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Malachi

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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Malachi

Introduction to Malachi

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of Malachi

The word of Yahweh comes to Israel (1:1)

Yahweh loves Israel and rejects Esau (Edom) (1:2-5)

A message against the priests (1:6-2:9)

A message against Judah: they have broken faith by divorcing and intermarrying (2:10-16)

A message about the day of refining (2:17-3:6)

A message about tithing (3:7-12)

A message about those who others treated shamefully, but who were faithful to Yahweh (3:13-18)

Yahweh will punish the wicked and send Elijah before the "great and terrible day of Yahweh" (4:5-6)

What is the Book of Malachi about?

The Book of Malachi is about the prophecies that Malachi spoke to the Jews who had returned from Babylon to Judah. At that time, the Jews were discouraged even though they had finished building a new temple. The wonderful things that previous prophets had promised for Judah had not yet happened. And the Persian Empire still ruled over them. As a result, they no longer were concerned about the law or worshiping Yahweh. Malachi rebuked them for not trusting in Yahweh. But he also promised them that Yahweh would do everything that he promised to do.

How should the title of this book be translated?

This book traditionally has been titled "Malachi" or "The Book of Malachi." Translators may decide to call it "The Book about Malachi" or "The Sayings of Malachi." (See: **How to Translate Names (p.83)**)

Who wrote the Book of Malachi?

The prophet Malachi wrote these messages from Yahweh to the Jews. However, since "Malachi" means "my messenger," it is possible that this was a title for this prophet. If so, we do not know his real name.

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

What was meant by the day of Yahweh?

Malachi spoke about "the day" several times. This is the same as "the day of Yahweh." In the Book of Malachi, this is the time when Yahweh would judge his people. He would remove those who wickedly sin and bless those who trust in him. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/dayofthelord\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/sin\]\]](#))

Malachi 1

Malachi 1 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Yahweh of hosts

This is an important title used in this chapter. It reminds the reader of the great power Yahweh has to punish the nations. (See: **Yahweh of hosts, God of hosts, host of heaven, host of the heavens, Lord of hosts (p.121)**)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Rhetorical questions

There are many rhetorical questions in this chapter. They all have a rather dramatic effect. They increase the emotional connotations of what is being said. (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Malachi 1:1

The declaration of the word of Yahweh to Israel by the hand of Malachi

If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. "This is the declaration of the word of Yahweh to Israel by the hand of Malachi"

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.

by the hand of Malachi

The phrase "by the hand of" is an idiom that means that Yahweh used Malachi to deliver his message. Alternate translation: "through Malachi" or "spoken to them by Malachi" (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Malachi 1:2

How have you loved us?

This question indicates that the people doubt the truth of what God says. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "You have not shown that you love us." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Was not Esau Jacob's brother?

This question, a reply of Yahweh reminding the people of their nation's history, may also be expressed as a statement. Alternate translation: "You know that Esau was Jacob's brother." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

declares Yahweh

Alternate translation: "Yahweh has solemnly said this"

I have loved Jacob

Here "loved" implies a relationship of loyalty between Yahweh and Jacob, in which a covenant existed between them. This can be made explicit. Alternate translation: "as you know, I obligated myself with a covenant to love Jacob" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

I have loved Jacob

This name "Jacob" refers here not only to Jacob, but also to all his descendants. (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

Malachi 1:3

Esau I have hated

Here “hated” implies that there was no covenant between Yahweh and Esau. However, it does not imply that Yahweh was emotionally against Esau.

Esau I have hated

This name “Esau” refers here not only to Esau, but also to all his descendants. (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

his mountains

This refers to the hill country of Edom.

I have made his inheritance a place for the jackals of the wilderness

In the Old Testament, the presence of wild animals such as jackals was a frequent description of land deserted by the people who once lived there.

his inheritance

Here “inheritance” stands for the region that Esau’s descendants, the nation of Edom, occupied. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 1:4

If Edom says

Here “Edom” stands for the people of Edom. Alternate translation: “If the people of Edom say” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

I will throw down

Here “throw down” stands for “destroy.” Alternate translation: “I will destroy” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

country of wickedness

Here “wickedness” stands either for wicked people or for wicked actions. Alternate translation: “country of wicked people” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

Malachi 1:5

Your own eyes will see this

Here "your own eyes" stands for the people themselves. Alternate translation: "You yourselves will see this" (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

Malachi 1:6

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh rebukes the priests using an imaginary conversation in which the priests protest that they are doing right and Yahweh tells them what they are doing wrong.

despise my name

Here “my name” stands for Yahweh himself. Alternate translation: “treat me as though you hate me” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

How have we despised your name?

Here the priests are asking a question in order to state that they have not really despised Yahweh. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “We have not really despised your name.” or “Tell us how we have despised your name, because we do not think that we have done so.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Malachi 1:7

polluted bread

Here “polluted” describes anything that is not suitable to sacrifice to God. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

How have we polluted you?

Here the priests are asking a question in order to state that they have not really polluted Yahweh. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “We have not polluted you.” or “Tell us how we have polluted you, because we do not think that we have done so.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

polluted you

This expression refers to insulting God by giving him unsuitable sacrifices. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

table

This refers to an altar.

By saying that Yahweh’s table is contemptible.

This is the answer that Yahweh gives to the priests, but the full answer is only implied. This can be made explicit. Alternate translation: “You have polluted me by saying, ‘Yahweh’s table is contemptible.’” (See: **Ellipsis (p.80)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.80)**)

contemptible

regarded as worthless

Malachi 1:8

When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not evil?

Here Yahweh uses a question to rebuke the people. Alternate translation: “You know very well that it is evil for you to offer blind animals for sacrifice!” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

When you offer the lame and sick, is that not evil?

Here Yahweh uses a question to rebuke the people. Alternate translation: “And you know very well that it is evil for you to offer lame and sick animals!” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Present that to your governor! Will he accept you or will he lift up your face?

The command in the first sentence functions as a hypothetical condition. Alternate translation: “If you present that to your governor, will he accept you or will he lift up your face?” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-imperative\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-hypo\]\]](#)) (See: **Imperatives — Other Uses (p.93)**)

Will he accept you or will he lift up your face?

