the intensity of gladness. The writer uses these words to mock the people. He knew that the people of Edom would be glad that Jerusalem is being destroyed. Alternate translation: “Be very glad” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-doublet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **Doublet (p.184)**)

daughter of Edom

The people of the land of Edom are spoken of as if they were a woman. They were Israel’s enemy. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

But to you also the cup will be passed

The cup is a metonym for the wine in it. The wine is a metaphor for punishment. Alternate translation: “But Yahweh will also punish you” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 4:22

Daughter of Zion

The people of Jerusalem are spoken of as if they were a woman. (See: **Personification (p.222)**) (See: **Personification (p.222)**)

your punishment will come to an end

“your punishment will end.” The abstract noun punishment can be expressed with the verb “punish.” Alternate translation: “Yahweh will stop punishing you” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.168)**)

he will not extend your exile

Alternate translation: “Yahweh will not make your time in exile longer” or “Yahweh will not make you stay in exile longer”

he will uncover your sins

Here the sins not being known by others are spoken of as if they are under a cover. Removing the cover represents letting other people know about them. Alternate translation: “he will expose your sins” or “he will cause other people to know how you have sinned” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 5

Lamentations 5 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Judah was destroyed for her sin. As slaves, life was very hard. The author wondered if God would be angry forever.
(See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/eternity\]\]](#))

Lamentations 5:1

General Information:

General Information:

A new poem begins. See [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.209)**. (See: **Poetry (p.224)**)

Remember, Yahweh, what has happened to us

“Remember” here is an idiom. Alternate translation: “Yahweh, think about what has happened to us” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

look and see our disgrace

Alternate translation: “look at the shameful state we are in”

Lamentations 5:2

Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers; our houses to foreigners

The idea of things being turned over to others can be expressed with an active form. Since it is also understood in the second part of the sentence, those words can be repeated there. Alternate translation: “You have turned our inheritance over to strangers; you have turned our houses over to strangers” or “You have allowed strangers to take possession of our inheritance; you have allowed foreigners to take possession of our houses” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 5:3

We have become orphans & our mothers are like widows

The people of Jerusalem have no one to protect them because the men have either died in battle or have gone into exile. This speaks of the people not having their fathers and husbands present as if they had actually become orphans and widows. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

orphans, the fatherless

These two phrases have the same meaning and emphasize that the people no longer have their fathers. Alternate translation: "orphans who have no fathers" (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**)

Lamentations 5:4

We must pay silver for the water we drink & our own wood

This means that their enemies are making them pay money to have the water and wood that they once used for free. Alternate translation: "We have to pay silver to our enemies in order to drink our own water ... our own wood" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

we must pay silver to get our own wood

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: "our enemies sell us our own wood" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 5:5

Those who are coming after us

“Our enemies who are chasing after us.” This refers to the Babylonian army.

we can find no rest

This speaks of being able to rest as if “rest” were an object that could be found. Alternate translation: “we are unable to rest” (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 5:6

We have given ourselves to Egypt and to Assyria to get enough food

This phrase "given ourselves" is an idiom. Alternate translation: "We have made a treaty with Egypt and with Assyria so that we would have food to eat" or "We have surrendered to Egypt and to Assyria to have enough food to remain alive" (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 5:7

they are no more

This refers to them being dead. Alternate translation: “they have died” (See: **Euphemism (p.186)**) (See: **Euphemism (p.186)**)

we bear their iniquities

Here “iniquities” represents the punishment received because of their ancestors’ sins. Alternate translation: “we bear the punishment for their sins” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 5:8

Slaves rule over us

This could mean: (1) "Now the people who rule over us are themselves slaves to their own masters in Babylon" or (2) "People who used to be slaves in Babylon now rule over us." (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

to deliver us from their hand

Here the word "hand" refers to control. Alternate translation: "to rescue us from their control" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 5:9

bread

Here “bread” refers to food in general. Alternate translation: “food” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

because of the sword in the wilderness

Here robbers with swords are represented by their “swords.” Alternate translation: “because there are robbers in the wilderness who kill others with swords” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 5:10

Our skin has grown as hot as an oven because of the burning heat of hunger

This speaks of the peoples' bodies being hot and feverish as if their skin was as hot as an oven. The people have fever because of their hunger. Alternate translation: "Our skin has become hot like an oven, and we have a very high fever because we are extremely hungry" (See: **Simile (p.230)**) (See: **Simile (p.230)**)

Lamentations 5:11

Women are raped in Zion, and virgins in the cities of Judah

These two phrases have similar meaning and emphasize that the women are being violated. The words “are raped” are understood in the second part of this sentence and can be repeated. Alternate translation: “Women are raped in Zion, and virgins are raped in the cities of Judah” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.219)**)

Women are raped & and virgins

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: “Our enemies have raped the women ... and the virgins” or “Our enemies have violated the women ... and the virgins” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 5:12

Princes are hung up by their own hands

This could mean: (1) the word “their” refers to their enemies. Alternate translation: “With their own hands, they hung princes” or (2) they tied each prince’s hands together with one end of a rope and tied the other end so the prince’s feet could not touch the ground.

