



# **unfoldingWord® Translation Notes**

**Jonah**

**Version 73**

[en]

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# **unfoldingWord® Translation Notes**

## **Jonah**

## Introduction to Jonah

### Part 1: General Introduction

#### Outline of the Book of Jonah

Jonah tries to run away from Yahweh. (1:1-2:10)

- Jonah disobeys Yahweh's first call to go to Nineveh. (1:1-3)
- Jonah and the Gentile sailors. (1:4-16)
- Yahweh provides a large fish to swallow Jonah, and he prays and is rescued. (1:17-2:10)

Jonah in Nineveh (3:1-4:11)

- Yahweh again calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah proclaims Yahweh's message. (3:1-4)
- Nineveh repents. (3:5-9)
- Yahweh decides not to destroy Nineveh. (3:10)
- Jonah is very angry with Yahweh. (4:1-3)
- Yahweh teaches Jonah about grace and mercy. (4:4-11)

#### What is the Book of Jonah about?

Jonah, son of Amittai, was a prophet from Gath Hepher (2 Kings 14:25). This book tells about what happened to Jonah. It tells how Yahweh shows mercy and grace to Gentiles. It also tells how the Ninevites repented and called out to Yahweh for mercy. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/mercy\]\]](#), [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/grace\]\]](#) and **repent, repentance (p.138)**)

Yahweh sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that he was ready to punish them. Yahweh said that if they would repent he would not harm them. However, Jonah was an Israelite and he did not want the Ninevites to repent. So Jonah tried to sail away in the opposite direction instead of doing what Yahweh told him to do. But Yahweh stopped him by sending a storm and a large fish to swallow him.

Jonah repented and warned the Ninevites. As a result, Yahweh taught him that he is concerned about all people, not just the Israelites.

#### How should the title of this book be translated?

This book is traditionally titled "The Book of Jonah" or just "Jonah." Translators may decide to use a clearer title such as "The Book about Jonah." (See: **How to Translate Names (p.93)**)

#### Who wrote the Book of Jonah?

Jonah was probably involved in the writing of this book. However, scholars do not know who actually wrote it.

Jonah lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. He prophesied sometime between 800 and 750 B.C., during the reign of King Jeroboam II.

## Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

### What was the nation of Assyria?

During the time of Jonah, Assyria was the most powerful kingdom in the ancient Near East. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria.

Assyria was cruel to its enemies. Eventually, Yahweh punished the Assyrians for the wicked things they did.

### Did Assyria convert to Judaism?

Some scholars think that the Assyrians started worshiping Yahweh alone. However, most scholars think they continued to worship other false gods. (See: **god, false god, goddess, idol, idolater, idolatrous, idolatry (p.129)**)

# Jonah 1

## Jonah 1 General Notes

### Structure and formatting

The narrative of this chapter starts abruptly. This could cause difficulty for the translator. The translator should not attempt to smooth this introduction unless absolutely necessary.

### Special concepts in this chapter

#### Miracle

In verse [Jonah 17](#), there is the mention of “a great fish.” It may be difficult to imagine a sea creature big enough to swallow a man whole; he then survives for three days and nights inside. Translators should not try to explain miraculous events in an attempt to make it easier to understand. (See: **miracle, wonder, sign (p.136)**)

### Important figures of speech in this chapter

#### Situational irony

There is an ironic situation in this chapter. This means that people do or say things that are the opposite of what one would expect them to do. Jonah is a prophet of God and should endeavor to do God's will. Instead, he runs away from God. Although the Gentile sailors are not Israelites, they act out of faith and fear of Yahweh when sending Jonah to an almost certain death by throwing him overboard. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#), [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/willofgod\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/faith\]\]](#))

#### Sea

People in the ancient Near East also saw the sea as chaotic and did not trust it. Some of the gods they worshiped were gods of the sea. Jonah's people, the Hebrews, feared the sea greatly. However, Jonah's fear of Yahweh was not enough to keep him from sailing on a ship to get away from Yahweh. His actions are contrasted to the actions of the Gentiles. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/fear\]\]](#))

### Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

#### Implicit information

Even though no one knows for sure where Tarshish was, the writer assumes that the reader knows that Jonah had to face away from Nineveh to go there. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)



## Jonah 1:1

### Now the word of Yahweh came

This phrase introduces the first half of the story of Jonah. The same phrase introduces the second half of the story (3:1). This is a common way of beginning a historical story about a prophet. (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**) (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**)

### Now the word of Yahweh came

This is an idiom meaning that Yahweh spoke or communicated his message in some way. Alternate translation: “Yahweh spoke his message” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### the word of Yahweh

Alternate translation: “the message of Yahweh”

### Yahweh

This is the name of God that he revealed to his people in the Old Testament.

### Amittai

This is the name of Jonah’s father. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.93)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.93)**)

## Jonah 1:2

### Get up, go to Nineveh, the great city

Alternate translation: “go to the large and important city of Nineveh”

### Get up

This is an idiom that means that Jonah should take action and go. It does not mean that he was sitting or lying down at the time that God spoke to him. Many languages would use only one verb, such as “go.” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### and call out against it

The word **it** here, meaning the city of Nineveh, is a metonym referring to the people living in and around the city. Alternate translation: “warn the people” (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**)

### their wickedness has risen up before my face

Alternate translation: “I know they have been continually sinning” or “I know that their sin has been getting worse and worse”

### before my face

This is an expression that refers to the face of Yahweh to represent his presence. The idea of Yahweh’s presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. Yahweh is saying that he can has noticed how wicked the people of Nineveh have become. (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**)

## Jonah 1:3

### But Jonah got up to run away

Here the words **got up** mean that Jonah took action in response to God's command, but his action was to disobey instead of to obey. See how you translated this idiom in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "but Jonah ran away" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### from before the face of Yahweh

This is an expression that refers to the face of Yahweh to represent his presence. The idea of Yahweh's presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. By running away, Jonah is hoping that Yahweh will not notice that he is disobeying. Alternate translation: "from the presence of Yahweh" or "from Yahweh" (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### to run away to Tarshish

"to flee to Tarshish" This city named Tarshish was in the opposite direction to Nineveh. This can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "and went in the opposite direction, toward Tarshish, away" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### And he went down to Joppa

Alternate translation: "Jonah went to Joppa"

### a ship

A **ship** is a very large type of boat that can travel on the sea and carry many passengers or heavy cargo.

### So he paid the fare

Alternate translation: "there Jonah paid for the trip"

### and went down into it

Alternate translation: "got on the ship"

### with them

The word **them** refers to the others who were going on the ship.

### away from before the face of Yahweh

This is an expression that refers to the face of Yahweh to represent his presence. The idea of Yahweh's presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. By running away, Jonah is hoping that Yahweh will not notice that he is disobeying. Alternate translation: "from the presence of Yahweh" or "from Yahweh" (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

## Jonah 1:4

### But Yahweh sent out a great wind on the sea

This clause introduces the new event of Yahweh's response to Jonah running away. Translate this so that your readers know that this event brings a change in the story. (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**) (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**)

### so that the ship was thinking to be broken apart

Here the term **thinking** describes the ship as if it were a person. This means that the storm was so severe that the ship was close to breaking apart. Alternate translation: "so that the ship was almost breaking apart" (See: **Personification (p.116)**) (See: **Personification (p.116)**)

### to be broken apart

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: "to break apart" (See: **Active or Passive (p.63)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.63)**)

## **Jonah 1:5**

### **the sailors**

Alternate translation: "the men who worked on the ship"

### **his own god**

Here, **god** refers to false gods and idols that people worship.

### **And they threw the things that were in the ship**

"the men threw the heavy things off the ship" By doing this, they hoped to keep the ship from sinking.

### **to lighten it from upon them**

This could mean: (1) to make the ship lighter so that it would float better, Alternate translation: "to help the ship float better" or (2) to lighten or relieve a dangerous situation, Alternate translation: "to lessen the danger they were in"

### **But Jonah had gone down into the innermost parts of the ship**

This is background information. Translate this in a way that it is clear that Jonah had already done this before the storm started. (See: **Background Information (p.69)**) (See: **Background Information (p.69)**)

### **the innermost parts of the ship**

Alternate translation: "inside the ship"

### **and had lain down, and was deeply asleep**

"and was lying there fast asleep" or "and was lying there and sleeping deeply" For this reason, the storm did not wake him up.

## Jonah 1:6

### Then the captain of the crew came to him and said to him

Alternate translation: “the man in charge of the men working on the ship went to Jonah and said”

### What are you doing sleeping

**Why are you sleeping?** Here the captain uses a rhetorical question to scold Jonah. Alternate translation: “stop sleeping” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

### Get up

This is a command to begin some activity that is named following this word. See how you translated this idiom in [1:2](#) and [1:3](#). In this verse, the Captain is telling Jonah to pray to his god. Because Jonah was lying down, the captain may also be telling Jonah literally to stand up. (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### Cry out to your god

“pray to your god” To **cry out to** someone means to loudly ask him for help. (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### Maybe that god will notice us and we will not perish

The implicit information that Jonah’s god might save them could be made explicit. Alternate translation: “maybe your god will hear and save us so that we will not die” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### and we will not perish

This can be stated positively. Alternate translation: “and he will save us” (See: **Double Negatives (p.85)**) (See: **Double Negatives (p.85)**)

## Jonah 1:7

### Then every man said to his friend

The phrase **each man ... to his friend** is an idiom expressing reciprocal action. This means that all the men in the group were saying this to each other. Alternate translation: "the sailors all said to each other" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### Come, and let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this evil is happening to us

"we should cast lots to know who has caused this trouble" The men believed that the gods would control how the lots fell in order to tell them what they wanted to know. This was a form of divination.

### this evil

This refers to the terrible storm.

### and the lot fell on Jonah

The expression **the lot fell on Jonah** is an idiom meaning that, when the men cast lots, the result indicated Jonah. This does not mean that the lot literally fell down on top of Jonah. Alternate translation: "the lot showed that Jonah was the guilty person" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## **Jonah 1:8**

### **Then they said to him**

Alternate translation: "then the men who were working on the ship said to Jonah"

### **Please tell us on whose account this evil is happening to us**

Alternate translation: "who caused this bad thing that is happening to us"



## Jonah 1:9

### I fear Yahweh, the God of heaven

Here the word **fear** means that Jonah worshiped Yahweh and not any other god.

## Jonah 1:10

### Then the men were afraid with great fear

Alternate translation: “then the men were very afraid”

### What is this that you have done

The men on the ship use a rhetorical question to show how afraid and angry they were at Jonah for causing so much trouble for all of them. Alternate translation: “you have done a terrible thing” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

### from before the face of Yahweh

This is an expression that refers to the face of Yahweh to represent his presence. The idea of Yahweh’s presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. By running away, Jonah is hoping that Yahweh will not notice that he is disobeying. Alternate translation: “from the presence of Yahweh” or “from Yahweh” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### because he had told them

Before the sailors cast lots, Jonah had already told them that he was running away from Yahweh, the God he worshiped. (See: **Connect — Background Information (p.72)**) (See: **Connect — Background Information (p.72)**)

### because he had told them

What he told them can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: “because he had said to them, ‘I am trying to get away from Yahweh’” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## Jonah 1:11

### Then they said to him

Alternate translation: "Then the men on the ship said to Jonah" or "Then the sailors said to Jonah"

### What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down from upon us

Alternate translation: "What should we do with you in order to make the sea become calm?"

