

# A Guide to *GOD'S WORD* Translation

*Translating the Bible according  
to the Principles  
of Closest Natural Equivalence*

 **GOD'S WORD**® Translation



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# Translation Philosophy

## Closest Natural Equivalence

Closest natural equivalent (CNE) translation attempts to be exactly what its name suggests. First, it provides readers with a meaning in the target language that is equivalent to that of the source language. Second, it seeks to express that meaning naturally, in a way that a native English speaker would speak or write. Finally, it expresses the meaning with a style that preserves many of the characteristics of the source text.

In CNE, meaning and naturalness are equal partners. If the proposed words of a translation have the potential to convey the correct meaning of the source text but are not natural for English readers, most readers will probably not understand the text correctly. Likewise, if a translation uses natural English but does not convey the meaning of the source text well, most readers will probably misunderstand it. Thus, two important principles of CNE are:

a translation that is not natural in the target language is not equivalent to the source text, no matter how well it may match the source text on a word-by-word basis

target language naturalness by itself does not ensure a good translation

CNE, however, does more than achieve a combination of equivalent meaning and naturalness. CNE preserves many of the characteristics of the source text (e.g., style, modes of expression, etc.).

For example, *beyad hazaqah ubizroa' netuyah* is one common biblical expression that describes how God used his power to free his people from Egypt. This phrase is often translated into English as “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” While “mighty hand” clearly and naturally communicates to readers that God was using his power, “outstretched arm” does not. In English the picture painted by outstretched arm could be one of greeting or reconciliation—or one of weakness because the arm is overextended. Some Bible translations have recognized this problem. The New Century Version translates this phrase “with his great power and strength” (Deut. 26:8; Ps. 136:12). While this communicates the meaning of the Hebrew well, it loses the vivid metaphorical language because the concrete words *arm* and *hand* are reduced to the abstract concepts of *power* and *strength*. CNE translation avoids both the unnatural translation found in many English Bibles and the meaningful but less vivid translation offered by others. In GOD'S WORD Translation (GW) the phrase is translated “with his mighty hand and powerful arm.”

GW does not indiscriminately use any one of many possible natural equivalent translations. It insists on the *closest* natural equivalent in order to translate meaning clearly while preserving the text's literary integrity.

### Contrasting Closest Natural Equivalence with Form Equivalence

Most well-known English Bible translations were produced using the traditional approach to translation called “form equivalence.” Many translations of the Bible available in bookstores today use some variation of form-equivalent translation.

Strict form equivalence translates word-by-word, matching each Hebrew or Greek word with one or more English words. Strict form equivalence would produce very difficult English. For instance, John 3:16 would read:

This way for loved the God the world so that the son the only he gave so that all those believing in him would not perish but have life eternal.

Since grammar and syntax vary from one language to the next, adjustments have to be made when moving from the source language to English. If adjustments were not made, the resulting translation would be difficult, if not impossible, for most readers to understand. For this reason, no translation is strictly form equivalent.

In essence, form-equivalent translations adjust the grammar and syntax of the source language text only enough to produce a reasonably recognizable and understandable English translation. Form-equivalent translation results in an English text that is a combination of English words, some English syntax, and some Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek syntax. For instance, the NRSV translation of Numbers 35:18 is:

Or anyone who strikes another with a weapon of wood in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.

At other times form equivalence produces translations that appear to be natural English and that make sense in English. But the meaning of some form-equivalent translations in English do not match the meaning of the source language because an idiom or figure of speech in the source language means something different in English. While form-equivalent translation is often called “literal translation,” it can present a text whose meaning is literally wrong for English readers.

For instance, the beginning of Psalm 1 in the NIV reads:

Blessed is the man  
 who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
 or stand in the way of sinners  
 or sit in the seat of mockers.

In English this says that someone who avoids stopping sinners from sinning is blessed. But the Hebrew text means that a person who does not join sinners in sinning is blessed.

### **Contrasting Closest Natural Equivalence with Function Equivalence**

Because of the problems associated with form-equivalent translation, another translation theory was developed, called dynamic-equivalent or function-equivalent translation. Function equivalence takes the

differences between the source language and the target language seriously.<sup>1</sup>

In function equivalence the translator's goal is to ensure that the meaning of the translation is the same for a native speaker of the target language as the meaning of the source language text was to a native speaker of that language. The function-equivalent theory is not concerned with preserving the maximum number of characteristics (e.g., word order, grammar, syntax, idioms, etc.) of the source language text. It recognizes that if a translation preserves the maximum number of these characteristics, it is often unnatural in the target language.

Function equivalence is a great advance in translation theory. It helps the translator focus on the goal of translation and not on technical matters concerning the source language. Function equivalence avoids producing translations that convey the wrong meaning, no meaning, or ambiguous meaning, or that contain bad grammar or style. It conveys the meaning of the text in ways that are natural and meaningful in the target language.

While the function equivalence theory of translation has the proper focus, in practice it has produced English translations that have lost some of the source texts' meaning. One reason for this is that translators using function equivalence have often attempted to translate the Bible so that all passages can be understood on a common, predefined conceptual level.

For instance, the NIrV is marketed as an edition specifically translated for children. While many parts of the Bible are appropriate for children, other parts were written for more mature audiences. Song of Songs is not for children. Job is a complicated and difficult book in Hebrew. In trying to make these books function on levels for which they were not intended, the translators risk miscommunication by oversimplifying or destroying the literary and artistic integrity of the text they are translating.