no honor is shown to the elders

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 have shown no honor to the elders” (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

Lamentations 5:13

Young men are forced

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 force young men" (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.170)**)

boys stagger under heavy loads of wood

The boys are forced to carry the loads of wood. Alternate translation: "boys stagger because they are forced to carry heavy loads of wood" or "they force the boys to carry heavy loads of wood which make them stagger" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 5:14

the city gate

This is where the elders would give legal advice, but also where people would meet socially.

the young men have left their music

Playing music was part of the social life at the city gate. This speaks of the men no longer playing their music as if the act of playing music were a place that they left. Alternate translation: "the young men have stopped playing their music" (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.209)**)

Lamentations 5:15

The joy of our heart

Here the word "heart" refers to the whole person and emphasizes their emotions. Alternate translation: "Our joy"
(See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.235)**)

Lamentations 5:16

The crown has fallen from our head

This could mean: (1) "We no longer wear flowers on our heads for celebrations" or (2) The "crown" represents their king and their "head" represents a place of authority over the people. Alternate translation: "We no longer have a king" (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

Lamentations 5:17

For this our heart has become sick

The “heart” represents a person's emotions. This speaks of a person being discouraged as if their emotions were sick. Alternate translation: “Because of this we are discouraged” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

for these things our eyes grow dim

This means that they have a hard time seeing because they are crying. Alternate translation: “and we can hardly see because our eyes are full of tears” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.175)**)

Lamentations 5:18

for Mount Zion lies desolate

Here “Mount Zion” refers to Jerusalem. The phrase “lies desolate” means that no one lives there.

jackals

These are fierce wild dogs. See how you translated this in [Lamentations 4:3](#).

Lamentations 5:19

sit upon your throne

Here sitting on the throne represents ruling as king. Alternate translation: “rule as king” (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.215)**)

from generation to generation

This is an idiom. Alternate translation: “always” (See: **Idiom (p.202)**) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 5:20

Why do you forget us forever? Why do you forsake us for the length of your days?

The author uses these rhetorical questions to express his feelings that Yahweh has forgotten them. These questions can be written as a statement. Alternate translation: "It is as though you will forget us forever or not come back to us for a very long time!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.227)**)

for the length of your days

Here this idiom refers to the duration of God's life. Since God lives forever, it can also be translated as "forever." Perhaps the writer was using hyperbole and exaggerating the length of time he believed that God was forsaking them. Alternate translation: "for as long as you live" or "forever" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#)) (See: **Idiom (p.202)**)

Lamentations 5:21

Restore us to yourself

Alternate translation: "Bring us back to yourself"

Lamentations 5:22

unless you have utterly rejected us and you are angry with us beyond measure

This could mean: (1) that the writer is afraid that Yahweh might be too angry to restore them or (2) that he is saying that Yahweh is too angry to restore them.

are angry with us beyond measure

This speaks of Yahweh being very angry as if his anger cannot be measured. This is an exaggeration. Alternate translation: “are extremely angry with us” (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.199)**) (See: **Hypothetical Situations (p.199)**)



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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: [Lamentations 1:3](#); [Lamentations 1:5](#); [Lamentations 1:7](#); [Lamentations 1:18](#); [Lamentations 2:5](#); [Lamentations 2:14](#); [Lamentations 3:22](#); [Lamentations 3:47](#); [Lamentations 3:61](#); [Lamentations 3:65](#); [Lamentations 4:17](#); [Lamentations 4:22](#)

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.

[Abstract Nouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

[Word Order \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Lamentations 1:1](#); [Lamentations 1:8](#); [Lamentations 1:12](#); [Lamentations 2:6](#); [Lamentations 2:20](#); [Lamentations 3:48](#); [Lamentations 4:5](#); [Lamentations 4:6](#); [Lamentations 4:8](#); [Lamentations 4:9](#); [Lamentations 5:2](#); [Lamentations 5:4](#); [Lamentations 5:11](#); [Lamentations 5:12](#); [Lamentations 5:13](#)

Apostrophe

Description

An apostrophe is a figure of speech in which a speaker turns his attention away from his listeners and speaks to someone or something that he knows cannot hear him. He does this to tell his listeners his message or feelings about that person or thing in a very strong way.

This page answers the question: *What is the figure of speech called an apostrophe?*

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Many languages do not use apostrophe, and readers could be confused by it. They may wonder who the speaker is talking to, or think that the speaker is crazy to talk to things or people who cannot hear.

Examples from the Bible

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on you. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

King Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa, and David sang a sad song about it. By telling these mountains that he wanted them to have no dew or rain, he showed how sad he was.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to you. (Luke 13:34a ULT)

Jesus was expressing his feelings for the people of Jerusalem in front of his disciples and a group of Pharisees. By speaking directly to Jerusalem as though its people could hear him, Jesus showed how deeply he cared about them.

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

The man of God spoke as if the altar could hear him, but he really wanted the king, who was standing there, to hear him.

