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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

3 John

Introduction to 3 John

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of 3 John

Introduction (1:1)

Encouragement and instructions to show hospitality (1:2-8)

Diotrephes and Demetrius (1:9-12)

Conclusion (1:13-14)

Who wrote the Book of 3 John?

The letter does not give the name of the author. The author only identified himself as **The elder** (1:1). The letter was probably written by the apostle John near the end of his life.

What is the Book of 3 John about?

John wrote this letter to a believer named Gaius. He instructed Gaius to be hospitable to fellow believers who were traveling through his area.

How should the title of this book be translated?

Translators may choose to call this book by its traditional title, “3 John” or “Third John.” Or they may choose a clearer title, such as “The Third Letter from John” or “The Third Letter John Wrote”. (See: **How to Translate Names** (p.36))

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

What is hospitality?

Hospitality was an important concept in the ancient Near East. It was important to be friendly towards foreigners or outsiders and provide help to them if they needed it. In 2 John, John discouraged Christians from showing hospitality to false teachers. In 3 John, John encouraged Christians to show hospitality to faithful teachers.

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

How does the author use family relationships in his letter?

The author used the terms **brother** and **children** in a way that can be confusing. The scriptures often used the term **brothers** to refer to Jews. But in this letter, John used the word to refer to Christians. Also, John called some believers his **children**. These were believers he taught to obey Christ.

John also used the term **Gentile** in a way that could be confusing. The scriptures often used the term **Gentile** to refer to people who are not Jews. But in this letter, John used the word to refer to those who did not believe in Jesus.

3 John 1

3 John 1:1

General Information:

General Information:

This is a personal letter from John to Gaius. All instances of **you** and **your** refer to Gaius and are singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.35)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.35)**)

The elder

The elder refers to John, the apostle and disciple of Jesus. He refers to himself as the **elder** either because of his old age or because he is a leader in the church. The name of the author can be made explicit: "I, John the elder, am writing" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.26)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.26)**)

to & Gaius

Gaius is a fellow believer to whom John is writing this letter. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**)

whom I love in truth

Alternate translation: "whom I truly love"

3 John 1:2

I pray concerning everything {for} you to prosper and to be healthy

Alternate translation: "I pray that you may do well in all things and be healthy"

just as your soul prospers

Alternate translation: "just as you are doing well spiritually"

3 John 1:3

at {the} coming of {the} brothers

These **brothers** were probably all male. Alternate translation: “when fellow believers came”

you are walking in truth

Here, **walking** on a path is a metaphor for how a person lives his life. Alternate translation: “you are living your life according to God’s truth” (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**)

3 John 1:4

my children

John speaks of those he taught to believe in Jesus as though they were his **children**. This emphasizes his love and concern for them. It could also be that he himself led them to the Lord. Alternate translation: “my spiritual children” (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**)

3 John 1:5

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

John's purpose in writing this letter is to commend Gaius for taking care of people who are traveling to serve God; then he talks about two people, one evil and one good.

Beloved

Here, **Beloved** is used as a term of endearment for Gaius as a fellow believer. Use a term here for a dear friend in your language.

you are doing a faithful thing

Alternate translation: "you are doing what is faithful to God" or "you are being loyal to God"

whenever you might work for the brothers, and this {for} strangers

Alternate translation: "when you help fellow believers, especially those whom you do not know"

3 John 1:6

the ones having borne witness to your love in {the} presence of the church

These words describe the “strangers” (verse 5). Alternate translation: “the strangers who have told the believers in the church about how you have loved them”

You will do well to send them on {their journey}

John is commending Gaius for his normal practice of helping believers who are traveling. Translate this in a way that shows that this is something that Gaius does continually.

3 John 1:7

because they went out for the sake of the name

Here, **the name** refers to Jesus. This could mean: (1) they left where they were in order to tell others about Jesus. (2) they left where they were because others forced them to leave because of their belief in Jesus. (3) both of these things. Alternate translation: “since they have gone out to tell people about Jesus” (See: **Metonymy (p.48)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.48)**)

receiving nothing

This could mean: (1) unbelievers have not helped them by giving them anything. (2) they did not accept any help or gifts from unbelievers.

the Gentiles

Here, **Gentiles** does not just mean people who are not Jewish. It refers to any people who do not trust in Jesus.

