Introduction: Further Resources

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# How Translations Emend the Text

Here are some examples of the kind of procedures involved, taken from NRSV of Proverbs. Transliterations from Hebrew are approximate, to make it as uncomplicated as possible.

1:19 Hebrew *the ways* = ’*orhot* (consonants *’rht*)
Greek *the end* implies Hebrew *’aharit* (consonants *’hrt*)

2:18 Hebrew *her house* = *betah* (consonants *bth*)
NRSV suggests *her way* = Hebrew *netibah* (consonants *ntbh*)

3:24 Hebrew *you lie down* = *tishkab* (consonants *tshkb*)
Greek *you sit down* implies *tesheb* (consonants *tshb*)

5:7 Hebrew *my children* = *banim* (there’s actually no *my*) Greek *my child* = *bni*

Note that the verbs that follow also have to be changed from plural to singular

6:2 Hebrew *by the words of your mouth* comes twice in the line. This raises the question whether one of these is an accident (same issue at 10:10 repeating 10:8)
Greek has *by the utterance of your lips* in the first half, which might be the original Hebrew before this accident.

6:5 Hebrew *from the hand* = *miyyad* (consonants *myd*)
Greek *from the hunter* = *missayyad* (consonants *msyd*)

6:24 Hebrew *the evil woman* = *me’ eshet ra‘*
Greek *the wife of another* = *me’ eshet rea’*

6:26 Hebrew *because of a harlot* = *be’ad ’ishshah zonah*
(consonants *b’d ’shh zwnh*)
Greek *a prostitute’s fee* = *biqqeshah zonah*
(consonants *bqshh zwnh*)

7:22 Hebrew *or like the stocks for the correction of a fool* (cf. KJV). The line does not fit the context very well.

*Stocks* = *‘ekes* comes only here and the meaning is a guess, but KJV assumes the root is something to do with tying legs and hindering movement
Greek suggests a verb *‘akos* = *bounding*

Fool = *‘ewil* (consonants *‘wl*) Greek *stag* = *‘ayyal* (consonants *‘yl*)

11:16 Greek has two extra half-lines. The first of them ends very like v. 16b so maybe the Hebrew scribe’s eye jumped and missed the two half-lines.

11:28 Hebrew *fall* = *yippol*
Greek *wither* = *yibbol*

# Which Is the Best Translation of the Old Testament?

All translations are more or less accurate, but they have different approaches to translation. It’s a good idea to use more than one translation to make sure you don’t accidentally rely on an idiosyncrasy in a translation’s rendering of a particular verse. Here are some comments on some translations.

1. In English, the oldest translation tradition goes back to the King James Version (KJV), usually known in Britain as the Authorized Version (AV) because it was authorized for reading in church. In the nineteenth century it was produced in a Revised Version (RV), whose American edition is the American Standard Version (ASV). It was revised again as the Revised Standard Version (RSV), and revised again as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Both the RSV and the NRSV were more willing than previous versions to rework the Hebrew text where they thought it had become corrupted. The NRSV uses gender-inclusive language: when the Hebrew uses words that had traditionally been translated “man” or “men” but was referring to both men and women, the NRSV uses words such as “people” or “humanity.” In contrast to the NRSV’s policies, the New KJV simply updated the KJV language, while the New American Standard Version similarly simply updated the ASV. This family of translations are fairly “word-for-word,” so they get you as near as you can get to the way the Hebrew text works.
2. The New International Version (NIV) was made from scratch, initially in the 1970s. It had a more conservative policy over revising the Hebrew Text than RSV and NRSV. It spawned two gender-inclusive translations, but these have been discontinued; another is on the way. The NET Bible is an internet-based translation with extensive notes on the text. The Common English Bible (CEB) is another version that started from scratch. Like the NRSV it is gender-inclusive and like the NRSV it is more willing to revise the Hebrew text when it thinks the text had become corrupted.
3. Over against the NRSV, the CEB made a fresh start in seeking to produce a new translation in contemporary English. In doing so, it was more willing to paraphrase. The result is that it is especially good for reading whole chapters or stories. Eugene Petersen’s one-person version *The Message* goes much further in that direction.