Translation Strategies

If apostrophe would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. But if this way of speaking would be confusing to your people, let the speaker continue speaking to the people that are listening to him as he tells **them** his message or feelings about the people or thing that cannot hear him. See the example below.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

He cried against the altar by the word of Yahweh: "**Altar, altar!** This is what Yahweh says, 'See, ... on you they will burn human bones.'" (1 Kings 13:2 ULT)

He said this about the altar: "This is what Yahweh says **about this altar**. 'See, ... they will burn people's bones on **it**.'"

Mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **you**. (2 Samuel 1:21a ULT)

As for these mountains of Gilboa, let there not be dew or rain on **them**.

"

Referenced in: [Lamentations 2:18](#); [Lamentations 2:19](#)

Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Assumed knowledge is whatever a speaker assumes his audience knows before he speaks and gives them some kind of information. The speaker does not give the audience this information because he believes that they already know it.

This page answers the question: *How can I be sure that my translation communicates the assumed knowledge and implicit information along with the explicit information of the original message?*

When the speaker does give the audience information, he can do so in two ways. The speaker gives explicit information in what he states directly. Implicit Information is what the speaker does not state directly because he expects his audience to be able to learn it from other things he says.

Description

When someone speaks or writes, he has something specific that he wants people to know or do or think about. He normally states this directly. This is explicit information.

The speaker assumes that his audience already knows certain things that they will need to think about in order to understand this information. Normally he does not tell people these things, because they already know them. This is called assumed knowledge.

The speaker does not always directly state everything that he expects his audience to learn from what he says. Implicit information is information that he expects people to learn from what he says even though he does not state it directly.

Often, the audience understands this implicit information by combining what they already know (assumed knowledge) with the explicit information that the speaker tells them directly.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All three kinds of information are part of the speaker's message. If one of these kinds of information is missing, then the audience will not understand the message. Because the target translation is in a language that is very different from the biblical languages and is made for an audience that lives in a very different time and place than the people in the Bible, many times the assumed knowledge or the implicit information is missing from the message. In other words, modern readers do not know everything that the original speakers and hearers in the Bible knew. When these things are important for understanding the message, it is helpful if you include this information in the text or in a footnote.

Examples From the Bible

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

Jesus did not say what foxes and birds use holes and nests for, because he assumed that the scribe would have known that foxes sleep in holes in the ground and birds sleep in their nests. This is **assumed knowledge**.

Jesus did not directly say here "I am the Son of Man" but, if the scribe did not already know it, then that fact would be **implicit information** that he could learn because Jesus referred to himself that way. Also, Jesus did not state explicitly that he travelled a lot and did not have a house that he slept in every night. That is **implicit information** that the scribe could learn when Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty deeds had been done in **Tyre and Sidon** which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the **day of judgment** than for you.
(Matthew 11:21-22 ULT)

Jesus assumed that the people he was speaking to knew that Tyre and Sidon were very wicked, and that the day of judgment is a time when God will judge every person. Jesus also knew that the people he was talking to believed that they were good and did not need to repent. Jesus did not need to tell them these things. This is all **assumed knowledge**.

An important piece of **implicit information** here is that the people he was speaking to would be judged more severely than the people of Tyre and Sidon would be judged **because** they did not repent.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands when they eat bread**. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

One of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating. People thought that in order to be righteous, they had to follow all the traditions of the elders. This was **assumed knowledge** that the Pharisees who were speaking to Jesus expected him to know. By saying this, they were accusing his disciples of not following the traditions, and thus not being righteous. This is **implicit information** that they wanted him to understand from what they said.

Translation Strategies

If readers have enough assumed knowledge to be able to understand the message, along with any important implicit information that goes with the explicit information, then it is good to leave that knowledge unstated and leave the implicit information implicit. If the readers do not understand the message because one of these is missing for them, then follow these strategies:

(1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the foxes slept in their holes and birds slept in their nests.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes to live in**, and the birds of the sky **have nests to live in**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head and sleep."

It will be more tolerable for **Tyre and Sidon** at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the people of Tyre and Sidon were very, very wicked. This can be stated explicitly.
>

At the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for **those cities of Tyre and Sidon, whose people were very wicked**, than it will be for you. or At

the day of judgment, It will be more tolerable for those **wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon**, than for you.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands** when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that one of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating, which they must do to be righteous. It was not to remove germs from their hands to avoid sickness, as a modern reader might think.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not go through the ceremonial handwashing ritual of righteousness** when they eat bread.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

The implicit information is that Jesus himself is the Son of Man. Other implicit information is that if the scribe wanted to follow Jesus, then, like Jesus, he would have to live without a house.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but **I, the Son of Man**, have **no home to rest in. If you want to follow me, you will live as I live.**"

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The implicit information is that God would not only judge the people; he would punish them. This can be made explicit.

At the day of judgment, God will **punish Tyre and Sidon**, cities whose people were very wicked, **less severely than he will punish you.**
or:

At the day of judgment, God will **punish you more severely** than Tyre and Sidon, cities whose people were very wicked.