### the sea was going forward and storming

This is an idiom that means that the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. Alternate translation: "the strength of the storm was increasing" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### the sea was going forward and storming

This was the reason that the men asked Jonah what they should do. If it is more clear in your language to put the reason first, this can be stated at the beginning of verse 11, connecting to the result with a word like "so" or "therefore." (See: **Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship (p.77)**) (See: **Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship (p.77)**)

## **Jonah 1:12**

**for I know that this great storm is upon you because of me**

Alternate translation: "because I know that this huge storm is my fault"

## Jonah 1:13

### **But the men rowed hard to return themselves to the land**

The men did not want to throw Jonah into the sea, so they did not do as Jonah suggested. This information can be made explicit. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### **the sea was going forward and storming**

“the storm became worse, and the waves became bigger” See how you translated this idiom in [verse 11](#).

## Jonah 1:14

### So they cried out

Alternate translation: “because of that they called out” or “because the sea became more violent they called loudly”

### So they cried out to Yahweh

Alternate translation: “therefore the men prayed loudly to Yahweh”

### Ah

In this context, the word **Ah!** shows intense desperation. Represent this emotion in the most natural way for your language. (See: **Exclamations (p.90)**) (See: **Exclamations (p.90)**)

### Ah! Yahweh, please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man

Alternate translation: “O Yahweh, please do not kill us because we caused this man to die” or “O Yahweh, even though we are going to cause this man to die, please do not kill us”

### and do not put innocent blood upon us

This is an idiom that means “do not consider us guilty of killing an innocent person.” Alternate translation: “and please do not blame us for his death” or “and do not hold us accountable for having killed someone who did not deserve to die” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### you, Yahweh, have done just as you desired

Alternate translation: “you, Yahweh, have chosen to do things in this way” or “you, Yahweh, have caused all this to happen”

## **Jonah 1:15**

**and the sea ceased from its raging**

“the sea stopped moving violently:

**and the sea ceased from its raging**

This can be stated positively. Alternate translation: “the sea became calm”

## Jonah 1:16

### Then the men feared Yahweh with great fear

Alternate translation: “then the men became greatly awed at Yahweh’s power” or “then the men worshiped Yahweh with great awe”



## Jonah 1:17

### General Information:

## General Information:

Some versions number this verse as the first verse of chapter 2. You may want to number the verses according to the main version that your language group uses.

### Now Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah

This clause introduces the next part of the story, where Yahweh saves Jonah from the sea, and Jonah prays. In this context, the word **Now** is used in English to introduce a new part of the story. (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**) (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**)

### three days and three nights

Perhaps this expression is an idiom in Hebrew meaning “a couple of days” or “a few days” or something similar, but this is uncertain. Alternate translation: “three days and nights” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## Jonah 2

### Jonah 2 General Notes

#### Structure and formatting

This chapter begins with a prayer by Jonah, and many translators have chosen to set it apart by setting its lines farther to the right on the page than the rest of the text. Translators can follow this practice, but they are not obligated to.

#### Special concepts in this chapter

##### Sea

This chapter contains many terms from the sea.

#### Important figures of speech in this chapter

##### Poetry

Prayers in Scripture often contain a poetic form. Poetry frequently uses metaphors to communicate something with a special meaning. For example, since Jonah was in a fish in the sea, being so trapped is compared to a prison. Jonah is overwhelmed by the depth of the sea and expresses this by speaking about being at the “base of the mountains” and in the “belly of Sheol.” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

#### Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

##### Repentance

Scholars are divided over whether Jonah’s repentance was genuine or whether he was trying to save his life. In light of his attitude in chapter 4, it is uncertain whether he was genuinely repentant. If possible, it is best for translators to avoid taking a definitive stance on whether Jonah’s repentance was genuine. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/repent\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/save\]\]](#))

## Jonah 2:1

### Yahweh his God

This means "Yahweh, the God he worshiped." The word **his** does not mean that Jonah owned God.

## Jonah 2:2

### And he said

Alternate translation: "Jonah said"

### I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me

This line begins a poem describing Jonah's experience and prayer in the belly of the fish. The poem does not give the exact words that Jonah prayed at the time because the poem was written later, describing Jonah's experience in the fish, his prayer, and God's answer as if they had already happened in the past. This first line of the poem can be understood in one of two ways: either as being addressed to Yahweh as part of the description of the prayer, or as being addressed to another person as an introduction to the description of the prayer. See also the Note concerning the phrase "Salvation belongs to Yahweh!" in [2:9](#). (See: **Poetry (p.118)**) (See: **Poetry (p.118)**)

### I cried out to Yahweh from my distress

Alternate translation: "I prayed to Yahweh during my great trouble" or "Yahweh, I cried out to you during my distress"

### and he answered me

Alternate translation: "Yahweh responded to me or he helped me or you answered me"

### from the belly of Sheol

"from the center of Sheol" or "from the deep part of Sheol" Possible meanings include: (1) Jonah was speaking of being in the belly of the fish as being in Sheol; or (2) Jonah believed that he was about to die and go to Sheol; or (3) He was speaking as if he already had died and gone to Sheol. (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### Sheol

**Sheol** was the name of the place where people went after they died. It was thought to be a shadowy world located somewhere under the ground. The New Testament equivalent seems to be "Hades," where the dead wait for judgment (see Rev. 20:13). If your language has a word for this place, you may want to use it here, or borrow the word "Sheol." (See: **How to Translate Names (p.93)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.93)**)

### you heard my voice

This phrase probably has both a literal and a figurative meaning. The phrase probably means literally that Yahweh heard Jonah's voice while he was praying inside the belly of the fish. However, the phrase "to hear someone's voice" in the Old Testament often means "to listen and obey (comply)." In this context, Jonah is expressing that Yahweh both heard him and acted to save him. (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## Jonah 2:3

### into the heart of the seas

Here the term **heart** is a metaphor for “being inside” something. The phrase “in the heart of” means to be “in the middle of” or “completely surrounded by” sea water. Alternate translation: “in the middle of the sea” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### and a current surrounded me

Alternate translation: “the sea water closed in around me”

### your billows and your waves

Both of these are disturbances on the surface of the ocean. They could be combined into one term, such as “waves” (See: **Doublet (p.88)**) (See: **Doublet (p.88)**)

## Jonah 2:4

### But as for me

This expression shows that there is a contrast between the actions of Yahweh, which Jonah had just talked about, and his own response. Alternate translation: “then I” (See: **Connect — Contrast Relationship (p.75)**) (See: **Connect — Contrast Relationship (p.75)**)

### I have been driven out

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “you drove me out” (See: **Active or Passive (p.63)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.63)**)

### from before your eyes

Here, **eyes** is a metonym meaning seeing, and seeing is a metonym for the knowledge, notice, and attention of God. Alternate translation: “from before you” or “from your presence” or “where you do not notice me” (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**)

### yet I might again look toward your holy temple

Jonah still has hope that, in spite of all that he is going through, God will allow him to see the temple in Jerusalem again.

## Jonah 2:5

**Water had closed around me even as far as life, the deep was surrounding me**

Jonah uses two similar phrases to express the severity and hopelessness of his situation. (See: **Parallelism (p.113)**)  
(See: **Parallelism (p.113)**)

### **Water**

Here, **water** refers to the sea.

### **even as far as life**

Here the Hebrew term **life** can possibly mean “my life” or “my neck” or “my spirit.” In any case, the water was threatening to end his life. Alternate translation: “up to my neck” or “as far as my spirit”

### **the deep was surrounding me**

Alternate translation: “deep water was all around me”

### **seaweed**

**Seaweed** is grass that grows in the sea.

## Jonah 2:6

### the earth with its bars were around me forever

Here Jonah uses a metaphor to compare the earth to a prison. Alternate translation: “the earth was like a prison that was about to lock me in forever” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### but you brought up my life from the pit

Here the term **pit** has two This could mean: (1) this could be a way to describe being in a very deep place underground or underwater or (2) this could be a metaphor meaning the place of the dead (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**). In either case, the term probably refers to the fact that Jonah felt certain that he would die. Alternate translation: “but you saved me from dying in a deep place” or “but you saved my life from the place of the dead” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### Yahweh, my God

In some languages, it may be more natural to put this at the beginning of the sentence or next to the word “you.”



## Jonah 2:7

### When my spirit fainted upon me

This phrase could mean either: (1) Jonah was already in the process of dying when he remembered Yahweh; or (2) Jonah had given up hope of being rescued and resigned himself to the fact that he would die. Alternate translation: “when my life was fainting away from me” or “when my spirit inside me had fainted” (See: **Connect — Simultaneous Time Relationship (p.79)**) (See: **Connect — Simultaneous Time Relationship (p.79)**)

### I remembered Yahweh

Since Jonah was praying to Yahweh, it might be more clear in some languages to say “I thought about you, Yahweh” or “Yahweh, I thought about you.”

### and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple

Jonah speaks as if his prayers could travel to God and his temple. This means that God heard his prayer and responded to it. Alternate translation: “then you in your holy temple heard my prayer” (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### your holy temple

Here the term **holy temple** may have either a literal or a figurative meaning, or perhaps both. Jonah might be speaking about the literal temple in Jerusalem, or he might be speaking about God’s dwelling place in heaven. See the UST. (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**)

### my spirit

Here the Hebrew term **my spirit** could also mean **my life**.

## Jonah 2:8

### Those who give attention to empty vanities

Here the term **empty vanities** is probably an idiom referring to idols of false gods. Alternate translation: “those who give attention to useless idols” or “those who pay attention to useless gods” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p. 97)**)

### forsake their covenant faithfulness

Here, **covenant faithfulness** could mean: (1) the faithfulness of God or (2) the faithfulness of the people. Therefore, it could mean (1) “are rejecting you, who would be faithful to them” or (2) “are abandoning their commitment to you”

## Jonah 2:9

### But as for me

This expression shows that there is a contrast between the people Jonah had just spoken about and himself. They paid attention to useless gods, but he would worship Yahweh. Alternate translation: “but I” (See: **Connect — Contrast Relationship (p.75)**) (See: **Connect — Contrast Relationship (p.75)**)

### I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving

This phrase probably means that Jonah would thank God while he offered a sacrifice to him. It is not clear whether Jonah planned to thank God by singing or shouting joyfully.

### Salvation belongs to Yahweh

This last line of the poem can be understood in one of two ways: either (1) as being addressed to Yahweh as part of the description of the prayer; or (2) as being addressed to another person as a conclusion to the description of the prayer. See also the Note concerning the phrase “I cried out to Yahweh from my distress ...” in [2:2](#).

### Salvation belongs to Yahweh

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **salvation**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “save.” Alternate translation: “Yahweh is the one who saves people” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.61)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.61)**)

## **Jonah 2:10**

### **onto the dry land**

Alternate translation: “upon the ground” or “onto the shore”

## Jonah 3

### Jonah 3 General Notes

### Structure and formatting

This chapter returns to a narrative of Jonah's life.

