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Nahum

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unfoldingWord® Translation Notes

Nahum

Introduction to Nahum

General Introduction

Outline of the book of Nahum

Nahum introduces this book (1:1)

Yahweh will destroy his enemies (1:2–6)

Yahweh cares for his people and will destroy Nineveh (1:7–15)

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

What is the book of Nahum about?

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

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian Empire was very powerful and cruel. It was conquering and absorbing the kingdoms all around it. The Assyrians had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. They were threatening the southern kingdom of Judah. The audience of the book is the people of Judah. This book was to encourage their faith in God and to give them confidence that the Assyrians would be defeated.

How should the title of this book be translated?

“The Book of Nahum” or just “Nahum” is the traditional title of this book. Translators may choose to call it “The Prophecies of Nahum.” (See: **How to Translate Names (p.84)**)

Who wrote the book of Nahum?

The prophet Nahum spoke these prophecies, and either he or one of his disciples wrote them down. Nahum was a prophet from Elkosh, an unknown city, probably in Judah.

Nahum mentions the destruction of Thebes, a city in Egypt, as a past event, which happened about 663 B.C. He prophesied about the destruction of Nineveh, which happened in 612 B.C. Therefore, the book of Nahum was written sometime between 663 and 612 B.C. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.137)**)

Translation Issues

Personification

In this prophecy, Yahweh often addresses the people of Judah and the people of Nineveh as simply “Judah” and “Nineveh,” using the names of the nation and city to represent the people. He also uses verbs in the singular that describe the nation or city doing things that people do, such as Judah wearing a yoke and shackles [1:13](#) or celebrating festivals and fulfilling vows [1:15](#). He describes Nineveh as a soldier who guards walls, watches a road, and strengthens his loins [2:1](#), and also as a prostitute whom Yahweh will strip naked and cover with filth [3:4-6](#), and as a drunkard who hides himself [3:11](#). If it is not clear that these things describe the people as a whole, you could explain this in a footnote or use one of the ideas in [personification](#).

Short, unconnected statements

In the descriptions of the battle for Nineveh, Nahum uses short statements that are not connected to the rest of the prophecy. For example, it is difficult to tell who “He” and “they” are in [2:5](#) or who is saying “Stop, stop” in [2:8](#).

There is no explanation of who the statements of 2:10 apply to, “Empty and desolate and ruined! And the heart is melted, and a shaking of knees, and anguish {is} in all loins, and all of their faces gather beauty.” The statements of 3:1-3 are similar. The reason seems to be that Nahum is reproducing in his description the confusion and anguish and the overwhelming of the senses that occurs in battle. Try to reproduce this effect in your translation in a way that makes sense in your language.

Nahum 1

Nahum 1 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

Some translations prefer to set apart extended quotations, prayers and songs. The ULT and many other English translations set the lines of the entire book (except for verse 1 of this chapter) farther to the right on the page than regular text to show that they are poetic prophecy. (See: **prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess (p.137)**)

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

Outline of chapter 1

Nahum introduces this book (1:1)

Yahweh will destroy his enemies (1:2-6)

Yahweh cares for his people and will destroy Nineveh (1:7-15)

Religious and Cultural Concepts in This Chapter

Yahweh's anger against Nineveh

This prophecy should be read in reference to the book of Jonah. That book described how the people of Nineveh, Assyria's capital city, repented when Jonah warned them that Yahweh was angry with them. The book of Nahum, written a little over one hundred years later than the book of Jonah, indicates that the Ninevites had returned to their evil ways and would soon be punished by God. Reading the two books together shows God's mercy and patience and also his anger and judgment for cruelty, evil, and sin.

Complete destruction

At the time of Nahum's prophecy, Assyria controlled almost the entire Near East. The Assyrians were terribly violent and cruel to the peoples that they conquered, including Israel. Because of this, Nahum prophesied that the Assyrians would be completely destroyed as a nation and as a people (1:14). This prophecy came true very suddenly in 612 B.C.

Translation Issues in This Chapter

Direct Address

The audience for this book is the people of Judah. They are in danger of attack by the cruel and powerful nation of Assyria, represented in this book by its capital, Nineveh. This chapter begins by describing Yahweh's anger at his enemies and his love for his people. Then Yahweh begins to address Nineveh directly in verse 9 and continues to do so in various places throughout the book. The people of Nineveh are not part of the audience of this book, however. The address to Nineveh is intended to show the people of Judah Yahweh's attitude toward the people of Nineveh and their evil actions. This direct address is also to let the people of Judah know that Yahweh will destroy Nineveh. Yahweh also addresses Judah directly in verses 12, 13, and 15.

Nahum 1:1

The burden of

The author is speaking of a message as though it were a **burden**, that is, a heavy load to carry. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [The pronouncement about] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the Elkoshite

An **Elkoshite** is someone from a place called Elkosh. If your readers would not be familiar with this place, you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: [who lived at Elkosh] (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

Nahum 1:2

takes vengeance on his adversaries

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **vengeance**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [avenges himself on his adversaries] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

Yahweh {is} a jealous and avenging God; Yahweh {is} an avenger and master of wrath

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. Hebrew poetry was based on this kind of repetition, and it would be good to show this to your readers by including both phrases in your translation rather than combining them. However, if it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases in a way that shows that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [Yahweh is a jealous and avenging God; yes, Yahweh is an avenger and master of wrath] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

and master of wrath

Here, **master of wrath** is an expression that means that Yahweh is extremely angry. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, use a comparable expression from your language that does have that meaning, or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [and wrathful beyond human ability] or [and is supremely angry] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

Yahweh takes vengeance on his adversaries, and he maintains against his enemies

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. Hebrew poetry was based on this kind of repetition, and it would be good to show this to your readers by including both phrases in your translation rather than combining them. However, if it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [Yahweh takes vengeance on his adversaries, indeed, he maintains against his enemies] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

and he maintains against his enemies

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply **wrath** from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and he maintains wrath against his enemies] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 1:3

is} long of nostrils

Here, **long of nostrils** is an idiom that means “slow to become angry.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [is patient] or [is slow to anger] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

and great in power

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **power**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [and very strong] or [and very mighty] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

and to acquit he will not acquit

The author is repeating the verb **acquit** in order to intensify the idea that it expresses. If your language can repeat words for intensification, it would be appropriate to do that here in your translation. If not, your language may have another way of expressing the emphasis. Alternate translation: [he will certainly not leave the guilty unpunished] or [he surely does not clear the guilty] (See: **Reduplication (p.123)**)

Nahum 1:4

He rebukes

The author says that Yahweh **rebukes** the sea as if Yahweh were scolding the sea as one might scold a person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [He controls] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Bashan withers

Nahum assumes that his readers will understand that **Bashan** refers to a region with which they would be familiar, and more specifically, refers to the plant life growing there. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [The plants growing at Bashan wither] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

also Carmel

Carmel is the name of a mountain with many plants. If your readers would not be familiar with this place, you could include an explanation. Alternate translation: [also the plants of Mount Carmel] (See: **How to Translate Names (p.84)**)

also Carmel

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply “wither” from other parts of the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [the plants growing on Mount Carmel wither] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 1:5

and the hills melt

The author is using extreme language of physical events to emphasize how powerful Yahweh is. If it would be clearer in your language, you could express this in a non-figurative way. Alternate translation: [and the hills crumble] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)

the dwellers in it

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply **shake** from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [the dwellers in it shake before his face] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 1:6

To the face of his indignation, who can stand? And who can arise against the burning of his nose

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. Hebrew poetry was based on this kind of repetition, and you may choose to show this to your readers by including both phrases in your translation rather than combining them. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases with a word other than **And** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [To the face of his indignation, who can stand? I say again, who can arise against the burning of his nose] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

To the face of

Here, **To the face of** is an idiom that means “In the presence of.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [In the presence of] or [Confronted with] or [Before] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

against the burning of his nose

Here, **the burning of his nose** is an idiom meaning that someone is angry. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [against his fierce anger] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

To the face of his indignation, & His wrath is poured out like fire

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **indignation** and **wrath**, you could express the same ideas in other ways. Alternate translation: [When he is furious at someone ... When he is wrathful, it is as though fire pours out from him] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

To the face of his indignation, who can stand

The author is using the question form to emphasize that no one can endure when Yahweh is angry. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [No one can endure when he is angry!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

And who can arise against the burning of his nose

The author is using the question form to emphasize that no one can resist when Yahweh is angry. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [No one can resist his fierce anger!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

Nahum 1:7

for a stronghold

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply “he is” from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [for he is a stronghold] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

in a day of trouble

The author is using the possessive form to describe a **day** that is characterized by **trouble**. If your language would not use the possessive form for this, you could express this as a time when trouble happens. Alternate translation: [in a time when there is trouble] (See: **Possession (p.116)**)

those taking refuge in him

The author is speaking of Yahweh as if he were a **refuge**, that is, a safe place to hide. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [those who come to him for protection] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Nahum 1:8

to its place

The pronoun **its** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the city's name here. Alternate translation: [to Nineveh's place] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

darkness will pursue his enemies

Here, **darkness** represents all kinds of bad things, and Nahum speaks of it as if it were a person pursuing his enemies. It means that Yahweh will not allow his enemies to escape their punishment. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [his enemies will not escape their punishment] (See: **Personification (p.111)**)

Nahum 1:9

What are you plotting against Yahweh

Nahum is using the question form to strongly communicate that it is useless to plot against Yahweh. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [Whatever you are plotting against Yahweh, it does not matter] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

are you plotting

The pronoun **you** refers to the Ninevites. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the people's name here. Alternate translation: [are you Ninevites plotting] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

are you plotting

Here, **you** is plural. It refers to the Ninevites, so use the plural form in your translation if your language marks that distinction. (See: **Forms of 'You' — Singular (p.80)**)

trouble

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **trouble**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [troubling events] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

will not rise up

The author is speaking of **trouble** as if it were a person who could **rise up**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [will not happen] or [will not come upon you] (See: **Personification (p.111)**)

Nahum 1:10

like tangled thorn-bushes and like their drink being drunk, they are devoured

The author is saying that the Ninevites are like tangled thorn bushes and dried stubble in a fire and like the drink in their own hands, because all of these things are quickly consumed. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [as tangled thorn bushes are in a fire and as a drink is in the hands of a Ninevite, they are quickly consumed] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

and like their drink & they are devoured

The pronouns **their** and **they** refer to the Ninevites. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the people's name here. Alternate translation: [and the Ninevites' drink ... the Ninevites are devoured] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

they are devoured

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. If you need to say who did the action, it is clear from the context that it was God. Alternate translation: [God will destroy them] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nahum 1:11

From you

The pronoun **you** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could add the city's name here. Alternate translation: [From you, Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

From you

Here, **you** is singular. It refers to Nineveh, so use the singular form in your translation if your language marks that distinction. (See: **Forms of 'You' — Singular (p.80)**)