Among the scores of other translations, The Jerusalem Bible (JB) and its revised edition The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) have an important distinctive feature: they use the name Yahweh. Most English translations of the OT often refer to “the LORD”—that is, all the letters of the word are capitals, though the later letters are in smaller capitals. They also sometimes refer to “GOD”—again, the first letter is a large capital, the others smaller capitals. In both cases, the Hebrew word is not the Hebrew word for Lord (*’adonay*) or for God (*’elohim*). It is the actual name of God—the traditional English version of this was Jehovah, but the likely proper form of it is Yahweh. The background to the practice of replacing God’s name by these other words is as follows. In late OT times, many Jews became hesitant about using the name Yahweh. There may have been two reasons: (1) They didn’t want to take Yahweh’s name in vain—better not to take it at all. (2) They didn’t want to give the impression that the God of whom the OT spoke was merely a local Jewish God with an odd name. It was *the* God, the Lord of all the earth.

So when people reading the lesson in the synagogue came to the name Yahweh, they substituted the expression *’adonay* (“the Lord”). That raised a problem for passages where the Hebrew said “the Lord Yahweh”, because they would end up with the “the Lord LORD”, which would be odd. So there they substituted the word for God—hence the phrase “the Lord GOD”, especially in Ezekiel. When the Bible was translated into Greek, then into Latin, then into modern languages, this custom was usually continued; these translations also used their languages’ word for “the Lord” or “God” instead of including the name Yahweh. But putting these words in capitals as “the LORD” or “GOD” means you can tell it’s the name Yahweh.

As we have noted in #115, when copyists of Scripture came to the name of God, they then started putting the vowels of he words for “Lord” or God,” *’adonay* or *’elohim* into the consonants *yhwh,* to remind people to use the substitute words “Lord” or “God.” It is this substitution that produces the name Jehovah, which is a non-word: it comprises the consonants of *yhwh* and the vowels of *‘adonay*. You might have expected this non-word to be Yahowah. Why does it come out as Jehovah? What follows is fiendishly complicated, so feel free to skip it.

* The English version of the name Yahweh comes via the Greek via the Latin. Greek and Latin don’t have the letter “y” so “y” got changed to “i” and then to “j”. This also happened to other names such as Jeremiah or Joshua or Jesus, which really begin with a “y” (thus Jesus’ name was actually Yeshua‘).
* The word for lord (*’adonay*) begins with “a” because it follows the Hebrew letter *aleph*, which is a guttural letter—gutturals like to be followed by “a”. The form *yehovah* can have the more regular shape because it begins with “y”, which is not a guttural.
* Either “w” or “v” can represent the Hebrew letter called *waw* or *vav*—it is just a different way of pronouncing the same letter. “W” is the traditional western/northern European (Ashkenazi) pronunciation, “v” the usual southern European/Israeli (Sephardi) pronunciation. It would thus be just as logical to say “Yahveh” as “Yahweh”, and I think that is what a modern Israeli would say.

# Large Numbers in the Old Testament

Largely based on R. W. Klein, “How Many in a Thousand?” in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. P Graham and others), pp. 270-82

In 2 Chronicles 13, a Judean army of 400,000 attacks an Ephraimite army of 800,000 and kills 500,000 men. In 2 Chronicles 14, a Judean army of 580,000 fight an Ethiopian army of 1,000,000. This is but one example of such numbers. They seem too large.

1. 500,000 is about the number of deaths in the whole Civil War or the number of American deaths in World War II.
2. On the usual estimates, the total size of the armies is greater than the actual population of Israel at any time in the OT period.
3. The records of major ancient powers such as the Assyrians suggest that armies were one tenth of the size of the ones Chronicles speaks of.

Similar questions are raised by the numbers of Israelites said to be involved in the exodus—600,000 men, implying over 2 million people (e.g., Exod 12:37; Num 1). Marching as a column four abreast, the last people would not have left the Red Sea when the first people reached Sinai, and the last people would not have left Sinai when the first people reached the edge of the Promised Land.

What is going on here?