### Special concepts in this chapter

#### Animals

According to the king's proclamation, the animals had to participate in the fast he ordered. This most likely reflects their pagan mindset. There was nothing in the law of Moses that instructed the people to have the animals participate in any religious acts. (See: **law, law of Moses, law of Yahweh, law of God (p.132)**)

### Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

#### Size of Nineveh

When the author talks about the size of Nineveh, the measurements he gives are confusing. The phrase "three days' journey" is ambiguous in Hebrew, as many scholars have remarked. In Jonah's day, cities were not as big as they are today. So, although Nineveh was a big city, it was not as big as most modern cities.

#### God repenting or relenting

The last verse of this chapter says, "So then God changed his mind about the punishment that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." This concept of God changing His mind may seem inconsistent with the fact that God's character and his plans do not change. But this whole book is written from a human viewpoint, and so it presents the actions of God as Jonah saw them. God had told Jonah to warn the Ninevites of judgment for their sin.

Yahweh is just, but he is also merciful. Because the Ninevites repented, God did not follow through with a judgment in this instance, and Jonah described that in a human way as "changing his mind." The reader understands that this was God's plan from the beginning. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#), [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/mercy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/judge\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/evil\]\]](#))

## Jonah 3:1

### Then the word of Yahweh came

This phrase introduces the second half of the story of Jonah. The same phrase introduces the first half of the story [1:1](#). (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**) (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**)

### Then the word of Yahweh came

This is an idiom meaning that Yahweh spoke in some way. See how you translated this in [1:1](#). Alternate translation: “Yahweh spoke his message” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## Jonah 3:2

### Get up, go to Nineveh, the great city

Alternate translation: "Go to the large and important city of Nineveh"

### Get up

**Get up** here is an idiom intended to motivate Jonah to obey the next command, which is "go." See how you translated this in [1:2](#) and [1:3](#). (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### and call out to it the proclamation that I tell to you

Alternate translation: "tell the people there what I tell you to tell them"

## Jonah 3:3

### So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh

Here the words **got up** mean that Jonah took action in response to God's command to go, and this time he obeyed instead of disobeying. Alternate translation: "his time Jonah obeyed Yahweh and went to Nineveh" or "so Jonah left the beach and went to Nineveh, as Yahweh had commanded him" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### according to the word of Yahweh

Alternate translation: "the message of Yahweh" or "the command of Yahweh" (See: **Metonymy (p.108)**)

### Now Nineveh was great city to God, a journey of three days

This sentence gives background information about the city of Nineveh. (See: **Background Information (p.69)**) (See: **Background Information (p.69)**)

### great city to God

This is an idiom meaning that the city is both extremely large and one of the largest cities in the world. (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### a journey of three days

This appears to mean that a person had to walk for three days to completely go through it from one side of the city to the opposite side. It could also mean that it took three days to see the whole city. Alternate translation: "a city so large that it would take a person three days to walk through it" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)



## **Jonah 3:4**

### **So Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he called out**

This phrase has two This could mean: (1) Jonah walked a day's journey into the city, then he started calling out; or (2) while Jonah was walking through the city on the first day, he started calling out.

### **and he called out and said**

Alternate translation: "and he proclaimed" or "and he shouted"

### **Until forty days**

Alternate translation: "after 40 days" or "in 40 days" or "there remain 40 days, and"

### **forty days**

**forty days** (See: **Numbers (p.110)**) (See: **Numbers (p.110)**)

## Jonah 3:5

### And they proclaimed a fast

People fasted to show sadness or devotion to God or both. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**)

### and put on sackcloth

The reason why people **put on sackcloth** can be stated more clearly. Alternate translation: “they also put on coarse cloth to show that they were sorry for having sinned” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### from the greatest of them even to the least of them

Alternate translation: “from the most significant to the least significant people” or “including all of the important people and all of the unimportant people”

## Jonah 3:6

### the word

Alternate translation: "Jonah's message"

### and he rose up from his throne

"he got up from his throne" or "he stood up from his throne" The king left his throne to show that he was acting humbly. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**)

### from his throne

A **throne** is a special chair that a king sits on when performing his official duties as king. It is reserved for only the king.

### and sat down on the ash heap

**Sitting in ashes** was a way to show great humility and sorrow. In this case, it was to show how sorry he was for his sin. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.124)**)

## Jonah 3:7

### And he proclaimed and spoke & saying

Alternate translation: "he sent out an official announcement that said" or "he sent his messengers to announce"

### from a decree of the king and his nobles

Alternate translation: "a command with the full authority of the king and his officials"

### and his nobles

The term **nobles** refers to important men who helped the king rule the city.

### herd or flock

This refers to two kinds of animals that people care for. A **herd** is made up of large livestock (such as oxen or cattle) and a **flock** is made up of small livestock (such as sheep or goats). Alternate translation: "cattle or sheep"

### they must not graze, and they must not drink water

"they must not eat or drink anything" The reason they were not to eat or drink anything can be made explicit by adding "in order to show that they are sorry for their sins." (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## Jonah 3:8

### and every animal

Here the word **animal** refers to animals that people own.

### and they must cry out to God with strength

“and they must pray earnestly to God” What the people were to pray for can be made explicit. Alternate translation: “and they must cry out loudly to God and ask for mercy” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p. 66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### the violence that is in his hands

Here, **hands** is a metonym meaning doing. This refers to the violence that the people of Nineveh were doing. Alternate translation: “the violent things that he has done” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## Jonah 3:9

### Who knows

The king used this rhetorical question to get the people to think about something that is possible, but uncertain: that if they would stop sinning, God might not kill them. It could be translated as a statement: "We do not know." Or it could be stated as a word and be part of the next sentence: "Perhaps." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

### This god might turn back and have compassion

Here the author speaks of God changing his mind about bringing judgment as if God were turning around and walking in the opposite direction. Alternate translation: "God may decide instead to have compassion" or "God may do the opposite of what he said and be merciful" (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### from the burning of his nose

Here **the burning of his nose** is an idiom meaning that the person is angry. Alternate translation: "from his anger" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### so that we will not perish

Alternate translation: "and we will not die"

## Jonah 3:10

### **And God saw their deeds, that they turned away from their evil ways**

Alternate translation: "God saw that they stopped doing evil actions"

### **they turned away from their evil ways**

Here the author speaks of the people stopping their sinning as if they turned around from walking on a path toward evil and started walking in the opposite direction. (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.102)**)

### **And God relented in regard to the evil**

The word translated as "evil" here is very broad, including moral evil, physical evil, and everything that is bad. It is the same word used in the previous sentence (and verse 8) to describe the actions of the Ninevites. The author is showing that when people repent of moral evil, God relents of doing physical evil (punishment). God never does moral evil. If this is clear in your language, you may want to use the same word in both sentences. If that is not clear, you may want to use different words.

### **and he did not do it**

What God did not do can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "and he did not punish them" or "and he did not destroy them" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## Jonah 4

### Jonah 4 General Notes

#### Structure and formatting

Jonah continues the narrative while bringing the book to what seems like an unusual end. This emphasizes that the book is not really about Jonah. It is about God's desire to be merciful to everyone, whether Jew or pagan. (See: **mercy, merciful (p.134)**)

#### Special concepts in this chapter

##### Prophecy not coming true

It is important to see the relationship between a prophet and Yahweh. A prophet was to prophesy for Yahweh, and his words must come true. According to the law of Moses, if that did not happen, the penalty was death, because that shows that he was not a real prophet. But when Jonah told the city of Nineveh that it was going to be destroyed in forty days, it did not happen at that time. This is because God reserves the right to be merciful. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/lawofmoses\]\]](#))

##### Jonah's anger

When God did not destroy Nineveh, Jonah was angry with God because Jonah hated the people of Nineveh. They were enemies of Israel. But God wanted Jonah, and the readers of this book, to learn that God loves all people.

#### Important figures of speech in this chapter

##### Rhetorical questions

As in other places, Jonah asks rhetorical questions to show how angry he was at Yahweh. (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

##### Parallel to Mount Sinai

In verse 2, Jonah attributes a series of characteristics to God. A Jewish reader of this book would recognize this as a formula Moses used in speaking about God when he was meeting God on Mount Sinai. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

#### Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

##### God's grace

When Jonah went outside the city, he got very hot and God graciously provided some relief through the plant. God was trying to teach Jonah through an object lesson. It is important for the reader to see this clearly. (See: **grace, gracious (p.131)**)



## Jonah 4:1

### **But this was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and it burned to him**

This sentence introduces the next part of the story where Jonah responds to God saving the city of Nineveh. (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**) (See: **Introduction of a New Event (p.99)**)

### **and it burned to him**

This is an idiom that speaks of Jonah's anger as if it were a fire burning inside him. Alternate translation: "and he was very angry" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## Jonah 4:2

### Ah

In this context, the word **Ah!** shows intense frustration. Represent this emotion in the most natural way for your language. (See: **Exclamations (p.90)**) (See: **Exclamations (p.90)**)

### Yahweh, was this not my word while I was in my country

Jonah used this rhetorical question to tell God how angry he was. If it is more clear, this can be made into a statement. Alternate translation: “ah, Yahweh, this is what I said when I was still in my own country” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

### Yahweh, was this not my word while I was in my country

What Jonah said when he was back in his own country can be stated explicitly. Alternate translation: “now Yahweh, when I was still in my own country I knew that if I warned the people of Nineveh, they would repent, and you would not destroy them” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### long of nostrils

This is an idiom meaning that Yahweh does not get angry quickly. Alternate translation: “slow to get angry” or “very patient” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### and abundant in covenant faithfulness

Alternate translation: “and very faithful” or “and you love people very much”

### and one who relents from evil

Here, **evil** refers to the physical destruction of the city of Nineveh and its people. It does not refer to moral evil. In this context, this phrase means that God feels sadness about causing bad things to happen to people who sin and he changes his mind when sinners repent of their sin. This implicit information can be made explicit. Alternate translation: “and you feel sadness about causing disaster for sinners” or “and you decide not to punish sinners who repent” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## Jonah 4:3

### **I beg you, take my life from me**

Jonah's reason for wanting to die can be stated explicitly. Alternate translation: "since you will not destroy Nineveh as you said you would, please allow me to die" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### **for my death is better than my life**

Alternate translation: "I would prefer to die rather than to live" or "because I want to die. I do not want to live"

## Jonah 4:4

### Is it right that it burns to you

This is an idiom that speaks of Jonah's anger as if it were a fire burning inside him. See how you translated it in [4:1](#). Alternate translation: "is it right for you to be angry about this" (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

### Is it right that it burns to you

The reason for Jonah's anger can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "is it right for you to be angry that I did not destroy Nineveh" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

## **Jonah 4:5**

### **Then Jonah went out from the city**

Alternate translation: "then Jonah left the city of Nineveh"

### **what would transpire within the city**

Jonah wanted to see if God would destroy the city or not. Alternate translation: "what would become of the city" or "what God would do to the city"

## Jonah 4:6

### from over Jonah to be a shade over his head

Alternate translation: "over Jonah's head for shade"

### in order to rescue him from his evil

Here the term **evil** could mean two things (or both at the same time): (1) "discomfort" or "distress," meaning the intense heat of the sun shining on Jonah's head; or (2) "wrong," meaning Jonah's wrong attitude concerning God's decision not to destroy Nineveh. If both meanings can be preserved, that is preferable. If not, you could choose an Alternate translation: "to protect Jonah from the heat of the sun" or "to save Jonah from his wrong attitude"

## **Jonah 4:7**

### **Then God appointed a worm**

Alternate translation: "then God sent a worm"

### **and it attacked the plant**

Alternate translation: "and the worm chewed the plant"

### **and it withered**

The plant became dry and died. Alternate translation: "so that the plant died"

## Jonah 4:8

### And as soon as the rising of the sun happened

The **rising of the sun** is background information that gives the time when the hot wind from the east started blowing. Express this relationship in a natural way in your language. (See: **Connect — Background Information (p.72)**) (See: **Connect — Background Information (p.72)**)

### then God appointed a hot east wind

God caused a hot wind from the east to blow on Jonah. If “wind” in your language can only mean a cool or cold wind, then you can try this alternate translation: “God sent a very hot warmth from the east to Jonah.” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### and the sun beat down

Alternate translation: “the sun was very hot”

### on the head of Jonah

This phrase may have a literal meaning or a figurative meaning. Perhaps Jonah felt the heat most on his head, or perhaps the phrase **the head of Jonah** is a synecdoche meaning Jonah’s entire body. Alternate translation: “on Jonah” (See: **Synecdoche (p.126)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.126)**)

### and he became faint

Alternate translation: “and he became very weak” or “and he lost his strength”

### Then he asked his spirit to die

Jonah is talking to himself. Alternate translation: “he wished he would die” or “he wanted to die”

### My death is better than my life

“I would rather die than live” or “I want to die; I do not want to live” See how you translated this in [4:3](#).



