



# **unfoldingWord® Translation Notes**

**Nahum**

**Version 79**

[en]

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# **unfoldingWord® Translation Notes**

**Nahum**

## Introduction to Nahum

### Part 1: General Introduction

#### Outline of the Book of Nahum

Nahum introduces this book (1:1)

Yahweh will destroy his enemies (1:2-15)

Nahum describes how Nineveh will fall (2:1–3:19)

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

The Book of Nahum contains prophecies about how Yahweh would judge and punish Nineveh.

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. They were threatening the southern kingdom of Judah. The book gave Judah hope that the Assyrians would be defeated.

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

“The Book of Nahum” or just “Nahum” is the traditional title of this book. Translators may choose to call it “The Sayings of Nahum.” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**)

#### Who wrote the Book of Nahum?

The prophet Nahum probably wrote this book. He was a prophet from Elkosh, an unknown city probably in Judah.

Nahum wrote before Nineveh fell in about 612 B.C. Nahum also mentions the destruction of Thebes, a city in Egypt, which happened about 663 B.C. Therefore, the Book of Nahum was written sometime between 663 and 612 B.C. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.119)**)

### Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

#### What is the importance of the descriptions of locusts in 3:15–17?

Locust attacks occurred often in the ancient Near East. Certain kinds of grasshoppers would come in countless numbers. There would be so many that they would darken the sky like a black cloud that blocked the sunlight. They often came after a long period of no rain. They came down on whatever crops were surviving in the fields and stripped them bare of their leaves. The locusts could not be stopped and caused terrible damage. For this reason, locust attacks served as a powerful image of military attacks in the Old Testament.

The original language of the Old Testament used various names for locusts. It is uncertain whether these names refer to different kinds of locusts or to the same kind of locust in different stages of growth. For this reason, versions of the Bible differ in how they translate these terms.

### Part 3: Important Translation Issues

#### What emotions were present in the various speakers in the Book of Nahum?

When Nahum spoke to the Israelites, he wanted to comfort them.

When Nahum and Yahweh spoke against the Ninevites, they often mocked them. This manner of speech was similar to speech in the ancient Near East when conquerors laughed at their victims.

It is important for translators to present both emotions of comfort and of mockery when translating this book.

# Nahum 1

## Nahum 1 General Notes

### Structure and formatting

Some translations prefer to set apart extended quotations, prayers and songs. The ULT and many other English translations set the lines of the entire book (except for verse 1 of this chapter) farther to the right on the page than regular text because they are poetic prophecy. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.119)**)

Despite being divided into three chapters, this book consists of one long prophecy.

### Special concepts in this chapter

#### Yahweh's anger against Nineveh

This prophecy should be read in reference to the book of Jonah. That book described how the people of Niniveh, Assyria's capital city, repented when Jonah warned them that Yahweh was angry at them. The book of Nahum, written a little over one hundred years later than when Jonah was set, indicates that the Ninevites would be punished by God, but only after he had used them for his own purposes. These actions of Yahweh, although described as vengeance or anger, do not have the same sinful quality as they usually do with humans. (See: [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/kt/evil\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///tw/dict/bible/other/avenge\]\]](#) and **sin, sinful, sinner, sinning (p.121)**)

#### Complete destruction

At that time, Assyria controlled almost the entire Near East. Nahum prophesied that the Assyrians would be so completely destroyed as a nation that they would no longer even be a people group. This prophecy came true very suddenly.



## **Nahum 1:1**

### **General Information:**

## **General Information:**

Nahum describes the destruction of Nineveh in poetry. (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**)

### **The declaration about Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite**

These words are an introduction to the entire book. This can be stated as a complete sentence. Alternate translation: "This is the book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite, which gives a declaration about Nineveh" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

### **Elkoshite**

A person from the village of Elkosh (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**)

## Nahum 1:2

### General Information:

## General Information:

Nahum begins to describe Yahweh coming to judge his enemies and to save his people. The vision is full of metaphorical language and uses different kinds of parallelism. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### 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.

### full of wrath

Alternate translation: "very angry"

### he continues his anger for

Alternate translation: "continues to be angry with"

## **Nahum 1:3**

### **slow to anger**

Alternate translation: "slow to become angry"

### **he will not allow the wicked to go unpunished**

This emphatic negative statement can be translated positively. Alternate translation: "he will always be sure to punish the wicked" (See: **Litotes (p.86)**) (See: **Litotes (p.86)**)

### **Yahweh makes his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet**

The biblical writers often associated Yahweh's presence with powerful storms. Here Yahweh rides in strong storm winds and his feet are creating clouds by kicking up dust as he is coming to judge the people. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

### **the dust of his feet**

Alternate translation: "the dust that his feet kick up"

## Nahum 1:4

### **Bashan is weak, and Carmel also; the flowers of Lebanon are weak**

The word translated as “weak” can also mean “wither” or “dry out.” Bashan was known for its good pastureland where people tended sheep and cattle, “Carmel” refers to Mount Carmel, which was known for its tree orchards, and the snow from the mountains in Lebanon kept that place fertile. Since Yahweh dries up all the rivers and causes drought, these fertile places will no longer be fertile. Alternate translation: “The fields of Bashan wither, the trees of Mount Carmel die, and the flowers of Lebanon fade” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

## **Nahum 1:5**

### **the hills melt**

This could mean: (1) the earthquake causing the hills to crumble to pieces is spoken of as if the hills were melting or (2) the water from the storms coursing down the hills and causing them to erode is spoken of as if the hills were melting. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **the earth collapses**

This could mean: (1) the mountains and hills collapse or (2) the entire ground begins to move with violent motions.

### **the world and all people who live in it**

Here the word “world” refers to the inhabited places on the earth. The verb for this phrase is understood from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: “the world shakes and all the people who live in it collapse” (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**)

## Nahum 1:6

### Who can stand before his wrath? Who can resist the fierceness of his anger?

These two rhetorical questions mean basically the same thing. They can be translated with statements. Alternate translation: "No one can stand before his wrath! No one can resist the fierceness of his anger!" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**)

### fierceness of his anger

Alternate translation: "intensity of his anger" or "amount of his anger"

### His wrath is poured out like fire

Nahum speaks of Yahweh's anger as if it were a liquid that he pours out and which burns like fire. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "He pours out his wrath like fire" or "He expresses his fierce anger" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### the rocks are broken apart by him

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "he breaks apart the rocks" or "he causes the rocks to break apart" (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

## **Nahum 1:7**

### **a stronghold & those who take refuge in him**

Nahum speaks of Yahweh as if he were a place where people can be safe from those who wish to harm them, and of those who trust Yahweh to protect them as if they were taking refuge inside that safe place. (See: **Metaphor (p. 88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **in the day of trouble**

“in times of trouble” or “when troubles happen.” The word “day” here refers to a general period of time.