Here Yahweh asks this question in order to remind the people that their governor would never accept defective animals from them. Alternate translation: “If you do those things, you know that the governor will not accept you. He will not lift up your face.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

will he lift up your face

Lifting up someone’s face refers to accepting him with favor. Alternate translation: “will he accept you with favor” or “will he agree to help you” (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Present

give as a gift to show respect

Malachi 1:9

Now you keep asking the face of God, that he may be gracious to us

Malachi is no longer speaking for God. He is talking directly to the Israelites; he is criticizing them for daring to think that God will have mercy on them.

keep asking the face of God

Here “face” stands for God and also for his presence. Alternate translation: “keep asking God in his presence” (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

with such an offering in your hand, would he lift up any of your faces?

Here Yahweh is asking a question in order to make a statement of rebuke. Alternate translation: “if you offer unacceptable offerings, he will certainly not lift up your faces.” (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-idiom\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

with such an offering in your hand

This difficult phrase in Hebrew is interpreted in many different ways by modern versions.

in your hand

Here “hand” stands for the people bringing the offering. Alternate translation: “brought by you” (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

would he lift up any of your faces

Lifting up someone’s face refers to accepting him with favor. Alternate translation: “would he accept any of you with favor” or “would he agree to help any of you” (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Malachi 1:10

Oh, if only

This expresses great desire.

so that you might not light fires on my altar in vain

Here “light fires on my altar” stands for offering sacrifices on Yahweh’s altar. Alternate translation: “so that you might not make fires to burn offerings that I will not accept” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

from your hand

Here “your hand” stands for “you.” Alternate translation: “from you” (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

Malachi 1:11

from the rising of the sun to its setting

This double expression means “everywhere.” It is parallel to “among the nations” and “in every place” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-parallelism\]\]](#)) (See: **Merism (p.96)**)

my name will be great among the nations

Here “my name” stands for Yahweh’s reputation and honor. Alternate translation: “I will be honored in other nations” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

in every place incense and pure offerings will be offered in my name

This may be expressed in active form. Alternate translation: “in these nations people will offer incense and pure offerings to me in order to worship me” (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

in my name

Here “name” stands for Yahweh. Alternate translation: “to me” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 1:12

its fruit, its food

This could mean: (1) "the meat sacrificed on the altar from animals whose other parts the priests should eat" or (2) "the meat sacrificed on the altar."

Malachi 1:13

snort at it

show great disrespect by making noises through the nose (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Should I accept this from your hand?

Here Yahweh is asking a question in order to make a statement of rebuke. Alternate translation: "I should certainly not accept this from you!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

from your hand

Here "your hand" stands for "you." Alternate translation: "from you" (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

Malachi 1:14

my name will be honored among the nations

This may be expressed in active form. Alternate translation: "people in the other nations honor my name" (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

my name will be honored

Here "my name" stands for Yahweh. Alternate translation: "I will be honored" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 2

Malachi 2 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Levites

The priests are given a strong warning in this chapter. They have not followed the law of Moses and have led the people in the wrong direction. Yahweh has not accepted their sacrifices. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/priest\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/lawofmoses\]\]](#))

Marital unfaithfulness

Because the Jews lived under a covenantal arrangement with Yahweh, their relationship is described using the imagery of a marriage. Marital unfaithfulness indicates a person's unfaithfulness to Yahweh. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/covenant\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/faithful\]\]](#) and **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 2:1

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Malachi 2:2

lay it on your heart

This refers to considering something to be very important. Alternate translation: "consider it to be very important" (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

give honor to my name

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **honor**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "honor my name" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

my name

Here this expression refers to God. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

I will send a curse on you

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **curse**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "I will curse you" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

you are not laying my command on your heart

This refers to considering God's command to be very important. Alternate translation: "you are not considering my command to be very important" (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Malachi 2:3

I will spread dung on your faces

Here “dung on your faces” stands for disgrace. Alternate translation: “I will most certainly put you in deep disgrace; it will be as bad as if I had spread dung on your faces” (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the dung from your festivals

Here “festivals” stands for the animals that the priests offered in sacrifice at the Israelite festivals. “The dung” probably refers both to the dung that was produced by the animals just before they were slaughtered for sacrifice, and to the dung that was found inside the animals when their bodies were cut apart before being sacrificed. Temple workers had to transport this dung to a place outside of the temple, and probably outside of Jerusalem. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

he will take you away with it

This difficult expression can be translated as “God will take you away with it,” that is, with the dung. This expression continues the same metaphor of slaughtering animals for sacrifice, and it can be put in active form. Alternate translation: “they will throw you on the dung pile; God will make sure that they take you away when they remove all the dung” (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

he will take you away with it

This could mean: (1) God will punish the unfaithful priests by killing them and causing their bodies to be carried away on the piles of animal dung, or (2) God will punish the unfaithful priests in such a horrible way that it will be as if their bodies had been carried away with the animal dung. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 2:4

Levi

Here Levi represents his descendants, the tribe of Levi. Alternate translation: “so that my covenant may be with you, the descendants of Levi” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 2:5

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh speaks of the tribe of Levi as though they are Levi. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

My covenant with him was life and peace

Here the intended results of the covenant are spoken of as if they were the covenant itself. Alternate translation: "The purpose of my covenant with Levi was for the priests to live in prosperity and peace" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

fear, and he feared me

This expression continues the same metaphor, but leaves out an idea that is implied in the text. This can begin a new sentence. Alternate translation: "My covenant with him was also fear, and he feared me" or "In my covenant with him, I required him to fear me, and he did fear me" (See: **Ellipsis (p.80)**) (See: **Ellipsis (p.80)**)

in awe of my name

Here "my name" stands for God himself. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 2:6

nothing false was found

Here finding something stands for that thing existing. Alternate translation: "there was no falsehood" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

on his lips

Here "lips" stands for a person's ability to speak. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

He walked with me

Here walking stands for living, conducting one's life in a certain way. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

in peace and uprightness

Here the idea of location stands for the manner in which Levi lived. Alternate translation: "peacefully and uprightly" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

he turned many away from sin

Here persuading people to stop sinning is spoken of as if it were turning them away from sin. Alternate translation: "he persuaded many people to stop sinning" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

lips

Here "lips" stands for a person's ability to speak. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 2:7

