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Micah

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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Micah

Introduction to Micah

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the Book of Micah

God promises to punish the northern and southern kingdoms (1:1–16)
Those who take advantage of others are guilty (2:1–3:12)

- Rich people who oppress poor people (2:1–11)
- Promise to be delivered and restored (2:12–13)
- Rulers, priests, and prophets condemned (3:1–12)

Yahweh's victory for all Israel (4:1–5:15)

- Yahweh will rule over all the nations (4:1–10)
- Israel will be destroyed, then will be victorious over its enemies (4:11–13)
- Messiah will shepherd his flock and devastate the nations who fought against him (5:1–6)
- Messiah will destroy everything that harmed his people (5:7–15)

Yahweh's case against Israel (6:1–16)

- Yahweh reminds Israel when he led them out of slavery in Egypt (6:1–5)
- Israel punished; true repentance (6:6–16)

Israel miserable and Israel restored (7:1–20)

- Israel broken and miserable (7:1–7)
- Israel will rise again (7:8–13)
- Yahweh restores and gives grace (7:14–20)

What is the Book of Micah about?

This book contains many of Micah's prophecies. Micah repeated many similar prophecies as found in Isaiah. Micah warned the kingdoms of Israel and Judah that the Assyrians would soon attack them. Micah condemned those who acted unjustly and immorally. He spoke against those who did not work for a living. He also spoke against the false prophets in Israel and Judah. These false prophets were telling the people that Yahweh would never let a foreign kingdom harm or conquer them.

Micah called the people to please Yahweh by living righteous and holy lives. However, the sinful way they lived and the unjust way they treated their fellow countrymen proved that they no longer wanted to obey and honor Yahweh. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#), [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#), [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/righteous\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/holy\]\]](#) and **faith (p.183)**)

How should the title of this book be translated?

Translators may decide to translate the traditional title "The Book of Micah" or just "Micah" in a way that is clearer to the readers. They may decide to call it "The Sayings of Micah." (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

Who wrote Micah?

The prophet Micah probably wrote this book. Micah lived at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea. This was sometime between 750 and 700 B.C., during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He began prophesying when he lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. Then he moved to the kingdom of Judah.

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

Who is the deliverer Micah mentions?

Micah frequently mentioned a king who would deliver the people. It is clear that Micah meant the Messiah, the descendant of David who would rule forever, though he never referred to him as the Messiah. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/other/deliverer\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/christ\]\]](#))

Were the Israelites required to offer sacrifices or live holy lives to please Yahweh?

Many of the Old Testament writers were concerned with offering sacrifices according to the law of Moses. However, Micah explained to the people that Yahweh was pleased only when they offered these sacrifices in faith. Without faith, the sacrifices had no meaning. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/lawofmoses\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#))

Part 3: Important Translation Issues

Why does Micah 1:10-16 sound unusual?

This passage sounds unusual because of how it is constructed in Hebrew. It includes what is called a play on words. The names of the cities were used to describe how they would be destroyed. For example, in Hebrew “Lachish” sounds like “to the chariots.” This is a poetic form that might not be the actual way they would be punished.

What does a translator need to know before translating Micah?

Micah did not often explain how his prophecies were historically situated. This may result in the translator failing to understand implicit information unless they understand Micah’s time. It is therefore suggested that translators understand well the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.190)**)

How do I translate passages where the speaker or addressee is not mentioned explicitly?

Micah did not usually say who was speaking or who was being addressed. Reading the verses before and after the quote will often help the reader to understand who is speaking or being addressed. It is acceptable to make this information explicit so the reader can more easily understand it. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

How should the text of Micah be formatted?

The ULT uses a poetic language style like the Hebrew text. Many languages can do this but some languages will not be able to do this. The ULT also sets apart the poetic portions of the text by setting the poetic lines farther to the

right on the page than the rest of the text. With the exception of the first verse, the entire book is indented because the prophecies were written as a series of poems.

Micah 1

Micah 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

Micah is written mainly in a poetic form. Most of the prophets wrote to either the Northern Kingdom or the Southern Kingdom. Micah wrote to both of them at times without clear distinction, as he did in this chapter.

Important figures of speech in this chapter

City Names

This passage sounds unusual in English because of its construction in Hebrew. It contains several “puns” or “plays on words.” The names of the cities are used to describe their destruction. “Lachish will be lashed” is an example of this type of construction. This poetic element might metaphors describing the actual way they will be punished. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 1:1

General Information:

General Information:

God speaks through Micah to the people of Israel using poetry. (See: **Parallelism (p.166)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.166)**)

the word of Yahweh that came

This idiom is used to explain that a God gave a message to someone. Alternate translation: “the message that Yahweh spoke” (See: **Idiom (p.151)**) (See: **Idiom (p.151)**)

Yahweh

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

the Morashtite

This means he is from Moresheth which is a town in Judah. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah

Alternate translation: “when Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah”

which he saw

Alternate translation: “which he heard in a vision”

Micah 1:2

General Information:

General Information:

Micah 1:2-7 is about God's judgment on Samaria.

Listen, all you peoples. Listen, earth, and all that is in you

This begins Micah's prophecy. Micah speaks to the people of Samaria as if all the people of the earth and even the earth itself were able to hear him. (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

Micah 1:3

he will come down and tread on the high places of the earth

Micah speaks as if Yahweh were a mighty soldier coming down from heaven and beginning to march on top of the mountains. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

he will & tread

Alternate translation: "he will ... march"

the high places of the earth

Alternate translation: "the high mountains"

Micah 1:4

The mountains will melt under him; the valleys will break apart, like wax before fire, like waters that are poured down a steep place

Micah speaks as if Yahweh were a hot, solid object that melted the earth as it moved. Alternate translation: "He will crush the mountains and the valleys as he marches over them; he will destroy them, and they will completely disappear" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 1:5

because of the sins of the house of Israel

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house, in this case the people of Israel. Alternate translation: “because the people of Israel have sinned against me” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

All this is

Alternate translation: “The Lord will come and judge”

What is Jacob’s transgression?

The name “Jacob” is a metonym for those of his descendants who live in the northern kingdom of Israel. (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Is it not Samaria?

Here “Samaria” is a metonym for the evil activities that take place there. Micah uses a question to emphasize that the people know what the truth is. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “You know that it is Samaria.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

What is Judah’s high place?

Here “high place” is a synecdoche for the entire system of idol worship. “Judah” is a metonym for the people who live there. Alternate translation: “Where do the people of Judah go to worship idols?” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Is it not Jerusalem?

Here “Jerusalem” is a metonym for the evil activities that take place there. Micah uses a question to emphasize that the people know what the truth is. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “You know that it is Jerusalem.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Micah 1:6

I will make

Here "I" refers to Yahweh.

Samaria & her stones & her foundations

Yahweh speaks of Samaria as if the city were a woman. Alternate translation: "Samaria ... its stones ... the foundations of the buildings in the city" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

I will pour her stones

Here "her" refers to the city of Samaria.

Micah 1:7

her carved figures & her gifts that she received & her idols

Yahweh speaks of Samaria as if the city were a woman. Alternate translation: “the carved figures in the city ... the gifts that people gave to the temple in the city ... the idols in the city” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

All her carved figures will be broken to pieces

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “I will break all her carved figures to pieces” (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

all her gifts & will be burned with fire

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “I will burn with fire all the gifts that she received” (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

she received

Alternate translation: “people gave her”

Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, they will become the wages of prostitutes again

Yahweh speaks of the people giving gifts to idols as if the people were hiring prostitutes. When the Assyrians destroy Samaria, they will take to Assyria the gifts the people of Samaria gave to their idols and give them as gifts to their own idols. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 1:8

General Information:

General Information:

Micah 1:8-16 is about God's judgment on Judah.

I will lament

Here "I" refers to Micah.

I will lament and wail

"Lament" refers to the inner feeling of sadness, and "wail" refers to the activity of making a loud, sad sound.

I will go barefoot and naked

This is a sign of extreme mourning and distress. Another possible meaning is "I will look like someone has taken off my clothes; I will be naked"

naked

probably wearing only a loincloth

like the jackals & like owls

Jackals and owls live in wastelands, and their loud cries sound like people wailing or weeping. (See: **Simile (p.175)**)
(See: **Simile (p.175)**)

Micah 1:9

For her wound is incurable

Here “her” refers to the city of Samaria. This means nothing can stop the enemy army from destroying the people who live there. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

for it has come to Judah

Micah uses contagious disease as a metaphor for the army that Yahweh has sent to judge Samaria. Here “it” refers to the “wound,” that is, to the army that God will use to punish Samaria. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 1:10

Beth Leaphrah

You may want to make a footnote saying, "The name of this city means 'house of dust.'" (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

I roll myself in the dust

People under God's judgment are expressing their grief in a strong way. Alternate translation: "I roll myself on the ground" or "I roll myself in the mud" (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**)

Micah 1:11

General Information:

General Information:

The meanings of the names of the villages is important to Micah here. You may want to include the meanings of the names of the places in a footnote.

Shaphir

The name of this city sounds like one meaning “beautiful.” It contrasts with “nakedness and shame.” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

in nakedness and shame

This idiom makes explicit that the people will be totally naked. Alternate translation: “totally naked and ashamed” (See: **Idiom (p.151)**) (See: **Idiom (p.151)**)

Zaanan

The name of this city means “go out.” They are too afraid to go out and help.

