

TRANSLATING JOHN'S GOSPEL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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New translations continue to proliferate at an astonishing pace, and there is a growing need for translators to develop both linguistic and exegetical sophistication in order to be adequate to their task.¹ The present essay focuses on particular challenges—and opportunities—in translating John's Gospel. This includes textual issues, questions of background or chronology, and ideological, exegetical, and stylistic matters. The following discussion may serve as a survey and brief for the translator of a biblical book that in terms of influence and significance is second to few.² To make things a bit more interesting, the essay will conclude with an attempt at rating the quality and accuracy of nine major English translations of the Gospel of John.

TEXTUAL ISSUES

The first difficult textual issue in translating John's prologue—pertaining to punctuation—is the proper rendering of 1:3–4. Should the phrase *ho gegonen* (“that has been made”) be construed with what precedes or with what follows? If we choose the former, “without him nothing has been made that has been made” can easily be seen to bring closure to the thought expressed in v. 3 by way of emphatic restatement of the converse. If the latter, on the other hand, it is unclear what the statement, “That which has been made in him was life,” would mean.³ Also, John frequently begins a sentence or clause with *en* and a demonstrative pronoun (e.g. 13:35; 15:8; 16:26). Johannine theology elsewhere likewise favors taking the phrase with what precedes (cf. 5:26, 39; 6:53). Among the translations that construe *ho gegonen* with what precedes are the NASB, NIV, NKJV, ISV, NLT, HCSB, ESV, and TNIV; among the major translations only the NRSV favors the alternative.

One of the most important textual issue affecting translation in John's Gospel is the reading of 1:18. With the acquisition of p⁶⁶ and p⁷⁵, however, both of which read *monogenēs theos*, the preponderance of the evidence now leans in the direction of “one and only God” as the probable original wording. This is not only is the earlier but also the more difficult reading. Most likely, *monogenēs huios* represents a scribal assimilation to John 3:16 and 18.⁴ This evidence convinced the NIV, NASB, ISV, and ESV, though not the NKJV and HCSB. The NRSV (“God the only Son”), NLT (“his only Son, who is himself God”), and TNIV (“the one and only [Son], who is himself God”) also appear to accept *theos* as the original reading, though render *monogenēs* “only Son,” with the latter two versions taking *theos* as in apposition to *monogenēs*.

Murray J. Harris expresses a “strong preference” for *monogenēs theos*, for at least four reasons: (1) its superior manuscript support; (2) it represents the more difficult reading; (3) the phrase serves as a more proper climax to the entire prologue, attributing deity to the Son by way of *inclusio* with vv. 1 and 14; (4) this reading seems best to account for the other variants.⁵ In this he follows Westcott and Hort and an impressive list of commentators, including R. E. Brown, L. Morris, B. Lindars, F. F. Bruce, and G. R. Beasley-Murray.⁶ A translation such as “one-of-a-kind [Son, himself] God” is to be preferred.⁷

Another knotty issue is the reading “Bethzatha” vs. “Bethesda” in 5:2. While “Bethzatha” is preferred by Nestle-Aland (followed by Newman and Nida), “Bethesda” is attested much more

widely and clearly constitutes the superior reading. After an extended discussion, the eminent German historian Martin Hengel states categorically, “One should by all means read ‘Bethesda.’”⁸ Hengel considers the reading “Bethzatha” to be a scribal emendation (*pace* Josephus). “Bethesda” is favored by the NASB, NIV, ISV, NLT, NKJV, HCSB, and TNIV; “Bethzatha” is the reading adopted by the NRSV and the ESV. In light of the very sparse external attestation of “Bethzatha” (x 33 Eusebius), “Bethesda” is to be preferred.

Also the subject of much discussion is the pericope of the adulterous woman in 7:53–8:11. The literature on this passage is substantial, with most scholars favoring non-inclusion.⁹ Virtually every verse in 8:1–11 (the sole exception being 8:5) contains words not otherwise found in the Gospel or even the other Johannine writings.¹⁰ Perhaps most notable is the occurrence of the term “elders” (*presbyteroi*) only here but nowhere else in John’s Gospel, since one may surmise that John would have had occasion to use the expression elsewhere as well. Several other words occur elsewhere only once or twice. To this should be added the conspicuous absence of standard Johannine vocabulary (such as *alla*, *ean*, *ek*, *hēmeis*, *hina mē*, *mathētēs*, *oida*, *hos*, *hoti*, *ou*, *hymas*, *hymeis*) and syntactical differences with the rest of the Gospel.¹¹ The penchant for verbs with a *kata*-prefix in the present pericope (*katagraphō*, *kataklyptō*, *kataleipō*, *katakrinō*) seems unusual as well.

For reasons such as these, the United Bible Societies committee unanimously rejects inclusion, considering the evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the pericope to be “overwhelming”—citing lack of early manuscript support as well as stylistic considerations—and the case against its Johannine authorship “conclusive.”¹² Newman and Nida likewise state categorically, “This passage was doubtless not an original part of the Gospel of John. . . . It is not found in the earlier and better Greek manuscripts, it differs in style and vocabulary from the rest of John’s Gospel, and it interrupts the sequence of 7.52 and 8.12 and following.”¹³ Nevertheless, most of those preferring non-inclusion affirm the probable authenticity of the event. This raises interesting questions of both a doctrinal and a pragmatic nature.