1. The word for a thousand, *eleph*, can also mean a company of men or a family (e.g., Joshua 22:21; Judges 6:15). So 600,000 might “mean” 600 families. This figure for the exodus would fit hints elsewhere (e.g., the Israelites needed only two midwives: Exod 1).
2. But elsewhere, e.g. in Numbers and Chronicles, *eleph* alternates with words for hundred or with more specific numbers, or applies to animals or chariots. So even if at an earlier stage in the development of the text the word might have had this meaning, the authors of the biblical books did not understand it that way. They meant the figures we have.
3. The related word *alluph* means a commander or warrior, so *eleph* might be a textual misreading for *alluph*. The armies in 2 Chronicles 13 might thus go down to 400 and 800, with 500 casualties. This suggestion raises the same difficulties about the fact that the biblical authors themselves seem not to have understood the words that way.
4. The numbers might be there to make a theological point. To speak of 600,000 at the exodus might be a way of saying “It is as if all succeeding generations were there—we were all involved in the exodus”. To say that Judah repelled an invading army of a million (2 Chr 14:8) gives greater glory to God. But this is compromised by the fact that Judah’s own army is said to be over half a million.
5. More likely the numbers are simply hyperbolic. They are a vivid way of saying “This was a huge people”, “This was a huge battle”.

# Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament

OT believers knew that when you died, your body became lifeless and incapable of action or movement. It was put into the family tomb, joining the physical remains of earlier members of your family, and was left there in darkness. Or you were put in a communal grave pit. They pictured what happened to the non-physical part of you along similar lines. Your “self” or “personality” - “soul” is a rather misleading word - was also lifeless and unable to do anything. It also joined other lifeless personalities in a non-physical equivalent of the grave, Sheol, or the Pit. You were stuck there. See, e.g., Psalms 30; 88.

Existence after death was not painful but it was not much fun; it was rather boring, because you were too dead to do worthwhile things such as praise God. But OT believers were basically accepting of death. If you are in danger of dying before your time, this is not so. Then (as in the Psalms) you rail against the possibility of death. But ideally you live your three score years and ten and go to be with your family, full of years.

Books such as Psalms also assume that you may not wait till the end of your life to experience “death.” They do not distinguish life and death as sharply as we do. People saw, or felt, experiences such as illness, depression, separation from God, oppression, and loneliness as a loss of fullness of life - it was as if death had got hold of them while the experience lasted. The idea is a bit like John’s understanding of “eternal life” beginning now as fullness of life, while “eternal death” begins now as people fail to experience fullness of life in Christ.

It is striking that Israelites held this theology when many other peoples in the ancient world did believe in a more positive afterlife, at least for some people (that is the point of the pyramids). It is not that God had not yet revealed the idea of afterlife: Israelites would be familiar with the idea. It was simply that God had revealed to them the truth, which was that there was no positive afterlife. They were not wrong, they were right, in their understanding of what would happen to them after death, because this was human beings’ destiny before Christ’s death and resurrection. Only then could Israelite believers start to look forward to resurrection with certainty (cf. Matt 27:52; 1 Peter 4:6). So it is a strength, not a weakness, that there are no passages in the OT that speak of a positive life after death, except for the limited resurrection in Daniel 12. Apart from there, the OT keeps its nerve and faces facts.

The truth and importance of the Sheol doctrine:

* there are no grounds for resurrection hope before Christ came
* no one else is Lord of the realm of death
* this life deserves to be taken seriously
* deathly is how it feels
* deathly is how it is when we are cut off from God
* while Sheol is not now the end for believers, it is the place where we rest until resurrection day

# Death and Afterlife in the New Testament

The NT takes a similar view to the OT as it implies that after we die our experience is rather like sleep, but on the basis of Christ’s resurrection it can add that we will eventually awake to be raised and judged together at the End (e.g., John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelations 20:11-15). In the meantime, we are safe and secure with Jesus.

There are two NT passages that are difficult to fit with these other passages:

*The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).* But in general it would be unwise to base a doctrine on the detail of a parable. Further, here Jesus is picking up a well-known folktale (known from Egypt and from Jewish sources). The point Jesus wants to make is that there will be eternal life (contrary to Sadducean belief), and he uses the folktale as a way of making the point that one needs to take that fact into account in the way one lives one’s life. But being in Abraham’s bosom is a similar phrase to the idea of being gathered to join one’s ancestors, and could imply that Sheol is divided into a section for believers who are safe and on their way to resurrection, and a section for unbelievers who are on their way to judgment. That would fit with the idea that we go to be with Christ when we die.

*“Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).* “Paradise” is a term for the Garden of Eden and then thus for a future earthly paradise and for heaven. But was Jesus really going to heaven on Good Friday? Surely he was on his way to preach in Sheol (1 Peter 4:6)? It is on Easter Day that he is ascending to his Father (John 20:17). Does Jesus mean “I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise”? Or does “today” refer to the time of salvation that now dawns (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7 - 4:10; cf. the “from now on” of Luke 22:69? Today Jesus is opening the gates of Sheol so that people can leave for heaven. Does Jesus mean that the man is “in Christ” and therefore secure, “with Christ” (cf. Philippians 1:23) and in effect in heaven, as we are raised to new life in Christ (e.g., Ephesians 2:5-6) even though not yet raised to bodily resurrection life?