Modern readers may not know some of the things that the people in the Bible and the people who first read it knew. This can make it hard for them to understand what a speaker or writer says, and to learn things that the speaker left implicit. Translators may need to state some things explicitly in the translation that the original speaker or writer left unstated or implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Lamentations 1:7](#); [Lamentations 1:9](#); [Lamentations 1:11](#); [Lamentations 1:19](#); [Lamentations 1:20](#); [Lamentations 1:21](#); [Lamentations 1:22](#); [Lamentations 2:19](#); [Lamentations 2:21](#); [Lamentations 3:37](#); [Lamentations 3:39](#); [Lamentations 3:50](#); [Lamentations 3:51](#); [Lamentations 4:7](#); [Lamentations 4:8](#); [Lamentations 4:18](#); [Lamentations 5:4](#); [Lamentations 5:8](#); [Lamentations 5:13](#); [Lamentations 5:17](#)

Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding

Description

In some languages, phrases that modify a noun can be used with the noun for two different purposes. They can either (1) distinguish the noun from other similar items, or (2) they can give more information about the noun. That information could be new to the reader, or a reminder about something the reader might already know. Other languages use modifying phrases with a noun only for distinguishing the noun from other similar things. When people who speak these languages hear a modifying phrase along with a noun, they assume that its function is to distinguish one item from another similar item.

This page answers the question: *When a phrase is used with a noun, what is the difference between phrases that distinguish the noun from others and phrases that simply inform or remind?*

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Some languages use a comma to mark the difference between (1) making a distinction between similar items and (2) giving more information about an item. Without the comma, the sentence below communicates that it is making a distinction:

- Mary gave some of the food to **her sister who was very thankful**.
 - If her sister was usually thankful, the phrase “who was thankful” could distinguish this sister of Mary’s from another sister who was not usually thankful.

With the comma, the sentence is giving more information:

- Mary gave some of the food to **her sister, who was very thankful**.
 - This same phrase can be used to give us more information about Mary’s sister. It tells us about how Mary’s sister responded when Mary gave her the food. In this case it does not distinguish one sister from another sister.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Many source languages of the Bible use phrases that modify a noun both for distinguishing the noun from another similar item and also for giving more information about the noun. You (the translator) must be careful to understand which meaning the author intended in each case.
- Some languages use phrases that modify a noun only for distinguishing the noun from another similar item. When translating a phrase that is used for giving more information, translators who speak these languages will need to separate the phrase from the noun. Otherwise, people who read it or hear it will think that the phrase is meant to distinguish the noun from other similar items.

Examples From the Bible

Examples of words and phrases that are used to distinguish one item from other possible items:

(These usually do not cause any problem in translation.)

■ The curtain is to separate **the holy place** from **the most holy place**. (Exodus 26:33b ULT)

The words “holy” and “most holy” distinguish two different places from each other and from any other place.

■ A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to **the woman who bore him**. (Proverbs 17:25 ULT)

The phrase “who bore him” distinguishes which woman the son is bitterness to. He is not bitterness to all women, but to his mother.

Examples of words and phrases that are used to give added information or a reminder about an item:

(These are a translation issue for languages that do not use these.)

... for **your righteous judgments** are good. (Psalm 119:39b ULT)

The word “righteous” simply reminds us that God’s judgments are righteous. It does not distinguish his righteous judgments from his unrighteous judgments, because all of his judgments are righteous.

How can Sarah, **who is 90 years old**, bear a son? (Genesis 17:17b ULT)

The phrase “who is 90 years old” is the reason that Abraham did not think that Sarah could bear a son. He was not distinguishing one woman named Sarah from another woman named Sarah who was a different age, and he was not telling anyone something new about her age. He simply did not think that a woman who was that old could bear a child.

I will wipe away mankind **whom I have created** from the surface of the earth. (Genesis 6:7 ULT)

The phrase “whom I have created” is a reminder of the relationship between God and mankind. It is the reason God had the right to wipe away mankind. There is not another mankind that God did not create.

Translation Strategies

If readers would understand the purpose of a phrase with a noun, then consider keeping the phrase and the noun together. For languages that use words or phrases with a noun only to distinguish one item from another, here are some strategies for translating phrases that are used to inform or remind.

- (1) Put the information in another part of the sentence and add words that show its purpose.
- (2) Use one of your language’s ways for expressing that this is just added information. It may be by adding a small word, or by changing the way the voice sounds. Sometimes changes in the voice can be shown with punctuation marks, such as parentheses or commas.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Put the information in another part of the sentence and add words that show its purpose.

I hate those who serve **worthless** idols (Psalm 31:6 ULT)

By saying “worthless idols,” David was commenting about all idols and giving his reason for hating those who serve them. He was not distinguishing worthless idols from valuable idols.

>

Because idols are worthless, I hate those who serve them.

... for your **righteous** judgments are good. (Psalm 119:39b ULT)

... for your judgments are good **because they are righteous**.

Can Sarah, **who is 90 years old**, bear a son? (Genesis 17:17b ULT)

The phrase “who is 90 years old” is a reminder of Sarah’s age. It tells why Abraham was asking the question. He did not expect that a woman who was that old could bear a child.