On the doctrinal level, if inspiration is not attributed to the pericope, one deals here with a possibly authentic, yet nonetheless fallible account composed at a time subsequent to the writing of the Gospel. More pertinent still in the present context are pragmatic considerations. In the case of the pericope of the adulteress, Bible translators (and publishers) are faced with a dilemma—either not to include an account that has the ring of authenticity (though not inspiration) or to include it in a qualified fashion, be it within square brackets with an explanatory footnote or in a footnote. Most translations, such as the NIV, NASB, NLT, NRSV, HCSB, ESV, and TNIV opting for the former alternative—in which case the boundaries between the presumed original, inspired text and material added later (no matter how interesting or possibly authentic) may be blurred.¹⁴ In order to avoid such compromise, I personally favor not including the pericope in the text (even in square brackets) but rather putting the entire section in a footnote indicating its doubtful inclusion in the original Gospel.

Of more than academic interest is the translation of 12:32. Will Jesus draw “all people” or “all things” to himself? Both external and internal considerations weigh decisively in favor of the former. Since I have elsewhere provided a detailed discussion of this issue, I need not do so again here.¹⁵ Suffice it to say that the best contextual understanding of the phrase holds that the exalted Jesus will draw, not literally *all* people, but all *kinds of* people to himself, including Gentiles such as the Greeks who had, in the preceding pericope (12:20–23), just requested to see him.

The major English translations struggle, not so much with the textual issue—all construe the underlying text as *pantas* (masculine plural), not *panta* (neuter plural)—but with the potentially implied universalism of the passage (see also 1:7, 9). The NIV and NASB have “all men,” which is in our age unduly gender-specific (women, too, are included); the NRSV, HCSB, ISV, ESV, and TNIV have “all people”; the NLT has “everyone”; the NKJV has “all peoples.” In light of the above exegetical comments, my preference is “all *kinds of* people,” with a footnote indicating that this means both Jews and Gentiles, with reference to 12:20–23 and 11:52. By this standard, the NKJV seems to come closest.

Yet another difficult issue that continues to puzzle interpreters is the reading of 20:31. Both the present subjunctive *pisteuēte* and the aorist subjunctive *pisteusēte* have early support.¹⁶ It is ironic that, of the evangelists, it is only John who provides us with a purpose statement, and yet this statement is sufficiently ambiguous to make ascertaining his purpose difficult. In any case, there is widespread consensus that the form of the subjunctive, whether present or aorist, is by itself insufficient to indicate John's purpose.¹⁷ In translation, "that you may believe" or a similar translation adequately renders the Greek without prejudging the textual issue. The rendering "continue to believe" is problematic.

Beyond this there are several other textual uncertainties facing the translator, yet only few have a bearing on significant theological or interpretive issues.¹⁸

BACKGROUND ISSUES

Several items pertaining to first-century background or chronology affect the translation of particular passages in John's Gospel. One such issue is the proper construal of the Greek term *Hebraisti*, which is variously rendered "in Hebrew" or "in Aramaic" in the major versions. Translations of Hebrew or Aramaic terms are provided in 1:38 and 20:16 ("rabbi"); 1:41 and 4:25 ("Messiah"); 1:42 ("Cephas"); 9:7 ("Siloam"); 11:16, 20:24, and 21:2 ("Didymus"); and 19:17 ("Golgotha"). A study of the linguistic background of the translated terms yields the following results:

- "Rabbi" derives from the Heb./Aram. term *rabbi*, which literally means "my great one."
- "Messiah" is a transliteration of a Heb. or Aram. word, meaning "anointed one."
- Underlying "Cephas" in 1:42 is Aram. *kêpā'*, "rock."
- In 9:7, "Siloam" is the translation for Heb. *šilôah* (itself derived from the verb "to send").
- As to 11:16, 20:24, and 21:2, both Heb. *t'ôm* and Aram. *t'ômā* mean "twin."
- In 19:17, the underlying word is Aram. *gulgoltâ*, which means "skull."

On the whole, it seems therefore preferable to render *Hebraisti* in 19:17 as "in Aramaic" (NIV, TNIV), not "in Hebrew" (NASB, NLT, ISV, NKJV, HCSB, ESV; also NRSV, but see footnote: "That is, Aramaic").¹⁹ Currently, the NIV and TNIV (with the partial exception of the NRSV) stand alone over against all other major English translations.

Decisions must also be made regarding the rendering of the Johannine time references. John provides time markers in 1:39 ("tenth hour"), 4:6 ("sixth hour") and 52 ("seventh hour"), and 19:14 ("sixth hour"). While it is sometimes argued that Roman reckoning of time commenced at midnight—so that "tenth hour," for example, would mean "ten in the morning"—the preponderance of evidence suggests that time in first-century Palestine was counted from sunrise to sunset (i.e., from about 6 A.M. until about 6 P.M.; cf. John 11:9).²⁰ Moreover, the day was divided into three-hour intervals, with people approximating the estimated time to the next full three-hour segment.

