



So, you're a missionary. You have fulfilled your God given dream. After many years of study and deputation you are now on the field and ready to go. You have even completed language training. You learned to speak, read, and write your new language. That was when you made a *startling* discovery. The Bible they have in their language is far from a good one. When you preach, you find yourself having to correct verses, because they were incorrectly translated. You may find that verses are missing in various places. It makes teaching difficult. *You may not realize this, but when you correct the current Bible in their language, you have become a Bible translator.*

On the other hand, you may be among a people group who does not have any Bible at all. Every time you tell them what God has said, you have to put the Bible's words into their language. When you do that, you have become a translator by necessity. The people cannot get God's words in their language unless you give the words to them. To do *that* you must *translate*.

In either case, you are faced with the reality that there is a need for translation work. In the first case, the current Bible needs to be updated and corrected to true accuracy or there may be a need for a new translation. In the second case, there is no choice. An entire Bible must be translated. You are face to face with the stark reality that, in both cases, the people need a true and accurate translation of God's word. You see the need and you are concerned.

Then you have another heart shaking revelation. It is YOU who sees the need. As far as you know, there is *no one else* who sees the need like you do. So suddenly, you *know* that God wants *you* to do *something* about it! But, what can you do? You're not a translator, right? You've not been trained, have you? You don't have the time, do you? You have to pray, plan, study, preach, teach, evangelize, and train. Yes, you are busy. And, no, you are not trained in Bible translation. However, if you are a missionary, it is highly likely you are in one of the two circumstances described above. If so, you cannot avoid becoming a translator on some level. Those who have a poorly translated Bible need to know what God has really said. It may only be in teaching, but you have to translate portions of the true word of God into their language. If you are ministering to a people who does not have a Bible at all, *everything* you tell them from God's mouth must be translated.

So, you need to do something to make the situation better. How are you to go about it? What steps do you need to take? Which step is first? In this article, we hope to answer these questions and to give you encouragement and direction.

Step One: Assess the Need

The first thing you need to thoroughly understand is the need. You may have already seen some problems with the translation you have been using, but you need to know how extensive the problem is. You should find out about all the translations available in the national language and assess their quality.

Make a list of all the available translations in your ministry language. A good place to learn what translations are available is the internet. A simple search for “Bible translations in the ---- language” could reveal much. Another place to look is the *Ethnologue* at www.ethnologue.com. The *Ethnologue* is the most complete source of information available about the world’s languages. Another source of information is the Bible Society of the country where you are. Many countries have a Bible Society that is connected with the United Bible Societies headquartered in England. Although the United Bible Societies is the organization that issues the Critical Greek New Testament, it is still a good source of information on available Bible translations. Also, do not overlook the local library if any are available on your field. Other pastors can also show you the translations with which they are familiar.

Research the origin, history, and availability of these translations. Who published the translation? When was it published? Who were the translators? Is there any connection between the translators and the United Bible Societies? Were the translators connected with any heretical group? Are the translations in print? Are any of them in digital format? If you can get copies of the translations, the introduction or preface will often give you all the information you need on their history and origin. You may be able to get this information from the internet or the local Bible Society.

Were the New Testaments of these translations from the Critical Greek Text or the Textus Receptus? Check the translations to determine their faithfulness and accuracy to the Hebrew Masoretic OT Text and Received Greek Text of the NT. This can easily be done by comparing the translations with the King James Version, which is the best representative of the Hebrew and Greek texts. Most Bible translations being done these days around the world are based on the United Bible Societies’ Critical Greek Text or the Nestle-Aland Text (which is currently identical). Therefore, there are similar errors made in nearly all the translations. A large fairly complete check-list is available on the Global Bible Translators’ web site at:

https://www.bpsglobal.org/uploads/2/9/3/0/29302395/new_testament_check_list_-_modified.pdf

If you find a translation that was based on the Textus Receptus, you will have to evaluate its worth. Simply because a translation was based on the Textus Receptus does not automatically make it a good translation. The translation may have many translation errors. It may be so old and the national language has changed so much that the translation can no longer be used effectively. The age of the language would have made the 1611 King James Version unusable if it had not gone through a revision in 1769 to extensively update the spelling. In China, the Global Bible Translators’ translation team made the determination not to revise the Peking Version (which was largely based on the TR). They determined that that translation had so many problems it would be easier to make a new translation.

List any other difficulties you have with your national translation. There may be problems in the translation you are using that are not related to the Critical Text. In China, the translators considered the style of writing in the Peking Version to be out of sync with how the general public uses their language. In Togo the current version in the Ewe language uses a word for *baptism* that specifically means *sprinkling*. That makes it hard for a Baptist to use it.