From you came out

Nahum has been referring to Nineveh in the third person, but now he addresses the city directly in the second person. He does this even though he knows that the people of Nineveh cannot hear him. He does this in order to more powerfully express his prophecy against the people of Nineveh to his audience, the people of Judah. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the transition here more clearly or add the name of the city. Alternate translation: [This is what I say to Nineveh: From you came out] or [From you, Nineveh, came out] (See: **Apostrophe (p.64)**)

a plotter of evil & an advisor of wickedness

These two clauses mean basically the same thing. The second clause emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine the clauses or connect them with a word that shows that the second clause is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [a plotter of evil ... indeed, an advisor of wickedness] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

a plotter of evil & an advisor of wickedness

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **evil** and **wickedness**, you could express the same ideas in another way. Alternate translation: [an evil plotter ... a wicked advisor] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

Nahum 1:12

they are full

The pronoun **they** refers to the Ninevites. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the people's name here. Alternate translation: [the Ninevites are full] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

they are full

The implication is that **they are full** in strength. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [they are at full strength] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

they have been sheared, and he has passed away

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [they will be sheared, and he will pass away] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

they have been sheared

The implication is that they are **sheared** like sheep. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [they have been sheared like sheep] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

they have been sheared

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. If you need to say who did the action, it is clear from the context that it was God. Alternate translation: [God has sheared them] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

and he has passed away

In this verse, the word **he** refers to the “plotter of evil” in verse 10. It is probable, however, that this person represents the many plotters of evil in Nineveh, and so **he** here refers to all of them as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [and those plotters have passed away] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Though I have afflicted you

The pronoun **you** refers to the people of Judah. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the nation's name here. Alternate translation: [Though I have afflicted you, Judah] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Nahum 1:13

his yoke

In this verse, the word **his** continues to refer to the “plotter of evil” in verse 10, who represents the many plotters of evil in Nineveh, and so, as in verse 12, **his** here refers to all of them as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use a plural pronoun. Alternate translation: [their yoke] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

his yoke

The author is speaking of oppression as if it were a **yoke** that weighs down a work animal. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [their control over you] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

from upon you, and your shackles

The pronouns **you** and **your** refer to the people of Judah. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the nation’s name here. Alternate translation: [from upon you, Judah, and your shackles] or [off of you, people of Judah, and your shackles] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

and your shackles I will tear off

The author is speaking of oppression as if it were **shackles** that bind a prisoner. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [and I will relieve your oppression] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Nahum 1:14

concerning you

The pronoun **you** here refers to the people of Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the city's name here. Alternate translation: [concerning you, Nineveh] or [concerning you, people of Nineveh] (See:

Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120))

One will not be sown from your name

Here, **sown from your name** is an idiom that means “descendants who will carry on your name.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning, or you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [There will not be descendants to carry on your name] (See: **Idiom (p.92))**

I will cut off

The author is speaking of destroying something as if it were **cut off**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [I will eliminate] (See: **Metaphor (p.98))**

Nahum 1:15

Behold

The author is using the term **Behold** to: (1) tell his readers to actually look toward the mountains, from which a messenger will come. (2) focus his readers' attention on what he is about to say. Your language may have a comparable expression that you could use in your translation. Alternate translation: [Listen] or [See] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the feet of a herald

Here, **feet** represents the action that the herald does with his feet, that is, he is coming. Alternate translation: [a herald is coming] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Celebrate your celebrations

Here, **Celebrate your celebrations** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. (See: **Poetry (p.113)**)

O Judah

Here, **Judah** represents the people who live in Judah. Alternate translation: [people of Judah] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

the wicked

The word **wicked** represents evil people in general, not one particular person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use a more natural expression. Alternate translation: [wicked people] (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.82)**)

he is completely cut off

The author is speaking of destroying someone as if they were **cut off**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [he is completely eliminated] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

he is completely cut off

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. If you need to say who did the action, it is clear from the context that it was God. Alternate translation: [God has completely eliminated him] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

he is completely cut off

The pronoun **he** refers to the wicked. If you have decided to use a plural form for **wicked**, you could use a plural pronoun here, or repeat your form for **wicked**. Alternate translation: [they are completely cut off] or [those wicked people are completely cut off] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Nahum 2

Nahum 2 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

If you have decided to set the text of this book into short lines of poetry, you will want to continue to do so in this chapter.

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

Outline of chapter 2

Description of the battle that destroys Nineveh (2:1-10)

Comparison of Nineveh to a lion's den (2:11-13)

Translation Issues

Past and present for future

In this chapter, Nahum describes a battle for Nineveh in which the city is destroyed. He describes the battle and the resulting devastation of the city as though he is watching it happen, probably because God showed it to him in a vision (1:1). However, the actual battle and destruction did not happen until many years after Nahum spoke this prophecy. If it would be helpful in your translation, you could explain this in a footnote, or you could change the verbs to future so that your readers will know that Nahum was predicting something that would happen later; it was not happening at that time.

Extended metaphor

There is an extended metaphor in 2:11-13. In this metaphor, Yahweh compares Nineveh to a lion's den and its inhabitants to lions who kill and devour their enemies. If this is unclear for your readers, you may want to provide an explanation in a footnote. (See: [extended metaphor](#)).

Nahum 2:1

A scatterer has come up against your face

Nahum turns from addressing Judah to addressing Nineveh. He does this even though he knows that the people of Nineveh cannot hear him. His purpose is to more powerfully express his prophecy against the people of Nineveh to his audience, the people of Judah. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the transition here more clearly or add the name of the city. Alternate translation: [To Nineveh, I say: A scatterer has come up against your face] or [A scatterer has come up against your face, Nineveh] (See: **Apostrophe (p.64)**)

has come up

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [will come up] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

your face

The pronoun **your** refers to the Ninevites. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the people's name here. Alternate translation: [your face, Ninevites] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

your face

Here, **face** represents the whole person. Alternate translation: [you] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

greatly fortify {your} power

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **power**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [make yourself much more powerful] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

strengthen {your} loins

Here, **strengthen {your} loins** is a common expression that means to prepare yourself to do something that is physically demanding, in this case, to fight. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use a comparable expression from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [summon your strength] or [prepare yourself for battle] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

Nahum 2:2

has restored

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [will restore] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

Yahweh has restored the majesty of Jacob, indeed, the majesty of Israel

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **majesty**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [Yahweh has made Jacob great again; he has made Israel great as well] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

the plunderers plundered them

Here, **plunderers plundered** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. (See: **Poetry (p.113)**)

Nahum 2:3

his mighty men

The pronoun **his** refers to Yahweh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [Yahweh's mighty men] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

are clothed in scarlet

The author is leaving out a word that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply a word for the clothing if that would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [are clothed in scarlet uniforms] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

the chariot {flashes} with fire of

In this verse, the word **chariot** is singular in form, but it refers to all of the chariots as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [the chariots flash with fire of] (See: **Collective Nouns (p.72)**)

flashes} with fire of metal

The author is speaking of **metal** as if it were **fire** because of how it gleams in the sunlight. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [has metal that flashes like fire in the sunlight] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

and the cypresses

Here, the word **cypresses** represents spears made from shafts of cypress wood. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [and the spears made with cypress shafts] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Nahum 2:4

race madly

The implication is that the chariots are rushing wildly and without control. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [rush wildly and uncontrollably] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

like torches

The author is saying that the chariots are like torches because they shine brightly. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [bright, like blazing torches] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

they run like lightning

The author is saying that the chariots are like lightning because they move with great speed. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [they flash quickly from one place to another like lightning] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

Nahum 2:5

He calls

The pronoun **He** could refer to: (1) Yahweh or Yahweh's chosen commander, the "scatterer" from verse 1. Alternate translation: [The attacker calls] (2) The commander of Nineveh's army. Alternate translation: [Nineveh's commander calls] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

to her city wall

The pronoun **her** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [to Nineveh's wall] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

The siege-shelter is prepared

If your language does not use a passive form like **is prepared**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [They prepare the siege shelter] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nahum 2:6

The gates of the rivers have been opened, and the palace has melted away

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [The gates of the rivers will open, and the palace will melt away] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

The gates of the rivers

This refers to the gates that controlled the flow and direction of the river. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

have been opened

If your language does not use a passive form like **have been opened**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [have opened] or [stand open] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

and the palace has melted away

The author is speaking of **the palace** as if it could melt to express how the flood of water will destroy the palace. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [and the floodwaters have destroyed the palace] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

Nahum 2:7

It is established

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. If you need to say who did the action, it is clear from the context that it was God.

Alternate translation: [God has established it] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

she is taken into exile

If your language does not use a passive form like **she is taken**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [her enemies take her into exile] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

she is led away

If your language does not use a passive form like **she is led away**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [they lead her away] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

she is taken into exile; she is led away, and her female servants

The pronouns **she** and **her** refer to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [Nineveh is taken into exile; Nineveh is led away, and Nineveh's female servants] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

she is taken into exile; she is led away, and her female servants

Nahum speaks of Nineveh as if the city were a woman who had female servants and who could be led away into exile. He also speaks of the female inhabitants of the city as if they served this woman. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [the inhabitants of Nineveh are taken into exile; they are led away, and the women of Nineveh] (See: **Personification (p.111)**)

their hearts

Here, **hearts** represents chests. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [their chests] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

beating on their hearts

When people beat on their hearts or chests it was a symbolic action to show that they were sad. If this would not be clear to your readers, you could explain the significance of this action in the text or in a footnote. Alternate translation: [beating on their hearts in sadness] (See: **Symbolic Action (p.131)**)

Nahum 2:8

was} like a pool of water

The author is saying that Nineveh was like a pool of water because it was calm and undisturbed. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [was undisturbed, like a smooth pool of water] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

throughout her days

Here, **her days** represents the time when Nineveh was a city. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [during the time when Nineveh was a city] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

now they

The pronoun **they** refers to the people of Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [now the people of Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Stop, stop

The implication is that the officials are the ones calling out to the people. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [The officials call out, "Stop, stop"] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

Nahum 2:9

Plunder silver, plunder gold, for there is no end to the supply; a wealth of all things of delight

The implication is that these are the words of the attackers. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [The attackers say, "Plunder silver, plunder gold, for there is no end to the supply; a wealth of all things of delight"] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

for there is no end to the supply

The author is using an exaggeration to emphasize how much wealth Nineveh had. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [for there is an abundance available] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)

things of delight

The author is using the possessive form to describe **things** that are characterized by **delight**. If your language would not use the possessive form for this, you could use an adjective. Alternate translation: [delightful things] (See: **Possession (p.116)**)

Nahum 2:10

Empty and desolate and ruined

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [Nineveh is empty and desolate and ruined] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

And the heart

In this verse, the word **heart** is singular in form, but it refers to each person's heart as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [And everyone's heart] (See: **Collective Nouns (p.72)**)

And the heart is melted

Nahum is speaking of a **heart** as if it could melt, using this expression to communicate how people have lost their courage. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [The people experience a loss of courage] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

and anguish {is} in all loins

Here, **loins** represents the abdomen area where people feel strong emotions. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [everyone feels anguish inside them] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

gather beauty

Nahum is using the term **beauty** to mean paleness by association with the way pale skin was considered beautiful in that culture. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [become pale] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Nahum 2:11