>

Can Sarah bear a son **even when she is 90 years old**?

I will call on Yahweh, **who is worthy to be praised**. (2 Samuel 22:4a ULT) There is only one Yahweh. The phrase “who is worthy to be praised” gives a reason for calling on Yahweh.

I will call on Yahweh, because **he is worthy to be praised**

(2) Use one of your language’s ways for expressing that this is just added information.

You are my Son, **whom I love**. I am pleased with you. (Luke 3:22 ULT)

You are my Son. **I love you** and I am pleased with you.

Receiving my love, you are my Son. I am pleased with you.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Double Negatives ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Lamentations 4:20](#)

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: [Lamentations 2:8](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:2](#); [Lamentations 1:12](#); [Lamentations 3:19](#); [Lamentations 3:42](#); [Lamentations 3:47](#); [Lamentations 3:49](#); [Lamentations 4:12](#); [Lamentations 4:21](#)

Euphemism

Description

A euphemism is a mild or polite way of referring to something that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable, such as death or activities usually done in private.

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

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

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

... they found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa.
(1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

This means that Saul and his sons “were dead.” It is a euphemism because the important thing was not that Saul and his sons had fallen but that they were dead. Sometimes people do not like to speak directly about death because it is unpleasant.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages use different euphemisms. If the target language does not use the same euphemism as in the source language, readers may not understand what it means and they may think that the writer means only what the words literally say.

Examples From the Bible

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT)

The original hearers would have understood that Saul went into the cave to use it as a toilet, but the writer wanted to avoid offending or distracting them, so **he did not say specifically** what Saul did or what he left in the cave.

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

In order **to be polite**, Mary uses a euphemism to say that she has never had sexual intercourse with a man.

Translation Strategies

If euphemism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.
- (2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT) — Some languages might use euphemisms like these:

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **dig a hole**”

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **have some time alone**”

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

But Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not **slept with a man?**"

(2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

They found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa. (1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

"They found Saul and his sons **dead** on Mount Gilboa."

"

Referenced in: [Lamentations 2:21](#); [Lamentations 5:7](#)

Exclamations

Description

Exclamations are words or sentences that show strong feeling such as surprise, joy, fear, or anger. In the ULT and UST, they usually have an exclamation mark (!) at the end. The mark shows that it is an exclamation. The situation and the meaning of what the people said helps us understand what feelings they were expressing. In the example below from Matthew 8, the speakers were terribly afraid. In the example from Matthew 9, the speakers were amazed, because something happened that they had never seen before.

This page answers the question: *What are ways of translating exclamations?*

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

Sentence Types ([UTA PDF](#))

Save us, Lord; we are about to die! (Matthew 8:25b ULT)

When the demon had been driven out, the mute man spoke. The crowds were astonished and said, "This has never been seen before in Israel!" (Matthew 9:33 ULT)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Languages have different ways of showing that a sentence communicates strong emotion.

Examples From the Bible

Some exclamations have a word that shows feeling. The sentences below have "Oh" and "Ah." The word "oh" here shows the speaker's amazement.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! (Romans 11:33 ULT)

The word "Alas" below shows that Gideon was very frightened.

When Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, Gideon lamented, "**Alas**, O my Lord Yahweh, for because of this I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!" (Judges 6:22 ULT)

Some exclamations start with a question word such as "how" or "why," even though they are not questions. The sentence below shows that the speaker is amazed at how unsearchable God's judgments are.

How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond discovering! (Romans 11:33b ULT)

Some exclamations in the Bible do not have a main verb. The exclamation below shows that the speaker is disgusted with the person he is speaking to.

You worthless person! (Matthew 5:22b ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If an exclamation in your language needs a verb, add one. Often a good verb is "is" or "are."
- (2) Use an exclamation word from your language that shows the strong feeling.
- (3) Translate the exclamation word with a sentence that shows the feeling.
- (4) Use a word that emphasizes the part of the sentence that brings about the strong feeling.

(5) If the strong feeling is not clear in the target language, then tell how the person felt.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If an exclamation in your language needs a verb, add one. Often a good verb is “is” or “are.”

You worthless person! (Matthew 5:22b ULT)

“You **are** such a worthless person!”

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! (Romans 11:33b ULT)

“Oh, the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God **are** so deep!”

(2) Use an exclamation word from your language that shows the strong feeling. In the first suggested translation below, the word “wow” shows that they were astonished. In the second suggested translation, the expression “Oh no” shows that something terrible or frightening has happened.

They were extremely astonished, saying, “He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (Mark 7:37 ULT)

“They were extremely astonished, saying, ‘**Wow!** He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’”

Alas, oh my Lord Yahweh! For because of this I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face! (Judges 6:22b ULT)

“**Oh no**, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!”

(3) Translate the exclamation word with a sentence that shows the feeling.

“**Alas**, O my Lord Yahweh, for because of this I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!” (Judges 6:22 ULT)

“Lord Yahweh, **what will happen to me?** For I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!”

“**Help**, Lord Yahweh! For I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!”