As to current translations, some opt for a literal translation of, e.g., John 1:39, such as "the tenth hour" (so the NIV, ESV, NKJV, and NASB), in some cases with explanatory footnotes.²¹ Other translations choose to spell out the modern-day equivalent, be it along the lines of time reckoning outlined above—NRSV, NLT, ISV, and TNIV ("about four o'clock in the afternoon"; ISV footnote: Lit. *the tenth hour*)—or on the basis of presumed Roman time (HCSB: "about ten in the morning").²² By way of evaluation, little is to be said for the Roman time theory (disqualifying the HCSB rendering and the NASB footnote). "Tenth hour" (NIV *et al.*) is literal, but hardly helpful. Most satisfying are those translations that give the modern-day equivalent, with first prize in this category going to the ISV where the literal rendering is noted in a footnote.

Another interpretive crux affecting translation is the proper construal of 2:20. Renderings such as that found in the NIV, ESV, NKJV, and TNIV—"It has taken (NASB = NLT: 'took') forty-six

years to build this temple”—suggest, almost certainly incorrectly, that the temple building was still under reconstruction at the time of Jesus’ cleansing of the temple.²³ Historical records indicate, however, that Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.) began restoring the temple (*naos*) in the eighteenth year of his reign, that is, 20/19 B.C. (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.380), with completion a year and a half later in 18/17 B.C. (*Ant.* 15.421). It is true that the restoration of the entire temple area (*hieron*) was not completed until A.D. 63/64 under Herod Agrippa II and governor Albinus (*Ant.* 20.219). But John’s consistent use of *naos* for the temple building proper and *hieron* for the temple area precludes taking *naos* in 2:20 as referring, not to the temple building, but to the entire temple area.²⁴ A better rendering is therefore, “This temple *has stood for forty-six years*, and you will raise it up again in three days?”²⁵ In this case, the contrast would be between the lasting nature of the temple (“stood for forty-six years”) and the quickness of both its destruction (cf. v. 19: “Destroy this temple”) and rebuilding (“three days”).

Even more important are issues relating to the chronology of the last supper and the dating of Jesus’ crucifixion. The primary passages affected are 13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42. By way of background, the Synoptic Gospels clearly present the last supper as a Passover (Matt 26:17, 19 and parallels). Certain references to the “Day of Preparation” for the Passover in John’s Gospel seem to suggest that, for John, the Passover is still future from the vantage point of Jesus and his followers at the time of the last supper, so that the latter cannot be a Passover meal but must have taken place earlier. Before involving John and the Synoptists in factual contradiction, however, it is important to investigate closely the most likely meaning of the crucial phrases *tēs heortēs tou pascha* (John 13:1), *phagōsin to pascha* (18:28), and *paraskeuē tou pascha* (19:14; cf. vv. 31, 42).

The best evidence suggests that John, just as other writers, used the term “Passover” (*pascha*) with reference to the entire Passover week including the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see esp. Luke 22:1: “the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover”; see also John 18:39). Moreover, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Josephus alike use *paraskeuē* (“Day of Preparation”) to refer to the day *preceding the Sabbath* (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; *Ant.* 16.163–64).²⁶ If so, 13:1 indicates that Passover week was at hand; “eat the Passover” in 18:28 probably means simply “to celebrate the Feast” (2 Chr 30:21), that is, the eight-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, not necessarily the Passover more narrowly conceived; and 19:14, 31, 42 refer to the Day of Preparation, not for the Passover in a narrow sense, but to the Day of Preparation *for the Sabbath of Passover week*. If so, there is no actual conflict between John and the Synoptics; all four evangelists portray Jesus as observing the Passover proper with his disciples on Thursday evening and place Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday afternoon, the Day of Preparation for the “special Sabbath” of Passover week.²⁷

A look at the major translations yields the following picture.

	John 13:1	18:28	19:14
NIV	Passover Feast	eat the Passover	day of Preparation of Passover Week
NASB	Feast of the Passover	eat the Passover	day of Preparation for the Passover
ISV	Passover Festival	eat the Passover meal	Preparation Day for the Passover
HCSB	Passover Festival	eat the Passover	Preparation Day for the Passover
NKJV	feast of the Passover	eat the Passover	Preparation Day of the Passover
NLT	Passover celebration	celebrate the P. feast	day of preparation for the Passover
NRSV	Passover Feast	eat the Passover	day of Preparation for the Passover
ESV	Feast of the Passover	eat the Passover	day of Preparation of the Passover
TNIV	Passover Feast	eat the Passover	day of Preparation of the Passover

As to the translation of 13:1 and 18:28, the NLT probably does greatest justice to the exegetical conclusions arrived at above. “Passover celebration” and “celebrate the Passover feast” are

sufficiently broad to encompass, not just the Passover meal in a narrow sense but the entire week of festivities. With regard to the Day of Preparation referred to in 19:14, the NIV alone brings out the presumed true meaning of the phrase: “Day of Preparation of Passover *Week*.” All other major English translations, while not literally incorrect, seem to convey the notion that the “Passover” referred to is the actual Passover meal in a narrow sense—which, if the above argumentation is correct, it is not. The alternatives in this case are to resort to paraphrase (as the NIV does by adding “Week”) in order to accentuate the actual meaning or to provide a more functionally equivalent translation with an actually misleading effect. The choice must be the former.²⁸

IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Clearly the most important ideological issue facing the translator of John’s Gospel today is the rendering of the expression *hoi Ioudaioi*.²⁹ The consistent translation of this term with “the Jews” in a given version renders John open to the charge of anti-Semitism.³⁰ Once again, since I commented on this issue previously, I can limit myself to a few summarizing comments.³¹ First, it is true that John, like the other Gospels, places ultimate responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion squarely on the shoulders of the Jewish people as represented by their religious leadership—the Jewish ruling council called Sanhedrin. Yet, importantly, the thrust of John’s use of the term “the Jews” in this context is not ethnic but salvation-historical. For Jesus, and John, the Jews in their day wrongly presumed upon their religious heritage by claiming Abraham and Moses as their ancestors and the Scripture as their own while at the same time rejecting their God-sent Messiah. Just as Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, told his Jewish audience that “God has made this Jesus, whom *you* crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36) and later confronted the same group, chillingly, with their guilt by saying, “*You* handed him [God’s servant Jesus] over to be killed, and *you* disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. *You* disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. *You* killed the author of life” (Acts 3:13–15), John, too, held the Jewish people responsible for the death of their Messiah. Yet, like Peter, John did so, not to condemn them, but to proceed to tell them the good news of salvation in Jesus; yet this was good news not for them only, but for “everyone who believes” (3:16). Thus the general charge of anti-Semitism is refuted.

A study of the major English translations yields the following picture (the relevant passages are 1:19; 2:18, 20; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 6:41, 52; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 31, 48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22; 10:19, 24, 31, 33; 11:8, 19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54; 12:9, 11; 13:33; 18:14, 20, 31, 33, 36, 38, 39; 19:3, 7, 12, 14, 19, 20, 31, 38; 20:19):

- The NIV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, ISV, and ESV render all major instances of *hoi Ioudaioi* with “the Jews.”³²
- In addition, the ISV provides explanatory footnotes in order to distinguish references to the Jews in general from references to the Jewish leaders. The footnote “I.e. Jewish leaders” is placed at the following passages: 5:15, 16, 18; 6:41; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:48, 52; 10:19, 31; 11:45, 54; 13:33; 18:36, 38. While the practice of retaining the general reference “the Jews” in the text and of placing explanatory comments in footnotes has much to commend it, there seem to be several instances where the label “Jewish leaders” is questionable (see 6:41; 10:19, 31; 11:45, 54). Also, there are some problems with consistency (if 10:31, why not 11:8?; if 18:36, 38, why not 19:7?).
- In the HCSB, one finds at 1:19 the global footnote, “In John *the Jews* usually indicates the Jewish authorities who led the nation.” At 7:1, 11, 13, 15, and 35, footnotes are placed referring to 1:19. This is a half-hearted solution at best. Does “the Jews” in John “usually” refer to the Jewish authorities? This is a doubtful assertion. Moreover, why are footnotes placed only at the above-mentioned five instances in chap. 7 and nowhere else? This hardly exhausts the possible references to the Jewish authorities.

- The NLT translates “Jewish leaders” at 1:19; 2:18; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22; 9:19, 22; 10:24, 31; 11:8; 13:33; 18:14, 31, 36; 19:7, 12, 31, 38; 20:19. At 6:41, 52; 9:31, 48, 52, 57; 10:19; 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54; 12:9, 11; 18:20, 38; 19:14, 20, the chosen translation is “the people” (footnote: Greek *Jewish people*). A comparison with the ISV indicates that, on the whole, the NLT construes a larger number of references to be to the Jewish leaders (ISV: 18; NLT: 26). At the same time, several passages taken by the ISV as referring to the Jewish leaders are taken by the NLT as referring to the Jewish people at large (6:41; 10:19; 11:45, 54; 18:38). Thus it is interesting to note that in two recent translations with a similar orientation there remains a certain degree of variance as to which references are construed as referring to the Jewish leaders vs. the Jewish people at large respectively.
- The TNIV, finally, renders the term as “Jewish leaders” in 1:19; 5:10, 15, 16; 7:1, 11, 13; 9:22; 18:14, 28, 36; 19:12, 31, 38; 20:19 (15 instances, less than 18 in the ISV and 26 in the NLT; see above). At other places, the added epithet “there” limits “the Jews” to those present at a given instance. On the whole, the committee showed commendable restraint.

By way of evaluation, it seems necessary to go beyond the earlier practice of simply translating *hoi Ioudaioi* with “the Jews”—at the very least by adding appropriate explanatory footnotes (ISV). Better still, translators may infer from the context which nuance of *Ioudaioi* is invoked in a particular instance and then provide the appropriate gloss. While this procedure may open the door to ideology (minimizing general references to Jews in order to avoid anti-Semitism)—thus necessitating exegetical restraint along the cautions registered above—such an approach is both responsible and most sophisticated and satisfying linguistically. It is responsible in that it refuses to choose the easy path of an alleged functional equivalence where Greek *oi Ioudaioi* equals “the Jews” in English. It is most sophisticated and satisfying linguistically, because it recognizes the determinative role played by context which may limit the scope of reference either locally or otherwise.