After you have researched these things, you will have an answer for anyone who asks you why a new translation is needed. You will be the resident expert on such matters.

Step Two: Prayer and Commitment

Every spiritual accomplishment begins with prayer. This circumstance is no exception. Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). You should pray that God would raise up translators. Ask God to raise up nationals from among those to whom you are ministering to be translators. We have seen this happen around the world: in Asia, in Africa, and in South America. God has been preparing and using nationals all over the world for many years. God is able to do the same where you are.

However, your prayers should not only center on asking God to raise up *someone else* to do the job. You need to ask God what He wants *you* to do. God has called you to be a missionary in this place. That obviously means you must give them “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). How can you do that when they do not have a Bible, or they have an inadequate Bible? Someday in the future you will have to leave them and they will never see you again. If you have not provided a true and accurate Bible to the people, how can you follow Paul’s example in Acts 20:32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace?” As a missionary, you look at your field and think about what you must do to fulfill the ministry there. When you do that, remember “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Nevertheless, you’re already busy enough, right? Besides, you haven’t been trained in translation techniques. Very few missionaries have had formal training in translation work. Maybe you haven’t thought about it, but when you studied the national language, you started by learning how the words of your mother tongue translate into that language. So, could it be that you *have* had *some* training in translation work? You speak at least two languages now. So, you are familiar with the differences between languages. Therefore, you have already learned a lot of what you need to know.

There are many ways to be involved in a translation project. Very possibly, you will be the leader of such a project, but you do not necessarily have to be a translator. The leader of the Chinese team is not very involved in actual translating. He provides the meeting schedule, the place to meet, translation advice, theological advice, and discusses special translation problems with the team. On the other hand, the team leader in Togo, West Africa, is one of the chief translators. The team leader in Paraguay speaks Spanish, but he is not yet fully fluent in the tribal target language of the translation, Guaraní. He motivates and guides the team. He has made the Bible translation project a part of his Bible Institute program. So even if you are not a translator there are ways to lead a team. Here are some ways you can lead a team.

1. You can train your people on issues about the Bible text.
2. You can initiate the project
3. You can guide the project and keep it on track
4. You can recruit translators
5. You can organize the team
6. You can work with Global Bible Translators to get them motivated and trained, and to check their accuracy.
7. You can help the translators with resources they need.

It may be, as you pray for laborers and for guidance, that God will lay it on your heart to be directly involved in starting and leading the necessary translation project. You may have no idea what the next step is or how to recruit a team or how to organize them or anything about how to proceed. At this point, that doesn’t matter. Trust God. *What is important, at this stage of the game, is that you fully commit yourself to the task as a calling from God.* The task of translating the Bible will take years to finish. You must have a conviction in your heart that God wants you to help make it happen and be fully committed to the task. This is necessary, if you are to remain faithful and finish it. But, you do not have to do it alone. God will raise up the translators and Global Bible Translators is ready to step in and help you. “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he” (Prov. 16:20).

Step Three: Survey the Situation

The very next thing you must do is gather some vital information. You need to look at the situation around you and determine what resources and difficulties are there. Gain a thorough understanding of your circumstances as they relate to a possible new Bible translation project.

First, look closely at the surrounding church situation. The first church to examine is your own. You, of course, are very familiar with the size and membership of the church you have started. Are there members of your church who are concerned about problems they see in the Bible they use? Are there members who are familiar with the problematic issues between the Critical Text and the Textus Receptus? Are there members of your church who you feel would be capable of translating the Bible? Have you started a Bible school with students who are capable?

Are there other churches of like faith and practice within driving distance? Are any of these churches and their pastors concerned with the condition of the local language Bible? The ideal situation for a translation project is to have multiple churches involved. The more churches involved, the more likely the nationals will accept the new translation. However, this is not always possible. Sometimes the project must begin small and grow slowly. If this is the case, do not let it discourage you from starting a new project.

Are there other missionaries in the country who share your concerns? Do these missionaries also share your conviction that the Textus Receptus is the correct New Testament Greek text? The knowledge gained in this survey will be the basis of your efforts to build a support base for the translation project. Do not limit yourself to listing churches or missionaries of your own denomination only. There may be some of other denominations who will agree with your goals and be in favor of a translation project. The primary agreement needs to be on the textual basis of the translation, the Textus Receptus.

Step Four: Build a foundation

Begin by educating your church about the need. Teach them about the issues of the Bible text. If you have a Bible institute, this is especially important knowledge for Bible students to have. Teach your people what your concerns about the Bible translation are and tell them you believe God wants you to help fix these problems. Look closely at your people. Are any of them concerned about the national Bible translation? Are any of them capable of helping with a translation project?