3 John 1:8

so that we become fellow workers for the truth

Alternate translation: "so that we will cooperate with them in announcing God's truth to people"

for the truth

Here, **the truth** is spoken of here as though it were a person that John, Gaius, and others worked for. This could refer to: (1) "the true message from God" as in the UST. (2) "God, who is Truth." (See: **Personification (p.50)**) (See: **Personification (p.50)**)

3 John 1:9

to the church

Here, **the church** refers to Gaius and the group of believers who met together to worship God.

Diotrephes

Diotrephes was a member of the congregation. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**)

the one loving to be first among them

Alternate translation: “who loves to be the most important one among them” or “who loves to act as though he is their leader”

us

The word **us** is exclusive; it refers to John and those with him and does not include Gaius. It may also be a polite way for John to refer to himself. See the UST. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.33)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.33)**)

Diotrephes, & does not accept us

Saying **Diotrephes ... does not accept us** does not mean that he has physically rejected John and those with John, but it is a shorter way of saying that he does not accept John’s authority or the instructions that John gives. See the UST. (See: **Metonymy (p.48)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.48)**)

3 John 1:10

accusing us with evil words

Alternate translation: "that is, that he says evil things about us that certainly are not true"

he does not receive the brothers

Alternate translation: "he does not welcome the fellow believers"

he stops the ones willing

John leaves out words that are understood from the previous clause. Alternate translation: "he stops those who want to welcome the believers" (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**)

puts {them} out of the church

Alternate translation: "forces them to leave the group of believers"

3 John 1:11

Beloved

Here, **Beloved** is used as a term of endearment for Gaius as a fellow believer. See how you translated this in [3 John 1:5](#).

do not imitate what {is} evil

Alternate translation: “do not copy the evil things that people do”

but what {is} good

John leaves out words that are understood from the previous clause. Alternate translation: “but imitate the good things that people do” (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**)

is from God

Alternate translation: “comes from God”

has not seen God

“Seeing” here is a metaphor that stands for knowing or understanding. Alternate translation: “has not experienced God” or “has not believed in God” (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.42)**)

3 John 1:12

Demetrius has been borne witness to by all

If your language does not use this passive form, you can state this in active form. Alternate translation: "All who know Demetrius bear witness of him" or "Every believer who knows Demetrius speaks well of him" (See: **Active or Passive (p.23)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.23)**)

Demetrius

Demetrius is probably a man whom John wants Gaius and the congregation to welcome when he comes to visit. He may be the person delivering this letter. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.36)**)

by the truth itself

Here, **truth** is described as though it were a person speaking. Here, **truth** refers to "the true message from God." Alternate translation: "everyone who knows the truth knows that he is a good person" (See: **Personification (p.50)**) (See: **Personification (p.50)**)

by the truth itself

John leaves out words that are understood from the previous clause. Alternate translation: "he is borne witness to by the truth itself" (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.31)**)

And we also bear witness

What John is confirming is implied and can be made explicit here. Alternate translation: "we also speak well of Demetrius" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.26)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.26)**)

we

Here, **we** refers to John and those with him and does not include Gaius. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.33)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive 'We' (p.33)**)

3 John 1:13

General Information:

General Information:

This is the end of John's letter to Gaius. In this section, he mentions coming to see him and closes with a greeting.

I am not wishing to write them to you with ink and pen

This is a doublet, because **ink and pen** stand for the process of writing that was already mentioned. John is not saying that he would write them with something other than ink and pen. He is saying that he does not wish to write these other things at all. Alternate translation: "I do not want to write about them to you" (See: **Doublet (p. 29)**) (See: **Doublet (p.29)**)

3 John 1:14

mouth to mouth

Here, **mouth to mouth** is an idiom meaning "in person." Alternate translation: "in person" (See: **Idiom (p.40)**) (See: **Idiom (p.40)**)

3 John 1:15

Peace to you

Alternate translation: "May God give you peace"

The friends greet you

Alternate translation: "The believers here greet you"

Greet the friends by name

Alternate translation: "Greet each of the believers there for me"



unfoldingWord® Translation Academy

Version 36

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.

