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Translation Notes (unfoldinWord)

Jonah - Introduction

Introduction to Jonah

Part 1: General Introduction

Outline of the book of Jonah

1. Jonah tries to run away from Yahweh. (1:1-2:10)
 - Jonah disobeys Yahweh's first call to go to Nineveh. (1:1-3)
 - Jonah is on the ship with the Gentile sailors. (1:4-16)
 - Yahweh provides a large fish to swallow Jonah, who prays and is rescued. (1:17-2:10)
2. Jonah goes to Nineveh. (3:1-4:11)
 - Yahweh again calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah proclaims Yahweh's message. (3:1-4)
 - Nineveh repents. (3:5-9)
 - Yahweh decides not to destroy Nineveh. (3:10)
 - Jonah is very angry with Yahweh. (4:1-3)
 - Yahweh teaches Jonah about grace and mercy. (4:4-11)

What is the book of Jonah about?

Jonah, son of Amitai, was a prophet from Gath Hepher, a village in the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 14:25). This book tells about what happened to Jonah. It tells how Yahweh shows mercy and grace to Gentiles. It also tells how the Ninevites repented and called out to Yahweh for mercy. (See: Mercy, Grace and Repent)

Yahweh sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that he was ready to punish them. Yahweh said that if they would repent he would not harm them. However, Jonah was an Israelite, and he did not want the Ninevites to repent and escape

punishment. So Jonah tried to sail away in the opposite direction instead of doing what Yahweh told him to do, but Yahweh stopped him by sending a storm and a large fish to swallow him.

Jonah repented and warned the Ninevites. As a result, Yahweh taught him that he is concerned about all people, not just the Israelites.

How should the title of this book be translated?

This book is traditionally titled "The Book of Jonah" or just "Jonah." Translators may decide to use a clearer title such as "The Book about Jonah." (See: How to Translate Names)

Who wrote the book of Jonah?

Jonah was probably involved in the writing of this book. However, scholars do not know who actually wrote it.

Jonah lived in the northern kingdom of Israel, during or before the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel. He probably prophesied sometime between 800 and 750 B.C.

Part 2: Important Religious and Cultural Concepts

What was the nation of Assyria?

During the time of Jonah, Assyria was the most powerful kingdom in the ancient Near East. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria.

Assyria was cruel to its enemies. Eventually, Yahweh punished the Assyrians for the wicked things that they did.

Did Assyria convert to Judaism?

Some scholars think that the Assyrians started worshiping Yahweh alone. However, most scholars think that they continued to worship other false gods, perhaps after a brief time of worshiping Yahweh. (See: False God)

Jonah - Chapter 1 Introduction

Jonah 1 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

The narrative of this chapter starts abruptly. This is a typical way for a prophetic book to begin. The translator should not add information to smooth this introduction, but the first verse could be made into several sentences to make a more natural beginning. See the UST.

Special Concepts in this Chapter

Miracle

In verse [1:17](#), there is the mention of “a great fish.” It may be difficult to imagine a sea creature big enough to swallow a man whole, and we do not know what kind of creature this was. Jonah then survives for three days and nights inside the fish. This is something that God made to happen. Translators should not try to explain miraculous events in an attempt to make them easier to understand. (See: Miracle)

Important Figures of Speech in this Chapter

Situational irony

There is an ironic situation in this chapter. This means that people do or say things that are the opposite of what one would expect them to do. Jonah is a prophet of God, and as such, he would be expected to endeavor to do God’s will. Instead, he runs away from God. Although the Gentile sailors are not Israelites, they act out of faith and fear of Yahweh when sending Jonah to an almost certain death by throwing him overboard. (See: Irony, Prophet and Willofgod and Faith)

Sea

People in the ancient Near East saw the sea as chaotic, and they did not trust it. Some of the gods they worshiped were gods of the sea. Jonah’s people, the Hebrews, feared the sea greatly. However, Jonah’s fear of the sea was not enough to keep him from sailing on a ship to avoid doing what Yahweh commanded. (See: Fear)

Other Possible Translation Difficulties in this Chapter

Implicit information

Even though no one knows for sure where Tarshish was, the writer assumes that the reader knows that Jonah had to face away from Nineveh to go there.