When educating your people, especially in a Bible institute, it may be helpful to get Dr. Steve Combs' book, *A Practical Theology of Bible Translating*. It teaches the biblical basis for Bible translating, basic biblical principles of translating, how those principles apply to the practice of translating and the history of the correct Bible text, and gives answers to many of the textual issues that trouble Bible students.

Continue by approaching the Pastors and missionaries you identified in step four. Ask them about their thoughts concerning the local language Bible. Share with them your concerns and why you have them. Ask them if they would be supportive of a Bible translation project. You are not trying to raise financial support with this. You are seeking for moral and prayer support. You want the pastors and missionaries to get behind a translation project, as much as possible. Ask if they would be willing to attend a Bible translation conference by Global Bible Translators.

It is possible that you will gain little support from other churches and missionaries. You must be ready for this. It is an intimidating and scary prospect, but you may have to proceed without their help. This will be a time when your commitment and certainty that God has called you to translation work will be severely tested. I trust that, as a missionary, you are committed to doing God's will no matter who helps you and who rejects you. As a missionary you are willing to carry on God's work in spite of no help, recognition, or thanks. You know that you labor only for the glory of God and expect a rich reward from Him, who is the great Physician, the great Encourager, the great Healer, and the Giver of great power, strength, and success. If this is the circumstance you find yourself in, *do not give up*. Martin Luther began his great German translation alone. Later God gave him the help of others. Adoniram Judson labored in translation work alone for many years. Many others have

done so. Do not give up. Choose a couple of translation helpers from your church, contact Global Bible Translators, and proceed.

Step Five: Begin to Identify a Potential Team

Start making a list of potential translation team members. Look for individuals who love God and are seeking to live an obedient Christian life. This is very important. Look for those who are fluent in the target language, preferably those who speak it as their mother tongue. Seek individuals who are proficient in the spelling and grammar of that language. Find people who have knowledge and experience reading various types of literature in the target language. In addition to this, look for those individuals who are proficient in Greek and/or in a major language that has a good Textus Receptus based translation, such as English, Spanish, or French. This is a tall order, but God is a great God who provides. Keep these people in mind and invite them later when you have a Bible Translation Conference held by Global Bible Translators.

Translation teams do not have to be large. The King James Version translation committee consisted of forty-seven individuals, but historically it seems that few projects have had a team that large. Teams around the world are not usually large. The Global Bible Translators' team in Chinese started with six individuals and have added three or four more over time. The team in Togo had fifteen workers. The team in Paraguay had more, but they have made the project a part of their Bible institute. The team that translated the first Isan New Testament for the Isan people of Northeast Thailand had two and sometimes a third person, consisting of the missionary and two translation helpers. However, the more you have, the better the translation can be.

Step Six: Call on Global Bible Translators

Global Bible Translators can send an individual or a team to the field to assist you in making these assessments and preparations. We can travel to the field, talk to pastors and missionaries, preach in the churches, talk about the need and the call and the responsibility to translate, and help with recruiting a team.

Global Bible Translators can hold an initial translation conference. The purpose of the conference is to inform churches and individuals about the issues of the Bible text, challenge them with the need for Bible translating, give basic translation training, and challenge them to make a commitment to help. This alone can result in recruiting an entire team and starting a project.

GBT continues to help throughout the translation process. After the conference, we will give you detailed guidance in organizing the team and creating a plan of translation. We will encourage you to begin with John and Romans. When you have translated a rough draft of John and Romans, we will send a team to help you begin the process of checking and correcting the translation toward the status of "first draft." At the same time, we will give further training. When the first draft of John and Romans is complete, we will raise funds and arrange for printing and shipping of an agreed upon quantity. The printing may take place in the USA, or it may take place in the country or near the country where the booklets will be used. We will continue together from there in the translation process toward a complete New Testament and beyond.

Conclusion

Your Bible situation and problem is one of several thousand just like it. There are about 7,000 languages on earth. Nearly 3,000 languages do not have any published Scripture. Many hundreds, even thousands have inadequate or poorly translated Bibles. Our God is a wise and mighty God, and He is using many of these translations in spite of their shortcomings. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus Christ has declared, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). It is God's will that His people have every one of His words to live by. It is imperative that every missionary be sensitive to this need. Bible translating is a greatly neglected mission ministry, especially among Bible-believing fundamental missionaries. When it comes time for you to leave your mission field, will you be able to confidently say with Paul, "And now, brethren, I commend you **to God**, and **to the word of his grace**, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:31)?