Beth Ezel

The name of this city means “house of taking away.”

for their protection is taken away

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “for I have taken away everything that might protect them” (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Micah 1:12

Maroth

The name of this city means “bitterness.”

disaster has come down from Yahweh

The abstract noun **disaster** is spoken of here as a solid object rolling down a hill. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **disaster**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: “Yahweh has caused bad things to happen” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

Micah 1:13

Lachish

The name “Lachish” sounds like “to the chariots” in Hebrew. The people are hitching their chariots to flee, not fight. Lachish was the most important city after Jerusalem in Judah. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/translate-names\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

the daughter of Zion

The word “daughter” is a metonym for the people of the city. Alternate translation: “the people of Zion” or “the people who live in Zion” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

for the transgressions of Israel were found in you

This idiom can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “for you disobeyed like the people of Israel did” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p. 125)**)

Micah 1:14

Moresheth Gath

You may want to add a footnote saying “The name ‘Moresheth’ means ‘to depart.’ It is also similar in sound to the word for ‘fiancée.’” In this metaphor, Moresheth is the bride that Assyria takes, and the “parting gift” is the dowry, the gift her family gives for her to take into the marriage. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-names\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

Akzib

You may want to add a footnote saying “The name of this town sounds almost the same as the Hebrew expression for ‘deceitful thing.’”

Micah 1:15

I will again bring

Here "I" refers to Yahweh.

Mareshah

You may want to make a footnote saying, "The name of this village sounds like the Hebrew word for 'conqueror.'" (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

Adullam

This is the name of a royal city in Philistia. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

Micah 1:16

Shave your head and cut off your hair

Israelites who were mourning would shave bald spots on their heads. This could mean: (1) "Shave larger spots than usual on your heads" or (2) "Cut off all your hair and shave your heads," stating the events in the order in which they were to occur. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**)

eagles

This word can also be translated "vultures."

Micah 2

Micah 2 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter continues using poetic forms in communicating that people who take advantage of others are guilty of sin and injustice. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/guilt\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and **just, justice, unjust, injustice, justify, justification** (p.185))

Special concepts in this chapter

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Context

Micah does not frequently explain the historical context of his prophecies. This may result in the translator failing to understand implicit information. Additional research may be needed regarding the time period of Micah's ministry. Therefore, translators have a good understanding of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#))

Micah 2:1

General Information:

General Information:

Micah speaks against the leaders in Israel who are taking advantage of the poor and not following God's commands.

Micah 2:2

They oppress a man

“They oppress any man they choose to oppress.” This is a generalization. Micah is not speaking of one individual man here.

Micah 2:3

Look

Alternate translation: "Listen carefully" or "Pay attention"

disaster

See how you translated this in [Micah 1:12](#).

this clan

This "clan" refers to the entire community of Israel, whose rich people are oppressing the poor. The sins of the leaders are coming back on the whole nation.

from which you will not remove your necks

Yahweh speaks of punishing the people as if he were putting a yoke around their necks. Alternate translation: "from which you will not be able to escape" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 2:4

sing a song about you

Alternate translation: "sing a song to make fun of you"

lament with a wailing lamentation

"they will cry loudly." They are pretending to mourn, as if those they love have died. (See: **Irony (p.153)**) (See: **Irony (p.153)**)

We Israelites & to traitors

This is the song that the enemies will sing to make fun of the Israelites and laugh as the Israelites suffer. (See: **Irony (p.153)**) (See: **Irony (p.153)**)

How can he remove it from me?

The enemy mocks the surprise the rich leaders of Israel feel because God has taken their land and given it to someone else just as they had taken the land from the poor. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "How wrong he is to take it from me!" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 2:5

Therefore, you rich people will have no descendants to divide up the territory by lot in the assembly of Yahweh

This could mean: (1) Micah looks forward to a time after the exile when those who return will divide up the land or (2) he is speaking of a custom of his time when the tribe or clan would divide up their land and give it to individuals.

Micah 2:6

General Information:

General Information:

Micah speaks to false prophets, as well as to the rich who have abused their power.

Do not prophesy

The speakers are speaking to Micah and to others, so this is plural. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

they say

Alternate translation: "the people of Israel say"

They must not prophesy

Alternate translation: "The prophets must not prophesy"

reproaches must not come

Reproach is spoken of as if it were a robber chasing a person. It can be translated as a verb. Alternate translation: "we will not allow you to reproach us" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 2:7

Should it really be said & “Is the Spirit & his deeds?”

Micah is scolding the Israelites by using this question. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “You know that you do not need to ask ... ‘Is the Spirit ... his deeds?’” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

house of Jacob

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Jacob’s descendants. Alternate translation: “descendants of Jacob” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

said & “Is the Spirit of Yahweh angry? Are these really his deeds?”

This could mean: (1) the people really do not know if they are seeing Yahweh act. Alternate translation: “asked ... ‘Is the Spirit of Yahweh angry? Are these really his deeds?’” or (2) the people do not believe that Yahweh is really punishing them. These rhetorical questions can be translated as statements. Alternate translation: “said ... ‘The Spirit of Yahweh is not really angry. These are not really his deeds.’” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Do not my words do good to anyone who walks uprightly?

Micah uses a question to teach the people. It can be translated as a statement. Alternate translation: “My message does good to those who walk uprightly.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 2:8

my people

Here, **my people** could mean: (1) Micah's people or (2) Yahweh's people.

You strip the robe, the garment, from those who pass by unsuspectingly

This could mean: (1) the wicked rich people are literally stealing robes from the poor or (2) creditors are keeping the outer garments of the poor who come to borrow money and give the garment as assurance they will repay. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 2:9

you take my blessing from their young children forever

This refers, in general, to blessings God has given to his people. It could refer to (1) being landowners in Israel, (2) a promising future or (3) to the children's fathers, farmers who worked hard to establish the nation.

my blessing

Micah speaks as if he were Yahweh.

Micah 2:10

it is destroyed with complete destruction

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "I will completely destroy it" (See: **Active or Passive (p. 125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Micah 2:11

comes to you & will prophesy to you

Micah is speaking to the people of Judah, so both instances of “you” are plural. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

he would be considered

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “the people would consider him” or “you would consider him” (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 2:12

all of you, Jacob

Micah is speaking to some of the descendants of Jacob, so the word “you” is plural. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)
(See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 2:13

Someone who breaks open their way & Yahweh will be at their head.

This is a picture of a king leading his people out of an enclosed city.

Micah 3

Micah 3 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Justice

An unjust society was considered sinful. It was considered to be against the law of Moses. If these kingdoms did not have justice, they were not obedient to Yahweh. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/justice\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#) and **law, law of Moses, law of Yahweh, law of God (p.187)**)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Metaphors

There are vivid pictures used in this chapter which show how the leaders of the people were treating the Israelites. These situations are absurd unless taken as a metaphor. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:1

General Information:

General Information:

Chapter 3 focuses on the corrupt leaders in Israel.

I said

Here "I" refers to Micah.

Is it not right for you to understand justice?

Micah is scolding the leaders. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "You act as though you think it is wrong for you to understand justice." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 3:2

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Micah begins to compare the leaders of Israel to butchers.

hate good and love evil

These nominal adjectives can be translated as adjectives. Alternate translation: "hate everything that is good and love everything that is evil" (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.164)**) (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.164)**)

you who tear off their skin, their flesh from their bones

A butcher cutting up animals into meat is a metaphor for the leaders being cruel to the poor. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:3

Connecting Statement:

Connecting Statement:

Micah finishes comparing the leaders of Israel to butchers.

just like meat in a cauldron

A butcher cutting up animals into meat is a metaphor for the leaders being cruel to the poor. (See: **Metaphor (p. 156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:4

cry out to Yahweh

Alternate translation: "shout to Yahweh for help"

he will not answer you

Alternate translation: "he will not do what you ask him to do"

He will hide his face from you

Hiding the face is a metaphor for refusing to listen. Alternate translation: "He will turn his face away from you and cover it" or "You will see that he has no desire to help you" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:5

who lead my people astray

Walking on a good path is a metaphor for obeying God. Going astray from the path is a metaphor for disobeying God, in this case perhaps without knowing it. Alternate translation: “who lead my people to disobey me” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

if one gives them something to eat, they proclaim, ‘Peace.’

Micah is using a metaphor to describe a situation that actually happens. The phrase “something to eat” is an ironic way of speaking of a small payment. Alternate translation: “they tell people who pay them even a small amount that things will go well for those people.” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

if he puts nothing in their mouths, they dedicate themselves to wage war on him

Micah is using a metaphor to describe a situation that actually happens. The phrase “puts nothing in their mouths” is an ironic exaggeration for not giving what they want. Alternate translation: “they do all they can to destroy people who pay them too little” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:6

it will be night for you & the day will be dark on them

Darkness is a metaphor for Yahweh not speaking to the prophets. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

no vision for you

Alternate translation: "you will no longer see visions"

Micah 3:7

The seers will be put to shame, and the diviners will be confused

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "I will cause the seers to be ashamed, and I will confuse the diviners" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

All of them will cover their lips

Here "lips" represents speaking. Alternate translation: "They shall no longer speak" (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

there is no answer from me

Alternate translation: "I will be silent"

Micah 3:8

But as for me

Here “me” refers to Micah, a true prophet, setting himself apart from the false prophets.

