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Zephaniah

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Table of Contents

unfoldingWord® Translation Notes	6
Zephaniah	6
Introduction to Zephaniah	7
Zephaniah 1	9
Zephaniah 2	35
Zephaniah 3	55
unfoldingWord® Translation Academy	78
Abstract Nouns	79
Active or Passive	81
Apostrophe	84
Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information	86
Collective Nouns	89
Connect — Goal (Purpose) Relationship	92
Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship	95
Direct and Indirect Quotations	97
Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding	99
Double Negatives	102
Doublet	105
Ellipsis	107
Exclamations	110
First, Second or Third Person	112
Forms of ‘You’ — Singular	114
Generic Noun Phrases	116
How to Translate Names	118
Hyperbole	122
Idiom	126
Introduction of New and Old Participants	128
Litany	131
Litotes	133
Merism	135
Metaphor	137
Metonymy	143
Nominal Adjectives	145
Oath Formulas	147
Parallelism	149
Personification	152
Poetry	154
Possession	157
Predictive Past	160
Pronouns — When to Use Them	162
Quotations and Quote Margins	164
Quote Markings	166
Quotes within Quotes	169
Reduplication	172
Simile	173
Symbolic Action	176
Synecdoche	178
Unusual Uses of the Plural	180

When Masculine Words Include Women	182
Contributors	184
unfoldingWord® Translation Notes Contributors	184
unfoldingWord® Literal Text Contributors	190
unfoldingWord® Simplified Text Contributors	191
unfoldingWord® Translation Academy Contributors	192
unfoldingWord® Translation Words Contributors	192
unfoldingWord® Translation Words Links Contributors	193



unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Zephaniah

Introduction to Zephaniah

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the book of Zephaniah

Title of the book; introduces Zephaniah (1:1) 1. Yahweh will punish Judah and Jerusalem (1:2–18) “For in the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed.” 2. Yahweh will punish the nations * Warning to Judah (2:1–3) * Yahweh will punish the Philistines (2:4–7) * Yahweh will punish Moab and Ammon (2:8–11) * Yahweh will punish Ethiopia (2:12) * Yahweh will punish Assyria (2:13–16) * Yahweh will punish Jerusalem (3:1–7) * General review (3:8) “For in the fire of my jealousy the whole earth will be consumed.” 3. Yahweh will restore Judah and Jerusalem (3:9–20)

Who wrote the book of Zephaniah?

This book records messages that Yahweh spoke through a man named Zephaniah. The title to the book lists Zephaniah's ancestors back to his great-grandfather, a man named Hezekiah. Since no other prophet's ancestry is traced back four generations, this Hezekiah must have been a significant person, and interpreters generally agree that he was King Hezekiah, who ruled over Judah from about 715 B.C. to about 686 B.C. So Zephaniah was likely a member of the royal family. In his prophecies, he shows a first-hand knowledge of the city of Jerusalem, so it is also probable that he was part of the royal court in Jerusalem. The title of the book says that he prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, who began to rule Judah around 640 B.C. So Zephaniah would have prophesied at about the same time that Jeremiah began to prophesy.

What is the book of Zephaniah about?

Through Zephaniah's prophecies, Yahweh warned Judah and other nations that he was about to destroy them because of their wickedness and idolatry. This message seems to have led at least the Judeans to repent, if only for a generation. Hezekiah had been a godly ruler, but his son Manasseh and his grandson Amon were wicked and idolatrous kings. Amon was so unpopular that he was assassinated, and his son Josiah became king when Josiah was only a boy. But when Josiah became a young adult and could assert himself, he introduced a series of reforms that led the people of Judah to worship and obey Yahweh once more. The prophecies of Zephaniah seem to have influenced Josiah strongly to do this. Zephaniah also prophesied about how Yahweh would restore Judah, and those prophecies had at least a partial fulfillment in his own time due to the reforms of Josiah.

What title should translators use for this book?

Translators may choose to use the traditional title, “The Book of Zephaniah,” or simply “Zephaniah.” They may use a different title such as “The Prophecies of Zephaniah.”

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

The “day of Yahweh”

Zephaniah speaks many times of “the day of Yahweh,” meaning the time when Yahweh will judge and punish the nations, including Judah, for disobeying him and worshiping idols. However, in the final oracle in the book, the phrase “that day” instead means the time when Yahweh will restore Judah and Jerusalem. Notes suggest ways that you can translate these expressions in their various occurrences.

The time reference of Zephaniah's prophecies

Some of Zephaniah's prophecies focus on specific places and times. They warn Judah and other nations that Yahweh will soon destroy them, and they suggest implicitly that this will happen when an enemy empire invades and conquers them. But other prophecies speak of the entire world, and their time reference is uncertain. For example, in the first prophecy in the book, Yahweh says that he is going to destroy every living creature on earth—people, animals, birds, and fish. This could be a prophecy about the more distant future, about the end of the world. But it could also be a generalization for emphasis, and if so, it could apply to the time of Josiah. It is not necessary to determine the exact time reference of all of the prophecies in the book in order to translate the book.

The identity of the invading empire

Zephaniah often suggests that a foreign empire will invade and conquer Judah and other nations. He probably means the empire of Babylon. However, he does not name it specifically, and so it would not be appropriate to use any particular name for the invading army that Zephaniah describes in this book.

Zephaniah 1

Zephaniah 1 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

This chapter is the first of the three major parts of the book of Zephaniah. (See the outline in the General Introduction to the book.) This part describes how Yahweh will punish Judah and Jerusalem for their sinfulness and complacency.

The ULT sets the lines of verses 2–18 farther to the right on the page than the rest of the text because they are poetry.

Important Figures of Speech in This Chapter

Litany

Verses 2 and 3 state in general terms that Yahweh's judgment will be comprehensive. Then, in four places later in the chapter, prophecies emphasize a general point by making a series of specific statements that illustrate that point. These typically move from more obvious or central examples to more peripheral ones. In that way, they demonstrate how comprehensive Yahweh's judgment will be: It will reach to the most distant and obscure places.

Series of statements such as these are known as litanies. If your readers would recognize the litany form, you could translate and format these litanies the way the ULT does, as lines of poetry. If the litany form would not be familiar to your readers, you could format these litanies in a way that would illustrate how they work. You could format the general statement in a way that would set it off from the other poetry in the book. For example, if you have chosen to indent that poetry, you could present the general statement without any indentation. You could then put each sentence of the litany on a separate line. The format might look something like this:

Verses 4–6:

and I will cut off from this place

the remnant of Baal, the name of the idol-priests with the priests, and the ones bowing down on the housetops to the army of the skies, and the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king, and the ones turning back from after Yahweh, and who do not search for Yahweh and do not seek him.

Verses 8–9:

And it will happen on the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh that I will visit

upon the princes and upon the sons of the king and upon all the ones wearing foreign clothing, and on that day I will visit

upon all the ones leaping over the threshold, the ones filling the house of their lords {with} violence and fraud.

Verse 10:

the sound of

a cry from the Fish Gate and a wailing from the Second {District} and a great ruin from the hills.

Verses 15–16:

That day {will be}

a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and overcast, a day of horn and battle-cry against the fortified cities and against the high towers.

Zephaniah 1:1

The word of Yahweh that was to Zephaniah

In this title for the book, the term **word** refers to the message that Yahweh sent to the Judeans through Zephaniah by using words. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “The message that Yahweh sent through Zephaniah” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah

The author is describing the ancestors of **Zephaniah** in order to introduce him to readers as a key participant in the book, the person through whom Yahweh spoke the messages that the book records. Your culture may have its own way of introducing people by describing their ancestors, and if so, you can use it here in your translation. (See: **Introduction of New and Old Participants (p.128)**)

Zephaniah & Cushi, & Gedaliah, & Amariah, & Hezekiah, & Josiah & Amon

The words **Zephaniah**, **Cushi**, **Gedaliah**, **Amariah**, **Hezekiah**, **Josiah**, and **Amon** are the names of men. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah

In this title, the term **days** means a specific time, the reign of **Josiah** as **king of Judah**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “during the reign of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 1:2

Removing, I will exterminate everything from upon the face of the ground”— the declaration of Yahweh

Zephaniah is using the phrase **the declaration of Yahweh** to indicate that he is quoting the message that Yahweh has given him for the people of Judah. Consider natural ways of identifying direct quotations in your language. It may be more natural for you to put this attribution of the saying to Yahweh before the saying itself, as the UST does. Alternate translation: “This is what Yahweh declares: ‘Removing, I will exterminate everything from upon the face of the ground’” (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

Removing, I will exterminate everything from upon the face of the ground

When Yahweh says that he is going to destroy **everything** on the surface of the earth, he is probably making an overstatement for emphasis. He wants to express how angry he is at the sinful disobedience of people. If it would be clearer in your language, you could show the emphasis in a different way. Alternate translation: “I will cause very great destruction on the earth” (See: **Hyperbole (p.122)**)

Removing, I will exterminate everything

Yahweh is using one verb and a different verb of similar meaning together in order to intensify the idea that these verbs express. Ordinarily in this construction, the same verb would be used twice. But here two verbs of similar sound and meaning are used for poetic effect and emphasis. If your language can repeat verbs for intensification, it would be appropriate to do that here in your translation. If it has two verbs of similar sound and meaning that you can use, that would reflect the poetic effect here. Your language may also have another way of expressing the emphasis. Alternate translation: “I will totally exterminate everything” (See: **Reduplication (p.172)**)

the face of the ground

Yahweh is speaking as if the surface of the earth or ground were literally its **face**. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the surface of the earth” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 1:3

the declaration of Yahweh

See how you translated the phrase **the declaration of Yahweh** in the previous verse. If you used it to introduce the quotation there, you may wish to do the same thing here. (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

I will take away man and beast; I will take away the birds of the skies and the fish of the sea

Yahweh is using creatures from the three components of creation—land creatures, sky creatures, and **sea** creatures—to mean all creatures throughout creation. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression or plain language. Alternate translation: “I will take away all the creatures that live everywhere in creation” (See: **Merism (p.135)**)

man and beast; & man

Here the masculine term **man** has a generic sense that includes both men and women. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use language in your translation that clearly includes both men and women. Alternate translation: “humans and beasts ... humans” (See: **When Masculine Words Include Women (p.182)**)

man and beast

Yahweh is using two types of creatures that live on the earth, **man** and **beast**, to mean all creatures that live on the earth. If you would like to retain in your translation the references in this verse to the three different parts of creation, you could explain the meaning of this reference. Alternate translation: “all the creatures that live on the earth” (See: **Merism (p.135)**)

and the stumbling blocks with the wicked

Yahweh is using the adjective **wicked** as a noun to mean a certain kind of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “and the stumbling blocks with wicked people” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

and the stumbling blocks

Yahweh is speaking of idols as if they were literally **stumbling blocks**, that is, objects that people would trip over. He is using stumbling to mean doing what is morally and spiritually wrong. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and the idols” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

with the wicked

The implication is that the **wicked** people Yahweh is talking about are doing things that are morally and spiritually wrong because their actions are being guided by the values implicit in idolatry rather than by Yahweh's law. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “with the people who are wicked because they worship idols” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

and I will cut off man from upon the face of the ground

When Yahweh says that he will kill all the people who live on earth, as in verse 2, he is making an overstatement for emphasis. If it would be clearer in your language, you could express the emphasis in a different way. Alternate translation: “and the wicked people who are disobeying me, I will punish by killing them” (See: **Hyperbole (p.122)**)

and I will cut off man

Here the masculine term **man** has a generic sense that includes both men and women. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use language in your translation that is clearly inclusive of both men and women. Alternate translation: “and I will cut off all people” (See: **When Masculine Words Include Women (p.182)**)

and I will cut off man

Yahweh is speaking as if he were going to **cut off** the people who live on the earth the way one would cut a branch off from a tree. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy all people” or “and I will eliminate all people” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

the face of the ground

See how you translated this expression in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “the surface of the earth” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 1:4

And I will stretch out my hand

Here, **hand** represents the power that a person has to do something. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “And I will use my power” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

and I will cut off from this place

See how you translated the expression **cut off** in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “and I will remove from this place” or “and I will eliminate from this place” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and I will cut off from this place

As the General Notes to this chapter discuss, this phrase is the beginning of a litany. You may use that discussion to help you consider how to format the material in verses 4–6. (See: **Litany (p.131)**)

the remnant of Baal

Yahweh is using the name **Baal** by association to mean the worship of Baal, a false god. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the remnant of Baal-worship” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

the remnant of Baal

The worship of **Baal** had not been reduced to a **remnant** at this time. As the General Introduction to Zephaniah explains, the prophet spoke these oracles to warn the people of Judah that they needed to stop worshiping Baal. So Yahweh is using this expression to mean that he will destroy Baal worship so completely that nothing is left—there will be no remnant. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “every last trace of Baal worship” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

the name of the idol-priests with the priests

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “yes, I will cut off the name of the idol-priests with the priests” or “yes, I will destroy the name of the idol-priests with the priests” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

the name of

Here, **name** represents the reputation of an individual, which extends beyond the place and time in which that individual is known personally. When someone's **name** in this sense is destroyed, no one remembers that person any longer. Alternate translation: “the memory of” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

with the priests

The term **priests** probably refers to the priests descended from Aaron who were supposed to lead the Israelites in the worship of Yahweh. Unfortunately, at this time they were not serving Yahweh faithfully, as Zephaniah says in

3:4. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “along with the degenerate priests from the line of Aaron” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Zephaniah 1:5

and the ones bowing down on the housetops to the army of the skies, and the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “and I will cut off the ones bowing down on the housetops to the army of the skies, and I will cut off the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king” or “and I will destroy the ones bowing down on the housetops to the army of the skies, and I will destroy the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

and the ones bowing down on the housetops to the army of

Yahweh is using one aspect of worship, **bowing down**, to mean worship generally. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy the ones who worship the army of” (See: **Synecdoche (p.178)**)

to the army of the skies

Yahweh is speaking of the sun, moon, and stars as if they were an **army** in the **skies**. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “to the heavenly bodies” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “and the ones bowing down, swearing to me” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

and the ones bowing down, swearing to Yahweh

The terms **bowing down** and **swearing to** mean similar things. They both indicate worship; **bowing down**, one aspect of worship, represents worship generally, while the expression **swearing to** describes pledging oneself to worship Yahweh as God. Yahweh is using the two terms together for emphasis since, as the rest of the verse shows, this worship was not wholehearted. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: “the ones appearing to worship me devotedly” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king

The word translated **their king** could be the name of a false god, Milcom, also called Molech, Molek, or Moloch. If you choose to use the name in your translation, spell it the way it sounds in your language. If a translation of the Bible exists in your region, you may wish to use the spelling that it uses. Alternate translation: “swearing to me but swearing by Milcom” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

swearing to Yahweh but swearing by their king

Yahweh is drawing a contrast between **swearing to** and **swearing by**. The Judeans who swore **to** Yahweh pledged themselves to worship him as their God. But they then swore **by** Milcom, invoking the name of that false god to guarantee a vow or promise that they had made. Yahweh is saying how inconsistent and inappropriate it was for

them to do that. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “pledging themselves to worship me but then guaranteeing their oaths by invoking the false god Milcom” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Zephaniah 1:6

and the ones turning back from after Yahweh, and who do not search for Yahweh and do not seek him

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “and the ones turning back from after me, and who do not search for me and do not seek me” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

and the ones turning back from after Yahweh, and who do not search for Yahweh and do not seek him

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. This could be describing: (1) two groups, people who are no longer actively worshiping Yahweh and people who still worship Yahweh formally but who do not relate to him actively as their God. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy those who have stopped worshiping me actively, and I will destroy those who still worship me formally but do not relate to me actively as their God” (2) one group, people who show that they are no longer worshiping Yahweh by the way they no longer relate to him actively as their God. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy those who show they have stopped worshiping me by the way they no longer relate to me actively as their God” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

and the ones turning back from after Yahweh

Yahweh is speaking as if the Judeans who are ceasing to worship him were literally walking on a path and **turning back** from the direction in which they had been heading. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy the ones who have stopped worshiping me” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and who do not search for Yahweh and do not seek him

Yahweh could be using the expressions **search for** and **seek** to mean: (1) two similar things. He could be speaking as if the Judeans should literally have been looking for him, meaning that they should have been praying to him. In this case Yahweh would be using two similar terms together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase Alternate translation: “and I will destroy the ones who no longer pray to me at all” (2) two different things. The expression **search for** could mean to ask for help, and the expression **seek** could mean to ask for guidance. Alternate translation: “and I will destroy those who no longer ask for my help or guidance” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

Zephaniah 1:7

Hush from the face of Lord Yahweh

Here the word **face** represents the presence of a person by association with the way people can see the face of someone who is present. Alternate translation: “Hush in the presence of Lord Yahweh” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Hush from the face of Lord Yahweh

The word **Hush** is an exclamation that urges listeners to be silent. In your translation, you may choose to use an exclamation that is natural in your language for communicating this. You could also translate the word as an imperative. Alternate translation: “Shh! in the presence of Lord Yahweh” (See: **Exclamations (p.110)**)

the day of Yahweh {is} near

The expression **the day of Yahweh** refers to a specific time when God will punish people for their sins. Alternate translation: “the time is coming soon when Yahweh will punish people for their sins” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice, he has sanctified his invited ones

Zephaniah is speaking as if Yahweh had literally **prepared a sacrifice** and ceremonially cleansed (**sanctified**) those he had **invited** to share a meal from the meat of the sacrificed animal. He is speaking of the people of Judah as if they were this sacrifice, and of an enemy army, most likely that of the Babylonians, as if it would feast on the Judeans, meaning that this foreign power would conquer them and plunder them, as verses 13–16 indicate. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “Yahweh is going to allow a foreign army to conquer and plunder the land of Judah” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

his invited ones

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the ones he has invited” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

Zephaniah 1:8

And it will happen on the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh

As the General Notes to this chapter discuss, this phrase is the beginning of a litany. You may use that discussion to help you consider how to format the material in verses 8–9. (See: **Litany (p.131)**)

on the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “on the day of my sacrifice” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p. 112)**)

on the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh

As Zephaniah did in the previous verse, Yahweh is speaking as if he is literally going to offer a sacrifice. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “on the day when I punish you Judeans for your sins” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

on the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh

See how you translated the expression “the day of Yahweh” in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “at the time when I punish you Judeans for your sins” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

that I will visit upon the princes and upon the sons of the king and upon all the ones wearing foreign clothing

The expression **visit upon** means to punish. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “that I will punish the princes and the sons of the king and all the ones wearing foreign clothing” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the princes

In some languages the term **princes** describes male direct descendants of a monarch, but here it means court officials who may or may not have been members of the royal family. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “the court officials” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

the sons of the king

This could mean: (1) the actual members of the royal family. In that case, the word **sons** would have a generic sense, applying to both men and women, and it would mean not just the literal children of the present king but also the grandchildren and even later descendants of previous kings. Alternate translation: “the royal family” (2) the literal sons of the present king, Josiah, who would have been just boys at this time. The implication is that Yahweh is going to punish the Judeans so thoroughly that not even children will be spared. Alternate translation: “even the king’s young boys” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

all the ones wearing foreign clothing

Yahweh is using one thing that the Judeans were doing to curry favor with foreign powers, wearing the same **clothing** that they did, to mean everything that they did to curry favor, especially including worshiping their gods. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “all those who have adopted foreign ways” (See: **Synecdoche (p.178)**)

Zephaniah 1:9

and on that day I will visit upon

See how you translated the expressions “on the day” and “I will visit upon” in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “and at the time when I punish you Judeans, I will punish” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

all the ones leaping over the threshold

The expression **leaping over the threshold** seems to refer to people entering other people’s houses forcibly, as if in a rush, in order to seize their possessions by **violence** or **fraud**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “all those who enter other people’s houses violently in order to seize their possessions” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the ones filling the house of their lords {with} violence and fraud