Where {now} {is} the lions' den and that feeding place for the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness there, the cubs of the lion, and nothing made {them} afraid

The author is using the question form to emphasize that this place is gone. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [That lions' den, that feeding place for the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness there, and the cubs of the lion, where nothing made them afraid—that place is gone!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

is} the lions' den

Here through verse 13 Nahum uses an extended metaphor in which he speaks of the people of Nineveh as though they were lions, and of their victims as though they were the lion's prey. See the discussion in the chapter introduction. (See: **Biblical Imagery — Extended Metaphors (p.69)**)

the lioness there

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [the lioness also walked there] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

the cubs of the lion

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [the cubs of the lion also walked there] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 2:12

tearing enough

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [tearing enough prey] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

and strangling

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and strangling victims] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

he filled his caves with prey, his dens with torn carcasses

These two clauses mean basically the same thing. The second clause emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the clauses with a word that shows that the second clause is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [he filled his caves with prey, that is, his dens with torn carcasses] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

his dens

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [he filled his dens] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 2:13

Behold me, against you

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [Behold, I am against you] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Behold me, against you

Yahweh is using the term **Behold** to focus attention on what he is about to say. Your language may have a comparable expression that you could use in your translation. Alternate translation: [Listen carefully—I am against you] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

the declaration of

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [this is the declaration of] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

her chariot

The pronoun **her** refers to the city of Nineveh. Since Yahweh is speaking directly to the city of Nineveh in the rest of the verse, it may be more natural in your language to continue using direct address here. Alternate translation: [your chariot] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

her chariot

In this verse, the word **chariot** is singular in form, but it refers to all of the chariots as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [her chariots] or [your chariots] (See: **Collective Nouns (p.72)**)

the sword will devour

Yahweh is speaking of **the sword** as if it could **devour** like an animal. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [soldiers will kill] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

I will cut off

The phrase **I will cut off** is an expression that means that Yahweh will take it away. Your language may have a comparable expression that you could use in your translation. Alternate translation: [I will take away] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

Nahum 3

Nahum 3 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

If you have decided to set the text of this book into short lines of poetry, you will want to continue to do so in this chapter.

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

Outline of chapter 3

Woe to Nineveh (3:1-3)

Nineveh the prostitute (3:4-7)

The example of Thebes (3:8-11)

The destruction of Nineveh is sure (3:12-19)

Religious and Cultural Concepts in This Chapter

The Locusts in 3:15-17

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

Translation Issue

There is an extended metaphor in 3:4-7. In this metaphor, Yahweh compares Nineveh to a prostitute who brings men under her control by charm and witchcraft. Both prostitution and witchcraft were associated with idol worship, and in the Bible, prostitution is used as a metaphor for idol worship. Just as a prostitute is not faithful to a husband, people who worship idols are not faithful to the only true God, the one who deserves worship. Nineveh was a very powerful and prosperous city, and thus, it was attractive to others to adopt Nineveh's ways and to worship Nineveh's gods. If this is unclear for your readers, you may want to provide an explanation in a footnote. (See: [extended metaphor](#)).

Nahum 3:1

to the city of bloodshed

The phrase **the city of bloodshed** represents the murderous people in Nineveh. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [to the murderous people in Nineveh] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

All of it {is} lies

Here, **lies** represents lying people. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [It is full of lying people] (See: **Metonymy (p.104)**)

Nahum 3:2

a whip & a rattling wheel and a galloping horse and a bounding chariot

In this verse, the words **whip**, **wheel**, **horse**, and **chariot** are singular in form, but each refers to multiple items as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [whips ... rattling wheels and galloping horses and bounding chariots] (See: **Collective Nouns (p.72)**)

Nahum 3:3

A charging horseman and a flash of a sword and a gleam of a spear

In this verse, the words **horseman**, **sword**, and **spear** are singular in form, but each refers to multiple items as a group. If it would be helpful in your language, you could say this plainly. Alternate translation: [The charging horsemen and flashing swords and gleaming spears] (See: **Collective Nouns (p.72)**)

A charging horseman and a flash of a sword and a gleam of a spear

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [There are charging horsemen and flashing swords and gleaming spears] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

There is no end to the dead bodies

The author is using an exaggeration to emphasize how many bodies there are. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [The dead bodies are endless] or [The dead bodies never stop] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)

they stumble over

The pronoun **they** refers to the attackers. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [the attackers stumble over] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

their dead bodies

The pronoun **their** refers to the Ninevites. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [the Ninevites' dead bodies] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Nahum 3:4

harlotries of the prostitute

From here through verse 7, Nahum uses an extended metaphor in which he speaks of the people of Nineveh as though they were a prostitute who is also a witch. See the discussion in the chapter introduction. (See: **Biblical Imagery — Extended Metaphors (p.69)**)

From the many

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [This is happening from the many] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

and peoples

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and she sells peoples] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 3:5

Behold me, against you

Yahweh is using the term **Behold** to focus attention on what he is about to say. Your language may have a comparable expression that you could use in your translation. See how you translated this in [2:13](#). Alternate translation: [Listen carefully—I am against you] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

against you

The pronoun **you** refers to Nineveh, which Yahweh has been describing as a prostitute. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [against you, Nineveh the prostitute] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

the declaration of

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [this is the declaration of] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

and the kingdoms your shame

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words from earlier in the sentence if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and I will show the kingdoms your shame] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

your shame

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **shame**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [how shameful you are] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

Nahum 3:6

on you

The pronoun **you** refers to Nineveh, which Yahweh described as a prostitute in [3:4](#). If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [on you, Nineveh the prostitute] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

I will throw filth on you

The word translated as **filth** refers to all kinds of garbage. Throwing garbage on a person was a sign of strong contempt. Alternate translation: [I will show utter contempt for you] (See: **Symbolic Action (p.131)**)

Nahum 3:7

Nineveh is destroyed

If your language does not use a passive form like **is destroyed**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [Attackers have destroyed Nineveh] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nineveh is destroyed

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [Nineveh will be destroyed] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

who will sympathize with her

The author is using the question form to emphasize that no one will sympathize with Nineveh. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [no one will sympathize with her!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

From where can I find a comforter for you

The author is using the question form to emphasize that no one will comfort Nineveh. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [I cannot find anyone to comfort you!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

Nahum 3:8

Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile River, water all around her, whose defense {was} the sea, water her wall

The author is using the question form to emphasize that Nineveh is not better than Thebes. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [You are not better than Thebes, which was situated on the Nile River, with water all around her, whose defense was the sea, with water as her wall!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

than Thebes

Thebes refers to the powerful capital city of ancient Egypt in North Africa. It was conquered by Assyria in 663 B.C. If your readers would not be familiar with this place, you could describe it in a footnote. (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

whose defense {was} the sea, water her wall

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second phrase emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [whose defense was the sea, that is, water was her wall] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

water her wall

The author is speaking of **water** as if it were a **wall** because it protected the city. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [protected by water like a wall] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

water her wall

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [whose wall was water] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 3:9

were} her strength

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **strength**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: [made her strong] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

and there was no end

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and there was no end to that strength] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

and there was no end

The author is using an exaggeration to emphasize how much strength Egypt and Cush provided to Thebes. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [and their strength seemed limitless] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)

Put

Put was a region in North Africa, probably bordering the Mediterranean Sea west of Egypt. If your readers would not be familiar with this place, you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: [the region of Put] (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

and Libya

Libya refers to a region in North Africa west of Egypt that contained several related kingdoms. If your readers would not be familiar with this place, you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: [and the kingdoms of Libya] (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

among your allies

The pronoun **your** refers to Thebes. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name or continue with a third-person pronoun. Alternate translation: [among Thebes' allies] or [among her allies] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Nahum 3:10

she as an exile

The pronoun **she** refers to the people of Thebes. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [Thebes as an exile] or [the people of Thebes as exiles] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

her great ones

The author is using the adjective **great** as a noun to mean important people. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you could translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: [her important people] (See: **Nominal Adjectives (p.106)**)

her young children were dashed in pieces

If your language does not use a passive form like **were dashed in pieces**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [her enemies dashed her young children in pieces] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

at the head of every street

Here, **head of every street** is an idiom that means “every intersection of streets.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [at every intersection] (See: **Idiom (p.92)**)

they cast

The pronoun **they** refers to the enemies of Thebes. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [the enemies of Thebes cast] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

and all her great ones were bound

If your language does not use a passive form like **were bound**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [and her enemies bound all her great ones] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nahum 3:11

You

The pronoun **You** refers to the people of the city of Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [You, Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

will become drunk

The author is speaking of the people being **drunk** to express how they will stagger and be confused when their enemies attack them. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [stagger around in confusion] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

you will be hidden

If your language does not use a passive form like **be hidden**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [you will hide yourself] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nahum 3:12

All of your fortresses {are} fig trees with first fruits

The author is speaking of **fortresses** as if they were **fig trees with first fruits** because they will be easy to capture, just as ripe figs are easy to pick. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly.

Alternate translation: [All of your fortresses will be as easy to capture as ripe figs are to pick] (See: **Metaphor (p. 98)**)

Nahum 3:13

Behold

The author is using the term **Behold** to focus attention on what he is about to say. Your language may have a comparable expression that you could use in your translation. Alternate translation: [Listen carefully] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

your people

The pronoun **your** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [your people, Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

are} women

The author is speaking of **people** as if they were **women** because women did not have the physical strength or training to be a soldier and so, would not be able to defend the city. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [are weak and unable to fight] or [are ineffective] or [are powerless] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

opening have been opened

Nahum is repeating forms of the verb **open** here in order to intensify the idea that it expresses. If your language can repeat words for intensification, it would be appropriate to do that here in your translation. If not, your language may have another way of expressing the emphasis. Alternate translation: [have been opened wide] (See: **Reduplication (p.123)**)

have been opened & has devoured

The author uses the past tense here in order to refer to something that will certainly happen in the future. If it would not be natural to do that in your language, you could use the future tense. Alternate translation: [will be opened ... will devour] (See: **Irregular Use of Tenses (p.94)**)

your bars

The implication is that these **bars** are the wooden beams that secure the gates. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: [the wooden beams that secure your gates] (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

Nahum 3:14

Draw siege water for yourself

The phrase **siege water** refers to water that is stored to last through a time when enemies surround a city, separating the people in the city from their normal source of water. If your readers would not be familiar with this concept, you could explain the idea. Alternate translation: [Draw water to store for when enemies surround the city] (See: **Translate Unknowns (p.133)**)

for yourself

The pronoun **yourself** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could use the name. Alternate translation: [for yourself, Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

the brick mold

The phrase **brick mold** represents brick molds in general, not one particular mold. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use a more natural expression. Alternate translation: [the brick molds] (See: **Generic Noun Phrases (p.82)**)