Next we recommend you learn about:

"

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

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

Referenced in: [3 John 1:12](#)

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: [3 John 1:1](#); [3 John 1:12](#)

Doublet

Description

We are using the word “doublet” to refer to two words or phrases that are used together and either mean the same thing or mean very close to the same thing. Often they are joined with the word “and.” Unlike [Hendiadys](#), in which one of the words modifies the other, in a doublet the two words or phrases are equal and are used to emphasize or intensify the one idea that is expressed by the two words or phrases.

This page answers the question: *What are doublets and how can I translate them?*

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

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: [3 John 1:13](#)

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis^[1] occurs when a speaker or writer leaves out one or more words that normally should be in the sentence. The speaker or writer does this because he knows that the hearer or reader will understand the meaning of the sentence and supply the words in his mind when he hears or reads the words that are there. For example:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, **nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous**.
(Psalm 1:5 ULT)

There is ellipsis in the second part because “nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous” is not a complete sentence. The speaker assumes that the hearer will understand what it is that sinners will not do in the assembly of the righteous by filling in the action from the previous clause. With the action filled in, the complete sentence would read:

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **will** sinners **stand** in the assembly of the righteous.

Two Types of Ellipsis

A Relative Ellipsis happens when the reader has to supply the omitted word or words from the context. Usually the word is in the previous sentence, as in the example above.

An Absolute Ellipsis happens when the omitted word or words are not in the context, but the phrases are common enough in the language that the reader is expected to supply what is missing from this common usage or from the nature of the situation.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers who see incomplete sentences or phrases may not know that there is information missing that the writer expects them to fill in. Or readers may understand that there is information missing, but they may not know what information is missing because they do not know the original biblical language, culture, or situation as the original readers did. In this case, they may fill in the wrong information. Or readers may misunderstand the ellipsis if they do not use ellipsis in the same way in their language.

Examples From the Bible

Relative Ellipsis

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox**. (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

The writer wants his words to be few and to make good poetry. The full sentence with the information filled in would be:

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**not as unwise but as wise**. (Ephesians 5:15b ULT)

The information that the reader must understand in the second parts of these sentences can be filled in from the first parts:

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

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Watch carefully, therefore, how you walk—**walk** not as unwise but **walk** as wise,

Absolute Ellipsis

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

It seems that the man answered in an incomplete sentence because he wanted to be polite and not directly ask Jesus for healing. He knew that Jesus would understand that the only way he could receive his sight would be for Jesus to heal him. The complete sentence would be:

“Lord, **I want you to heal me so** that I might receive my sight.”

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. (Titus 1:4 ULT)

The writer assumes that the reader will recognize this common form of a blessing or wish, so he does not need to include the full sentence, which would be:

To Titus, a true son in our common faith. **May you receive** grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Translation Strategies

If ellipsis would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here is another option:

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add the missing words to the incomplete phrase or sentence.

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor **sinner in the assembly** of the righteous. (Psalm 1:5 ULT)

So the wicked will not stand in the judgment, and **sinner will not stand in the assembly** of the righteous.

Then when he had come near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And so he said, “Lord, **that I might recover my sight.**” (Luke 18:40b-41 ULT)

Then when the man was near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, **I want you to heal me** that I might receive my sight.”

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf **and Sirion like a young ox.** (Psalm 29:6 ULT)

He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and **he makes** Sirion **skip** like a young ox.