## Nahum 1:8

### he will make a full end to his enemies

The idiom “make a full end” refers to causing his enemies to die. Alternate translation: “he will completely destroy his enemies” or “he will kill all his enemies” (See: **Idiom (p.81)**) (See: **Idiom (p.81)**)

### with an overwhelming flood

Nahum speaks of Yahweh destroying his enemies in such a way that they will be powerless to avoid death as if Yahweh caused them to drown in a great flood of water. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### he will pursue them into darkness

Here the word “darkness” represents the place of the dead, which is characterized as a dark place. Nahum speaks of Yahweh killing his enemies as if he were chasing them into this dark place. Alternate translation: “he will cause all his enemies to die” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)



## Nahum 1:9

### General Information:

## General Information:

Nahum tells the people of Nineveh how Yahweh will deal with them.

### What are you people plotting against Yahweh?

This rhetorical question emphasizes the futility of making evil plans against Yahweh. Alternate translation: "It is futile for you people to plot against Yahweh" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)

### He will make a full end to it

The idiom "make a full end" refers to causing something to exist no longer. Alternate translation: "He will completely stop what you do" or "He will cause your plotting to fail" (See: **Idiom (p.81)**) (See: **Idiom (p.81)**)

### trouble will not rise up a second time

This could mean: (1) "trouble" is a metonym for the punishment that Yahweh will inflict upon the people. Alternate translation: "Yahweh will not have to punish you a second time" or (2) "trouble" refers to the trouble that the people cause by plotting against Yahweh. Alternate translation: "you will not cause trouble a second time" (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

## Nahum 1:10

### they will become tangled up like thornbushes

This metaphor could mean: (1) the people who plot against Yahweh will not be able to free themselves from the trouble that Yahweh will bring upon them, like a person who is tangled up in thornbushes cannot easily free himself or (2) just as thornbushes burn more quickly when they are tangled together, Yahweh will quickly destroy those who plot against him. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### they will be saturated in their own drink

Nahum speaks of those who plot against Yahweh suffering the consequences of their plans as if they were completely drunk with alcohol. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### they will be completely devoured by fire like dry stubble

Nahum speaks of Yahweh completely destroying those who plot against him as if fire would burn them up like fire burns up dry stubble. 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: "fire will completely devour them like it devours dry stubble" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### devoured by fire

Nahum speaks of fire burning something completely as if the fire were devouring that thing. Alternate translation: "burned up by fire" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## **Nahum 1:11**

### **promoted wickedness**

encouraged people to do wicked things

## Nahum 1:12

### General Information:

### General Information:

Yahweh speaks to the Israelites about Nineveh.

### Even if they are at their full strength and full numbers

This refers to the Assyrians or to the people of Nineveh.

### they will nevertheless be sheared

Yahweh speaks of destroying the people of Nineveh as if they were sheep that he will shear. 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: "I will nevertheless shear them" or "I will nevertheless destroy them" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## **Nahum 1:13**

### **Now will I break that people's yoke from off you; I will break your chains**

Yahweh speaks of freeing Judah from Assyrian oppression as if he were breaking the yoke and chains that the Assyrians had placed on them. Alternate translation: "Now I will free you from that people and they will no longer oppress you" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## Nahum 1:14

### **I will cut off the carved figures and the cast metal figures from the houses of your gods**

Yahweh speaks of destroying the Assyrian idols as if he were cutting them off, like a person would cut a branch from a tree. The word "house" is a metonym for the temples in which the people worshiped these idols. Alternate translation: "I will destroy the carved figures and the cast metal figures that are in the temples of your gods" (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **I will dig your graves**

It is implied that Yahweh will also bury them in the graves that he digs for them. Alternate translation: "I will dig your graves and bury you in them" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

## Nahum 1:15

### on the mountains there are the feet of someone who is bringing good news

Here the word "feet" represent the person who is running in order to declare a message. Alternate translation: "on the mountains there is someone who is bringing good news" (See: **Synecdoche (p.113)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.113)**)

### wicked one & he

Nahum refers to the people of Nineveh as though they were one person.

### he is completely cut off

Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh being completely destroyed as if they had been cut off, like a person would cut a branch from a tree. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "he is completely destroyed" or "Yahweh has completely destroyed him" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## Nahum 2

### Nahum 2 General Notes

#### Structure and formatting

Some translations prefer to set apart extended quotations, prayers and songs. The ULT and many other English translations set the lines of the entire book (except for verse 1 of chapter 1) farther to the right on the page than regular text because they are poetic prophecy. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.119)**)

Despite being divided into three chapters, this book contains one long prophecy.

#### Special concepts in this chapter

##### Complete destruction

At that time, Assyria controlled almost the entire Near East. Nahum prophesied that the Assyrians would be so completely destroyed as a nation that they would no longer even be a people group. This prophecy came true and did so very suddenly. At times, this chapter is very violent in describing the destruction of Assyria, and this violence should not be toned down through the use of euphemism.



## Nahum 2:1

### General Information:

## General Information:

Nahum often wrote prophecy in the form of poetry. Hebrew poetry uses different kinds of parallelism. Here he begins to describe the destruction of Nineveh. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/writing-poetry\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Poetry (p.101)**)

### The one who will dash you to pieces

The word “you” refers to Nineveh. Nahum speaks of an army or military leader destroying Nineveh as if he were to shatter Nineveh like one would shatter a clay pot. Alternate translation: “The one who will destroy you” (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### The one who will dash you

The person who is “the one” is not clear, so translate using a general term. Alternate translation: “Someone who will break you”

### is coming up against you

The idiom to “come against” means to attack. Alternate translation: “is preparing to attack you” (See: **Idiom (p.81)**) (See: **Idiom (p.81)**)

### Man the city walls, guard the roads, make yourselves strong, assemble your armies

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh. He tells them to prepare for battle, although he knows that the enemy will destroy the city. (See: **Irony (p.83)**) (See: **Irony (p.83)**)

### Man the city walls

Nineveh had a large, thick wall surrounding it. This refers to placing soldiers on the top of the wall in order to fight off attackers. This can be translated with a more general phrase if necessary. Alternate translation: “Man the fortifications” or “Prepare the defenses” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

### guard the roads

This refers to having soldiers watch the roads leading to the city so that they can keep track of the enemy’s approach.