Nahum 3:15

Fire will devour you there

The pronoun **you** in this verse refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could add the name. Alternate translation: [Fire will devour you there, Nineveh] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

will cut you off

The author is using the phrase **the sword will cut you off** to mean “the sword will end your life.” If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [will end your life] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

as the creeping locust

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [as completely as the creeping locust devours plants] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

as the creeping locust

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [as the creeping locust multiplies itself] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

as the swarming locust

The author is leaving out some of the words that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply these words if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [as the swarming locust multiplies itself] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

Nahum 3:16

You have multiplied

The pronoun **You** refers to Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could add the name. Alternate translation: [You, Nineveh, have multiplied] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

more than the stars of the heavens

The author is using an extreme comparison to emphasize how many merchants Nineveh has. If it would be clearer in your language, you could express this in a non-figurative way. Alternate translation: [to a very great number] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)

a locust stripped and flew away

The author is saying that the merchants will be like locusts because they will take everything valuable and leave, as locusts do, and they will do this suddenly, as locusts strip off their skin and fly away. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [they will be like locusts that strip the land and themselves and then fly away] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

stripped

Here, **stripped** seems to have a double meaning. It can refer to the locust stripping itself of its outer skin, which releases its wings so that it can fly, but it also can refer to stripping a land or city of its valuable things. If possible, use a term that could have either meaning. (See: **Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information (p.66)**)

Nahum 3:17

Your guards {are} like the locust, and your generals, like a swarm of locusts

The author is saying that the guards and generals are like locusts because they are unreliable and disloyal, just as locusts fly away when conditions change. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state that explicitly. Alternate translation: [Your guards and generals are as unreliable and disloyal as locusts] (See: **Simile (p.128)**)

Your guards {are} like the locust, and your generals, like a swarm of locusts

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second phrase emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could combine the phrases as in the UST, or connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [Your guards {are} like the locust, indeed, your generals, like a swarm of locusts] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

and your generals, like a swarm of locusts

The author is leaving out a word that in many languages a sentence would need in order to be complete. You could supply this word if it would be clearer in your language. Alternate translation: [and your generals are like a swarm of locusts] (See: **Ellipsis (p.75)**)

and it flies away & its place

The pronouns **it** and **its** here refer to the locust swarm. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use plural forms to refer to the locusts. Alternate translation: [and they fly away and their place] (See: **Pronouns — When to Use Them (p.120)**)

Nahum 3:18

King of Assyria, your shepherds are asleep

Nahum has been addressing the people of Nineveh, which is the capital city of the nation of Assyria, but now he addresses the king who rules in Nineveh. He does this even though he knows that the king cannot hear him, in order to more powerfully express his prophecy against the people of Assyria and its leaders. If it would be helpful in your language, you could introduce this more clearly and put the rest of this address (through verse 19) in quote marks. Alternate translation: [This is what I would say to the king of Assyria: "Your shepherds are asleep"] (See: **Apostrophe (p.64)**)

your shepherds are asleep; your nobles are lying down

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second phrase emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: [your shepherds are asleep; that is, your nobles are lying down] (See: **Parallelism (p.108)**)

your shepherds

The author is speaking of **shepherds** as if they were leaders because they guide and protect people as shepherds guide and protect sheep. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [your leaders] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

are asleep; & are lying down

The author is referring to death in a polite way by using the phrases **asleep** and **lying down**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use a more normal polite way of referring to this in your language, or you could state this plainly. Alternate translation: [have died ... are dead] (See: **Euphemism (p.78)**)

Your people are scattered

If your language does not use a passive form like **are scattered**, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: [Enemies have scattered your people] (See: **Active or Passive (p.61)**)

Nahum 3:19

There is no relief for your destruction

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **relief** and **destruction**, you could express the same ideas in other ways. Alternate translation: [No one can help you when you are destroyed] (See: **Abstract Nouns (p.59)**)

Your wound is severe

The author is speaking of Nineveh as though it were a person with a deadly **wound**. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [The end of your kingdom is very soon] (See: **Metaphor (p.98)**)

hearing the news of you

Here, **hearing the news** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object, both of which come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. (See: **Poetry (p.113)**)

will clap {their} hands

People clap their hands as a symbolic action to show that they are joyful. If this would not be clear to your readers, you could explain the significance of this action in the text or in a footnote. Alternate translation: [will clap their hands with joy] (See: **Symbolic Action (p.131)**)

For upon whom has not come your endless evil

The author is using the question form to emphasize that Nineveh has done evil to everyone. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: [For you have done endless evil to everyone!] (See: **Rhetorical Question (p.124)**)

your endless evil

Nahum is using an exaggeration to emphasize how much evil Nineveh and her king did to people of other nations. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: [your great abundance of evil deeds] (See: **Hyperbole (p.88)**)



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Abstract Nouns

Description

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

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

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:2](#); [Nahum 1:3](#); [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 1:11](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:2](#); [Nahum 3:5](#); [Nahum 3:9](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

Active or Passive

Some languages use both active and passive sentences. In active sentences, the subject does the action. In passive sentences, the subject is the one that receives the action. Here are some examples with their subjects bolded:

- Active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- Passive: **The house** was built in 2010.

Translators whose languages do not use passive sentences will need to know how they can translate passive sentences that they find in the Bible. Other translators will need to decide when to use a passive sentence and when to use the active form.

This page answers the question: *What do active and passive mean, and how do I translate passive sentences?*

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Verbs ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

Some languages have both active and passive forms of sentences.

- In the active form, the subject does the action and is always mentioned.
- In the passive form, the action is done to the subject, and the one who does the action is not always mentioned.

In the examples of active and passive sentences below, we have bolded the subject.

- active: **My father** built the house in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built by my father in 2010.
- passive: **The house** was built in 2010. (This does not tell who did the action.)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All languages use active forms. Some languages use passive forms, and some do not. Some languages use passive forms only for certain purposes, and the passive form is not used for the same purposes in all of the languages that use it.

Purposes for the Passive

- The speaker is talking about the person or thing the action was done to, not about the person who did the action.
- The speaker does not want to tell who did the action.
- The speaker does not know who did the action.

Translation Principles Regarding the Passive

- Translators whose language does not use passive forms will need to find another way to express the idea.
- Translators whose language has passive forms will need to understand why the passive is used in a particular sentence in the Bible and decide whether or not to use a passive form for that purpose in his translation of the sentence.

Examples From the Bible

Then their shooters shot at your soldiers from off the wall, and some of the king's servants **were killed**, and your servant Uriah the Hittite **was killed** too. (2 Samuel 11:24 ULT)

This means that the enemy's shooters shot and killed some of the king's servants, including Uriah. The point is what happened to the king's servants and Uriah, not who shot them. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on the king's servants and Uriah.

When the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal **was torn down**.
(Judges 6:28a ULT)

The men of the town saw what had happened to the altar of Baal, but they did not know who broke it down. The purpose of the passive form here is to communicate this event from the perspective of the men of the town.

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

This describes a situation in which a person ends up in the sea with a millstone around his neck. The purpose of the passive form here is to keep the focus on what happens to this person. Who does these things to the person is not important.

Translation Strategies

If your language would use a passive form for the same purpose as in the passage that you are translating, then use a passive form. If you decide that it is better to translate without a passive form, here are some strategies that you might consider.

(1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who or what did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action. (2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who or what did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone." (3) Use a different verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Use the same verb in an active sentence and tell who did the action. If you do this, try to keep the focus on the person receiving the action.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21b ULT)

The king's servants gave Jeremiah a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

(2) Use the same verb in an active sentence, and do not tell who did the action. Instead, use a generic expression like "they" or "people" or "someone."

It would be better for him if a millstone **were put** around his neck and he **were thrown** into the sea. (Luke 17:2a ULT)

It would be better for him if **they were to put** a millstone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea. It would be better for him if **someone were to put** a heavy stone around his neck and **throw** him into the sea.

(3) Use a different verb in an active sentence.

A loaf of bread **was given** him every day from the street of the bakers. (Jeremiah 37:21 ULT)

He **received** a loaf of bread every day from the street of the bakers.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Abstract Nouns ([UTA PDF](#))
Word Order ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:10](#); [Nahum 1:12](#); [Nahum 1:15](#); [Nahum 2:5](#); [Nahum 2:6](#); [Nahum 2:7](#); [Nahum 3:7](#); [Nahum 3:10](#); [Nahum 3:11](#); [Nahum 3:18](#)

Apostrophe

Description

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples from the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:11](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 3:18](#)

Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Assumed knowledge is whatever a speaker assumes his audience knows before he speaks and gives them some kind of information. The speaker does not give the audience this information because he believes that they already know it.

This page answers the question: *How can I be sure that my translation communicates the assumed knowledge and implicit information along with the explicit information of the original message?*

When the speaker does give the audience information, he can do so in two ways. The speaker gives explicit information in what he states directly. Implicit Information is what the speaker does not state directly because he expects his audience to be able to learn it from other things he says.

Description

When someone speaks or writes, he has something specific that he wants people to know or do or think about. He normally states this directly. This is explicit information.

The speaker assumes that his audience already knows certain things that they will need to think about in order to understand this information. Normally he does not tell people these things, because they already know them. This is called assumed knowledge.

The speaker does not always directly state everything that he expects his audience to learn from what he says. Implicit information is information that he expects people to learn from what he says even though he does not state it directly.

Often, the audience understands this implicit information by combining what they already know (assumed knowledge) with the explicit information that the speaker tells them directly.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

All three kinds of information are part of the speaker's message. If one of these kinds of information is missing, then the audience will not understand the message. Because the target translation is in a language that is very different from the biblical languages and is made for an audience that lives in a very different time and place than the people in the Bible, many times the assumed knowledge or the implicit information is missing from the message. In other words, modern readers do not know everything that the original speakers and hearers in the Bible knew. When these things are important for understanding the message, it is helpful if you include this information in the text or in a footnote.

Examples From the Bible

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

Jesus did not say what foxes and birds use holes and nests for, because he assumed that the scribe would have known that foxes sleep in holes in the ground and birds sleep in their nests. This is **assumed knowledge**.

Jesus did not directly say here "I am the Son of Man" but, if the scribe did not already know it, then that fact would be **implicit information** that he could learn because Jesus referred to himself that way. Also, Jesus did not state explicitly that he travelled a lot and did not have a house that he slept in every night. That is **implicit information** that the scribe could learn when Jesus said that he had nowhere to lay his head.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty deeds had been done in **Tyre and Sidon** which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But

I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the **day of judgment** than for you.
(Matthew 11:21-22 ULT)

Jesus assumed that the people he was speaking to knew that Tyre and Sidon were very wicked, and that the day of judgment is a time when God will judge every person. Jesus also knew that the people he was talking to believed that they were good and did not need to repent. Jesus did not need to tell them these things. This is all **assumed knowledge**.