For a priest's lips should keep knowledge

Here knowledge is spoken of as if it were an object that a priest could keep. In this passage, the idea of "keep knowledge" implies communicating true knowledge about God. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

seek instruction

Here instruction is spoken of as if it were an object that people could look for. If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word *******, *you can express the same idea with a verbal form. Alternate translation: "want to be instructed" or "want a priest to teach them truly"* (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

from his mouth

Here "mouth" stands for what a person says. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 2:8

you have turned away from the true path

The right way to behave is spoken of as if it were the right path to follow, and abandoning right conduct is spoken of as if it were turning away from that path. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

You have caused many to stumble

Disobeying God is spoken of as if it were stumbling. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

You have caused many to stumble with respect to the law

The expression “with respect to the law” gives the context for the “stumbling.” Alternate translation: “You have caused many to disobey the law”

Malachi 2:9

before all the people

This spatial idea stands for the people's awareness of the priests' evil behavior. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

kept my ways

Here "ways" stands for "desires" and "behavior." These ways are spoken of as if they were things that could be kept by people. Alternate translation: "followed my desires in how you should live" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

shown partiality with regard to the instruction

Alternate translation: "set easy standards of behavior for people you like and difficult standards of behavior for people you do not like"

shown partiality

Here the habit of favoring some people more than others is spoken of as if it were a thing that could be shown to others. Alternate translation: "made people aware that you favor some people more than others (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 2:10

General Information:

General Information:

Here the prophet Malachi begins to speak to his fellow Israelites.

Is there not one father for us all? Has not one God created us?

Malachi asks these questions in order to remind his fellow Israelites about what they already know. Alternate translation: “You know that we all have one father, that our God has created a nation out of us.” or “You all know that God is the father of all us Israelites, because he is the one who made our nation.” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/writing-background\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#)) (See: **Background Information (p.75)**)

Has not one God created us?

This question is meant to express a statement. Alternate translation: “Certainly it is the same God who has created us.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

created us

This probably refers to God forming the Hebrews into a nation.

Why are we faithless each man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Malachi asks this question in order to rebuke his fellow Israelites. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “We should certainly not mistreat our brothers and disrespect God’s covenant by disobeying his commands, as you have been doing.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Malachi 2:11

Judah has been faithless

Here "Judah" stands for the people in the region of Judah, and the fact that they have been faithless to Yahweh is spoken of as if they were one man named "Judah." Alternate translation: "The people of Judah have been faithless" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

A disgusting thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem

This can be expressed in active form. Alternate translation: "People have done disgusting things in Israel and in Jerusalem" (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

For Judah has profaned the holy place of Yahweh

Here "Judah" refers again to the people of Israel. Alternate translation: "For the people of Judah have profaned the holy place of Yahweh" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

has married the daughter of a foreign god

The people of Judah are again referred to as if they were one man named "Judah." Alternate translation: "have married women from other nations, women who worship idols" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 2:12

May Yahweh cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who

Destroying something is often spoken of as it were cutting it off from something else. Alternate translation: “May Yahweh destroy anyone in the tents of Jacob who” or “May Yahweh kill anyone in the community of Israel who” (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the tents of Jacob

Here “tents of Jacob” stands for the community of Israel. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Jacob

Here “Jacob” stands for all the Israelites, because Jacob was one of the patriarchs from whom the Israelites were descended. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

the one who is awake and the one who answers

This expression seems to mean “absolutely everyone.” (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

Malachi 2:13

You cover the altar of Yahweh with tears

This sarcastically exaggerates the amount of tears the people cry to show that Yahweh knows that the people do not really feel sad. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-hyperbole\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-irony\]\]](#)) (See: **Hyperbole (p.87)**)

with weeping and sighing

The words “weeping” and “sighing” share similar meanings and intensify the idea of weeping. Alternate translation: “with great weeping” (See: **Doublet (p.78)**) (See: **Doublet (p.78)**)

does not turn toward the offering

Here turning toward a gift stands for receiving it and showing favor to the giver. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

does not turn toward the offering

This implies that those who are weeping at Yahweh’s altar have offered sacrifices to him. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

from your hand

Here “hand” stands for the person giving the offering. Alternate translation: “from you” (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**) (See: **Synecdoche (p.116)**)

Malachi 2:14

Why does he not?

The full thought, as in [Malachi 2:13](#), is “Why does he not turn toward the offering or accept it with favor from our hand?” Some translators may decide to provide this entire thought in their versions. (See: [Ellipsis \(p.80\)](#)) (See: [Ellipsis \(p.80\)](#))

the wife of your youth

Alternate translation: “the woman you married when you were young”

Yahweh was a witness between you and the wife of your youth

This statement assumes that this woman is still living. (See: [Background Information \(p.75\)](#)) (See: [Background Information \(p.75\)](#))

a witness between you and the wife of your youth

Here a witness to an agreement between two people is thought of as standing between them in order to testify about what they agreed to, in case a dispute arises between the two people. This sentence also was meant to remind the people that Yahweh would punish any Israelite who broke the covenant of marriage. (See: [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc:///ta/man/translate/writing-background\]\]](#)) (See: [Metaphor \(p.98\)](#))

she was your companion and your wife by covenant

This statement implies that many of the Israelites had divorced their wives. (See: [Background Information \(p.75\)](#)) (See: [Background Information \(p.75\)](#))

by covenant

Alternate translation: “by the covenant of marriage that you agreed to”

Malachi 2:15

Did he not make them one, with a portion of his spirit?

If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “He certainly made husband and wife one, with a portion of his spirit.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

make them one

This expression implies making husband and wife one flesh. Alternate translation: “make husband and wife one flesh” (See: **Background Information (p.75)**) (See: **Background Information (p.75)**)

an offspring from God

Children who would honor and obey God.

Malachi 2:16

I hate divorce

Here "divorce" stands for the act of divorce, when a man sends away his wife, so as to end his marriage to her. Alternate translation: "I hate it when a man divorces his wife" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

the one who covers his garment with violence

This phrase probably means any man who is violent toward his wife. (See: **Idiom (p.91)**) (See: **Idiom (p.91)**)

So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless

Alternate translation: "So be careful to be loyal to your wife"

Malachi 2:17

You have wearied Yahweh

Yahweh is spoken of as if human behavior could make him tired, but God cannot grow weary in a physical or emotional sense. This statement probably means that Yahweh has become offended or exasperated. Alternate translation: "You have offended Yahweh" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

How have we wearied him?