EXEGETICAL ISSUES

In other cases, the translation of a particular passage in John’s Gospel is dependent on interpretive judgments. One such instance is 1:5. Does *katelaben* there mean “understand” or “overcome”—or both? Again, I need not repeat what I’ve said elsewhere.³³ In short, in light of the close parallel 12:35—“Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes (*katalambanō*) you” (see also 16:33)—I advocate “overcome” as the superior rendering. The major translations divide more or less evenly between the two options, usually mentioning the one not chosen in a footnote: (1) NIV: “understood”; NASB = NKJV: “comprehend”; (2) NLT: “extinguish”; NET: “mastered”; ISV: “put out”; HCSB, ESV, NRSV: “overcome.” Notably, the TNIV changed the NIV’s “understood” to “overcome.” I believe a strong case can be made for the second group of translations having captured the force of the original better than the first.

Another interesting issue is that of the Johannine intersentence connections, specifically, *oun*, *de*, *kai*, and asyndeton. As Randall Buth and Stephen Levinsohn observe, John seems to be using these connectors differently than the Synoptics.³⁴ While in the Synoptics (and Acts) *kai* serves as an unmarked connector, John employs a simple asyndeton. The Synoptic “development marker” *de* is frequently replaced by the Johannine *oun*. After a preliminary analysis of the four above-mentioned intersentence connections, Buth concludes that John’s usage revolves around the two coordinates “significant change” and “close connection”:

- *oun* is used for significant change and close connection (logical, resumptive, new unit, change of subject; analyzed are 1:39; 4:28–34, 40; 6:3–5; 11:46–47, 54)

- *de* occurs for significant change but loose connection (background, new unit, change of subject; 2:8; 6:71; 11:45–46, 54–55)

- *kai* indicates coordinated sameness (same subject, continuity with previous subject; 1:19–21; 2:9; but see comments on instances of an adversative *kai* in John below)
- asyndeton is unmarked regarding both significance and connection (1:17, 39; 2:6–7, 17; 4:22; 9:9; 12:12, 22)

The implications for translators of John’s Gospel can be sketched as follows:

- As to *kai*, no translation will often be necessary; the English asyndeton will suffice. Care should be taken, however, to identify instances of an adversative *kai*, which should be rendered “yet” or the like (cf. 1:10, 11; 3:6, 19, 32; 5:39; 7:19, 30; 8:52; 9:27; 10:25, 39; 12:34, 35, 47; 18:11; 20:29).³⁵
- The connector *oun* may be translated with “now” (conveying the beginning of a new unit or resumptive force).
- Finally, *de* will need to be treated on a case-by-case basis to determine if the change is significant enough to warrant an explicit English rendering that reflects such a change.³⁶

While a comprehensive evaluation of the nine major translations regarding their rendering of intersentence connections is beyond the scope of this essay, their translation of three instances of adversative *kai* in John 1:10 (“the world was made through him, yet the world did not recognize him”), 11 (“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him”), and 3:19 (“Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light”) may serve as a test case for the sensitivity of these versions to those kinds of issues. The picture is as follows:

	1:10	1:11	3:19
NIV	“though”	“but”	“but”
NASB	“and”	“and”	“and”
NKJV	“and”	“and”	“and”
NRSV	“yet”	“and”	“and”
NLT	“although”	“even”	“but”
ISV	“yet”	“yet”	“but”
HCSB	“yet”	“and”	“and”
ESV	“yet”	“and”	“and”
TNIV	“though”	“but”	“but”

This survey suggests that the NASB and NKJV are insufficiently sensitive to instances of adversative *kai* (and perhaps other intersentence connection issues), while the NIV, NLT, ISV, and TNIV display an appropriate awareness of this important nuance that ought to have translational implications. The NRSV, HCSB, and ESV come in mixed in the present spotcheck. One wonders if a commitment to a formal equivalence approach in translation has led—in the present case, in my opinion in fact misled—the translators of the NASB and NKJV to translate *kai* with “and” even when the conjunction demonstrably conveys an adversative force in the Johannine context.

In conclusion, a related—indeed foundational—issue that can merely be noted is that of the determination of what constitutes a (Greek) sentence. Vern Poythress, following Robert Longacre and Kenneth Pike, defines a sentence as a “maximal clause,” including relative and dependent clauses.³⁷ Consequently, the question arises regarding the legitimacy of breaking up Greek sentences into smaller English sentences for the sake of greater readability in English. This procedure may result in the loss of connection between related units in the Greek original—a considerable price to pay for greater clarity in the receptor language.

STYLISTIC ISSUES

In yet other instances, there are stylistic decisions to be made. One such instance is the rendering of Johannine passages that are generic in import but have in English traditionally been rendered using masculine language. Poythress and Grudem cite John 14:23 as an example.³⁸ The NIV renders this verse as follows: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” In the NRSV, the verse reads, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” In order to avoid masculine pronouns and to render the passage generically, singulars have been changed to plurals. According to Poythress and Grudem, this attempted remedy of one perceived problem introduces a problem that is even more severe: the shift of focus from individuals to groups.