In printed texts, meaning is conveyed not only by words and sentences but also by authors' choices of literary devices based on their assumptions about readers' concerns and their ability to think abstractly. Authors' skill in using language also conveys meaning. These factors vary from book to book in the Bible. A translation must take into account not only how meaning is communicated in the target language but also on what level the original author intended the meaning.

1. See Jan De Waard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986).

The Contemporary English Version (CEV) is intended to “be read with ease and understanding by readers of all ages.” That is, every book of the Bible is intended to be clear to children as well as adults. But Paul probably never envisioned his letter to the Ephesians being read by children. To make Ephesians understandable for children, the CEV translation of Ephesians 1:19 reads:

I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers.

The phrase “great and mighty power” translates the Greek words *hyperballon megethos tēs dynamēōs*. In this translation most of the meaning of the Greek word *hyperballon* has been lost. It does not merely mean “mighty,” but means “surpassing,” “extraordinary,” perhaps even “limitless.” But since these abstract concepts are difficult for children, the CEV translation has simplified the language—with a loss in meaning.

Some of the books of the Bible contain material that is very difficult to understand; others contain relatively easy-to-understand material. Translators should not make the text more difficult to understand in the target language than the source text was (as form equivalence can do). Neither should they assume the responsibility of making the text simpler than the source text was (as function equivalence can do).

### **Closest Natural Equivalence Maintains the Balance**

Closest natural equivalence shares some of the concerns of function-equivalent translation. For instance, it focuses upon meaning and naturalness in the target language. But CNE does not attempt to make all books or passages function on the same level. The more difficult books of the Bible are translated to the same level of difficulty as the original languages.

CNE also shares some of the concerns of form-equivalent translation. For example, abstract concepts in Greek and Hebrew are translated into abstract concepts in English, and concrete concepts remain concrete in translation. When possible, figures of speech are translated using figures of speech in English. Poetry is not just prose with a special layout on the page. Instead, it is translated as poetry. (Like much poetry, biblical poetry is not characterized by pretentious language or

artificial meter and rhyme. Its modes of expression, however, including parallelism and vocabulary, are distinct from prose.)

The emphasis in CNE on naturalness in the target language may, at times, force a compromise. Some metaphors in Hebrew may have to become similes in English to communicate properly. At other times, figurative language cannot be translated by an understandable figure of speech in English. The difference between CNE and form equivalence is that in CNE a form, such as a metaphor, is not unnaturally forced into English. On the other hand, the difference between CNE and functional equivalence is that a metaphor will not be eliminated.

The goal of CNE is to communicate as much of the source text as possible in a way that is useable for the type of readers that the original author targeted. CNE recognizes that not every book of the Bible was intended for every reader. Therefore, in GW Ecclesiastes is harder to read than Genesis. Second Peter is more difficult than Mark. Scriptures contains a variety of writings. New Christians can find portions that speak clearly to them. Mature Christians can find other portions that challenge them. CNE recognizes that translation should not obscure meaning and make the Bible more difficult to read than it ought to be (as form equivalence may do). But CNE also recognizes that Scripture allows for growth and maturity. Therefore, CNE does not simplify concepts or run roughshod over the literary artistry of the Scriptures (as function equivalence may do).

Since CNE attempts to balance these and many other factors, translation can never be completely objective. It involves subjective judgments. Even when operating under the guidelines of closest natural equivalence, translators cannot produce a perfect translation. Translators use cautious judgment and maintain a keen awareness of all the factors needed for a full understanding of the source text. Among other things, translators need to understand the original language's grammar and syntax, appreciate and understand literary devices used by the original authors, understand what kind of audience the original author had in mind when writing, and understand the modern target audience and its language. Because these factors call for balance and judgment, every translation (even those produced using CNE) can be improved. One major reason for the high quality of GW is that the CNE theory was used in its production. Moreover, the translators of GW understood that natural, readable English was not merely a matter of writing simplified English. A number of factors contribute to making an English text readable, and these factors must be balanced.

## Textual Basis

Every Bible translation must decide which Hebrew and Greek texts are the basis for translation. The translators of *GOD'S WORD* Translation (GW) used *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* for the Old Testament and *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed.) for the New Testament. In general, GW translates the texts of these publications.

In some cases the translation team believed that a better reading existed in manuscripts other than the ones on which those publications base their text. Whenever GW does not follow the text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece*, it contains a footnote that points this out. In a few cases, the translation followed *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece* but included a footnote, because the team felt that manuscript evidence for an alternate reading was strong enough to include a note for readers even though it was not part of the translated text.

The textual footnotes in GW are short and simple. They do not contain abbreviations. Moreover, they do not distinguish between various ancient translations in the same language. For instance, Latin denotes any one of the several ancient Latin translations of the Bible. The footnotes were designed to convey information to the nonspecialist in the least complicated and confusing way. The scholar who consults *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece* will be able to determine which manuscripts were followed.

In some cases in the Old Testament, the division of books into chapters and verses is different in the Hebrew text than in most English Bibles. Wherever this occurs, GW follows the standard English chapter and verse divisions but notes the differences in a footnote.

In a few cases slight differences in verse divisions exist between the Greek text of the New Testament and most English Bibles. Once again GW follows standard English verse divisions. Since these differences are slight (often involving only a phrase or clause), they are not noted.

# Readability

## The Concerns and Aims of Readability

The study of what makes a text readable was first undertaken by educators about sixty years ago.<sup>1</sup> They wanted textbooks and other reading materials that students used in schools to be understandable. For this reason, the readability of a text is often given as a number representing a grade level. Assigning a grade level to a written work is not an exact science. Most grade-level assignments are based on numerical formulas that count sentence length (most often in words) and word length (most often in syllables).