I am full of power by the Spirit of Yahweh, and am full of justice and might

Micah speaks of himself as if he were a container into which Yahweh were pouring a liquid. Alternate translation: “the Spirit of Yahweh has given me power, justice, and might” or “the Spirit of Yahweh has enabled me to be strong, to declare what justice is, and to be mighty” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

to declare to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin

Here “Jacob” and “Israel” are metonyms for Jacob’s descendants. Micah uses both names to emphasize that all of his descendants are guilty of sin. The abstract nouns “transgression” and “sin” can be translated using verbs. Alternate translation: “to declare to Jacob’s descendants that they have broken Yahweh’s law; I am telling the people of Israel that they have all sinned” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Micah 3:9

house of Jacob

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Jacob’s descendants. Alternate translation: “descendants of Jacob” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

the house of Israel

The word “house” is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. In this case it refers to Israel’s descendants, who had become the nation of Israel. Alternate translation: “descendants of Israel” or “you Israelites” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

detest

strongly dislike

Micah 3:10

You build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity

“Blood” here is a metonym for murder, and “Zion” and “Jerusalem” are spoken of as if they were buildings. Micah speaks of the rich murdering people and sinning in other ways as if those activities were the bricks and wood with which people use to build houses. Alternate translation: “You commit murder and other horrible sins as you work to make Zion and Jerusalem great” or “You commit murder as you worship in Zion, and you commit other sins as you get rich in Jerusalem” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 3:11

Is not Yahweh with us?

The leaders strongly believe that Yahweh is with them. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "We know that Yahweh is with us!" or "We know that Yahweh will help us do what we want to do!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

evil

See how you translated "disaster" in [Micah 1:12](#).

Micah 3:12

because of you

Here “you” refers to the priests, prophets, and leaders ([Micah 3:11](#)).

Zion will become a plowed field & and the hill of the temple will become a thicket

“Zion” and “the hill of the temple” refer to the same place. When a farmer plows a field, he turns over all the dirt and uproots all the plants that are growing there. A thicket is so full of bushes that no one can use it for anything. These two metaphors cannot be literally true at the same time, but they emphasize that Yahweh will allow the invaders to completely destroy the temple area. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

a plowed field

Alternate translation: “a field that a farmer has plowed”

a thicket

a place where many small woody plants grow

Micah 4

Micah 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter continues the poetic form to communicate that God will one day restore Israel. (See: **restore, restoration (p.193)**)

Special concepts in this chapter

Remnant

Micah speaks about a future hope and a remnant who will return to their homeland. Verses 1-8 are a vision of the future when God will restore Israel to its former glory. These verses will give hope to those about to be removed from their homeland. (See: **remnant (p.192)**)

Micah 4:1

the mountain & other mountains

Yahweh making the temple mount higher than all other mountains and hills is a metaphor for making his temple the most important place on earth. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

the mountain of Yahweh's house will be established

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will establish the mountain on which his temple is built" or "Yahweh will make the mountain on which his temple is built great" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

over the other mountains

Mount Zion will be the most important of all the mountains. It might also mean that this mountain will become the highest in the world, and not only in the region where it is located.

It will be exalted above the hills

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will exalt it above the hills" or "Yahweh will make it higher than the hills" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

peoples will stream to it

A stream flows continually to one place from many directions. Many people come to the temple mount from different directions. Alternate translation: "the people of the nations will flow like a stream to it" or "the people of the nations will go to it" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 4:2

Many nations

The word “nations” is a metonym for the people of the nations. Alternate translation: “The people from many nations” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Come

This is plural. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

He will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths

Here “his ways” and “his paths” refer to what God wants the people to do. “Walk” means they will obey what he says. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

from Zion the law will go out, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem

The law and the word going out is a metaphor for people hearing it and then being messengers to tell other people about it in other places. Alternate translation: “people will listen to the law in Zion and go out and tell others; they will listen to the word of Yahweh in Jerusalem and go out and tell others” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem

The words “will go out” are understood from the previous phrase. They can be repeated here. Alternate translation: “and the word of Yahweh will go out from Jerusalem” (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**)

Micah 4:3

plowshares

a blade that people use to dig into soil so they can plant seeds

pruning hooks

a metal tool that people use to cut off branches or stems from plants

will not lift up sword

will not threaten to start a war

Micah 4:4

they will sit every person under his vine and under his fig tree

Both the “vine” and the “fig tree” are symbols of prosperity. This phrase describes actions in which people live prosperously and in peace. If grapevines or fig trees are unknown you can translate this more generally. Alternate translation: “they will sit peacefully in their own gardens and fields” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken

The mouth is a synecdoche for the person. Alternate translation: “for Yahweh of hosts has spoken” (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Micah 4:5

the peoples walk & in the name of their god & we will walk in the name of Yahweh

Walking on a path is a metaphor for living one's life. Walking in the name of someone is a metaphor for worshiping and obeying. Alternate translation: "the peoples ... worship and obey their god ... we will worship and obey Yahweh" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 4:6

the lame

This refers to those who cannot walk well. Being lame is a synecdoche for having any form of disability. (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

gather the outcast

Alternate translation: "gather those whom I drove out of Jerusalem"

Micah 4:7

the ones driven away into a strong nation

The words "I will turn" are understood from the previous phrase. They can be repeated. The phrase "the ones driven away" can be translated with an active verb. Alternate translation: "I will turn the ones I drove away into a strong nation" or "I will make the ones I forcefully sent away into a strong nation" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Micah 4:8

As for you, watchtower for the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion—to you it will come, your former dominion

Micah speaks to the people of Jerusalem by speaking to the temple mount as if it could hear him. You may need to make explicit that Micah is giving his message to the people. Alternate translation: “As for the temple mount, the place from which Yahweh watches over you, his sheep, the place that Jerusalem’s people are most proud of—its former dominion will return” (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

watchtower for the flock

The people of Jerusalem protecting the other people in surrounding areas is spoken of as if they were a shepherd in a watchtower watching over his flock. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

daughter of Zion & daughter of Jerusalem

The people who live in a place are spoken of as if the place is a mother and they are the daughter. Alternate translation: “people who live in Zion ... people who live in Jerusalem” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

hill

Some modern versions understand this Hebrew word to mean “fortress” or “stronghold” here.

to you it will come, your former dominion

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **dominion**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: “you will rule over the nations as you did before” or “I will make you rule over the nations as you did before” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

Micah 4:9

Now, why do you shout so loudly?

Micah is mocking the people, trying to make them think about why God is dealing with them in this way. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "Look at how you are shouting loudly." or "Think carefully about why you are shouting loudly." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p. 171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Is there no king among you? Has your counselor died? Is this why pain grips you like that of a woman in labor?

Micah continues to mock the people. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the idea behind these questions as statements. Alternate translation: "You have a king, but he is useless to you. All your wise people are still alive, but they have nothing wise to say to you. This is why you are weeping loudly like a woman who is giving birth to a baby." (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 4:10

Be in pain & like a woman in labor

Micah compares the suffering the people will experience when enemies force them away from their cities to the pain a woman experiences when giving birth to a baby. (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

There you will be rescued. There Yahweh will rescue you

Yahweh says the same thing in both active and passive forms to emphasize that he will do what he has said he will do. This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "There Yahweh will rescue you. There he will rescue you" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

the hand of your enemies

Here, the word **hand** could mean: (1) it could be a metonym for the power that the hand exercises, Alternate translation: "the power of your enemies" or (2) it could be a synecdoche for the person. Alternate translation: "your enemies" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Micah 4:11

General Information:

General Information:

Jerusalem will defeat her enemies.

Let her be defiled

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "Let us defile her" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

let our eyes gloat over Zion

The eye is a synecdoche for the whole person. Alternate translation: "let us gloat over Zion" or "let us enjoy watching the invaders destroy Zion" (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Micah 4:12

for he has gathered them like bundles of grain prepared for the threshing floor

The writer speaks of Yahweh being ready to destroy the nations as if Yahweh were a farmer who has put his bundles of grain on his threshing floor and is now ready to thresh them. (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

Micah 4:13

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh presents the imagery of the threshing floor ([Micah 4:12](#)).

Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion & your horn & your hooves & You will crush

All instances of “your” and “you,” as well as the commands, refer to the “daughter of Zion” and so are singular and feminine. (See: [Forms of You \(p.142\)](#)) (See: [Forms of You \(p.142\)](#))

Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn to be iron, and I will make your hooves to be bronze

Yahweh speaks of the people of Zion as if they were strong oxen about to thresh wheat and their enemies were the wheat. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-unknown\]\]](#)) (See: [Metaphor \(p.156\)](#))

I will make your horn to be iron, and I will make your hooves to be bronze

If your reader is not familiar with oxen or iron or bronze, you could remove the metaphor. Alternate translation: “for I will make you able to defeat and destroy every enemy” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-unknown\]\]](#)) (See: [Metaphor \(p.156\)](#))

their unjust wealth

Alternate translation: “the wealth they got by acting unjustly” or “the things they stole from other people”

their wealth

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **wealth**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: “the things that they own” (See: [Abstract Nouns \(p.123\)](#)) (See: [Abstract Nouns \(p.123\)](#))

Micah 5

Micah 5 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Messiah

This chapter contains a prophecy explaining that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. This meaning is made clear in the New Testament. (See: Micah 5:2, [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/christ\]\]](#))

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Change in Personal Pronouns

Extra care must be taken in translating pronouns in this chapter. Sometimes “I” is a reference to the author and other times it is a reference to Yahweh. There is also a noticeable shift where the author stops speaking about the people as “you” and begins speaking about them as “we” or “us.”