Yahweh is using the plural form **lords** in a context where the singular term “lord” would suffice. This suggests that he may be using the plural form as a superlative to indicate the supreme example of its own class, in which case this would be a reference to the king, the lord or master of the Judeans. Your language may use plural forms in the same way. If not, you could express the meaning in another way. Alternate translation: “who have filled the house of their king with violence and fraud” or “who have filled the royal palace with violence and fraud” (See: **Unusual Uses of the Plural (p.180)**)

with} violence and fraud

Yahweh is using the terms **violence** and **fraud** by association to mean possessions unlawfully obtained from others by violence or on fraudulent grounds. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “with possessions that they have gotten violently or fraudulently” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Zephaniah 1:10

And it will happen on that day” the declaration of Yahweh— the sound of

See how you translated the phrase **the declaration of Yahweh** in verses 2 and 3. Alternate translation: “This is what Yahweh declares: ‘And it will happen on that day, the sound of’” (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p. 164)**)

on that day

See how you translated the expressions “on that day” in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “at the time when I punish you Judeans for your sins” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the sound of

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “that people will hear the sound of” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

from the Fish Gate

The expression **the Fish Gate** is the name of one of the gates in the wall of the ancient city of Jerusalem. It may have had that name because there was a fish market just outside this gate. If your language has a term for “fish,” you could use that term to translate this name. If not, you could translate the name the way it sounds in your language. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

the Second {District

The word **Second** is the name of one of the districts in the ancient city of Jerusalem. The ULT adds the word **District** to show that. This district may have had that name because it had been added to the original city. Some translations use a name for it that indicates that. Alternate translation: “the New Quarter” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

from the hills

Yahweh is using the term **hills** by association to mean the settlements on the hills around Jerusalem. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “from the settlements on the hills around Jerusalem” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Zephaniah 1:11

the Maktesh

The word **Maktesh** is the name of one of the districts in the ancient city of Jerusalem. It seems to have been a place where many goods were bought and sold, and so some translations refer to it with a descriptive phrase rather than with this name. Alternate translation: “the market district” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

all of the people of Canaan will be destroyed, all of the ones weighing silver will be cut off

These two phrases mean similar things. Yahweh is using repetition to emphasize the idea that the phrases express. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine them. Alternate translation: “all of the merchants and traders who make your district such a prosperous place will be completely destroyed” (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

all of the people of Canaan will be destroyed, all of the ones weighing silver will be cut off

If your language does not use these passive forms, you could express the ideas in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “I am going to destroy all of the people of Canaan; yes, I am going to cut off all of the ones weighing silver” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

the people of Canaan

In this context, the expression **people of Canaan** refers to traders, not to those from the Canaanite people group. Many traders were Phoenicians, that is, Canaanites, and that is how the profession got this name, but the reference is to the profession and not to the people group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the traders” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the ones weighing silver

Yahweh is using the expression **the ones weighing silver** by association to mean merchants. In this culture, people used silver as money, determining its value by its weight. So merchants would weigh silver in order to determine how much of it to pay for goods or to accept in payment for them. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the merchants” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

will be cut off

See how you translated the expression “cut off” in verse 3. Alternate translation: “will be destroyed” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 1:12

with lamps

Yahweh is speaking as if he is literally going to use **lamps** in order to **search** for evildoers so that he can find them and punish them. He means that he is going to search thoroughly, as if using a lamp in order to see into all dark corners where someone or something might escape notice. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “thoroughly” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and I will visit upon

See how you translated the expression “I will visit upon” in verse 8. Alternate translation: “and I will punish” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the men thickening on their sediment

Here the masculine term **men** has a generic sense that includes both men and women. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use language in your translation that is clearly inclusive of both men and women. Alternate translation: “the people who are thickening on their sediment” (See: **When Masculine Words Include Women (p.182)**)

the men thickening on their sediment

Yahweh is speaking as if the sinful, complacent people of Jerusalem were literally wine that is **thickening** because it has been left on its **sediment**. The term “sediment” describes the small pieces of stem, leaves, and seeds from grape plants that are unintentionally mixed with the juice during the winemaking process. Ordinarily, these are allowed to settle to the bottom of the wine, which is then poured off to separate it from them. Yahweh means that just as wine left on its sediment becomes thick, so these Judeans have become difficult to motivate to repentance. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. You may wish to represent the image as a comparison and explain its meaning. Alternate translation: “the people who have become so complacent” or “the people who have become so complacent that they are like wine that has thickened because no one has poured it off its sediment” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

the ones saying in their heart, Yahweh will not do good, and he will not do bad

If it would be clearer in your language, you could translate this so that there is not a quotation within a quotation. Alternate translation: “the ones saying in their heart that Yahweh will not do good and that he will not do bad” (See: **Quotes within Quotes (p.169)**)

the ones saying in their heart, Yahweh will not do good, and he will not do bad

If you decide to turn this quotation within a quotation into an indirect quotation, then Yahweh would be speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “the ones saying in their heart that I will not do good and that I will not do bad” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

in their heart

Here the **heart** represents the thoughts. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “in their thoughts” or “to themselves” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

in their heart

Since Job is speaking of many people, if you retain the image of **heart** in your translation, it may be more natural in your language to use the plural form of the word. Alternate translation: “in their hearts” (See: **Collective Nouns (p.89)**)

Yahweh will not do good, and he will not do bad

By **do good**, these people are implicitly referring to Yahweh rewarding them, and by **do bad**, they are referring to Yahweh punishing them. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. You could also bring out the further implication in what the people are saying: that Yahweh is not a God who enforces justice in the world, so they may act as they wish. Alternate translation: “Yahweh is not going to reward us, and he is not going to punish us” or “Yahweh is not the kind of God who rewards good people and punishes wicked people, so it does not matter how we live” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Zephaniah 1:13

and their wealth will become plunder and their houses a ruin

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “and their wealth will become plunder and their houses will become a ruin” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

and their wealth will become plunder and their houses a ruin

Yahweh does not mean that these things will happen on their own. He means implicitly that the enemy army he describes in verse 16 will plunder the wealth of these complacent Judeans and ruin their houses. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “An enemy army will plunder their wealth and ruin their houses” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

and they will build houses, but they will not inhabit {them}, and they will plant vineyards, but they will not drink their wine

Yahweh is alluding to what he told the Israelites would happen if they disobeyed him and worshiped false gods. When the Israelites first left Egypt, he told them through Moses that if they did those things, “You shall build a house but not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard but not use it” ([Deuteronomy 28:30](#)). Yahweh is quoting his own words to show that they would be fulfilled in the case of these Judeans. To indicate that in your translation, you could present this as a direct quotation, using second-level quotation marks or some other convention of your language. Alternate translation: “and ‘they will build houses, but they will not inhabit {them}, and they will plant vineyards, but they will not drink their wine’” (See: **Quote Markings (p.166)**)

Zephaniah 1:14

The great day of Yahweh {& the day of Yahweh

See how you translated the expression “the day of Yahweh” in verse 7. Alternate translation: “the awful time when Yahweh will punish people for their sins ... the time when Yahweh will punish people” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

The great day of Yahweh {& the day of Yahweh

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “the awful time when I will punish people for their sins ... the time when I will punish people” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

is} near, near and hastening quickly

Yahweh is repeating the word **near** in order to intensify the idea that it expresses. If your language can repeat words for intensification, it would be appropriate to do that here in your translation. If not, your language may have another way of expressing the emphasis. Alternate translation: “very near and hastening quickly” (See: **Reduplication (p.172)**)

is} near, near and hastening quickly

Yahweh is speaking as if the **day** or time when he will punish people were a living thing that was **hastening** to arrive. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “near; yes, it will happen very soon” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

The sound of the day of Yahweh {is} bitter

Yahweh is speaking of the **sound of the day** by association to mean the sounds that people will make on that **day**, that is, at that time. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “People will weep bitterly on the day of Yahweh” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

the warrior cries out

Yahweh is not referring to a specific **warrior**. He means a certain group of warriors in general. This could mean: (1) that the warriors who are trying to defend Judah will cry out in despair as they are defeated. Alternate translation: “the defenders of Judah will cry out in despair” (2) that the warriors of the enemy army that attacks Judah will shout a battle cry, as verse 16 describes. Alternate translation: “the invading warriors will shout a terrifying battle cry” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.116)**)

Zephaniah 1:15

That day

If you have been translating the phrase “the day of Yahweh” with an expression that uses the word “time,” you may wish to say “time” rather than **day** in each of the instances in this verse. (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

a day of distress and anguish, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and overcast

In these four cases, Yahweh is using two words with similar meaning together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: “a day of great distress, a day of severe destruction, a day of deep darkness, a day of thick cloud” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and overcast

Yahweh is speaking as if the sky will literally be dark and cloudy at the time when he punishes people for their sins. He means that it will be a time when people experience much trouble and feel great sorrow. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “a day of terrible trouble, a day of deep sorrow” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 1:16

a day of

If you have been translating the phrase “the day of Yahweh” with an expression that uses the word “time,” you may wish to say “time” rather than **day** here. Alternate translation: “a time of” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

horn and battle cry

Yahweh is referring to a ram’s **horn**, a shofar, that soldiers would use to signal an attack. Yahweh is using the term by association to mean the sound that this horn would make. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. It may be more natural in your language to use plural forms here. Alternate translation: “horn blasts and battle-cries” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

against the fortified cities and against the high corners

Yahweh is using the term **corners** by association to mean the towers that were built at the corners of the walls around cities in the kingdom of Judah. Those walls were not straight; they had angles and corners so that defenders could attack besieging armies from more than one direction. High towers were built at the corners so that the defenders could attack from a height. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “against the fortified cities and against the high towers at the corners of their walls” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

against the fortified cities and against the high corners

The phrases **fortified cities** and **high corners** mean similar things. The high towers at the corners of city walls were one part of their fortifications. Yahweh is using the two terms together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: “the walled cities and all of their fortifications” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

Zephaniah 1:17

to man

Here the masculine term **man** has a generic sense that includes both men and women. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use language in your translation that is clearly inclusive of both men and women. The reference is most likely to the sinful, complacent Judeans. Alternate translation: “to the people of Judah” (See: **When Masculine Words Include Women (p.182)**)

and they will walk like the blind, for

This is a further allusion to what Yahweh told the Israelites when they first left Egypt, like the allusion in verse 13. In [Deuteronomy 28:29](#), Yahweh told the Israelites that if they disobeyed him and worshiped false gods, “you will be groping about at noon, as the blind grope in the darkness.” To indicate that Yahweh is quoting his own words, you could present this as a direct quotation, using second-level quotation marks or some other convention of your language. Alternate translation: “and ‘they will walk like the blind,’ for” (See: **Quote Markings (p.166)**)

and they will walk like the blind

The point of this comparison is that just as a person who is **blind** does not know in what direction he should **walk** in order to arrive somewhere safely, so the Judeans will not be able to find any safe place to escape from the enemy army. Yahweh is not saying that blindness is a punishment for sin. Alternate translation: “and they will not be able to find any place where it is safe” (See: **Simile (p.173)**)

like the blind

Yahweh is using the adjective **blind** as a noun to mean a certain kind of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “as blind people do” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like dung

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards will be poured out like dung” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like dung

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “And their enemies will wound them so that their blood flows out like dust and their innards flow out like dung” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like dung

The point of these comparisons is that just as people consider **dust** and **dung** to have no value, the **blood** and **innards** of the Judeans, vital to their lives, will be **poured out** as if those substances and the lives they sustain had no value. If it would be helpful in your language, you could make this point explicitly. Alternate translation: “And their enemies will wound them so that their blood and their innards flow out profusely, as if they were worthless” (See: **Simile (p.173)**)

Zephaniah 1:18

Even their silver, even their gold, will not be able to deliver them

Yahweh is speaking as if the **silver** and the **gold** that the Judeans own were living things that could **deliver them** from their enemies. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "They will not even be able to pay their enemies silver or gold in order to be spared" (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

For in the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "For the fire of his jealousy will consume the whole earth" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

For in the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed

Yahweh is speaking as if his **jealousy** were a **fire** that is literally going to burn up the entire **earth**. As the next sentence indicates, he is using the term "earth" to mean the people who live on the earth, and he is referring to the way that he will punish those people for worshiping false gods and living sinfully. He is speaking of that punishment as if it were a fire. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "For he will destroy all of the people who live on the earth when he punishes them in his jealousy" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

For in the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **jealousy**, you could express the same idea in another way. Zephaniah is saying that Yahweh is jealous because the people who live on the earth have been worshiping false gods even though they owe him their exclusive worship because he is the only true God. Alternate translation: "For he will destroy all of the people who live on the earth when he punishes them because he is jealous that they have been worshiping false gods instead of him, the only true God" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

he will make all of the inhabitants of the earth a consummation, indeed, a hastened one

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **consummation**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: "he will end the lives of all the inhabitants of the earth, and he will do that quickly" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

all of the inhabitants of the earth

Since Yahweh does not kill righteous people along with wicked people, the word **all** may be a generalization for emphasis, or the expression **the inhabitants of the earth** may refer specifically to wicked people. Alternate translation: "many of the people who live on the earth" or "the wicked people who disobey him" (See: **Hyperbole (p.122)**)

a hastened one

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. The word translated **hastened** could mean: (1) that Yahweh will quickly do what he is describing. Alternate translation: “he will do this soon” (2) that when Yahweh does this, it will terrify people. Alternate translation: “a terrifying one” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

Zephaniah 2

Zephaniah 2 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

This chapter is the second of the three major parts of the book of Zephaniah. (See the outline in the General Introduction to the book.) This part begins with a warning to the people of Judah and Jerusalem (verses 1–3), and it then describes how Yahweh will punish the Philistines (verses 4–7), Moab and Ammon (verses 8–11), Ethiopia (verse 12), and Assyria (verses 13–16).

The ULT sets the lines of this chapter farther to the right on the page than the rest of the text because they are poetry.

Important Figures of Speech in This Chapter

Litany

In verses 1 and 2, Zephaniah uses the litany form, as he did four times in chapter 1. See the discussion of the litany form in the General Notes to chapter 1, and see how you formatted the litanies in that chapter. You may wish to present the general statement in verse 1 without any indentation and then put each sentence of verse 2 on a separate line. The format might look something like this:

Gather yourselves together! Yes, gather, O nation not desired,

before the bringing forth of the decree, before the day passes like chaff, before the burning of
the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you, before the day of the nose of Yahweh does not
come upon you.

Zephaniah 2:1

Gather yourselves together! Yes, gather

Zephaniah is repeating the verb **Gather** in order to emphasize the idea that it expresses. If a speaker of your language would not do that, you may be able to express the emphasis in another way in your translation. Alternate translation: "It is urgent that you gather together" (See: **Reduplication (p.172)**)

Gather yourselves together! Yes, gather

The word **yourselves** is plural because Zephaniah is addressing the Judeans as a group. The implied "you" in each of these imperative forms is also plural. So use plural forms in your translation if your language marks that distinction. (The word "you" and the implied "you" in imperatives continue to be plural in verses 2 and 3.) (See: **Forms of 'You' — Singular (p.114)**)

Gather yourselves together

Zephaniah is implicitly telling the Judeans to **Gather ... together** in order to repent. That is, he is telling them that they urgently need to hold a solemn assembly in which they confess and forsake their sins and ask Yahweh to be merciful to them. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Gather yourselves together in repentance" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p. 86)**)

O nation not desired

Zephaniah is expressing a positive meaning by using a negative word together with a word that is the opposite of the intended meaning. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. The phrase translated **not desired** could mean: (1) that Yahweh does not want to be close to this nation because he is so angry with its people over their sinfulness and idolatry. Alternate translation: "O nation with whom Yahweh is so angry" (2) that the people of this nation are not ashamed of the wrong things that they have been doing. Alternate translation: "O shameless nation" (See: **Litotes (p.133)**)

O nation not desired

Zephaniah is implicitly addressing the **nation** of Judah. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "you Judeans with whom Yahweh is so angry" or "you shameless Judeans" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Zephaniah 2:2

before the bringing forth of the decree

Zephaniah is using this possessive form not to describe something **bringing forth** the **decree** but to speak of the **decree** as if it would be **bringing forth** something, that is, as if it would literally be giving birth to something. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers, and it may be helpful to use plain language. Alternate translation: “before the decree takes effect” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

before the bringing forth of the decree

Zephaniah is referring implicitly to the **decree** of Yahweh that he announced in the previous chapter. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “before Yahweh carries out his decree to destroy sinful people” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

the day

By **the day**, Zephaniah means the “day of Yahweh.” See how you translated that expression in chapter 1. Alternate translation: “the time when Yahweh punishes people for their sins” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

before} & passes like chaff

The point of this comparison is that just as the wind blows away **chaff** so that it is gone and will not return, so the **day** of Yahweh will come and go, and afterwards there will be no further opportunity for people to repent. If it would be helpful in your language, you could make this point explicitly. Alternate translation: “before ... has come and gone and there is no further opportunity to repent” (See: **Simile (p.173)**)

before the burning of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you, before the day of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you

These two phrases mean similar things. Zephaniah is using repetition to emphasize the idea that the phrases express. However, rather than combine the phrases and show the emphasis in another way, it may be good to include both phrases in your translation, since they are part of a litany. See the discussion in the General Notes to this chapter of the litany form and how you might format verses 1–2 to show that Zephaniah is using this form. (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

before the burning of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you

Zephaniah is using a negative expression to describe an outcome that he is urging the people of Judah to avoid. He is effectively telling them to pursue the purpose of avoiding that outcome. Use a natural way in your language for introducing a purpose clause. The clause itself may be negative or positive, depending on the conventions of your language. Alternate translation: “so that the burning of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you” or “lest the burning of the nose of Yahweh come upon you” (See: **Connect — Goal (Purpose) Relationship (p.92)**)

before the burning of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you

Zephaniah is using the term **nose** to mean anger. He is doing this by association with the way that a person who is angry breathes heavily through his nose. Your language and culture may also associate anger with a particular part of the body. If so, in your translation you could use an expression involving that part of the body. You could also use plain language. Zephaniah is also speaking as if Yahweh's **nose** or anger were literally **burning**. He means that

Yahweh's anger is very intense. Alternate translation: "so that Yahweh's fierce anger does not come upon you" or "lest Yahweh's fierce anger come upon you" (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

before the burning of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you

Zephaniah is speaking as if Yahweh's **nose**, that is, his anger, were a living thing that could **come upon** the Judeans, that is, attack and overpower them. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "so that Yahweh does not destroy you in his fierce anger" or "lest Yahweh destroy you in his fierce anger" (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

before the day of the nose of Yahweh does not come upon you

See how you translated the similar expression just before this one, and see how you translated the term **day** earlier in the verse. Alternate translation: "so that Yahweh does not destroy you in his anger at the time when he punishes people for their sins" (See: **Connect — Goal (Purpose) Relationship (p.92)**)

Zephaniah 2:3

Seek Yahweh

Zephaniah is speaking as if he literally wanted the Judeans to **Seek** or look for Yahweh. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. See how you translated the similar expression in 1:6. Alternate translation: “Pray to Yahweh for mercy” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

all the humble of the earth

Zephaniah is using the adjective **humble** as a noun to mean a certain kind of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. While Zephaniah is speaking of these people in the third person, he is addressing them directly. Alternate translation: “all you humble people of the earth” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

all the humble of the earth

Here the term **earth** could mean: (1) the land of Judah, since Zephaniah is addressing a specific “nation,” the nation of Judah, in verses 1–3. Alternate translation: “all you humble people of the land” or “all you Judeans who are willing to humble yourselves” (2) the entire world, since that is what the term means in 1:18. Alternate translation: “all you humble people in the world” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

who do his justice

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **justice**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: “who do what he has said is just” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

Seek righteousness. Seek humility

Zephaniah is speaking as if he literally wanted the Judeans to **Seek** or look for **righteousness** and **humility**. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. The meaning of this image is slightly different from its meaning in 1:6 and in the first part of the verse. Alternate translation: “Practice righteousness. Cultivate humility” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Seek righteousness. Seek humility

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **righteousness** and **humility**, you could express the same ideas in other ways. Alternate translation: “Do what is right. Be humble” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

you will be hidden

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “you will be able to hide” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

you will be hidden

Zephaniah is speaking as if the Judeans could literally **be hidden** somewhere where Yahweh could not find them. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “you will be spared” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

on the day of the nose of Yahweh

See how you translated the similar expression at the end of the previous verse. Alternate translation: “at the time when Yahweh angrily punishes people” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 2:4