Computers can quickly count words and syllables and compute a grade level according to a formula. Sophisticated word processors on personal computers are able to produce a grade level analysis and a few other statistics relating to readability.

While helpful, these formulas have limitations. Sentence length and word length are very important factors in determining whether an English text is readable, but they are not the only factors. In addition, these formulas were never intended to be guides on how to write. They were intended to help analyze a text after it has been written.

Alice Davison notes that “since formulas do not define the sources of difficulty, they cannot be used as guidelines for writing.”<sup>2</sup> Davison

1. See Jeanne S. Chall, “The Beginning Years,” in Beverley L. Zakaluk and S. Jay Samuels, eds., *Readability: Its Past, Present, and Future* (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1988), 2–13.

2. Alice Davison, “Assigning Grade Levels without Formulas: Some Case Studies” in Zakaluk and Samuels, *Readability: Its Past, Present, and Future*, 37.

points out that readability formulas do not identify what specific feature makes a text difficult to read. While long sentences generally are harder to read, some short sentences can be too. In contrast, some long sentences can be very easy to read. Therefore, making a text readable is a matter of balancing a number of factors.

*GOD'S WORD* Translation (GW) was produced to be as readable as possible. The translators and English reviewers took many factors that affect readability into account during their work. Furthermore, since some parts of the Bible are written on different levels than others, assigning a grade level to a Bible translation is a very inaccurate way to judge how easy it is to read.

### Factors Affecting Readability

The following are some of the factors that the translation team for GW took into account.

#### *Reducing syntactical complexity*

**Sentence length.** Variation in sentence length is desirable. Shorter sentences tend to be less difficult to read because they contain fewer ideas and fewer connections between ideas, but a text that contains only short sentences becomes monotonous to read. A text that contains only long, complicated sentences is difficult to read. While some portions of the Bible are difficult for translators to break into shorter sentences, doing so can be accomplished with the proper effort and care. One example is Ephesians 1:19b–21. The NIV translates these verses as one sentence containing sixty-two words. In the NASB they are a sixty-five word sentence. In GW verses 19–21 read:

You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us, the believers. He [God] worked with that same power in Christ when he brought him back to life and gave him the highest position in heaven. He is far above all rulers, authorities, powers, lords, and all other names that can be named, not only in this present world but also in the world to come.

GW does not use short sentences in these verses because that would involve a loss of meaning. But the translation still avoids translating these verses as one long sentence.

**Number of clauses.** Sentences containing more than one clause are harder to read, since the reader must be able to understand the connection between the thoughts contained in the various clauses. GW avoids multiple-clause sentences where appropriate.

**Number of prepositional phrases.** Sentences that contain a pileup of prepositional phrases can be difficult to read. The translation team for GW used prepositional phrases where necessary and carefully chose the prepositions that were used.

**Modifier depth.** Modifying one word with a number of modifiers adds complexity to the thought of a sentence. The phrase “the big, dappled, gray, galloping horse” contains four modifiers for the word *horse*. GW avoids multiple modifiers where possible.

**Modifier distance.** Words that modify another word in a sentence should be as close as possible to the word they modify. For instance, 1 Samuel 25:34 in the NIV reads:

Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.

The phrase *who has kept me from harming you* modifies LORD, but is separated from LORD by the phrase *the God of Israel* (which also modifies LORD) and the verb *lives*. The same verse in GW reads:

But I solemnly swear—as the LORD God of Israel, who has kept me from harming you, lives—if you hadn't come to meet me quickly, Nabal certainly wouldn't have had one of his men left at dawn.

**Voice.** Passive verbs make a sentence more complex. Passive constructions not only require more words but also obscure the real source of the action. GW uses passive constructions where appropriate, but avoids overusing them.

### *Reducing semantic complexity*

**Infrequently used vocabulary.** Infrequently used words are more likely to be misunderstood. To translate the meaning of much of the Bible accurately, however, some less frequently used English words are needed. One example is the word *lyre*. A lyre is a musical instrument similar to a harp, which is also mentioned in the Bible. In fact, over twenty passages contain both *lyre* and *harp*. In cases like this, GW

uses the more difficult word *lyre*, not only for accuracy but also to be able to distinguish this word from *harp*. While GW tries to avoid infrequently used words and uses more familiar words whenever possible, it does recognize the need to use them in some cases.

**Technical vocabulary.** Many words have meanings that are used in a specialized field of study or vocation. These words are important for those who are in those fields, but they communicate poorly to those who are not. GW avoids using technical terms when acceptable alternatives are available.

**Multisemantic words and phrases.** The translation team for GW avoided using words and phrases that could have more than one meaning in context. For instance, Joel 2:11 in the NIV reads:

The day of the LORD is great;  
it is dreadful.  
Who can endure it?

Joel 2:11 in GW reads:

The day of the LORD is extremely terrifying. Who can endure it?

**Polysyllabic words.** Generally, the fewer syllables a word has, the more readable it is. GW uses shorter words when they can be appropriately substituted for longer ones.

**Affixes ratio.** Words with suffixes and prefixes tend to be harder to read because they add another element of meaning that readers must understand. English uses many affixes, and any English text will contain many affixed words. GW uses as few words with affixes as possible.

**Anaphora.** Anaphora are words or ideas that are repeated. To avoid repeating a noun, a pronoun can be used. But if the noun to which the pronoun refers is not clear to the reader, repeating the noun may be preferable. The translation team of GW examined anaphora closely throughout the translation process.