## **make yourselves strong**

This is an idiom that means to prepare oneself for action. Here it applies to military action. Alternate translation: "prepare yourselves for battle" (See: **Idiom (p.81)**) (See: **Idiom (p.81)**)

## Nahum 2:2

### For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of Jacob, like the majesty of Israel

The words "Jacob" and "Israel" are metonyms for the people who are descended from Jacob. This could mean: (1) the word "Jacob" refers to the southern kingdom and the word "Israel" refers to the northern kingdom. Alternate translation: "For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of Judah, as he promised to restore the majesty of Israel" or (2) both "Jacob" and "Israel" refer to the nation as a whole, included both northern and southern kingdoms and the two lines are parallel. Alternate translation: "For Yahweh is restoring the majesty of all Israel" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### the plunderers

people who steal things by force, usually in war

### destroyed their vine branches

This could mean: (1) this is a metaphor in which the Assyrians taking away Israel's possessions by force is spoken of as if Israel were a vine whose branches the Assyrians had stripped bare. Alternate translation: "robbed them of all of their possession, like one would strip bare vine branches" or (2) the words "vine branches" are a synecdoche for the agricultural fields throughout the nation. Alternate translation: "destroyed their fields of crops" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-synecdoche\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## Nahum 2:3

### The shields of his mighty men are red

This could mean: (1) the shields appear red as the light from the sun reflects upon their metal surfaces or (2) the shields are covered with leather that has been dyed red.

### his mighty men

the soldiers of the one “who will dash” Nineveh “to pieces” ([Nahum 2:1](#)).

### the chariots flash with their metal

This likely refers to the light from the sun reflecting upon the metal chariots.

### on the day that they are made ready

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: “when the soldiers have made them ready” or “when the soldiers have prepared them to attack” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### the cypress spears are waved in the air

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “the soldiers wave their cypress spears in the air” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### cypress

a type of tree whose wood is good for weapons (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.115)**) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.115)**)

## **Nahum 2:4**

### **The chariots speed through the streets**

Alternate translation: "The soldiers drive the chariots wildly through the streets"

### **They look like torches**

Nahum compares the way that the light from the sun reflects upon the chariots with torches whose fire gives light. (See: **Simile (p.108)**) (See: **Simile (p.108)**)

### **they run like lightning**

Nahum compares the way that the light from the sun reflects upon the chariots, and the quickness with which the chariots move, with lightning that flashes quickly in the sky. (See: **Simile (p.108)**) (See: **Simile (p.108)**)

## Nahum 2:5

### The one who will dash you to pieces

The word “you” refers to Nineveh. Nahum speaks of an army or military leader destroying Nineveh as if he were to shatter Nineveh like one would shatter a clay pot. See how you translated this in [Nahum 2:1](#). Alternate translation: “The one who will destroy you” (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### in their march

The word “march” can be translated as a verb. Alternate translation: “as they march” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.60)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.60)**)

### The large shield is made ready to protect these attackers

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “The attackers make ready the large shield to protect themselves” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### The large shield

This refers to a large cover that those who besieged a city would set up over themselves and their battering rams to protect themselves against the arrows and other projectiles with which the people in the city would attack them.

## **Nahum 2:6**

### **The gates at the rivers are forced open**

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "The enemy forces open the gates at the rivers" (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### **The gates at the rivers**

This refers to the gates that controlled the flow and direction of the river.

## Nahum 2:7

### Huzzab is stripped of her clothes and is taken away

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “The enemy strips Huzzab of her clothes and takes her away” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### Huzzab is stripped of her clothes and is taken away

The exact meaning of the word “Huzzab” is uncertain. Two This could mean: (1) it is the name of a queen in Nineveh and the sentence means that the attacking soldiers have stripped her of her clothes in order to humiliate her and then have carried her off into captivity or (2) it is the name of an idol and the sentence means that the attackers have stripped the gold and silver off the idol and have carried it away. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/translate-unknown\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.115)**)

### her female servants moan like doves

The moaning sounds that the female servants make sound like the sounds that doves make.

### her female servants

If the word “Huzzab” refers to a queen, then this phrase refers to the young women who attended her. If the word “Huzzab” refers to an idol, then this phrase refers to the young women who worked as temple prostitutes.

### beating on their breasts

Beating one’s breast was a gesture used to express great mourning. (See: **Symbolic Action (p.111)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.111)**)



## **Nahum 2:8**

### **Nineveh is like a leaking pool of water, with its people fleeing away like rushing water**

Nahum compares the way that the people flee from the city of Nineveh with the way that water gushes from a reservoir of water when the dam has been broken. (See: **Simile (p.108)**) (See: **Simile (p.108)**)

## Nahum 2:9

### Take the silver plunder & Nineveh's beautiful things

It is not clear who is speaking here. This may be an apostrophe in which Nahum gives directions to the attackers, or the attackers may be speaking and giving directions to one another. (See: **Apostrophe (p.65)**) (See: **Apostrophe (p.65)**)

### Take the silver plunder, take the gold plunder

The word "plunder" means things stolen by force, usually in war. Alternate translation: "Take the silver as plunder, take the gold as plunder" or "Take the silver, take the gold"

### there is no end to it

The words "no end" are an exaggeration to express that there is a great amount of something. Alternate translation: "there is so much of it" (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**)

### to the splendor of all Nineveh's beautiful things

This phrase refers to the silver, gold, and other treasures in Nineveh. The verb may be supplied from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "there is no end to the splendor of all Nineveh's beautiful treasures" (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**)

## **Nahum 2:10**

### **Everyone's heart melts**

Nahum speaks of the people losing courage as if their hearts melt like wax. Alternate translation: "Everyone loses courage" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **everyone's knees strike together**

This describes a physical response to great fear. The people's legs shake so badly that their knees knock together and they are unable to walk or run.

## Nahum 2:11

### General Information:

### General Information:

In these verses, Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were a group of lions, and of the city Nineveh as if it were their den. The metaphor speaks of the way in which the Assyrians would conquer other people and take their possessions as their own as if they were lions hunting prey and bringing the dead animals back to their den. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### Where now is the lions' den & afraid of nothing?

Nahum uses this rhetorical question to mock Nineveh, which has been destroyed. Alternate translation: "The lions' den is nowhere to be found ... afraid of nothing." or "Look at what has become of the lions' den ... afraid of nothing!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)

## Nahum 2:12

### he strangled victims

“he choked victims.” This is probably a reference to the way that lions usually kill their prey, by biting its throat. Alternate translation: “he killed his victims” (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

### filled his cave with victims, his dens with torn carcasses

These two phrases are saying the same thing in different ways. The verb may be supplied for the second phrase. Alternate translation: “filled his cave with victims, and filled his dens with torn carcasses” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-ellipsis\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**)

## Nahum 2:13

### See

Alternate translation: "Look" or "Listen" or "Pay attention to what I am about to tell you."

### the sword will devour your young lions

Here the word "sword" is a metonym for soldiers who attack with swords and is spoken of as if it were a person who eats its victims. Nahum also continues to speak to the people of Nineveh as if they were lions. Alternate translation: "attackers will kill your people with swords" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#)) and **Metaphor (p.88)** (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### I will cut off your prey from your land

Yahweh speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were lions who preyed upon the nations. This could mean: (1) the word "prey" is a metonym for the things that they have taken from those upon whom they preyed, and Yahweh speaks of taking those things away from them as if it were cutting off their prey. Alternate translation: "I will take away from your land all the things that you took from others" or (2) Yahweh speaks of the nations whom the people of Nineveh had plundered as if they were Nineveh's prey, and preventing Nineveh from plundering any more nations as if he were cutting off their prey. Alternate translation: "I will stop you from preying upon any other nation" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### the voices of your messengers will be heard no more

This likely refers to the messengers that the Assyrians sent out to other nations to demand surrender or payment of tribute. If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "no one will ever hear the voices of your messengers again" (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

## Nahum 3

### Nahum 3 General Notes

#### Structure and formatting

Some translations prefer to set apart extended quotations, prayers and songs. The ULT and many other English translations set the lines of the entire book (except for verse 1 of chapter 1) farther to the right on the page than regular text because they are poetic prophecy. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.119)**)

Despite being divided into three chapters, the book contains one long prophecy.