(See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information)

Jonah 1:1 (#1)

"The word of Yahweh came"

This phrase introduces the first half of the story of Jonah. This is a common way of beginning a historical story about a prophet. Use a word, phrase, or other method in your language that is natural for introducing a new event. The repetition of this same phrase introduces the second half of the story (3:1).

See: Introduction of a New Event

Jonah 1:1 (#2)

"The word of Yahweh came"

This is an idiom meaning that Yahweh spoke or communicated his message in some way. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “The message of Yahweh came” or “Yahweh spoke his message”

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:1 (#3)

"Amittai"

Amittai is the name of Jonah’s father.

See: How to Translate Names

Jonah 1:2 (#2)

"Nineveh, the great city"

Here, **great** means both large and important. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “the large and important city, Nineveh”

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:2 (#3)**"Get up"**

Get up is an idiom that means that Jonah should take action. It does not mean that he was sitting or lying down at the time that God spoke to him. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning, state the meaning plainly, or use only the verb "Go." Alternate translation: "Look alive" or "Prepare yourself"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:2 (#4)**"and call out against it"**

The pronoun **it** here, meaning the city of Nineveh, refers to the people living in and around the city. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "and call out against the people there"

See: Metonymy

Jonah 1:2 (#5)**"their evil has risen up before my face"**

Here, God speaks of **wickedness** as if it were something that has physically **risen up** in front of him as it has continually grown larger. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "I know that they have been continually sinning" or "I have seen that their sin has been getting worse and worse"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 1:2 (#1)**"Get up, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it, because their evil has risen up before my face"**

If it would be more natural in your language, you could reverse the order of these clauses since the second half of the verse gives the reason for the result that the first half describes. Alternate translation: "The wickedness of Nineveh has risen before my face. Therefore, get up, go to that great city, and call out against it"

See: Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

Jonah 1:2 (#6)**"their evil has risen up before my face"**

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of **wickedness**, you could express the same idea in another way. Alternate translation: "I have seen how wicked they have become"

See: Abstract Nouns

Jonah 1:3 (#1)**"But Jonah got up to run away"**

Here the words **got up** mean that Jonah took action in response to God's command, but his action was to disobey instead of to obey. If your readers would misunderstand this, you could state the meaning plainly. See how you translated this idiom in [1:2](#). Alternate translation: "But Jonah decided to run away" or "Jonah prepared himself, but to run away"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:3 (#2)**"from before the face of Yahweh." - "away from before the face of Yahweh"**

The expression **the face of Yahweh** represents his presence. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. The idea of Yahweh's presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. By running away, Jonah is hoping that Yahweh will not notice that he is disobeying. Alternate translation: "from the presence of Yahweh" ... "away from Yahweh"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 1:3 (#3)**"to run away to Tarshish"**

This city named Tarshish was in the direction opposite to Nineveh. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "to flee in the opposite direction, toward Tarshish, away"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:3 (#4)**"And he went down to Joppa"**

Alternate translation: "Jonah went to Joppa"

Jonah 1:3 (#5)**"a ship"**

A **ship** is a very large type of boat that can travel on the sea and carry many passengers or heavy cargo. If your readers would not be familiar with this type of boat, you could use the name of something similar in your area or you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: "a large boat"

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 1:3 (#6)**"So he paid the fare"**

Alternate translation: "There Jonah paid the cost of his trip"

Jonah 1:3 (#7)**"and went down into it"**

The ship is large enough that it has at least one lower deck that is inside the ship. This is where Jonah went. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "and went down inside the ship"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:3 (#8)**"with them"**

The pronoun **them** refers to the other people who were traveling on the ship, and the only other people we are told about are members of the crew. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could say who these people are. Alternate translation: "with the crew"

See: Pronouns — When to Use Them

Jonah 1:4 (#1)**"But Yahweh"**

But here indicates a strong contrast between what Jonah thought would happen and what God did. In your translation, indicate this strong contrast in a way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "However, Yahweh"

See: Connect — Contrast Relationship

Jonah 1:4 (#2)**"so that the ship was thinking to be broken apart"**

Here, the author speaks of **the ship** as if it were a person who could think. This clause means that the storm was so severe that the ship was close to breaking apart. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "so that the ship was almost breaking apart"

