

LANGUAGE PROGRAM PLANNING

“As a Bible translator, I have a responsibility to not only translate the Bible into my mother tongue, but to help my community to read the translated Bible, make them to come close to Jesus and grow more to be Christ-like so that the transformation of life may be seen in their life style.”

Yes! The message was getting through! During the first two weeks of August, I helped to teach a course on Language Program Planning at Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The comment above was made by one of the students. It showed that one of our main points was sinking in: the goal of Bible translation is not a book, but changed lives.

Other comments showed that another main point was also being taken to heart: a church community was more likely to use a Bible translation if they were involved in the translation process from the beginning. One student who had helped translate a New Testament lamented that he had not had this knowledge before. Many more of his people would have been putting the New Testament to use, had he known this information before.



My co-teacher, Paul Federwitz, making a point in class

CHALLENGES WITH THE JESUS FILM

Part of the course I helped teach identified some helpful ways that the Bible could be communicated to people besides in the printed form. One of those ways that has been very helpful in many languages is the Jesus Film. It

uses text from the gospel of Luke, so it is based closely on the local translation. But in a few cases, the portrayal of events in the film can communicate wrong meaning. One of the students shared this experience: “While watching the Jesus Film, community members saw Jesus speaking boldly to high authorities like Caiaphas and Pilate, answering Pilate’s question about his kingship with, ‘It is as you say.’ Later, while being crucified, Jesus cried out. A Tsamakko man observed this and remarked, ‘That is what happens, you spoke so arguing to kings, and now you cry.’ In Tsamakko culture, when a leader or king speaks, everyone, even respected elders, must respond smoothly and deferentially. For this man, because Jesus’ actions contradicted their deeply rooted cultural protocol for addressing authority, viewers misunderstood his crucifixion as a direct consequence of disrespect rather than as a sacrifice.” So, we need to try as much as possible so that people can understand the better meaning.



BACK TO THE BIBLE SUMMIT 2026

The Back to the Bible Summit 2026 is a free virtual event from Lutheran Bible Translators designed to help pastors, educators, ministry leaders, and lay leaders take practical next steps toward deeper Scripture engagement. Join us September 30 from 10:00am–1:00pm CST for encouragement, insight, and tools you can use in your church, school, or ministry.

Register at <https://www.LBT.org/Summit>.

HITTING A WALL

Sometimes, you can look ahead and anticipate where a team will have a problem translating something. But sometimes, a problem is totally unexpected. I was looking at the Tsamakko team's translation of Daniel with them, and we came to Daniel 5:5: "Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote." (NIV). I was expecting that there might be problems with talking about a hand without a body, but I was totally surprised when the team said, "We don't have a word for wall in our language."

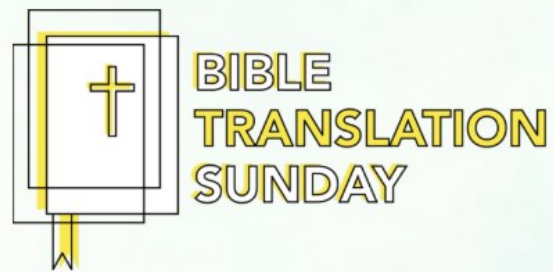
No word for a wall? Their houses are round, and are not divided into rooms. Their word for the wall in one of their houses describes something that is made by sticking wooden poles in the ground next to each other. They also have a word for a fence, but that is for something that is free-standing outside, and not part of a building.

Neither of those words worked well to describe a wall made out of stones. In the end, the team decided to try using a descriptive phrase: a house wall made by arranging stones. It is a bit awkward, but the best they could come up with at this time. As the Tsamakko people become more familiar with the style of houses built by outsiders,

they may eventually borrow the word for wall from the Amharic language, as they have done with other innovations.



Jim, with the Tsamakko translators and a consultant in training



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More information at:

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for the Kono & Mende teams (Sierra Leone) and the Tsamakko team (Ethiopia) as they continue to work on their translations of the Old Testament and revision of the New Testament.
- Pray for the online checking sessions scheduled with the Mende team (Sierra Leone) September 21-25 and October 26-30. Pray for good health, reliable electricity, good internet connection, wisdom, and guidance from the Holy Spirit for all involved.
- Pray for the online checking session scheduled with the Kono team (Sierra Leone) October 12-16. Pray for good health, reliable electricity, good internet connection, wisdom, and guidance from the Holy Spirit for all involved.
- Praise God for a safe trip to Ethiopia and Sierra Leone during August and September.

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