

## Payton, Bible Translation, Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2 Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Payton, Bible Translation, Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. George Payton's Bible translation course focuses on translating "unknown ideas" from biblical languages into modern ones. **Specific challenges addressed include transliterating proper nouns (names and places), requiring decisions about maintaining original sounds versus using phonetic approximations in the target language.** The lecture further explores translating units of measurement (weights, distances, and currency), emphasizing the importance of contextual understanding and cultural relevance to achieve effective communication rather than strict accuracy. **Strategies discussed include employing culturally familiar equivalents and using footnotes or glossaries for further explanation of less common terms.** Ultimately, the goal is to facilitate reader comprehension and engagement with the scripture.

**2. 10 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2 – Double click the icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introductory Series → Bible Translation).**



**Payton\_BT\_Session1  
8.mp3**

### 3. Bible Translation: Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2

#### Bible Translation Study Guide: Unknown Ideas (Part 2)

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the primary method used for translating biblical names, and why is this method typically employed?
2. Explain the challenge of transliterating names into languages that lack certain sounds present in the original language. Give an example of how a language adapts a sound.
3. How do languages like Swahili handle consonant clusters, and what adjustment do they make when borrowing words with these clusters?
4. Explain why, after transliteration, it is sometimes necessary to "build a bridge" by adding a corresponding word to a proper noun?
5. What does the personification in Matthew 11:21 (woe to you, Chorazin) represent? What additional translation step is needed?
6. Briefly describe the process for translating biblical weights and measures, and what is the general goal?
7. How do the Orma people measure lengths? Give an example from the text.
8. How would you translate a measure of liquid, like in John 2:6, into the Orma language?
9. What is a challenge when attempting to translate biblical money, and what is one potential solution that is mentioned in the text?
10. What role do footnotes and glossaries play when dealing with complex or unknown ideas like weights, measures, or money?

#### Answer Key

1. The primary method is transliteration, where the word is taken from the original language and expressed using the sounds available in the target language. This is done because these names are specific historical people and places, not concepts that can be translated.

2. Languages often lack certain sounds, leading to approximation using the closest available sounds. For example, the Orma language, lacking a "V" sound, substitutes it with an "F".
3. Swahili adds a vowel between consonants to break up consonant clusters. Borrowed words like "driver" become "day-ray-va" with added and altered vowels.
4. Transliterated proper nouns can be unclear without context, so "building a bridge" adds a corresponding word to indicate if it is a town, region, river, etc. For example, "Jordan River" or "town of Nazareth."
5. The personification in Matthew 11:21 represents the people living in those cities, and it uses metonymy, a part-whole representation. The translator needs to clarify the text by saying "you people from the town of Chorazin," etc.
6. The process is to identify the measurement, determine its equivalent amount, and use a term in the target language that provides a close approximation. The goal is not to be perfectly exact but to give a general mental picture.
7. The Orma people measure length with their arms, from their elbow to their fingertip, which they call "dun-dun." For example, they might say something is "three dun-dun" long.
8. A measure of liquid in the Orma language would be translated by the number of "debe" (jerry cans). For example, "four to six debe," because one measure is about two jerry cans.
9. The challenge with translating money is that currency values change over time. A potential solution is to use a day's wage to calculate the equivalent, as the idea of a day's labor tends to be more consistent than a specific monetary value.
10. Footnotes and glossaries provide additional context and explanations that do not need to be included in the main text. This allows for a concise translation while still providing access to necessary information for a clear understanding.

## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Answer the following essay questions, demonstrating your comprehension of the source material.

1. Discuss the challenges involved in translating unknown ideas, specifically focusing on biblical names and how different languages adapt or modify words from the original languages. Use examples from the lecture to illustrate your points.
2. Explain the concept of "building a bridge" in the context of biblical translation. Why is this necessary, and how does it contribute to the clarity and accuracy of the translation? Use an example like the one used in the text from Matthew 11:21.
3. Detail the process of translating biblical weights and measures into a target language, discussing the importance of approximating rather than providing exact measurements. Explain the examples used of a cubit, a bow shot, and a liquid measure and how they were translated for the Orma people.
4. Analyze the difficulties of translating biblical money into a target language and suggest different approaches to address this issue. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
5. Explain how paratextual information, such as footnotes and glossaries, contribute to the effective communication of unknown ideas in biblical translation. Why is this approach important in the overall translation process?

## **Glossary of Key Terms**

**Transliteration:** The process of representing letters or words from one language with corresponding letters or words from another language. It is often used with proper nouns to preserve the sounds.

**Consonant Clusters:** Groups of two or more consonants that appear together in a word without an intervening vowel, such as the "str" in "street."

**Personification:** A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstract concept is given human qualities or characteristics.

**Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.

**Cubit:** An ancient unit of length, typically based on the length of a person's arm from the elbow to the tip of the fingers.

**Denarius:** A Roman coin, often used as a reference to a day's wage in biblical times.

**Paratextual Information:** Additional information surrounding the main text, such as footnotes, glossaries, and maps, that help to provide context and understanding.