Gaza will become abandoned, & and Ekron will be uprooted

For poetic effect and emphasis, at the beginning and end of this verse Zephaniah uses verbs that echo the sound of the names of the cities he is describing. It may be possible for you to reproduce this effect in your translation. (See: **Poetry (p.154)**)

Gaza will become abandoned

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the people who used to live in Gaza will abandon that city” or “no one will live in Gaza anymore” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

and Ashkelon a ruin

Zephaniah is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: “and Ashkelon will become a ruin” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

Ashdod, they will expel her

Zephaniah is speaking of the city of **Ashdod** as if it were a woman who could be **expelled** from the home in which she was living. He is using the city to represent the people who live in the city. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “they will expel the inhabitants of Ashdod” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

Ashdod, they will expel her

Here, **they** is an indefinite pronoun that does not have a specific referent in the immediate context. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this with a different expression that does not use an indefinite pronoun. Alternate translation: “the inhabitants of Ashdod will be expelled” or “an army will expel the inhabitants of Ashdod” (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.162)**)

at noon

Zephaniah is speaking as if an army would literally expel the inhabitants of Ashdod at a specific time, **at noon**. He is likely using noon, the time when the sun is brightest in the sky, to mean “in broad daylight,” that is, as the result of an open attack by an overwhelming force. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “in an open attack” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and Ekron will be uprooted

Zephaniah is speaking as if the city of **Ekron** were literally a plant that could be **uprooted**, that is, pulled completely out of the ground, including its roots. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and Ekron will be completely destroyed” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and Ekron will be uprooted

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “and it will be as if Ekron were a plant that someone had pulled out by the roots” or “and an army will destroy Ekron” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

Zephaniah 2:5

the region of the sea

Zephaniah is using this possessive form to describe a **region** that is along the coast of the **sea**. He means specifically the area along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea where the Philistines lived. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “the seacoast” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

the Kerethites

The word **Kerethites** is another name for all or part of the people group also known as the **Philistines**. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could use the name Philistines here in order to show that Zephaniah is addressing one people group, not two. Alternate translation: “the Philistines” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

The word of Yahweh {is} against you

Zephaniah is using the term **word** to mean what Yahweh has said by using words. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “Yahweh has spoken a message against you” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

is} against you, Canaan, land of the Philistines

Zephaniah is speaking to something that he knows cannot hear him, the land of **Canaan**, in order to show in a strong way how he feels about the people who live there. If a speaker in your language would not do that, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “is against you Philistines who live in the land of Canaan” (See: **Apostrophe (p.84)**)

is} against you

The word **you** is plural here because Zephaniah is implicitly speaking to the Philistines who live in the land of **Canaan**. However, since he is addressing that land directly, if you retain the direct-address form in your translation, it may be more natural in your language to use a singular form of “you.” (That would match the singular form of **you** in the quotation from Yahweh, “And I will destroy you,” which addresses Canaan as if that land were a person.) (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

And I will destroy you until there is no inhabitant

It may be more natural in your language to make this an indirect quotation. Alternate translation: “He has said that he will destroy you until there is no inhabitant” (See: **Direct and Indirect Quotations (p.97)**)

And I will destroy you until there is no inhabitant

As Zephaniah did, Yahweh is speaking to something that he knows cannot hear him, the land of **Canaan**, in order to show in a strong way how he feels about the people who live there. If a speaker in your language would not do that, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “And I will destroy you Philistines until none of you live in the land of Canaan any more” (See: **Apostrophe (p.84)**)

Zephaniah 2:6

the region of the sea

See how you translated this expression in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “the seacoast” or “the seacoast where the Philistines formerly lived” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

pastures of meadows of shepherds and pens of flocks

Zephaniah is using these possessive forms to describe what will be in the **pastures**, who will use the **meadows**, and what the **pens** will contain. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “pastures in which there are meadows where shepherds graze their sheep and pens that hold their flocks” (See: **Possession (p. 157)**)

Zephaniah 2:7

the house of Judah

Zephaniah is using the word **house** to mean the people who live in the kingdom of Judah. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the people of Judah” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

in the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down in the evening

Zephaniah is using one aspect of living in a house, lying down there in the evening (that is, sleeping there at night) to mean living there in general. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “they will come and live in the abandoned houses in the city of Ashkelon” (See: **Synecdoche (p.178)**)

will visit them

Zephaniah is using the term **visit** in a specific sense to mean taking action in regard to someone. In [1:8](#), [1:9](#), and [1:12](#), the term describes taking action to punish people. But here it describes taking action to help people. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “will help them” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 2:8

I have heard the reproach of

This is the beginning of a direct quotation from Yahweh, as the phrase “the declaration of Yahweh of armies, the God of Israel” in the next verse indicates. See how you translated the phrase “the declaration of Yahweh” in 1:2. If you used it to introduce the quotation there, you may wish to use the comparable phrase from 2:9 to introduce the quotation here. The UST models a way to do that. (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

Moab

Yahweh is speaking of the country of **Moab** as if it were a living thing that could have expressed **reproach** against the people of Judah. He is referring to the people of that country. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the people of Moab” or “the Moabites” (See: **Personification (p. 152)**)

the sons of Ammon

Here the word **sons** means “descendants.” Yahweh is describing the members of the Ammonite people group by reference to their common descent from a single ancestor, Benammi, here called **Ammon**. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the people of Ammon” or “the Ammonites” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and made themselves great against their border

This could mean: (1) that the Moabites and Ammonites have expanded their territories by taking territory away from the kingdom of Judah. Alternate translation: “and have stolen bordering territories from them” (2) that the Moabites and Ammonites have threatened to attack the kingdom of Judah and take some or all of its territory. Alternate translation: “and have boasted that they will take their territory” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 2:9

Therefore, {as} I {am} alive”— & that

Yahweh is using this language to swear a solemn oath. He is indicating that the things he says will happen to Moab and Ammon are just as certain as some other very certain thing, the fact that he is **alive**. Translate this in a way that will show your readers that it is an oath. For example, it may be helpful to add the words **I swear**, as the UST does. If oaths are unfamiliar in your culture, you could also add a short explanation of what an oath is. (See: **Oath Formulas (p.147)**)

the declaration of Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel

This phrase indicates that the rest of the material in verses 2:8–9 is a direct quotation from Yahweh. See how you decided to introduce this direct quotation in the previous verse. (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

Yahweh of Armies

The phrase **Yahweh of Armies** is a title for God that indicates his great power. It describes him as the commander of heavenly armies. If a translation of the Bible exists in your region, it may have a particular way of translating this phrase, and you may wish to use that in your translation. If a translation of the Bible does not exist in your region, express the meaning of this phrase in a way that will be clear to your readers. Alternate translation: “Yahweh the Almighty” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

Moab will become like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah

The point of this comparison is that just as **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** were completely destroyed (see [Genesis 19:1–29](#)), so the countries of **Moab** and **Ammon** will be completely destroyed. If it would be helpful in your language, you could make this point explicitly. See how you translated the word “Moab” and the expression “the sons of Ammon” in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “the country of Moab will be completely destroyed, as the city of Sodom was, and the people of Ammon will be completely destroyed, as the people of the city of Gomorrah were” (See: **Simile (p.173)**)

a possession of the nettle and the pit of salt and a ruin forever

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “They will become a possession of the nettle and the pit of salt and a ruin forever” (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

a possession of the nettle and the pit of salt and a ruin forever

Yahweh is not referring to a specific **nettle** or **pit of salt**. He means nettles and salt pits in general. It may be more natural in your language to express this meaning by using plural forms. Alternate translation: “a possession of nettles and salt pits and a ruin forever” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.116)**)

a possession of the nettle and the pit of salt and a ruin forever

Yahweh is speaking as if nettles and salt pits would literally own or possess the territory where the Moabites and Ammonites formerly lived. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate

translation: “a place where only weeds grow and where people dig for salt and where no one will ever build any buildings again” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

The remnant of my people will plunder them, and the remainder of my nation will occupy them

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. Hebrew poetry was based on this kind of repetition, and it would be good to show this to your readers by including both phrases in your translation rather than combining them. It may be clearer in your language to connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: “The remnant of my people will plunder them; indeed, the remainder of my nation will occupy them” (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

Zephaniah 2:10

This will be to them instead of their pride, for they reproached and made themselves great against the people of Yahweh of Armies

If it would be more natural in your language, you could reverse the order of these phrases, since the second phrase gives the reason for the result that the first phrase describes. Alternate translation: “Because they reproached and made themselves great against the people of Yahweh of Armies, this will be to them instead of their pride” (See: **Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship (p.95)**)

This will be to them instead of their pride

Yahweh is speaking as if the **pride** of the Moabites and Ammonites were literally an object that belonged to them. He is also speaking as if the destruction they are going to experience were also an object and as if he were going to take away their pride and give them destruction in its place. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “This will happen to them because they were so proud” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and made themselves great against

See how you translated the expression “made themselves great” in [2:8](#). If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and stole bordering territories from” or “and boasted that they would take territory from” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Yahweh of Armies

See how you translated the title “Yahweh of Armies” in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “Yahweh the Almighty” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

Zephaniah 2:11

he will starve all of the gods of the earth

Zephaniah is speaking as if Yahweh is literally going to **starve** the false **gods** that other nations worship, that is, deny them food so that they become thin. This is likely a reference to the fat of animals that people sacrificed to gods. The implication is that people will no longer sacrifice to those gods because they will no longer worship them once Yahweh has shown that he is the only true and powerful God. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “he will show by his powerful actions that he is the only true God” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

And all of the islands of the nations will bow down to him

Zephaniah is using this possessive form not to describe **islands** that belong to **nations** but to describe island-nations among the nations. The term **islands** can describe not just land that is completely surrounded by water but also land along a seacoast. In Zephaniah’s culture, people used the term to refer to distant lands. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “And even the most distant nations will bow down to him” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

And all of the islands of the nations will bow down to him

Zephaniah is speaking of the **nations** of the world as if they were living things that could **bow down** to Yahweh. He means that the people of the nations will do this. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “And the people of even the most distant nations will bow down to him” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

a man from his place

The phrase **a man** refers to an individual. In this context it could mean an individual nation or an individual person. If you retain Zephaniah’s depiction of the nations as living things, in your translation you could say “each in its own territory.” If you choose to show that he is using the nations to represent their people, you could say “all of them in their own territories.” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 2:12

Also you, Cushites

This verse is a direct quotation from Yahweh. You may wish to indicate that in your translation by using a natural way of introducing direct quotations in your language. Alternate translation: "Yahweh also declares, 'You, Cushites'" (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

they {will be} pierced by my sword

Yahweh is speaking about the Cushites in the third person, but since he is addressing them directly, it may be more natural in your language to translate this in the second person. Alternate translation: "you will be pierced by my sword" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

they {will be} pierced by my sword

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "my sword will pierce you" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

they {will be} pierced by my sword

Yahweh is speaking as if he were literally going to pierce or kill the Cushites with a **sword**. He means that he is going to cause an enemy army to kill many of them. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "an enemy army will kill many of you" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 2:13

And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and he will destroy Assyria

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. You may wish to include both phrases in your translation, but it may be clearer in your language to connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: “And he will stretch out his hand against the north; yes, he will destroy Assyria” (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

And he will stretch out his hand

See how you translated the expression “I will stretch out my hand” in [1:4](#). Alternate translation: “And he will use his power” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

the north

Zephaniah is using the term **north** by association to mean the empire that was located to the north of Judah, **Assyria**, as he indicates later in a parallel phrase. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “the empire that is north of here” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Zephaniah 2:14

in its midst

The possessive pronoun **its** refers to the city of Nineveh. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “in the midst of Nineveh” (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.162)**)

every animal of the nation

Zephaniah is not referring to a specific **nation**. He means nations in general. He is also saying **every** as a generalization for emphasis. It may be more natural in your language to express this meaning by using a plural form. It may also be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “They will be various kinds of herds, composed of the sorts of animals found in many different nations” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.116)**)

Both the desert owl and the screech owl

Zephaniah is not referring to a specific **desert owl** or **screech owl**. He means many individual birds of these types. It may be more natural in your language to express this meaning by using plural forms. Zephaniah may also be using these two types of desert bird to mean desert birds in general. Alternate translation: “Both desert owls and screech owls” or “Various desert birds” (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.116)**)

will lodge on its columns

The word translated **columns** refers specifically to the tops of columns, which often had ornate decorations. The implication is that an army will have destroyed the elaborate buildings of Nineveh so that only columns remain standing, and they are not supporting a roof, so their tops are exposed and provide a roosting place for birds. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “will roost on top of the exposed columns of its destroyed buildings” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

A call will hoot in the window; devastation {will be} in the threshold, for the cedar-work will be bare

If it would be more natural in your language, you could reverse the order of these phrases, since the second phrase gives the reason for the result that the first phrase describes. Zephaniah is describing how badly Nineveh will be destroyed by referring to the fact that the costly and elaborate **cedar-work** of its ornate buildings will be exposed to the elements. Alternate translation: “Because the city will be destroyed so thoroughly that the cedar-work will be bare, a call will hoot in the window; devastation will be in the threshold” (See: **Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship (p.95)**)

A call will hoot in the window

Zephaniah is speaking of a bird's **call** as if it were a living thing that could **hoot** on its own. He is using the call of birds to represent the birds themselves. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “Birds will hoot their calls in the windows” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

devastation {will be} in the threshold

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **devastation**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: “debris will block doorways” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

Zephaniah 2:15

This {is} the exultant city, the one dwelling in security, the one saying in its heart, I {am}, and besides me {there is} not another

Zephaniah is speaking of the **city** of Nineveh as if it were a living thing that could exult, dwell in **security**, and speak. He means that the people of Nineveh have done these things. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "This is the city whose people exulted, who thought they dwelled in security, who said in their hearts, 'We are, and besides us there are no others.'" (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

the one saying in its heart, I {am}, and besides me {there is} not another

Here the **heart** represents the thoughts. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "the one saying in its thoughts, 'I am, and besides me there is not another'" or "the one saying to itself, 'I am, and besides me there it not another'" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

the one saying in its heart, I {am}, and besides me {there is} not another

In this context, the quoted statement means, "I am the only city that really matters; it is as if all other cities did not even exist." You could say that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the one saying in its heart, I {am}, and besides me {there is} not another

If it would be clearer in your language, you could translate this so that there is not a quotation within a quotation. Alternate translation: "The one saying to itself that it is the only city that really matters, as if all other cities did not even exist" or "The one whose people said to themselves that their city was the only one that really mattered, as if all other cities did not even exist" (See: **Quotes within Quotes (p.169)**)

How it has become a ruin

Zephaniah is using the past tense in order to describe something that will happen in the future. He is doing this to show that the event will certainly happen. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: "How it will become a ruin" (See: **Predictive Past (p.160)**)

a lair for the beast

Zephaniah is not referring to a specific **beast**. He means beasts in general. It may be more natural in your language to express this meaning by using a plural form. Alternate translation: "a lair for beasts" (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.116)**)

Every one passing by will hiss at it; he will shake his fist

Hissing and shaking a **fist** at Nineveh would be symbolic actions that expressed contempt for the city. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could explain the significance of these actions. Alternate translation: "Every one passing by will hiss at it in contempt; he will shake his fist in scorn" (See: **Symbolic Action (p.176)**)

Zephaniah 3

Zephaniah 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is the third of the three major parts of the book of Zephaniah. (See the outline in the General Introduction to the book.) This part begins with a warning to the city of Jerusalem (verses 1–8), and it then describes how Yahweh will restore Jerusalem and bring people from many nations there to worship him (verses 9–20).

The ULT sets the lines of this chapter farther to the right on the page than the rest of the text because they are poetry.

Important Figures of Speech in This Chapter

Personification

In verses 1–5, Zephaniah speaks of the city of Jerusalem as if it were a person who was acting in certain ways. Zephaniah is actually addressing the people of Jerusalem. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate that in your translation. For example, for the statement “Woe to the one rebelling” in verse 1, you might say “Woe to the people of Jerusalem, who are rebelling.”

Translation Issues in This Chapter

Gender of the pronoun for a city

In verses 1–5, Zephaniah uses the pronouns “she” and “her” to mean Jerusalem, since it was conventional in his language to use feminine pronouns when speaking about a city. In verses 11–12 and 18–19, Yahweh addresses the city as if it were a person, and he uses the feminine singular form of “you.” Zephaniah does the same in verses 14–15, as do the people who speak to Jerusalem in verses 16–17. If you decide to show in your translation that all of these speakers are addressing Jerusalem as if the city were a person, you may decide to use the gender of pronoun that is conventional in your own language.

Number of pronouns

The pronoun “you” is singular throughout the chapter except for in v. 20, where it is plural. Use the corresponding forms in your translation if your language marks a distinction between singular and plural “you” and if you decide to retain the references to the city of Jerusalem as if it were a person.

Zephaniah 3:1

Woe to the one rebelling and being defiled, the oppressing city

Zephaniah is implicitly referring to the **city** of Jerusalem. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “Woe to Jerusalem, the one rebelling and being defiled, the oppressing city” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

the one rebelling and being defiled, the oppressing city

As the General Notes to this chapter discuss, here and through verse 5, Zephaniah is speaking of the **city** of Jerusalem as if it were a person who could be **rebell**ing and who could have become **defiled** and who could be **oppressing** vulnerable people. Zephaniah is actually addressing the people of Jerusalem who have been doing these things. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could indicate this in your translation, here and in verses 2–5. Alternate translation: “you people of Jerusalem who are rebelling against Yahweh and who have become defiled and who are oppressing others” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

the one rebelling and being defiled, the oppressing city

If your language does not use a passive form such as **being defiled**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the city that has rebelled and defiled herself and that has oppressed people” or “you people of Jerusalem who are rebelling against Yahweh and who have defiled yourselves and who are oppressing others” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

the one rebelling and being defiled

In verses 1–7, as the ULT shows, Zephaniah uses feminine singular pronouns to refer to the city of Jerusalem. That was conventional in his language. Your language may use a different gender of pronouns to refer to cities. If you translate verses 1–7 as though Zephaniah is speaking directly to the city as a person, use the gender of pronoun that is most natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the city that has rebelled and defiled itself” (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.162)**)

Zephaniah 3:2

She does not hear the voice

Zephaniah is using the term **heard** in a specific sense to mean “obeyed.” If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “She does not obey the voice” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

She does not hear the voice

The term **voice** could mean: (1) the voice of Yahweh, that is, the message Yahweh has been sending to the people of Jerusalem through his prophets telling the people to repent. Alternate translation: “She has not obeyed Yahweh’s command to repent” (2) the voice of anyone who has been warning the people of the city that their wicked behavior will have destructive consequences. Alternate translation: “She does not listen to anyone who tries to warn her” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

to her God she does not draw near

Zephaniah is speaking as if the city of Jerusalem, meaning its people, could literally have **drawn near** to **God**, that is, moved closer to a place where God was. He means that they could have and should have worshiped God sincerely. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “she does not worship her God sincerely” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:3