(4) Use a word that emphasizes the part of the sentence that brings about the strong feeling.

How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond discovering! (Romans 11:33b ULT)

“His judgments are **so** unsearchable and his ways are **far** beyond discovering!”

(5) If the strong feeling is not clear in the target language, then tell how the person felt.

When Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, Gideon lamented, “**Alas**, O my Lord Yahweh, for because of this I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!” (Judges 6:22 ULT)

Gideon understood that this was the angel of Yahweh. **He was terrified** and said, “**Alas**, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!”

”

Referenced in: [Lamentations 4:1](#)

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 Lamentations](#)

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: [Lamentations 2:19](#); [Lamentations 3:14](#)

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.

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Referenced in: [Lamentations 5:22](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:9](#); [Lamentations 1:10](#); [Lamentations 1:12](#); [Lamentations 1:13](#); [Lamentations 1:14](#); [Lamentations 1:21](#); [Lamentations 1:22](#); [Lamentations 2:1](#); [Lamentations 2:2](#); [Lamentations 2:7](#); [Lamentations 2:11](#); [Lamentations 2:16](#); [Lamentations 2:19](#); [Lamentations 2:22](#); [Lamentations 3:8](#); [Lamentations 3:33](#); [Lamentations 3:51](#); [Lamentations 5:1](#); [Lamentations 5:6](#); [Lamentations 5:19](#); [Lamentations 5:20](#)

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: [Lamentations 2:7](#)

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: [Lamentations 2:18](#); [Lamentations 3:63](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:1](#); [Lamentations 1:2](#); [Lamentations 1:9](#); [Lamentations 1:14](#); [Lamentations 1:15](#); [Lamentations 1:16](#); [Lamentations 1:17](#); [Lamentations 1:20](#); [Lamentations 2:1](#); [Lamentations 2:2](#); [Lamentations 2:3](#); [Lamentations 2:4](#); [Lamentations 2:5](#); [Lamentations 2:8](#); [Lamentations 2:11](#); [Lamentations 2:12](#); [Lamentations 2:16](#); [Lamentations 2:18](#); [Lamentations 2:20](#); [Lamentations 3:1](#); [Lamentations 3:2](#); [Lamentations 3:5](#); [Lamentations 3:6](#); [Lamentations 3:7](#); [Lamentations 3:9](#); [Lamentations 3:13](#); [Lamentations 3:15](#); [Lamentations 3:16](#); [Lamentations 3:23](#); [Lamentations 3:24](#); [Lamentations 3:25](#); [Lamentations 3:27](#); [Lamentations 3:28](#); [Lamentations 3:30](#); [Lamentations 3:34](#); [Lamentations 3:38](#); [Lamentations 3:40](#); [Lamentations 3:41](#); [Lamentations 3:43](#); [Lamentations 3:44](#); [Lamentations 3:48](#); [Lamentations 3:52](#); [Lamentations 3:54](#); [Lamentations 3:58](#); [Lamentations 3:59](#); [Lamentations 3:62](#); [Lamentations 3:64](#); [Lamentations 4:1](#); [Lamentations 4:2](#); [Lamentations 4:7](#); [Lamentations 4:11](#); [Lamentations 4:14](#); [Lamentations 4:17](#); [Lamentations 4:18](#); [Lamentations 4:20](#); [Lamentations 4:21](#); [Lamentations 4:22](#); [Lamentations 5:1](#); [Lamentations 5:3](#); [Lamentations 5:5](#); [Lamentations 5:14](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:3](#); [Lamentations 1:7](#); [Lamentations 1:13](#); [Lamentations 1:14](#); [Lamentations 1:17](#); [Lamentations 1:20](#); [Lamentations 2:2](#); [Lamentations 2:3](#); [Lamentations 2:6](#); [Lamentations 2:7](#); [Lamentations 2:8](#); [Lamentations 2:11](#); [Lamentations 2:12](#); [Lamentations 2:17](#); [Lamentations 2:21](#); [Lamentations 2:22](#); [Lamentations 3:1](#); [Lamentations 3:3](#); [Lamentations 3:33](#); [Lamentations 3:35](#); [Lamentations 3:38](#); [Lamentations 3:51](#); [Lamentations 3:55](#); [Lamentations 3:56](#); [Lamentations 3:57](#); [Lamentations 3:62](#); [Lamentations 3:65](#); [Lamentations 3:66](#); [Lamentations 4:3](#); [Lamentations 4:5](#); [Lamentations 4:6](#); [Lamentations 4:9](#); [Lamentations 4:10](#); [Lamentations 4:11](#); [Lamentations 4:13](#); [Lamentations 4:14](#); [Lamentations 4:16](#); [Lamentations 4:17](#); [Lamentations 4:18](#); [Lamentations 5:7](#); [Lamentations 5:8](#); [Lamentations 5:9](#); [Lamentations 5:16](#); [Lamentations 5:17](#); [Lamentations 5:19](#)

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: [Lamentations 2:21](#)

Parallelism

Description

Parallelism is a poetic device in which two phrases or clauses that are similar in structure or idea are used together. The following are some of the different kinds of parallelism.