# Satan in the Old Testament

That great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him (Rev 12:9)

Revelation here puts together several different OT figures, but in order to understand passages such as Genesis 3, Job 1, and Isaiah 14/Ezekiel 28, you need to keep them apart initially.

1. *The great dragon* in the OT, the sea monster, is a personal embodiment of dynamic power asserted against God. It is the OT entity with the nearest personality profile to Satan. In the OT its name is Leviathan (e.g., Job 3:8; Isa 27:1) or Rahab (e.g., Job 9:13; 26:12)—note that in Hebrew this name is spelt differently (*rāhab*)from that of the Rahab who kept a bar in Jericho (*rākhāb*). This power was defeated by God before creation and again at the Red Sea, and is due to be finally defeated at the End.
2. *The ancient serpent* also recalls Leviathan (cf. Isa 27:1) but more specifically it recalls the snake in Genesis 3. In Genesis, however, the snake is “one of the animals Yahweh made”, not a supernatural being.
3. *Satan* in the OT is not a name. The Hebrew word *satan* usually denotes a human “adversary” (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:14, 23, 25). It can specifically refer to an adversary in court, an accuser (Ps 109:6). In four passages *satan* denotes a supernatural adversary:
4. Yhwh’s angel acting as “an adversary” to Balaam (Num 22:22, 32).
5. one of the sons of God acting as “the adversary” in relation to Job, accusing him (Job 1—2)
6. a member of the court in heaven acting as “the adversary” who condemns the high priest Joshua because he is tainted by exile (Zech 3)
7. “An adversary” who tempts David into taking a census (1 Chr 21:1)—apparently on Yahweh’s behalf (cf. 2 Sam 24:1).

We do not necessarily need to assume that this is the same person each time. There could be several supernatural beings who acted like this.

1. *The Devil* does not appear in the OT. But in the standard Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek word *diabolos* (devil) translates *satan* in Job 1—2, Zechariah 3, and 1 Chronicles 21. The Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach 2:24 (in the Apocrypha) also says that it was through the envy of *ho diabolos* that death entered the world—in other words, it sees the Devil’s activity in Genesis 3.
2. The translations in the LXX and the passage in Wisdom show how Jewish interest in a power of evil over against God and human beings was developing after OT times. The NT in its references to *ho diabolos* takes this theological development for granted, and Revelation 12 does the same in bringing together three separate figures from the OT.
3. Theologically we may then say that we can see the activity of Satan behind the sea monster, the adversary/ies, and the snake. But in understanding what God was saying to people in these passages, it is important to avoid reading this into them. We will then get confused about the passages and miss the point they are making in themselves, and thus miss what God wants to teach us through them.

# Satan’s Fall

The only passage where the Bible tells us about heavenly beings falling into sin is Genesis 6:1—3. That passage comes as the climax of the story of wrongdoing that runs through Genesis 3—6 (and is taken further in Gen 9—11). Wrongdoing involves first human disobedience to God (Gen 3), then the sin of human violence to other human beings (Gen 4), then heavenly beings crossing the boundary that divides them from human beings (Gen 6). This leads to the conclusion that the world is devastatingly spoiled. Genesis 6:1-3 is the nearest thing to an OT account of the fall of Satan.

The OT does not discuss how the dynamic power represented in the sea monster came to be in opposition to God. Apparently it just always was. Nor does it tell us how the Adversary got his job or whether he got too enthusiastic about it.

There are a number of Canaanite and Mesopotamian stories that tell of junior gods rebelling against senior gods and either winning or losing (see e.g., *When on High*, a Babylonian creation story). The OT does not have any such story.

Because readers have not been satisfied with not knowing where evil came from, they have had to hit the Bible on the head to make it tell them the answer. The chief passages that have been victims of this treatment are Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Theologians such as Tertullian and Origen in the second century AD were the first to take these passages as accounts of the fall of Satan (see e.g., Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2:10; Origen, *De Principiis* 1:5). This is where the word “Lucifer” comes from, in the KJV. This interpretation of Isaiah and Ezekiel then makes its way into Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. What Isaiah and Ezekiel were doing is taking those Canaanite and Mesopotamian stories and use them as parables of the arrogance and downfall of the kings of Babylon and Tyre. The passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel are thus not about events in heaven but events on earth. What these Christian theologians did was go back to the stories’ Canaanite and Mesopotamian meaning.