An important piece of **implicit information** here is that the people he was speaking to would be judged more severely than the people of Tyre and Sidon would be judged **because** they did not repent.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands when they eat bread**. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

One of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating. People thought that in order to be righteous, they had to follow all the traditions of the elders. This was **assumed knowledge** that the Pharisees who were speaking to Jesus expected him to know. By saying this, they were accusing his disciples of not following the traditions, and thus not being righteous. This is **implicit information** that they wanted him to understand from what they said.

Translation Strategies

If readers have enough assumed knowledge to be able to understand the message, along with any important implicit information that goes with the explicit information, then it is good to leave that knowledge unstated and leave the implicit information implicit. If the readers do not understand the message because one of these is missing for them, then follow these strategies:

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.
- (2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not have certain assumed knowledge, then provide that knowledge as explicit information.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes**, and the birds of the sky **have nests**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the foxes slept in their holes and birds slept in their nests.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes **have holes to live in**, and the birds of the sky **have nests to live in**, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head and sleep."

It will be more tolerable for **Tyre and Sidon** at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that the people of Tyre and Sidon were very, very wicked. This can be stated explicitly.

At the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for **those cities of Tyre and Sidon, whose people were very wicked**, than it will be for you. or At the day of judgment, It will be more tolerable for those **wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon**, than for you.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not wash their hands** when they eat bread. (Matthew 15:2 ULT)

The assumed knowledge was that one of the traditions of the elders was a ceremony in which people would wash their hands in order to be ritually clean before eating, which they must do to be righteous. It was not to remove germs from their hands to avoid sickness, as a modern reader might think.

Why do your disciples violate the traditions of the elders? For **they do not go through the ceremonial handwashing ritual of righteousness** when they eat bread.

(2) If readers cannot understand the message because they do not know certain implicit information, then state that information clearly, but try to do it in a way that does not imply that the information was new to the original audience.

Then a scribe came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:19-20 ULT)

The implicit information is that Jesus himself is the Son of Man. Other implicit information is that if the scribe wanted to follow Jesus, then, like Jesus, he would have to live without a house.

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but **I, the Son of Man, have no home to rest in. If you want to follow me, you will live as I live.**"

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you (Matthew 11:22 ULT)

The implicit information is that God would not only judge the people; he would punish them. This can be made explicit.

At the day of judgment, God will **punish Tyre and Sidon**, cities whose people were very wicked, **less severely than he will punish you.** or: At the day of judgment, God will **punish you more severely** than Tyre and Sidon, cities whose people were very wicked.

Modern readers may not know some of the things that the people in the Bible and the people who first read it knew. This can make it hard for them to understand what a speaker or writer says, and to learn things that the speaker left implicit. Translators may need to state some things explicitly in the translation that the original speaker or writer left unstated or implicit.

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:4](#); [Nahum 1:12](#); [Nahum 2:4](#); [Nahum 2:8](#); [Nahum 2:9](#); [Nahum 3:13](#); [Nahum 3:16](#)

Biblical Imagery — Extended Metaphors

An **extended metaphor** is an explicit metaphor that uses multiple images and multiple ideas at the same time. This is in contrast to a **simple metaphor**, which uses only a single Image and a single Idea. The difference between an extended metaphor and a **complex metaphor** is that an extended metaphor is explicitly stated by a writer/speaker, but a complex metaphor is not.

This page answers the question: *What is an extended metaphor?*

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

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

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

Explanation of an Extended Metaphor

When using a metaphor, a writer/speaker uses a physical Image in order to express an abstract Idea about some immediate Topic, with at least one point of comparison between the Topic and the Image. In an extended metaphor, the writer/speaker explicitly states the Topic, and then describes multiple images and communicates multiple ideas.

In Isaiah 5:1b-7, the prophet Isaiah uses a vineyard (the **Image**) to express God's disappointment (the **Idea**) with the nation of Israel (the **Topic**) for their unfaithfulness to God and his covenant with them as his people. Farmers care for their gardens, and a farmer would feel disappointed if his vineyard produced bad fruit. If a vineyard produced only bad fruit for a long enough time, the farmer would eventually stop caring for it. We call this an extended metaphor because the prophet describes in detail multiple images relating to a vineyard as well as multiple aspects of God's disappointment.

1b My well beloved had a **vineyard** on a very fertile hill. 2 He **spaded it, removed the stones, and planted it** with an excellent kind of vine. He **built a tower** in the middle of it, and also **built a winepress**. He **waited for it to produce grapes, but it produced wild grapes**. 3 So now, inhabitant of Jerusalem and man of Judah; judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more could have been done for my vineyard, that I have not done for it? **When I looked for it to produce grapes, why did it produce wild grapes?** 5 Now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will remove the hedge; I will turn it into a pasture; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled down. 6 I will lay it waste, and it will not be pruned nor hoed. Instead, briars and thorns will spring up. I will also command the clouds not to rain on it. 7 For **the vineyard of Yahweh of hosts is the house of Israel**, and the man of Judah his pleasant planting; **he waited for justice, but instead, there was killing; for righteousness, but, instead, a shout for help**. (Isa 5:1b-7 ULT)

Other Examples From the Bible

In Psalm 23, the psalmist uses the physical **Image** of a shepherd to describe the way that God (the **Topic**) shows great concern and care (the **Idea**) for his people. The psalmist describes multiple aspects of what shepherds do for sheep (leads them to pasture and to water, protects them, etc.). The psalmist also describes multiple aspects of how God takes care of him (gives him life, righteousness, comfort, etc.). Shepherds give sheep what they need, take them to safe places, rescue them, guide them, and protect them. What God does for his people is like these actions.

1 Yahweh is my shepherd; I will lack nothing. 2 He **makes me** to lie down in green pastures; he **leads me** beside tranquil water. 3 He **brings back** my life; he **guides me** along right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through a valley of darkest shadow, I will not fear harm since you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. (Psalm 23:1-4 ULT)

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not realize that the images represent other things.
- People may not be familiar with the things that are used as images.
- Extended metaphors are often so profound that it would be impossible for a translator to show all of the meaning generated by the metaphor.

Translation Principles

- Make the meaning of the extended metaphor as clear to the target audience as it was to the original audience.
- Do not make the meaning more clear to the target audience than it was to the original audience.
- When someone uses an extended metaphor, the images are an important part of what he is trying to say.
- If the target audience is not familiar with some of the images, you will need to find some way of helping them understand the images so that they can understand the whole extended metaphor.

Translation Strategies

Consider using the same extended metaphor if your readers will understand it in the same way the original readers would have understood it. If not, here are some other strategies:

- (1) If the target audience would think that the images should be understood literally, translate the metaphor as a simile by using words such as “like” or “as.” It may be enough to do this in just the first sentence or two.
- (2) If the target audience would not know the image, find a way of translating it so they can understand what the image is.
- (3) If the target audience still would not understand, then state it clearly.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If the target audience would think that the images should be understood literally, translate the metaphor as a simile by using words such as “like” or “as.” It may be enough to do this in just the first sentence or two. See Psalm 23:1-2 as an example:

Yahweh is **my shepherd**; I will lack nothing. He makes **me** to lie down in green pastures; **he leads me** beside tranquil water. (ULT)

Can be translated as:

“Yahweh is **like** a shepherd to me, so I will lack nothing. **Like** a shepherd who makes his sheep lie down in green pastures and leads them by peaceful waters, Yahweh helps me to rest peacefully.”

- (2) If the target audience would not know the image, find a way of translating it so they can understand what the image is.

My well beloved had a **vineyard** on a very fertile hill. He **spaded** it, removed the stones, and planted it with **an excellent kind of vine**. He built a **tower** in the middle of it, and also built a **winepress**. He waited for it to produce grapes, but it only produced **wild grapes**. (Isaiah 5:1b-2 ULT)

May be translated as:

My well beloved had a **grapevine garden** on a very fertile hill. He **dug up the ground** and removed the stones, and planted it with **the best grapevines**. He built a **watchtower** in the middle of it, and also built a **tank where he could crush the juice out of the grapes**. He

waited for it to produce grapes, but it produced **wild grapes that were not good for making wine**.

(3) If the target audience still would not understand, then state it clearly.

Yahweh is **my shepherd**; I will lack nothing. (Psalm 23:1 ULT)

"Yahweh **cares for me** like a shepherd that cares for his sheep, so I will lack nothing."

For the vineyard of Yahweh of hosts **is** the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant planting; he waited for justice, but instead, there was killing; for righteousness, but, instead, a shout for help. (Isaiah 5:7 ULT)

Can be translated as:

For the vineyard of Yahweh of hosts **represents** the house of Israel, and the men of Judah **are like** his pleasant planting; he waited for justice, but instead, there was killing; for righteousness, but, instead, a cry for help.

or as:

So as a farmer stops caring for a grapevine garden that produces bad fruit, Yahweh will stop protecting Israel and Judah, **because they do not do what is right**. He waited for justice, but instead, there was killing; for righteousness, but, instead, a cry for help.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Nahum 2 General Notes](#); [Nahum 2:11](#); [Nahum 3 General Notes](#); [Nahum 3:4](#)

Collective Nouns

Description

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

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

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

Reason This is a Translation Issue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examples from the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 2:3](#); [Nahum 2:10](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:2](#); [Nahum 3:3](#)

Ellipsis

Description

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

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

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

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

[^1]: 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.

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:

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](#))

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

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

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

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

Absolute Ellipsis

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:2](#); [Nahum 1:4](#); [Nahum 1:5](#); [Nahum 1:7](#); [Nahum 2:3](#); [Nahum 2:10](#); [Nahum 2:11](#); [Nahum 2:12](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:3](#); [Nahum 3:4](#); [Nahum 3:5](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:9](#); [Nahum 3:15](#); [Nahum 3:17](#)

Euphemism

Description

A euphemism is a mild or polite way of referring to something that is unpleasant, embarrassing, or socially unacceptable, such as death or activities usually done in private.

... they found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa.
(1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

This means that Saul and his sons “were dead.” It is a euphemism because the important thing was not that Saul and his sons had fallen but that they were dead. Sometimes people do not like to speak directly about death because it is unpleasant.

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Different languages use different euphemisms. If the target language does not use the same euphemism as in the source language, readers may not understand what it means and they may think that the writer means only what the words literally say.

Examples From the Bible

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT)

The original hearers would have understood that Saul went into the cave to use it as a toilet, but the writer wanted to avoid offending or distracting them, so **he did not say specifically** what Saul did or what he left in the cave.

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

In order **to be polite**, Mary uses a euphemism to say that she has never had sexual intercourse with a man.

Translation Strategies

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

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.
- (2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use a euphemism from your own culture.

... where there was a cave. Saul went inside to **cover his feet**. (1 Samuel 24:3b ULT) — Some languages might use euphemisms like these:

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **dig a hole**”

“... where there was a cave. Saul went into the cave to **have some time alone**”

But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I have not **known a man**?” (Luke 1:34 ULT)

But Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not **slept with a man?**"

(2) State the information plainly without a euphemism if it would not be offensive.

They found Saul and his sons **fallen** on Mount Gilboa. (1 Chronicles 10:8b ULT)

"They found Saul and his sons **dead** on Mount Gilboa."