Micah 5:1

daughter of soldiers

The people of a city are spoken of as if they were a woman. The soldiers are attacking the city. Alternate translation: "people of the city, whom soldiers are attacking" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

With a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek

The rod is a metonym for a greater man punishing a lesser man with a rod. To strike a man on the cheek was to insult him more than to harm him. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will punish the judge of Israel by having the invaders insult the judge of Israel" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

the judge of Israel

This irony describes the king as having lost so much of his power and authority that he is really only a judge. (See: **Irony (p.153)**) (See: **Irony (p.153)**)

Micah 5:2

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah

Yahweh speaks to the people of Judah, and especially to the people of Bethlehem, as if he were speaking to the town of Bethlehem itself. (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

Ephrathah

This is either the name of the area in which Bethlehem was situated or it is just another name for Bethlehem or it distinguishes this Bethlehem from another. Bethlehem is about six miles south of Jerusalem. It was the hometown of King David. Translators may add this footnote: "The name 'Ephrathah' means 'to be fruitful.'" (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

even though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come

Alternate translation: "even though other clans in Judah have more people in them, it is one of your people who will come"

will come to me

Here "me" refers to Yahweh.

whose beginning is from ancient times, from everlasting

This refers to the ruler descending from the ancient family of King David. The phrases "from ancient times" and "from everlasting" mean basically the same thing and emphasize how old this family line is. (See: **Doublet (p.133)**) (See: **Doublet (p.133)**)

Micah 5:3

Therefore

Alternate translation: "Because what I have just said is true" or "Because this ruler will come later"

will give them up

will abandon the people of Israel

until the time when she who is in labor bears a child

This refers to the time when the ruler is born, a limited time.

the rest of his brothers

"the rest of the ruler's fellow Israelites," who are in exile

Micah 5:4

General Information:

General Information:

These verses continue describing the ruler from Bethlehem.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh

A shepherd, who feeds and protects his sheep, is a metaphor for the ruler, who will provide for and protect the people of Israel. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will give him the strength to lead his people" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God

The person's name is a metonym for person's authority. Alternate translation: "and people will honor him because Yahweh his God has given him the authority to rule" (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

They will remain

the people of Israel will remain

remain

Alternate translation: "live in safety"

he will be great to the ends of the earth

All people from every nation will give honor to Israel's ruler.

Micah 5:5

seven shepherds and eight leaders over men

Here “shepherds” is a metonym for “rulers,” another way of saying “leaders over men.” The phrase “seven ... and eight” is an idiom for “more than enough.” Alternate translation: “enough, even more than enough, rulers” or “more than enough shepherds and leaders over men” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 5:6

They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in its entrances

The sword is a metonym for killing in war. Here the Israelites ruling over the Assyrians is spoken of ironically as if they were killing sheep instead of herding them. The land of Assyria is a metonym for the people who live there. The entrances to cities were where official business took place. Alternate translation: "They will make war against the people of Assyria, and they will rule the cities of the land of Nimrod" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#) and **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

and the land of Nimrod

The words "they will shepherd" are understood from the beginning of the sentence. They can be repeated. Alternate translation: "and they will shepherd the land of Nimrod" (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**)

land of Nimrod

This is another name for the land of Assyria. Nimrod was a hunter and early ruler. Translators may add this footnote: "The name 'Nimrod' means 'rebellion.'" (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

He will rescue

The ruler will rescue

Micah 5:7

like dew from Yahweh, like showers on the grass

Dew and rain showers refresh the land and cause things to grow. The Israelites will cause the people among whom they live to live well. (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

grass, that do not wait for a man, and they do not wait for the children

“grass. It is not for a man that they wait, nor is it for the children.” It is Yahweh alone who causes dew and rain showers.

Micah 5:8

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh promises that the Israelites who are alive after Yahweh has punished his people with war will completely defeat and rule over their enemies.

remnant of Jacob

descendants of Jacob who survive the war

among the nations, among many peoples

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and emphasize that the “remnant of Jacob” will live in many different nations. (See: **Doublet (p.133)**) (See: **Doublet (p.133)**)

like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep

Lions are able to kill and eat any wild animal of the forest, and they easily kill sheep. Alternate translation: “like the fiercest of wild animals, like a wild animal that kills helpless livestock” (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

When he goes through them

when the young lion goes through the flocks of sheep

will trample over them and tear

Alternate translation: “will jump on them so they fall down, and then he will tear”

Micah 5:9

Your hand & your enemies

The writer is speaking to Yahweh, so both instances of "your" are masculine singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Your hand will be lifted against your enemies

The hand is a metonym for the power that the hand exercises or a synecdoche for the whole person. To lift the hand is to exercise power. Alternate translation: "You will completely defeat your enemies" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

it will destroy them

The hand is a synecdoche for the whole person. Alternate translation: "you will destroy them" (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Micah 5:10

I will destroy your horses from among you and will demolish your chariots

The people of Israel used horses and chariots only in battle, and they may have traded for them with the godless nations around them. God did not want the people to trust in their weapons of war to protect them more than they trusted in him. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

your horses & among you & your chariots

Yahweh is speaking to the people of Israel as if they were one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 5:11

your land & your strongholds

Yahweh is speaking to the people of Israel as if they were one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 5:12

the witchcraft in your hand

Being in the “hand” represents the actions that the person does. Alternate translation: “the witchcraft that you do” (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

your hand & you will

Yahweh continues to speak to the people of Israel as if they were one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 5:13

your carved & your stone & among you. You will & your hands

Yahweh continues to speak to the people of Israel as if they were one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

the workmanship of your hands

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **workmanship**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as "make." Alternate translation: "what your hands have made" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

Micah 5:14

your Asherah & among you & your cities

Yahweh continues to speak to the people of Israel as if they were one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

will uproot your Asherah poles

Yahweh speaks of Asherah poles as if they were trees that he would pull out of the ground. Alternate translation: "will pull your Asherah poles out of the ground" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 5:15

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Micah 6

Micah 6 General Notes

Structure and formatting

This chapter is written as a court case or lawsuit by Yahweh against His people. (See: **people of God (p.189)**)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Names in Lawsuit

Moses, Aaron and Miriam are mentioned as witnesses for Yahweh and against Israel. Ahab and Omri are mentioned as kings who were evil and did not follow Yahweh. Obedience to the law of Moses is contrasted with disobedience to the law. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/testimony\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/evil\]\]](#) and **law, law of Moses, law of Yahweh, law of God (p.187)**)

Micah 6:1

Now listen

Micah speaks to the people of Israel as if he were speaking to mountains that can hear him, so both instances of “listen” are plural. (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

Arise & state

Micah speaks to the people of Israel as if they were one man, so the commands and the word “your” are singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Arise and state your case before the mountains; let the hills hear your voice

Yahweh speaks as if he is in court and the mountains and hills are the judges. He commands the people of Israel to tell the judges why they have done what they did. (See: **Personification (p.169)**) (See: **Personification (p.169)**)

Micah 6:2

Listen to Yahweh's lawsuit

Micah speaks to the people of Israel as if he were speaking to mountains that can hear him, so both instances of "listen" are plural. (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

you mountains & you enduring foundations of the earth

Micah is speaking to these things as if they are humans. Micah is using the mountains, hills, and foundations of the earth as an eternal witness against his people's idolatry. (See: **Personification (p.169)**) (See: **Personification (p.169)**)

Micah 6:3

My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Testify against me!

God uses questions to emphasize that he is a good God, and he has done nothing to cause the people to stop worshiping him. Alternate translation: "My people, I have been good to you. I have done nothing to make you tired of me. If you think I have, testify against me, now." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

to you & wearied you? Testify

Yahweh speaks to the people as if they were one man, so all instances of "you" and all the commands are masculine singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

Micah 6:4

brought you & rescued you & Miriam to you

Yahweh speaks to the people as if they were one man, so all instances of “you” and all the commands are masculine singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

house of bondage

A house is a metaphor for a place in which one lives for a long time. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **bondage**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “to be slaves.” Alternate translation: “the place where you were slaves for a long time” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 6:5

remember & you went & you may know

Yahweh speaks to the people as if they were one man, so all instances of “you” and all the commands are masculine singular. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

what Balak & devised

“the plans Balak ... made to harm you

how Balaam & answered him

This could mean: (1) Balaam obeyed Balak by coming when Balak called him, Alternate translation: “how Balaam ... did what Balak asked him to do” or (2) Balaam explained to Balak why Balaam had blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them as Balak had commanded. Alternate translation: “what Balaam told Balak” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

Beor

This is the name of Balaam’s father. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

Shittim

This is the name of a place in Moab.

so you may know the righteous acts of Yahweh

Yahweh refers to himself by his own name. Alternate translation: “so that you may remember the righteous things that I, Yahweh, have done for you” (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.140)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.140)**)

Micah 6:6

What should I bring to Yahweh & God? Should I come & old?

Micah speaks as if he were a person who truly wanted to know what God expects him to do. This could mean: (1) he asks questions and then in verse 8 answers the questions he has asked or (2) he is using questions to teach the people. Alternate translation: "I know that I do not need to bring to Yahweh ... God, or come ... old" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 6:7

Will Yahweh be pleased & oil? Should I give & sin?

Micah continues to speak as if he were a person who truly wanted to know what God expects him to do. This could mean: (1) he asks questions and then in verse 8 answers the questions he has asked or (2) he is using questions to teach the people. Alternate translation: "I know that Yahweh will not be pleased ... oil or if I give ... sin." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

thousands of rams & ten thousand rivers of oil

"rams in groups of 1,000 ... 10,000 rivers of oil" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-numbers\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

Micah 6:8

He has told you

Alternate translation: "Yahweh has told you"

good, and what Yahweh requires from you: Act & God

Many versions read, "good. And what does Yahweh require from you? He wants you to act ... God." or "good. And what does Yahweh require from you but to act ... God?"

love kindness

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **kindness**, you can express the same idea with an adjective such as "kind." Alternate translation: "love being kind to people" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p. 123)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

Micah 6:9

even now wisdom acknowledges your name

Wisdom is spoken of as a person and is a metonym for the wise person. The word “name” here is a metonym for the person himself, what people think of him, and his authority. Alternate translation: “and the wise person will fear you” or “and the wise person will acknowledge that you are good and will obey you” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Pay attention to the rod, and to the one who has put it in place

Here “rod” refers to the enemy army with which Yahweh, who “has put it in place,” will discipline his people. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 6:10

There is wealth in the houses of the wicked that is dishonest

Dishonest wealth is a metonym for wealth that people have gained by acting dishonestly. The words “the wicked” refer to wicked people. Houses are a synecdoche for everything a person possesses. Alternate translation: “Wicked people have acted dishonestly to gain wealth” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-nominaladj\]\]](#) and **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

false measures

incorrect weights that people use with scales to increase their wealth by deceiving those with whom they trade

Micah 6:11

Should I consider a person to be innocent & weights?