- The second clause or phrase means the same as the first. This is called synonymous parallelism.
- The second clarifies or strengthens the meaning of the first.
- The second completes what is said in the first.
- The second says something that contrasts with the first, but adds to the same idea.

Parallelism is most commonly found in Old Testament poetry, such as in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. It also occurs in Greek in the New Testament, both in the four gospels and in the apostles' letters.

This article will only discuss synonymous parallelism, the kind in which the two parallel phrases mean the same thing, because that is the kind that presents a problem for translation. Note that we use the term "synonymous parallelism" for long phrases or clauses that have the same meaning. We use the term "doublet" for words or very short phrases that mean basically the same thing and are used together.

In the poetry of the original languages, synonymous parallelism has several effects:

- It shows that something is very important by saying it more than once and in more than one way.
- It helps the hearer to think more deeply about the idea by saying it in different ways.
- It makes the language more beautiful and raises it above the ordinary way of speaking.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use synonymous parallelism. They would either think it odd that someone said the same thing twice, or, since it is in the Bible, they would think that the two phrases must have some difference in meaning. For them it would be confusing, rather than beautiful. They would not understand that the repetition of the idea in different words serves to emphasize the idea.

Examples From the Bible

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 ULT)

Both parts of the sentence are metaphors saying that God's word teaches people how to live. That is the single idea. The words "lamp" and "light" are similar in meaning because they refer to light. The words "my feet" and "my path" are related because they refer to a person walking. Walking is a metaphor for living.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:6 ULT)

Both lines say that God made man the ruler of everything. "To rule over" is the same idea as putting things "under his feet," and "the works of your [God's] hands" is the same idea as "all things."

Yahweh sees everything a person does
and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

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](#))

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: [Lamentations 4:11](#); [Lamentations 4:13](#); [Lamentations 5:3](#); [Lamentations 5:11](#)

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: [Introduction to Lamentations](#); [Lamentations 1:1](#); [Lamentations 1:2](#); [Lamentations 1:3](#); [Lamentations 1:4](#); [Lamentations 1:5](#); [Lamentations 1:6](#); [Lamentations 1:8](#); [Lamentations 1:9](#); [Lamentations 1:10](#); [Lamentations 1:11](#); [Lamentations 1:12](#); [Lamentations 1:13](#); [Lamentations 1:15](#); [Lamentations 1:16](#); [Lamentations 1:17](#); [Lamentations 1:18](#); [Lamentations 1:20](#); [Lamentations 1:21](#); [Lamentations 2:1](#); [Lamentations 2:2](#); [Lamentations 2:4](#); [Lamentations 2:5](#); [Lamentations 2:8](#); [Lamentations 2:10](#); [Lamentations 2:13](#); [Lamentations 2:15](#); [Lamentations 2:18](#); [Lamentations 3:18](#); [Lamentations 4:21](#); [Lamentations 4:22](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:1](#); [Lamentations 2:1](#); [Lamentations 3:1](#); [Lamentations 4:1](#); [Lamentations 5:1](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:12](#); [Lamentations 2:13](#); [Lamentations 2:15](#); [Lamentations 2:20](#); [Lamentations 3:37](#); [Lamentations 3:39](#); [Lamentations 5:20](#)

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: [Lamentations 1:1](#); [Lamentations 1:6](#); [Lamentations 1:8](#); [Lamentations 2:4](#); [Lamentations 2:6](#); [Lamentations 2:12](#); [Lamentations 2:13](#); [Lamentations 2:22](#); [Lamentations 3:10](#); [Lamentations 3:45](#); [Lamentations 4:3](#); [Lamentations 4:8](#); [Lamentations 4:19](#); [Lamentations 5:10](#)

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.

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Referenced in: [Lamentations 2:10](#); [Lamentations 2:15](#); [Lamentations 2:16](#); [Lamentations 2:19](#)

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](#))

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metonymy ([UTA PDF](#))

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

Referenced in: [Lamentations 1:10](#); [Lamentations 1:11](#); [Lamentations 1:18](#); [Lamentations 1:20](#); [Lamentations 1:22](#); [Lamentations 2:7](#); [Lamentations 2:18](#); [Lamentations 4:10](#); [Lamentations 4:11](#); [Lamentations 5:15](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 40

god, false god, goddess, idol, idolater, idolatrous, idolatry

Definition:

A false god is something that people worship instead of the one true God. The term “goddess” refers specifically to a female false god.

- These false gods or goddesses do not exist. Yahweh is the only God.
- People sometimes make objects into idols to worship as symbols of their false gods.
- In the Bible, God’s people frequently turned away from obeying him in order to worship false gods.
- Demons often deceive people into believing that the false gods and idols they worship have power.
- Baal, Dagon, and Molech were three of the many false gods that were worshiped by people in Bible times.
- Asherah and Artemis (Diana) were two of the goddesses that ancient peoples worshiped.

An idol is an object that people make so they can worship it. Something is described as “idolatrous” if it involves giving honor to something other than the one true God.