How valid is this argument? To begin with, to make this an issue of doctrinal fidelity and orthodoxy (inerrancy)—as Grudem and Poythress continue to insist on doing³⁹—is erroneous and fails to appreciate the complexities involved in Bible translation. As D. A. Carson rightly contends, translation is an exercise in the impossible—in that sense, translation is “treason,” because of necessity it will always fall short of perfection. While there is clearly a tradeoff in the kind of shift that has taken place from the NIV to the NRSV in the above example, this does not mean that the motive for such translation is a low view of Scripture or that inerrancy is in fact compromised.⁴⁰

Thus Grudem’s contention that in the NIVI rendering of John 14:23 “six singular Greek words which John wrote as part of Scripture are mistranslated in this one text”⁴¹ is sheer populism, reflecting naïveté concerning the types of tradeoffs needing to be made in the “inevitable and impossible task” of (Bible) translation.⁴² Also, Grudem’s argument that John’s use of the singular in the original obliges the faithful translator to use a singular in translation misconstrues the relationship between donor and receptor languages by conceiving of it in unduly rigid, wooden terms.⁴³ It is true that the shift from singular to plural in the case of John 14:23 may have the (doubtless unintended) effect of diluting the believer’s personal relationship with each of the persons of the Godhead and thus is less than ideal.⁴⁴ Yet it is also true that the immediate context does in fact suggest a collective reference on Jesus’ part to the disciples as a group.⁴⁵ Note the question of Judas (not Iscariot) that triggered Jesus’ response: “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to *us* and not to the world?” (14:22, emphasis mine). It is *those disciples* whom Jesus addresses in 14:23ff. Moreover, to charge, as Poythress and Grudem do, that a plural translation in this instance “mutes the masculinity of God’s words,”⁴⁶ since it suppresses the sense of male representation present in the original, is hardly accurate.

Much of the discussion revolves around the use of generic “he” in English. Carson says that many have stopped using generic “he” and use alternatives. Poythress and Grudem agree, but contend that generic “he” should still be considered as a possible alternative in translation together with other options.⁴⁷ To some extent, the difference is over perceptions to which degree the English language has in fact shifted or is expected to shift. While I am no expert in this area, I believe that translation committees should consider all the available options—including generic “he”—and then choose the best overall translation that presents the least amount of difficulties. In my consulting work I have seen a fair share of instances where translation committees were so intent on avoiding generic “he” that they chose inferior options instead.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, to say that generic “he” is still being used and understood is not the same as saying that it is widely accepted by all audiences. Just as Poythress and Grudem criticize Carson for appearing to exclude generic “he” as an option, they should be open to other possibilities—including those that entail changes from singular to plural, from third to second person singular, etc. They should not claim divine sanction for English generic “he,” as if it were somehow intrinsically superior to possible alternatives. I am also not so sure that the latent masculinity Poythress and Grudem claim underlies certain generics is as widespread as they allege.⁴⁹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

For easy reference, it may be helpful to summarize the conclusions reached in the preceding discussion in chronological order of appearance in John's Gospel. The recommended translations were as follows:

1:3	“without him nothing was made that has been made”
1:5	“overcome” or synonym
1:10, 11; 3:19; etc.	“but” or “yet”
1:18	“one-of-a-kind [Son, himself] God” or the like
1:19; etc.	“the Jews” with appropriate explanatory footnote or contextually sensitive gloss
1:39; 4:6, 52; 19:14	based on time reckoning starting day at around six in the morning
2:20	“this temple has stood for forty-six years”
5:2	“Bethsaida”
7:53–8:11	put in footnote, not in square brackets in the text
12:32	“all <i>kinds of</i> people” (that is, Jews as well as Gentiles)
13:1; 18:28	“celebrate the Passover”
19:14	“the Day of Preparation [for the Sabbath] of Passover Week”
19:17 (cf. 1:38, 41, 42; 4:25; 9:7; 11:16; 20:16, 24; 21:2)	“in Aramaic”
20:31	“believe”

It is now time to rate the existing translations as to translation accuracy in John's Gospel. A plus rating is awarded in case of a superior translation of above average accuracy; a minus rating is assigned for a rendering of doubtful accuracy; no rating is given for an average translation with nothing particularly to commend or disqualify it. Pluses and minuses offset each other.

The ratings are as follows:

	NIV	NASB	NKJV	ISV	NLT	HCSB	ESV	NRSV	TNIV
1:3–4	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	–	+
1:5	–	–	–	+	+	+	+	+	+
1:10, etc.	+	–	–	+	+				+
1:18	+	+	–	+		–	+		+
1:19, etc.				+	+	–			+
1:39, etc.		–		+					
2:20	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
5:2	+	+	+	+	+	+	–	–	+
7:53ff			–	–			–		
12:32			+		–				
18:28					+				
19:14	+								
19:17	+	–	–	–	–	–	–		+

Total 4 -2 -3 4 3 -1 -1 -2 6

Hence, in our unscientific case study, the TNIV comes out on top with a superior “6” rating. The NIV and ISV also receive a very favorable rating (+4 each), as does the NLT (fourth at +3). A distant fifth are the HCSB and ESV (both at -1), followed by the NASB and NRSV (tied at -2), and the NKJV (-3). While the above comparison of translations of John’s Gospel is admittedly less than comprehensive—not to mention my postulation of exegetical and other judgments with which other scholars may differ—I believe the comparison is nevertheless revealing as to the translation philosophy and quality of translation of these nine major English translations. This, of course, still allows for the possibility that the quality of a given version may be uneven with regard to the various books of the Bible, in which case the above results would be representative of the translation of John’s Gospel but not necessarily the rest of Scripture.

NOTES

1. I offer this essay as a token of appreciation and respect to my predecessor as *JETS* editor, Ronald Youngblood, with best wishes for his continuing ministry and scholarship.

2. On the translation of John’s Gospel, see also Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on The Gospel of John* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980).