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 3:18](#)

Forms of 'You' — Singular

Description

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

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

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

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

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

Pronouns ([UTA PDF](#))

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 1:11](#)

Generic Noun Phrases

Description

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:15](#); [Nahum 3:14](#)

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 Nahum](#); [Nahum 1:4](#)

Hyperbole

Description

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

It rains here every night.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hyperbole

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

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

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

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

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

Generalization

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

Examples From the Bible

Examples of Hyperbole

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examples of Generalization

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

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

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

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

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

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

Caution

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Express the meaning without the exaggeration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:5](#); [Nahum 2:9](#); [Nahum 3:3](#); [Nahum 3:9](#); [Nahum 3:16](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

Idiom

An idiom is a figure of speech made up of a group of words that, as a whole, has a meaning that is different from what one would understand from the meanings of the individual words. Someone from outside of the culture usually cannot understand an idiom without someone inside the culture explaining its true meaning. Every language uses idioms. Some English examples are:

- You are pulling my leg. (This means, “You are teasing me by telling me something that is not true.”)
- Do not push the envelope. (This means, “Do not take a matter to its extreme.”)
- This house is under water. (This means, “The debt owed for this house is greater than its actual value.”)
- We are painting the town red. (This means, “We are going around town tonight celebrating very intensely.”)

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

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

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

Description

An idiom is a phrase that has a special meaning to the people of the language or culture who use it. Its meaning is different than what a person would understand from the meanings of the individual words that form the phrase.

He **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

The words “set his face” is an idiom that means “decided.”

Sometimes people may be able to understand an idiom from another culture, but it might sound like a strange way to express the meaning.

I am not worthy that you would **come under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

The phrase “come under my roof” is an idiom that means “enter my house.”

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

This idiom means “Listen carefully and remember what I say.”

Purpose: An idiom is probably created in a culture somewhat by accident when someone describes something in an unusual way. But, when that unusual way communicates the message powerfully and people understand it clearly, other people start to use it. After a while, it becomes a normal way of talking in that language.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People can easily misunderstand idioms in the original languages of the Bible if they do not know the cultures that produced the Bible.
- People can easily misunderstand idioms that are in the source language Bibles if they do not know the cultures that made those translations.
- It is useless to translate idioms literally (according to the meaning of each word) when the target language audience will not understand what they mean.

Examples From the Bible

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “Look, we are your **flesh and bone**.” (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

This means, “We and you belong to the same race, the same family.”

■ The children of Israel went out **with a high hand**. (Exodus 14:8b ASV)

This means, "The Israelites went out defiantly."

■ the one who **lifts up my head** (Psalm 3:3b ULT)

This means, "the one who helps me."

Translation Strategies

If the idiom would be clearly understood in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.
- (2) Use a different idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Translate the meaning plainly without using an idiom.

Then all Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Look, we are your **flesh and bone**." (1 Chronicles 11:1 ULT)

■ Look, we all **belong to the same nation**.

Then he **set his face** to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51b ULT)

■ He started to travel to Jerusalem, **determined to reach it**.

I am not worthy that you would come **under my roof**. (Luke 7:6b ULT)

■ I am not worthy that you should enter **my house**.

- (2) Use an idiom that people use in your own language that has the same meaning.

Put these words **into your ears**. (Luke 9:44a ULT)

■ **Be all ears** when I say these words to you.

My **eyes grow dim** from grief. (Psalm 6:7a ULT)

■ I am crying my **eyes out**

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:2](#); [Nahum 1:3](#); [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 1:14](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:13](#); [Nahum 3:10](#)

Irregular Use of Tenses

Description

This page answers the question: *How do I translate tenses that are unexpected?*

Normally, languages indicate when an event happens by marking it as past, present, or future (or some subset of those categories) through using different verb tenses. But sometimes speakers use those verb tenses in other ways to draw special attention to what they are saying. This article will discuss three ways that this happens in the Bible.

Past For Future

In the Bible, sometimes the past tense is used to refer to things that will happen in the future. This is a figure of speech that is used in prophecy to show that the event will certainly happen. It is sometimes called the “predictive past” or “prophetic perfect.”

Therefore my people have gone into captivity for lack of understanding; their honored leaders go hungry, and their common people have nothing to drink. (Isaiah 5:13 ULT)

In the example above, the people of Israel had not yet gone into captivity, but God spoke of their going into captivity as if it had already happened because he had decided that they certainly would go into captivity.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue:

Speakers of languages that do not use the past tense in prophecy to refer to future events may think that these are events that have already happened.

Examples From the Bible

Now Jericho was tightly closed because of the sons of Israel. No one went out and no one came in. Yahweh said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand.” (Joshua 6:1-2 ULT)

For to us a child has been born, to us a son has been given; and the rule will be on his shoulder. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

In the examples above, God spoke of things that would happen in the future as if they had already happened.

But even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them, saying, “Look! The Lord came with thousands and thousands of his holy ones.” (Jude 1:14 ULT)

Enoch was speaking of something that would happen far in the future, but he used the past tense when he said, “the Lord came.”

Present For Past

In the Bible, sometimes the present tense is used to refer to events that happened in the past. This is a figure of speech that makes these events more vivid or prominent for the reader. The effect can be to draw the reader into the story because these events are told as though they are happening now. The reader, however, knows that the events happened in the past. This is sometimes called the “historical present.”

Now the mother-in-law of Simon was lying down, being sick with a fever, and immediately they speak to him concerning her. (Mark 1:30 ULT)

In the example above, Mark had been narrating events that happened in the past, using the past tense. But when he came to the part about the disciples speaking to Jesus about Simon's mother-in-law, he changed from past tense to present tense.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue:

Speakers of languages that do not use the present tense to refer to past events may think that these events are happening now or that the Bible translation makes no sense.

Examples From the Bible

And Simon and the ones with him searched for him 37 and found him and say to him, "Everyone is seeking you." 38 And he says to them, "Let us go elsewhere, (Mark 1:36-38 ULT)

As in the above example, the historical present is often used to make direct speech stand out from the narrative.

And he enters into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbaths, having entered into the synagogue, he began to teach. (Mark 1:21 ULT)

As in the above example, the historical present sometimes serves to set the scene for a new set of events. By using the historical present in this way, the writer draws the reader into the scene, and then relates the events using the past tense.

Present For Future

In the Bible, sometimes the present tense is used for a future event. Usually, this is to communicate that the event will happen very soon. Also, like the predictive past, this can communicate that the event is sure to happen or that the speaker is fully committed to making the event happen. This is sometimes called the "imminent future."

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night I am going out in the midst of Egypt, (Exodus 11:4 ULT)

In the example above, Yahweh uses the present tense for something that he will do soon.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue:

Speakers of languages that do not use the present tense to refer to future events may think that these events are happening at the time of speaking or writing or that the Bible translation is confusing or wrong.

Examples From the Bible

For behold me, raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation... (Habakkuk 1:6 ULT)

Therefore, remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the first works. But if not, I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand from its place—if you do not repent. (Revelation 2:5 ULT)

In the examples above, God speaks of a future event as though he is doing it in the present. This is a way of emphasizing the certainty of the event.

Therefore my people have gone into captivity for lack of understanding; their honored leaders go hungry, and their common people have nothing to drink. (Isaiah 5:13 ULT)

In the example above, the present tense continues the sense of the predictive past, communicating future events that are sure to happen.

Translation Strategies

If the tense that is used in the Literal Translation would be natural and give the right meaning in your language, consider using it. If not, here are some other options.

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.
- (2) Use the past tense to refer to past events.
- (3) Use the tense that your language commonly uses to communicate the time of the event.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the future tense to refer to future events.

For to us a child **has been born**, to us a son **has been given**. (Isaiah 9:6a ULT)

For to us a child **will be born**, to us a son **will be given**.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, **I have delivered** Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, **I will deliver** Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand."

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night **I am going out** in the midst of Egypt, (Exodus 11:4 ULT)

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night **I will go out** in the midst of Egypt,

- (2) Use the past tense to refer to past events.

And Simon and the ones with him searched for him and found him and **say** to him, "Everyone is seeking you." And he **says** to them, "Let us go elsewhere, (Mark 1:36-38 ULT)

And Simon and the ones with him searched for him and found him and **said** to him, "Everyone is seeking you." And he **said** to them, "Let us go elsewhere,

And he **enters** into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbaths, having entered into the synagogue, he began to teach. (Mark 1:21 ULT)

And he **entered** into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbaths, having entered into the synagogue, he began to teach.

- (3) Use the tense that your language commonly uses to communicate the time of the event.

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, **I have delivered** Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand." (Joshua 6:2 ULT)

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, **I am delivering** Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand."

Or:

Yahweh said to Joshua, "See, **I am about to deliver** Jericho and its king and its powerful soldiers into your hand."

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night **I am going out** in the midst of Egypt, (Exodus 11:4 ULT)

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night **I will be going out** in the midst of Egypt,

Or:

And Moses said, "Thus says Yahweh: 'About the middle of the night **I shall certainly go out** in the midst of Egypt,

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:12](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:2](#); [Nahum 2:6](#); [Nahum 3:7](#); [Nahum 3:13](#)

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

Metonymy

Description

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

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

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

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

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

The blood represents Christ's death.

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

The cup represents the wine that is in the cup.

Metonymy can be used

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Referenced in: [Nahum 1:15](#); [Nahum 2:1](#); [Nahum 2:3](#); [Nahum 2:7](#); [Nahum 2:8](#); [Nahum 2:10](#); [Nahum 3:1](#)

Nominal Adjectives

Description

In some languages an adjective can be used to refer to a class of things that the adjective describes. When it does, it acts like a noun. For example, the word “rich” is an adjective. Here are two sentences that show that “rich” is an adjective.

The rich man had huge numbers of flocks and herds.
(2 Samuel 12:2 ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes before the word “man” and describes “man.”

He will not be rich; his wealth will not last. (Job 15:29a ULT)

The adjective “rich” comes after the verb “be” and describes “He.”

Here is a sentence that shows that “rich” can also function as a noun.

The rich must not give more than the half shekel, and **the poor** must not give less. (Exodus 30:15b ULT)

In Exodus 30:15, the word “rich” acts as a noun in the phrase “the rich,” and it refers to rich people. The word “poor” also acts as a noun and refers to poor people.

This page answers the question: *How do I translate adjectives that act like nouns?*

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

- Many times in the Bible adjectives are used as nouns to describe a group of people.
- Some languages do not use adjectives in this way.
- Readers of these languages may think that the text is talking about one particular person when it is really talking about the group of people whom the adjective describes.

Examples From the Bible

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

“The righteous” here are people who are righteous, not one particular righteous person.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

“The meek” here are all people who are meek, not one particular meek person.

Translation Strategies

If your language uses adjectives as nouns to refer to a class of people, consider using the adjectives in this way. If it would sound strange, or if the meaning would be unclear or wrong, here is another option:

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use the adjective with a plural form of the noun that the adjective describes.