## Jonah 4:9

### Is it right that it burns to you about the plant

In this context, God's question is intended to lead Jonah to draw a conclusion about his selfish attitude. This implicit information can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "is it right that you should be so angry about the plant that only gave shade to you" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

### It is right that it burns to me, even as far as death

Alternate translation: "I am right to be angry. I am angry enough to die"

## Jonah 4:10

### Then Yahweh said

Here Yahweh is speaking to Jonah. This implicit information can be made explicit. Alternate translation: “Yahweh said to Jonah” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

שָׁבֵן לַיְלָה הָיָה וּבֹן לַיְלָה אָבֵד לַיְלָה

This idiom means that the plant existed only briefly. Alternate translation: “it grew in one night and died the next” or “it grew quickly and died just as quickly” (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)

## Jonah 4:11

### So as for me

This expression, paired with **As for you** in verse 10, shows a comparison between Jonah's attitude toward the plant and Yahweh's attitude toward the people of Nineveh. Express this comparison in a natural way in your language. (See: **Connecting Words and Phrases (p.81)**) (See: **Connecting Words and Phrases (p.81)**)

### **So as for me, should I not feel troubled about Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand, and many animals**

God used this rhetorical question to emphasize his claim that he should have compassion on Nineveh. Alternate translation: "I certainly should have compassion for Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand, and also many cattle" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.121)**)

### in which there are more

This can also be translated as the beginning of a new sentence. Alternate translation: "There are more than" or "it has more than"

### than 120,000 people

**one hundred twenty thousand people** (See: **Numbers (p.110)**) (See: **Numbers (p.110)**)

### **who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand**

This idiom means "who do not know the difference between right and wrong." (See: **Idiom (p.97)**) (See: **Idiom (p.97)**)



# **unfoldingWord® Translation Academy**

**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: [Jonah 2:9](#)

## Active or Passive

Some languages use both active and passive sentences. In active sentences, the subject does the action. In passive sentences, the subject is the one that receives the action. Here are some examples with their subjects bolded:

- Active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- Passive: **The house** was built in 2010.

Translators whose languages do not use passive sentences will need to know how they can translate passive sentences that they find in the Bible. Other translators will need to decide when to use a passive sentence and when to use the active form.

This page answers the question: *What do active and passive mean, and how do I translate passive sentences?*

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

*Sentence Structure* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Verbs* ([UTA PDF](#))

## Description

Some languages have both active and passive forms of sentences.

- In the active form, the subject does the action and is always mentioned.
- In the passive form, the action is done to the subject, and the one who does the action is not always mentioned.

In the examples of active and passive sentences below, we have bolded the subject.

- active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built by my father in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built in 2010. (This does not tell who did the action.)

## Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All languages use active forms. Some languages use passive forms, and some do not. Some languages use passive forms only for certain purposes, and the passive form is not used for the same purposes in all of the languages that use it.

## Purposes for the Passive

- The speaker is talking about the person or thing the action was done to, not about the person who did the action.
- The speaker does not want to tell who did the action.
- The speaker does not know who did the action.

## Translation Principles Regarding the Passive

- Translators whose language does not use passive forms will need to find another way to express the idea.
- Translators whose language has passive forms will need to understand why the passive is used in a particular sentence in the Bible and decide whether or not to use a passive form for that purpose in his translation of the sentence.

## Examples From the Bible

Then their shooters shot at your soldiers from off the wall, and some of the king's servants **were killed**, and your servant Uriah the Hittite **was killed** too. (2 Samuel 11:24 ULT)

This means that the enemy's shooters shot and killed some of the king's servants, including Uriah. The point is what happened to the king's servants and Uriah, not who shot them. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on the king's servants and Uriah.

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal **was torn down**.  
(Judges 6:28a ULT)

The men of the town saw what had happened to the altar of Baal, but they did not know who broke it down. The purpose of the passive form here is to communicate this event from the perspective of the men of the town.

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

This describes a situation in which a person ends up in the sea with a millstone around his neck. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on what happens to this person. Who does these things to the person is not important.

## Translation Strategies

If your language would use a passive form for the same purpose as in the passage that you are translating, then use a passive form. If you decide that it is better to translate without a passive form, here are some strategies that you might consider.

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who or what did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.
- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who or what did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."
- (3) Use a different verb.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21b ULT)

**The king's servants gave** Jeremiah a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

- (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

It would be better for him if **they were to put** a millstone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

It would be better for him if **someone were to put** a heavy stone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

- (3) Use a different verb in an active sentence.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21 ULT)

He **received** a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.



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

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

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:4](#); [Jonah 2:4](#)

## 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:** [Jonah 1 General Notes](#); [Jonah 1:3](#); [Jonah 1:6](#); [Jonah 1:10](#); [Jonah 1:13](#); [Jonah 3:5](#); [Jonah 3:7](#); [Jonah 3:8](#); [Jonah 3:10](#); [Jonah 4 General Notes](#); [Jonah 4:2](#); [Jonah 4:3](#); [Jonah 4:4](#); [Jonah 4:8](#); [Jonah 4:9](#); [Jonah 4:10](#)

## Background Information

### Description

When people tell a story, they normally tell the events in the order that they happened. This sequence of events makes up the storyline. The storyline is full of action verbs that move the story along in time. But sometimes a writer may take a break from the storyline and give some information to help his listeners understand the story better. This type of information is called background information. The background information might be about things that happened before the events he has already told about, or it might explain something in the story, or it might be about something that would happen much later in the story.

This page answers the question: *What is background information, and how can I show that some information is background information?*

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

*Order of Events* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Writing Styles* ([UTA PDF](#))

**Example** — The bolded phrases in the story below are all background information.

Peter and John went on a hunting trip because **their village was going to have a feast the next day. Peter was the best hunter in the village. He once killed three wild pigs in one day!** They walked for hours through low bushes until they heard a wild pig. The pig ran, but they managed to shoot the pig and kill it. Then they tied up its legs with some rope **they had brought with them** and carried it home on a pole. When they brought it to the village, Peter's cousin saw the pig and realized that it was his own pig. Peter had mistakenly killed his cousin's pig.

Background information often tells about something that had happened earlier or something that would happen much later. Examples of these are: "their village was going to have a feast the next day," "He once killed three wild pigs in one day," and "that they had brought with them."

Often background information uses "be" verbs like "was" and "were," rather than action verbs. Examples of these are "their village was going to have a feast the next day," and "Peter **was** the best hunter in the village."

Background information can also be marked with words that tell the reader that this information is not part of the event line of the story. In this story, some of these words are "because," "once," and "had."

### A writer may use background information:

- to help their listeners be interested in the story
- to help their listeners understand something in the story
- to help the listeners understand why something is important in the story
- to tell the setting of a story
  - > \* Setting includes:
    - > \* where the story takes place
    - > \* when the story takes place
    - > \* who is present when the story begins
    - > \* what is happening when the story begins

### Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Languages have different ways of marking background information and storyline information.
- You (the translator) need to know the order of the events in the Bible, which information is background information, and which is storyline information.
- You will need to translate the story in a way that marks the background information in a way that your own readers will understand the order of events, which information is background information, and which is storyline information.

## Examples From the Bible

Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram **was 86 years old** when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:15-16 ULT)

The first sentence tells about two events. Hagar gave birth and Abraham named his son. The second sentence is background information about how old Abram was when those things happened.

And Jesus himself **was beginning about 30 years old**. He **was the son** (as it was assumed) of Joseph, of Heli, (Luke 3:23 ULT)

The verses before this tell about when Jesus was baptized. This sentence introduces background information about Jesus' age and ancestors. The story resumes in chapter 4 where it tells about Jesus going to the wilderness.

Then **it happened on a Sabbath** that he **was going through the grain fields**, and his disciples **were picking and eating the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands**. But some of the Pharisees said ... (Luke 6:1-2a ULT)

These verses give the setting of the story. The events took place in a grain field on the Sabbath day. Jesus, his disciples, and some Pharisees were there, and Jesus' disciples were picking heads of grain and eating them. The main action in the story starts with the phrase, "But some of the Pharisees said ...."

## Translation Strategies

To keep translations clear and natural you will need to study how people tell stories in your language. Observe how your language marks background information. You may need to write down some stories in order to study this. Observe what kinds of verbs your language uses for background information and what kinds of words or other markers signal that something is background information. Do these same things when you translate, so that your translation is clear and natural and people can understand it easily.

- (1) Use your language's way of showing that certain information is background information.
- (2) Reorder the information so that earlier events are mentioned first. (This is not always possible when the background information is very long.)

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use your language's way of showing that certain information is background information. The examples below explain how this was done in the ULT English translations.

**And** Jesus himself **was** beginning about 30 years old. He **was** the son (as it was assumed) of Joseph, of Heli. (Luke 3:23 ULT)

As here, English sometimes uses the word "and" to show that there is some kind of change in the story. The verb "was" shows that it is background information.

Therefore, also exhorting many other things, he preached the good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, having been rebuked by him concerning Herodias, the wife of his brother, and **concerning all the evil things that Herod had done**, added even this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:18-20 ULT)

The bolded phrase happened before John rebuked Herod. In English, the helping verb "had" in "had done" shows that Herod did those things before John rebuked him.

- (2) Reorder the information so that earlier events are mentioned first.

Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.  
**Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.** (Genesis 16:16 ULT)

"**When Abram was 86 years old**, Hagar gave birth to his son, and Abram named his son Ishmael."

Therefore, also exhorting many other things, he preached the good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, having been rebuked by him concerning Herodias, the wife of his brother, and **concerning all the evil things that Herod had done**, added even this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:18-20 ULT)

The translation below reorders John's rebuke and Herod's actions.

"Now Herod the tetrarch married his brother's wife, Herodias, and **he did many other evil things**, so John rebuked him. But then Herod did another very evil thing. He had John locked up in prison."