”

Referenced in: [3 John 1:10](#); [3 John 1:11](#); [3 John 1:12](#)

Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'

Description

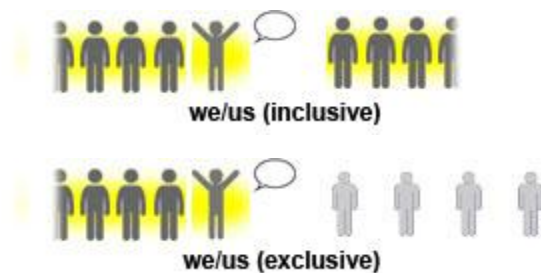
Some languages have more than one form of "we": an inclusive form that means "I and you" and an exclusive form that means "I and someone else but not you." The exclusive form excludes the person being spoken to. The inclusive form includes the person being spoken to and possibly others. This is also true for "us," "our," "ours," and "ourselves." Some languages have inclusive forms and exclusive forms for each of these. Translators whose language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms for these words will need to understand what the speaker meant so that they can decide which form to use.

This page answers the question: *What are the exclusive and inclusive forms of "we"?*

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

[Pronouns \(UTA PDF\)](#)

See the pictures. The people on the right are the people that the speaker is talking to. The yellow highlight shows who the inclusive "we" and the exclusive "we" refer to.



Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible was first written in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Like English, these languages do not have separate exclusive and inclusive forms for "we." If your language has separate exclusive and inclusive forms of "we," then you will need to understand what the speaker meant so that you can decide which form of "we" to use.

Examples From the Bible

Exclusive

They said, "There are not more than five loaves of bread and two fish with us—unless **we** go and buy food for all these people." (Luke 9:13 ULT)

In the second clause, the disciples are talking about some of them going to buy food. They were speaking to Jesus, but Jesus was not going to buy food. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" would use the **exclusive** form there.

We have seen it, and **we** bear witness to it. **We** are announcing to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and which has been made known to **us**. (1 John 1:2 ULT)

John is telling people who have not seen Jesus what he and the other apostles have seen. So languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of "we" and "us" would use the **exclusive** forms in this verse.

Inclusive

The shepherds said one to each other, "Let **us** now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to **us**." (Luke 2:15b ULT)

The shepherds were speaking to one another. When they said “us,” they were including the people they were speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of “we” and “us” would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Now it happened that on one of those days, he indeed got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let **us** go over to the other side of the lake.” So they set sail. (Luke 8:22 ULT)

When Jesus said “us,” he was referring to himself and to the disciples he was speaking to, so languages that have inclusive and exclusive forms of “we” and “us” would use the **inclusive** form in this verse.

Next we recommend you learn about:

When Masculine Words Include Women ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [3 John 1:9](#); [3 John 1:12](#)

Forms of You

Singular, Dual, and Plural

Some languages have more than one word for “you” based on how many people the word “you” refers to. The **singular** form refers to one person, and the **plural** form refers to more than one person. Some languages also have a **dual** form which refers to two people, and some languages have other forms that refer to three or four people.

This page answers the question: *What are the different forms of you?*

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

Forms of ‘You’ — Singular ([UTA PDF](#))

Forms of ‘You’ — Dual/Plural ([UTA PDF](#))

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_younum.

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses a singular form of “you” even though he is speaking to a crowd.

- [Singular Pronouns that Refer to Groups](#)

Formal and Informal

Some languages have more than one form of “you” based on the relationship between the speaker and the person he is talking to. People use the **formal** form of “you” when speaking to someone who is older, or has higher authority, or is someone they do not know very well. People use the **informal** form when speaking to someone who is not older, or does not have higher authority, or is a family member or close friend.

You may also want to watch the video at https://ufw.io/figs_youform.

For help with translating these, we suggest you read:

- [Forms of “You” — Formal or Informal](#)

”

Referenced in: [3 John 1:1](#)

How to Translate Names

Description

The Bible contains the names of many people, groups of people, and places. Some of these names may sound strange and be hard to say. Sometimes readers may not know what a name refers to, and sometimes they may need to understand what a name means. This page will help you see how you can translate these names and how you can help people understand what they need to know about them.

This page answers the question: *How can I translate names that are new to my culture?*

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

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Meaning of names

Most names in the Bible have meaning. Most of the time, names in the Bible are used simply to identify the people and places they refer to, but sometimes the meaning of a name is especially important.

For this **Melchizedek**, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, was the one who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him. (Hebrews 7:1 ULT)

Here the writer uses the name “Melchizedek” primarily to refer to a man who had that name, and the title “king of Salem” tells us that he ruled over a certain city.