Her princes

See how you translated the term “princes” in 1:8. Alternate translation: “her officials” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

are} roaring lions in her midst

Zephaniah is speaking as if the **princes** of Jerusalem were literally **roaring lions**. He means that they exploit and harm vulnerable people rather than protecting them. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. You may find it helpful to translate this image as a comparison. Alternate translation: “exploit and harm the vulnerable people of the city, as if they were roaring lions attacking their prey” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

are} wolves of the evening

Zephaniah is speaking as if the **judges** of Jerusalem were literally **wolves**. As in the case of his comparison of the city’s princes to lions, he means that they exploit and harm vulnerable people rather than protecting them. By **wolves of the evening**, Zephaniah means wolves that have not eaten all day and so are especially aggressive from hunger. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Once again you may find it helpful to translate this image as a comparison. Alternate translation: “also exploit and harm the vulnerable people of the city, like hungry wolves attacking their prey” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

they do not gnaw in the morning

Zephaniah is continuing to speak of the city’s **judges** as if they were **wolves**. The last thing a wolf would do in eating an animal it had killed, after consuming its flesh, would be to **gnaw** on its bones to get at the marrow inside. Zephaniah is saying that these judges are like wolves that eat an entire animal at once when they kill it in the evening or at night, leaving not even this final task for the morning. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “they take everything away from vulnerable people” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:4

are} light

Zephaniah is speaking as if the **prophets** in Jerusalem were literally **light**, that is, as if they did not weigh very much. He could mean: (1) that they are frivolous in character and so what they say is not profound or significant. Alternate translation: “are frivolous” (2) that nothing restrains them from doing wrong things, as if they were a light object with nothing weighing it down that would float away or be blown away. Alternate translation: “are unprincipled” or “are reckless” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

men of treacheries

The phrase **men of treacheries** gives further information about the **prophets** whom Zephaniah is describing. It does not refer to a different group of people. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “They are men of treacheries” (See: **Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding (p.99)**)

men of treacheries

Zephaniah is using this possessive form not to describe men who belong to treacheries but to describe **men** who habitually commit **treacheries**. This could mean: (1) that these prophets deceive and betray other people in order to take advantage of them. Alternate translation: “They treat others treacherously” (2) that they are not faithful to Yahweh, that is, they do not speak only messages that Yahweh has given them. Rather, they speak messages that they claim are from Yahweh but which Yahweh has not given them. Alternate translation: “They do not speak faithfully only what Yahweh has told them” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

profane the holy

Zephaniah is using the adjective **holy** as a noun to mean a certain thing or kind of thing. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. The word **holy** could be referring to: (1) the temple, as a holy place set apart for the worship of Yahweh. Alternate translation: “treat the temple as if it were just an ordinary place” (2) in addition to the temple, all of the clothing, equipment, and food that was set apart for the use of the priests in leading the people in the worship of Yahweh. Alternate translation: “treat the special things that they are supposed to use in worship as if they were ordinary things” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

Zephaniah 3:5

He does not commit unrighteousness

If it would be clearer in your language, you could use a positive expression to translate this double negative that consists of the negative particle **not** and the negative word **unrighteousness**. Alternate translation: "He always does what is right" (See: **Double Negatives (p.102)**)

In the morning, in the morning he gives his justice; at light he is not left out

The word **light** could mean: (1) the light of dawn. In that case, Zephaniah would be saying the same thing twice in slightly different ways for emphasis. Hebrew poetry was based on this kind of repetition. To reflect this, you may wish to include both phrases in your translation rather than combining them. If you do that, it may be helpful to add a connecting word in order to show that the second clause is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: "In the morning, in the morning he gives his justice; indeed, at dawn he is not left out" (2) visibility, representing how Yahweh makes **justice** evident. In that case, the phrase **at light** would apply to the first clause rather than to the second one. Alternate translation: "In the morning, in the morning he brings his justice to light; he is not left out" or "In the morning, in the morning he makes his justice evident; indeed, he does not fail to do that" (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

In the morning, in the morning

Zephaniah is repeating the phrase **In the morning** in order to intensify the idea that it expresses. If your language can repeat phrases for intensification, you may find it appropriate to do that here in your translation. Your language may also have another way of expressing the emphasis. Alternate translation: "Morning by morning" or "Every morning" (See: **Reduplication (p.172)**)

In the morning, in the morning

Zephaniah is using the term **morning** to mean a day, by association with the way that each day begins with a morning. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "Day by day" or "Every day" (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

he gives his justice

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **justice**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: "he tells people how to act justly" or "he declares what would be the just thing to do" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

he is not left out

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "he is not missing" or "he does not fail to appear" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

he is not left out

If it would be clearer in your language, you could use a positive expression to translate this double negative that consists of the negative particle **not** and the negative verb **left out**. The double negative expresses emphasis, and

you may choose to express that emphasis in a different way. Alternate translation: “he diligently appears” (See: **Double Negatives (p.102)**)

Yet the unrighteous does not know shame

Zephaniah is using the adjective **unrighteous** as a noun to mean a certain kind of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: “Yet people who are unrighteous do not know shame” (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

Yet the unrighteous does not know shame

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **shame**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: “Yet people who are unrighteous are not ashamed of what they do, even though they should be” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.79)**)

Zephaniah 3:6

I have cut off nations, their corners have been demolished; I have destroyed their streets

This is the beginning of a direct quotation from Yahweh that continues through verse 13. You may wish to indicate that in your translation by using a natural way of introducing direct quotations in your language. Alternate translation: "Yahweh has said, 'I have cut off nations, their corners have been demolished; I have destroyed their streets'" (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

I have cut off nations, their corners have been demolished; I have destroyed their streets

Yahweh is speaking as if he has done these things personally, but he means that the enemy army he has been describing throughout the book has done them. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "I have caused an enemy army to cut off nations, their corners have been demolished; that army has destroyed their streets" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

I have cut off

See how you translated the expression "cut off" in [1:3](#). Alternate translation: "I have destroyed" or "I have caused an enemy army to destroy" (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

their corners have been demolished

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "I have demolished their corners" or "it has demolished their corners" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

their corners

See how you translated the word **corners** in [1:16](#). Alternate translation: "the high towers at the corners of their walls" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Their cities are ruined

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "Their cities are in ruins" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

without a man, with no one dwelling

These two phrases mean similar things. Yahweh is using them together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: "without a single person living there" (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

Zephaniah 3:7

I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will take correction. Then her dwelling will not be cut off by} all that I have visited upon her

In this quotation, Yahweh first speaks directly to the city of Jerusalem in the second person, and then he speaks about that city in the third person. If it would help your readers appreciate what Yahweh is saying, you could translate the entire quotation in the third person. Alternate translation: “I said, ‘Surely she will fear me; she will take correction. Then her dwelling will not be cut off {by} all that I have visited upon her.’” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will take correction. Then her dwelling will not be cut off by} all that I have visited upon her

If it would be clearer in your language, you could translate this so that there is not a quotation within a quotation. Alternate translation: “I said that she would surely fear me; she would take correction. Then her dwelling would not be cut off by all that I had visited upon her” (See: **Quotes within Quotes (p.169)**)

I said, ‘Surely you will fear me; you will take correction. Then her dwelling will not be cut off by} all that I have visited upon her

Yahweh is speaking to and about the city of Jerusalem as if it were a person who could **fear** him and **take correction**. He is actually speaking to and about the people who live in Jerusalem. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. See what you did in [3:1–5](#). Alternate translation: “I said that the people of Jerusalem would surely fear me; they would take correction. Then their dwelling would not be cut off by all that I had visited upon them” (See: **Personification (p.152)**)

by} all that I have visited upon her

See how you translated the expression “visit upon” in [1:8](#). Alternate translation: “by all that I have done to punish her” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

they rose early, they corrupted all of their deeds

Yahweh is using the expression **rose early** to mean that the people were eager to do corrupt things. The expression comes from the way that people get up early in the morning to do something if they are eager to do it. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “they eagerly corrupted all of their deeds” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

they rose early, they corrupted all of their deeds

Yahweh says that as a generalization for emphasis. If it would be clearer in your language, you could express the emphasis in a different way. Alternate translation: “they eagerly corrupted their deeds even more” (See: **Hyperbole (p.122)**)

Zephaniah 3:8

Therefore wait for me”—the declaration of Yahweh— for the day of my arising to the prey

See how you translated the phrase “the declaration of Yahweh” in 1:2, 1:3, 1:10, and 2:9. If you used it to introduce the quotations in those places, you may wish to do the same thing here. Alternate translation: “This is what Yahweh declares: ‘Therefore wait for me, for the day of my arising to the prey’” (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins** (p. 164))

Therefore wait for me”—the declaration of Yahweh— for the day of my arising to the prey

The imperative **wait** is plural, so Yahweh is addressing some group of people. That group could be: (1) the wicked Judeans who are still disobeying Yahweh despite his warnings. In that case, Yahweh would be using the term **wait** to indicate that he is certainly going to do what he describes. Your language may use the term “wait” in this same sense. If not, you could use plain language. Alternate translation: “‘Therefore, you sinful Judeans, just wait!’—the declaration of Yahweh—‘One day soon I will arise to the prey’” or “‘Therefore you can be certain, you sinful Judeans’—the declaration of Yahweh—‘that one day soon I will arise to the prey’” (2) the “humble of the earth” whom Zephaniah mentions in 2:3. In that case, Yahweh would be using the term **wait** to tell them to be patient until he punishes sin and enforces justice. Alternate translation: “‘Therefore, be patient, you godly people’—the declaration of Yahweh—‘until the day when I arise to the prey’” (See: **Idiom** (p.126))

for the day of my arising

While Yahweh is going to punish sinful nations on a specific **day**, he is using that term here to refer to a specific time. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “until the time when I arise” (See: **Idiom** (p.126))

to the prey

Yahweh is speaking as if he were a predatory animal and the wicked **nations** and **kingdoms** that he is going to punish were **prey** that he was going to pounce on. (This could be an allusion to the description of Jerusalem’s “princes” as “lions” and its “judges” as “wolves” in 3:3, indicating that those who preyed on others will themselves become prey.) If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “to punish wicked people” (See: **Metaphor** (p.137))

to the prey

The phrase translated **to the prey** could also be translated **as a witness**. If that is the meaning, then Yahweh would be speaking as if he were literally going to stand up and give evidence that these kingdoms and nations had sinned wickedly against him. If a translation of the Bible exists in your region, you may wish to use the reading that it uses. If a translation of the Bible does not exist in your region, you may wish to use the reading of ULT. Alternate translation: “as if I were going testify against you” (See: **Metaphor** (p.137))

to pour out my indignation on them

Yahweh is speaking as if his **indignation** were a liquid that he was going to **pour out** onto wicked nations and kingdoms. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “to punish them in my indignation” (See: **Metaphor** (p.137))

all of the burning of my nose

The phrase **all of the burning of my nose** is a further description of Yahweh's **indignation**. See how you translated the similar expression in [2:2](#). It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: "My anger against them is very intense" (See: **Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding (p.99)**)

in the fire of my jealousy all of the earth will be consumed

See how you translated the similar expression in [1:18](#). As the General Introduction to Zephaniah indicates, these parallel statements mark the boundaries between the major sections of the book. It may be helpful to your readers to translate them in the same way. Alternate translation: "I will destroy all of the people who live on the earth when I punish them in my jealousy" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:9

I will surely give to the peoples a pure lip, for all of them to call upon the name of Yahweh

Yahweh is using the term **lip** by association to mean the capacity to speak. He could mean: (1) the peoples were saying wicked things because their character was wicked, but he will purify their character so that they will say pure things. Alternate translation: "I will surely give the peoples righteous character so that they will say pure things; then they will pray to me acceptably" (2) that by invoking the names of other gods (as described in 1:5), they had made themselves unworthy to pray to Yahweh, but he will cleanse their capacity to speak so that they can pray to him. Alternate translation: "I will surely cleanse the speech of the peoples from the defilement of the names of other gods so that they can pray to me acceptably" (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

I will surely give to the peoples a pure lip

Since Yahweh is speaking of many **peoples**, it may be more natural in your language to use the plural form of **lip**. Alternate translation: "I will surely give the peoples pure lips" (See: **Collective Nouns (p.89)**)

for all of them to call upon the name of Yahweh

Here, **name** represents a person by association with the way that each person has a name. However, in this instance there is also the idea that the peoples will call upon Yahweh (that is, pray to him) by name, acknowledging him as God. Alternate translation: "for all of them to pray to Yahweh by name" (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

upon the name of Yahweh, to serve him

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: "upon my name, to serve me" (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

with} one shoulder

Yahweh is using this expression to mean that the peoples will serve him unitedly, as if they were all putting their shoulders together to lift or push something heavy. Your language may have a comparable expression that you can use in your translation. You could also use plain language. Alternate translation: "shoulder to shoulder" or "together" (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 3:10

From across the rivers of Cush

Yahweh is using one distant place, the area around the **rivers of Cush** (the upper Nile region), to mean distant places in general. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "From even as far away as across the rivers of Cush" or "From even the most distant places" (See: **Synecdoche (p. 178)**)

the daughter of my scattered one

Here the expression **daughter of** describes the people who make up a certain group. The group in view here is the Jewish nation that will have been **scattered** into many different places through exile. Alternate translation: "the people of my scattered nation" (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

the daughter of my scattered one

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "the Jewish people, whom conquering empires will have scattered into many lands" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

will bring my offering

Since Yahweh is speaking of what many people will **bring**, it may be more natural in your language to use the plural form of **offering**. Alternate translation: "will bring my offerings" or "will bring offerings to me" (See: **Collective Nouns (p.89)**)

Zephaniah 3:11

you will not feel shame & your deeds

The words **you** and **your** are singular throughout this verse because Yahweh is speaking to the city of Jerusalem as if it were a person, as he did in [3:7](#). Since Yahweh is actually speaking to the people who live in Jerusalem, you could use the plural forms of “you” and “your” in your translation if your language marks that distinction. (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

the exultant {ones} of your pride

Yahweh is using this possessive form to describe **exultant** or boastful people in the city of Jerusalem who are characterized by pride. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “the people who have been boasting so proudly” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

Zephaniah 3:12

in your midst

See whether you decided to use the singular or plural form of “you” and “your” in the previous verse. It would be helpful to use the same form here. (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

a humble and lowly people

The terms **humble** and **lowly** mean similar things. Yahweh is using the two terms together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: “a genuinely humble people” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

and they will trust in the name of Yahweh

Yahweh is speaking about himself in the third person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could translate this in the first person. Alternate translation: “and they will trust in my name” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.112)**)

and they will trust in the name of Yahweh

Here, **name** represents a person by association with the way that each person has a name. Alternate translation: “and they will trust in me personally” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Zephaniah 3:13

and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth

and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth Since Yahweh is speaking of many people, it may be more natural in your language to use plural forms here. Alternate translation: “and they will not speak lies, and tongues of deceit will not be found in their mouths” (See: **Collective Nouns (p.89)**)

and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. You may wish to show this to your readers by including both phrases in your translation but connecting them with a word other than **and**. Alternate translation: “and they will not speak lies; no, tongues of deceit will not be found in their mouths” (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “and no one will find deceitful tongues in their mouths” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth

Here the word **found** indicates that something will not be able to be found because it will not be there. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and there will be not be any deceitful tongues in their mouths” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth

Yahweh is using the terms **tongue** and **mouth** by association to mean speaking. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and they will not say any deceitful things” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

But they will graze and lie down, and there will be none frightening {them

If it would be more natural in your language, you could reverse the order of these phrases, since the second phrase gives the reason for the result that the first phrase describes. Alternate translation: “And since no one will frighten them, they will be able to graze and lie down” (See: **Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship (p.95)**)

But they will graze and lie down, and there will be none frightening {them

Yahweh is speaking as if the people in the remnant of Israel will be animals that will **graze** and **lie down** in pastures. He means that they will be able to live peacefully, like animals grazing undisturbed out in a field. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “But they will be able to live without anyone disturbing them” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:14

Sing, & Shout, & Rejoice and exult

The implied “you” in the imperatives **Sing**, **Rejoice**, and **exult** is singular because Zephaniah is addressing a group as if it were a single individual. The implied “you” in the imperative **Shout** is plural because Zephaniah is addressing a group as a number of individuals. Use the same singular and plural forms in your translation if your language marks a distinction between singular and plural “you” and you decide to retain the singular and plural forms of address. However, see the notes to the rest of this verse, which suggest the possibility of using a plural address throughout the verse. (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

daughter of Zion

See how you translated the expression **daughter of** in 3:10. Here as well it describes the people who make up a certain group. Alternate translation: “you people of Zion” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

daughter of Zion

The word **Zion** is the name of the mountain on which the city of Jerusalem was located. Zephaniah is using the name by association to represent the entire kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. Alternate translation: “you people of Judah” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.118)**)

Israel

Zephaniah is addressing many people by the name of their nation, **Israel**. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “you people of Israel” (See: **Collective Nouns (p.89)**)

Rejoice and exult

The terms **Rejoice** and **exult** mean similar things. Zephaniah is using the two terms together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could express the emphasis with a single phrase. Alternate translation: “Rejoice greatly” (See: **Doublet (p.105)**)

with all of {your} heart

Here the **heart** represents the feelings. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “with deep emotion” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

daughter of Jerusalem

See how you translated the expression **daughter of** earlier in this verse. Alternate translation: “you people of Jerusalem” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

Zephaniah 3:15

your judgments; & You will not fear

As the General Notes to this chapter discuss, the words “you” and “your” are singular in these instances and generally in verses 16–19 because they are addressing Jerusalem as an individual. If you decide to retain the singular address, use the singular form in your translation if your language marks that distinction, but use plural forms if you decide to have a plural address. (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

your judgments

Zephaniah is using this possessive form not to describe **judgments** that the people of Jerusalem have made but to describe judgments that **Yahweh** has made against them. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “his judgments against you” (See: **Possession (p.157)**)

The king of Israel

It is true in one sense that **Yahweh** is the **king** of the people of **Israel**. As their God, he is the ruler whom they must obey. But in another sense, he is not literally the king who rules from the palace in Jerusalem. It may be helpful to clarify this for your readers. Alternate translation: “The ruler of Israel” or “The God whom the Israelites worship and obey” (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:16

In that day

Zephaniah is using the term **day** to refer to a specific time. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “At that time” (See: **Idiom (p.126)**)

it will be said

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Some languages might use an indefinite pronoun. Alternate translation: “they will say” (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

to Jerusalem, Do not fear, Zion! Do not slacken your hands

The word **your** and the implied “you” in the imperative **Do not fear** are singular here because they are addressing **Zion** as an individual. However, the implied “you” in the imperative **Do not slacken** is plural because it envisions Zion as a group consisting of a number of individuals. You may have decided to use plural forms in verses 16–19. Alternate translation, using plural forms: “to the people of Jerusalem, ‘Do not fear, you people of Zion! None of you slacken your hands’” (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

Do not fear, Zion! Do not slacken your hands

These two phrases mean similar things. The people who are speaking to Zion are using repetition to emphasize the idea that the phrases express. (They are referring to the way that a person’s hands **slacken** or become limp when that person is afraid.) If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine these phrases. Alternate translation: “There is no reason for you to become weak with fear, Zion” (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

Zephaniah 3:17

he will be silent in his love

Since the people who are speaking to Jerusalem say that Yahweh will **rejoice** and **exult**, they do not mean that he will literally **be silent**. Rather, they mean that Yahweh will no longer speak words of condemnation and judgment against Jerusalem. You could indicate that in your translation if it would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "in his love, he will no longer speak to condemn you" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

Zephaniah 3:18

I will gather the ones grieving for the solemn assembly, they are from you; the reproach {was} a burden upon her

This verse is very difficult to understand. Modern versions translate it in many different ways. The ULT offers one reasonable interpretation of it. If a translation of the Bible exists in your region, you may wish to follow the interpretation that it expresses. If a translation of the Bible does not exist in your region, you may wish to follow the interpretation of ULT. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.86)**)

I will gather the ones grieving for the solemn assembly, they are from you

Yahweh may be using one kind of worship, a **solemn assembly**, to mean worship in general. He is addressing the city of Jerusalem as if it were an individual, so the phrase **they are from you** may be clarifying that the people who are **grieving** are Judeans who have been taken into exile and who are sad because they can no longer participate in the worship of Yahweh. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "I will bring back the Judeans who have been taken into exile, who are sad because they cannot take part in public worship of me" (See: **Synecdoche (p.178)**)

I will gather

This is the beginning of a direct quotation from Yahweh that continues through verse 20. You may wish to indicate that in your translation, using a natural way of introducing direct quotations in your language. Alternate translation: "Yahweh says, 'I will gather'" (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)

the reproach {was} a burden upon her

Yahweh is speaking as if the **reproach** of being conquered were literally a **burden** or heavy weight that Jerusalem was carrying with difficulty. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "it was painful for the people of Jerusalem to feel the disgrace of being conquered" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