Next we recommend you learn about:

*Connecting Words and Phrases* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Introduction of a New Event* ([UTA PDF](#))

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:5](#); [Jonah 3:3](#)

## Connect — Background Information

### Time Relationship

Some connectors establish time relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate clauses that give background information?*

### Background Clause

#### Description

A background clause is one that describes something that is ongoing. Then, in the same sentence, another clause indicates an event that begins to happen during that time. These events are also simultaneous events, but they have the further relationship of background event and main event because the event that is already happening serves as the background for the other event, the one that is in focus. The background event simply provides the time frame or other context for the main event or events.

#### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Languages indicate a shift in time in different ways. You (the translator) need to understand how these shifts in time are indicated in the original languages in order to communicate them clearly in your own language. Background clauses often indicate a time that began long before the event that is in focus. Translators need to understand how both the source language and the target language communicate background events. Some English words that indicate background events are “now,” “when,” “while,” and “during.” Those words can also indicate simultaneous events. To tell the difference, ask yourself if all of the events seem to be equal in importance and started at about the same time. If so, they are probably simultaneous events. But if an event(s) is ongoing and another event(s) just started, then the ongoing event(s) is probably background to the other event(s). Some common phrases that indicate background events are “in those days” and “at that time.”

### Examples From OBS and the Bible

**When** Solomon was old, he also worshiped their gods. (OBS Story 18 Frame 3)

Solomon began to worship foreign gods at a time when he was old. Being old is the background event. Worshiping other gods is the main event.

And his parents went **every year** to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover. And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to the custom of the feast. (Luke 2:41-42 ULT)

The first event—going to Jerusalem—is ongoing and started long ago. We know this because of the words “every year.” Going to Jerusalem is the background event. Then an event begins that started during the time “when he was twelve years old.” So the main event is the specific time Jesus and his family traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover festival **when he was twelve years old**.

And it came about that, **while** they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. (Luke 2:6 ULT)

Being in Bethlehem is the background event. The birth of the baby is the main event.

And in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—**while** Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **during** the high priesthood of



Annas and Caiaphas—the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.  
(Luke 3:1-2 ULT)

This example begins with five background clauses (marked by commas), signalled as background by the words “while” and “during.” Then the main event happens: “the word of God came to John.”

## Translation Strategies

If the way that the Background Clauses are marked is also clear in your language, then translate the Background Clauses as they are.

(1) If the connecting word does not make it clear that what follows is a Background Clause, use a connecting word that communicates this more clearly.

(2) If your language marks Background Clauses in a different way than using connecting words (such as by using different verb forms), then use that way.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

And in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—**while** Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **during** the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas—the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.  
(Luke 3:1-2 ULT)

(1) If the connecting word does not make it clear that what follows is a background clause, use a connecting word that communicates this more clearly.

**It happened during the time that** Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, **and during the time that** Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, **and during the time that** his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, **and during the time that** Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, **and also during the time that** Annas and Caiaphas were high priests—**that** the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

(2) If your language marks background clauses in a different way than using connecting words, such as with different verb forms, then use that way.

Pontius Pilate **was governing** Judea, and Herod **was ruling over** Galilee, and his brother Philip **was ruling over** the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias **was ruling over** Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas **were being** high priests—the word of God **came** to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

## Example of Differences in Time Relationship Connecting Words:

Category	Example
Background setting	Yahweh's word was rare <b>in those days</b> ;
Background repeated	there was no frequent prophetic vision.
Introduction of main event	<b>At that time, when</b> Eli
Background	<b>whose</b> eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see well,
Simultaneous background	was lying down in his own bed.
Simultaneous background	The lamp of God <b>had not yet</b> gone out,
Simultaneous background	<b>and</b> Samuel was lying down to sleep in the temple of Yahweh,
Simultaneous background	where the ark of God was.
Main event	<b>Yahweh called to Samuel,</b>
Sequential event	who said, "Here I am." (1 Sam 3:1-4 ULT)

In the above example, the first two lines talk about a condition that was going on for a long time. This is the general, long-term background. We know this from the phrase "in those days." After the introduction of the main event ("At that time,"), there are several lines of simultaneous background. The first one is introduced by "when," and then three more follow, with the last connected by "and." The background clause introduced by "where" explains a little more about the background clause before it. Then the main event happens, followed by more events. Translators will need to think about the best way to show these relationships in their language.

"

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:10](#); [Jonah 4:8](#)

## Connect — Contrast Relationship

### Logical Relationships

Some connectors establish logical relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate a contrast relationship?*

### Contrast Relationship

#### Description

A contrast relationship is a logical relationship in which one event or item is in contrast or opposition to another.

#### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In Scripture, many events did not happen as the people involved intended or expected them to happen. Sometimes people acted in ways that were not expected, whether good or bad. Often it was God at work, changing the events. These events were often pivotal. It is important that translators understand and communicate these contrasts. In English, contrast relationships are often indicated by the words “but,” “although,” “even though,” “though,” “yet,” or “however.”

#### Examples From OBS and the Bible

You tried to do evil when you sold me as a slave, **but** God used the evil for good! (Story 8 Frame 12 OBS)

Joseph’s brothers’ evil plan to sell Joseph is contrasted with God’s good plan to save many people. The word “but” marks the contrast.

For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? **Yet** I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:27 ULT)

Jesus contrasts the proud way that human leaders behave with the humble way that he behaves. The contrast is marked by the word “yet.”

The hill country will also be yours. **Though** it is a forest, you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders, for you will drive out the Canaanites, even **though** they have chariots of iron, and even **though** they are strong. (Joshua 17:18 ULT)

It was unexpected that the Israelites, who had been slaves in Egypt, would be able to conquer and lay claim to the promised land.

#### Translation Strategies

If your language uses contrast relationships in the same way as in the text, then use them as they are.

- (1) If the contrast relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a connecting word or phrase that is more specific or more clear.
- (2) If it is more clear in your language to mark the other clause of the contrast relationship, then use a connecting word on the other clause.
- (3) If your language shows a contrast relationship in a different way, then use that way.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the contrast relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a connecting word or phrase that is more specific or more clear.

For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? **Yet** I am among you as one who serves. (Luke 22:27 ULT)

For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? **Unlike that person**, I am among you as one who serves.

(2) If it is more clear in your language to mark the other clause of the contrast relationship, then use a connecting word on the other clause.

The hill country will also be yours. **Though** it is a forest, you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders, for you will drive out the Canaanites, even **though** they have chariots of iron, and even **though** they are strong. (Joshua 17:18 ULT)

The hill country will also be yours. It is a forest, **but** you will clear it and it will become yours to its farthest borders. They have chariots of iron, and they are strong, **but** you will drive out the Canaanites.

(3) If your language shows a contrast relationship in a different way, then use that way.

{David} found favor in the sight of God, and he asked if he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. **However**, Solomon built the house for him. **But** the Most High does not live in houses made with hands. (Acts 7:46-48a ULT)

[David] found favor in the sight of God, and he asked if he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. **But** it was, Solomon, **not David**, who built the house for God. **Even though Solomon built him a house**, the Most High does not live in houses made with hands.

"

Referenced in: [Jonah 2:4](#); [Jonah 2:9](#)

## Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

### Logical Relationships

Some connectors establish logical relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate the reason-result relationship?*

### Reason-and-Result Relationships

#### Description

A reason-and-result relationship is a logical relationship in which one event is the **reason** or cause for another event. The second event, then, is the **result** of the first event.

#### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

A reason-and-result relationship can look forward — “I did Y because I wanted X to happen.” But usually it is looking backward — “X happened, and so I did Y.” Also, it is possible to state the reason either before or after the result. Many languages have a preferred order for the reason and the result, and it will be confusing for the reader if they are in the opposite order. Common words used to indicate a reason-and-result relationship in English are “because,” “so,” “therefore,” and “for.” Some of these words can also be used to indicate a goal relationship, so translators need to be aware of the difference between a goal relationship and a reason-and-result relationship. It is necessary for translators to understand how the two events are connected, and then communicate them clearly in their language.

If the reason and result are stated in different verses, it is still possible to put them in a different order. If you change the order of the verses, then put the verse numbers together at the beginning of the group of verses that were rearranged like this: 1-2. This is called a [Verse Bridge](#).

#### Examples From OBS and the Bible

The Jews were amazed, **because** Saul had tried to kill believers, and now he believed in Jesus!  
(Story 46 Frame 6 OBS)

The **reason** is the change in Saul — that he had tried to kill people who believed in Jesus, and now he himself believed in Jesus. The **result** is that the Jews were amazed. “Because” connects the two ideas and indicates that what follows it is a reason.

Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **so that** the boat was covered with the waves.  
(Matthew 8:24a ULT)

The **reason** is the great storm, and the **result** is that the boat was covered with the waves. The two events are connected by “so that.” Notice that the term “so that” often indicates a goal relationship, but here the relationship is reason-and-result. This is because the sea cannot think and therefore does not have a goal.

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, **because** in it he rested from all his work which he had done in his creation. (Genesis 2:3 ULT)

The **result** is that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. The **reason** is because he rested on the seventh day from his work.

“Blessed are the poor, **for** yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20b ULT)

The **result** is that the poor are blessed. The **reason** is that the kingdom of God is theirs.

But he raised up in their place their sons that Joshua circumcised, being uncircumcised, **because** they had not been circumcised on the way. (Joshua 5:7 ULT)

The **result** is that Joshua circumcised the boys and men who had been born in the wilderness. The **reason** was that they had not been circumcised while they were journeying.

## Translation Strategies

If your language uses reason-and-result relationships in the same way as in the text, then use them as they are.

- (1) If the order of the clauses is confusing for the reader, then change the order.
- (2) If the relationship between the clauses is not clear, then use a more clear connecting word.
- (3) If it is more clear to put a connecting word in the clause that does not have one, then do so.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, **because** in it he rested from all his work which he had done in his creation. (Genesis 2:3 ULT)

- (1) God rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done in his creation. **That is why** he blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

Blessed are the poor, **for** yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20 ULT)

- (1) The kingdom of God belongs to you who are poor. **Therefore**, the poor are blessed.
- (2) Blessed are the poor, **because** yours is the kingdom of God.
- (3) **The reason that** the poor are blessed **is because** yours is the kingdom of God.

Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **so that** the boat was covered with the waves. (Matthew 8:24a ULT)

- (1) Behold, the boat was covered with the waves **because** a great storm arose on the sea.
- (2) Behold, a great storm arose on the sea, **with the result that** the boat was covered with the waves.
- (3) Behold, **because** a great storm arose on the sea, the boat was covered with the waves.

**Since** he was not able to find out anything for certain because of the noise, he ordered that he be brought into the fortress. (Acts 21:34b ULT)

- (1) The captain ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress, **because** he could not tell anything because of all the noise.
- (2) **Because** the captain could not tell anything because of all the noise, he ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress.
- (3) The captain could not tell anything because of all the noise, **so** he ordered that Paul be brought into the fortress.

"

Referenced in: [Jonah 1:11](#)

## Connect — Simultaneous Time Relationship

### Time Relationships

Some connectors establish time relationships between two phrases, clauses, sentences, or chunks of text.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate clauses with a simultaneous time relationship?*

### Simultaneous Clause

#### Description

A simultaneous clause is a time relationship that connects two or more events that occur at the same time.

#### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Languages indicate in many different ways that events occur simultaneously. These ways may vary based on whether or not something is causing the events to occur simultaneously. Connecting words that may indicate simultaneous events are words such as “while,” “as,” and “during.” Often the Bible does not state a relationship between the events but simply says they occurred at the same time. It is important that you (the translator) know when a time relationship is implied and when it is not implied so that you can communicate it clearly. A simultaneous clause communicates that events happened at the same time but it does not indicate that one event caused the other. That would be a reason-and-result relationship.