If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "I certainly will not consider a person innocent ... weights." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

deceptive weights

weights with which sellers deceive buyers

Micah 6:12

The rich men are full of violence

Rich men are spoken of as if they were containers, and people treating each other violently is spoken of as if it were a liquid that could be put into a container. Alternate translation: “The rich men act violently toward everyone” or “The rich men act violently all the time” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

their tongue in their mouth is deceitful

The tongue is a synecdoche for the person. Alternate translation: “Everything they say is a lie” (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Micah 6:13

I will strike you with a terrible blow

Yahweh striking his people with blows is a metaphor for him punishing them. Alternate translation: "I have punished you severely" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 6:14

your emptiness will remain inside you

A person or thing being hungry is spoken of as if it were something that could be put in a container, and the people are spoken of as if they were containers. Alternate translation: "You will be hungry, and you will not be able to eat enough to satisfy yourself" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 6:15

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Micah 6:16

The regulations made by Omri have been kept, and all the deeds of the house of Ahab

This can be translated in active form, and you may need to supply the words that the ellipsis omitted. Alternate translation: "You have done what Omri commanded, and you have done the same things the house of Ahab did" (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Omri & Ahab

Both of these men were kings over the northern kingdom of Israel. God considered both of them to be very wicked. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.143)**)

house of Ahab

The word "house" is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. Alternate translation: "the descendants of Ahab"

You walk by their advice

Walking on a path is a metaphor for how a person lives his life. Alternate translation: "You do what Omri and Ahab told the people to do" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

I will make you, city, a ruin, and you inhabitants an object of hissing

Micah speaks to the people of the city, who can hear him, as if he were speaking to the city itself, which cannot hear him. You may need to make explicit the words that the ellipsis omits. Alternate translation: "I will make your city a ruin, and I will make you inhabitants an object of hissing" or "I will make you, city, a ruin, and I will cause everyone who sees you, inhabitants of the city, to hiss at you" or "I will make the city a ruin, and I will make people hiss at the inhabitants" (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.128)**)

you will bear the reproach of my people

Alternate translation: "you will suffer because my people will reproach you"

Micah 7

Micah 7 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Last days

This chapter looks forward to the hope of the coming savior for the faithful remnant. This is the future restoration of Israel when true peace will come. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/savior\]\]](#), [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/faithful\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/remnant\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/restore\]\]](#))

Prophet

The prophet was able to speak to God on behalf of the people. Often in this chapter, the prophet speaks in Israel's place and offers repentance to Yahweh. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/repent\]\]](#))

Micah 7:1

I have become like the gathering of summer fruit, and like the grapes that have been gleaned

Micah speaks of looking for faithful people but being unable to find any as if he were a person looking for food after the harvesters have taken it all. The idea of a person wanting to gather fruit can be stated clearly. Alternate translation: "I have become like someone looking for fruit after the gathering of summer fruit, like a gleaner after the grapes have been gleaned" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

no grape cluster & no ripe early fig

Micah speaks of faithful, upright people as if they were fruit that is good to eat. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:2

The faithful ones have disappeared & land; there is no upright person & They all lie in wait & blood; each one hunts

These are exaggerations. Alternate translation: "I feel as though faithful people have disappeared ... land and there is no upright person ... I feel as though they all lie in wait ... blood, and each one hunts" (See: **Hyperbole (p.147)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.147)**)

to shed blood

Blood is a metaphor for the death of innocent people. Alternate translation: "to kill innocent people" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:3

Their hands are very good

The hand is a synecdoche for the person. Alternate translation: "The people are very good" (See: **Synecdoche (p. 180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

Micah 7:4

The best of them is like a brier, the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge

Briers and thorns are good for nothing and harm those who touch them. The Israelite rulers and judges did nothing good and harmed people. (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

the most upright

Alternate translation: "those of them who try hardest to do what is good"

It is the day foretold by your watchmen, the day of your punishment

Micah speaks to the people of Israel, so both instances of "your" are plural. The word "watchmen" is a metaphor for prophets. Alternate translation: "Their prophets have told them that Yahweh would punish them" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-you\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Now is the time of their confusion

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **confusion**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "Now is when they do not understand what is happening" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

Micah 7:5

Do not trust any neighbor

Micah continues to show that there is no longer anyone good, honest, and loyal to God among God's people. Here he emphasizes that they cannot even trust friends or family.

Micah 7:6

people of his own house

Micah continues to show that there is no longer anyone good, honest, and loyal to God among God's people. Here he emphasizes that they cannot even trust friends or family.

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law

The words "rises up" are understood from the previous phrase. They can be repeated here. Alternate translation: "a daughter-in-law rises up against her mother-in-law" (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.135)**)

his own house

The word "house" is a metonym for the family that lives in the house. Alternate translation: "his own family" (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)

Micah 7:7

General Information:

General Information:

In verse 8 Micah begins speaking as if he were one woman speaking to her enemy, another woman. This is perhaps the daughter of Zion ([Micah 1:13](#)), who represents the people of Israel, speaking to the “daughter of soldiers” ([Micah 5:1](#)), who represents the nations which attacked Israel. All commands and instances of “you” are feminine singular. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-you\]\]](#)) (See: [Metaphor \(p.156\)](#))

But as for me

Here “me” refers to Micah.

I will wait for the God of my salvation

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **salvation**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: “I will wait for the God who saves me” or “I will wait for God, who saves me” (See: [Abstract Nouns \(p.123\)](#)) (See: [Abstract Nouns \(p.123\)](#))

will hear me

The word “hear” represents hearing and acting. Alternate translation: “will act to help me” (See: [Metonymy \(p.162\)](#)) (See: [Metonymy \(p.162\)](#))

Micah 7:8

fall & rise

These words are metaphors for suffering from disaster and then recovering. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

sit in darkness

These words are a metaphor for suffering from disaster. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:9

I will bear his rage

Rage is spoken of as if it were a solid object that Yahweh was forcing Micah to carry. Alternate translation: "I will suffer because he is angry with me" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

until he pleads my cause, and executes judgment for me

Yahweh will punish the people of the other nations who harmed the people of Israel.

he pleads my cause

Yahweh is spoken of as if he were defending Micah in court. Alternate translation: "he defends me against those who harm me" (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

executes judgment for me

Alternate translation: "brings about justice for me"

He will bring me to the light

Bringing Micah from darkness ([Micah 7:8](#)) to light is a metaphor for ending the suffering from disaster and enabling him to live well. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

rescue me in his justice

Alternate translation: "bring justice to me and rescue me"

Micah 7:10

my enemy & the one who said & your God & My eyes

The words “enemy,” “one,” “your,” and “my” here refer to the women in the poem and so are feminine singular.

Where is Yahweh your God?

The enemy uses a question to mock the people of Israel. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “Yahweh your God cannot help you” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

My eyes

This phrase here refers to the whole person. Alternate translation: “I” or “We” (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.180)**)

she will be trampled down

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “her enemies will trample her down” (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

like the mud in the streets

People who walk on mud without thinking they are doing anything bad are compared with those who will destroy Israel’s enemies without thinking they are doing anything evil. (See: **Simile (p.175)**) (See: **Simile (p.175)**)

Micah 7:11

General Information:

General Information:

Micah speaks to the people of Israel as if he were speaking to one man. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

A day to build your walls will come

Here “walls” refers to the walls around their cities, which provided safety and security from their enemies.

the boundaries will be extended very far

This can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: “Yahweh will greatly extend the boundaries of your land” or “Yahweh will greatly increase the size of your kingdom” (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.125)**)

Micah 7:12

the River

You may need to make explicit the name of river. Alternate translation: “the Euphrates River” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

from sea to sea

You may need to make explicit the names of the seas. “from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Dead Sea in the east” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

from mountain to mountain

“from one mountain to another.” Micah does not speak of any particular mountain. (See: **Idiom (p.151)**) (See: **Idiom (p.151)**)

Micah 7:13

the land will be desolate

Alternate translation: “the land will be empty” or “no one will live in the land”

because of the fruit of their actions

Fruit is a metaphor for the results of an earlier action. Alternate translation: “because of the results of what they have done” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:14

Shepherd your people with your rod, the flock of your inheritance

Micah is praying to Yahweh, asking him to protect his people of Israel again. Here “rod” refers to God’s leadership and guidance, as a shepherd uses a stick to guide and protect his sheep. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

They live alone in a thicket, in the midst of a pastureland

Micah speaks of his people as if they were wild animals hiding in bushes instead of livestock grazing in fields with much grass to eat. (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

a thicket

a place where many small woody plants grow

Bashan and Gilead

These regions are known as rich land for growing food.

as in the old days

Bashan and Gilead had been part of Israel long ago, when David was king. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.130)**)

Micah 7:15

As in the days & them wonders

Yahweh speaks to the people.