Zephaniah 3:19

And I will save the lame and gather the cast-out one

The expressions **lame** and **cast-out one** are both feminine singular, suggesting that Yahweh is using both expressions to refer to Jerusalem as if that city were a female individual. In that case, Yahweh would be using repetition to emphasize the idea that these phrases express. The reference would actually be to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, who would be **lame** or limping from the difficulty of walking from their homeland to a place of exile and who could be described as **cast-out** since they had been taken from their homeland. It may be helpful to indicate in your translation that these two phrases are expressing the same idea. Alternate translation: "And I will rescue the people of Judah who are limping from walking so far away from home; yes, I will bring them back from exile" (See: **Parallelism (p.149)**)

the lame

Yahweh is using the adjective **lame** as a noun to mean a certain kind of person. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you can translate this adjective with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: "the lame people" or "the people of Judah who are limping from walking so far away from home" (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.145)**)

the cast-out one

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "the exile" or "the people of Judah whose enemies have taken them into exile" (See: **Active or Passive (p.81)**)

And I will turn them into praise, and their shame into a name in all of the earth

Yahweh is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You can supply these words from the context if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: "And I will turn them into praise, and I will turn their shame into a name in all of the earth." (See: **Ellipsis (p.107)**)

And I will turn them into praise

Yahweh is speaking as if he were literally going to **turn** the people of Judah into **praise**. If it would be clearer in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "And I will cause people to praise them" (See: **Metaphor (p.137)**)

and their shame into a name in all of the earth

Here, **name** represents the reputation of a group. Alternate translation: "and I will give them a good reputation throughout the earth instead of the shame that they now experience" (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Zephaniah 3:20

I will bring you in

As the General Notes to this chapter indicate, the words **you** and **your** are plural in this verse. Yahweh is now addressing the people of Judah as a group of individuals. If you have been using singular and plural forms in your translation to show the different kinds of address in this chapter, you may wish to indicate explicitly that the address changes to plural here. Alternate translation: “I will bring in you people of Judah” (See: **Forms of ‘You’ — Singular (p.114)**)

I will give you for a name and for praise among all of the peoples of the earth

See how you translated term **name** in the previous verse. Alternate translation: “I will give you a good reputation among all of the peoples of the earth, and they will praise you” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

in my restoring your fortunes before your eyes

Yahweh is using the term **eyes** by association to mean sight. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. It may be helpful to begin a new sentence here. Alternate translation: “You will personally witness me restoring your fortunes” (See: **Metonymy (p.143)**)

Yahweh has spoken

Zephaniah is using this phrase to indicate that verses 18–20 have been a quotation of a message that Yahweh gave him for the people of Judah. (This phrase means the same thing as “the declaration of Yahweh,” which occurs several times in the book.) Consider natural ways of identifying direct quotations in your language. It may be more natural for you to put this attribution of the saying to Yahweh at the beginning of the message, that is, at the start of verse 18, as the UST does. (See: **Quotations and Quote Margins (p.164)**)



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Version 78

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: [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:7](#); [Zephaniah 1:11](#); [Zephaniah 1:17](#); [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:1](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [Zephaniah 3:6](#); [Zephaniah 3:10](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:16](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#)

Apostrophe

Description

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples from the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:5](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:4](#); [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#); [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 1:13](#); [Zephaniah 2:1](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 2:5](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:1](#); [Zephaniah 3:2](#); [Zephaniah 3:3](#); [Zephaniah 3:6](#); [Zephaniah 3:17](#); [Zephaniah 3:18](#)

Collective Nouns

Description

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

A collective noun is a singular noun that refers to a group of something. Examples: a **family**, **clan**, or **tribe** is a group of people who are related to each other; a **flock** is a group of birds or sheep; a **fleet** is a group of ships; and an **army** is a group of soldiers.

Many collective nouns are used exclusively as a singular replacement for a group as in the examples above. Frequently in the Bible the name of an ancestor is used, through a process of metonymy, as a collective noun referencing the group of his descendants. In the Bible, sometimes the singular noun will take a singular verb form, other times it will take a plural verb form. This may depend on how the author is thinking about the group, or whether the action is being done as a group or as individuals.

Reason This is a Translation Issue

There are several issues that require care when translating collective nouns. Further care is needed because the language you are translating into may not use collective nouns in the same way as the language you are translating from. Issues include:

The source language may have a collective noun for a group that the target language does not and vice-versa. You may have to translate a collective noun with a plural noun in your language, or you may need to translate a plural noun with a collective noun in your language.

Subject-verb agreement. Different languages or dialects may have different rules about using singular or plural verbs with collective nouns. Examples (from Wikipedia):

a singular noun with a singular verb: The team *is* in the dressing room.

a singular noun with a plural verb which is correct in British, but not American, English: The team *are* fighting among themselves. The team *have* finished the project.

Pronoun agreement. Similar to the previous, care needs to be taken to use the correct pronoun plurality and possibly gender or noun class to agree with the number/gender/class of the noun used. See the biblical examples below.

Clarity of referent. Especially if there is a mismatch in your translation between the verb and noun or pronoun concerning any of the factors above, readers may be confused about who or what is being referenced.

Examples from the Bible

And Joab and all the **army** which was with him arrived (2 Samuel 3:23a ULT)

The word in bold is written in singular form in both Hebrew and English, but it refers to a group of warriors that fight together.

and though the **flock** is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls. (Habakkuk 3:17b ULT)

The word in bold is singular and refers to a group of sheep.

And he went out again beside the sea, and all the **crowd** was coming to him, and he was teaching **them**. (Mark 2:13 ULT)

Note in this example that the noun is singular but the pronoun is plural. This may or may not be allowed or natural in your language.

Do not let **your heart** be troubled. **You** believe in God; believe also in me. (John 14:1 ULT)

In this verse, the words translated “your” and “you” are plural, referring to many people. The word “heart” is singular in form, but it refers to all of their hearts as a group.

And he shall take the **hair** of the head of his separation. And he shall put **it** on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. (Num 6:18b ULT)

The word **hair** is singular, but it refers to many hairs, not just one.

And Pharaoh said, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let **Israel** go? I do not know Yahweh; and moreover, I will not let **Israel** go.” (Exodus 5:2 ULT)

Here, “Israel” is singular, but means “the Israelites” by metonymy.

Translation Strategies

If your language has a collective (singular) noun that refers to the same group as referenced by the collective noun in the source text, then translate the word using that term. If not, here are some strategies to consider:

- (1) Translate the collective noun with a plural noun.
- (2) Add a plural word to the collective noun so that you can use a plural verb and pronouns.
- (3) Use a phrase to describe the group that the collective noun references. A useful strategy here can be to use a general collective noun that refers to a group of people or things.
- (4) If your language uses a collective noun for something that is a plural noun in the source language, you can translate the plural noun as a collective noun and, if necessary, change the form of the verb and any pronouns so that they agree with the singular noun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate the collective noun with a plural noun.

And Pharaoh said, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let **Israel** go? I do not know Yahweh; and moreover, I will not let **Israel** go.” (Exodus 5:2 ULT)

And Pharaoh said, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let **the Israelites** go? I do not know Yahweh; and moreover, I will not let **the Israelites** go.”

And he shall take the **hair** of the head of his separation. And he shall put **it** on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. (Num 6:18b ULT)

And he shall take the **hairs** of the head of his separation. And he shall put **them** on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings.

- (2) Add a plural word to the collective noun so that you can use a plural verb and pronouns.

And Joab and all the **army** which was with him arrived (2 Samuel 3:23a ULT)

And Joab and all the **army men who were** with him arrived

And he went out again beside the sea, and all the **crowd** was coming to him, and he was teaching **them**. (Mark 2:13 ULT)

And he went out again beside the sea, and all the **people of the crowd were** coming to him, and he was teaching **them**.

- (3) Use a phrase to describe the group that the collective noun references. A useful strategy here can be to use a general collective noun that refers to a group of people or things.

and though the **flock** is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls. (Habakkuk 3:17b ULT)

and though the **group of sheep** is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls.

And Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let **Israel** go? I do not know Yahweh; and moreover, I will not let **Israel** go." (Exodus 5:2 ULT)

And Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let **the people of Israel** go? I do not know Yahweh; and moreover, I will not let **the people of Israel** go."

(4) If your language uses a collective noun for something that is a plural noun in the source language, you can translate the plural noun as a collective noun and, if necessary, change the form of the verb and any pronouns so that they agree with the singular noun.

Now this John had his clothing from the **hairs** of a camel and a leather belt around his waist (Matthew 3:4a ULT)

Now this John had his clothing from the **hair** of a camel and a leather belt around his waist

You shall not make for yourself a carved figure nor any likeness that {is} in **the heavens** above, or that {is} in the earth beneath, or that {is} in **the waters** under the earth. (Deuteronomy 5:8 ULT)

You shall not make for yourself a carved figure nor any likeness that is in **heaven** above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in **the water** under the earth.

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:9](#); [Zephaniah 3:10](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#)

Connect — Goal (Purpose) Relationship

Logical Relationships

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

This page answers the question: *How can I translate a goal (purpose) relationship?*

Goal (or Purpose) Relationship

Description

A Goal Relationship is a logical relationship in which the second event is the purpose or goal of the first event. In order for something to be a goal relationship, someone must do the first event with the intention that it will cause the second event.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In Scripture, the goal or purpose may be stated either first or second. But in some languages, the goal or purpose must always occur in the same position (either first or second) in order for that logical relationship to be understood. You (the translator) need to understand the relationship between the two parts and communicate those accurately in your language. This may require changing the order of the two events. It may also require specific words to indicate that one is the goal or purpose of the other. Words commonly used to indicate a goal relationship in English are “in order to,” “in order that” or “so that.” It is important that the translator recognize the words that signal a goal relationship and translate that relationship in a natural way.

Examples From OBS and the Bible

She became angry and falsely accused Joseph **so that he was arrested and sent to prison.**
(Story 8 Frame 5 OBS)

The goal or purpose of the woman’s false accusation was to get Joseph arrested and sent to prison.

Meanwhile Gideon, his son, was threshing out wheat at the winepress **in order to hide from the presence of Midian.** (Judges 6:11b ULT)

Here the prepositional phrase begins with “in order to.”

Now if I have found favor in your eyes, show me your ways **so that I may know you and continue to find favor in your eyes.** Remember that this nation is your people. (Exodus 33:13 ULT)

Moses wants God to show him God’s ways for the goal or purpose of Moses knowing God and continuing to find favor with God.

Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **for her to glean,** and do not rebuke her! (Ruth 2:16 ULT)

The goal or purpose of Boaz instructing the men to pull out the grain from their bundles and leave it was for Ruth to gather (glean) it.

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem, **and let us see this thing that has happened,** which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15 ULT)

The purpose of going to Bethlehem was to see the thing that had happened. Here the purpose is not marked and might be misunderstood.

“... if you want **to enter into life**, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17b ULT)

The goal of keeping the commandments is to enter into life.

Do not turn from it to the right or to the left **so that you may be wise** in everything in which you walk. (Joshua 1:7c ULT)

The purpose of not turning away from the instructions that Moses gave to the Israelites was so that they would be wise.

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance**.’ So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

The purpose of the vine growers killing the heir was so they could take his inheritance. They state both events as a plan, joining them only with “and.” Then the word “so” marks the reporting of the first event, but the second event (the goal or purpose) is not stated.

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) If the construction of the Goal statement is unclear, change it to one that is more clear.
- (2) If the order of the statements makes the Goal statement unclear or confusing for the reader, then change the order.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the construction of the goal statement is unclear, change it to one that is more clear.

“Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **for her to glean**, and do not rebuke her!” (Ruth 2:16 ULT)

“Even be sure to pull some out from the bundles for her and leave it **so that she can glean it**, and do not rebuke her!”

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem, **and let us see this thing that has happened**, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15 ULT)

The shepherds said to each other, “Let us indeed go over as far as Bethlehem **so that we can see this thing that has happened**, which the Lord has made known to us.”

- (2) If the order of the statements makes the goal statement unclear or confusing for the reader, then change the order.

“... if you want **to enter into life**, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17b ULT)

“... keep the commandments if you want **to enter into life**.” or: “... keep the commandments **so that you can enter into life**.”

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance**.’ So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

(1) and (2)

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **and take over his inheritance.**' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. (Matt 21:38-39 ULT)

But when the vine growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him **so that we can take over his inheritance.**' So they took him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him **so that they could take over his inheritance.**

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:2](#)

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: [Zephaniah 2:10](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#)

Direct and Indirect Quotations

Description

There are two kinds of quotations: direct quotations and indirect quotations.

A direct quotation occurs when someone reports what another person said from the viewpoint of that original speaker. People usually expect that this kind of quotation will represent the original speaker's exact words. In the example below, John would have said "I" when referring to himself, so the narrator, who is reporting John's words, uses the word "I" in the quotation to refer to John. To show that these are John's exact words, many languages put the words between quotation marks: "".

- John said, "I do not know at what time I will arrive."

An indirect quotation occurs when a speaker reports what someone else said, but in this case, the speaker is reporting it from his own point of view instead and not from the original person's point of view. This kind of quotation usually contains changes in pronouns, and it often includes changes in time, in word choices, and in length. In the example below, the narrator refers to John as "he" in the quotation and uses the word "would" to replace the future tense, indicated by "will."

- John said that he did not know at what time he would arrive.

This page answers the question: *What are direct and indirect quotations?*

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages, reported speech can be expressed by either direct or indirect quotations. In other languages, it is more natural to use one than the other. There may be a certain meaning implied by using one rather than the other. So for each quotation, translators need to decide whether it is best to translate it as a direct quotation or as an indirect quotation.

Examples From the Bible

The verses in the examples below contain both direct and indirect quotations. In the explanation below the verse, we have marked in bold the words that are quoted.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."
(Luke 5:14 ULT)

- Indirect quote: He commanded him **to tell no one**,
- Direct quote: but told him, "**Go, show yourself to the priest ...**"

And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21 ULT)

- Indirect quote: Being asked by the Pharisees **when the kingdom of God was coming**,
- Direct quote: he answered them and said, "**The kingdom of God is not coming with careful observation. Neither will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is among you.**"
- Direct quotes: Neither will they say, '**Look, here it is!**' or, '**There it is!**'

Translation Strategies

If the kind of quote used in the source text would work well in your language, consider using it. If the kind of quote used in that context is not natural for your language, follow these strategies.

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.
- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If a direct quote would not work well in your language, change it to an indirect quote.

And he commanded him to tell no one, but, **“Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”** (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him to tell no one, but **to go and show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for his cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.**

- (2) If an indirect quote would not work well in your language, change it to a direct quote.

And he commanded him **to tell no one**, but, “Go, show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing, according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” (Luke 5:14 ULT)

He commanded him, **“Tell no one.** But go and show yourself to the priest and offer a sacrifice for your cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.”

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:5](#)

Distinguishing Versus Informing or Reminding

Description

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

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

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

When the phrase that modifies a noun is a relative clause (a phrase that starts with a word such as “who” or “which”), some languages use a comma to mark the difference between (1) making a distinction between similar items and (2) giving more information about an item. Without the comma, the sentence below communicates that the added phrase is making a distinction:

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

With the comma, the phrase is giving more information:

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You must surely open your hand to your brother, **to your needy and to your poor** in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11 ULT)

The phrases “to your needy and to your poor” give further information about “your brother.” They do not refer to a separate group of people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You must surely open your hand to your brother, **to your needy and to your poor** in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11 ULT)

You must surely open your hand to any of **your needy and poor brothers** in your land.

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

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

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

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

You must surely open your hand to your brother, **to your needy and to your poor** in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:11 ULT)

You must surely open your hand to your brother **who is needy and poor** in your land.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Double Negatives ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 3:4](#); [Zephaniah 3:8](#)

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 **unpunished**. (Proverbs 11:21a ULT)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Double negatives mean very different things in different languages.

- In some languages, such as English, a second negative in a clause cancels the first one, creating a positive sentence. So, “He is not unintelligent” means “He is intelligent.”
- In some languages, such as French and Spanish, two negative words in a clause do not cancel each other to become a positive. The Spanish sentence, “No vi a nadie,” literally says “I did not see no one.” It has both the word ‘no’ next to the verb and ‘nadie,’ which means “no one.” The two negatives are seen as in agreement with each other, and the sentence means, “I did not see anyone.”
- In some languages, a double negative creates a stronger negative statement.
- In some languages, a double negative creates a positive sentence, but it is a weak statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” means, “He is somewhat intelligent.”
- In some languages, including the languages of the Bible, a double negative can produce a stronger positive meaning than a simple positive statement. So, “He is not unintelligent” can mean “He is very intelligent.” In this case, the double negative is actually the figure of speech called [litotes](#).

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

Examples From the Bible

The Greek of John 15:5 says:

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν
Without me **not** you can do **nothing**

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

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

or:

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

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

This means "in order to be fruitful."

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

This means "a prophet is honored."

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

This means "I want you to be knowledgeable."

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

For we do **not** have a high priest who **cannot** feel sympathy for our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15a ULT)

"For we have a high priest who can feel sympathy for our weaknesses."

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

"... so that they may be fruitful."

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

χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν
Without me **not** you can do **nothing** (John 15:5)

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

or:

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

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

...ἰῶτα 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: [Zephaniah 3:5](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:6](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#); [Zephaniah 1:16](#); [Zephaniah 3:6](#); [Zephaniah 3:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#)

Ellipsis

Description

An ellipsis¹ occurs when a speaker or writer leaves out one or more words that normally should be in the sentence. The speaker or writer does this because he knows that the hearer or reader will understand the meaning of the sentence and supply the words in his mind when he hears or reads the words that are there. For example:

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

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

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

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)

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](#))

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

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

Absolute Ellipsis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

English has a punctuation symbol which is also called an ellipsis. It is a series of three dots (...) used to indicate an intentional omission of a word, phrase, sentence or more from text without altering its original meaning. This translationAcademy article is not about the punctuation mark, but about the concept of omission of words that normally should be in the sentence. ↩

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:4](#); [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:6](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#); [Zephaniah 1:13](#); [Zephaniah 1:17](#); [Zephaniah 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:7](#)

First, Second or Third Person

Normally a speaker refers to himself as “I” and the person he is speaking to as “you.” Sometimes in the Bible a speaker refers to himself or to the person he is speaking to with terms other than “I” or “you.”

Description

- First person — This is how a speaker normally refers to himself. English uses the pronouns “I” and “we.” (Also: me, my, mine; us, our, ours)
- Second person — This is how a speaker normally refers to the person or people he is speaking to. English uses the pronoun “you.” (Also: your, yours)
- Third person — This is how a speaker refers to someone else. English uses the pronouns “he,” “she,” “it,” and “they.” (Also: him, his, her, hers, its; them, their, theirs) Noun phrases like “the man” or “the woman” are also third person.

This page answers the question: *What are first, second, and third person, and how do I translate when a third person form does not refer to the third person?*

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

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

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses the third person to refer to himself or to the people he is speaking to. Readers might think that the speaker was referring to someone else. They might not understand that he meant “I” or “you.”

Examples From the Bible

Sometimes people used the third person instead of “I” or “me” to refer to themselves.

But David said to Saul, “**Your servant** used to keep **his** father’s sheep.” (1 Samuel 17:34 ULT)

David referred to himself in the third person as “your servant” and used “his.” He was calling himself Saul’s servant in order to show his humility before Saul.

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said, “... Do you have an arm like **God’s**? Can you thunder with a voice like **his**?” (Job 40:6, 9 ULT)

God referred to himself in the third person with the words “God’s” and “his.” He did this to emphasize that he is God, and he is powerful.

Sometimes people use the third person instead of “you” or “your” to refer to the person or people they are speaking to.

Abraham answered and said, “Look, I have undertaken to speak to my Lord, even though I am only dust and ashes!” (Genesis 18:27 ULT)

Abraham was speaking to the Lord, and referred to the Lord as “My Lord” rather than as “you.” He did this to show his humility before God.

So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if **each of you** does not forgive **his** brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:35 ULT)

After saying “each of you,” Jesus used the third person “his” instead of “your.”

Translation Strategies

If using the third person to mean “I” or “you” would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Use the third person phrase along with the pronoun “I” or “you.”
- (2) Simply use the first person (“I”) or second person (“you”) instead of the third person.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the third person phrase along with the pronoun “I” or “you.”

But David said to Saul, “**Your servant** used to keep **his** father’s sheep.” (1 Samuel 17:34)

But David said to Saul, “**I, your servant**, used to keep **my** father’s sheep.”