3. *Ibid.*, 168: “. . . —whatever that may be supposed to mean.” In Bruce Metzger’s dissenting opinion (the majority of the committee favors taking the phrase with what follows), “Despite valiant attempts of commentators to bring sense out of taking *ho gegonen* with what follows, the passage remains intolerably clumsy and opaque.”

4. This is the judgment of the majority of the UBS committee: see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 169–70 for discussion and a more extended rationale.

5. Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 78–80.

6. Note that C. K. Barrett changed his position between the first and second edition of his commentary: cf. *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1955), 141 and *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2d ed. (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1978), 169: “the added evidence of the two recently discovered papyri may seem to swing the verdict this way.” See also Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 360: “the unique One, God.”

7. See my forthcoming commentary on John’s Gospel in the BECNT series. Cf. TNIV: “one and only [Son], himself God.”

8. Martin Hengel, “Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Judentums,” in *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana. Kleine Schriften II* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 309, who also refers to the discussion in Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 252–53, and notes that the UBS committee was divided on this point.

9. See Frederick A. Schilling, “The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress,” *ATR* 37 (1955): 91–106; Ulrich Becker, *Jesus und die Ehebrecherin* (BZNW 29; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1963), 8–74; Gary M. Burge, “A Specific Problem in the New Testament Text and Canon: The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53–8:11),” *JETS* 27 (1984): 141–48; and Bart D. Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulteress,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 24–44, critiqued by J. Ian H. McDonald, “The So-called *Pericope de Adultera*,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 415–27. See also Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187–89 and commentaries. Dissenting voices are John Paul Heil, “The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7,53–8,11) Reconsidered,” *Bib* 72 (1991): 182–91—but see the convincing critique by Daniel B.

Wallace, “Reconsidering ‘The Story and the Adulteress Reconsidered,’ ” *NTS* 39 (1993): 290–96—and Maurice A. Robinson, “Preliminary Observations regarding the *Pericope Adulterae* based upon Fresh Collations of nearly all Continuous-Text Manuscripts and over One Hundred Lectionaries” (paper presented at the 50th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 19–21 November, 1998). Gail O’Day, “John 7:53–8:11: A Study in Misreading,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 631–40 unconvincingly construes the canonical marginalization of the pericope as the result of an attempt “to marginalize not only the woman but her story as well.”

10. The evidence pertaining to vocabulary statistics is set forth in Robert Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (2d ed.; Zurich: Gotthelf, 1958), 60–62.

11. Cf. Morgenthaler, *Statistik*, 61–62; Wallace, “Reconsidering,” 291; Burge, “Woman Caught in Adultery,” 144.

12. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187 and 188. A re-assessment of the available evidence is beyond the scope of the present essay and in light of the preceding comments hardly necessary in any case. The following discussion is therefore devoted to pragmatic challenges facing the translator.

13. *Handbook*, 257. On the external evidence, see esp. William L. Petersen, “Ουδε εγω σε [κατα]κρινω. John 8:11, the *Protevangelium Iacobi*, and the History of the *Pericope Adulterae*,” in *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-canonical. Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda* (ed. William L. Petersen et al.; NovTSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 191–221, who claims to have found an allusion to John 8:11 in the *Protevangelium Iacobi*, an apocryphal Christian romance dating from the second half of the second century A.D. He thinks that the pericope originated in Egypt (probably Alexandria) in the first half of the second century A.D. (p. 220, n. 99).

14. The ISV simply includes the pericope without any indication such as square brackets (other than a footnote at the very end of the pericope) that the text may not have been part of the original Gospel. The NKJV places an asterisk at 7:53, noting that the Nestle-Aland and UBS text brackets the pericope as not in the original text but noting that these verses are present “in over 900 mss.”

15. *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 134.

16. In the parallel 19:35 the preponderance of witnesses have *pisteusēte*, with the notable exceptions of \aleph and B.

17. As D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 662, rightly notes, “John elsewhere in his Gospel can use *either* tense to refer to *both* coming to faith and continuing in the faith.” Carson goes on to advocate the rendering, “that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus.” See on this idem, “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 639–51; and the critiques by Gordon D. Fee, “On the Text and Meaning of John 20,30–31,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Fs. Frans Neirynck* (BETL C; ed. F. van Segbroeck et al.; Leuven: University Press, 1992), 3:2193–2205 and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 46–47.

18. An interesting instance is the reading “Son of God” (cf. v. 49; the reading adopted by the NIV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, ISV, ESV, NLT, and HCSB) vs. “Chosen One of God” (cf. Isa. 42:1; notably adopted by the TNIV) in 1:34. While some early mss. have “Son of God,” “Chosen One of God” is found in \aleph^* , p^{5vid} , and a recently published papyrus (p^{106} ; *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* Vol. LXV, Egypt Exploration Society, 1998, pp. 12–13), which renders the latter—harder—reading marginally more likely (contra, in part, P. R. Rodgers, “The Text of John 1:34,” in *Theological Exegesis. Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* [ed. C. Seitz and K. Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999], 299–305, who prefers a combination of both [!] readings). On textual issues surrounding John 3:13, see David Alan Black, “The Text of John 3:13,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 49–66, who advocates including the final clause, “who is in heaven” (*ho ōn en tō ouranō*). Currently, only the NKJV and the ISV follow this reading. Personally, I favor “Chosen One of God” in 1:34 and not including “who is in heaven” in 3:13.