**Concept density.** Concept density refers to the number of ideas contained in an expression. A sentence that contains many ideas is harder to read because readers have to spend extra energy analyzing the text. Sentences with fewer ideas are more readable. GW breaks distinct ideas into separate sentences when possible. For instance, Romans 5:17 in the NIV reads:

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

This sentence is so complicated that most people won't understand it. It contains forty-one words, at least five major concepts, eight prepositional phrases, and three verbs. In addition, it is a conditional sentence. *GW* translates this verse as:

It is certain that death ruled because of one person's failure. It's even more certain that those who receive God's overflowing kindness and the gift of his approval will rule in life because of one person, Jesus Christ.

In *GW* the verse is two sentences with a total of four prepositional phrases. No sentence has more than two verbs. The average sentence length is nineteen words. The number of concepts per sentence has been reduced without loss of meaning.

**Abstract versus concrete words and phrases.** Abstract concepts add difficulty to a text. Concrete words are more easily understood. At times, using one abstract word may produce a shorter sentence than using a concrete phrase in its place. The shorter sentence, however, may actually be harder to understand because it is less specific. (See the example of the use of "mighty hand and powerful arm" discussed earlier.)

## Judgment in Readability

Since readability is determined by many factors, making a text readable is not a matter of mechanically applying a number of rules. Sometimes these factors conflict with each other. Judgment is required to determine which is more important for a particular sentence based on its context. This is a challenge for translators, because translators, unlike authors, cannot decide to change what the text means to make it more readable.

The translation team for *GW* weighed the various factors that affect readability as they produced the translation. The readability of *GW* is not an accident. It is the result of the translation team's careful use of readability principles.

# Word Choice in *GOD'S WORD* Translation

## Communicating with the Proper Words

Both the theory of closest natural equivalence and the factors that affect the readability of a text made word choice an important part of the work of the translation team that produced *GOD'S WORD* Translation (GW). The team chose words that were natural in context and that were as easily understood as possible without losing accuracy and faithfulness to the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible.

But producing a consistent and accurate translation is more than making a translation decision on a word-by-word basis from Genesis to Revelation. Translators have to take into account how each Hebrew or Greek word relates to other Hebrew or Greek words. That is, they need to understand the words as part of the Hebrew and Greek language systems. As part of a system, words are related in meaning to one another, and those relationships are not only complex but also unique to each language. This requires translators to match the complex relationships among words in Greek and Hebrew to the equally complex relationships among words in English.

One of the ways the translators of GW did this was by grouping words according to the components of meaning they share with one another. Words that share a component of meaning are said to be in the same semantic field.

For instance, a native speaker of English can easily name a number of words in the semantic field for color: red, orange, green, blue, pink,

white, black, violet, purple, gray, and so on. These words relate to each other in specific ways. Some of them are thought of as part of a spectrum of colors. Some are opposites (black, white). Others are synonyms or nearly synonymous (violet, purple).

Translators face the challenge of choosing the right word for each word that signifies color in Hebrew or Greek. While English speakers may use *violet* and *purple* interchangeably at times, at other times *violet* signifies a difference in shade from *purple*. Another language does not necessarily differentiate colors the same way English does. A translator may not be able to equate *violet* with one word and *purple* with another word. The other language may divide the semantic field for color differently. If that is the case, a word in the other language may be translated *purple* in some cases and *violet* in other cases.

This phenomenon of semantic fields is repeated for every concept a language can express. A translator needs to understand how the source language divides meaning in a semantic field and how the target language divides that same meaning. In addition, words can have meaning in more than one semantic field. For example, the English word *ford* can indicate a shallow place to cross a river, a brand of automobile, or a last name.

Translations can be misleading if translators do not understand the relationships between words in a semantic field in both the source language and the target language. In addition, translations can be misleading if the translators do not recognize that a word in the source language is used in more than one semantic field and that the target language uses different expressions in each semantic field.

For this reason the translation team of GW compiled lists of words in semantic fields as they studied the relationships between words in Hebrew or Greek. One example is the semantic field for utensils used by the priests in worship:

*'agartal* dish

*kepor* bowl

*ya'* shovel

*kiyyor* basin

*keliy* utensil, thing, accessory, furnishing

*kaph* dish

*mizlagah* fork

*mezammeret* snuffer

*mizraq* bowl  
*mahalaph* knife  
*mahta* incense burner  
*melqahayim* tongs  
*menaqqiyt* bowl  
*menorah* lamp stand  
*miqteret* incense burner  
*siyr* pot  
*saph* dish  
*qe'arah* plate  
*qaswah* pitcher

Some of the items in this semantic field are distinct in English (pot, tongs, plate, pitcher, etc.). Others use distinct terms in Hebrew but cannot be distinguished in English without a long paraphrase. Also note the three terms for bowl and the two terms for dish.

In another case the translators of GW were careful to note when the words *'amah*, *'ebed*, and *shiphah* were used in different semantic fields. Most often *'amah* and *shiphah* mean female servant or slave, and *'ebed* means “male servant or slave.” But these words are also used in polite, formal address to a superior. A speaker may refer to herself as *'amateka* or *shiphhateka* when speaking to a superior, as Abigail does when speaking to David in 1 Samuel 25:28. She says, “Please forgive my offense.” If an English translation read “Please forgive your servant,” most English readers will think that Abigail was talking to David about someone else, not about herself.

Normally, speakers can only refer to themselves with the pronouns *I*, *me*, *we*, or *us* in English, no matter how formal the situation. (Politeness is indicated in other ways in English. Trying to force “your servant” into a translation to indicate politeness results in an unnatural and confusing sentence.)