## 4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton\_BT\_\_EN\_Session18.pdf":

### Briefing Document: Bible Translation - Unknown Ideas (Part 2)

**Source:** Excerpts from "Payton\_BT\_\_EN\_Session18.pdf," Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2.

**Date:** 2025 (as noted in the document)

#### Overview:

This session focuses on the challenges of translating "unknown ideas" in the Bible—concepts, objects, or measurements that don't exist or aren't understood in the target language and culture. Dr. Payton delves into specific categories of these unknown ideas, focusing on names, weights, measures, and money, and provides practical strategies for handling them effectively in Bible translation. The overarching goal is clear communication and accessibility of the biblical text for the target audience.

#### Key Themes and Ideas:

##### 1. Transliteration of Biblical Names:

- **Concept:** Proper names of people and places in the Bible are generally *transliterated*, not translated. This involves finding the closest equivalent sounds in the target language.
  - **Process:** Translators must identify the sounds of the original language (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic) and find matching sounds in the target language. This process acknowledges the historical importance of these names.
  - **Challenges:** Languages have different phonetic inventories (sounds). Some sounds in one language may not exist in another. Examples include the "v" sound in Orma (replaced with "f") and consonant clusters in Swahili (solved by inserting vowels).
  - **Examples:** "Apostolos" becomes "apostles," "batidzo" becomes "baptized," "Yeshua" becomes "Yesu/Jesus," "Jerusalem" becomes "Yerusalemu."
1. "The most common way is because these are specific, exact names of people and or places; we usually don't translate them. We transliterate them..." "So, we try to use the sounds that are available that exist in the target language."

## 2. Building Bridges with Corresponding Words:

- **Concept:** After transliterating, additional clarifying words are added to provide context and make it clear what the proper noun represents.
  - **Purpose:** To address ambiguity; for example, is "Judah" a person or a tribe? Is "Galilee" a lake or a region?
  - **Process:** Add words like "town," "region," "river" to clarify nouns and remove ambiguity.
  - **Example:** "Nazareth" becomes "the town of Nazareth"; "Jordan" becomes "the Jordan River."
  - **Figurative Language:** Requires even more careful bridge-building.
  - **Concept:** The passage might be personification or metonymy (part-whole representation).
  - **Process:** Translate not only the name but the implicit information, clarifying the figure of speech being used.
  - **Example:** In Matthew 11:21, it's not cursing the cities themselves but the people in the cities; so the translation would read, "Woe to you people from the town of Chorazin, you people from the town of Bethsaida..."
1. "We need some kind of bridge to clue people into what kind of thing it is that this abstract noun represents." "Building a bridge, we say the town of Nazareth, Galilee region, or the region of Galilee, baptized by John in the Jordan River, or the River Jordan."

## 2. Translating Weights and Measures:

- **Concept:** Convert biblical units of measure into culturally relevant and understandable terms.
- **Process:** Identify the biblical term (cubit, shekel, fathom etc.)
- Determine the equivalent amount.
- Find an approximation in the target language that's easily understood.
- **Challenges:** Biblical units are often not standard today; conversion requires research.
- Measurements may not be linear (e.g., a "bow shot" or a "Sabbath day's walk").

- Local measures might be more useful (e.g., steps vs. yards).
- **Examples:** Cubit: Translated as "dun-dun" in Orma (the length of the forearm).
- Bow Shot: Translated as "50 taraku" (50 steps) in Orma.
- Measures of liquid: Translated into "debe" (jerry cans) in Orma.
- Fathoms: Translated into "people" in a fishing culture, based on the distance of an individual's wingspan.

1. "We have to look at what the measure is, what the amount that the Bible mentions, and what that is equivalent to in today's world." "We're trying to paint a mental picture. We're trying to give the idea that this is about how much liquid was in these water pots."

## 2. Translating Money:

- **Challenge:** The value of money fluctuates over time and across cultures.
  - **Process:** Determine the original value in biblical terms.
  - Find a known and culturally relevant reference in the target culture that can communicate a similar amount or idea.
  - **Strategies:** Use approximate values (e.g., 60 million dollars for 10,000 talents) where the exact number isn't crucial for the message.
  - Use a day's wage as a reference for amounts, as this is a culturally common concept.
  - Use culturally-understood references for small amounts, such as "ndururu" (a small coin) in Swahili.
1. "The challenge is how to depict this relative value using some kind of metric, some kind of measurement scale that should remain constant for a number of years." "Our goal is effective communication. And if there's a way to remove the stumbling blocks, then let's remove the stumbling blocks."

## 2. Paratextual Information (Footnotes and Glossaries):

- **Concept:** For particularly difficult or recurring unknown ideas (like "talent"), utilize paratextual information, such as footnotes and glossaries.
- **Purpose:** To provide more in-depth explanations without interrupting the flow of the text.



- **Process:** Briefly explain the term in a footnote, and provide a more detailed explanation and potentially references to other verses in the glossary.
  - **Benefits:** Enables the text to remain concise while still providing the necessary information for readers.
1. "Using the paratextual information that we talked about will really help the text itself to stay short and concise without overburdening it with too much extra explanation..."