This question is meant to deny that the people have done any wrong. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "We have certainly not wearied him." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

By saying

The complete idea here is, "You have wearied him by saying." This is the prophet's answer to the rhetorical question. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

in the eyes

The eyes represent seeing, and seeing represents thoughts or judgment. Alternate translation: "in the opinion" or "in the judgment" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Where is the God of justice?

The priests ask this question in order to claim either that Yahweh does not care whether people do evil or not, or that he never punishes evildoers. Alternate translation: "God certainly does not punish evil people!" (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

the God of justice

the God who punishes evildoers justly

Malachi 3

Malachi 3 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Messiah

There are several prophecies in this chapter concerning the Messiah and the one who comes before the Messiah. At times, this chapter switches between prophesying about the first coming of the Messiah and the second coming of the Messiah without formal divisions between them. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/christ\]\]](#))

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Rhetorical questions

Several rhetorical questions are used in this chapter to convince the reader of the truth of what he is saying and of their sin. (See: **sin, sinful, sinner, sinning (p.119)**)

Malachi 3:1

General Information:

General Information:

Yahweh begins speaking again to the people of Israel in verse 1, but the prophet Malachi begins speaking in verse 2.

See

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

he will prepare the way before me

Here getting people ready to welcome Yahweh is spoken of as if a road were being cleared for Yahweh to travel on. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Then the Lord, whom you seek & The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight

Some modern versions translate this in a way that implies that these two expressions refer to the same person. Other modern versions leave this matter ambiguous. We recommend that translations leave this matter ambiguous, as the ULT and UST do.

The messenger of the covenant

Almost all versions leave ambiguous the sense of this expression. But translators may need to make explicit the relationship between "messenger" and "the covenant." The UST presents "the messenger" as one promised by the covenant that Yahweh had with Israel. Another choice is to present the messenger as a person who will either confirm that covenant or announce a new covenant.

Malachi 3:2

But who will be able to endure the day of his coming? Who will be able to stand when he appears?

These rhetorical questions imply that no one will be able to resist Yahweh when he comes. They can be combined into one statement. Alternate translation: "However, no one will be able to resist Yahweh when he comes to judge them." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

the day of his coming

Here "day" stands for "time." Alternate translation: "the time when he comes"

be able to stand

Here standing represents resisting someone's attack or accusations. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

For he will be like a refiner's fire and like laundry soap

This sentence gives the reason why no one will be able to resist God when he comes. God's power to judge the people and to stop them from sinning is spoken of as if it were the power of strong soap to clean clothes, or the power of fire to melt an object. These are ways of saying that God's power to do these things cannot be stopped. (See: **Simile (p.113)**) (See: **Simile (p.113)**)

Malachi 3:3

he will purify the sons of Levi

Forgiving the sons of Levi and persuading them not to sin any longer is spoken of as if it were purifying metal. Alternate translation: “he will correct the sons of Levi and forgive them for having sinned” (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the sons of Levi

Here “sons” refers to descendants. The male descendants of Levi were the priests and workers in the temple. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

He will sit

Here sitting implies the action of a metalworker, who sits down in order to purify small amounts of gold or silver. It also implies the action of a king, who sits down to judge people and give decrees. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-simile\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#)) (See: **Simile (p.113)**)

He will refine them like gold and silver

Here persuading people not to sin any longer is spoken of as if a metalworker were making gold and silver more pure. (See: **Simile (p.113)**) (See: **Simile (p.113)**)

they will bring offerings of righteousness to Yahweh

Here “of righteousness” means “motivated by righteous desires to worship God.” Alternate translation: “they will bring acceptable offerings to Yahweh in order to worship Yahweh”

Malachi 3:4

the offering of Judah and Jerusalem

Here "Judah" and "Jerusalem" stand for the people in those places. Alternate translation: "the offerings brought by the people of Judah and Jerusalem" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

as in the days of old, and as in ancient years

These two phrases mean basically the same thing and emphasize that the offering was once pleasing to Yahweh. Alternate translation: "as it was in the distant past" (See: **Parallelism (p.106)**) (See: **Parallelism (p.106)**)

Malachi 3:5

Then I will approach you for judgment

Here “judgment” refers to the act of judging. Alternate translation: “Then I will approach you in order to judge you” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

oppress the hired worker in his wages

Alternate translation: “cause the hired worker to suffer by not paying him for his work”

turn away the foreigner

That is, turning away the foreigner from gaining his rights. Depriving people of their rights is spoken of as if it were physically turning them away from oneself. Perhaps the idea is turning away someone who comes for a wrong to be set right. Alternate translation: “deny foreigners living in Israel the rights that they should have” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-explicit\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

Malachi 3:6

have not come to an end

Alternate translation: "have not perished"

Malachi 3:7

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them

Disobeying God's statutes is spoken of as if it were turning away from them. Alternate translation: "You have disobeyed my statutes ever since the days of your ancestors" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Return to me, and I will return to you

Here loving each other and being faithful to each other is spoken of as if it were returning to each other. Alternate translation: "Love me and honor me, and I will always help you" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

How will we return?

The people ask this question in order to claim that they have never stopped obeying God. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: "We have never gone away from you, so we cannot return to you." or "We have never gone away from you, so it makes no sense to speak of us as returning to you." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Malachi 3:8

Would a person rob God?

This question implies that the idea of robbing God is very wicked. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. God speaks of himself in the third person Alternate translation: "A man should certainly not rob God." or "No one should ever rob me." (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-rquestion\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-123person\]\]](#)) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

How have we robbed you?