His name first indeed means “king of righteousness,” and then also “king of Salem,” that is, “king of peace.” (Hebrews 7:2b ULT)

Here the writer explains the meanings of Melchizedek’s name and title because those things tell us more about the person. Other times, the writer does not explain the meaning of a name because he expects the reader to already know the meaning. If the meaning of the name is important to understand the passage, you can include the meaning in the text or in a footnote.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the names in the Bible. They may not know whether a name refers to a person or place or something else.
- Readers may need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand the passage.
- Some names may have different sounds or combinations of sounds that are not used in your language or are unpleasant to say in your language. For strategies to address this problem, see [Borrow Words](#).
- Some people and places in the Bible have two names. Readers may not realize that two names refer to the same person or place.

Examples From the Bible

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

Readers might not know that “Jordan” is the name of a river, “Jericho” is the name of a city, and “Amorites” is the name of a group of people.

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?” Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

Readers may not understand the second sentence if they do not know that “Beer Lahai Roi” means “Well of the Living One who sees me.”

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, “For out of the water I drew him.” (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

Readers may not understand why she said this if they do not know that the name Moses sounds like the Hebrew words “pull out.”

Saul was in agreement with his execution. (Acts 8:1a ULT)

But when the apostles, Barnabas and **Paul**, heard of it, they tore their clothing. (Acts 14:14a ULT)

Readers may not know that the names Saul and Paul refer to the same person.

Translation Strategies

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.
- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.
- (3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.
- (4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently.
- (5) Or if a person or place has two different names, then use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot easily understand from the context what kind of a thing a name refers to, you can add a word to clarify it.

Then you crossed over the **Jordan** and came to **Jericho**, and the men of Jericho, and the **Amorites** ... fought against you, but I gave them into your hand. (Joshua 24:11 ULT)

You went over the **Jordan River** and came to the **city of Jericho**. The men of Jericho fought against you, along with **the tribe of the Amorites**.

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Leave and go away from here, because **Herod** wants to kill you.” (Luke 13:31 ULT)

At that hour, certain Pharisees approached, saying to him, “Go and leave here, because **King Herod** wants to kill you.”

- (2) If readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, copy the name and tell about its meaning either in the text or in a footnote.

And she called his name **Moses** and she said, “For out of the water I drew him.” (Exodus 2:10b ULT)

She called his name **Moses (which sounds like ‘drawn out’)**, and she said,
“For out of the water I drew him.”

(3) Or if readers need to understand the meaning of a name in order to understand what is said about it, and that name is used only once, translate the meaning of the name instead of copying the name.

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?” Therefore, the well was called **Beer Lahai Roi**. (Genesis 16:13b-14a ULT)

She said, “Do I really continue to see, even after he has seen me?”
Therefore, the well was called **Well of the Living One who sees me**.

(4) If a person or place has two different names, use one name most of the time and the other name only when the text tells about the person or place having more than one name or when it says something about why the person or place was given that name. Write a footnote when the source text uses the name that is used less frequently. For example, Paul is called “Saul” before Acts 13 and “Paul” after Acts 13. You could translate his name as “Paul” all of the time, except in Acts 13:9 where it talks about him having both names.

... a young man named **Saul**. (Acts 7:58b ULT)

... a young man named **Paul** ¹

The footnote would look like:

^[1] Most versions say “Saul” here, but most of the time in the Bible he is called “Paul.”

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

(5) Or if a person or place has two names, use whatever name is given in the source text, and add a footnote that gives the other name. For example, you could write “Saul” where the source text has “Saul” and “Paul” where the source text has “Paul.”

a young man named **Saul** (Acts 7:58 ULT)

a young man named **Saul**

The footnote would look like:

^[1] This is the same man who is called Paul beginning in Acts 13.

Then later in the story, you could translate this way:

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit; (Acts 13:9)

But **Saul**, who is also called **Paul**, was filled with the Holy Spirit;

Then after the story has explained the name change, you could translate this way.

It came about in Iconium that **Paul** and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue (Acts 14:1 ULT)

It came about in Iconium that **Paul**¹ and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue

The footnote would look like:

[1] This is the same man who was called Saul before Acts 13.

