



Lutheran Bible
Translators

BIBLE TRANSLATION

Sunday

BIBLE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study guide is to give you a taste of the kinds of questions that a Bible translator will consider when they study a text for the purposes of translating it into their own language.

As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.

Jeremiah 36:23 (ESV)

CONTEXT

For a translator to understand a verse well enough to translate it, they need to understand the rest of the text that it appears in. They often also need to look beyond the text itself - to commentaries, other books of the Bible - to understand aspects of the historical and cultural context that clarify the meaning.

ACTIVITY: Read all of Jeremiah 36. What questions do you have about this verse that are answered by reading the rest of the chapter? (e.g. What is this scroll? Who is Jehudi?)

DISCUSSION: How did your understanding of this verse change when you read it in context? Were there any facts that you learned by reading the context that changed your understanding of the verse from when you first read it?

EXPERIENCE

One of the techniques that translators find useful to work out the meaning of a text - particularly a historical narrative - is to act it out. By playing the roles and simulating the events, translators can move beyond translating words and into naturally expressing what they have imagined those events to be like.

ACTIVITY: Divide the group into pairs. Assign one person in each pair to play Jehudi, the other to play the king. If you can, use a scroll, knife, and "fire pot" as props. Take a few minutes to decide how you want to act this verse out. Present your re-enactment to the group.

DISCUSSION: How did acting this verse out affect your understanding of it? What surprised you about the way another pair dramatized this verse? How did those surprises affect your understanding of this verse?

DEFINITIONS

We often assume that everyone means the same things by the same words. Translators can spend hours discussing the range of meanings of a word to ensure that it accurately expresses what the original text says. Words that are close in meaning (a.k.a. synonyms) will have slightly different shades of meaning. Words can have different connotations - positive or negative - for different hearers or readers, based on either the meaning shared by the language community or even their own personal experiences.

ACTIVITY: Think about the word consumed in this verse in the ESV. What does it mean in this context? What are some other meanings of this word in different contexts? What images come to mind when you hear this word? How does this word make you feel? What experiences might make you feel this way about the word?

DISCUSSION: Share some of your answers to the above questions with other members of the group. As you listen to other people's reaction to and definition of this word, how does their experience enrich your own understanding of the word? How has exploring this word together impacted your understanding of this verse?

VERSIONS

A translator can get a better sense of the meaning of a verse by reading a variety of translations. Every different translation presents a slightly different understanding of what the author of that verse meant. Translators typically make translation decisions with an audience in mind and with specific communication goals for that audience.

ACTIVITY: Read Jeremiah 36:23 in different translations. As you read each one, note where the translators of that version made different choices than the translators of the ESV version. Keep in mind issues related to definitions, such as possible negative and positive connotations.

DISCUSSION: What were some of the different translation choices? What do these choices suggest about differences in the goals of the translators of different versions? What do they suggest about the different audiences that those translators had in mind?