- (2) Simply use the first person (“I”) or second person (“you”) instead of the third person.

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said, “... Do you have an arm like **God’s**? Can you thunder with a voice like **his**?” (Job 40:6, 9 ULT)

Then Yahweh answered Job out of a fierce storm and said, “... Do you have an arm like **mine**? Can you thunder with a voice like **mine**?”

So also my heavenly Father will do to you if **each of you** does not forgive **his** brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:35 ULT)

So also my heavenly Father will do to you if **each of you** does not forgive **your** brother from your heart.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Forms of You (UTA PDF)

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:6](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#); [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 2:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:7](#); [Zephaniah 3:9](#); [Zephaniah 3:12](#)

Forms of 'You' — Singular

Description

Some languages have a **singular** form of “you” for when the word “you” refers to just one person, and a **plural** form for when the word “you” refers to more than one person. Translators who speak one of these languages will always need to know what the speaker meant so they can choose the right word for “you” in their language. Other languages, such as English, have only one form, which people use regardless of how many people it refers to.

This page answers the question: *How do I know if the word 'you' is singular?*

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

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

Forms of You ([UTA PDF](#))

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

The Bible was first written in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. These languages all have both a singular form of “you” and a plural form of “you.” When we read the Bible in those languages, the pronouns and verb forms show us whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one. When we read the Bible in a language that does not have different forms of you, we need to look at the context to see how many people the speaker was speaking to.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators who speak a language that has distinct singular and plural forms of “you” will always need to know what the speaker meant so they can choose the right word for “you” in their language.
- Many languages also have different forms of the verb depending on whether the subject is singular or plural. So even if there is no pronoun meaning “you,” translators of these languages will need to know if the speaker was referring to one person or more than one.

Often the context will make it clear whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one. If you look at the other pronouns in the sentence, they will help you know the number of people the speaker was speaking to. Sometimes Greek and Hebrew speakers used the singular form of “you” even though they were speaking to a group of people. (See [Forms of 'You' — Singular to a Crowd](#).)

Examples From the Bible

But he said, “All these things **I** have kept from my youth.” But when he heard this, Jesus said to him, “One thing is still lacking to **you**. All things, as much as **you** have, **sell** all and **distribute** to the poor, and **you** will have treasure in heaven—and **come, follow** me.” (Luke 18:21-22 ULT)

The ruler was speaking about just himself when he said “I.” This shows us that when Jesus said “you” he was referring only to the ruler and he used the singular form. So languages that have singular and plural forms of “you” need the singular form here, as well as for the verbs “sell,” “distribute,” “come,” and “follow.”

The angel said to him, “**Dress yourself** and **put on your** sandals.” So he did that. He said to him, “**Put on your** outer garment and **follow** me.” (Acts 12:8 ULT)

The angel used singular forms here and the context makes it clear that he was speaking to one person and that only one person did what the the angel commanded. So languages that have singular and plural forms of “you” would need the singular form here for “yourself” and “your.” Also, if verbs have different forms for singular and plural subjects, then the verbs “dress,” “put on,” and “follow” need the form that indicates a singular subject.

All the ones {who are} with me greet **you**. **Greet** the ones loving us in faith. Grace {be} with all of **you**. (Titus 3:15 ULT)

Paul wrote this letter to one person, Titus, so most of the time the word “you” in this letter is singular and refers only to Titus. In this verse, the first “you” is singular, so the greeting is for Titus, as well as the instruction to greet the others there. The second “you,” however, is plural, so the blessing is for Titus and for all of the believers there in Crete.

“Having gone, **search** carefully for the young child, and after **you** have found him, **report** to me so that I also, having come, might worship him.” (Matthew 2:8 ULT)

Since Herod is speaking to all of the learned men, the word “you” and the commands “search” and “report” are plural.

Strategies for finding out how many people “you” refers to

- (1) Look at the notes to see if they tell whether “you” refers to one person or more than one person.
- (2) Look at the UST to see if it says anything that would show you whether the word “you” refers to one person or more than one person.
- (3) If you have a Bible that is written in a language that distinguishes “you” singular from “you” plural, see which form of “you” that Bible has in that sentence.
- (4) Look at the context to see how many people the speaker was talking to and who responded.

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:1](#); [Zephaniah 2:5](#); [Zephaniah 3:11](#); [Zephaniah 3:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:16](#); [Zephaniah 3:20](#)

Generic Noun Phrases

Description

Generic noun phrases refer to people or things in general rather than to specific individuals or things. This happens frequently in proverbs, because proverbs tell about things that are true about people in general.

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

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

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

Can **a man** walk on hot coals without scorching his feet? So is **the man who goes in to his neighbor's wife; the one who touches her** will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 6:28-29 ULT)

The phrases in bold above do not refer to a specific man. They refer to any man who does these things.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages have different ways of showing that noun phrases refer to something in general. You (the translator) should refer to these general ideas in ways that are natural in your language.

Examples From the Bible

The **righteous person** is kept away from trouble and it comes upon **the wicked** instead. (Proverbs 11:8 ULT)

The bold phrases above do not refer to a specific person but to anyone who does what is right or anyone who is wicked.

People curse **the man who refuses to sell grain**. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

This does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who refuses to sell grain.

Yahweh gives favor to **a good man**, but he condemns **a man who makes evil plans**. (Proverbs 12:2 ULT)

The phrase "a good man" does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who is good. The phrase "a man who makes evil plans" does not refer to a particular man, but to any person who makes evil plans.

Translation Strategies

If your language can use the same wording as in the ULT to refer to people or things in general rather than to specific individuals or things, consider using the same wording. If not, here are some strategies you might use.

- (1) Use the word "the" in the noun phrase.
- (2) Use the word "a" in the noun phrase.
- (3) Use the word "any," as in "any person" or "anyone."
- (4) Use the plural form, as in "people."
- (5) Use any other way that is natural in your language.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the word "the" in the noun phrase.

Yahweh gives favor to **a good man**, but he condemns **a man who makes evil plans**. (Proverbs 12:2 ULT)

"Yahweh gives favor to **the good man**, but he condemns **the man who makes evil plans**." (Proverbs 12:2)

(2) Use the word "a" in the noun phrase.

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

"People curse **a man** who refuses to sell grain."

(3) Use the word "any," as in "any person" or "anyone."

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

"People curse **any man** who refuses to sell grain."

(4) Use the plural form, as in "people" (or in this sentence, "men").

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

"People curse **men** who refuse to sell grain"

(5) Use any other way that is natural in your language.

People curse **the man** who refuses to sell grain. (Proverbs 11:26 ULT)

"People curse **whoever** refuses to sell grain."

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 2:15](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:1](#); [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#); [Zephaniah 1:11](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 2:10](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#)

Hyperbole

Description

A speaker or writer can use exactly the same words to say something that he means as completely true, or as generally true, or as a hyperbole. This is why it can be hard to decide how to understand a statement. For example, the sentence below could mean three different things.

It rains here every night.

The speaker means this as literally true if he means that it really does rain here every night.

The speaker means this as a **generalization** if he means that it rains here most nights.

The speaker means this as a **hyperbole** if he wants to say that it rains more than it actually does, usually in order to express a strong attitude toward the amount or frequency of rain, such as being annoyed or being happy about it.

This page answers the question: *What are hyperboles? What are generalizations? How can I translate them?*

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

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

Hyperbole

In hyperbole, a figure of speech that uses exaggeration, a speaker deliberately describes something with an extreme or even unreal statement, usually to show his strong feeling or opinion about it. He expects people to understand that he is exaggerating.

They will not leave **stone upon stone in you**. (Luke 19:44b ULT)

This is an exaggeration. It means that the enemies will completely destroy Jerusalem.

Moses was educated in **all the wisdom of the Egyptians**. (Acts 7:22a ULT)

This hyperbole means that he had learned everything an Egyptian education could offer.

Generalization

This is a statement that is true most of the time or in most situations that it could apply to.

The one who ignores instruction **will have poverty and shame**, but **honor will come** to him who learns from correction. (Proverbs 13:18)

These generalizations tell about what normally happens to people who ignore instruction and what normally happens to people who learn from correction. There may be some exceptions to these statements, but they are generally true.

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as **the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words**. (Matthew 6:7)

This generalization tells about what Gentiles were known for doing. Many Gentiles did this. It does not matter if a few did not. The point was that the hearers should not join in this well-known practice.

Even though a hyperbole or a generalization may have a strong-sounding word like "all," "always," "none," or "never," it does not necessarily mean **exactly** "all," "always," "none," or "never." It simply means "most," "most of the time," "hardly any," or "rarely."

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Readers need to be able to understand whether or not a statement is literally true.

If readers realize that a statement is not literally true, they need to be able to understand whether it is a hyperbole, a generalization, or a lie. (Though the Bible is completely true, it tells about people who did not always tell the truth.)

Examples From the Bible

Examples of Hyperbole

If your hand causes you to stumble, **cut it off**. It is better for you to enter into life maimed ... (Mark 9:43a ULT)

When Jesus said to cut off your hand, he meant that we should **do whatever extreme things** we need to do in order not to sin. He used this hyperbole to show how extremely important it is to try to stop sinning.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The bolded phrase is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that the Philistine army was overwhelming in number. It means that there were **many, many** soldiers in the Philistine army.

But as his anointing teaches you **everything** and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:27b ULT)

This is a hyperbole. It expresses the assurance that God's Spirit teaches us about **all things that we need to know**. God's Spirit does not teach us about everything that it is possible to know.

When they found him, they also said to him, "**Everyone** is looking for you." (Mark 1:37 ULT)

The disciples probably did not mean that everyone in the city was looking for Jesus, but that **many people** were looking for him, or that all of Jesus' closest friends there were looking for him. This is an exaggeration for the purpose of expressing the emotion that they and many others were worried about him.

Examples of Generalization

Can **any good thing** come out of Nazareth? (John 1:46b ULT)

This rhetorical question is meant to express the generalization that there is nothing good in Nazareth. The people there had a reputation for being uneducated and not strictly religious. Of course, there were exceptions.

One of them, of their own prophets, has said, "**Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies**." (Titus 1:12 ULT)

This is a generalization that means that Cretans had a reputation to be like this because, in general, this is how Cretans behaved. It is possible that there were exceptions.

A lazy hand causes a person to be poor, but the hand of the diligent person gains riches. (Proverbs 10:4 ULT)

This is generally true, and it reflects the experience of most people. It is possible that there are exceptions in some circumstances.

Caution

- Do not assume that something is an exaggeration just because it seems to be impossible. God does miraculous things.

They saw Jesus **walking on the sea** and coming near the boat. (John 6:19b ULT)

This is not hyperbole. Jesus really walked on the water. It is a literal statement.

- Do not assume that the word “all” is always a generalization that means “most.”

Yahweh is righteous in **all** his ways and gracious in **all** he does. (Psalms 145:17 ULT)

Yahweh is always righteous. This is a completely true statement.

Translation Strategies

If the hyperbole or generalization would be natural and people would understand it and not think that it is a lie, consider using it. If not, here are other options.

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.
- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”
- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.
- (4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and troops **as numerous as the sand on the seashore**. (1 Samuel 13:5a ULT)

The Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 men to drive the chariots, and **a great number of troops**.

- (2) For a generalization, show that it is a generalization by using a phrase like “in general” or “in most cases.”

The one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame. (Proverbs 13:18a ULT)

In general, the one who ignores instruction will have poverty and shame

When you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the **Gentiles do**, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. (Matthew 6:7 ULT)

And when you pray, do not make useless repetitions as the Gentiles **generally** do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

- (3) For a hyperbole or a generalization, add a word like “many” or “almost” to show that the hyperbole or generalization is not meant to be exact.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

Almost all the country of Judea and **almost all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. or:

Many of the country of Judea and **many** of the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

(4) For a hyperbole or a generalization that has a word like “all,” “always,” “none,” or “never,” consider deleting that word.

The **whole** country of Judea and **all** the people of Jerusalem went out to him. (Mark 1:5a ULT)

The country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:2](#); [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zephaniah 3:7](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:1](#); [Zephaniah 1:7](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#); [Zephaniah 1:9](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#); [Zephaniah 1:11](#); [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#); [Zephaniah 1:16](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 2:7](#); [Zephaniah 2:8](#); [Zephaniah 2:10](#); [Zephaniah 2:11](#); [Zephaniah 2:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:2](#); [Zephaniah 3:6](#); [Zephaniah 3:7](#); [Zephaniah 3:8](#); [Zephaniah 3:9](#); [Zephaniah 3:10](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:16](#)

Introduction of New and Old Participants

Description

The first time that people or things are mentioned in a story, they are **new participants**. After that, whenever they are mentioned, they are **old participants**.

Now **there was a man from the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus** ... **This man** came to Jesus at night ... Jesus replied and said to **him** ... (John 3:1, 2a, 3a)

This page answers the question: *Why cannot the readers of my translation understand who the author was writing about?*

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

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

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

The first bolded phrase introduces Nicodemus as a new participant. After being introduced, he is then referred to as “This man” and “him” when he has become an old participant.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In order to make your translation clear and natural, it is necessary to refer to the participants in such a way that people will know if they are new participants or participants that they have already read about. Different languages have different ways of doing this. You must follow the way that your language does this, not the way that the source language does this.

Examples From the Bible

New Participants

Often the most important new participant is introduced with a phrase that says that he existed, such as “There was a man,” as in the example below. The phrase “There was” tells us that this man existed. The word “a” in “a man” tells us that the author is speaking about him for the first time. The rest of the sentence tells where this man was from, who his family was, and what his name was.

Now there was a man from Zorah, of the families of the Danites, and his name was Manoah. (Judges 13:2a ULT)

A new participant who is not the most important participant is often introduced in relation to the more important person who was already introduced. In the example below, Manoah’s wife is simply referred to as “his wife.” This phrase shows her relationship to him.

Now there was one man from Zorah, of the families of the Danites, and his name was Manoah. **His wife** was barren and she had never given birth. (Judges 13:2 ULT)

Sometimes a new participant is introduced simply by name because the author assumes that the readers know who the person is. In the first verse of 1 Kings, the author assumes that his readers know who King David is, so there is no need to explain who he is.

Now King David was old, he had advanced in the days, and they covered him with the garments, but it was not warm enough for him. (1 Kings 1:1 ULT)

Old Participants

A person who has already been brought into the story can be referred to with a pronoun after that. In the example below, Manoah is referred to with the pronoun “his,” and his wife is referred to with the pronoun “she.”

■ **His wife** was barren and **she** had never given birth. (Judges 13:2 ULT)

Old participants can also be referred to in other ways, depending on what is happening in the story. In the example below, the story is about bearing a son, and Manoah's wife is referred to by the noun phrase "the wife."

■ The angel of Yahweh appeared to **the wife** and he said to her ... (Judges 13:3a ULT)

If the old participant has not been mentioned for a while, or if there could be confusion between participants, the author may use the participant's name again. In the example below, Manoah is referred to by his name, which the author has not used since verse 2.

■ Then **Manoah** prayed to Yahweh. (Judges 13:8a ULT)

Some languages place an affix on the verb that tells something about the subject. In some of those languages, people do not always use noun phrases or pronouns for old participants when they are the subject of the sentence. The marker on the verb gives enough information for the listener to understand who the subject is. (See [Verbs](#).)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If the participant is new, use one of your language's ways of introducing new participants.
- (2) If it is not clear to whom a pronoun refers, use a noun phrase or name.
- (3) If an old participant is referred to by name or a noun phrase, and people wonder if this is another new participant, try using a pronoun instead. If a pronoun is not needed because people would understand it clearly from the context, then leave out the pronoun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the participant is new, use one of your language's ways of introducing new participants.

Then Joseph, who was called Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated as Son of Encouragement), a Levite from Cyprus by birth ... (Acts 4:36-37 ULT) — Starting the sentence with Joseph's name when he has not been introduced yet might be confusing in some languages.

There was a man from Cyprus who was a Levite. His name was Joseph, and he was given the name Barnabas by the apostles (that is, being interpreted, Son of Encouragement). There was a Levite from Cyprus whose name was Joseph. The apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which means Son of encouragement.

- (2) If it is not clear who a pronoun refers to, use a noun phrase or name.

And it happened that when he was praying in a certain place, when he stopped, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1 ULT) — Since this is the first verse in a chapter, readers might wonder who "he" refers to.

It happened when **Jesus** finished praying in a certain place, that one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples."

- (3) If an old participant is referred to by name or a noun phrase, and people wonder if this is another new participant, try using a pronoun instead. If a pronoun is not needed because people would understand it clearly from the context, then leave out the pronoun.

Joseph's master took Joseph and put him in prison, in the place where all the king's prisoners were put, and Joseph stayed there. (Genesis 39:20) — Since Joseph is the main person in the story, some languages might prefer the pronoun.

Joseph's master took **him** and put **him** in prison, in the place where all the king's prisoners were put, and **he** stayed there in the prison.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Pronouns — When to Use Them ([UTA PDF](#))

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

Litany

Description

A litany is a figure of speech in which the various components of a thing are listed in a series of very similar statements. The speaker does this to indicate that what he is saying should be understood as comprehensive and without exceptions.

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Many languages do not use litanies, and readers could be confused by them. They may wonder why the speaker seems to be saying the same thing over and over again.

Examples From the Bible

Though they dig into Sheol, there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to heaven, there I will bring them down. Though they hide on the top of Carmel, there I will search and take them. Though they are hidden from my sight in the bottom of the sea, there will I give orders to the serpent, and it will bite them. Though they go into captivity, driven by their enemies before them, there will I give orders to the sword, and it will kill them. (Amos 9:2-4 ULT)

In this passage Yahweh is telling the people of Israel that when he punishes them, none of them will escape.

But you should not have looked on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune. And you should not have rejoiced over the sons of Judah in the day of their perishing. And you should not have made your mouth great in a day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Yes, you! You should not have looked on his evil in the day of his calamity. And you women should not have looted his wealth in the day of his calamity. And you should not have stood at the crossroads to cut down his fugitives. And you should not have delivered up his survivors in a day of distress. (Obadiah 1:12-14)

In this passage Yahweh is telling the people of Edom that they should have helped the people of Judah when they were conquered by the Babylonians.

Translation Strategies

If the litany is understood as it is in the ULT, then translate the litany as it is. If it is not understood, then try one or more of the following strategies.

- (1) Often in the Bible there will be a general statement at the beginning or end of a litany that sums up its overall meaning. You can format that statement in a way that will show that it is a summary statement that gives the meaning of the litany.
- (2) You can put each sentence of the litany on a separate line. Also, if each sentence in the litany has two parts, you can format the litany so that the equivalent parts of each sentence line up. Use this or any other type of formatting that will show that each sentence is reinforcing the same meaning.
- (3) You can eliminate words like "and," "but," and "or" at the beginning of sentences so that it will be clearer that the component parts of the litany are all being listed in a row.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) combined with (3):

Often in the Bible there will be a general statement at the beginning or end of a litany that sums up its overall meaning. You can format that statement in a way that will show that it is a summary statement that gives the meaning of the litany;

You can eliminate words like “and,” “but,” and “or” at the beginning of sentences so that it will be clearer that the component parts of the litany are all being listed in a row.

You did nothing to help the Israelites when strangers carried away their wealth. They conquered all the cities of Judah, and they even plundered Jerusalem. And you were just as bad as those foreigners, because you did nothing to help:

You should not have looked on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune. You should not have rejoiced over the sons of Judah in the day of their perishing. You should not have made your mouth great in a day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Yes, you! You should not have looked on his evil in the day of his calamity. You women should not have looted his wealth in the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut down his fugitives. You should not have delivered up his survivors in a day of distress. (Obadiah 1:11-14)

In the above example, verse 11 provides the summary and meaning for the litany that follows in verses 12-14.

(1) combined with (2):

Often in the Bible there will be a general statement at the beginning or end of a litany that sums up its overall meaning. You can format that statement in a way that will show that it is a summary statement that gives the meaning of the litany;

You can put each sentence of the litany on a separate line. Also, if each sentence in the litany has two parts, you can format the litany so that the equivalent parts of each sentence line up. Use this or any other type of formatting that will show that each sentence is reinforcing the same meaning.