#### Examples From OBS and the Bible

Joseph served his master well, **and** God blessed Joseph. (OBS Story 8 Frame 4)

Two events happened while Joseph was a slave to a wealthy government official: Joseph served well, and God blessed Joseph. There is no indication of a reason-and-result (cause and effect) relationship between the two, or that the first event happened, and then the second event happened.

But in truth I say to you that there were many widows in Israel **during** the days of Elijah. (Luke 4:25b ULT)

The connecting word “**during**” tells us clearly that two things happened at the same time, but one event did not cause the other.

And the people were waiting for Zechariah, **and** they were wondering at his delaying in the temple. (Luke 1:21 ULT)

The people were both waiting and wondering at the same time. The general connector “**and**” indicates this.

**While** they were looking intensely into heaven **as** he was going up, suddenly, two men stood by them in white clothing. (Acts 1:10 ULT)

Three events happened at the same time — the disciples looking, Jesus going up, and two men standing. The connector words “**while**” and “**as**” tell us this.

#### Translation Strategies

If the way that the simultaneous clauses are marked also is clear in your language, then translate the simultaneous clauses as they are.

- (1) If the connecting word does not make it clear that the simultaneous clauses are happening at the same time, use a connecting word that communicates this more clearly.
- (2) If it is not clear which clause the simultaneous clause is connected to, and that they are happening at the same time, mark all of the clauses with a connecting word.
- (3) If your language marks events as simultaneous in a different way than using connecting words, then use that way.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

Below, each Bible verse will be restated in three different ways, according to the translation strategies in the list above. Each restatement will have the same number as the translation strategy that it is using.

And the people were waiting for Zechariah, **and** they were wondering at his delaying in the temple. (Luke 1:21 ULT)

- (1) Now **while** the people were waiting for Zechariah, they were wondering at his delaying in the temple.
- (2) Now **while** the people were waiting for Zechariah, they were **also** wondering at his delaying in the temple.
- (3) Now the people were waiting for Zechariah, wondering at his delaying in the temple.

**While** they were looking intently into heaven **as** he was going up, suddenly, two men stood by them in white clothing. (Acts 1:10 ULT)

- (1) And **during the time** they were looking intently into heaven **while** he was going up, suddenly, two men stood by them in white clothing.
- (2) And **while** they were looking intently into heaven **as** he was going up, suddenly, **at that same time** two men stood by them in white clothing.
- (3) They were looking intently into heaven; he was going up **when** they saw two men standing by them in white clothing.

"

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



## Connecting Words and Phrases

### Description

This page answers the question: *How do connecting words work to join parts of the text in different ways?*

As humans, we write our thoughts in phrases and sentences. We usually want to communicate a series of thoughts that are connected to each other in different ways. **Connecting words and phrases** show how these thoughts are related to each other. For example, we can show how the following thoughts are related by using the Connecting Words in bold type:

- It was raining, **so** I opened my umbrella.
- It was raining, **but** I did not have an umbrella. **So** I got very wet.

Connecting words or phrases can connect phrases or clauses within a sentence. They can connect sentences to each other. They can also connect entire chunks to one another in order to show how the chunk before relates to the chunk after the connecting word. Very often, the connecting words that connect entire chunks to one another are either conjunctions or adverbs.

It was raining, but I did not have an umbrella, so I got very wet.

**Now** I must change my clothes. Then I will drink a cup of hot tea and warm myself by the fire.

In the above example, the word **now** connects the two short chunks of text, showing the relationship between them. The speaker must change his clothes, drink hot tea, and warm himself because of something that happened earlier (that is, he got wet in the rain).

Sometimes people might not use a connecting word because they expect the context to help the readers understand the relationship between the thoughts. Some languages do not use connecting words as much as other languages do. They might say:

- It was raining. I did not have an umbrella. I got very wet.

You (the translator) will need to use the method that is most natural and clear in the target language. But in general, using connecting words whenever possible helps the reader to understand the ideas in the Bible most clearly.

### Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- You need to understand the relationship between paragraphs, between sentences, and between parts of sentences in the Bible, and how connecting words and phrases can help you to understand the relationship between the thoughts that they are connecting.
- Each language has its own ways of showing how thoughts are related.
- You need to know how to help readers understand the relationship between the thoughts in a way that is natural in your language.

### Translation Principles

- You need to translate in a way that readers can understand the same relationship between thoughts that the original readers would have understood.
- Whether or not a connecting word is used is not as important as readers being able to understand the relationship between the ideas.

## The Different Types of Connections

Listed below are different types of connections between ideas or events. These different types of connections can be indicated by using different connecting words. When we write or translate something, it is important to use the right connecting word so that these connections are clear for the reader. If you would like additional information, simply click the colored, hyperlinked word to be directed to a page containing definitions and examples for each type of connection.

- [Sequential Clause](#) — a time relationship between two events in which one happens and then the other happens.
- [Simultaneous Clause](#) — a time relationship between two or more events that occur at the same time.
- [Background Clause](#) — a time relationship in which the first clause describes a long event that is happening at the time when the beginning of the second event happens, which is described in the second clause.
- [Exceptional Relationship](#) — one clause describes a group of people or items, and the other clause excludes one or more items or people from the group.
- [Hypothetical Condition](#) — the second event will only take place if the first one takes place. Sometimes what takes place is dependent on the actions of other people.
- [Factual Condition](#) — a connection that sounds hypothetical but is already certain or true, so that the condition is guaranteed to happen.
- [Contrary-to-Fact Condition](#) — a connection that sounds hypothetical but is already certain that it is not true. See also: [Hypothetical Statements](#).
- [Goal Relationship](#) — a logical relationship in which the second event is the purpose or goal of the first.
- [Reason and Result Relationship](#) — a logical relationship in which one event is the reason for the other event, the result.
- [Contrast Relationship](#) — one item is being described as different or in opposition to another.

## Examples from the Bible

I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. **Instead**, I went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. **Then** after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days. (Galatians 1:16b-18 ULT)

The word “instead” introduces something that contrasts with what was said before. The contrast here is between what Paul did not do and what he did do. The word “then” introduces a sequence of events. It introduces something that Paul did after he returned to Damascus.

**Therefore**, whoever breaks the least one of these commandments **and** teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. **But** whoever keeps them and teaches them, that one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19 ULT)

The word “therefore” links this section with the section before it, signaling that the section that came before gave the reason for this section. “Therefore” usually links sections larger than one sentence. The word “and” links only two actions within the same sentence, that of breaking commandments and teaching others. In this verse the word “but” contrasts what one group of people will be called in God’s kingdom with what another group of people will be called.

We place nothing as a stumbling block in front of anyone, **so that** our ministry might not be discredited. **Instead**, we commend ourselves in everything as God’s servants. (2 Corinthians 6:3-4 ULT)

Here the words “so that” connect what follows as the reason for what came before; the reason that Paul does not place stumbling blocks is that he does not want his ministry brought into disrepute. “Instead” contrasts what Paul does (prove by his actions that he is God’s servant) with what he said he does not do (place stumbling blocks).

## General Translation Strategies

### See each type of Connecting Word above for specific strategies

If the way the relationship between thoughts is shown in the ULT would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, then consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Use a connecting word (even if the ULT does not use one).
- (2) Do not use a connecting word if it would be strange to use one and people would understand the right relationship between the thoughts without it.
- (3) Use a different connecting word.

### Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a connecting word (even if the ULT does not use one).

Jesus said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." Then immediately they left the nets and followed him. (Mark 1:17-18 ULT)

They followed Jesus because he told them to. Some translators may want to mark this clause with the connecting word "so."

Jesus said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." **So**, immediately they left the nets and followed him.

- (2) Do not use a connecting word if it would be odd to use one, and if people would understand the right relationship between the thoughts without it.

Therefore, whoever breaks the least one of these commandments **and** teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. **But** whoever keeps them and teaches them, that one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19 ULT)

Some languages would prefer not to use connecting words here because the meaning is clear without them and using them would be unnatural. They might translate like this:

Therefore, whoever breaks the least one of these commandments, teaching others to do so as well, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever keeps them and teaches them, that one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. **Instead**, I went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. **Then** after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days. (Galatians 1:16b-18 ULT) (Galatians 1:16-18 ULT)

Some languages might not need the words "instead" or "then" here. They might translate like this:

I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me. I went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. After three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days.

- (3) Use a different connecting word.

Therefore, whoever breaks the least one of these commandments **and** teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. **But** whoever keeps them and teaches them, that one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19 ULT)

Instead of a word like “therefore,” a language might need a phrase to indicate that there was a section before it that gave the reason for the section that follows. Also, the word “but” is used here because of the contrast between the two groups of people. But in some languages, the word “but” would show that what comes after it is surprising because of what came before it. So “and” might be clearer for those languages. They might translate like this:

**Because of that**, whoever breaks the least one of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.  
**And** whoever keeps them and teaches them, that one will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

”

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 4:11](#)

## 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.

χωρίς ἑμοῦ 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: [Jonah 1:6](#)

# 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: [Jonah 2:3](#)

# 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:** [Jonah 1:14](#); [Jonah 4:2](#)

# 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** <sup>1</sup>

The footnote would look like:

<sup>[1]</sup> 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:

<sup>[1]</sup> 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**<sup>1</sup> 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 Jonah](#); [Jonah 1:1](#); [Jonah 2:2](#)



## 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:** [Jonah 1:1](#); [Jonah 1:2](#); [Jonah 1:3](#); [Jonah 1:6](#); [Jonah 1:7](#); [Jonah 1:11](#); [Jonah 1:14](#); [Jonah 1:17](#); [Jonah 2:2](#); [Jonah 2:8](#); [Jonah 3:1](#); [Jonah 3:2](#); [Jonah 3:3](#); [Jonah 3:9](#); [Jonah 4:1](#); [Jonah 4:2](#); [Jonah 4:4](#); [Jonah 4:10](#); [Jonah 4:11](#)

# Introduction of a New Event

## Description

When people tell a story, they tell about an event or a series of events. Often they put certain information at the beginning of the story, such as who the story is about, when it happened, and where it happened. This information that the writer gives before the events of the story begin is called the setting of the story. Some new events in a story also have a setting because they might involve new people, new times, and new places. In some languages, people also tell if they saw the event or heard about it from someone else.

This page answers the question: *How do we introduce a new event in a story?*

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

*Writing Styles* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Order of Events* ([UTA PDF](#))

When your people tell about events, what information do they give at the beginning? Is there a certain order that they put it in? In your translation, you will need to follow the way your language introduces new information at the beginning of a story or a new event rather than the way the source language did that. In this way your translation will sound natural and communicate clearly in your language.

## Examples From the Bible

**In the days of Herod**, king of Judea, **there was a certain priest named Zechariah**, from the division of Abijah. And **his wife was** from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. (Luke 1:5 ULT)

The verses above introduce a story about Zechariah. The first bolded phrase tells when it happened, and the next two bolded phrases introduce the main people. The next two verses go on to explain that Zechariah and Elizabeth were old and did not have any children. All of this is the setting. Then the phrase “And it happened that” in Luke 1:8 helps to introduce the first event in this story:

**And it happened that** in his performing as priest before God, in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, he came up by lot to enter into the temple of the Lord to burn incense. (Luke 1:8-9 ULT)

**The birth of Jesus Christ happened in the following way.** His mother, Mary, was engaged to marry Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18 ULT)

The bolded sentence above makes it explicit that a story about Jesus is being introduced. The story will tell about how the birth of Jesus happened.

**Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king**, behold, learned men from the east arrived in Jerusalem. (Matthew 2:1 ULT)

The bolded phrase above shows that the events concerning the learned men happened **after** Jesus was born.

**Now in those days** John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. (Matthew 3:1-22 ULT)

The bolded phrase above shows that John the Baptist came preaching around the time of the previous events. It is probably very general and refers to when Jesus lived in Nazareth.

**Then** Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to John, to be baptized by him. (Matthew 3:13 ULT)

The word “then” shows that Jesus came to the Jordan River some time after the events in the previous verses.

Now there was **a man from the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus, a Jewish leader**.  
This man came to Jesus at night. (John 3:1-2a ULT)

The author first introduced the new person and then told about what he did and when he did it. In some languages, it might be more natural to tell about the time first.

6 Noah was 600 years old when the flood came upon the earth. 7 Noah, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives went into the ark together because of the waters of the flood. (Genesis 7:6-7 ULT)

Verse 6 is a statement of the events that happen in the rest of chapter 7. Chapter 6 already told about how God told Noah that there would be a flood, and how Noah prepared for it. Chapter 7 verse 6 introduces the part of the story that tells about Noah and his family and the animals going into the ship, the rain starting, and the rain flooding the earth. Some languages might need to make it clear that this verse simply introduces the event, or move this verse after verse 7. Verse 6 is not one of the events of the story. The people went into the ship before the flood came.

## Translation Strategies

If the information given at the beginning of a new event is clear and natural to your readers, consider translating it as it is in the ULT or UST. If not, consider one of these strategies:

- (1) Put the information that introduces the event in the order that your people put it.
- (2) If readers would expect certain information but it is not in the Bible, consider using an indefinite word or phrase to fill in that information, such as: "another time" or "someone."
- (3) If the introduction is a summary of the whole event, use your language's way of showing that it is a summary.
- (4) If it would be strange in the target language to give a summary of the event at the beginning, indicate that the event would actually happen later in the story.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Put the information that introduces the event in the order that your people put it.

Now there was **a man from the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus, a Jewish leader**.  
This man came to Jesus at night. (John 3:1-2a ULT)

There was a **man whose name was Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Council**. One night he came to Jesus.

One night **a man named Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Council**, came to Jesus.

As he passed by, **he saw Levi the son of Alpheus, sitting** at the tax collector's tent, and he said to him ... (Mark 2:14a ULT)

As he passed by, **Levi the son of Alpheus was sitting** at the tax collector's tent. Jesus saw him and said to him ...

As he passed by, **there was a man sitting** at the tax collector's tent. His name was Levi, and he was the son of Alpheus. Jesus saw him and said to him ...

As he passed by, **there was a tax collector** sitting at the tax collector's tent. His name was Levi, and he was the son of Alpheus. Jesus saw him and said to him ...

(2) If readers would expect certain information, but it is not in the Bible, consider using an indefinite word or phrase such as "another time," or "someone."

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came upon the earth. (Genesis 7:6 ULT) — If people expect to be told something about when the new event happened, the phrase "after that" can help them see that it happened after the events already mentioned.

**After that**, when Noah was 600 years old, the flood came upon the earth.

**Again he began** to teach beside the sea. (Mark 4:1a ULT) — In chapter 3 Jesus was teaching at someone's house. Readers may need to be told that this new event happened at another time, or that Jesus actually went to the sea.

**Another time** Jesus began to teach people again beside the sea.

Jesus went to the sea and **began to teach people again** there.

(3) If the introduction is a summary of the whole event, use your language's way of showing that it is a summary.

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came upon the earth. (Genesis 7:6 ULT)

**Now this is what happened when** Noah was 600 years old and the flood came upon the earth.

**This part tells about what happened when** the flood came upon the earth. It happened when Noah was 600 years old.

(4) If it would be strange in the target language to give a summary of the event at the beginning, show that the event will actually happen later in the story.

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came upon the earth. Noah, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives went into the ark together because of the waters of the flood. (Genesis 7:6-7 ULT)

**Now this is what happened when** Noah was 600 years old. Noah, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives went into the ark together because **God had said that the waters of the flood would come.**

Next we recommend you learn about:

*Background Information* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Introduction of New and Old Participants* ([UTA PDF](#))

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:1](#); [Jonah 1:4](#); [Jonah 1:17](#); [Jonah 3:1](#); [Jonah 4:1](#)

# 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](#).

"

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:3](#); [Jonah 1:10](#); [Jonah 2 General Notes](#); [Jonah 2:2](#); [Jonah 2:3](#); [Jonah 2:6](#); [Jonah 2:7](#); [Jonah 3:9](#); [Jonah 3:10](#)

# 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](#).

”

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1:2](#); [Jonah 2:4](#); [Jonah 2:7](#); [Jonah 3:3](#)

# Numbers

## Description

There are many numbers in the Bible. They can be written as words (“five”) or as numerals (“5”). Some numbers are very large, such as “two hundred” (200), “twenty-two thousand” (22,000), or “one hundred million” (100,000,000). Some languages do not have words for all of these numbers. Translators need to decide how to translate numbers and whether to write them as words or numerals.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate numbers?*

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

*Translate Unknowns* ([UTA PDF](#))

Some numbers are exact and others are rounded.

Abram was **86** years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Genesis 16:16 ULT)

Eighty-six (86) is an exact number.

That day about **3,000** of the people died. (Exodus 32:28b ULT)

Here the number three thousand (3,000) is a round number. It may have been a little more than that or a little less than that. The word “about” shows that it is not an exact number.

## Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not have words for some of these numbers.

## Translation Principles

- Exact numbers should be translated as closely and specifically as they can be.
- Rounded numbers can be translated more generally.

## Examples From the Bible

When Jared had lived **162** years, he became the father of Enoch. After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived **800** years. He became the father of more sons and daughters. Jared lived **962** years, and then he died. (Genesis 5:18-20 ULT)

The numbers 162, 800, and 962 are exact numbers and should be translated with something as close to those numbers as possible.

Our sister, may you be the mother of **thousands of ten thousands**. (Genesis 24:60b ULT)

This is a rounded number. It does not say exactly how many descendants she should have, but it was a huge number of them.

## Translation Strategies

- (1) Write numbers using numerals.
- (2) Write numbers using your language’s words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.
- (3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parentheses after them.

(4) Combine words for large numbers.

(5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

We will use the following verse in our examples:

Now, see, at great effort I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities. (1 Chronicles 22:14a ULT)

(1) Write numbers using numerals.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **100,000** talents of gold, **1,000,000** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(2) Write numbers using your language's words or the Gateway Language words for those numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **one million** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(3) Write numbers using words, and put the numerals in parenthesis after them.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house one **hundred thousand (100,000)** talents of gold, **one million (1,000,000)** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(4) Combine words for large numbers.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **one hundred thousand** talents of gold, **a thousand thousand** talents of silver, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

(5) Use a very general expression for very large rounded numbers and write the numeral in parentheses afterward.

I have prepared for Yahweh's house **a great amount of gold (100,000 talents), ten times that amount of silver (1,000,000 talents)**, and bronze and iron in large quantities.

## Consistency

Be consistent in your translations. Decide how the numbers will be translated, using numbers or numerals. There are different ways of being consistent.

- Use words to represent numbers all of the time. (You might have very long words.)
- Use numerals to represent numbers all of the time.
- Use words to represent the numbers that your language has words for and use numerals for the numbers that your language does not have words for.
- Use words for low numbers and numerals for high numbers.
- Use words for numbers that require few words and numerals for numbers that require more than a few words.
- Use words to represent numbers, and write the numerals in parentheses after them.

## Consistency in the ULT and UST

The *unfoldingWord® Literal Text* (ULT) and the *unfoldingWord® Simplified Text* (UST) use words for the numbers one through ten and use numerals for all numbers above ten.

When Adam had lived **130** years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and he called his name Seth. After Adam became the father of Seth, he lived **800** years. He became the father of more sons and daughters. Adam lived **930** years, and then he died.  
(Genesis 5:3-5 ULT)

Next we recommend you learn about:

*Ordinal Numbers* ([UTA PDF](#))

*Fractions* ([UTA PDF](#))

**Referenced in:** [Jonah 3:4](#); [Jonah 4:11](#)



# 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:** [Jonah 2:5](#)

# Personification

## Description

Personification is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of something as if it could do things that animals or people can do. People often do this because it makes it easier to talk about things that we cannot see:

Such as wisdom:

Does not Wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1a ULT)

Or sin:

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT)

People also use personification because it is sometimes easier to talk about people's relationships with non-human things such as wealth as if they were relationships between people.

You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

In each case, the purpose of the personification is to highlight a certain characteristic of the non-human thing. As in metaphor, the reader needs to think of the way that the thing is like a certain kind of person.

## Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use personification.
- Some languages use personification only in certain situations.

## Examples From the Bible

You cannot **serve** God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

Jesus speaks of wealth as if it were a master whom people might serve. Loving money and basing one's decisions on it is like serving it as a slave would serve his master.

Does not Wisdom **call** out? Does not Understanding **raise her voice**? (Proverbs 8:1 ULT)

The author speaks of wisdom and understanding as if they were woman who calls out to teach people. This means that they are not something hidden, but something obvious that people should pay attention to.

## Translation Strategies

If the personification would be understood clearly, consider using it. If it would not be understood, here are some other ways for translating it.

- (1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.
- (2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as "like" or "as" to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.
- (3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

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

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

*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:** [Jonah 1:4](#)

# 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: [Jonah 2:2](#)



## 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

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Referenced in: [Jonah 1:6](#); [Jonah 1:10](#); [Jonah 3:9](#); [Jonah 4 General Notes](#); [Jonah 4:2](#); [Jonah 4:11](#)

# 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: [Jonah 3:5](#); [Jonah 3:6](#)

# 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:** [Jonah 4:8](#)



# **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 Jonah](#)

## grace, gracious

### Definition:

The word “grace” refers to help or blessing that is given to someone who has not earned it. The term “gracious” describes someone who shows grace to others.

- God’s grace toward sinful human beings is a gift that is freely given.
- The concept of grace also refers to being kind and forgiving to someone who has done wrong or hurtful things.
- The expression to “find grace” is an expression that means to receive help and mercy from God. Often it includes the meaning that God is pleased with someone and helps him.

### Translation Suggestions:

- Other ways that “grace” could be translated include “divine kindness” or “God’s favor” or “God’s kindness and forgiveness for sinners” or “merciful kindness.”
- The term “gracious” could be translated as “full of grace” or “kind” or “merciful” or “mercifully kind.”
- The expression “he found grace in the eyes of God” could be translated as “he received mercy from God” or “God mercifully helped him” or “God showed his favor to him” or “God was pleased with him and helped him.”