#### Special concepts in this chapter

##### Euphemism

This chapter speaks about the evils of the Assyrians in violent ways. It is important to avoiding toning down this language through the use of euphemism, if at all possible. Although there is some hyperbole, the reader should not assume that the author intends this writing to be taken as completely hyperbolic. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/evil\]\]](#))

## **Nahum 3:1**

### **the city full of blood**

Here the word "blood" represents bloodshed and refers to the people who have committed murder. Alternate translation: "the city full of murderers" (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### **It is all full of lies**

Here the word "lies" is a metonym for those who tell lies. Alternate translation: "It is full of liars" (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)



## **Nahum 3:2**

### **the noise of whips and the sound of rattling wheels, prancing horses, and bounding chariots**

These phrases describe the sound of chariots rushing through the streets as their drivers use their whips on the horses.

## **Nahum 3:3**

### **heaps of corpses, great piles of bodies**

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and indicate that there were so many dead bodies that the attackers piled them in heaps. (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**)

### **corpses**

bodies of people who have died

### **There is no end to the bodies**

The words “no end” are an exaggeration for the great number of bodies that the attackers piled into heaps. Alternate translation: “There are too many bodies to count” or “There are a great number of bodies” (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**)

## **Nahum 3:4**

### **the lustful actions of the beautiful prostitute**

Nahum speaks of Nineveh causing other nations to be subject to her as if the city were a prostitute who seduces men with her beauty. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **the expert in witchcraft**

Nahum speaks of Nineveh causing other nations to be subject to her as if the city were a witch who casts a spells on others. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **who sells nations through her prostitution, and peoples through her acts of witchcraft**

Here the word "sells" implies that the people of Nineveh cause other nations and peoples to become slaves. Nineveh uses her beauty, power, and influence to make others her slaves. Alternate translation: "who by her prostitution and witchcraft causes the people of other nations to become her slaves" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

## Nahum 3:5

### See

Alternate translation: "Look" or "Listen" or "Pay attention to what I am about to tell you"

### **I will raise up your skirt over your face and show your private parts to the nations**

This refers to the practice of publicly humiliating prostitutes by stripping them naked in front of the community. This continues the metaphor of Yahweh speaking of the city of Nineveh as if it were a prostitute. Alternate translation: "I will publicly humiliate you, as one would humiliate a prostitute by raising up her skirt over her face and showing her private parts to all the people" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **your shame to the kingdoms**

This phrase explains the purpose of lifting up Nineveh's skirt. The verb may be supplied from the previous phrase. Alternate translation: "I will show your shame to the kingdoms" (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.70)**)

## Nahum 3:6

### I will throw disgusting filth on you

The words “disgusting filth” refer to all kinds of garbage. Throwing garbage at a person was a sign of strong contempt. Alternate translation: “I will show my contempt for you, like a person would throw disgusting filth at another” (See: **Symbolic Action (p.111)**) (See: **Symbolic Action (p.111)**)

## **Nahum 3:7**

### **who will weep for her?**

The people ask this rhetorical question to emphasize the negative answer. Alternate translation: “no one will weep for her.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)

### **Where can I find anyone to comfort you?**

Yahweh uses this rhetorical question to emphasize that there will be no one who will be able to comfort Nineveh. Alternate translation: “There will be no one to comfort you.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)

## Nahum 3:8

### General Information:

## General Information:

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself. (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### are you better than Thebes & itself?

Nahum asks this rhetorical question to emphasize the negative answer that it anticipates. Alternate translation: “you are not better than Thebes ... itself.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)

### Thebes

This was the former capital of Egypt, which the Assyrians had conquered. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**)

### that was built on the Nile River

Alternate translation: “that was situated by the Nile River”

### whose defense was the ocean, whose wall was the sea itself

These two phrases share similar meanings. The words “ocean” and “sea” both refer to the Nile River, which ran near the city. Nahum speaks of the Nile as if it were the wall that protected the city. Alternate translation: “which had the Nile river as its defenses, as some cities have a wall for theirs” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## **Nahum 3:9**

### **Cush and Egypt were her strength**

Alternate translation: "Ethiopia and Egypt strengthened her" or "Cush and Egypt were her allies"

### **there was no end to it**

The word "it" refers to the "strength" that Cush and Egypt gave to Thebes. That there was no end to it is a hyperbole that expresses the great amount of strength. Alternate translation: "their strength was very great" (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**)

### **Put and Libya**

These are the names of places in northern Africa that were close to Thebes. (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**) (See: **How to Translate Names (p.73)**)



## Nahum 3:10

### Yet Thebes was carried away

The word “Thebes” represents the people who lived in Thebes. 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: “Yet those who attacked Thebes carried the people away” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metonymy\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-activepassive\]\]](#)) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### she went into captivity

The word “she” refers to Thebes and represents the people who lived there. Alternate translation: “they went into captivity” (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### her young children were dashed in pieces

This is a brutal description of the soldiers killing children. 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: “enemy soldiers dashed her young children to pieces” or “enemy soldiers beat her young children to death” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### at the head of every street

The beginning of a street is spoken of as if it were the head. Also, “every” is a generalization that means many places all over the city. Alternate translation: “on every street corner” or “in the streets all over the city” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### all her great men were bound in chains

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: “they bound all her great men in chains” (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

## **Nahum 3:11**

### **You also will become drunk**

Here the word "You" refers to Nineveh. Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh suffering and dying in battle as if they had become drunk from drinking too much wine. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## Nahum 3:12

### All your fortresses

Here, the word **fortresses** could mean: (1) it refers to Nineveh's fortifications, such as the wall that surrounded the city Alternate translation: "All of your fortifications" or "All of your defenses" or (2) it refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders and prevented enemy armies from attacking Nineveh. Alternate translation: "All of your fortified cities" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

### All your fortresses will be like fig trees with the earliest ripe figs: if they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater

Nahum compares the ease with which the attackers will conquer Nineveh with the ease with which a person can cause ripe figs to fall from a tree. Alternate translation: "Your enemies will destroy your fortresses as easily as a person can shake a fig tree and eat the first ripe figs that fall" (See: **Simile (p.108)**) (See: **Simile (p.108)**)