See: Personification

Jonah 1:4 (#3)**"to be broken apart"**

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "of breaking apart"

See: Active or Passive

Jonah 1:5 (#1)**"the sailors"**

"The **sailors** were men who worked on a ship to control the sails and do other tasks. If your readers would not be familiar with this type of work, you could use a more general term or a phrase that explains it. Alternate translation: ""the crew members"" or "the men who worked on the ship""

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 1:5 (#2)**"his own god"**

"The author assumes that his audience will know that by **his own god** he does not mean the true God, Yahweh. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could state this explicitly in your translation. Alternate translation: ""the idol or false god that he worshiped"""

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:5 (#3)**"to lighten it from upon them"**

This could mean: (1) to make the ship lighter so that it would float better, Alternate translation: "to help the ship float better" or (2) to lighten or relieve a dangerous situation, Alternate translation: "to lessen the danger they were in"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:5 (#4)**"But Jonah had gone down into the innermost parts of the ship, and had lain down, and was deeply asleep"**

This sentence provides background information about Jonah's circumstances to help readers understand what happens next in the story. In your translation, present this information in a way that makes it clear that this is background information and that Jonah had already done this before the storm started.

See: Background Information

Jonah 1:5 (#5)**"the innermost parts of the ship"**

Alternate translation: "the interior of the ship"

Jonah 1:5 (#6)**"and had lain down, and was deeply asleep"**

Alternate translation: "and was lying there fast asleep" or "and lay sound asleep"

Jonah 1:6 (#1)**"Then the captain of the crew came to him and said to him"**

The **captain** of the ship is the person who is in charge of the ship and the **crew**. The **crew** is another name for the group of sailors who work there. If your readers would not be familiar with these occupations, you could use the name of something similar in your area or you could use a more general term or a description. Alternate translation: "Then the man in charge of the men working on the ship came to Jonah and said"

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 1:6 (#2)**"What are you doing sleeping"**

The captain is using the question form to scold Jonah. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "Stop sleeping!" or "You should not be sleeping!"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 1:6 (#3)**"Get up"**

While this phrase was used as an idiom in [1:2](#) and [1:3](#), meaning to prepare to begin the activity which was stated next, here the captain is telling Jonah literally to get up from sleeping.

Jonah 1:6 (#4)**"Cry out to your god"**

To **Cry out to** someone means to loudly ask him for help. Alternate translation: "Pray to your god"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:6 (#5)

"Maybe that god will notice us, and we will not perish"

The implication is that Jonah's god might not only notice them but save them. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Maybe your god will hear and save us so that we will not die"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:6 (#6)

"and we will not perish"

"If it would be clearer in your language, you could use a positive expression to translate this double negative that consists of the negative particle **not** and the negative verb **perish**. Alternate translation: "and he will save us" or ""and we will survive"""

See: Double Negatives

Jonah 1:7 (#1)

"Then every man said to his friend"

The phrase **every man said to his friend** is an idiom expressing reciprocal action. This means that the group together decided to do this. Alternate translation: "Then the sailors all said to each other"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:7 (#4)

"so that we may know on whose account this evil is happening to us"

The phrase **so that we may know** implies that the men believed that the gods would control how the lots fell in order to tell them what they wanted to know. This was a form of divination. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "so that the gods can tell us who has caused this trouble"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:7 (#5)

"this evil"

"Alternate translation: ""this awful storm"""

Jonah 1:7 (#6)

"and the lot fell on Jonah"

The expression **the lot fell on Jonah** is an idiom meaning that when the men cast lots, the result indicated Jonah. This does not mean that the lot literally fell down on top of Jonah. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "and the lot showed that Jonah was the guilty person"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:7 (#2)

"Come, and let us cast lots"

Here, **Come** is an idiom that invites the hearer to begin an action with the speaker that the speaker names next. If **Come** does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning, state the meaning plainly, or omit the word. Alternate translation: "Listen! We should cast lots" or "We should do this: cast lots"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:7 (#3)

"and let us cast lots"

We do not know the exact method that the sailors used to cast lots. It may have been with marked stones or pieces of wood. It was their method of getting a god to answer a question. If you have a name in your language for casting lots to get an answer to a question, consider using it here.