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Introduction to 3 John](#); [3 John 1:1](#); [3 John 1:9](#); [3 John 1:12](#)

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: [3 John 1:14](#)

Metaphor

Description

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of one thing as if it were a different thing because he wants people to think about how those two things are alike.

For example, someone might say, “The girl I love is a red rose.”

A girl and a rose are very different things, but the speaker considers that they are alike in some way. The hearer’s task is to understand in what way they are alike.

This page answers the question: *What is a metaphor and how can I translate a Bible passage that has one?*

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

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

Simile ([UTA PDF](#))

The Parts of a Metaphor

The example above shows us that a metaphor has three parts. In this metaphor, the speaker is talking about “the girl I love.” This is the **Topic**. The speaker wants the hearer to think about what is similar between her and “a red rose.” The red rose is the **Image** to which he compares the girl. Most probably, he wants the hearer to consider that they are both beautiful. This is the **Idea** that the girl and the rose both share, and so we may also call it the **Point of Comparison**.

Every metaphor has three parts:

- The **Topic**, the item being immediately discussed by the writer/speaker.
- The **Image**, the physical item (object, event, action, etc.) which the speaker uses to describe the topic.
- The **Idea**, the abstract concept or quality that the physical **Image** brings to the mind of the hearer when he thinks of how the **Image** and the **Topic** are similar. Often, the **Idea** of a metaphor is not explicitly stated in the Bible, but it is only implied from the context. The hearer or reader usually needs to think of the **Idea** himself.

Using these terms, we can say that a metaphor is a figure of speech that uses a physical **Image** to apply an abstract **Idea** to the speaker’s **Topic**.

Usually, a writer or speaker uses a metaphor in order to express something about a **Topic**, with at least one **Point of Comparison (Idea)** between the **Topic** and the **Image**. Often in metaphors, the **Topic** and the **Image** are explicitly stated, but the **Idea** is only implied. The writer/speaker often uses a metaphor in order to invite the readers/listeners to think about the similarity between the **Topic** and the **Image** and to figure out for themselves the **Idea** that is being communicated.

Speakers often use metaphors in order to strengthen their message, to make their language more vivid, to express their feelings better, to say something that is hard to say in any other way, or to help people remember their message.

Sometimes speakers use metaphors that are very common in their language. However, sometimes speakers use metaphors that are uncommon, and even some metaphors that are unique. When a metaphor has become very common in a language, often it becomes a “passive” metaphor, in contrast to uncommon metaphors, which we describe as being “active.” Passive metaphors and active metaphors each present a different kind of translation problem, which we will discuss below.

Passive Metaphors

A passive metaphor is a metaphor that has been used so much in the language that its speakers no longer regard it as one concept standing for another. Linguists often call these “dead metaphors.” Passive metaphors are extremely common. Examples in English include the terms “table **leg**,” “family **tree**,” “book **leaf**” (meaning a page in

a book), or the word “crane” (meaning a large machine for lifting heavy loads). English speakers simply think of these words as having more than one meaning. Examples of passive metaphors in Biblical Hebrew include using the word “hand” to represent “power,” using the word “face” to represent “presence,” and speaking of emotions or moral qualities as if they were “clothing.”

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

Many ways of metaphorical speaking depend on pairs of concepts, where one underlying concept frequently stands for a different underlying concept. For example, in English, the direction “up” (the Image) often represents the concepts of “more” or “better” (the Idea). Because of this pair of underlying concepts, we can make sentences such as “The price of gasoline is going **up**,” “A **highly** intelligent man,” and also the opposite kind of idea: “The temperature is going **down**,” and “I am feeling very **low**.”

Patterned pairs of concepts are constantly used for metaphorical purposes in the world’s languages because they serve as convenient ways to organize thought. In general, people like to speak of abstract qualities (such as power, presence, emotions, and moral qualities) as if they were body parts, or as if they were objects that could be seen or held, or as if they were events that could be watched as they happened.