Micah 7:16

The nations

The word “nations” is a metonym for the people who live in many nations. Alternate translation: “The people of the nations nearby” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

They will put their hands on their mouths

They do this to show that they are ashamed of what they have done. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.178)**)

their ears will be deaf

This is an idiom. Nothing anyone says will have any effect on them. (See: **Idiom (p.151)**) (See: **Idiom (p.151)**)

Micah 7:17

They will lick the dust like a snake

Snakes slither on the ground where dust gets on them, and here the people are being compared to snakes, though it is probably an exaggeration that they will lick the dust. This could mean: (1) will literally lie on the ground in shame or (2) will be so ashamed and humbled that it will be as if they were lying on the ground. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#) and **Symbolic Action (p.178)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.147)**)

their dens

The people are spoken of as if they were animals, because animals live in “dens.” Alternate translation: “their homes” or “their hiding places” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:18

Who is a God like you—who takes & inheritance?

Micah is emphasizing that there is no God like Yahweh. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "I know that there is no God like you, who takes ... inheritance." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.171)**)

the remnant of his inheritance

Alternate translation: "those of his chosen people who have survived his punishment"

you & of the remnant of his inheritance? He does not keep his anger forever, because he delights in his covenant faithfulness.

Here the words "his" and "he" can be stated in second person. Alternate translation: "you ... of the remnant of your inheritance, who do not keep your anger forever, because you delight in your covenant faithfulness?" or "you ... of the remnant of your inheritance? You do not keep your anger forever, because you delights in your covenant faithfulness." (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.140)**) (See: **First, Second or Third Person (p.140)**)

he delights in his covenant faithfulness

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **faithfulness**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as "faithful." Alternate translation: "he delights in being faithful to his covenant" or "he delights in being faithful to his people" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.123)**)

passes over

ignores

does not keep his anger

Alternate translation: "does not stay angry"

Micah 7:19

You will

Here “you” refers to Yahweh. (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**) (See: **Forms of You (p.142)**)

on us

Here “us” refers to Micah and the people, but not to Yahweh. (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.138)**) (See: **Exclusive and Inclusive ‘We’ (p.138)**)

you will trample our iniquities under your feet. You will throw all our sins into the depths of the sea

Iniquity and sin are spoken of as if they were solid objects. Alternate translation: “You will treat our iniquities and sins as if they were not important” (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.156)**)

Micah 7:20

You will give truth to Jacob and covenant faithfulness to Abraham

Here the names of Jacob and Abraham are metonyms for their descendants, the people of Israel to whom Micah was speaking. The abstract nouns "truth" and "faithfulness" can be stated as "trustworthy" and "faithful." Alternate translation: "You will show the descendants of Jacob and Abraham that you are trustworthy and faithful to your covenant" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.162)**)



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Version 79

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: [Micah 1:12](#); [Micah 4:8](#); [Micah 4:13](#); [Micah 5:13](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Micah 7:4](#); [Micah 7:7](#); [Micah 7:18](#)

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: [Micah 1:7](#); [Micah 1:11](#); [Micah 1:13](#); [Micah 2:10](#); [Micah 3:7](#); [Micah 4:1](#); [Micah 4:7](#); [Micah 4:10](#); [Micah 4:11](#); [Micah 6:16](#); [Micah 7:4](#); [Micah 7:10](#); [Micah 7:11](#)

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: [Micah 1:2](#); [Micah 4:8](#); [Micah 5:2](#); [Micah 6:1](#); [Micah 6:2](#); [Micah 6:16](#)

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: [Introduction to Micah](#); [Micah 4:4](#); [Micah 5:10](#); [Micah 6:5](#); [Micah 7:12](#); [Micah 7:14](#)

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.

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.

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 \(UTA PDF\)](#)

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: [Micah 5:2](#); [Micah 5:8](#)

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: [Micah 4:2](#); [Micah 5:6](#); [Micah 7:6](#)

Exclusive and Inclusive 'We'

Description

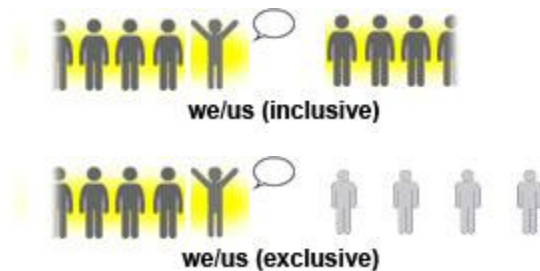
Some languages have more than one form of "we": an inclusive form that means "I and you" and an exclusive form that means "I and someone else but not you." The exclusive form excludes the person being spoken to. The inclusive form includes the person being spoken to and possibly others. This is also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

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

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

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

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



Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

Exclusive

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

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

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

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

Inclusive

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about: "
[When Masculine Words Include Women \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Micah 7:19](#)

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: [Micah 6:5](#); [Micah 7:18](#)

Forms of You

Singular, Dual, and Plural

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

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

Sometimes in the Bible a speaker uses a singular form of “you” even though he is speaking to a crowd. For help with translating these, we suggest you read:

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

Formal and Informal

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

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

For help with translating these, we suggest you read:

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

Masculine and Feminine

Some languages have a **masculine** form and a **feminine** form of the word for “you.” People use the **masculine** form when speaking to a man or boy and the **feminine** form when speaking to a woman or girl.

English does not make any of the above distinctions, so they are absent in the ULT. Please be aware of this and use the appropriate forms of “you” if your language does make any of these distinctions.

”

Referenced in: [Micah 2:6](#); [Micah 2:11](#); [Micah 2:12](#); [Micah 4:2](#); [Micah 4:13](#); [Micah 5:9](#); [Micah 5:10](#); [Micah 5:11](#); [Micah 5:12](#); [Micah 5:13](#); [Micah 5:14](#); [Micah 6:1](#); [Micah 6:3](#); [Micah 6:4](#); [Micah 6:5](#); [Micah 7:11](#); [Micah 7:19](#)

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

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

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

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

How to Translate Names

Description

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

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

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

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

Meaning of names

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

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

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

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

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

... a young man named **Paul** 1

The footnote would look like:

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

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

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

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

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

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

a young man named **Saul**

The footnote would look like:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The footnote would look like:

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Introduction to Micah](#); [Micah 1:1](#); [Micah 1:10](#); [Micah 1:11](#); [Micah 1:13](#); [Micah 1:14](#); [Micah 1:15](#); [Micah 5:2](#); [Micah 5:6](#); [Micah 6:5](#); [Micah 6:16](#)

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: [Micah 7:2](#); [Micah 7:17](#)

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: [Micah 1:1](#); [Micah 1:11](#); [Micah 7:12](#); [Micah 7:16](#)

Irony

Description

Irony is a figure of speech in which the sense that the speaker intends to communicate is actually the opposite of the literal meaning of the words. Sometimes a person does this by using someone else's words, but in a way that communicates that he does not agree with them. People do this to emphasize how different something is from what it should be, or how someone else's belief about something is wrong or foolish. It is often humorous.

This page answers the question: *What is irony and how can I translate it?*

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

Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)

Then Jesus answered and said to them, "People who are well do not have need of a physician, but those who have sickness. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
(Luke 5:31-32 ULT)

When Jesus spoke of "the righteous," he was not referring to people who were truly righteous, but to people who wrongly believed that they were righteous. By using irony, Jesus communicated that they were wrong to think that they were better than others and did not need to repent.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

If someone does not realize that a speaker is using irony, he will think that the speaker actually believes what he is saying. He will understand the passage to mean the opposite of what it was intended to mean.

Examples From the Bible

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9b ULT)

Here Jesus praises the Pharisees for doing something that is obviously wrong. Through irony, he communicates the opposite of praise: He communicates that the Pharisees, who take great pride in keeping the commandments, are so far from God that they do not even recognize that their traditions are breaking God's commandments. The use of irony makes the Pharisee's sin more obvious and startling.

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

People worshiped idols as if their idols had knowledge or power, and Yahweh was angry at them for doing that. So he used irony and challenged their idols to tell what would happen in the future. He knew that the idols could not do this, but by speaking as if they could, he mocked the idols, making their inability more obvious, and rebuked the people for worshiping them.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is many!** (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Job thought that he was wise. Yahweh used irony to show Job that he was not so wise. The two phrases in bold above are irony. They emphasize the opposite of what they say, because they are so obviously false. They emphasize that Job could not possibly answer God's questions about the creation of light because Job was not born until many, many years later.

Already you are satisfied! Already you have become rich! **You began to reign** apart from us, and I wish you really did reign, so that we also might reign with you. (1 Corinthians 4:8 ULT)

The Corinthians considered themselves to be very wise, self-sufficient, and not in need of any instruction from the Apostle Paul. Paul used irony, speaking as if he agreed with them, to show how proudly they were acting and how far from being wise they really were.

Translation Strategies

If the irony would be understood correctly in your language, translate it as it is stated. If not, here are some other strategies.

- (1) Translate the irony in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.
- (2) Translate the actual, intended meaning of the statement of irony. (Remember: The true meaning of the irony is **not** found in the literal words of the speaker, but instead the true meaning is found in the opposite of the literal meaning of the speaker's words.)

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate it in a way that shows that the speaker is saying what someone else believes.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You think that you are doing well when you reject God's commandment so you may keep your tradition!

or:

You act like it is good to reject God's commandment so you may keep your tradition!

I did not come to call **the righteous**, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32 ULT)

I did not come to call **people who think that they are righteous** to repentance, but to call people who know that they are sinners to repentance.

- (2) Translate the actual, intended meaning of the statement of irony.

How well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your tradition! (Mark 7:9a ULT)

You are doing a terrible thing when you reject the commandment of God so you may keep your tradition!