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **the righteous**. (Psalms 125:3a ULT)

The scepter of wickedness must not rule in the land of **righteous people**.

Blessed are **the meek**. (Matthew 5:5a ULT)

Blessed are **people who are meek**.

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 3:10](#)

Parallelism

Description

Parallelism is a poetic device in which two phrases or clauses that are similar in structure or idea are used together. The following are some of the different kinds of parallelism.

- The second clause or phrase means the same as the first. This is called synonymous parallelism.
- The second clarifies or strengthens the meaning of the first.
- The second completes what is said in the first.
- The second says something that contrasts with the first, but adds to the same idea.

Parallelism is most commonly found in Old Testament poetry, such as in the books of Psalms and Proverbs. It also occurs in Greek in the New Testament, both in the four gospels and in the apostles' letters.

This article will only discuss synonymous parallelism, the kind in which the two parallel phrases mean the same thing, because that is the kind that presents a problem for translation. Note that we use the term "synonymous parallelism" for long phrases or clauses that have the same meaning. We use the term "doublet" for words or very short phrases that mean basically the same thing and are used together.

In the poetry of the original languages, synonymous parallelism has several effects:

- It shows that something is very important by saying it more than once and in more than one way.
- It helps the hearer to think more deeply about the idea by saying it in different ways.
- It makes the language more beautiful and raises it above the ordinary way of speaking.

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Some languages would not use synonymous parallelism. They would either think it odd that someone said the same thing twice, or, since it is in the Bible, they would think that the two phrases must have some difference in meaning. For them it would be confusing, rather than beautiful. They would not understand that the repetition of the idea in different words serves to emphasize the idea.

Examples From the Bible

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 ULT)

Both parts of the sentence are metaphors saying that God's word teaches people how to live. That is the single idea. The words "lamp" and "light" are similar in meaning because they refer to light. The words "my feet" and "my path" are related because they refer to a person walking. Walking is a metaphor for living.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:6 ULT)

Both lines say that God made man the ruler of everything. "To rule over" is the same idea as putting things "under his feet," and "the works of your [God's] hands" is the same idea as "all things."

Yahweh sees everything a person does
and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

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

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

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

The first phrase and the second phrase mean the same thing. There are three ideas that are the same between these two phrases. "Sees" corresponds to "watches," "everything...does" corresponds to "all the paths...takes," and "a person" corresponds to "he."

Praise Yahweh, all you nations;
exalt him, all you peoples! (Psalm 117:1 ULT)

Both parts of this verse tell people everywhere to praise Yahweh. The words 'Praise' and 'exalt' mean the same thing. The words 'Yahweh' and 'him' refer to the same person. The terms 'all you nations' and 'all you peoples' refer to the same people.

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people,
and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2b ULT)

The two parts of this verse say that Yahweh has a serious disagreement with his people, Israel. These are not two different disagreements or two different groups of people.

Translation Strategies

For most kinds of parallelism, it is good to translate both of the clauses or phrases. For synonymous parallelism, it is good to translate both clauses if people in your language understand that the purpose of saying something twice is to strengthen a single idea. But if your language does not use parallelism in this way, then consider using one of the following translation strategies.

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.
- (2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as "truly" or "certainly."
- (3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like "very," "completely," or "all."

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Combine the ideas of both clauses into one.

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

Delilah expressed this idea twice to emphasize that she was very upset.

Until now you have deceived me with your lies.
Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

The phrase "all the paths he takes" is a metaphor for "all he does."

Yahweh pays attention to everything a person does.
For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, and he will fight in court against Israel. (Micah 6:2 ULT)

This parallelism describes one serious disagreement that Yahweh had with one group of people. If this is unclear, the phrases can be combined:

For Yahweh has a lawsuit with his people, Israel.

(2) If it appears that the clauses are used together to show that what they say is really true, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and include words that emphasize the truth such as “truly” or “certainly.”

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh truly sees everything a person does.

You make him to rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet
(Psalm 8:6 ULT)

You have certainly made him to rule over everything that you have created.

(3) If it appears that the clauses are used together to intensify an idea in them, you could combine the ideas of both clauses into one and use words like “very,” “completely” or “all.”

Until now you have dealt deceitfully with me and you have spoken lies to me. (Judges 16:13, ULT)

All you have done is lie to me.

Yahweh sees everything a person does and watches all the paths he takes. (Proverbs 5:21 ULT)

Yahweh sees absolutely everything that a person does.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Personification ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:2](#); [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 1:11](#); [Nahum 2:12](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:17](#); [Nahum 3:18](#)

Personification

Description

Personification is a figure of speech in which someone speaks of something as if it could do things that animals or people can do. People often do this because it makes it easier to talk about things that we cannot see:

Such as wisdom:

Does not Wisdom call out? (Proverbs 8:1a ULT)

Or sin:

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT)

People also use personification because it is sometimes easier to talk about people's relationships with non-human things such as wealth as if they were relationships between people.

You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

In each case, the purpose of the personification is to highlight a certain characteristic of the non-human thing. As in metaphor, the reader needs to think of the way that the thing is like a certain kind of person.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- Some languages do not use personification.
- Some languages use personification only in certain situations.

Examples From the Bible

You cannot **serve** God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24b ULT)

Jesus speaks of wealth as if it were a master whom people might serve. Loving money and basing one's decisions on it is like serving it as a slave would serve his master.

Does not Wisdom **call** out? Does not Understanding **raise her voice**? (Proverbs 8:1 ULT)

The author speaks of wisdom and understanding as if they were woman who calls out to teach people. This means that they are not something hidden, but something obvious that people should pay attention to.

Translation Strategies

If the personification would be understood clearly, consider using it. If it would not be understood, here are some other ways for translating it.

- (1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.
- (2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as "like" or "as" to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.
- (3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

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

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) Add words or phrases to make the human (or animal) characteristic clear.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — God speaks of sin as if it were a wild animal that is waiting for the chance to attack. This shows how dangerous sin is. An additional phrase can be added to make this danger clear.

Sin is at your door, **waiting to attack you**.

(2) In addition to Strategy (1), use words such as “like” or “as” to show that the sentence is not to be understood literally.

Sin crouches at the door. (Genesis 4:7b ULT) — This can be translated with the word “as.”

Sin is crouching at the door, **just as a wild animal does as it waits to attack a person..**

(3) Find a way to translate it without the personification.

Even the **winds and the sea obey him**. (Matthew 8:27b ULT) — The men speak of the “wind and the sea” as if they are able to hear and obey Jesus, just as people can. This could also be translated without the idea of obedience by speaking of Jesus controlling them.

He even **controls the winds and the sea**.

NOTE: We have broadened our definition of “personification” to include “zoomorphism” (speaking of other things as if they had animal characteristics) and “anthropomorphism” (speaking of non-human things as if they had human characteristics) because the translation strategies for them are the same.

Next we recommend you learn about:

Apostrophe ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Introduction to Nahum](#); [Nahum 1:8](#); [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 2:7](#)

Poetry

Description

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

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

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

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

Writing Styles ([UTA PDF](#))

In poetry we commonly find:

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

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

- repetition of some or all of a line:

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

- lines of similar length:

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

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

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

- the same sound repeated many times:

"Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater" (from an English rhyme)

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

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

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

We also find:

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

Some places to look for poetry in your language

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

Religious ceremony or chants of priests or witch doctors

Prayers, blessings, and curses

Old legends

Elegant or fancy speech

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue:

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods,

for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords,

for his covenant faithfulness endures forever.

(Psalm 136:1-3 ULT)

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

If you use poetry it may be more beautiful.

If you use ordinary speech it may be more clear.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

[Symbolic Language \(UTA PDF\)](#)

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:15](#); [Nahum 2:2](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

Possession

Description

In English, the grammatical form that commonly indicates possession is also used to indicate a variety of relationships between people and objects or people and other people. In English, that grammatical relationship is shown by using the word “**of**,” by using **an apostrophe and the letter “s”**, or by using a **possessive pronoun**. The following examples are different ways to indicate that my grandfather owns a house.

- the house **of** my grandfather
- my grandfather **'s** house
- **his** house

This page answers the question: *What is possession and how can I translate phrases that show it?*

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Possession is used in Hebrew, Greek, and English for a variety of situations. Here are a few common situations that it is used for.

- Ownership — Someone owns something.
- The clothes of me - my clothes — The clothes that I own
- Social Relationship — Someone has some kind of social relationship with another.
- The mother of John — John's mother - the woman who gave birth to John, or the woman who cared for John
- A teacher of Israel - Israel's teacher — a person who teaches Israel
- Association — A particular thing is associated with a particular person, place, or thing.
- The sickness of David - David's sickness — the sickness that David is experiencing
- the fear of the Lord — the fear that is appropriate for a human being to have when relating to the Lord
- Contents — Something has something in it.
- a bag of clothes — a bag that has clothes in it, or a bag that is full of clothes
- Part and whole: One thing is part of another.
- my head — the head that is part of my body
- the roof of a house — the roof that is part of a house

In some languages there is a special form of possession, termed **inalienable possession**. This form of possession is used for things that cannot be removed from you, as opposed to things you could lose. In the examples above, *my head* and *my mother* are examples of inalienable possession (at least in some languages), while *my clothes* or *my teacher* would be alienably possessed. What may be considered alienable vs. inalienable may differ by language. In languages that mark the difference, the expression of inalienable possession and alienable possession will be different.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- You (the translator) need to understand the relationship between two ideas represented by the two nouns when one is in the grammatical relationship of possessing the other.
- Some languages do not use grammatical possession for all of the situations that your source text Bible might use it for.

Examples From the Bible

Ownership — In the example below, the son owned the money.

▮ The younger son ... wasted his wealth by living recklessly. (Luke 15:13b)

Social Relationship — In the example below, the disciples were people who learned from John.

Then **the disciples of John** came to him. (Matthew 9:14a ULT)

Association — In the example below, the gospel is the message associated with Paul because he preaches it.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, from the seed of David, according to **my gospel**, (2 Timothy 2:8 ULT)

Material — In the example below, the material used for making the crowns was gold.

On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

Contents — In the example below, the cup has water in it.

For whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Part of a whole — In the example below, the door was a part of the palace.

But Uriah slept at **the door of the king's palace**. (2 Samuel 11:9a ULT)

Part of a group — In the example below, “us” refers to the whole group and “each one” refers to the individual members.

Now to **each one of us** grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (Ephesians 4:7 ULT)

Events and Possession

Sometimes one or both of the nouns is an abstract noun that refers to an event or action. In the examples below, the abstract nouns are in **bold** print. These are just some of the relationships that are possible between two nouns when one of them refers to an event.

Subject — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who would do the action named by the first noun. In the example below, **John baptized people**.

The **baptism of John**, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. (Mark 11:30)

In the example below, **Christ loves us**.

Who will separate us from the **love of Christ**? (Romans 8:35)

Object — Sometimes the word after “of” tells who or what something would happen to. In the example below, **people love money**.