19. Similarly, Newman and Nida, *Handbook*, 585, state: “In Hebrew . . . means ‘in Aramaic.’ ”

20. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 156–57, points out that the primary support for the Roman time reckoning theory comes from Pliny the Elder who notes that Roman authorities (like Egyptian ones) counted the official, civil day from midnight to midnight—in case of leases and other documents that expired at day’s end. But Pliny himself says that “common people everywhere” conceive of the day as running “from dawn to dark” (*Nat. Hist.* 2.188 LCL). See the discussion in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 800–801, n. 34.

21. NASB: “Perhaps 10 a.m. (Roman time)”; ESV: “That is, about 4 P.M.”

22. A footnote contends that John probably used a different method of reckoning time from the other three Gospels, adding that if he used the same method, the translation would be “about four in the afternoon.”

23. Similarly, ISV = NRSV: “has been under construction for forty-six years”; HCSB: “took forty-six years to build.”

24. This reading of John 2:20 and a date of A.D. 30 for Jesus’ first Passover and the temple cleansing are advocated by Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 38–43; idem, “Chronology,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green et al.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 119; C. J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, “The Jewish Calendar, a Lunar Eclipse and the Date of Christ’s Crucifixion,” *TynBul* 43 (1992): 351; and Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, Vol. 2 (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), *ad loc.*

25. It should be acknowledged that currently no major English translation renders the passage this way.

26. See in greater detail Köstenberger, “John,” *ZIBBC* 2, *ad loc.*

27. For this reconstruction, see Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 455–58; idem, *Matthew* (EBC 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 530–32; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 175–80; Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, 146.

28. Regrettably, the TNIV changes the NIV’s “day of Preparation of Passover Week” to “day of Preparation of the Passover,” thus aligning itself with a more literal, but overall less accurate and potentially misleading rendering. On the limitations of functional equivalence, see the essay by D. A. Carson in the present volume.

29. For a discussion of all the instances of “the Jews” in John’s Gospel, see Robert G. Bratcher, “‘The Jews’ in the Gospel of John,” App. 1 in Newman and Nida, *Handbook*, 641–49.

30. See esp. the massive volume edited by R. Bieringer et al., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001). Cf. Glenn Balfour, “Is John’s Gospel Anti-Semitic?” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 369–72 (abstract of Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1995)

31. See my *Encountering John*, 248–49.

32. A solitary footnote in the ESV at 7:1 has, “Or *Judeans*” (cross-referenced at 7:11).

33. *Encountering John*, 55.

34. Randall Buth, “Οὐν, Δέ, Καί, and Asyndeton in John’s Gospel,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (ed. David Alan Black; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 144–61; Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek* (Dallas: SIL, 1992), 39–48 (cf. 159–60); cf. the second 2000 edition, pp. 81–90 and 247–60. See also Vern S. Poythress, “The Use of the Intersentence

Conjunctions δέ, οὐν, καί, and Asyndeton in the Gospel of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 26 (1984): 312–40. For further literature on the subject, see Buth, p. 144, n. 1, and the bibliography on p. 161.

35. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 2d ed., 124–26, esp. 124, would probably agree that these kinds of passages ought to be translated adversatively: “Thus, although conjunctive καί can generally be translated ‘and’ (i.e., it is ‘connective’), there are times when it seems that ‘but’ would be more appropriate (i.e., it would appear to be ‘adversative’)” (p. 72). Yet he seeks to make the technical distinction that even in cases of an “adversative” use of *kai* there remains an underlying continuity. Buth, “Οὐν, Δέ, Καί,” in his discussion on pp. 152–54, fails to deal with adversative instances of *kai*.

36. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to evaluate existing translations as to their accuracy in rendering intersentence connections. The general comments above and below are designed to register important issues in the translation of John’s Gospel and to suggest basic guiding principles for the rendering of conjunctions marking intersentence connections.

37. Poythress, “Use of Intersentence Conjunctions,” 315.

38. Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 117–24, 154–55.

39. Chap. 3 in *ibid.*

40. See Chap. 3 “Translation and Treason” in D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 47–76.

41. Wayne Grudem, in *World* 12/5 (April 19, 1997): 16, quoted in Carson, *Inclusive Language Debate*, 31–32.

42. The quote is from the subtitle of Carson’s Chap. 3.

43. Cf. Carson, *Inclusive Language Debate*, 38; Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 120, who charges Grudem with an “overly wooden approach.”

44. *Ibid.*, 152–53.

45. Grant R. Osborne, “Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?” *Christianity Today* (October 27, 1997): 38, cited in Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?* 120.

46. *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 155.

47. Much of the discussion is chronicled in Carson, *Inclusive Language Debate*, Chap. 9: “But Is the English Language Changing?” and Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, App. 6: “The Evaporation of an Argument: D. A. Carson’s Lack of Evidence for the Unusability of Generic ‘He’ in English.” See also Chaps. 5 and 6 in Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?*

48. An example is a contemplated change of John 6:65 to read, “no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them” or for 7:38 to read, “Whoever believes in me, . . . streams of living water will flow from within them.”

49. See the example of 14:23 discussed above or substantival masculine participles such as *ho pisteuōn* in 14:12.