"Present your case," says Yahweh; "present your best arguments for your idols," says the King of Jacob. **"Let them bring us their own arguments; have them come forward and declare to us what will happen, so we may know these things well. Have them tell us of earlier predictive declarations, so we can reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled."** (Isaiah 41:21-22 ULT)

'Present your case,' says Yahweh; 'present your best arguments for your idols,' says the King of Jacob. **Can your idols bring us their own arguments or come forward to declare to us what will happen** so we may know these things well? **No!** We cannot hear them because **they cannot speak** to tell us their earlier predictive declarations, so we cannot reflect on them and know how they were fulfilled.

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is many!** (Job 38:20-21 ULT)

Can you lead light and darkness to their places of work? Can you find the way back to their houses for them? **You act like you know how light and darkness were created, as if you were there; as if you are as old as creation, but you are not!**

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Micah 2:4](#); [Micah 5:1](#)

Metaphor

Description

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Parts of a Metaphor

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

Every metaphor has three parts:

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

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

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

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

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

Passive Metaphors

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

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

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

Active Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Purposes of Metaphor

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Translation Principles

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I will make you **gather people**.

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

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Referenced in: Micah 1 General Notes; Micah 1:3; Micah 1:4; Micah 1:6; Micah 1:7; Micah 1:9; Micah 2:3; Micah 2:6; Micah 2:8; Micah 3 General Notes; Micah 3:2; Micah 3:3; Micah 3:4; Micah 3:5; Micah 3:6; Micah 3:8; Micah 3:10; Micah 3:12; Micah 4:1; Micah 4:2; Micah 4:5; Micah 4:8; Micah 4:13; Micah 5:1; Micah 5:4; Micah 5:5; Micah 5:6; Micah 5:14; Micah 6:4; Micah 6:9; Micah 6:12; Micah 6:13; Micah 6:14; Micah 6:16; Micah 7:1; Micah 7:2; Micah 7:4; Micah 7:7; Micah 7:8; Micah 7:9; Micah 7:13; Micah 7:14; Micah 7:16; Micah 7:17; Micah 7:19

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: [Micah 1:5](#); [Micah 1:13](#); [Micah 2:7](#); [Micah 3:7](#); [Micah 3:8](#); [Micah 3:9](#); [Micah 4:2](#); [Micah 4:10](#); [Micah 5:1](#); [Micah 5:4](#); [Micah 5:6](#); [Micah 5:9](#); [Micah 5:12](#); [Micah 6:9](#); [Micah 6:10](#); [Micah 7:6](#); [Micah 7:7](#); [Micah 7:20](#)

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**.

"

Referenced in: [Micah 3:2](#)

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: [Micah 1:1](#)

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: [Micah 6:1](#); [Micah 6:2](#)

Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is a question that a speaker asks when he is more interested in expressing his attitude about something than in getting information about it. Speakers use rhetorical questions to express deep emotion or to encourage hearers to think deeply about something. The Bible contains many rhetorical questions, often to express surprise, to rebuke or scold the hearer, or to teach. Speakers of some languages use rhetorical questions for other purposes as well.

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

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

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

[Sentence Types \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Description

A rhetorical question is a question that strongly expresses the speaker's attitude toward something. Often the speaker is not looking for information at all. Or, if he is asking for information, it is not usually the information that the question appears to ask for. The speaker is more interested in expressing his attitude than in getting information.

But those who stood by said, **“Are you insulting the high priest of God?”**(Acts 23:4 ULT)

The people who asked Paul this question were not asking if he was insulting God's high priest. Rather, they used this question to accuse Paul of insulting the high priest.

The Bible contains many rhetorical questions. These rhetorical questions might be used for the purposes: of expressing attitudes or feelings, rebuking people, teaching something by reminding people of something they know and encouraging them to apply it to something new, or introducing something they want to talk about.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use rhetorical questions; for them a question is always a request for information.
- Some languages use rhetorical questions, but for purposes that are different or more limited than in the Bible.
- Because of these differences between languages, some readers might misunderstand the purpose of a rhetorical question in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

Jezebel used the question above **to remind** King Ahab of something he already knew: he still ruled the kingdom of Israel. The rhetorical question made her point more strongly than if she had merely stated it, because it forced Ahab to admit the point himself. She did this in order **to rebuke** him for being unwilling to take over a poor man's property. She was implying that, since he was the king of Israel, he had the power to take the man's property.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

God used the question above **to remind** his people of something they already knew: a young woman would never forget her jewelry or a bride forget her veils. He then **rebuked** his people for forgetting him who is so much greater than those things.

But you, why do you judge your brother? And you also, why do you despise your brother? (Romans 14:10 ULT)

Paul used these rhetorical questions **to rebuke** the Romans for doing what they should not do.

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

Job used the question above **to show deep emotion**. This rhetorical question expresses how sad he was that he did not die as soon as he was born. He wished that he had not lived.

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

Elizabeth used the question above **to show how surprised and happy she was** that the mother of her Lord came to her.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Jesus used the question above **to remind** the people of something they already knew: a good father would never give his son something bad to eat. By introducing this point, Jesus could go on **to teach them** about God with his next rhetorical question:

Therefore, if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:11 ULT)

Jesus used this question **to teach** the people in an emphatic way that God gives good things to those who ask him.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and threw into his garden ... (Luke 13:18b-19a ULT)

Jesus used the question above **to introduce what he was going to talk about**. He was about to compare the kingdom of God to something. In this case, he compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

Translation Strategies

In order to translate a rhetorical question accurately, first be sure that the question you are translating truly is a rhetorical question and is not an information question. Ask yourself, "Does the person asking the question already know the answer to the question?" If so, it is a rhetorical question. Or, if no one answers the question, did the person who asked it expect to receive an answer? If not, it is a rhetorical question.

When you are sure that the question is rhetorical, then be sure that you understand the purpose for the rhetorical question. Is it to encourage or rebuke or shame the hearer? Is it to bring up a new topic? Is it to express surprise or other emotion? Is it to do something else?

When you know the purpose of the rhetorical question, then think of the most natural way to express that purpose in the target language. It might be as a question, or a statement, or an exclamation.

If using the rhetorical question would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider doing so. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Add the answer after the question.
- (2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.
- (3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.
- (4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Add the answer after the question.

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? **Of course not!** Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number!

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? **None of you would do that!**

(2) Change the rhetorical question to a statement or exclamation.

What is the kingdom of God like, and what can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. (Luke 13:18-19a ULT)

This is what the kingdom of God is like. It is like a mustard seed ...

Are you insulting the high priest of God? (Acts 23:4b ULT) (Acts 23:4 ULT)

You should not insult God's high priest!

Why did I not die when I came out from the womb? (Job 3:11a ULT)

I wish I had died when I came out from the womb!

And how has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43 ULT)

How wonderful it is that the mother of my Lord has come to me!

(3) Change the rhetorical question to a statement, and then follow it with a short question.

Do you not still rule the kingdom of Israel? (1 Kings 21:7b ULT)

You still rule the kingdom of Israel, **do you not?**

(4) Change the form of the question so that it communicates in your language what the original speaker communicated in his.

Or what man is there among you, of whom his son will ask for a loaf of bread, but he will give him a stone? (Matthew 7:9 ULT)

If your son asks you for a loaf of bread, **would you give him a stone?**

Will a virgin forget her jewelry, a bride her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number! (Jeremiah 2:32 ULT)

What virgin would forget her jewelry, and what bride would forget her veils? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number!

But you, **why do you judge your brother?** And you also, **why do you despise your brother?** (Romans 14:10 ULT)

Do you think it is good to judge your brother? Do you think it is good to despise your brother?

..

Referenced in: [Micah 2:4](#); [Micah 2:7](#); [Micah 3:1](#); [Micah 3:11](#); [Micah 4:9](#); [Micah 6:3](#); [Micah 6:6](#); [Micah 6:7](#); [Micah 6:11](#); [Micah 7:10](#); [Micah 7:18](#)

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: [Micah 1:8](#); [Micah 4:10](#); [Micah 4:12](#); [Micah 5:7](#); [Micah 5:8](#); [Micah 7:4](#); [Micah 7:10](#)

Symbolic Action

Description

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

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

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

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

Examples of symbolic actions

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) Tell what the person did and why he did it.
- (2) Do not tell what the person did, but tell what he meant.
- (3) Use an action from your own culture that has the same meaning. Do this only in poetry, parables, and sermons. Do not do this when there actually was a person who did a specific action.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Referenced in: [Micah 1:10](#); [Micah 1:16](#); [Micah 7:16](#); [Micah 7:17](#)

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: [Micah 1:5](#); [Micah 4:4](#); [Micah 4:6](#); [Micah 4:11](#); [Micah 5:9](#); [Micah 6:10](#); [Micah 6:12](#); [Micah 7:3](#); [Micah 7:10](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 79

faith

Definition:

In general, the term "faith" refers to a belief, trust or confidence in someone or something.

- To "have faith" in someone is to believe that what he says and does is true and trustworthy.
- To "have faith in Jesus" means to believe all of God's teachings about Jesus. It especially means that people trust in Jesus and his sacrifice to cleanse them from their sin and to rescue them from the punishment they deserve because of their sin.
- True faith or belief in Jesus will cause a person to produce good spiritual fruits or behaviors because the Holy Spirit is living in him.
- Sometimes "faith" refers generally to all the teachings about Jesus, as in the expression "the truths of the faith."
- In contexts such as "keep the faith" or "abandon the faith," the term "faith" refers to the state or condition of believing all the teachings about Jesus.