This question implies that the people do not think they have robbed God. Alternate translation: "We have certainly not robbed you." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

In tithes and offerings

This reply from Yahweh implies a fuller answer. Alternate translation: "You have robbed me by withholding from me your tithes and offerings" (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

Malachi 3:9

You are cursed with a curse

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 have certainly cursed you" (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

you are robbing me, the whole nation

Here "nation" stands for the people to whom Yahweh is speaking. Alternate translation: "all of you in the whole nation are robbing me"

Malachi 3:10

the full tithe

Alternate translation: "all the tithes"

my house

Here "house" stands for the temple. Alternate translation: "my temple" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

and test me now in this & if I do not open to you the windows of heaven

Here the command "test me" stands for something that the people can do and should do: "if you test me." This can be divided into two sentences also. Alternate translation: "And if you test me ... I will open up the windows of heaven" or "And you should test me ... If you do, I will open up the windows of heaven" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 3:11

(There are no notes for this verse.)

Malachi 3:12

All the nations will call you blessed

Here to be called blessed stands for being blessed. Alternate translation: "All the nations will know that you have been blessed" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

All the nations

This expression stands for the people in all the nations. Alternate translation: "The people in all the nations" (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

a land of delight

Here "delight" stands for the condition in which the inhabitants of a land take delight in their land. (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

Malachi 3:13

General Information:

General Information:

These verses begin a new section in the book. Here Yahweh is speaking to the people of Israel.

Your words against me have been strong

Here “strong” stands for “harsh” or “terrible.” And “Your words” stands for “What you have said.” Alternate translation: “What you have said about me is terrible” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#)) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

What have we said among ourselves against you?

The people ask this question in order to claim that they have said nothing against God. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express this question as a statement. Alternate translation: “We have not said anything among ourselves against you.” (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

Malachi 3:14

What profit is it that we have kept his requirements or walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts?

The people ask this question among themselves in order to make a statement. Alternate translation: "It is useless that we have kept his requirements and walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts." (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**) (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.109)**)

walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts

Here "walk mournfully" stands for "behave in a sorrowful manner," probably in order to indicate sorrow over their sins. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

before Yahweh of hosts

Here this expression refers to God being aware of what the people were doing. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Malachi 3:15

we call the arrogant blessed

Here to be called "blessed" stands for being blessed. Alternate translation: "we say that the arrogant are blessed" (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

we call the arrogant blessed

This may be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "we say that the arrogant are well off" (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**) (See: **Active or Passive (p.69)**)

escape

That is, "they escape God's punishment." (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**) (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.72)**)

Malachi 3:16

General Information:

General Information:

The event described here may have taken place after the godly people in Israel repented of their sins.

a book of remembrance was written before him about those who feared Yahweh

This could mean: (1) the Israelites wrote a book so they would remember what they had promised and listed the names of people who feared Yahweh or (2) Yahweh caused someone in heaven to write a book with the names of people who feared him.

book of remembrance

This expression refers to any book that helps people remember important things, such as events or people who lived in the past. (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

honored his name

Here “his name” stands for God himself. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Malachi 3:17

They will be mine

Alternate translation: "They will be my people"

my own treasured possession

Here "possession" refers to one's personal property. This idea can be expressed with a verb. Alternate translation: "they will belong completely to me" (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

I act

the time when Yahweh will judge and punish the rebellious Israelites, giving victory to the faithful Israelites

Malachi 3:18

distinguish between

Alternate translation: "see a difference between" or "treat differently"

Malachi 4

Malachi 4 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Last days

Although the Jews may have hoped these prophecies referenced a time in the near future to them, the prophecies of this chapter exclusively relate to the last days. (See: [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/prophet\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://tw/dict/bible/kt/lastday\]\]](#))

Malachi 4:1

see

Alternate translation: “look” or “listen” or “pay attention to what I am about to tell you”

the day is coming, burning like a furnace

The disaster occurring at this time is spoken of as if the day itself were burning. God’s judgment is often spoken of as if it were a fire. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

arrogant & evildoers

See how you translated these wordsd in [Malachi 3:15](#).

all the arrogant and all the evildoers will become stubble

These people are spoken of as if they will become dried-up plants fit only for being burned. It is common for the Bible to speak of people as if they were plants or trees. Alternate translation: “all the arrogant and all the evildoers will burn up like dry plants” (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

The day that is coming will burn them up

Here “the day” stands for the events that will occur on that day. Alternate translation: “On that day I will burn them up” (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

it will leave them neither root nor branch

This expression continues to speak of people as if they were plants or trees. So being deprived of all roots and branches stands for being completely killed off. Alternate translation: “nothing will be left” (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-merism\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Merism (p.96)**)

Malachi 4:2

you who fear my name

Here “my name” stands for Yahweh himself. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings

This could mean: (1) Yahweh, who always acts righteously, will come and heal his people on that day or (2) on that day Yahweh will reveal the people’s righteousness and heal them.

healing in its wings

This could mean: (1) the act of healing someone is spoken of as if it were an object that the sun carried to people by means of its wings or (2) the healing takes place under the wings, that is, in the security God gives his people. (See: [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-abstractnouns\]\]](#) and [\[\[rc://ta/man/translate/figs-metaphor\]\]](#)) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

wings

It was common in the Ancient Near East to speak of the sun as if it had wings, with which it moved across the sky. This could mean: (1) the sun’s life-giving rays of light are spoken of as if they were its wings or (2) the wings are said to cover God’s people so as to give them peace and safety. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

You will go out, and you will leap like calves from the stall

Here the redeemed people of Yahweh are spoken of as if they were young bulls released from their stalls, allowed to go out into their pasture. (See: **Simile (p.113)**) (See: **Simile (p.113)**)

Malachi 4:3

you will trample down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet

Here the victory of God's people is spoken of as if they were walking over the burned bodies of their enemies. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

they will be ashes

The Israelites' enemies are spoken of as having been burned to ashes ([Malachi 4:1](#)).

Malachi 4:4

Remember the teaching of my servant Moses that I gave him

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea behind the word **teaching**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as “taught.” Alternate translation: “Remember what I taught my servant Moses” (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**) (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.67)**)

Remember

Here “Remember” stands for “Think about” and, at the same time, “Obey.”

Horeb

This is another name for Sinai.

all Israel

Here “all Israel” is a reference to all the people in the nation of Israel. (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**) (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

the statutes

These are the laws that God gave Israel for all time.

the rulings

These are legal decisions meant to make clear how the general statutes apply to everyday life.