#### the earliest ripe figs

This refers to the figs that would ripen first on the tree. These figs fell from the tree easily, so that a person only had to shake the tree to make them fall. Figs that ripened later would require a person to climb the tree and pick them by hand. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.67)**)

#### if they are shaken

"if the trees are shaken." 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: "if a person shakes the trees" (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

#### they fall into the mouth of the eater

"the figs fall into the mouth of the eater." This is an exaggeration. By saying that the figs fall from the tree into the mouth of the one who eats it, Nahum emphasizes that the figs are ready to eat immediately. Alternate translation: "a person can eat the fig immediately" (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**)

## Nahum 3:13

### the people among you are women

In this ancient culture, women were not warriors for a number of reasons, including their being generally weaker physically than men. Here Nahum speaks of Nineveh's warriors losing their strength and courage to fight as if the people in the city were all women. Alternate translation: "your people are all like women who are weak and cannot defend themselves" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### the gates of your land have been opened wide to your enemies

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "the gates of your land are wide open to your enemies" or "someone has opened wide to your enemies the gates of your land" (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.62)**)

### the gates of your land have been opened wide to your enemies

This could mean: (1) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the Nineveh's defenses, then "the gates of your land" refers to the gates in the walls around Nineveh. Alternate translation: "the gates of your city are wide open for your enemies to attack" or (2) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders, then "the gates of your land" is a metaphor in which those cities are spoken of as if they were gates that prevented enemy armies from entering the land. Alternate translation: "your land is defenseless before your enemies because they have destroyed the cities that protected your borders" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### fire has devoured their bars

This could mean: (1) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the Nineveh's defenses, then "their bars" refers to the bars that locked the gates in the walls around Nineveh. Alternate translation: "fire has destroyed the bars that lock your city gates" or (2) if "fortresses" in v. 12 refers to the fortified cities that were situated along Assyria's borders, then "their bars" is a metaphor in which those cities are spoken of as if they were locked gates that prevented enemy armies from entering the land. Alternate translation: "the cities on your borders can no longer protect you, just as gates can no longer protect a city when fire has destroyed their bars" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### fire has devoured

Nahum speaks of fire burning up and destroying as if fire were eating. Alternate translation: "fire has destroyed" or "fire has burned up" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## **Nahum 3:14**

### **Go draw water for the siege & pick up the molds for the bricks**

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh. He tells them to prepare for battle and to repair the walls, although he knows that the enemy will destroy the city. (See: **Irony (p.83)**) (See: **Irony (p.83)**)

### **strengthen your fortresses**

Alternate translation: "repair the fortifications"

### **go into the clay and tread the mortar; pick up the molds for the bricks**

These phrases refer to making mud bricks that they will use to repair the city's wall.

## Nahum 3:15

### Fire will devour you there

Nahum speaks of fire burning and destroying as if it were eating. Alternate translation: “Fire will destroy you there” or “Your enemies will burn you with fire there” (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### the sword will destroy you

Here the word “sword” is a metonym for the enemies who will attack with swords. Alternate translation: “your enemies will kill you with their swords” (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### It will devour you as young locusts devour everything

The word “It” refers to the “sword,” which is personified as eating those whom it kills. The soldiers using their swords to kill everyone in Nineveh is compared with the way that a swarm of locusts eats every plant in its path. Alternate translation: “Your enemies’ swords will kill all of you, just as easily as a swarm of locusts devours everything in its path” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-personification\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#)) (See: **Personification (p.99)**)

### Make yourselves as many as the young locusts, as many as the full-grown locusts

These words begin a new paragraph where Nahum compares the number of people in Nineveh with the large number of locusts in a swarm.

## **Nahum 3:16**

### **General Information:**

## **General Information:**

Nahum speaks to the people of Nineveh as though they were the city itself. (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.94)**)

### **You have multiplied your merchants more than the stars in the heavens**

This exaggeration emphasizes the great number of merchants who lived and worked in Nineveh. Alternate translation: "It is as if you have more merchants than there are stars in the sky" or "You have more merchants than anyone could count" (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**) (See: **Hyperbole (p.77)**)

### **they are like young locusts: they plunder the land and then fly away**

Nahum compares the way that these merchants, who have made their profit by selling their goods in Nineveh, will flee from the city when the battle begins with the way that locusts fly away after they have eaten all of the plants in their path. (See: **Simile (p.108)**) (See: **Simile (p.108)**)

## **Nahum 3:17**

**your generals are like swarms of them that camp in the walls on a cold day.  
But when the sun rises they fly away**

Nahum compares the way that the officials in Nineveh will flee when the battle starts with the way that locusts will remain still while it is cold, but will fly away when the sun rises and the air becomes warm. (See: **Simile (p.108)**)  
(See: **Simile (p.108)**)

**to no one knows where**

Alternate translation: "and no one knows where they have gone"



## Nahum 3:18

### **your shepherds are asleep; your rulers are lying down resting**

These two lines share similar meanings. Nahum speaks of the leaders of Assyria as if they were shepherd who are to care for their sheep. He speaks of the shepherds and rulers dying as if they had fallen asleep. Alternate translation: "your leaders who are like shepherds are dead; your rulers are all dead" (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Parallelism (p.96)**)

### **Your people are scattered on the mountains**

Nahum speaks of the people of Nineveh as if they were sheep that scatter after the shepherds have died. Alternate translation: "Your people are scattered like sheep on the mountains" (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

## **Nahum 3:19**

### **No healing is possible for your wounds. Your wounds are severe**

Nahum speaks of the certainty of the destruction of Nineveh and the defeat of its king as if the king had suffered an incurable wound. (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.88)**)

### **No healing is possible for your wounds**

The word “healing” can be translated with a verbal phrase. Alternate translation: “No one is able to heal your wounds” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.60)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.60)**)

### **Who has escaped your constant wickedness?**

This rhetorical question emphasizes the negative answer that it anticipates. All of the nations that were near Assyria had suffered because of Assyria’s constant wickedness. Alternate translation: “No one has escaped your constant wickedness.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.104)**)



# **unfoldingWord® Translation Academy**

**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: [Nahum 2:5](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

## 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:** [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 2:3](#); [Nahum 2:5](#); [Nahum 2:6](#); [Nahum 2:7](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:10](#); [Nahum 3:12](#); [Nahum 3:13](#)



# Apostrophe

## Description

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

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

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

*Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)*

## Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

## Examples from the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Translation Strategies

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

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

"

**Referenced in:** [Nahum 2:9](#)

## 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:** [Nahum 1:1](#); [Nahum 1:3](#); [Nahum 1:4](#); [Nahum 1:14](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:12](#); [Nahum 3:4](#); [Nahum 3:12](#)

# Ellipsis

## Description

An ellipsis<sup>1</sup> 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.