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 1:8 (#1)

"Then they said to him"

Here, **they** refers back to the group of sailors referred to as “every man” in verse 7; the pronoun **him** refers to Jonah. If it would be helpful in your language, you could repeat Jonah’s name and the term that you are using for the sailors here. Alternate translation: “Then the men who were working on the ship said to Jonah”

See: Pronouns — When to Use Them

Jonah 1:8 (#2)

“Please tell us on whose account this evil is happening to us”

Alternate translation: “Reveal to us who caused this bad thing that is happening to us”

Jonah 1:9 (#1)

“I fear Yahweh”

Here, **I fear Yahweh** is an idiom that means “I worship Yahweh and not any other god.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “I am a worshiper of Yahweh”

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:10 (#1)

“Then the men were afraid with great fear”

Here, **afraid with great fear** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that both come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. Alternate translation: “Then the men were extremely frightened”

See: Poetry

Jonah 1:10 (#2)

“What is this that you have done”

The men on the ship used a rhetorical question to show how afraid and angry they were that Jonah

was causing so much trouble for all of them. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: “You have done a terrible thing!”

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 1:10 (#3)

“from before the face of Yahweh”

This is an expression that refers to the face of Yahweh to represent his presence. The idea of Yahweh’s presence also includes his knowledge, notice, attention, or judgment. By running away, Jonah is hoping that Yahweh will not notice that he is disobeying. Alternate translation: “from the presence of Yahweh”

See: Metaphor

Jonah 1:10 (#4)

“because he had told them”

This verse provides background information about Jonah’s disobedience to help readers understand why the sailors were afraid. The sailors reacted in fear because Jonah had already told them that he was running away from Yahweh, the God he worshiped. In your translation, present this information in a way that makes it clear that this is background information. Alternatively, place this information before the first sentence about the sailors being afraid.

See: Connect — Background Information

Jonah 1:10 (#5)

“For the men knew that he was running away from before the face of Yahweh, because he had told them”

Jonah told the sailors **that he was running away from before the face of Yahweh** before they reacted **with great fear**. If it is more natural in your language to put information in the order that it happened, you can put this sentence before the other and translate it as follows. Alternate translation: “Jonah told the men that he was running away from before the face of Yahweh”

See: Information Structure

Jonah 1:11 (#1)

"Then they said to him"

The pronoun **they** refers to the sailors. Alternate translation: "Then the sailors said to Jonah" or "Then the men on the ship said to Jonah"

See: Pronouns — When to Use Them

Jonah 1:11 (#2)

"so that the sea will calm down from upon us"

Here, **calm down from upon us** is an idiom that means "calm down for our benefit." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "so that the sea will calm down for us" or "in order to make the sea become calm"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:11 (#3)

"the sea was going forward and storming"

Here, **going forward and storming** is an idiom that means that the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "the strength of the storm was increasing"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:11 (#4)

"Then they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down from upon us?" For the sea was going forward and storming"

If it would be more natural in your language, you could reverse the order of these phrases, since the second phrase gives the reason for the result that the first phrase describes. Alternate translation: "The sea was going forward and storming.

Therefore, they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will calm down from upon us"

See: Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

Jonah 1:12 (#1)

"for I know that this great storm is upon you because of me"

Alternate translation: "because I know that this huge storm is my fault"

Jonah 1:12 (#2)

"Then the sea will calm down from upon you"

See how you translated the idiom **calm down from upon** in [verse 11](#).

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:13 (#1)

"But the men rowed hard"

"They did not do as Jonah suggested. The implication is that the men did not want to throw Jonah into the sea. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "The men did want want to throw Jonah into the sea, so they rowed hard"""

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:13 (#2)

"the sea was going forward and storming"

See how you translated this idiom in [1:11](#). Alternate translation: "the storm became worse, and even taller waves broke"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:14 (#1)

"So they cried out"

Here, **So** indicates that what follows is a result of what came before. Use a connector in your language that makes it clear that what follows is a

result of what came before. Alternate translation: "Because of that they called out" or "Because the sea became more violent, they called loudly"

See: Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

Jonah 1:14 (#2)

"So they cried out to Yahweh"

Alternate translation: "Therefore, the men prayed loudly to Yahweh"

Jonah 1:14 (#3)

"Ah"

Ah! is an exclamation that is expressing intense desperation. Use an exclamation that would communicate that meaning in your language.