- People make idols to represent the false gods that they worship.
- These false gods do not exist; there is no God besides Yahweh.
- Sometimes demons work through an idol to make it seem like it has power, even though it does not.
- Idols are often made of valuable materials like gold, silver, bronze, or expensive wood.
- An “idolatrous kingdom” means a “kingdom of people who worship idols” or a “kingdom of people who worship earthly things.”
- The term “idolatrous figure” is another word for a “carved image” or an “idol.”

Translation Suggestions:

- There may already be a word for “god” or “false god” in the language or in a nearby language.
- The term “idol” could be used to refer to false gods.
- In English, a lower case “g” is used to refer to false gods, and upper case “G” is used to refer to the one true God. Other languages also do that.
- Another option would be to use a completely different word to refer to the false gods.
- Some languages may add a word to specify whether the false god is described as male or female.

(See also: [God](#), [Asherah](#), [Baal](#), [Molech](#), [demon](#), [image](#), [kingdom](#), [worship](#))

Bible References:

- Genesis 35:2
- Exodus 32:1
- Psalms 31:6
- Psalms 81:8-10
- Isaiah 44:20
- Acts 7:41
- Acts 7:43
- Acts 15:20
- Acts 19:27
- Romans 2:22
- Galatians 4:8-9
- Galatians 5:19-21
- Colossians 3:5
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **10:2** Through these plagues, God showed Pharaoh that he is more powerful than Pharaoh and all of Egypt's **gods**.
- **13:4** Then God gave them the covenant and said, "I am Yahweh, your God, who saved you from slavery in Egypt. Do not worship other **gods**."
- **14:2** They (Canaanites) worshiped false **gods** and did many evil things.
- **16:1** The Israelites began to worship the Canaanite **gods** instead of Yahweh, the true God.
- **18:13** But most of Judah's kings were evil, corrupt, and they worshiped idols. Some of the kings even sacrificed their children to false **gods**.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H0367, H0410, H0426, H0430, H0457, H1322, H1544, H1892, H2553, H3649, H4656, H4906, H5236, H5566, H6089, H6090, H6091, H6456, H6459, H6673, H6736, H6754, H7723, H8163, H8251, H8267, H8441, H8655, G14930, G14940, G14950, G14960, G14970, G22990, G27120

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Lamentations](#)

priest, priesthood

Definition:

In the Bible, a priest was someone who was chosen to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of God's people. The "priesthood" was the name for the office or condition of being a priest.

- In the Old Testament, God chose Aaron and his descendants to be his priests for the people of Israel.
- The "priesthood" was a right and a responsibility that was passed down from father to son in the Levite clan.
- The Israelite priests had the responsibility of offering the people's sacrifices to God, along with other duties in the temple.
- Priests also offered regular prayers to God on behalf of his people and performed other religious rites.
- The priests pronounced formal blessings on people and taught them God's laws.
- In Jesus' time, there were different levels of priests, including the chief priests and the high priest.
- Jesus is our "great high priest" who intercedes for us in God's presence. He offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. This means that the sacrifices made by human priests are no longer needed.
- In the New Testament, every believer in Jesus is called a "priest" who can come directly to God in prayer to intercede for himself and other people.
- In ancient times, there were also pagan priests who presented offerings to false gods such as Baal.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, the term "priest" could be translated as "sacrifice person" or "God's intermediary" or "sacrificial mediator" or "person God appoints to represent him."
- The translation of "priest" should be different from the translation of "mediator."
- Some translations may prefer to always say something like "Israelite priest" or "Jewish priest" or "Yahweh's priest" or "priest of Baal" to make it clear that this does not refer to a modern-day type of priest.
- The term used to translate "priest" should be different from the terms for "chief priest" and "high priest" and "Levite" and "prophet."

(See also: [Aaron](#), [high priest](#), [mediator](#), [sacrifice](#))

Bible References:

- 2 Chronicles 6:41
- Genesis 14:17-18
- Genesis 47:22
- John 1:19-21
- Luke 10:31
- Mark 1:44
- Mark 2:25-26
- Matthew 8:4
- Matthew 12:4
- Micah 3:9-11
- Nehemiah 10:28-29
- Nehemiah 10:34-36
- Revelation 1:6

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **4:7** "Melchizedek, the **priest** of God Most High"

- **13:9** Anyone who disobeyed God's law could bring an animal to the altar in front of the Tent of Meeting as a sacrifice to God. A **priest** would kill the animal and burn it on the altar. The blood of the animal that was sacrificed covered the person's sin and made that person clean in God's sight. God chose Moses' brother, Aaron, and Aaron's descendants to be his **priests**.
- **19:7** So the **priests** of Baal prepared a sacrifice but did not light the fire.
- **21:7** An Israelite **priest** was someone who made sacrifices to God on behalf of the people as a substitute for the punishment of their sins. **Priests** also prayed to God for the people.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H3547, H3548, H3549, H3550, G07480, G07490, G24050, G24060, G24070, G24090, G24200

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Referenced in: [Lamentations 4 General Notes](#)

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