Not one of them will get away, not one of them will escape:

Though they dig into Sheol,	there my hand will take them.
Though they climb up to heaven,	there I will bring them down.
Though they hide on the top of Carmel,	there I will search and take them.
Though they are hidden from my sight in the bottom of the sea,	there will I give orders to the serpent, and it will bite them.
Though they go into captivity, driven by their enemies before them,	there will I give orders to the sword, and it will kill them.

(Amos 9:1b-4 ULT)

In the above example, the sentence before the litany explains its overall meaning. That sentence can be placed as an introduction. The second half of each sentence can be formatted in a descending staircase pattern as above, or lined up evenly like the first half of each sentence, or in another way. Use whatever format best shows that these sentences are all communicating the same truth, that it is not possible to escape from God.

”

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:4](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#)

Litotes

Description

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

or:

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

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:1](#)

Merism

Definition

Merism is a figure of speech in which a person refers to something by speaking of two extreme parts of it. By referring to the extreme parts, the speaker intends to include also everything in between those parts.

"I am **the alpha and the omega**," says the Lord God, "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 ULT)

I am **the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**. (Revelation 22:13, ULT)

This page answers the question: *What does the word merism mean and how can I translate phrases that have it?*

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

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

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is a merism that includes everything from the beginning to the end. It means eternal.

... I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth** ..., (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

Heaven and earth is a merism that includes everything that exists.

Reason This is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use merism. The readers of those languages may think that the phrase only applies to the items mentioned. They may not realize that it refers to those two things and everything in between.

Examples From the Bible

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

This bolded phrase is a merism because it speaks of the east and the west and everywhere in between. It means "everywhere."

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13)

The bolded phrase is merism because it speaks of old people and young people and everyone in between. It means "everyone."

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.
- (2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything**.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

In all places, people should praise Yahweh's name.

(2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything, including both what is in heaven and what is on earth**.

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13 ULT)

He will bless **all those** who honor him, regardless of whether they are **young or old**.

"

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

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: [Zephaniah 1:2](#); [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:4](#); [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:6](#); [Zephaniah 1:7](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#); [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#); [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:7](#); [Zephaniah 2:8](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 2:10](#); [Zephaniah 2:11](#); [Zephaniah 2:12](#); [Zephaniah 2:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:2](#); [Zephaniah 3:3](#); [Zephaniah 3:4](#); [Zephaniah 3:8](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:18](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#)

Metonymy

Description

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an item (either physical or abstract) is called not by its own name, but by the name of something closely associated with it. A metonym is a word or phrase used as a substitute for something that it is associated with.

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

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

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

... and **the blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin. (1 John 1:7b ULT)

The blood represents Christ's death.

And he took **the cup** in the same way after supper, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20 ULT)

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

- as a shorter way of referring to something
- to make an abstract idea more meaningful by referring to it with the name of a physical object associated with it

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible uses metonymy very often. Speakers of some languages are not familiar with metonymy and they may not recognize it when they read it in the Bible. If they do not recognize the metonymy, they will not understand the passage or, worse yet, they will get a wrong understanding of the passage. Whenever a metonym is used, people need to be able to understand what it represents.

Examples From the Bible

The Lord God will give to him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

A throne represents the authority of a king. "Throne" is a metonym for "kingly authority," "kingship," or "reign." This means that God would make him become a king who would follow King David.

Then immediately his **mouth** was opened (Luke 1:64a ULT)

The mouth here represents the power to speak. This means that he was able to talk again.

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

The word "wrath" or "anger" is a metonym for "punishment." God was extremely angry with the people and, as a result, he would punish them.

Translation Strategies

If people would easily understand the metonym, consider using it. Otherwise, here are some options.

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.
- (2) Use only the name of the thing the metonym represents.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.

And he took the cup in the same way after the supper, saying, “**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20 ULT)

He took the cup in the same way after supper, saying, “**The wine in this cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

This verse also contains a second metonym: The cup, (representing the wine it contains) also represents the new covenant made with the blood Christ shed for us.

(2) Use the name of the thing the metonym represents.

The Lord God will give him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

“The Lord God will give him **the kingly authority** of his father, David.” or:
“The Lord God will **make him king** like his ancestor, King David.”

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

“Who warned you to flee from God’s coming **punishment**?”

To learn about some common metonymies, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies](#).

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Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:1](#); [Zephaniah 1:4](#); [Zephaniah 1:7](#); [Zephaniah 1:9](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#); [Zephaniah 1:11](#); [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 1:16](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:5](#); [Zephaniah 2:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [Zephaniah 3:9](#); [Zephaniah 3:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#); [Zephaniah 3:20](#)

Nominal Adjectives

Description

In some languages an adjective can be used to refer to a class of things that the adjective describes. When it does, it acts like a noun. For example, the word “rich” is an adjective. Here are two sentences that show that “rich” is an adjective.

The rich man had huge numbers of flocks and herds.
(2 Samuel 12:2 ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes before the word “man” and describes “man.”

He will not be rich; his wealth will not last. (Job 15:29a ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes after the verb “be” and describes “He.”

Here is a sentence that shows that “rich” can also function as a noun.

The rich must not give more than the half shekel, and **the poor** must not give less. (Exodus 30:15b ULT)

In Exodus 30:15, the word “rich” acts as a noun in the phrase “the rich,” and it refers to rich people. The word “poor” also acts as a noun and refers to poor people.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate adjectives that act like nouns?*

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Many times in the Bible adjectives are used as nouns to describe a group of people.
- Some languages do not use adjectives in this way.
- Readers of these languages may think that the text is talking about one particular person when it is really talking about the group of people whom the adjective describes.

Examples From the Bible

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

“The righteous” here are people who are righteous, not one particular righteous person.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

“The meek” here are all people who are meek, not one particular meek person.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses adjectives as nouns to refer to a class of people, consider using the adjectives in this way. If it would sound strange, or if the meaning would be unclear or wrong, here is another option:

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **righteous people**.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

Blessed are **people who are meek**.

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Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:17](#); [Zephaniah 2:3](#); [Zephaniah 3:4](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#)

Oath Formulas

An oath is a solemn promise that someone makes to another person to do something or to solemnly testify that something is true that includes a punishment if the person does not do it.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate oath formulas into my language?*

Description

As a guarantee that the person taking the oath will do what he promises, the person calls on God to punish him severely if he does not do the thing promised, or if what he testifies to is not true. Sometimes the person will name a deity different than God as punisher or will name something that the person holds sacred. In the case of a sacred object, the idea is that the person is willing to let that object be desecrated if he does not fulfill his oath. So an oath has four parts, some of which are often left implied: 1. Calling on God to witness the oath and judge the person making it 2. Making the promise (may be implied as the opposite of the violation) 3. Telling what would be a violation of the oath (may be implied as the opposite of the promise) 4. Saying what punishment God would do if the person violates the oath

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue:

People in some cultures may not be familiar with the practice of taking oaths, and so they may not understand what the people in the Bible are doing. In many languages, people would not take an oath the way that people did in the Bible, and so they might not recognize that the person is taking an oath. In the Old Testament, people often did not speak one or more parts of the oath, leaving those parts implied. The part that was most often left unspoken was the part that would tell what they are asking God to do if they break the oath. People believed that spoken words have power, and that speaking the part about punishment might cause the punishment to happen, so they often left that part to be understood silently. Because of these things, people might think that the person in the Bible is not making a real oath or they may not understand what the verse is talking about at all.

Examples From the Bible

"I raise my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, if from a thread even to the strap of a sandal, or if I take from anything that {belongs} to you, so that you will not say, 'I made Abram rich.' (Genesis 14:22-23 ULT)

In the verse above, Abram describes a symbolic action (raising his hand to Yahweh) to signal that he is taking an oath and calling on Yahweh as witness and judge. He says what would violate his oath (thus promising to do the opposite). Then he leaves out the part that would describe how Yahweh would punish him if he fails to do what he is promising.

May Yahweh do thus to me, and thus may he add, if death separates between me and between you. (Ruth 1:17 ULT)

Ruth calls on Yahweh and includes the part about Yahweh punishing her, says what the violation would be (thus promising to do the opposite), but does not say what the punishment would be.

And Saul said, "Thus may God do and thus may he add, for dying you will die, Jonathan." (1 Samuel 14:44 ULT)

Saul takes an oath that Jonathan will die, but does not specifically say whom God would punish, what the punishment would be, or what the person would do that would violate the oath and bring about God's punishment.

Translation Strategies

If people who speak your language would recognize the oath as it is in the ULT, consider translating it in its current form. If not, consider using the following strategies.

- (1) Add in the missing parts so that people recognize it as an oath.
- (2) If oaths are unfamiliar, add a short explanation of what an oath is.
- (3) Put the oath into a form that would be natural in your language.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Add in the missing parts so that people recognize it as an oath.

"I raise my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, if from a thread even to the strap of a sandal, or if I take from anything that {belongs} to you, so that you will not say, 'I made Abram rich.' (Genesis 14:22-23 ULT)

"I raise my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, **and ask him to punish me severely** if from a thread even to the strap of a sandal, or if I take from anything that {belongs} to you, so that you will not say, 'I made Abram rich.'

And Saul said, "Thus may God do and thus may he add, for dying you will die, Jonathan." (1 Samuel 14:44 ULT)

And Saul said, "May God **punish me severely** and may he add **even more punishment if I do not kill you**, for dying you will die, Jonathan."

- (2) If oaths are unfamiliar, add a short explanation of what an oath is.

May Yahweh do thus to me, and thus may he add, if death separates between me and between you. (Ruth 1:17 ULT)

Then Ruth called on Yahweh to enforce her promise: "May Yahweh do thus to me, and thus may he add, if death separates between me and between you."

- (3) Put the oath into a form that would be natural in your language.

"I raise my hand to Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, if from a thread even to the strap of a sandal, or if I take from anything that {belongs} to you, so that you will not say, 'I made Abram rich.' (Genesis 14:22-23 ULT)

"I solemnly swear before Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, **that I will not take** from a thread even to the strap of a sandal, or from anything that {belongs} to you, **so help me God**, so that you will not say, 'I made Abram rich.'

May Yahweh do thus to me, and thus may he add, if death separates between me and between you. (Ruth 1:17 ULT)

May Yahweh **strike me dead right where I stand** if death separates between me and between you.

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:9](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:11](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 2:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#); [Zephaniah 3:13](#); [Zephaniah 3:16](#); [Zephaniah 3:19](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:8](#); [Zephaniah 2:11](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 2:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:1](#); [Zephaniah 3:7](#)

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)

- The same root word used as both a verb and as a noun:

Your old men will **dream dreams** (Joel 2:28 ULT)

Yahweh,...**light lightning** and scatter them (Psalm 144:5-6 ULT)

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](#))

Possession

Description

In English, the grammatical form that commonly indicates possession is also used to indicate a variety of relationships between people and objects or people and other people. In English, that grammatical relationship is shown by using the word “**of**,” by using **an apostrophe and the letter “s”**, or by using a **possessive pronoun**. The following examples are different ways to indicate that my grandfather owns a house.

- the house **of** my grandfather
- my grandfather **'s** house
- **his** house

This page answers the question: *What is possession and how can I translate phrases that show it?*

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Possession is used in Hebrew, Greek, and English for a variety of situations. Here are a few common situations that it is used for.

- Ownership — Someone owns something.
 - The clothes of me - my clothes — The clothes that I own
- Social Relationship — Someone has some kind of social relationship with another.
 - The mother of John — John's mother - the woman who gave birth to John, or the woman who cared for John
 - A teacher of Israel - Israel's teacher — a person who teaches Israel
- Association — A particular thing is associated with a particular person, place, or thing.
 - The sickness of David - David's sickness — the sickness that David is experiencing
 - the fear of the Lord — the fear that is appropriate for a human being to have when relating to the Lord
- Contents — Something has something in it.
 - a bag of clothes — a bag that has clothes in it, or a bag that is full of clothes
- Part and whole: One thing is part of another.
 - my head — the head that is part of my body
 - the roof of a house — the roof that is part of a house

In some languages there is a special form of possession, termed **inalienable possession**. This form of possession is used for things that cannot be removed from you, as opposed to things you could lose. In the examples above, *my head* and *my mother* are examples of inalienable possession (at least in some languages), while *my clothes* or *my teacher* would be alienably possessed. What may be considered alienable vs. inalienable may differ by language. In languages that mark the difference, the expression of inalienable possession and alienable possession will be different.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- You (the translator) need to understand the relationship between two ideas represented by the two nouns when one is in the grammatical relationship of possessing the other.
- Some languages do not use grammatical possession for all of the situations that your source text Bible might use it for.

Examples From the Bible

Ownership — In the example below, the son owned the money.

| The younger son ... wasted his wealth by living recklessly. (Luke 15:13b)

Social Relationship — In the example below, the disciples were people who learned from John.

| Then **the disciples of John** came to him. (Matthew 9:14a ULT)

Association — In the example below, the gospel is the message associated with Paul because he preaches it.

| Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, from the seed of David, according to **my gospel**,
(2 Timothy 2:8 ULT)

Material — In the example below, the material used for making the crowns was gold.

| On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

Contents — In the example below, the cup has water in it.

| For whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Part of a whole — In the example below, the door was a part of the palace.

| But Uriah slept at **the door of the king's palace**. (2 Samuel 11:9a ULT)

Part of a group — In the example below, “us” refers to the whole group and “each one” refers to the individual members.

| Now to **each one of us** grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:7 ULT)

Events and Possession

Sometimes one or both of the nouns is an abstract noun that refers to an event or action. In the examples below, the abstract nouns are in **bold** print. These are just some of the relationships that are possible between two nouns when one of them refers to an event.

Subject — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who would do the action named by the first noun. In the example below, **John baptized people**.

| The **baptism of John**, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. (Mark 11:30)

In the example below, **Christ loves us**.

| Who will separate us from the **love of Christ**? (Romans 8:35)

Object — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who or what something would happen to. In the example below, **people love money**.

| For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10a ULT)

Instrument — Sometimes the word after “of” tells how something would happen. In the example below, God would **punish people by sending enemies to attack them with swords**.

| Then be afraid of the sword, because wrath brings **the punishment of the sword**. (Job 19:29a ULT)

Representation — In the example below, John was baptizing people who were repenting of their sins. They were being baptized to show that they were repenting. Their **baptism represented their repentance**.

| John came, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching **a baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4 ULT)

Strategies for learning what the relationship is between the two nouns

- (1) Read the surrounding verses to see if they help you to understand the relationship between the two nouns.
- (2) Read the verse in the UST. Sometimes it shows the relationship clearly.
- (3) See what the notes say about it.

Translation Strategies

If possession would be a natural way to show a particular relationship between two nouns, consider using it. If it would be strange or hard to understand, consider these.

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.
- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.
- (3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.

On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

"On their heads were **gold crowns**"

- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.

Whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Whoever gives you a **cup that has water in it** to drink ... will not lose his reward.

Wealth is worthless on **the day of wrath**. (Proverbs 11:4a ULT)

Wealth is worthless on **the day when God shows his wrath**. or: Wealth is worthless on the **day when God punishes people because of his wrath**.

- (3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb. (In the example below, there are two possession relationships, "punishment of Yahweh" and "your God.")

Notice that I am not speaking to your children, who have not known or seen **the punishment of Yahweh your God**. (Deuteronomy 11:2a ULT)

Notice that I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen **how Yahweh, the God whom you worship, punished the people of Egypt**.

You will only observe and see the **punishment of the wicked**. (Psalms 91:8 ULT)

You will only observe and see **how Yahweh punishes the wicked**.

You will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 2:38b ULT)

You will receive the **Holy Spirit, whom God will give to you**.

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:5](#); [Zephaniah 2:6](#); [Zephaniah 2:11](#); [Zephaniah 3:4](#); [Zephaniah 3:11](#); [Zephaniah 3:15](#)

Predictive Past

Description

The predictive past is a figure of speech that uses the past tense to refer to things that will happen in the future. This is sometimes done in prophecy to show that the event will certainly happen. It is also called the prophetic perfect.

Therefore my people have gone into captivity for lack of understanding; their honored leaders go hungry, and their common people have nothing to drink. (Isaiah 5:13 ULT)

In the example above, the people of Israel had not yet gone into captivity, but God spoke of their going into captivity as if it had already happened because he had decided that they certainly would go into captivity.

This page answers the question: *What is the predictive past?*

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

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

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Reason This Is a Translation Issue:

Readers who are not aware of the past tense being used in prophecy to refer to future events may find it confusing.

Examples From the Bible

Now Jericho was tightly closed because of the sons of Israel. No one went out and no one came in. Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:1-2 ULT)

For to us a child has been born, to us a son has been given; and the rule will be on his shoulder. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

In the examples above, God spoke of things that would happen in the future as if they had already happened.

But even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them, saying, "Look! The Lord came with thousands and thousands of his holy ones." (Jude 1:14 ULT)

Enoch was speaking of something that would happen in the future, but he used the past tense when he said "the Lord came."

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.
- (2) If it refers to something in the immediate future, use a form that would show that.
- (3) Some languages may use the present tense to show that something will happen very soon.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.

For to us a child **has been born**, to us a son **has been given**. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

For to us a child **will be born**, to us a son **will be given**.

(2) If it refers to something that would happen very soon, use a form that shows that.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I **am about to deliver** over to you Jericho, its king, and its powerful soldiers."

(3) Some languages may use the present tense to show that something will happen very soon.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho, and its king, and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, I **am delivering** over to you Jericho, its king, and its powerful soldiers."

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:15](#)

Pronouns — When to Use Them

Description

When we talk or write, we use pronouns to refer to people or things without always having to repeat the noun or name. Usually, the first time we refer to someone in a story, we use a descriptive phrase or a name. The next time we might refer to that person with a simple noun or by name. After that we might refer to him simply with a pronoun as long as we think that our listeners will be able to understand easily to whom the pronoun refers.

This page answers the question: *How do I decide whether or not to use a pronoun?*

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

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

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

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

In John 3, Nicodemus is first referred to with noun phrases and his name. Then he is referred to with the noun phrase “this man.” Then he is referred to with the pronoun “him.”

Each language has its rules and exceptions to this usual way of referring to people and things.

- In some languages, the first time something is referred to in a paragraph or chapter, it is referred to with a noun rather than a pronoun.
- The main character is the person whom a story is about. In some languages, after a main character is introduced in a story, he is usually referred to with a pronoun. Some languages have special pronouns that refer only to the main character.
- In some languages, marking on the verb helps people know who the subject is. (See [Verbs](#).) In some of these languages, listeners rely on this marking to help them understand who the subject is. Speakers will use a pronoun, noun phrase, or proper name only when they want either to emphasize or to clarify who the subject is.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- If translators use a pronoun at the wrong time for their language, readers might not know about whom the writer is talking.
- If translators too frequently refer to a main character by name, listeners of some languages might not realize that the person is a main character, or they might think that there is a new character with the same name.
- If translators use pronouns, nouns, or names at the wrong time, people might think that there is some special emphasis on the person or thing to which it refers.

Examples From the Bible

The example below occurs at the beginning of a chapter. In some languages it might not be clear to whom the pronouns refer.

Then Jesus entered into the synagogue again, and there was a man who had a withered hand. Some people watched **him** closely to see if **he** would heal **him** on the Sabbath so that they might accuse **him**. (Mark 3:1-2 ULT)

In the example below, two men are named in the first sentence. It might not be clear whom “he” in the second sentence refers to.

Now after some days had passed, **King Agrippa** and Bernice came down to Caesarea to pay their respects to **Festus**. After **he** had been there for many days, Festus presented to the king the things concerning Paul. (Acts 25:13-14)

Jesus is the main character of the book of Matthew, but in the verses below he is referred to four times by name. This may lead speakers of some languages to think that Jesus is not the main character. Or it might lead them to think that there is more than one person named Jesus in this story. Or it might lead them to think that there is some kind of emphasis on him, even though there is no emphasis.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.
- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.

Again **he** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **him** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath. (Mark 3:1-2)

Again **Jesus** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **Jesus** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath.

- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

This may be translated as:

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **him**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **he** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **he** left from there and went into their synagogue.