In this case the translation team for GW recognized that these three Hebrew words function in more than one semantic field. GW does not force a word from one semantic field into another semantic field where it does not belong. Instead, GW uses the correct words for each English semantic field, even though the Hebrew or Greek languages may use the same word in both semantic fields.

## Eliminating Technical Theological Language

Another challenge faced by the translators of GW was finding words that accurately communicate the meaning of important theological concepts in the Bible. Many of these concepts have traditionally been translated by words that no longer communicate to most English speakers. While these words continue to be used by theologians and even by many Christians, the meanings that speakers assign to them in everyday use do not match the meanings of the Hebrew or Greek words they are intended to translate. The words have become jargon—words with specialized meanings often poorly understood by nonspecialists.

To determine how English speakers understand a few key theological terms, God's Word to the Nations Bible Society undertook a survey of churchgoing lay people. Of five theological terms tested, no term was understood correctly by a majority of the respondents. That is, a majority of the respondents did not give a definition that matched the primary meaning of the underlying Greek word. Some of the definitions that respondents gave were correct meanings for the English word but not for the Greek word it was supposed to translate.

One example is the word *covenant*. The survey produced these results:

- other 17%
- don't know 15%
- agreement 28%
- promise/pledge 40%

A large number of respondents understood *covenant* to mean a promise or a pledge, a correct meaning for the Greek word *diathēkē*. Many understood it to mean an agreement (an incorrect meaning for *diathēkē*), and others gave different answers or did not know what *covenant* means.

In secular Greek *diathēkē* meant “last will and testament.” Its primary New Testament meaning is derived from this secular meaning. Most often the New Testament writers used *diathēkē* to mean “a unilateral pledge or promise.” The English word *covenant* can mean “an agreement or a mutually acceptable arrangement, often arrived at through bargaining.” But the Greek word *diathēkē* cannot. One

Greek dictionary clearly states that “in the ‘covenants’ of God it was God alone who set the conditions; hence, *covenant* can be used to translate *diathēkē* only when this is kept in mind.”<sup>1</sup>

If a majority of readers do not understand the correct meaning of the Greek word *diathēkē* when they read the English word *covenant*, other words should be used to translate it. GW uses the words *promise* and *pledge*.

The situation is even more complicated because many translations use *covenant* to translate the Hebrew word *beriyt* in the Old Testament. *Beriyt* can mean “promise” or “agreement,” depending on context. Therefore, a reader’s good assumption when reading the Old Testament use of *covenant* becomes a bad assumption when reading the New Testament.

The survey results for *covenant* (40 percent gave acceptable answers) were better than for the other words included in the bible society’s survey. For instance, only 10 percent of the respondents gave a correct meaning for the Greek word *dikaioō* when asked to define *justify*. For this reason, the translators of GW avoid using words like *covenant*, *justify*, *righteous*, *grace*, and others that have become theological jargon and do not correctly communicate the meaning of the Hebrew or Greek words they are translating. In some cases a footnote in GW offers the traditional theological terms for those who are familiar with them.

1. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., tr. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 228. The comment is intended only to describe the meaning of *diathēkē* and not its Hebrew counterpart *beriyt*, which can mean either “agreement” or “promise,” depending on context.

## Gender References

The Scriptures contain many passages that apply to people in general. But the traditional use of words such as *man* to mean “people in general” can no longer be assumed to communicate the Bible’s meaning accurately to all readers. For instance, Psalm 1:1 is traditionally translated, “Blessed is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked.” For many who currently speak English, this translation reads as if Psalm 1 is speaking about blessings males receive. But the psalm is intended to apply to any person. Therefore, *GOD’S WORD Translation (GW)* renders the first psalm, “Blessed is the person who does not follow the advice of the wicked.”

This concern is not a recent phenomenon. Almost five hundred years ago, Martin Luther expressed the same concern as he translated Psalm 1 into German.<sup>1</sup> Even the Scriptures themselves give indications that some words should at times be understood as gender-inclusive. For example, in 2 Chronicles 28:10 *beney-yehudah* (traditionally “sons of Judah”) is defined as ‘*abadiym* (male slaves) and *shephahot* (female slaves).

Due to developments in the English language in the last few decades, the concern for appropriate use of gender-inclusive language requires translators to avoid producing translations that are read as inappropriately excluding some persons. For this reason, GW avoids using words like *man* and *he* if the Hebrew or Greek is speaking about people regardless of gender.

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 14 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 288.

In some places gender-inclusive language cannot be used because English has no uniquely gender-inclusive third person singular pronoun. For instance, Psalm 1:3 in GW reads:

He is like a tree planted beside streams—a tree that produces  
fruit in season  
and whose leaves do not wither.  
He succeeds in everything he does.

GW could have shifted Psalm 1 into plural in verse 1, as some modern English translations do (“Blessed are the people who . . .”). Then verse 3 would read “They are like trees . . .” But doing this changes the psalm’s imagery. The psalmist is speaking about a solitary person, who despite pressures from others remains faithful to God. That person is like a lone tree that God waters and cares for. Making the image into a forest or orchard that God waters loses an important part of the message of the psalm. The comfort of God protecting a faithful person who feels isolated would be lost.

For this reason, GW occasionally uses the pronoun *he* to refer to a single person, male or female. The translation team felt that retaining some singular pronouns was more important than a slavish loyalty to gender neutrality.

In addition, GW does not change gender references inappropriately. For example, when Gamaliel addresses the Jewish council in Acts 5:35, he begins *andres Israēlitai* (“men, Israelites”). Some modern translations have translated this in a gender-inclusive way, even though all the members of the Jewish council were men. GW recognizes this and translates the phrase as “men of Israel.”