### **Overarching Goal of Bible Translation:**

- **Effective Communication:** The main objective is to communicate the meaning of the text clearly and accurately to the target audience.
- **Removing Stumbling Blocks:** Identify potential misunderstandings and address them proactively.
- **Engagement with Scripture:** To make the scriptures accessible and engaging so that people will not give up when they don't understand the text.
- **Accuracy:** Ensuring clarity does not diminish the accuracy of the text; rather, it enhances it.

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Payton emphasizes the importance of finding creative and culturally appropriate solutions when translating "unknown ideas." The goal is not literal, word-for-word translation but to ensure the message of the Bible resonates with and is understood by the people for whom it is intended. He emphasizes the need to avoid burdening readers, and instead facilitate their engagement with Scripture.

## 5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 18, Unknown Ideas, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions About Translating Unknown Ideas in the Bible

1. **What are "unknown ideas" in the context of Bible translation, and why are they challenging to translate?**
2. "Unknown ideas" refer to concepts, objects, or cultural practices that exist in the biblical world (and its original languages of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) but do not have direct equivalents in the target language and culture of the translation. This can include things like specific names of people or places, weights and measures, and currency. These are challenging because they are unfamiliar and can lack clear semantic and cultural meaning for the target audience. Translators need to find ways to convey the intended meaning effectively while acknowledging these differences.
3. **How are biblical names typically handled in translation? Why is transliteration preferred over translation in most cases?**
4. Biblical names, representing specific people and places, are usually *transliterated* rather than translated. This means the sounds of the original name are approximated using the closest sounds available in the target language. Translating names would erase the historical and cultural link to the original context. Transliteration preserves this connection, even if the pronunciation might be altered to fit the target language's phonetic system.
5. **Can you give some examples of how sounds are adapted when transliterating biblical names across languages, and why do these changes happen?**
6. Yes. For example, the English word "apostle" comes from the Greek "apostolos". The Greek plural form is "apostoloi", but English adds an "s" at the end of the word for pluralization: "apostles". The Greek word "baptidzo" becomes "baptized" in English. Swahili adapts words differently. For example, it changes "driver" into "day-ray-va" by adding vowels to break up consonant clusters and by modifying the "r" sound. "Hospital" becomes "ho-spi-ta-lee" because all nouns in Swahili end in a vowel. These changes happen due to differences in phonetic inventories, rules for syllable structure and preferred sound combinations in the target languages. Sometimes there are specific sounds that simply do not exist.

7. **Why is it sometimes necessary to "build a bridge" by adding clarifying words to proper nouns in the Bible after transliterating them, and how does this process enhance comprehension?**
8. After transliterating names, a "bridge" (additional context) is often needed to clarify the significance of these names, especially when the word or concept has multiple meanings. For example, "Judah" could be the name of a person or a tribe; "Galilee" could be a lake or a region. By adding words like "the town of Nazareth" or "the River Jordan," the translator specifies the context for the reader so that there is no ambiguity about which meaning is intended. This additional information aids in comprehension without adding extra-biblical content.
9. **What is personification in the Bible, and how does it affect Bible translation? What is metonymy, and how does it relate to the process?**

Personification is a figure of speech where inanimate objects or abstract concepts are given human attributes. In the Bible, it's often used when referring to cities as if they can repent. This impacts translation because the translator must determine whether the text is literally referring to the physical place or to the people associated with that place. Metonymy involves a substitution of words (such as using "Chorazin" to refer to the people of Chorazin) and represents another level of complexity in translation. These linguistic devices require a careful interpretation to ensure an accurate representation of the message.

1. **How should weights, measures, and distances be translated, given that these systems are culturally specific?**
2. Translators must first identify what exactly is being measured, then determine the approximate amount within the biblical context, and then use equivalent terms and measurements that are familiar to the target audience. For weights, kilograms are often used because they are widely understood. For distances, if the target culture uses kilometers, that would be a straightforward option; however, if the target audience is unfamiliar with kilometers, the translator might consider something based on walking or some other common method of travel (such as "a day's walk"). If the target audience still would not understand, other approaches may need to be considered.

3. **What are some strategies for translating units of currency or value in the Bible, considering that currencies change in value over time?**
4. Given that currency changes over time, translators should not use direct currency conversions. Instead, they might use culturally relevant equivalents that represent the *relative* value, such as a day's wage. For small amounts, they could use the smallest unit of currency known in the target culture. For larger amounts, a reference to an activity or something tangible that represents value can be used, or an approximate value in modern currency (like millions of dollars) might be included (particularly for illustrative contexts such as parables). The goal is not to achieve a mathematically accurate conversion, but to help readers understand if something represents a small, medium, or large sum of money.
5. **What role does "paratextual" information play in translating unknown ideas, and why is it useful?**
6. Paratextual information (such as footnotes, glossaries, and endnotes) provides essential context that cannot be easily integrated directly into the translation. It offers extra explanations about concepts such as talents and cubits, or even the meaning of certain figures of speech. This information helps readers understand terms that are culturally or historically removed from them without overburdening the main text or interrupting the flow of reading. By using paratextual information, translators can ensure that the main text remains concise while providing a way for interested readers to delve into more background information.