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:4](#); [Zephaniah 2:14](#); [Zephaniah 3:1](#)

Quotations and Quote Margins

Description

This page answers the question: *What are quote margins and where should I put them?*

When saying that someone said something, we often tell who spoke, whom they spoke to, and what they said. The information about who spoke and whom they spoke to is called the quote margin. What the person said is the quotation. (This is also called a quote.) In some languages the quote margin may come first, last, or even in between two parts of the quotation.

The quote margins are bolded below.

- **She said**, "The food is ready. Come and eat."
- "The food is ready. Come and eat," **she said**.
- "The food is ready," **she said**. "Come and eat."

Also in some languages, the quote margin may have more than one verb meaning "said."

But his mother **answered** and **said**, "No. Rather, he will be called John." (Luke 1:60 ULT)

When writing that someone said something, some languages put the quote (what was said) in quotation marks called inverted commas (" "). Some languages use other symbols around the quotation, such as these angle quote marks (« »), or something else.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Translators need to put the quote margin where it is most clear and natural in their language.
- Translators need to decide whether they want the quote margin to have one or two verbs meaning "said."
- Translators need to decide which marks to use around the quotation.

Examples From the Bible

Quote margin before the quote

Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in her days." (Luke 1:18 ULT)

Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and **they said to him**, "Teacher, what should we do?" (Luke 3:12 ULT)

So **he said to them**, "Collect nothing more than what you have been ordered." (Luke 3:13 ULT)

Quote margin after the quote

Yahweh relented concerning this. "It will not happen," **he said**. (Amos 7:3 ULT)

Quote margin between two parts of the quote

"I will hide my face from them," **he said**, "and I will see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful." (Deuteronomy 32:20 ULT)

For look, days are coming—**this is Yahweh's declaration**—when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah. (Jeremiah 30:3a ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) Decide where to put the quote margin.
- (2) Decide whether to use one or two words meaning “said.”

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Decide where to put the quote margin.

He said, “Therefore, those among you who are leaders should go down with us. If there is something wrong with the man, let them accuse him.” (Acts 25:5 ULT)

“Therefore, those who can should go there with us,” **he said**. “If there is something wrong with the man, you should accuse him.”

“Therefore, those who can should go there with us. If there is something wrong with the man, you should accuse him,” **he said**.

“Therefore, those who can,” **he said**, “should go there with us. If there is something wrong with the man, you should accuse him.”

- (2) Decide whether to use one or two words meaning “said.”

But his mother **answered and said**, “No. Rather, he will be called John.” (Luke 1:60 ULT)

But his mother **replied**, “No. Rather, he will be called John.”

But his mother **said**, “No. Rather, he will be called John.”

But his mother **answered** like this. “No. Rather, he will be called John,” she **said**.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Direct and Indirect Quotations ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:2](#); [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#); [Zephaniah 2:8](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#); [Zephaniah 2:12](#); [Zephaniah 3:6](#); [Zephaniah 3:8](#); [Zephaniah 3:18](#); [Zephaniah 3:20](#)

Quote Markings

Description

Some languages use quotation marks to mark off direct quotes from the rest of the text. English uses the mark " immediately before a quote and " immediately after it.

- John said, "I do not know when I will arrive."

Quotation marks are not used with indirect quotes.

- John said that he did not know when he would arrive.

When there are several layers of quotations inside of other quotations, it might be hard for readers to understand who is saying what. Alternating two kinds of quotation marks can help careful readers to keep track of them. In English, the outermost quotation has double quote marks, and the next quotation within it has single marks. If there is a third embedded quote, that quotation again has double quotation marks.

- Mary said, "John said, 'I do not know when I will arrive.'"
- Bob said, "Mary told me, 'John said, "I do not know when I will arrive.'" "

Some languages use other kinds of quotation marks: Here are some examples: , ' ' " " < > « » 7 — .

Examples From the Bible

The examples below show the kind of quotation markings used in the ULT.

A quotation with only one layer

A first layer direct quote has double quotation marks around it.

So the king replied, "That is Elijah the Tishbite." (2 Kings 1:8b ULT)

Quotations with two layers

A second layer direct quote has single quotation marks around it. We have printed it and the phrase in bold type for you to see them clearly.

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, '**Pick it up and walk**'?" (John 5:12 ULT)

He sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you. As you enter, you will find a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it to me. If any one asks you, '**Why are you untying it?**'" you will say thus, '**The Lord has need of it.**'" (Luke 19:29b-31 ULT)

A quotation with three layers

A third layer direct quote has double quotation marks around it. We have printed it in bold type for you to see them clearly.

Abraham said, "Because I thought, 'Surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. When God caused me to leave my father's

This page answers the question: *How can quotes be marked, especially when there are quotes within quotes?*

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

Direct and Indirect Quotations ([UTA PDF](#))

house and travel from place to place, I said to her, 'You must show me this faithfulness as my wife: At every place where we go, say about me, "**He is my brother.**"' (Genesis 20:11-13 ULT)

A quotation with four layers

A fourth layer direct quote has single quotation marks around it. We have printed it in bold for you to see it clearly.

They said to him, "A man came to meet us who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Yahweh says this: **'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'**"' " (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

Quote Marking Strategies

Here are some ways you may be able to help readers see where each quote starts and ends so they can more easily know who said what.

- (1) Alternate two kinds of quote marks to show layers of direct quotation. English alternates double quote marks and single quote marks.
- (2) Translate one or some of the quotes as indirect quotes in order to use fewer quote marks, since indirect quotes do not need them. (See [Direct and Indirect Quotations](#).)
- (3) If a quotation is very long and has many layers of quotation in it, indent the main overall quote, and use quote marks only for the direct quotes inside of it.

Examples of Quote Marking Strategies Applied

- (1) Alternate two kinds of quotation marks to show layers of direct quotation as shown in the ULT text below.

They said to him, "A man came to meet us who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Yahweh says this: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'""' (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

- (2) Translate one or more of the quotes as indirect quotes in order to use fewer quotation marks, since indirect quotes do not need them. In English, the word "that" can introduce an indirect quote. In the example below, everything after the word "that" is an indirect quote of what the messengers said to the king. Within that indirect quote, there are some direct quotes marked with double and single quotation marks.

They said to him, "A man came to meet us who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Yahweh says this: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'""' (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

They told him **that** a man came to meet them who said to them, "Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, 'Yahweh says this: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'""

- (3) If a quotation is very long and has many layers of quotation in it, indent the main overall quote, and use quote marks only for the direct quotes inside of it.

They said to him, "A man came to meet us who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Yahweh says this: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'""' (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

They said to him,

A man came to meet us who said to us, "Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, 'Yahweh says this: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'""

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:13](#); [Zephaniah 1:17](#)

Quotes within Quotes

Description

A quotation may have a quote within it, and quotes that are inside of other quotes can also have quotes within them. When a quote has quotes within it, we say there are “layers” of quotation, and each of the quotes is a layer. When there are many layers of quotes inside of quotes, it can be hard for listeners and readers to know who is saying what. Some languages use a combination of direct quotes and indirect quotes to make it easier.

This page answers the question: *What is a quote within a quote, and how can I help the readers understand who is saying what?*

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

Direct and Indirect Quotations ([UTA PDF](#))

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

When there is a quote within a quote, the listener needs to know who the pronouns refer to. For example: if a quote that is inside a quote has the word “I,” the listener needs to know whether “I” refers to the speaker of the inner quote or the outer quote.

Some languages make this clear by using different kinds of quotes when there are quotes within quotes.

They may use direct quotes for some and indirect quotes for others.

Some languages do not use indirect quotes.

Examples From the Bible

A quotation with only one layer

But Paul said, “I, however, was indeed born a citizen.” (Acts 22:28b ULT)

Quotations with two layers

Jesus answered and said to them, “Be careful that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name. They will say, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:4-5 ULT)

The outermost layer is what Jesus said to his disciples. The second layer is what other people will say.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king.” (John 18:37b ULT)

The outermost layer is what Jesus said to Pilate. The second layer is what Pilate said about Jesus.

A quotation with three layers

Abraham said, “... I said to her, ‘You must show me this faithfulness as my wife: At every place where we go, say about me, **“He is my brother.”**” (Genesis 20:11a, 13 ULT)

The outermost layer is what Abraham responded to Abimelech. The second layer is what Abraham had told his wife. The third layer is what he wanted his wife to say. (We have bolded the third layer.)

A quotation with four layers

They said to him, “A man came to meet us who said to us, ‘Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, “Yahweh says this: **‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal- Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.’**”” (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

The outermost layer is what the messengers said to the king. The second layer is what the man who had met the messengers told them. The third is what that man wanted the messengers to say to the king. The fourth is what Yahweh said. (We have bolded the fourth layer.)

Translation Strategies

Some languages use only direct quotes. Other languages use a combination of direct quotes and indirect quotes. In those languages it might sound strange and perhaps even be confusing if there are many layers of direct quotes.

- (1) Translate all of the quotes as direct quotes.
- (2) Translate one or some of the quotes as indirect quotes. (See [Direct and Indirect Quotations](#).)

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate all of the quotes as direct quotes. In the example below we have bolded the indirect quotes in the ULT and the quotes that we have changed to direct quotes below it.

Festus presented to the king the things concerning Paul, saying, "There is a certain man was left here as a prisoner by Felix. So I am uncertain about the things concerning this matter. I asked **if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there to be judged concerning these things**. But when Paul appealed **to keep him in custody for the decision of the emperor**, I ordered him **to be held in custody until when I could send him to Caesar**." (Acts 25:14b, 20-21 ULT)

Festus presented Paul's case to the king. He said, "A certain man was left behind here by Felix as a prisoner. I was uncertain about the things concerning this matter. I asked him, '**Will you go to Jerusalem to be judged there concerning these things?**' But when Paul said, '**I want to be kept in custody for the emperor's decision,**' I told the guard, '**Keep him in custody until when I can send him to Caesar.**'"

- (2) Translate one or some of the quotes as indirect quotes. In English the word "that" can come before indirect quotes. It is bolded in the examples below. The pronouns that changed because of the indirect quote are also bolded.

And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, "I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel. Speak to them and say, 'During the evenings you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be satisfied with bread. And you will know that I am Yahweh your God.'" (Exodus 16:11-12 ULT)

And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, "I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel. Tell them **that** during the evenings **they** will eat meat, and in the morning **they** will be satisfied with bread. And **they** will know that I am Yahweh **their** God."

They said to him, "A man came to meet us who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Yahweh says this: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'"" (2 Kings 1:6 ULT)

They told him **that** a man had come to meet **them** who said to **them**, "Go back to the king who sent you, and tell him **that** Yahweh says this: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you sent men to consult with Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed to which you have gone up; instead, you will certainly die.'"

Quote Markings [\(UTA PDF\)](#)

Next we recommend you learn about:

Quote Markings [\(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 2:15](#); [Zephaniah 3:7](#)

Reduplication

This is a placeholder for an article to be written about reduplication in the biblical text, such as infinitive-absolute + indicative or other repeated words.

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

Description

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Examples From the Bible

Begin, possess, to possess his land (Deut 2:31 ULT)

Translation Strategies

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:2](#); [Zephaniah 1:14](#); [Zephaniah 2:1](#); [Zephaniah 3:5](#)

Simile

Description

A simile is a comparison of two things that are not normally thought to be similar. The simile focuses on a particular trait the two items have in common, and it includes the words “like,” “as,” or “than.”

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

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

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

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were troubled and discouraged, **like sheep not having a shepherd**. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus compared the crowds of people to sheep without a shepherd. Sheep grow frightened when they do not have a good shepherd to lead them in safe places. The crowds were like that because they did not have good religious leaders.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be as wise **as the serpents** and harmless **as the doves**. (Matthew 10:16 ULT)

Jesus compared his disciples to sheep and their enemies to wolves. Wolves attack sheep; Jesus' enemies would attack his disciples.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

God's word is compared to a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a weapon that can easily cut through a person's flesh. God's word is very effective in showing what is in a person's heart and thoughts.

Purposes of Simile

- A simile can teach about something that is unknown by showing how it is similar to something that is known.
- A simile can emphasize a particular trait, sometimes in a way that gets people's attention.
- Similes help form a picture in the mind or help the reader experience what he is reading about more fully.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not know how the two items are similar.
- People may not be familiar with both of the items being compared.

Examples From the Bible

Suffer hardship with me, **as a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 ULT)

In this simile, Paul compares suffering with what soldiers endure, and he encourages Timothy to follow their example.

Just as the lightning flashing from a place under the sky shines to another place under the sky, so will the Son of Man be. (Luke 17:24b ULT)

This verse does not tell how the Son of Man will be like the lightning. But in context we can understand from the verses before it that just as lighting flashes suddenly and everyone can see it, the Son of Man will come suddenly and everyone will be able to see him. No one will have to be told about it.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the correct meaning of a simile, consider using it. If they would not, here are some strategies you can use:

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience. (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote. (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — This compares the danger that Jesus' disciples would be in with the danger that sheep are in when they are surrounded by wolves.

See, I send **you out among wicked people** and you will be in danger from them **as sheep are in danger when they are among wolves**.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

For the word of God is living and active and **more powerful than a very sharp two-edged sword**.

(2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — If people do not know what sheep and wolves are, or that wolves kill and eat sheep, you could use some other animal that kills another.

See, I send you out **as chickens in the midst of wild dogs**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, **as a mother closely watches over her infants**, but you refused!

If you have faith **as a grain of mustard** ... (Matthew 17:20)

If you have faith even as small **as a tiny seed**,

(3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT)

See, I send you out among **people who will want to harm you**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to **protect you**, but you refused!

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metaphor ([UTA PDF](#))

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

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:17](#); [Zephaniah 2:2](#); [Zephaniah 2:9](#)

Symbolic Action

Description

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

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

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

Translate Unknowns ([UTA PDF](#))

Examples of symbolic actions

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.
- (2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.
- (3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning. Do this only in poetry, parables, and sermons. Do not do this when there actually was a person who did a specific action.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 2:15](#)

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: [Zephaniah 1:5](#); [Zephaniah 1:8](#); [Zephaniah 2:7](#); [Zephaniah 3:10](#); [Zephaniah 3:18](#)

Unusual Uses of the Plural

The biblical languages sometimes use plural forms to refer to single objects, ideas, or people.

This page answers the question: *What are some unusual uses of the plural and how can I translate them?*

Description

Using a plural form to refer to something singular is done to show an intensified feeling about the object, idea, or person, or to show that an object or idea is extraordinary in some way. Also, sometimes a person refers to himself or herself with a plural pronoun. If the person is a king or a leader in a high position, this is to show that the person is very important and represents many people. If the person is writing a letter, such as Paul in the New Testament, this is to do the opposite. It is to avoid referring directly to himself, to avoid any sense that he is boasting or drawing attention to himself.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Many languages do not use plural forms to refer to single objects, ideas, or people. In these languages, doing so would be both wrong and confusing. Instead, they need to use a singular form and express any intended intensification in another way.

Examples From the Bible

■ The tents of robbers prosper, and securities {are} to the provokers of God (Job 12:6 ULT)

Job is using the plural form **securities** to indicate that these provokers of God experience security to a supreme extent.

■ Now you had cast me deep into the heart of the seas (Jonah 2:3 ULT)

Jonah refers to the sea using the plural **seas** to intensify the idea of either the sea's vastness or activity.

■ The letter that you sent to **us** has been carefully read aloud before me. (Ezra 4:18 ULT)

Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, refers to himself as **us** in response to a letter sent to him.

■ ...through whom [Jesus] **we** received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the Gentiles (Romans 1:5 ULT)

Since this letter is from Paul alone, it is likely that he is using the plural **we** to refer to himself.

Translation Strategies

If a plural form would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, consider these strategies.

- (1) Use a singular form instead of the plural.
- (2) If the plural is used to intensify the meaning, use a singular form with another word that intensifies it such as "very" or "great" or "many."
- (3) If the plural is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language's ways of doing that.

Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a singular form instead of the plural.

■ The letter that you sent to **us** has been carefully read aloud before me. (Ezra 4:18 ULT)

The letter that you sent to **me** has been carefully read aloud before me.

■ ...through whom [Jesus] **we** received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the Gentiles (Romans 1:5 ULT)

...through whom [Jesus] **I** received grace and apostleship for obedience of faith among all the Gentiles

(2) If the plural is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use a singular form with another word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”

■ The tents of robbers prosper, and **securities {are}** to the provokers of God (Job 12:6 ULT)

The tents of robbers prosper, and **great security {is}** to the provokers of God

■ Now you had cast me deep into the heart of the **seas** (Jonah 2:3 ULT)

Now you had cast me deep into the heart of the **great sea**

(3) If the plural is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language’s ways of doing that.

■ The tents of robbers prosper, and **securities {are}** to the provokers of God (Job 12:6 ULT)

The tents of robbers prosper, and the provokers of God **enjoy complete security**

■ Now you had cast me deep into the heart of the **seas** (Jonah 2:3 ULT)

Now you had cast me deep into the heart of the **raging sea**

”

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

When Masculine Words Include Women

In the Bible, sometimes the words “men,” “brothers,” and “sons” refer only to men. At other times, those words include both men and women. In those places where the writer meant both men and women, you (the translator) need to translate it in a way that does not limit the meaning to men.

Description

In some languages a word that normally refers to men can also be used in a more general way to refer to both men and women. For example, the Bible sometimes says “brothers” when it refers to both brothers and sisters.

Also in some languages, the masculine pronouns “he” and “him” can be used in a more general way for any person if it is not important whether the person is a man or a woman. In the example below, the pronoun is “his,” but it is not limited to males.

A wise son makes **his** father rejoice but a foolish son brings grief to **his** mother. (Proverbs 10:1 ULT)

This page answers the question: *How do I translate “brother” or “he” when it could refer to anyone, male or female?*

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

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

[Generic Noun Phrases \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- In some cultures words like “man,” “brother,” and “son” can only be used to refer to men. If those words are used in a translation in a more general way, people will think that what is being said does not apply to women.
- In some cultures, the masculine pronouns “he” and “him” can only refer to men. If a masculine pronoun is used, people will think that what is said does not apply to women.

Translation Principles

When a statement applies to both men and women, translate it in such a way that people will be able to understand that it applies to both.

Examples From the Bible

Now we want you to know, **brothers**, the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia. (2 Corinthians 8:1 ULT)

This verse is addressing the believers in Corinth, not only men, but **men and women**.

Then said Jesus to his disciples, “If anyone wants to follow me, **he** must deny **himself**, take up **his** cross, and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24 ULT)

Jesus was not speaking only of men, but of **men and women**.

Caution: Sometimes masculine words are used specifically to refer to men. Do not use words that would lead people to think that they include women. The words below are specifically about men.

Moses said, ‘If **someone** dies, not having children, **his brother** must marry **his** wife and have children for **his brother**.’ (Matthew 22:24 ULT)

Translation Strategies

If people would understand that that masculine words like “man,” “brother,” and “he” can include women, then consider using them. Otherwise, here are some ways for translating those words when they include women.

- (1) Use a noun that can be used for both men and women.
- (2) Use a word that refers to men and a word that refers to women.
- (3) Use pronouns that can be used for both men and women.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use nouns that can be used for both men and women.

The wise **man** dies just like the fool dies. (Ecclesiastes 2:16b ULT)

“The wise **person** dies just like the fool dies.” “Wise **people** die just like fools die.”

- (2) Use a word that refers to men and a word that refers to women.

For we do not want you to be uninformed, **brothers**, about the troubles that happened to us in Asia. (2 Corinthians 1:8) — Paul was writing this letter to both men and women.

“For we do not want you to be uninformed, **brothers and sisters**, about the troubles that happened to us in Asia.”

- (3) Use pronouns that can be used for both men and women.

“If anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”
(Matthew 16:24 ULT)

English speakers can change the masculine singular pronouns, “he,” “himself,” and “his” to plural pronouns that do not mark gender, “they,” “themselves,” and “their” in order to show that it applies to all people, not just men.

“If **people** want to follow me, **they** must deny **themselves**, take up **their** cross, and follow me.”

”

Referenced in: [Zephaniah 1:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:12](#); [Zephaniah 1:17](#)

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