Malachi 4:5

the coming of the great and fearful day of Yahweh

Here the occurrence of this day is spoken of as if it were coming. Alternate translation: “before the great and fearful day of Yahweh happens” (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the great and fearful day of Yahweh

This expression refers to any time in which Yahweh acts decisively.

Malachi 4:6

He will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers

Here changing how people think is spoken of as if it were turning their hearts. (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**) (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)



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Version 79

Abstract Nouns

Description

Abstract nouns are nouns that refer to attitudes, qualities, events, or situations. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as happiness, weight, unity, friendship, health, and reason. This is a translation issue because some languages may express a certain idea with an abstract noun, while others would need a different way to express it.

This page answers the question: *What are abstract nouns and how do I deal with them in my translation?*

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

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

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

Remember that nouns are words that refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. Abstract nouns are the nouns that refer to ideas. These can be attitudes, qualities, events, situations, or even relationships between those ideas. These are things that cannot be seen or touched in a physical sense, such as joy, peace, creation, goodness, contentment, justice, truth, freedom, vengeance, slowness, length, weight, and many, many more.

Some languages, such as Biblical Greek and English, use abstract nouns a lot. They provide a way of giving names to actions or qualities. With names, people who speak these languages can talk about the concepts as though they were things. For example, in languages that use abstract nouns, people can say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." But some languages do not use abstract nouns very much. In these languages, speakers may not have the two abstract nouns "forgiveness" and "sin," but they would express the same meaning in other ways. For example, they would express, "I believe that God is willing to forgive people after they have sinned," by using verb phrases instead of nouns for those ideas.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

The Bible that you translate from may use abstract nouns to express certain ideas. Your language might not use abstract nouns for some of those ideas. Instead, it might use phrases to express those ideas. Those phrases will use other kinds of words such as adjectives, verbs, or adverbs to express the meaning of the abstract noun. For example, "What is its **weight**?" could be expressed as "How much does it **weigh**?" or "How **heavy** is it?"

Examples From the Bible

From **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

The abstract noun "childhood" refers to when someone was a child.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

The abstract nouns "godliness" and "contentment" refer to being godly and content. The abstract noun "gain" refers to something that benefits or helps someone.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

The abstract noun "salvation" here refers to being saved.

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The abstract noun "slowness" refers to the lack of speed with which something is done.

He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

The abstract noun "purposes" refers to the things that people want to do and the reasons they want to do them.

Translation Strategies

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

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Reword the sentence with a phrase that expresses the meaning of the abstract noun. Instead of a noun, the new phrase will use a verb, an adverb, or an adjective to express the idea of the abstract noun. Alternative translations are indented below the Scripture example.

... from **childhood** you have known the sacred writings ... (2 Timothy 3:15a ULT)

Ever since **you were a child** you have known the sacred writings.

But **godliness** with **contentment** is great **gain**. (1 Timothy 6:6 ULT)

But **being godly** and **content** is very **beneficial**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **are godly** and **content**. But we **benefit** greatly when we **honor and obey God** and when we are **happy with what we have**.

Today **salvation** has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9 ULT)

Today the people in this house **have been saved** ... Today God **has saved** the people in this house ...

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **slowness** to be. (2 Peter 3:9a ULT)

The Lord does not move slowly concerning his promises, as some consider **moving slowly** to be.

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the **purposes** of the heart. (1 Corinthians 4:5b ULT)

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal **the things that people want to do and the reasons that they want to do them**.

"

Referenced in: [Malachi 1:4](#); [Malachi 2:2](#); [Malachi 2:7](#); [Malachi 2:16](#); [Malachi 3:5](#); [Malachi 3:12](#); [Malachi 3:16](#); [Malachi 3:17](#); [Malachi 4:2](#); [Malachi 4:4](#)

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: [Malachi 1:11](#); [Malachi 1:14](#); [Malachi 2:3](#); [Malachi 2:11](#); [Malachi 3:9](#); [Malachi 3:15](#)

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: [Malachi 1:2](#); [Malachi 2:13](#); [Malachi 2:17](#); [Malachi 3:5](#); [Malachi 3:8](#); [Malachi 3:15](#)

Background Information

Description

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A writer may use background information:

- to help their listeners be interested in the story
- to help their listeners understand something in the story
- to help the listeners understand why something is important in the story
- to tell the setting of a story

- Setting includes:
 - where the story takes place
 - when the story takes place
 - who is present when the story begins
 - what is happening when the story begins

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

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

Referenced in: [Malachi 2:10](#); [Malachi 2:14](#); [Malachi 2:15](#)

Doublet

Description

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

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

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

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

A very similar issue is the repetition of the same word or phrase for emphasis, usually with no other words between them. Because these figures of speech are so similar and have the same effect, we will treat them here together.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

In some languages people do not use doublets. Or they may use doublets, but only in certain situations, so a doublet might not make sense in their language in some verses. People might think that the verse is describing two ideas or actions, when it is only describing one. In this case, translators may need to find some other way to express the meaning expressed by the doublet.

Examples From the Bible

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

The bolded words mean the same thing. Together they mean the people were spread out.

He attacked two men **more righteous** and **better** than himself. (1 Kings 2:32b ULT)

This means that they were “much more righteous” than he was.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

This means that they had decided to lie, which is another way of saying that they intended to deceive people.

... like of a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

This means that he was like a lamb that did not have any defect—not even one.

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, “**Master! Master!** We are perishing!” (Luke 8:24 ULT)

The repetition of “Master” means that the disciples called to Jesus urgently and continually.

Translation Strategies

If a doublet would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, consider these strategies.

- (1) Translate only one of the words or phrases.
- (2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words or phrases and add a word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”
- (3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language’s ways of doing that.

Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Translate only one of the words.

You have decided to prepare **false** and **deceptive** words. (Daniel 2:9b ULT)

“You have decided to prepare **false** things to say.”

(2) If the doublet is used to intensify the meaning, translate one of the words and add a word that intensifies it such as “very” or “great” or “many.”

He has one people **scattered** and **dispersed** among the peoples (Esther 3:8 ULT)

“He has one people **very spread out**.”

(3) If the doublet is used to intensify or emphasize the meaning, use one of your language’s ways of doing that.