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)*

## Two Types of Ellipsis

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

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

## Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

## Examples From the Bible

### Relative Ellipsis

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

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

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

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

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

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:** [Nahum 1:5](#); [Nahum 2:9](#); [Nahum 3:5](#)



## 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**<sup>1</sup> and Barnabas entered together into the synagogue

The footnote would look like:

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

**Referenced in:** [Introduction to Nahum](#); [Nahum 1:1](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:9](#)

# 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:** [Nahum 2:9](#); [Nahum 3:3](#); [Nahum 3:9](#); [Nahum 3:12](#); [Nahum 3:16](#)



## 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:** [Nahum 1:8](#); [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 2:1](#)

# 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:** [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 3:14](#)

## Litotes

### Description

Litotes is a figure of speech in which the speaker expresses a strong positive meaning by negating a word or phrase that means the opposite of the meaning that he intends. For example, someone could intend to communicate that something is extremely good by describing it as "not bad." The difference between a litotes and a **double negative** is that a litotes heightens the positive meaning beyond what a plain positive statement would do, and a double negative does not. In the example above, the literal meaning of "not bad," taken as a plain double negative, would be "acceptable" or even "good." But if the speaker intended it as a litotes, then the meaning is "very good" or "extremely good."

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

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

*Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)*

### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use litotes. People who speak those languages might not understand that a statement using litotes actually strengthens the positive meaning. Instead, they might think that it weakens or even cancels the positive meaning.

### Examples From the Bible

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was **not useless**, (1 Thessalonians 2:1 ULT)

By using litotes, Paul emphasized that his visit with them was **very** useful.

Now when it became day, there was **no small disturbance** among the soldiers over what therefore had happened to Peter. (Acts 12:18 ULT)

By using litotes, Luke emphasized that there was a **lot** of excitement or anxiety among the soldiers about what happened to Peter. (Peter had been in prison, and even though there were soldiers guarding him, he escaped when an angel let him out. So they were very agitated.)

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are **not the least** among the leaders of Judah, for from you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. (Matthew 2:6 ULT)

By using litotes, the prophet emphasized that Bethlehem would be a **very important city**.

### Translation Strategies

If the litotes would be understood correctly, consider using it.

(1) If the meaning with the negative would not be clear, give the **positive** meaning in a strong way.

### Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If the meaning with the negative would not be clear, give the **positive** meaning in a strong way.

For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was **not useless**. (1 Thessalonians 2:1 ULT)

"For you yourselves know, brothers, our visit to you **did much good**."

Now when it became day, there was **no small disturbance** among the soldiers over what therefore had happened to Peter. (Acts 12:18 ULT)

“Now when it became day, there was **great excitement** among the soldiers, regarding what had happened to Peter.”

or:

“Now when it became day, the soldiers were **very concerned** because of what had happened to Peter.”

”

**Referenced in:** [Nahum 1:3](#)

# Metaphor

## Description

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Parts of a Metaphor

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

Every metaphor has three parts:

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

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

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

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

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

## Passive Metaphors

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



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

## Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Active Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Purposes of Metaphor

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

## Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

## Translation Principles

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

## Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Translation Strategies

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

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

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

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I will make you **gather people**.

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

"

**Referenced in:** [Nahum 1:2](#); [Nahum 1:5](#); [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [Nahum 1:8](#); [Nahum 1:10](#); [Nahum 1:12](#); [Nahum 1:13](#); [Nahum 1:14](#); [Nahum 1:15](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:2](#); [Nahum 2:5](#); [Nahum 2:10](#); [Nahum 2:11](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:4](#); [Nahum 3:5](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:10](#); [Nahum 3:11](#); [Nahum 3:13](#); [Nahum 3:15](#); [Nahum 3:18](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

# Metonymy

## Description

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which an item (either physical or abstract) is called not by its own name, but by the name of something closely associated with it. A metonym is a word or phrase used as a substitute for something that it is associated with.

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

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

*Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)*

... and **the blood** of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin. (1 John 1:7b ULT)

The blood represents Christ's death.

And he took **the cup** in the same way after supper, saying, "**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20 ULT)

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

## Metonymy can be used

- as a shorter way of referring to something
- to make an abstract idea more meaningful by referring to it with the name of a physical object associated with it

## Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible uses metonymy very often. Speakers of some languages are not familiar with metonymy and they may not recognize it when they read it in the Bible. If they do not recognize the metonymy, they will not understand the passage or, worse yet, they will get a wrong understanding of the passage. Whenever a metonym is used, people need to be able to understand what it represents.

## Examples From the Bible

The Lord God will give to him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

A throne represents the authority of a king. "Throne" is a metonym for "kingly authority," "kingship," or "reign." This means that God would make him become a king who would follow King David.

Then immediately his **mouth** was opened (Luke 1:64a ULT)

The mouth here represents the power to speak. This means that he was able to talk again.

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

The word "wrath" or "anger" is a metonym for "punishment." God was extremely angry with the people and, as a result, he would punish them.

## Translation Strategies

If people would easily understand the metonym, consider using it. Otherwise, here are some options.

- (1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.
- (2) Use only the name of the thing the metonym represents.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the metonym along with the name of the thing it represents.

And he took the cup in the same way after the supper, saying, “**This cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:20 ULT)

He took the cup in the same way after supper, saying, “**The wine in this cup** is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

This verse also contains a second metonym: The cup, (representing the wine it contains) also represents the new covenant made with the blood Christ shed for us.

(2) Use the name of the thing the metonym represents.

The Lord God will give him **the throne** of his father David. (Luke 1:32b ULT)

“The Lord God will give him **the kingly authority** of his father, David.” or:  
“The Lord God will **make him king** like his ancestor, King David.”

Who warned you to flee from **the wrath** that is coming? (Luke 3:7b ULT)

“Who warned you to flee from God’s coming **punishment?**”

To learn about some common metonymies, see [Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies](#).

”

**Referenced in:** [Nahum 1:8](#); [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 2:2](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:1](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:10](#); [Nahum 3:15](#); [Nahum 3:16](#)

# 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:** [Nahum 1:1](#); [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 2:12](#); [Nahum 3:3](#); [Nahum 3:18](#)

## 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:** [Nahum 3:15](#)

# Poetry

## Description

Poetry is one of the ways that people use the words and sounds of their language to make their speech and writing more beautiful and to express strong emotion. Through poetry, people can communicate deeper emotion than they can through simple non-poetic forms. Poetry gives more weight and elegance to statements of truth, such as proverbs, and is also easier to remember than ordinary speech.