# The Translation Process

The talents of a wide variety of people were used to produce *GOD'S WORD* Translation. At the core of this effort was a full-time translation team composed of biblical scholars who served as translators, English experts who constantly reviewed English style, and professional production personnel who oversaw the work. The basic process is outlined below.

## Translation

In the first step of this process, a biblical scholar used the principles of closest natural equivalent to produce an initial translation of one of the books of the Bible. During this time, the translator was able to consult with the rest of the translation team as needed.

## English Review

With the initial draft of a book completed, an expert in English style reviewed the translator's text and suggested changes. The English reviewer was concerned primarily with a natural English rendering. Additionally, computer technology allowed the English reviewer to search the entire translation to ensure that any proposed revisions would not destroy the translation's consistency.

The translator and the English reviewer then worked together to produce a second draft that improved both the naturalness and ac-

curacy of the translation. Upon completion of the second draft, the translator and English reviewer served as resources for the rest of the editorial process.

### **Peer Review**

After the English review process, the second draft was circulated to the other full-time translators and English reviewers for comments. This peer review stage allowed the other members of the translation team to compare the draft with their own work, offer suggestions for further improvement, and maintain consistency from one book of the Bible to another.

### **Technical Review**

The translator and English reviewer incorporated all appropriate suggestions offered in the peer review stage to produce a third draft. This draft was then submitted to technical reviewers, which included clergy, college professors, and seminary professors. These technical reviewers submitted written suggestions for improvements in the translation.

### **Review by Book Editorial Committees**

The next step in the process produced a fourth draft of the text. Taking into account the comments of technical reviewers, a book editorial committee composed of members of the translation team met to read and discuss the text for each book of the Bible.

The final step for the book editorial committee was reading the text aloud. Since the Bible is read not only silently but also aloud in worship and instructional settings, having a Bible that can be immediately grasped and understood without the benefit of rereading was an important consideration.

### **Review by Consultative Committee**

After the members of the book editorial committee finished their work, they passed the fourth draft to the members of the consultative

committee. This group of over fifty Christian leaders from various denominations was invited to submit comments and suggestions.

### **Review by Old Testament, New Testament, and Bible Editorial Committees**

The final editorial changes were made when all the books of the Bible had been completed or were near completion. Old and New Testament committees and, finally, a Bible editorial committee approved the accuracy and readability of the text.

## The Translation Committee

**Eugene W. Bunkowske**, PhD in linguistics, LittD, DD, *Translation Consultant, Bible Editorial Committee*. Bunkowske, supervisor of the doctor of missiology program at Concordia Theological Seminary, served as translation coordinator for the United Bible Societies for the entire African continent. He is a recognized expert in this area of mission and translation work. He received his PhD in linguistics with minors in cross-culture studies, anthropology, and communication from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has lectured and conducted workshops and seminars in over half of the countries in Africa and in many other parts of the world. His *Topics in Yala Grammar* is recognized as making an outstanding contribution in the field of linguistics with respect to the analysis of tone and eliding boundaries.

**Ruth J. Kurth**, PhD in curriculum and instruction, reading, *Readability Consultant*. Kurth is dean of the College of Education at Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois. She is a widely published academic author and has presented numerous academic research papers. In 1980, she was named Distinguished Professor at the University of North Texas, where she was head of graduate and undergraduate programs in reading. Kurth is a former president of the American Reading Forum and was awarded first place in the 1977 National Storytelling Contest sponsored by the National Story and Folklore Festival in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Andrew E. Steinmann**, PhD in Near Eastern Studies, MDiv, BS, *Translation Coordinator, Translator, New & Old Testament Editorial Committees, Bible Editorial Committee*. Andrew Steinmann received his PhD from the University of Michigan under the direction of Peter Machinist and Jarl Fossum. He has served as a parish pastor and has taught biblical studies, Hebrew, and Aramaic at the college level. He has also been a guest instructor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. Steinmann has contributed articles to various academic journals and books and has presented research papers on the local, regional, and national levels. He has served as the co-chair of the Bible Translation Group of the Society of Biblical Literature.

**Richard Gudgeon**, DMin, MDiv, MA, BA, *Translator, Old Testament Editorial Committee, Novell Network Manager*. Gudgeon received his DMin from Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York, under the direction of Thomas Troeger and Carol Doran. He received his BA and MA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He served in a parish and has taught biblical Hebrew and Syriac at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**Martin Homan**, ThM, STM, MDiv, BA, *Translator*. He has experience as a college professor, parish pastor, campus pastor, and volunteer hospital chaplain. Homan has been an abstractor for Religious and Theological Abstracts since 1982 and has written scholarly articles for theological journals.

**David Moke**, PhD in classics, MA in classics, STM, BD, BA, *Translator*. Moke earned his PhD from the University of Minnesota. He has taught courses in biblical literature, Homer, Plato, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, scientific terminology, and mythology. Some of the institutions where he taught include Ball State University, University of Minnesota, Bethany College, and Seminary and Capital University. Moke also has experience as a parish pastor.

**Daniel Moriarity**, MDiv, BA, *Translator*. Moriarity received an MDiv from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He was an assistant professor at Concordia College, Ann Arbor, Michi-

gan, where he taught Greek, Hebrew, and Latin and served as chairman of the foreign language department.

### English Reviewers

**Richard Sweney Jr.**, BA in Education, *Editorial Review Coordinator*

**Tamara Stross**, BA in English, *Assistant Editorial Reviewer*

**Kristine Luber**, BS in Elementary Education, *Assistant Editorial Reviewer*

### Executive Director

**D. Michael Hackbardt**, MDiv, BA, *Bible Editorial Committee*. Hackbardt became executive director of the Bible Society in 1992. Hackbardt received an MDiv from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. His management background includes an eight-year career with IBM, experience as a parish pastor, and a staff position at Concordia Theological Seminary.