When these metaphors are used in normal ways, it is rare that the speaker and audience regard them as figurative speech. Examples of metaphors in English that go unrecognized are:

- “Turn the heat **up**.” More is spoken of as up.
- “Let us **go ahead** with our debate.” Doing what was planned is spoken of as walking or advancing.
- “You **defend** your theory well.” Argument is spoken of as war.
- “A **flow** of words.” Words are spoken of as liquids.

English speakers do not view these as metaphorical expressions or figures of speech, so it would be wrong to translate them into other languages in a way that would lead people to pay special attention to them as figurative speech. For a description of important patterns of this kind of metaphor in biblical languages, please see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#) and the pages it will direct you to.

When translating something that is a passive metaphor into another language, do not treat it as a metaphor. Instead, just use the best expression for that thing or concept in the target language.

Active Metaphors

These are metaphors that people recognize as one concept standing for another concept, or one thing for another thing. Metaphors make people think about how the one thing is like the other thing, because in most ways the two things are very different. People also easily recognize these metaphors as giving strength and unusual qualities to the message. For this reason, people pay attention to these metaphors. For example,

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.
(Malachi 4:2a ULT)

Here, God speaks about his salvation as if it were the sun rising in order to shine its rays on the people whom he loves. He also speaks of the sun’s rays as if they were wings. Also, he speaks of these wings as if they were bringing medicine that would heal his people. Here is another example:

And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox ...” (Luke 13:32a ULT)

Here, “that fox” refers to King Herod. The people listening to Jesus certainly understood that Jesus was intending for them to apply certain characteristics of a fox to Herod. They probably understood that Jesus intended to communicate that Herod was evil, either in a cunning way or as someone who was destructive, murderous, or who took things that did not belong to him, or all of these.

Active metaphors require the translator’s special care to make a correct translation. To do so, you need to understand the parts of a metaphor and how they work together to produce meaning.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35 ULT)

In this metaphor, Jesus called himself the bread of life. The **Topic** is “I” (meaning Jesus himself) and the **Image** is “bread.” Bread was the primary food that people ate in that place and time. The similarity between bread and Jesus is that people need both to live. Just as people need to eat food in order to have physical life, people need to trust in Jesus in order to have eternal life. The **Idea** of the metaphor is “life.” In this case, Jesus stated the central Idea of the metaphor, but often the Idea is only implied.

Purposes of Metaphor

- One purpose of metaphor is to teach people about something that they do not know (the **Topic**) by showing that it is like something that they already do know (the **Image**).
- Another purpose is to emphasize that something (the **Topic**) has a particular quality (the **Idea**) or to show that it has that quality in an extreme way.
- Another purpose is to lead people to feel the same way about the **Topic** as they would feel about the **Image**.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not recognize that something is a metaphor. In other words, they may mistake a metaphor for a literal statement, and thus, misunderstand it.
- People may not be familiar with the thing that is used as an image, and so, not be able to understand the metaphor.
- If the topic is not stated, people may not know what the topic is.
- People may not know the points of comparison that the speaker wants them to understand. If they fail to think of these points of comparison, they will not understand the metaphor.
- People may think that they understand the metaphor, but they do not. This can happen when they apply points of comparison from their own culture, rather than from the biblical culture.

Translation Principles

- Make the meaning of a metaphor as clear to the target audience as it was to the original audience.
- Do not make the meaning of a metaphor more clear to the target audience than you think it was to the original audience.

Examples From the Bible

Listen to this word, **you cows of Bashan**, (Amos 4:1q ULT)

In this metaphor Amos speaks to the upper-class women of Samaria (“you,” the Topic) as if they were cows (the Image). Amos does not say what similarity(s) he intends between these women and cows. He wants the reader to think of them, and he fully expects that readers from his culture will easily do so. From the context, we can see that he means that the women are like cows in that they are fat and interested only in feeding themselves. If we were to apply similarities from a different culture, such as that cows are sacred and should be worshiped, we would get the wrong meaning from this verse.

NOTE: Amos does not actually mean that the women are cows. He speaks to them as human beings.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; **we are the clay. You are our potter**; and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

The example above has two related metaphors. The Topic(s) are “we” and “you,” and the Image(s) are “clay” and “potter.” The similarity between a potter and God is the fact that both make what they wish out of their material.