This page answers the question: *What is poetry and how do I translate it into my language?*

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

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

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

## In poetry we commonly find:

- many figures of speech such as [Apostrophe](#)
- arrangements of clauses into particular patterns such as:
  - parallel lines (See [Parallelism](#))
  - acrostics (beginning lines with successive letters of the alphabet)
  - chiasms (in which the first line relates to the last line, the second to the next-to-last line, etc.):

You should not give what is holy to the dogs,  
 and should not throw your pearls in front of the pigs.  
 Otherwise they will trample them under their feet,  
 and having turned, they might tear you to pieces. (Matt 7:6 ULT)

- repetition of some or all of a line:

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. (Psalm 148:2-3 ULT)

- lines of similar length:

Listen to my call to you,  
 Yahweh; think about my groanings.  
 Listen to the sound of my call, my King and my God,  
 for it is to you that I pray. (Psalm 5:1-2 ULT)

- the same sound used at the end or at the beginning of two or more lines:

“Twinkle, twinkle little **star**. How I wonder what you **are**.” (from an English rhyme)

- the same sound repeated many times:

“Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater” (from an English rhyme)

- The same root word used as both a verb and as a noun:

Your old men will **dream dreams** (Joel 2:28 ULT)

Yahweh,...**light lightning** and scatter them (Psalm 144:5-6 ULT)

We also find:

- old words and expressions
- dramatic imagery
- different use of grammar — including:
  - incomplete sentences
  - lack of connective words

## Some places to look for poetry in your language

Songs, particularly old songs or songs used in children's games

Religious ceremony or chants of priests or witch doctors

Prayers, blessings, and curses

Old legends

## Elegant or fancy speech

Elegant or fancy speech is similar to poetry in that it uses beautiful language, but it does not use all of the language's features of poetry, and it does not use them as much as poetry does. Popular speakers in the language often use elegant speech, and this is probably the easiest source of text to study to find out what makes speech elegant in your language.

## Reasons This Is a Translation Issue:

- Different languages use poetry for different things. If a poetic form would not communicate the same meaning in your language, you may need to write it without the poetry.
- Different languages use different poetic devices. A poetic device that conveys elegance or emotion in a biblical language may be confusing or misunderstood in another language.
- In some languages, using poetry for a particular part of the Bible would make it much more powerful.

## Examples From the Bible

The Bible uses poetry for songs, teaching, and prophecy. Almost all of the books of the Old Testament have poetry in them and many of the books are completely made up of poetry.

... for you saw my affliction; you knew the distress of my soul. (Psalm 31:7b ULT)

This example of [Parallelism](#) has two lines that mean the same thing.

Yahweh, judge the nations; vindicate me, Yahweh, because I am righteous and innocent, Most High. (Psalm 7:8 ULT)

This example of parallelism shows the contrast between what David wants God to do to him and what he wants God to do to the unrighteous nations. (See [Parallelism](#).)

Keep your servant also from arrogant sins; let them not rule over me. (Psalm 19:13a ULT)

This example of personification speaks of sins as if they could rule over a person. (See [Personification](#).)

Oh, give thanks to Yahweh; for he is good,  
for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.  
  
Oh, give thanks to the God of gods,

for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.  
 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
 for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.  
 (Psalm 136:1-3 ULT)

This example repeats the phrases “give thanks” and “his covenant faithfulness endures forever.”

## Translation Strategies

If the style of poetry that is used in the source text would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other ways of translating it.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry.
- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.
- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

If you use poetry it may be more beautiful.

If you use ordinary speech it may be more clear.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of mockers. But his delight is in the law of Yahweh, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ULT)

The following are examples of how people might translate Psalm 1:1-2.

- (1) Translate the poetry using one of your styles of poetry. (The style in this example has words that sound similar at the end of each line.)

“Happy is the person not encouraged **to sin**, Disrespect for God he will not **begin**, To those who laugh at God he is **no kin**. God is his constant **delight**, He does what God says **is right**, He thinks of it all day **and night**.”

- (2) Translate the poetry using your style of elegant speech.

This is the kind of person who is truly blessed: the one who does not follow the advice of wicked people nor stop along the road to speak with sinners nor join the gathering of those who mock God. Rather, he takes great joy in Yahweh’s law, and he meditates on it day and night.

- (3) Translate the poetry using your style of ordinary speech.

The people who do not listen to the advice of bad people are really happy. They do not spend time with people who continually do evil things or join with those who do not respect God. Instead, they love to obey Yahweh’s law, and they think about it all the time.

Next we recommend you learn about:  
[Symbolic Language \(UTA PDF\)](#)

## 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:** [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 2:11](#); [Nahum 3:7](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

## 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:** [Nahum 2:4](#); [Nahum 2:8](#); [Nahum 3:12](#); [Nahum 3:16](#); [Nahum 3:17](#)

## Symbolic Action

### Description

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

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

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

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

### Examples of symbolic actions

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

### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

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

### Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

### Translation Strategies

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

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

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 2:7](#); [Nahum 3:6](#)



# Synecdoche

## Description

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a speaker uses a part of something to refer to the whole thing, or uses the whole to refer to a part.

■ **My soul** magnifies the Lord. (Luke 1:46b ULT)

Mary was very happy about what the Lord was doing, so she said “my soul,” which means the inner, emotional part of herself, to refer to her whole self.

■ So **the Pharisees** said to him, “Look, why are they doing that which is not lawful?” (Mark 2:24a ULT)

The Pharisees who were standing there did not all say the same words at the same time. Instead, it is more likely that one man representing the group said those words.

## Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some readers may not recognize the synecdoche and thus misunderstand the words as a literal statement.
- Some readers may realize that they are not to understand the words literally, but they may not know what the meaning is.

## Example From the Bible

■ Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

“My hands” is a synecdoche for the whole person because clearly the arms and the rest of the body and the mind were also involved in the person’s accomplishments. The hands are chosen to represent the person because they are the parts of the body most directly involved in the work.

## Translation Strategies

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

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) State specifically what the synecdoche refers to.

■ “**My soul** magnifies the Lord.” (Luke 1:46b ULT)

■ “**I** magnify the Lord.”

So **the Pharisees** said to him ... (Mark 2:24a ULT)

■ **A representative of the Pharisees** said to him ...

Then I looked on all the deeds that **my hands** had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 2:11a ULT)

■ I looked on all the deeds that **I** had accomplished

This page answers the question: *What is a synecdoche, and how can I translate such a thing into my language?*

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

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

*Metonymy (UTA PDF)*

*Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies (UTA PDF)*

Next we recommend you learn about:

*Metonymy (UTA PDF)*

*Biblical Imagery — Common Metonymies (UTA PDF)*

**Referenced in:** [Nahum 1:15](#)

## Translate Unknowns

While working to translate the Bible, you (the translator) might find yourself asking: “How do I translate words like lion, fig tree, mountain, priest, or temple when people in my culture have never seen these things and we do not have a word for them?”

This page answers the question: *How can I translate ideas that my readers are not familiar with?*

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

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

### Description

Unknowns are things that occur in the source text that are not known to the people of your culture. The unfoldingWord® Translation Words pages and the unfoldingWord® Translation Notes will help you understand what they are. After you understand them, you will need to find ways to refer to those things so that people who read your translation will understand what they are.

They said to him, “We have nothing here except five loaves of **bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

Bread is a particular food made by mixing finely crushed grains with oil, and then cooking the mixture so that it is dry. (Grains are the seeds of a kind of grass.) In some cultures people do not have bread and do not know what it is.

### Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Readers may not know some of the things that are in the Bible because those things are not part of their own culture.
- Readers may have difficulty understanding a text if they do not know some of the things that are mentioned in it.

### Translation Principles

- Use words that are already part of your language if possible.
- Keep expressions short if possible.
- Represent God’s commands and historical facts accurately.

### Examples From the Bible

So I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals**. (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

Jackals are wild animals like dogs that live in only a few parts of the world. So they are not known in many places.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous **wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

If wolves do not live where the translation will be read, the readers may not understand that they are fierce, wild animals like dogs that attack and eat sheep.

They offered him wine mixed with **myrrh**, but he did not drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT)

People may not know what myrrh is and that it was used as a medicine.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

Some languages have terms for things that give light, like the sun and fire, but they have no general term for lights.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT)

People in many parts of the world have not seen snow, but they may have seen it in pictures.

## Translation Strategies

Here are ways you might translate a term that is not known in your language:

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.
- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.
- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.
- (4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.
- (5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

## Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a phrase that describes what the unknown item is, or what is important about the unknown item for the verse being translated.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**. (Matthew 7:15 ULT)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but **inwardly they are very hungry and dangerous animals**.

"Ravenous wolves" is part of a metaphor here, so the reader needs to know that they are very dangerous to sheep in order to understand this metaphor. (If sheep are also unknown, then you will need to also use one of the translation strategies to translate sheep, or change the metaphor to something else, using a translation strategy for metaphors. See [Translating Metaphors](#).)

"We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish." (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked grain seeds** and two fish.

- (2) Substitute something similar from your language if doing so does not falsely represent a historical fact.

Your sins ... will be white like **snow**. (Isaiah 1:18b ULT) This verse is not about snow. It uses snow in a figure of speech to help people understand how white something will be.

Your sins ... will be white like **milk**.

Your sins ... will be white like **the moon**.

- (3) Copy the word from another language, and add a general word or descriptive phrase to help people understand it.

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **myrrh**. But he refused to drink it. (Mark 15:23 ULT) — People may understand better what myrrh is if it is used with the general word "medicine."

Then they tried to give Jesus wine that was mixed with **a medicine called myrrh**. But he refused to drink it.

“We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT) —  
People may understand better what bread is if it is used with a phrase that tells what it is made  
of (seeds) and how it is prepared (crushed and baked).

We have nothing here except five loaves of **baked crushed seed bread**  
and two fish.

(4) Use a word that is more general in meaning.

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **jackals** (Jeremiah 9:11a ULT)

I will turn Jerusalem into piles of ruins, a hideout for **wild dogs**

“We have nothing here except five **loaves of bread** and two fish.” (Matthew 14:17 ULT)

We have nothing here except five **loaves of baked food** and two fish.

(5) Use a word or phrase that is more specific in meaning.

... to him who made **great lights** ... (Psalm 136:7a ULT)

to him who made **the sun and the moon**

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

[How to Translate Names \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Nahum 2:3](#); [Nahum 2:7](#)



# **unfoldingWord® Translation Words**

**Version 79**

## 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 Nahum](#); [Nahum 1 General Notes](#); [Nahum 2 General Notes](#); [Nahum 3 General Notes](#)



## sin, sinful, sinner, sinning

### Definition:

The term “sin” refers to actions, thoughts, and words that are against God’s will and laws. Sin can also refer to not doing something that God wants us to do.

- Sin includes anything we do that does not obey or please God, even things that other people don’t know about.
- Thoughts and actions that disobey God’s will are called “sinful.”
- Because Adam sinned, all human beings are born with a “sinful nature,” a nature that that controls them and causes them to sin.
- A “sinner” is someone who sins, so every human being is a sinner.
- Sometimes the word “sinners” was used by religious people like the Pharisees to refer to people who didn’t keep the law as well as the Pharisees thought they should.
- The term “sinner” was also used for people who were considered to be worse sinners than other people. For example, this label was given to tax collectors and prostitutes.

### Translation Suggestions:

- The term “sin” could be translated with a word or phrase that means “disobedience to God” or “going against God’s will” or “evil behavior and thoughts” or “wrongdoing.”
- To “sin” could also be translated as to “disobey God” or to “do wrong.”
- Depending on the context “sinful” could be translated as “full of wrongdoing” or “wicked” or “immoral” or “evil” or “rebellious against God.”
- Depending on the context the term “sinner” could be translated with a word or phrase that means “person who sins” or “person who does wrong things” or “person who disobeys God” or “person who disobeys the law.”
- The term “sinners” could be translated by a word or phrase that means “very sinful people” or “people considered to be very sinful” or “immoral people.”
- Ways to translate “tax collectors and sinners” could include “people who collect money for the government, and other very sinful people” or “very sinful people, including (even) tax collectors.”
- Make sure the translation of this term can include sinful behavior and thoughts, even those that other people don’t see or know about.
- The term “sin” should be general, and different from the terms for “wickedness” and “evil.”

(See also: disobey, [evil](#), flesh, [tax collector](#))

### Bible References:

- 1 Chronicles 9:1-3
- 1 John 1:10
- 1 John 2:2
- 2 Samuel 7:12-14
- Acts 3:19
- Daniel 9:24
- Genesis 4:7
- Hebrews 12:2
- Isaiah 53:11
- Jeremiah 18:23
- Leviticus 4:14
- Luke 15:18
- Matthew 12:31

- Romans 6:23
- Romans 8:4

### Examples from the Bible stories:

- **3:15** God said, "I promise I will never again curse the ground because of the evil things people do, or destroy the world by causing a flood, even though people are **sinful** from the time they are children."
- **13:12** God was very angry with them because of their **sin** and planned to destroy them.
- **20:1** The kingdoms of Israel and Judah both **sinned** against God. They broke the covenant that God made with them at Sinai.
- **21:13** The prophets also said that the Messiah would be perfect, having no **sin**. He would die to receive the punishment for other people's **sin**.
- **35:1** One day, Jesus was teaching many tax collectors and other **sinner**s who had gathered to hear him.
- **38:5** Then Jesus took a cup and said, "Drink this. It is my blood of the New Covenant that is poured out for the forgiveness of **sins**."
- **43:11** Peter answered them, "Every one of you should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that God will forgive your **sins**."
- **48:8** We all deserve to die for our **sins**!
- **49:17** Even though you are a Christian, you will still be tempted to **sin**. But God is faithful and says that if you confess your **sins**, he will forgive you. He will give you strength to fight against **sin**.

### Word Data:

- Strong's: H0817, H0819, H2398, H2399, H2400, H2401, H2402, H2403, H2408, H2409, H5771, H6588, H7683, H7686, G02640, G02650, G02660, G02680, G03610, G37810, G39000, G42580

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Referenced in: [Nahum 1 General Notes](#)

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