### Technical Reviewers

Dr. Paul Alford

Professor John Beck

Mr. Reu Beck

Professor John Brug

Dr. Rexford Boda

Dr. Roddy Braun

Rev. Steven Briel

Dr. Carol Doran

Dr. John I. Durham

Rev. Charles Evanson

Dr. Steve Harold

Professor Adolph Harstad

Professor Mark Harstad

Dr. Joel Heck

Dr. Jakob Heckert

Dr. Horace Hummel

Rev. Curtis Jahn

Dr. Nathan Jastram

Dr. Richard Jensen

Rev. Silas Krueger

Professor David Kuske

Dr. John Lawrenz

Dr. Walter Maier III

Dr. Menahem Mansoor

Dr. Paul Michael Middendorf

Dr. Russell Nelson

Fr. Dennis O'Brien  
Rev. Richard Resch  
Dr. Lavon Riley  
Dr. Paul Schrieber

Rev. Stephen Starke  
Dr. Ronald Vahl  
Professor James Westendorf  
Dr. John Wilch

### Consultative Committee

Pastor James Anderson  
Dr. Katy Barnwell  
Dr. Bill Bright  
Dr. Fletcher Brothers  
Dr. Daniel Chamberlain  
Dr. Herb Bowdoin  
Dr. Dave Breese  
Dr. James Hefley  
Dr. Carl F. H. Henry  
Dr. E. V. Hill  
Dr. Ed Hindson  
Evangelist Sonny Holland  
Dr. Don Howard  
Dr. W. A. Criswell  
Rev. Charles Fiore  
Dr. Greer Garrot  
Mr. Muzzam Gill  
Dr. H. A. Hanke  
Dr. D. James Kennedy  
Dr. James Kilgore

General Albion Knight  
Dr. Richard Land  
Dr. Harold Lindsell  
Mr. Ed McAteer  
Dr. W. S. McBirnie  
Dr. Charles Mims  
Dr. Ray Newcomb  
Mr. Ed Noble  
Dr. Paige Patterson  
Dr. Jimmy Robertson  
Dr. James Robinson  
Dr. Adrian Rogers  
Dr. Karl Rutz  
Mr. Jack Stewart  
Dr. Nathaniel Urshan  
Dr. Stan Wachstetter  
Dr. Jerry Wiles  
Dr. Ray Wilson  
Dr. Moses Yang

## Endorsements

“*GOD’S WORD* is a remarkably fresh, accurate, and readable translation that communicates well the original text for modern readers. Based on a sound linguistic approach, this new translation is an outstanding achievement.”

—Dr. David Dockery

“*GOD’S WORD* is an easy-to-understand Bible. . . . It is a wonderful version.”

—Rev. Billy Graham

“This new Bible translation, *GOD’S WORD*, strives to interpret passages for the American reader without changing the original Hebrew meaning of the text. The English language is constantly changing. It is time, and vitally important, to bring Bible translations up-to-date. The Old Testament portion of *GOD’S WORD* ranks among the best.”

—Dr. Menahem Mansoor, (retired) department chair, Research Programs in Semitic Texts and Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Dr. Mansoor was a key technical reviewer and consultant for the entire Old Testament of *GOD’S WORD* Translation.

“Even if the rather prolific output of modern translations, paraphrases, and versions of Scripture should increase, this particular linguistic achievement, *GOD’S WORD*, will rank among the top contenders with the Bible-reading public.”

—Dr. D. James Kennedy

“*GOD'S WORD* is very possibly the most accurate English translation of the original text available today. *GOD'S WORD* is a must-read for twenty-first century Christians.”

—Dr. Larry Richards

“As a lay leader in several evangelical organizations, including colleges and parachurch organizations, I am often asked to lead devotions or give a speech. Over the years my walk with Christ has deepened through study of the Bible in various translations and paraphrase editions. It was with great joy that I discovered *GOD'S WORD* Translation because I appreciate a more contemporary writing style that honors original meaning. This may be the Bible that I go to first from now on.”

—Robert C. Andringa, PhD, president emeritus, Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

“From the helpful indentations of the text to the accurate and fluent wording of the translation, *GOD'S WORD* provides the reader with a compelling translation of the Bible that communicates to today's reader. Read through some of your favorite Bible passages and see how well the passage flows. Read Jer. 31:31–34 or Psalm 23, and you'll know what I mean. Rediscover the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 or faith stories of Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11. Prepare yourself for a fresh reading of Scripture, whether it's your first time or your hundredth time.”

—Joel D. Heck, ThD, professor of theology, executive editor, Concordia University Press

“Even though there are many English translations of the Bible, *GOD'S WORD* stands out due to its clarity and scholarship. I believe that the *GOD'S WORD* Translation will be the one that stays in your hands, not on your shelf.”

—Steve Wingfield, author, speaker, and president of the Steve Wingfield Evangelistic Association

“I am by profession a radio and television journalist, but I am also a lay evangelist, and in that capacity I am always looking for a translation of the Hebrew/Aramaic/Greek text that is both accurate and clear. Clarity matters, but accuracy matters even more. For my own private study I want a translation that is essentially literal. But for evangelistic speaking, writing, and broadcasting I want a translation that is *clear* . . . .

“For the former purpose I’ve tended to use the NASB or the NRSV. . . . For the latter purpose I’ve tried the CEV and the NLT but have not been really satisfied with either. *GOD'S WORD* performs both these tasks better than any other translation I’ve come across.