Translation Suggestions:

- In some contexts, "faith" can be translated as "belief" or "conviction" or "confidence" or "trust."
- For some languages these terms will be translated using forms of the verb "believe." (See: [abstractnouns](#))
- The expression "keep the faith" could be translated by "keep believing in Jesus" or "continue to believe in Jesus."
- The sentence "they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith" could be translated by "they must keep believing all the true things about Jesus that they have been taught."
- The expression "my true son in the faith" could be translated by something like "who is like a son to me because I taught him to believe in Jesus" or "my true spiritual son, who believes in Jesus."

(See also: [believe](#), [faithful](#))

Bible References:

- 2 Timothy 4:7
- Acts 6:7
- Galatians 2:20-21
- James 2:20

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **5:6** When Isaac was a young man, God tested Abraham's **faith** by saying, "Take Isaac, your only son, and kill him as a sacrifice to me."
- **31:7** Then he (Jesus) said to Peter, "You man of little **faith**, why did you doubt?"
- **32:16** Jesus said to her, "Your **faith** has healed you. Go in peace."
- **38:9** Then Jesus said to Peter, "Satan wants to have all of you, but I have prayed for you, Peter, that your **faith** will not fail."

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0529, H0530, G16800, G36400, G41020, G60660

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Micah](#)

just, justice, unjust, injustice, justify, justification

Definition:

“Just” and “justice” refer to treating people fairly according to God’s laws. Human laws that reflect God’s standard of right behavior toward others are also just.

- To be “just” is to act in a fair and right way toward others. It also implies honesty and integrity to do what is morally right in God’s eyes.
- To act “justly” means to treat people in a way that is right, good, and proper according to God’s laws.
- To receive “justice” means to be treated fairly under the law, either being protected by the law or being punished for breaking the law.
- Sometimes the term “just” has the broader meaning of “righteous” or “following God’s laws.”

The terms “unjust” and “unjustly” refer to treating people in an unfair and often harmful manner.

- An “injustice” is something bad that is done to someone that the person did not deserve. It refers to treating people unfairly.
- Injustice also means that some people are treated badly while others are treated well.
- Someone who is acting in an unjust way is being “partial” or “prejudiced” because he is not treating people equally.

The terms “justify” and “justification” refer to causing a guilty person to be righteous. Only God can truly justify people.

- When God justifies people, he forgives their sins and makes it as though they have no sin. He justifies sinners who repent and trust in Jesus to save them from their sins.
- “Justification” refers to what God does when he forgives a person’s sins and declares that person to be righteous in his sight.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, other ways to translate “just” could include “morally right” or “fair.”
- The term “justice” could be translated as “fair treatment” or “deserved consequences.”
- To “act justly” could be translated as “treat fairly” or “behave in a just way.”
- In some contexts, “just” could be translated as “righteous” or “upright.”
- Depending on the context, “unjust” could also be translated as “unfair” or “partial” or “unrighteous.”
- The phrase “the unjust” could be translated as “the unjust ones” or “unjust people” or “people who treat others unfairly” or “unrighteous people” or “people who disobey God.”
- The term “unjustly” could be translated as “in an unfair manner” or “wrongly” or “unfairly.”
- Ways to translate “injustice” could include, “wrong treatment” or “unfair treatment” or “acting unfairly.” (See: [abstractnouns](#))
- Other ways to translate “justify” could include “declare (someone) to be righteous” or “cause (someone) to be righteous.”
- The term “justification” could be translated as “being declared righteous” or “becoming righteous” or “causing people to be righteous.”
- The phrase “resulting in justification” could be translated as “so that God justified many people” or “which resulted in God causing people to be righteous.”
- The phrase “for our justification” could be translated as “in order that we could be made righteous by God.”

(See also: [forgive](#), [guilt](#), [judge](#), [righteous](#), [righteous](#))

Bible References:

- Genesis 44:16
- 1 Chronicles 18:14
- Isaiah 4:3-4
- Jeremiah 22:3
- Ezekiel 18:16-17
- Micah 3:8
- Matthew 5:43-45
- Matthew 11:19
- Matthew 23:23-24
- Luke 18:3
- Luke 18:8
- Luke 18:13-14
- Luke 21:20-22
- Luke 23:41
- Acts 13:38-39
- Acts 28:4
- Romans 4:1-3
- Galatians 3:6-9
- Galatians 3:11
- Galatians 5:3-4
- Titus 3:6-7
- Hebrews 6:10
- James 2:24
- Revelation 15:3-4

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **17:9** David ruled with **justice** and faithfulness for many years, and God blessed him.
- **18:13** Some of these kings (of Judah) were good men who ruled **justly** and worshiped God.
- **19:16** They (the prophets) all told the people to stop worshiping idols and to start showing **justice** and mercy to others.
- **50:17** Jesus will rule his kingdom with peace and **justice**, and he will be with his people forever.

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0205, H2555, H3477, H4941, H5765, H5766, H5767, H6662, H6663, H6664, H6666, H8003, H8264, H8636, G00910, G00930, G00940, G13420, G13440, G13450, G13460, G13470, G17380

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Referenced in: [Micah 2 General Notes](#)

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

Definition:

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

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

Translation Suggestions:

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

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

Bible References:

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

Examples from the Bible stories:

- **13:7** God also gave many other **laws** and rules to follow. If the people obeyed these **laws**, God promised that he would bless and protect them. If they disobeyed them, God would punish them.
- **13:9** Anyone who disobeyed **God’s law** could bring an animal to the altar in front of the Tent of Meeting as a sacrifice to God.
- **15:13** Then Joshua reminded the people of their obligation to obey the covenant that God had made with the Israelites at Sinai. The people promised to remain faithful to God and follow **his laws**.
- **16:1** After Joshua died, the Israelites disobeyed God and did not drive out the rest of the Canaanites or obey **God’s laws**.

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

Word Data:

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

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Referenced in: [Micah 3 General Notes](#); [Micah 6 General Notes](#)

people of God

Definition:

The concept of the “people of God” in the Bible refers to people with whom God has established a covenant relationship.

- In the Old Testament, the phrase “people of God” refers to the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was chosen by God and set apart from the other nations of the world in order to serve and obey him.
- In the New Testament, the phrase “people of God” refers to the “Church,” meaning everyone who believes in Jesus. This includes both Jews and Gentiles. In the New Testament, sometimes this group of people is called the “sons of God” or “children of God.”
- When God uses the phrase “my people,” he is referring to people who have a covenant relationship with him. God’s people are chosen by him, and he wants them to live in a way that is pleasing to him.

Translation Suggestions:

- The term “people of God” could be translated as “God’s people” or “the people who worship God” or “people who serve God” or “people who belong to God.”
- When God says “my people” other ways to translate it could include “the people I have chosen” or “the people who worship me” or “the people who belong to me.”
- Similarly, “your people” could be translated as “the people who belong to you” or “the people you chose to belong to you.”
- Also “his people” could be translated as “the people who belong to him” or “the people God chose to belong to himself.”

(See also: [Israel](#), [people group](#))

Bible References:

- 1 Chronicles 11:2
- Acts 7:34
- Acts 7:51-53
- Acts 10:36-38
- Daniel 9:24-25
- Isaiah 2:5-6
- Jeremiah 6:20-22
- Joel 3:16-17
- Micah 6:3-5
- Revelation 13:7-8

Word Data:

- Strong’s: H0430, H5971, G23160, G29920

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Referenced in: [Micah 6 General Notes](#)

prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess

Definition:

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

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

Translation Suggestions:

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

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

Bible References:

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

Examples from the Bible stories:

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

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

Word Data:

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

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Referenced in: [Introduction to Micah](#)

remnant

Definition:

The term “remnant” literally refers to people or things that are “remaining” or “left over” from a larger amount or group.

- Often a “remnant” refers to people who survive a life-threatening situation or who remain faithful to God while undergoing persecution.
- Isaiah referred to a group of Jews as being a remnant who would survive attacks from outsiders and live to return to the Promised Land in Canaan.
- Paul talks about there being a “remnant” of people who were chosen by God to receive his grace.
- The term “remnant” also implies that there were other people who did not remain or were not left over.

Translation Suggestions:

- A phrase such as “the remnant of this people” could be translated as “the rest of these people” or “the people who are left.”
- The “whole remnant of people” could be translated by “all the rest of the people” or “the remaining people.”

Bible References:

- Acts 15:17
- Amos 9:12
- Ezekiel 6:8-10
- Genesis 45:7
- Isaiah 11:11
- Micah 4:6-8

Word Data:

- Strong's: H3498, H3499, H5629, H6413, H7604, H7605, H7611, H8281, H8300, G26400, G30050, G30620

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

restore, restoration

Definition:

The terms “restore” and “restoration” refer to causing something to return to its original place or condition.

- When a diseased body part is restored, this means it has been “healed.”
- A broken relationship that is restored has been “reconciled.” God restores sinful people and brings them back to himself.
- If people have been restored to their home country, they have been “brought back” or “returned” to that country.

Translation Suggestions:

- Depending on the context, ways to translate “restore” could include “renew” or “repay” or “return” or “heal” or “bring back.”
- Other expressions for this term could be “make new” or “make like new again.”
- When property is “restored,” it has been “repaired” or “replaced” or “given back” to its owner.
- Depending on the context, “restoration” could be translated as “renewal” or “healing” or “reconciliation.”

Bible References:

- 2 Kings 5:10
- Acts 3:21
- Acts 15:15-18
- Isaiah 49:5-6
- Jeremiah 15:19-21
- Lamentations 5:22
- Leviticus 6:5-7
- Luke 19:8
- Matthew 12:13
- Psalm 80:1-3

Word Data:

- Strong's: H7725, H7999, H8421, G06000, G26750

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

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