### Bible References:

- Acts 4:33
- Acts 6:8
- Acts 14:4
- Colossians 4:6
- Colossians 4:18
- Genesis 43:28-29
- James 4:7
- John 1:16
- Philippians 4:21-23
- Revelation 22:20-21

### Word Data:

- Strong’s: H2580, H2587, H2589, H2603, H8467, G21430, G54850, G55430

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

## law, law of Moses, law of Yahweh, law of God

### Definition:

Most simply, the term “law” refers to a rule or instruction that should be followed. In the Bible, the term “law” is often used generally to refer to anything and everything God wants his people to obey and do. The specific term “law of Moses” refers to the commandments and instructions that God gave Moses for the Israelites to obey.

- Depending on the context, the “law” can refer to:
  - the Ten Commandments that God wrote on stone tablets for the Israelites
  - all the laws given to Moses
  - the first five books of the Old Testament
  - the entire Old Testament (also referred to as “scriptures” in the New Testament).
  - all of God’s instructions and will
- The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” is used in the New Testament to refer to the Hebrew scriptures (or “Old Testament”)

### Translation Suggestions:

- These terms could be translated using the plural, “laws,” since they refer to many instructions.
- The term “law of Moses” could be translated as “the laws that God told Moses to give to the Israelites.”
- Depending on the context, “the law of Moses” could also be translated as “the law that God told to Moses” or “God’s laws that Moses wrote down” or “the laws that God told Moses to give to the Israelites.”
- Ways to translate “the law” or “law of God” or “God’s laws” could include “laws from God” or “God’s commands” or “laws that God gave” or “everything that God commands” or “all of God’s instructions.”
- The phrase “law of Yahweh” could also be translated as “Yahweh’s laws” or “laws that Yahweh said to obey” or “laws from Yahweh” or “things Yahweh commanded.”

(See also: [instruct](#), [Moses](#), [Ten Commandments](#), [lawful](#), [Yahweh](#))

### Bible References:

- Acts 15:6
- Daniel 9:13
- Exodus 28:42-43
- Ezra 7:25-26
- Galatians 2:15
- Luke 24:44
- Matthew 5:18
- Nehemiah 10:29
- Romans 3:20

### Examples from the Bible stories:

- **13:7** God also gave many other **laws** and rules to follow. If the people obeyed these **laws**, God promised that he would bless and protect them. If they disobeyed them, God would punish them.
- **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.
- **15:13** Then Joshua reminded the people of their obligation to obey the covenant that God had made with the Israelites at Sinai. The people promised to remain faithful to God and follow **his laws**.
- **16:1** After Joshua died, the Israelites disobeyed God and did not drive out the rest of the Canaanites or obey **God’s laws**.

- **21:5** In the New Covenant, God would write **his law** on the people's hearts, the people would know God personally, they would be his people, and God would forgive their sins.
- **27:1** Jesus answered, "What is written in **God's law**?"
- **28:1** Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me 'good?' There is only one who is good, and that is God. But if you want to have eternal life, obey **God's laws**."

## Word Data:

- Strong's: H0430, H1881, H1882, H2706, H2710, H3068, H4687, H4872, H4941, H8451, G23160, G35510, G35650

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**Referenced in:** [Jonah 3 General Notes](#)

## mercy, merciful

### Definition:

The terms “mercy” and “merciful” refer to helping people who are in need, especially when they are in a lowly or humbled condition.

- The term “mercy” can also include the meaning of not punishing people for something they have done wrong.
- A powerful person such as a king is described as “merciful” when he treats people kindly instead of harming them.
- Being merciful also means to forgive someone who has done something wrong against us.
- We show mercy when we help people who are in great need.
- God is merciful to us, and he wants us to be merciful to others.

### Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, “mercy” could be translated as “kindness” or “compassion” or “pity.”
- The term “merciful” could be translated as “showing pity” or “being kind to” or “forgiving.”
- To “show mercy to” or “have mercy on” could be translated as “treat kindly” or “be compassionate toward.”

(See also: [compassion](#), [forgive](#))

### Bible References:

- 1 Peter 1:3-5
- 1 Timothy 1:13
- Daniel 9:17
- Exodus 34:6
- Genesis 19:16
- Hebrews 10:28-29
- James 2:13
- Luke 6:35-36
- Matthew 9:27
- Philippians 2:25-27
- Psalms 41:4-6
- Romans 12:1

### Examples from the Bible stories:

- **19:16** They (the prophets) all told the people to stop worshiping idols and to start showing justice and **mercy** to others.
- **19:17** He (Jeremiah) sank down into the mud that was in the bottom of the well, but then the king had **mercy** on him and ordered his servants to pull Jeremiah out of the well before he died.
- **20:12** The Persian Empire was strong but **merciful** to the people it conquered.
- **27:11** Then Jesus asked the law expert, “What do you think? Which one of the three men was a neighbor to the man who was robbed and beaten?” He replied, “The one who was **merciful** to him.”
- **32:11** But Jesus said to him, “No, I want you to go home and tell your friends and family about everything that God has done for you and how he has had **mercy** on you.”
- **34:9** “But the tax collector stood far away from the religious ruler, did not even look up to heaven. Instead, he pounded on his chest and prayed, ‘God, please be **merciful** to me because I am a sinner.’”

## Word Data:

- Strong's: H2551, H2603, H2604, H2616, H2617, H2623, H3722, H3727, H4627, H4819, H5503, H5504, H5505, H5506, H6014, H7349, H7355, H7356, H7359, G16530, G16550, G16560, G24330, G24360, G36280, G36290, G37410, G46980

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**Referenced in:** [Jonah 4 General Notes](#)

## miracle, wonder, sign

### Definition:

A “miracle” is something amazing that is not possible unless God causes it to happen.

- Examples of miracles that Jesus did include calming a storm and healing a blind man.
- Miracles are sometimes called “wonders” because they cause people to be filled with wonder or amazement.
- The term “wonder” can also refer more generally to amazing displays of God’s power, such as when he created the heavens and the earth.
- Miracles can also be called “signs” because they are used as indicators or evidence that God is the all-powerful one who has complete authority over the universe.
- Some miracles were God’s acts of redemption, such as when he rescued the Israelites from being slaves in Egypt and when he protected Daniel from being hurt by lions.
- Other wonders were God’s acts of judgment, such as when he sent a worldwide flood in Noah’s time and when he brought terrible plagues on the land of Egypt during the time of Moses.
- Many of God’s miracles were the physical healings of sick people or bringing dead people back to life.
- God’s power was shown in Jesus when he healed people, calmed storms, walked on water, and raised people from the dead. These were all miracles.
- God also enabled the prophets and the apostles to perform miracles of healing and other things that were only possible through God’s power.

### Translation Suggestions:

- Possible translations of “miracles” or “wonders” could include “impossible things that God does” or “powerful works of God” or “amazing acts of God.”
- The frequent expression “signs and wonders” could be translated as “proofs and miracles” or “miraculous works that prove God’s power” or “amazing miracles that show how great God is.”
- Note that this meaning of a miraculous sign is different from a sign that gives proof or evidence for something. The two can be related.

(See also: power, [prophet](#), [apostle](#), [sign](#))

### Bible References:

- 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10
- Acts 4:17
- Acts 4:22
- Daniel 4:1-3
- Deuteronomy 13:1
- Exodus 3:19-22
- John 2:11
- Matthew 13:58

### Examples from the Bible stories:

- **16:8** Gideon asked God for two **signs** so he could be sure that God would use him to save Israel.
- **19:14** God did many **miracles** through Elisha.
- **37:10** Many of the Jews believed in Jesus because of this **miracle**.
- **43:6** “Men of Israel, Jesus was a man who did many mighty **signs** and **wonders** by the power of God, as you have seen and already know.”



- **49:2** Jesus did many **miracles** that prove he is God. He walked on water, calmed storms, healed many sick people, drove out demons, raised the dead to life, and turned five loaves of bread and two small fish into enough food for over 5,000 people.

## Word Data:

- Strong's: H0226, H0852, H2368, H2858, H4150, H4159, H4864, H5251, H5824, H5953, H6381, H6382, H6383, H6395, H6725, H7560, H7583, H8047, H8074, H8539, H8540, G08800, G12130, G12290, G14110, G15690, G17180, G17700, G18390, G22850, G22960, G22970, G31670, G39020, G45910, G45920, G50590

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**Referenced in:** [Jonah 1 General Notes](#)

## repent, repentance

### Definition:

The terms “repent” and “repentance” refer to turning away from sin and turning back to God.

- To “repent” literally means to “change one’s mind.”
- In the Bible, “repent” usually means to turn away from a sinful, human way of thinking and acting, and to turn to God’s way of thinking and acting.
- When people truly repent of their sins, God forgives them and helps them start obeying him.

### Translation Suggestions:

- The term “repent” can be translated with a word or phrase that means “turn back (to God)” or “turn away from sin and toward God” or “turn toward God, away from sin.”
- Often the term “repentance” can be translated using the verb “repent.” For example, “God has given repentance to Israel” could be translated as “God has enabled Israel to repent.”
- Other ways to translate “repentance” could include “turning away from sin” or “turning to God and away from sin.”

(See also: [forgive](#), [sin](#), turn)

### Bible References:

- Acts 3:19-20
- Luke 3:3
- Luke 3:8
- Luke 5:32
- Luke 24:47
- Mark 1:14-15
- Matthew 3:3
- Matthew 3:11
- Matthew 4:17
- Romans 2:4

### Examples from the Bible stories:

- **16:2** After many years of disobeying God and being oppressed by their enemies, the Israelites **repented** and asked God to rescue them.
- **17:13** David **repented** of his sin and God forgave him.
- **19:18** They (prophets) warned people that God would destroy them if they did not **repent**.
- **24:2** Many people came out to the wilderness to listen to John. He preached to them, saying, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of God is near!”
- **42:8** “It was also written in the scriptures that my disciples will proclaim that everyone should repent in order to **receive** forgiveness for their sins.”
- **44:5** “So now, **repent** and turn to God so that your sins will be washed away.”

### Word Data:

- Strong’s: H5150, H5162, H5164, G02780, G33380, G33400, G33410

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**Referenced in:** [Introduction to Jonah](#)

# Contributors

## unfoldingWord® Translation Notes Contributors

Door43 World Missions Community

Aaron Fenlason

Abner Bauman

Adam Van Goor

Alan Bird

Alan Borkenhagen

Alfred Van Dellen

Alice Wright

Allen Bair

Allyson Presswood Nance

Amanda Adams

Andrew Belcher

Andrew Johnson

Andrew Rice

Angelo Palo

Anita Moreau

April Linton

Aurora Lee

Barbara Summers

Barbara White

Becky Hancock

Beryl Carpenter

Bethany Fenlason

Betty Forbes

Bianca Elliott

Bill Cleveland

Bill Pruett

Bob Britting

Bram van den Heuvel

Brian Metzger

Bruce Bridges

Bruce Collier

Bruce Smith

Caleb Worgess

Carlyle Kilmore

Carol Pace

Carol Heim

Caroline Crawford

Caroline Fleming

Caroline S Wong

Carol Lee

Carol Moyer

Carolyn Lafferty

Catherine C Newton

Charese Jackson

Charlotte Gibson

Charlotte Hobbs

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

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

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

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



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

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

## **unfoldingWord® Literal Text Contributors**

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

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

## **unfoldingWord® Simplified Text Contributors**

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

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

## **unfoldingWord® Translation Academy Contributors**

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

## **unfoldingWord® Translation Words Contributors**

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

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

## **unfoldingWord® Translation Words Links Contributors**

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