“So, for those purposes in which a combination of clarity (and simplicity of language) with accuracy and reliability is needed, *GOD'S WORD* seems to me to win hands down.”

—Kel Richards

“*GOD'S WORD* is accurate, inspirational, and easy to read. Thank God for this translation!”

—Dr. T. W. Wilson, former executive assistant to Billy Graham

“After extensive study, I am convinced that the *GOD'S WORD* Translation is, without exception, the most accurate, easy-to-read version of the Bible available on the face of the earth. It is a powerful tool for this new millenium that should be placed in the hands of every individual at every reading age level.”

—Tim Todd, executive director of Revival Fires International

“I’m a huge fan of the *GOD'S WORD* Translation; in fact, it’s the translation we use most in our particular church because of its excellent mix of accuracy and readability. The *GOD'S WORD* Translation has been a key ingredient in our efforts to reach people for whom church itself has been an obstacle to knowing God; many of these same people have been blocked from a relationship with Christ by a misunderstanding that the Bible is boring and irrelevant to them. We’re accomplishing our mission . . . thanks in large part to you accomplishing yours!”

—Pastor Ron Crawford

“Over the last two years God has permitted me to lead over fifty people to Christ or back to Christ. When I share Christ with them I read certain verses from three or even four translations—NIV, NKJV, NASB, TEV—but last I’ll read from *GOD'S WORD*. Invariably, when I read from *GOD'S WORD* their eyes will light up and they’ll say something like, ‘Wow! That was really clear. What Bible is that?’ I then give them a copy of *GOD'S WORD* and mark out what I want them to read. *GOD'S WORD* is a wonderful, clear, and accurate translation.”

—Pastor Robert J. Muller

"I don't know any other translation that so conscientiously captures the meaning of the original languages yet reads more simply and clearly."

—Rev. Ron Mehl

"As a pastor and radio broadcaster I especially love the flow, clarity, and accuracy of *GOD'S WORD* Translation. It has greatly enhanced my teaching/preaching ministry. I've noticed people paying much closer attention to the reading of the Word because of the natural way the *GOD'S WORD* Translation sounds when it is read in sermons and on the radio."

—Pastor Don Wight

"I am greatly impressed! I couldn't put *GOD'S WORD* down. It certainly is the most readable English translation I've read. I predict it will become a standard text. I believe *GOD'S WORD* will enrich the study habits of a whole generation."

—Dr. Joe C. Aldrich

"Wow! *GOD'S WORD* is translated the way I teach my students to translate the New Testament."

—Dr. Charles Guth

"We've always had translations that are very accurate and from time to time we've had translations that are readable. *GOD'S WORD* combines these two in a way that makes for an incredibly useful tool to give students."

—Dr. Marv Penner

"*GOD'S WORD* is an easy-to-read, accurate translation your students will love."

—Helen Musick

"New translations of the Bible abound today, but many fall short because they 'dumb-down' its meaning to try and appeal to man and in doing so fail to glorify God. Conversely, the *GOD'S WORD* Translation of the Bible stands head and shoulders above its peers. It uses clear, contemporary language of our day *and* still 'guards the trust' of the rich meaning of the Scriptures."

—Steve Camp

“With so many Bible translations available, *GOD'S WORD* is the break-out choice. It's clear and contemporary yet intelligent and elegant. Its refreshing style communicates powerfully. Most important, it's thoroughly accurate.”

—Rev. Peter M. Wallace, executive producer  
and host alliance for Christian Media

“As Point of Grace, we struggle just like the rest of the world . . . being wives, being moms, and just being. Life requires a daily decision as well as a commitment to stay focused on those things that are of eternal matter (Phil. 4:8). The Bible reveals the truth to us, empowering us with the armor necessary to make good choices. *GOD'S WORD* Translation puts those truths in a language that is easy to read and understand, making it clear to us how to choose wisely.”

—Leigh Cappillino, *Point of Grace*

“As we share God's Word with our audience this year we choose to use the *GOD'S WORD* Translation Bible. It's easy to read, easy to understand, and easy to share with others.”

—Denise Jones, *Point of Grace*

“The amateur Bible scholar in me loves versions like the HCSB and ESV because their precise translation allows for good word studies and comparisons to the original languages (even though the HCSB isn't as literal as the ESV). The evangelist in me likes translations like the Good News, NLT, and TNIV because they speak the language of ordinary people. Ultimately I want a person to actually enjoy reading the Bible I give them. But I don't like for a translation to be overly interpretive, and the dynamic equivalent translations sometimes disappoint me in this area, particularly the NLT. GW seems to excel in the area of readability while avoiding over-interpretation. That's a big achievement.”

—Shane Raynor

“For nearly ten years, I've been using the *GOD'S WORD* Translation in my morning devotions. It is a good combination of accuracy and readability, and many times I've found that it gives fresh meaning on old familiar passages.

One favorite passage is Psalm 71:20–21:

You have made me endure many terrible troubles.  
You restore me to life again.

You bring me back from the depths of the earth.  
You comfort me and make me greater than ever.

“No other translation gives the warmth and lyricism to these verses.”

—Gretchen W. Goldsmith, president/CEO, Rose Publishing, Inc.

“The Bible is the means God has chosen to reach out in human language, reveal the essence of his relational heart, and relate the Good News of his redemptive plan. *GOD'S WORD* Translation presents that message in a way that makes sense to readers of all ages. It is an accurate translation using modern English language and phraseology which makes it easier to understand.”

—Josh McDowell