The potter makes what he wishes out of the clay, and God makes what he wishes out of his people. The Idea being expressed by the comparison between the potter's clay and "us" is that **neither the clay nor God's people have a right to complain about what they are becoming.**

Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of **the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"
The disciples reasoned among themselves and said, "It is because we did not take bread."
(Matthew 16:6-7 ULT)

Jesus used a metaphor here, but his disciples did not realize it. When he said "yeast," they thought he was talking about bread, but "yeast" was the Image in his metaphor, and the Topic was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Since the disciples (the original audience) did not understand what Jesus meant, it would not be good to state clearly here what Jesus meant.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the metaphor in the same way that the original readers would have understood it, go ahead and use it. Be sure to test the translation to make sure that people do understand it in the right way.

If people do not or would not understand it, here are some other strategies.

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, it is a passive metaphor), then express the **Idea** in the simplest way preferred by your language.
- (2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible**. If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.
- (3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as "like" or "as." See [Simile](#).
- (4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.
- (5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.
- (6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the Topic was.)
- (7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity (the **Idea**) between the topic and the image, then state it clearly.
- (8) If none of these strategies is satisfactory, then simply state the **Idea** plainly without using a metaphor.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the metaphor is a common expression in the source language or expresses a patterned pair of concepts in a biblical language (that is, a passive metaphor), then express the Idea in the simplest way preferred by your language.

Then, see, one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **fell at his feet.** (Mark 5:22 ULT)

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue, named Jairus, came, and when he saw him, **immediately bowed down in front of him.**

(2) If the metaphor seems to be an active metaphor, you can translate it literally **if you think that the target language also uses this metaphor in the same way to mean the same thing as in the Bible.** If you do this, be sure to test it to make sure that the language community understands it correctly.

But Jesus said to them, “He wrote this commandment to you because of your **hardness of heart.**” (Mark 10:5 ULT)

It was because of your **hard hearts** that he wrote you this law.

We made no change to this one, but it must be tested to make sure that the target audience correctly understands this metaphor.

(3) If the target audience does not realize that it is a metaphor, then change the metaphor to a simile. Some languages do this by adding words such as “like” or “as.”

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we **are the clay.** You **are our potter;** and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are **like** clay. You are **like** a potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

(4) If the target audience would not know the **Image**, see [Translate Unknowns](#) for ideas on how to translate that image.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad.** (Acts 26:14b ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a pointed stick.**

(5) If the target audience would not use that **Image** for that meaning, use an image from your own culture instead. Be sure that it is an image that could have been possible in Bible times.

Yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **clay.** You are our **potter;** and we all are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8 ULT)

“And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **wood.** You are our **carver;** and we all are the work of your hand.”

“And yet, Yahweh, you are our father; we are the **string.** You are the **weaver;** and we all are the work of your hand.”

(6) If the target audience would not know what the **Topic** is, then state the topic clearly. (However, do not do this if the original audience did not know what the topic was.)

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; **He is my rock.** May he be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

(7) If the target audience would not know the intended similarity between the Topic and the Image, then state it clearly.

Yahweh lives; may **my rock** be praised. May the God of my salvation be exalted. (Psalm 18:46 ULT)

Yahweh lives; may he be praised because he is the rock **under which I can hide from my enemies**. May the God of my salvation be exalted.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you **to kick against a goad**. (Acts 26:14 ULT)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? You **fight against me and hurt yourself like an ox that kicks against its owner's pointed stick**.

(8) If none of these strategies are satisfactory, then simply state the idea plainly without using a metaphor.

I will make you to become **fishers of men**. (Mark 1:17b ULT)

I will make you to become **people who gather men**.
Now you gather fish. I will make you **gather people**.

To learn more about specific metaphors, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns](#).

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Referenced in: [3 John 1:3](#); [3 John 1:4](#); [3 John 1:11](#)

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: [3 John 1:7](#); [3 John 1:9](#)

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: [3 John 1:8](#); [3 John 1:12](#)

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)