... like a lamb **without blemish** and **without spot**. (1 Peter 1:19b ULT)

- English can emphasize this with “any” and “at all.”

“... like a lamb **without any blemish at all**.”

Then they approached {and} woke him up, saying, “**Master! Master!** We are perishing!” (Luke 8:24 ULT)

Then they approached {and} woke him up, **urgently shouting, “Master!**
We are perishing!”

”

Referenced in: [Malachi 2:13](#)

Ellipsis

Description

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

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

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

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

Two Types of Ellipsis

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

Relative Ellipsis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)

Sentence Structure (UTA PDF)

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

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

Absolute Ellipsis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Malachi 1:7](#); [Malachi 2:5](#); [Malachi 2:14](#)

How to Translate Names

Description

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

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

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

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

Meaning of names

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

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

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

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

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The footnote would look like:

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

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

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

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

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

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

a young man named **Saul**

The footnote would look like:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The footnote would look like:

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Introduction to Malachi](#)

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: [Malachi 2:13](#)

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: [Malachi 1:1](#); [Malachi 1:8](#); [Malachi 1:9](#); [Malachi 1:13](#); [Malachi 2:2](#); [Malachi 2:12](#); [Malachi 2:16](#)

Imperatives — Other Uses

Description

Imperative sentences are mainly used to express a desire or requirement that someone do something. In the Bible, sometimes imperative sentences have other uses.

This page answers the question: *What other uses are there for imperative sentences in the Bible?*

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use an imperative sentence for some of the functions that they are used for in the Bible.

Examples From the Bible

Speakers often use imperative sentences to tell or ask their listeners to do something. In Genesis 26, God spoke to Isaac and told him not to go to Egypt but to live where God would tell him to live.

Now Yahweh appeared to him and said, “**Do not go down** to Egypt; **live** in the land that I tell you to live in.” (Genesis 26:2 ULT)

Sometimes imperative sentences in the Bible have other uses.

Imperatives that make things happen

God can make things happen by commanding that they happen. Jesus healed a man by commanding that the man be healed. The man could not do anything to obey the command, but Jesus caused him to be healed by commanding it. (In this context, the command “Be clean” means to “be healed” so that others around would know that it was safe to touch the man again.)

“I am willing. **Be clean.**” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:3b ULT)

In Genesis 1, God commanded that there should be light, and by commanding it, he caused it to exist. Some languages, such as the Hebrew of the Bible, have commands that are in the third person. English does not do that, and so it must turn the third-person command into a general, second-person command, as in the ULT:

God said, “**Let there be** light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

Languages that have third-person commands can follow the original Hebrew, which translates into English as something like “light must be.”

Imperatives that function as blessings

In the Bible, God blesses people by using imperatives. This indicates what his will is for them.

God blessed them and said to them, “**Be fruitful**, and **multiply**. **Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **Have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28 ULT)

Imperatives that function as conditions

An imperative sentence can also be used to tell the **condition** under which something will happen. The proverbs mainly tell about life and things that often happen. The purpose of Proverbs 4:6 below is not primarily to give a command, but to teach what people can expect to happen **if** they love wisdom.

Do not abandon wisdom and she will watch over you; **love** her and she will keep you safe.
(Proverbs 4:6 ULT)

The purpose of Proverbs 22:6, below, is to teach what people can expect to happen if they teach their children the way they should go.

Teach a child the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction. (Proverbs 22:6 ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If people would not use an imperative sentence for one of the functions in the Bible, try using a statement instead.
- (2) If people would not understand that a sentence is used to cause something to happen, add a connecting word like “so” to show that what happened was a result of what was said.
- (3) If people would not use a command as a condition, translate it as a statement with the words “if” and “then.”

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If people would not use an imperative sentence for one of the functions in the Bible, try using a statement instead.

Be clean. (Matthew 8:3b ULT)

“You are now clean.” “I now cleanse you.”

God said, “**Let there be light,**” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

God said, “**There is now light**” and there was light.

God blessed them and said to them, “**Be fruitful, and multiply. Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **Have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28 ULT)

God blessed them and said to them, “**My will for you is that you be fruitful, and multiply. Fill** the earth, and **subdue** it. **I want you to have dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

- (2) If people would not understand that a sentence is used to cause something to happen, add a connecting word like “so” to show that what happened was a result of what was said.

God said, “**Let there be light,**” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ULT)

God said, ‘Let there be light,’ **so** there was light. God said, “Light must be;” **as a result**, there was light.

- (3) If people would not use a command as a condition, translate it as a statement with the words “if” and “then.”

Teach a child the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction. (Proverbs 22:6 ULT)

Translated as:

“**If** you teach a child the way he should go, **then** when he is old he will not turn away from that instruction.”

”

Referenced in: [Malachi 1:8](#)

Merism

Definition

Merism is a figure of speech in which a person refers to something by speaking of two extreme parts of it. By referring to the extreme parts, the speaker intends to include also everything in between those parts.

“I am **the alpha and the omega**,” says the Lord God, “the one who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8 ULT)

I am **the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end**. (Revelation 22:13, ULT)

This page answers the question: *What does the word merism mean and how can I translate phrases that have it?*

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

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

Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is a merism that includes everything from the beginning to the end. It means eternal.

... I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth** ..., (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

Heaven and earth is a merism that includes everything that exists.

Reason This is a Translation Issue

Some languages do not use merism. The readers of those languages may think that the phrase only applies to the items mentioned. They may not realize that it refers to those two things and everything in between.

Examples From the Bible

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh’s name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

This bolded phrase is a merism because it speaks of the east and the west and everywhere in between. It means “everywhere.”

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13)

The bolded phrase is merism because it speaks of old people and young people and everyone in between. It means “everyone.”

Translation Strategies

If the merism would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are other options:

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.
- (2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Identify what the merism refers to without mentioning the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything**.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, Yahweh's name should be praised. (Psalm 113:3 ULT)

In all places, people should praise Yahweh's name.

(2) Identify what the merism refers to and include the parts.

I praise you, Father, Lord of **heaven and earth**. (Matthew 11:25b ULT)

I praise you, Father, Lord of **everything, including both what is in heaven and what is on earth**.