For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:10a ULT)

Instrument — Sometimes the word after “of” tells how something would happen. In the example below, God would **punish people by sending enemies to attack them with swords**.

Then be afraid of the sword, because wrath brings **the punishment of the sword**. (Job 19:29a ULT)

Representation — In the example below, John was baptizing people who were repenting of their sins. They were being baptized to show that they were repenting. Their **baptism represented their repentance**.

John came, baptizing in the wilderness and preaching **a baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4 ULT)

Strategies for learning what the relationship is between the two nouns

- (1) Read the surrounding verses to see if they help you to understand the relationship between the two nouns.
- (2) Read the verse in the UST. Sometimes it shows the relationship clearly.
- (3) See what the notes say about it.

Translation Strategies

If possession would be a natural way to show a particular relationship between two nouns, consider using it. If it would be strange or hard to understand, consider these.

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.
- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.
- (3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Use an adjective to show that one noun describes the other.

On their heads were something like **crowns of gold**. (Revelation 9:7b)

"On their heads were **gold crowns**"

- (2) Use a verb to show how the two are related.

Whoever gives you **a cup of water** to drink ... will not lose his reward. (Mark 9:41 ULT)

Whoever gives you a **cup that has water in it** to drink ... will not lose his reward.

Wealth is worthless on **the day of wrath**. (Proverbs 11:4a ULT)

Wealth is worthless on **the day when God shows his wrath**.

or:

Wealth is worthless on the **day when God punishes people because of his wrath**.

- (3) If one of the nouns refers to an event, translate it as a verb. (In the example below, there are two possession relationships, "punishment of Yahweh" and "your God.")

Notice that I am not speaking to your children, who have not known or seen **the punishment of Yahweh your God**. (Deuteronomy 11:2a ULT)

Notice that I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen **how Yahweh, the God whom you worship, punished the people of Egypt**.

You will only observe and see the **punishment of the wicked**. (Psalms 91:8 ULT)

You will only observe and see **how Yahweh punishes the wicked**.

You will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 2:38b ULT)

You will receive the **Holy Spirit, whom God will give to you**.

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:7](#); [Nahum 2:9](#)

Pronouns — When to Use Them

Description

When we talk or write, we use pronouns to refer to people or things without always having to repeat the noun or name. Usually, the first time we refer to someone in a story, we use a descriptive phrase or a name. The next time we might refer to that person with a simple noun or by name. After that we might refer to him simply with a pronoun as long as we think that our listeners will be able to understand easily to whom the pronoun refers.

This page answers the question: *How do I decide whether or not to use a pronoun?*

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

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

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

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

In John 3, Nicodemus is first referred to with noun phrases and his name. Then he is referred to with the noun phrase “this man.” Then he is referred to with the pronoun “him.”

Each language has its rules and exceptions to this usual way of referring to people and things.

- In some languages, the first time something is referred to in a paragraph or chapter, it is referred to with a noun rather than a pronoun.
- The main character is the person whom a story is about. In some languages, after a main character is introduced in a story, he is usually referred to with a pronoun. Some languages have special pronouns that refer only to the main character.
- In some languages, marking on the verb helps people know who the subject is. (See [Verbs](#).) In some of these languages, listeners rely on this marking to help them understand who the subject is. Speakers will use a pronoun, noun phrase, or proper name only when they want either to emphasize or to clarify who the subject is.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- If translators use a pronoun at the wrong time for their language, readers might not know about whom the writer is talking.
- If translators too frequently refer to a main character by name, listeners of some languages might not realize that the person is a main character, or they might think that there is a new character with the same name.
- If translators use pronouns, nouns, or names at the wrong time, people might think that there is some special emphasis on the person or thing to which it refers.

Examples From the Bible

The example below occurs at the beginning of a chapter. In some languages it might not be clear to whom the pronouns refer.

Then Jesus entered into the synagogue again, and there was a man who had a withered hand. Some people watched **him** closely to see if **he** would heal **him** on the Sabbath so that they might accuse **him**. (Mark 3:1-2 ULT)

In the example below, two men are named in the first sentence. It might not be clear whom “he” in the second sentence refers to.

Now after some days had passed, **King Agrippa** and Bernice came down to Caesarea to pay their respects to **Festus**. After **he** had been there for many days, Festus presented to the king the things concerning Paul. (Acts 25:13-14)

Jesus is the main character of the book of Matthew, but in the verses below he is referred to four times by name. This may lead speakers of some languages to think that Jesus is not the main character. Or it might lead them to think that there is more than one person named Jesus in this story. Or it might lead them to think that there is some kind of emphasis on him, even though there is no emphasis.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

Translation Strategies

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.
- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) If it would not be clear to your readers to whom or to what a pronoun refers, use a name or a noun.

Again **he** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **him** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath. (Mark 3:1-2)

Again **Jesus** walked into the synagogue, and a man with a withered hand was there. Some Pharisees watched **Jesus** to see if **he** would heal the man on the Sabbath.

- (2) If repeating a noun or name would lead people to think that a main character is not a main character, or that the writer is talking about more than one person with that name, or that there is some kind of emphasis on someone when there is no emphasis, use a pronoun instead.

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **Jesus**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **Jesus** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **Jesus** left from there and went into their synagogue. (Matthew 12:1-3,9 ULT)

This may be translated as:

At that time **Jesus** went on the Sabbath day through the grainfields. **His** disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and eat them. But when the Pharisees saw that, they said to **him**, "See, your disciples do what is unlawful to do on the Sabbath." But **he** said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was hungry, and the men who were with him?" Then **he** left from there and went into their synagogue.

"

Referenced in: Nahum 1:8; Nahum 1:9; Nahum 1:10; Nahum 1:11; Nahum 1:12; Nahum 1:13; Nahum 1:14; Nahum 1:15; Nahum 2:1; Nahum 2:3; Nahum 2:5; Nahum 2:7; Nahum 2:8; Nahum 2:13; Nahum 3:3; Nahum 3:5; Nahum 3:6; Nahum 3:9; Nahum 3:10; Nahum 3:11; Nahum 3:13; Nahum 3:14; Nahum 3:15; Nahum 3:16; Nahum 3:17

Reduplication

This is a placeholder for an article to be written about reduplication in the biblical text, such as infinitive-absolute + indicative or other repeated words.

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

Description

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

Examples From the Bible

Begin, possess, to possess his land (Deut 2:31 ULT)

Translation Strategies

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:3](#); [Nahum 3:13](#)

Rhetorical Question

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

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

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

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

Sentence Types ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

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

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

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

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

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

- (1) Add the answer after the question.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You should not insult God's high priest!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:6](#); [Nahum 1:9](#); [Nahum 2:11](#); [Nahum 3:7](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

Simile

Description

A simile is a comparison of two things that are not normally thought to be similar. The simile focuses on a particular trait the two items have in common, and it includes the words “like,” “as,” or “than.”

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

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

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

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were troubled and discouraged, **like sheep not having a shepherd**. (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus compared the crowds of people to sheep without a shepherd. Sheep grow frightened when they do not have a good shepherd to lead them in safe places. The crowds were like that because they did not have good religious leaders.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, so be as wise **as the serpents** and harmless **as the doves**. (Matthew 10:16 ULT)

Jesus compared his disciples to sheep and their enemies to wolves. Wolves attack sheep; Jesus' enemies would attack his disciples.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

God's word is compared to a two-edged sword. A two-edged sword is a weapon that can easily cut through a person's flesh. God's word is very effective in showing what is in a person's heart and thoughts.

Purposes of Simile

- A simile can teach about something that is unknown by showing how it is similar to something that is known.
- A simile can emphasize a particular trait, sometimes in a way that gets people's attention.
- Similes help form a picture in the mind or help the reader experience what he is reading about more fully.

Reasons This Is a Translation Issue

- People may not know how the two items are similar.
- People may not be familiar with both of the items being compared.

Examples From the Bible

Suffer hardship with me, **as a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3 ULT)

In this simile, Paul compares suffering with what soldiers endure, and he encourages Timothy to follow their example.

Just as the lightning flashing from a place under the sky shines to another place under the sky, so will the Son of Man be. (Luke 17:24b ULT)

This verse does not tell how the Son of Man will be like the lightning. But in context we can understand from the verses before it that just as lighting flashes suddenly and everyone can see it, the Son of Man will come suddenly and everyone will be able to see him. No one will have to be told about it.

Translation Strategies

If people would understand the correct meaning of a simile, consider using it. If they would not, here are some strategies you can use:

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience. (2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote. (3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

(1) If people do not know how the two items are alike, tell how they are alike. However, do not do this if the meaning was not clear to the original audience.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — This compares the danger that Jesus' disciples would be in with the danger that sheep are in when they are surrounded by wolves.

See, I send **you out among wicked people** and you will be in danger from them **as sheep are in danger when they are among wolves**.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper **than any two-edged sword**. (Hebrews 4:12a ULT)

For the word of God is living and active and **more powerful than a very sharp two-edged sword**.

(2) If people are not familiar with the item that something is compared to, use an item from your own culture. Be sure that it is one that could have been used in the cultures of the Bible. If you use this strategy, you may want to put the original item in a footnote.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**, (Matthew 10:16a ULT) — If people do not know what sheep and wolves are, or that wolves kill and eat sheep, you could use some other animal that kills another.

See, I send you out **as chickens in the midst of wild dogs**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, **as a mother closely watches over her infants**, but you refused!

If you have faith **as a grain of mustard** ... (Matthew 17:20)

If you have faith even as small **as a tiny seed**,

(3) Simply describe the item without comparing it to another.

See, I send you out **as sheep in the midst of wolves**. (Matthew 10:16a ULT)

See, I send you out among **people who will want to harm you**.

How often did I long to gather your children together, just **as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings**, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37b ULT)

How often I wanted to **protect you**, but you refused!

Next we recommend you learn about:

Metaphor ([UTA PDF](#))

Biblical Imagery — Common Patterns ([UTA PDF](#))

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:10](#); [Nahum 2:4](#); [Nahum 2:8](#); [Nahum 3:16](#); [Nahum 3:17](#)

Symbolic Action

Description

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

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

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

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

Examples of symbolic actions

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

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

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jairus showed Jesus great respect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"

Referenced in: [Nahum 2:7](#); [Nahum 3:6](#); [Nahum 3:19](#)

Translate Unknowns

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

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

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

Sentence Structure ([UTA PDF](#))

Description

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

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

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

Reason This Is a Translation Issue

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

Translation Principles

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

Examples From the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translation Strategies

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

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

Examples of Translation Strategies Applied

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next we recommend you learn about:

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

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

Referenced in: [Nahum 1:1](#); [Nahum 2:6](#); [Nahum 3:8](#); [Nahum 3:9](#); [Nahum 3:14](#)



unfoldingWord® Translation Words

Version 85

prophet, prophecy, prophesy, seer, prophetess

Definition:

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

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

Translation Suggestions:

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

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

Bible References:

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

Examples from the Bible stories:

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

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

Word Data:

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

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

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