There are two NT passages that refer to the fall of Satan, Revelation 12:9 itself and Luke 10:18. These refer not to a fall of Satan from grace before creation but to a fall of Satan from power that is brought about through the work of Christ. They invite us to rejoice in the fact that Satan has fallen from power.

# The Soul

“Soul” in the English Bible usually represents Hebrew *nephesh* or Greek *psuche*. These words can also be translated “person” or “life.”

(a) Soul as the self separable from but not independent of the body

In scripture, a human person comprises a visible, physical entity and an invisible entity, both indispensable to the person as a whole. Whereas the English word “soul” often denotes the inner person conceived of as independent of the body, this is not really a scriptural usage. Scripture does speak of our soul going down to Sheol/Hades when our body is put in the tomb (e.g., Pss 89:48; 94:17; Acts 2:27). John sees the martyrs’ souls under the altar (Rev 6:9; cf. 20:4). Nevertheless, scripture is inclined to see the soul as more intrinsically connected with the body than Western thinking traditionally does.

(b) Soul as the innermost being of the whole person

In English “soul” can mean the inner being or heart or deeply felt emotions (“she bared her soul,” “soul music,” “soul food”). The word *nephesh* can thus have a similar meaning to *leb* (“heart”). The first occurrences of the word in scripture (Gen 34:3, 8) relate how Shechem’s soul was drawn to Dinah – i.e., he fell in love with her (cf. Song 1:7; 3:1-4). God’s soul hates Israel’s festivals (Isa 1:14; cf. Ps 11:5). We are to seek, love, serve, obey, and turn to God with soul as well as heart and might (e.g., Deut 4:29; 6:5; 10:12; 11:13; 30:2, 10; Matt 22:37). We are to put God’s words in our heart and soul (Deut 11:18). It is in our hearts and souls that we acknowledge what God has done (Josh 23:14). Hannah pours out her soul before God (1 Sam 1:15; cf. Ps 42:4).

(c) Soul as the whole person

In English “soul” can mean person or self (“the ship went down with all souls”). So in the classic description of human origins in Genesis 2, God makes a man from dirt and breathes living breath into him so that he becomes “a living soul/person” (NRSV “living being”). The soul or person thus comprises physical body plus divine breath. Abner says “As your soul lives…” (1 Sam 17:55; cf. 2 Sam 11:11); NRSV elsewhere translates the same phrase “as you yourself live” (1 Sam 20:3; 25:26). Our whole being waits for God (Ps 33:20) or boasts in God (Ps 34:2) or listens for God to promise our deliverance (Ps 35:3) or rejoices in God (35:9; Luke 1:46) or longs and thirsts for God (e.g., Ps 42:1, 2) or takes refuge in God (Ps 57:1) or obeys God (Ps 119:129, 167) or is bowed down (Ps 57:6) or waits (Pss 62:1, 5; 130:5, 6) or feasts (Ps 63:5) or clings (Ps 63:8) or blesses (e.g., Ps 103:1-2) or trembles (Isa 15:4) or finds rest (Ps 116:7; Jer 6:16; Matt 11:29) or sins (Mic 6:7) or is full of troubles (Ps 88:3). The idea of the soul as thirsty or feasting may link with the fact that *nephesh* sometimes means appetite or gullet or desire (e.g., Eccl 6:7, 9).

(d) Soul as the life of the person

In the OT *nephesh* sometimes denotes “life,” a meaning harder to parallel for “soul” in English. When Rachel was dying, “her soul was departing” (Gen 35:18). Jonathan loved David as he loved his own soul (1 Sam 18:1, 3) – i.e., life (20:17, where NRSV has “life”; cf. 1 Kgs 1:29; 17:21-22). Job’s soul is poured out within him (literally, “upon him”) – his life is running out (Job 30:16). God’s teaching renews life (Ps 19:7). God gives us our lives (Jer 38:16), delivers our lives (e.g., Pss 22:20; 33:19; 56:13; 71:23; 74:19) or restores our lives (Ps 23:3 – see margin).