He will bless those who honor him, both **young and old**. (Psalm 115:13 ULT)

He will bless **all those** who honor him, regardless of whether they are **young or old**.

"

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

Metaphor

Description

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Parts of a Metaphor

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

Every metaphor has three parts:

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

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

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

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

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

Passive Metaphors

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

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

Patterned Pairs of Concepts Acting as Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

Active Metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Purposes of Metaphor

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Translation Principles

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I will make you **gather people**.

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

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Referenced in: Malachi 1:3; Malachi 1:7; Malachi 2 General Notes; Malachi 2:3; Malachi 2:5; Malachi 2:6; Malachi 2:7; Malachi 2:8; Malachi 2:9; Malachi 2:12; Malachi 2:14; Malachi 2:17; Malachi 3:1; Malachi 3:2; Malachi 3:3; Malachi 3:7; Malachi 3:10; Malachi 3:12; Malachi 3:13; Malachi 3:14; Malachi 3:15; Malachi 4:1; Malachi 4:2; Malachi 4:3; Malachi 4:5; Malachi 4:6

Metonymy

Description

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

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

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

Figures of Speech (UTA PDF)

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

The blood represents Christ's death.

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

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Referenced in: [Malachi 1:4](#); [Malachi 1:6](#); [Malachi 1:10](#); [Malachi 1:11](#); [Malachi 1:14](#); [Malachi 2:2](#); [Malachi 2:3](#); [Malachi 2:4](#); [Malachi 2:5](#); [Malachi 2:6](#); [Malachi 2:7](#); [Malachi 2:11](#); [Malachi 2:12](#); [Malachi 2:13](#); [Malachi 3:4](#); [Malachi 3:12](#); [Malachi 3:16](#); [Malachi 4:1](#); [Malachi 4:2](#); [Malachi 4:4](#)

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: [Malachi 3:4](#)

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?

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Referenced in: [Malachi 1 General Notes](#); [Malachi 1:2](#); [Malachi 1:6](#); [Malachi 1:7](#); [Malachi 1:8](#); [Malachi 1:9](#); [Malachi 1:13](#); [Malachi 2:10](#); [Malachi 2:15](#); [Malachi 2:17](#); [Malachi 3:2](#); [Malachi 3:7](#); [Malachi 3:8](#); [Malachi 3:13](#); [Malachi 3:14](#)

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 lightning 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: [Malachi 3:2](#); [Malachi 3:3](#); [Malachi 4:2](#)

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: [Malachi 1:2](#); [Malachi 1:3](#); [Malachi 1:5](#); [Malachi 1:9](#); [Malachi 1:10](#); [Malachi 1:13](#); [Malachi 2:13](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 79

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: [Malachi 3 General Notes](#)

Yahweh of hosts, God of hosts, host of heaven, host of the heavens, Lord of hosts

Definition:

The terms “Yahweh of hosts” and “God of hosts” are titles that express God’s authority over the thousands of angels who obey him.

- The term “host” or “hosts” is a word that refers to a large number of something, such as an army of people or the massive number of stars. It can also refer to all the many spirit beings, including evil spirits. The context makes it clear what is being referred to.
- Phrases similar to “host of the heavens” refer to all the stars, planets and other heavenly bodies.
- In the New Testament, the phrase, “Lord of hosts” means the same as “Yahweh of hosts” but it cannot be translated that way since the Hebrew word “Yahweh” is not used in the New Testament.

Translation Suggestions:

- Ways to translate “Yahweh of hosts” could include, “Yahweh, who rules all the angels” or “Yahweh, the ruler over armies of angels” or “Yahweh, the ruler of all creation.”
- The phrase “of hosts” in the terms “God of hosts” and “Lord of hosts” would be translated the same way as in the phrase “Yahweh of hosts” above.
- Certain churches do not accept the literal term “Yahweh” and prefer to use the capitalized word, “LORD” instead, following the tradition of many Bible versions. For these churches, a translation of the term “LORD of hosts” would be used in the Old Testament for “Yahweh of hosts.”

(See also: [angel](#), [authority](#), [God](#), [lord](#), [Lord](#), [Lord Yahweh Yahweh](#))

Bible References:

- Zechariah 13:2

Word Data:

- Strong's: H0430, H3068, H6635, G29620, G45190

”

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

Contributors

unfoldingWord® Translation Notes Contributors

Door43 World Missions Community

Aaron Fenlason

Abner Bauman

Adam Van Goor

Alan Bird

Alan Borkenhagen

Alfred Van Dellen

Alice Wright

Allen Bair

Allyson Presswood Nance

Amanda Adams

Andrew Belcher

Andrew Johnson

Andrew Rice

Angelo Palo

Anita Moreau

April Linton

Aurora Lee

Barbara Summers

Barbara White

Becky Hancock

Beryl Carpenter

Bethany Fenlason

Betty Forbes

Bianca Elliott

Bill Cleveland

Bill Pruett

Bob Britting

Bram van den Heuvel

Brian Metzger

Bruce Bridges

Bruce Collier

Bruce Smith

Caleb Worgess

Carlyle Kilmore

Carol Pace

Carol Heim

Caroline Crawford

Caroline Fleming

Caroline S Wong

Carol Lee

Carol Moyer

Carolyn Lafferty

Catherine C Newton

Charese Jackson

Charlotte Gibson

Charlotte Hobbs

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

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

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

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

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

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

unfoldingWord® Literal Text Contributors

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

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

unfoldingWord® Simplified Text Contributors

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

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

unfoldingWord® Translation Academy Contributors

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

unfoldingWord® Translation Words Contributors

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

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

unfoldingWord® Translation Words Links Contributors

Door43 World Missions Community

Jesse Griffin (BA Biblical Studies, Liberty University; MA Biblical Languages, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary)

Perry Oakes (BA Biblical Studies, Taylor University; MA Theology, Fuller Seminary; MA Linguistics, University of Texas at Arlington; PhD Old Testament, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary)

Larry Sallee (Th.M Dallas Theological Seminary, D.Min. Columbia Biblical Seminary)

Joel D. Ruark (M.A.Th. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Th.M. Stellenbosch University; Ph.D. Candidate in Old Testament Studies, Stellenbosch University)