See: Exclamations

Jonah 1:14 (#4)

"please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man"

In this context, **the life of this man** means "taking the life of this man." You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "please do not kill us for taking the life of this man" or "even though we are going to cause this man to die, please do not kill us"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 1:14 (#5)

"and do not put innocent blood upon us"

Here, **do not put innocent blood upon us** is an idiom that means ""do not consider us guilty of killing an innocent person." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "and please do not blame us for his death" or "and do not hold us accountable for having killed someone who did not deserve to die"

See: Idiom

Jonah 1:14 (#7)

"Ah! Yahweh, please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood upon us, because you, Yahweh, have done just as you desired"

If it would be more natural in your language, you could move the last phrase to the first part of what the sailors pray, since this phrase gives the reason for what the rest of the prayer describes. Alternate translation: "Ah! You, Yahweh, have chosen to do things in this way. Therefore, Yahweh, please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood upon us" or "Ah! You, Yahweh, have caused all of this to happen, so Yahweh, please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood upon us"

See: Connect — Reason-and-Result Relationship

Jonah 1:14 (#6)

"please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood upon us"

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases with a word other than **and** in order to show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: "please do not let us perish on account of the life of this man; that is, do not put innocent blood upon us"

See: Parallelism

Jonah 1:15 (#1)

"and the sea ceased from its raging"

Here, **the sea** is spoken of as if it were a person who could rage. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "the sea stopped moving violently"

See: Personification

Jonah 1:15 (#2)**"and the sea ceased from its raging"**

If it would be clearer in your language, you could use a positive expression to translate this double negative that consists of the negative words **ceased** and **raging**. Alternate translation: "and the sea became still"

See: Double Negatives

Jonah 1:16 (#1)**"Then the men feared Yahweh with great fear"**

Here, **feared ... with great fear** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that both come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. See how you translated this phrase in [verse 10](#), but be aware that you may want a different translation here for the different kind of fear that this is. The danger of the storm is past; now they are in awe of Yahweh's power. Alternate translation: "then the men became greatly awed at Yahweh's power" or "then the men worshiped Yahweh with great awe"

See: Poetry

Jonah 1:16 (#2)**"and they sacrificed a sacrifice to Yahweh and vowed vows"**

Here, both **sacrificed a sacrifice** and **vowed vows** use a verb and its object both that come from the same root to emphasize the ideas. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. Alternate translation: "and they offered up a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows to him"

See: Poetry

Jonah 1:17 (#1)

""

Some versions number this verse as the first verse of chapter 2. You may want to number the verses

according to the main version that your language group uses.

Jonah 1:17 (#2)**"Now Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah"**

The author is using the word translated **Now** to introduce a new event in the story. Use a word, phrase, or other method in your language that is natural for introducing a new event. This new event starts the next part of the story, where Yahweh saves Jonah from the sea, and Jonah prays.

See: Introduction of a New Event

Jonah - Chapter 2 Introduction

Jonah 2 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

This chapter begins with a prayer by Jonah, and many translators have chosen to set it apart by setting its lines farther to the right on the page than the rest of the text. Also, the prayer is in the style of poetry. To show that, many translations put each line of the poem on a separate line. Translators can follow these practices, but they are not obligated to do so. You may wish to follow the format of a well-known translation in your area.

*Special Concepts in this Chapter***Sea**

This chapter contains many terms that describe the sea. If people who speak your language are unfamiliar with the sea, you will need to discuss how to describe these things. (See: Translate Unknowns)

*Important Figures of Speech in this Chapter***Poetic Imagery**

Prayers in Scripture are often expressed in poetry. Poetry frequently uses metaphors and other imagery to more powerfully communicate very emotional topics. For example, Jonah thought he would die in a fish in the sea, and so he compares being trapped there as being surrounded by the bars of the earth and being in the "belly of Sheol."

Jonah is overwhelmed by the depth of the sea and expresses this by speaking about being at the “base of the mountains.” (See: Metaphor)

Other Possible Translation Difficulties in this Chapter

Parallelism

Hebrew poetry often expresses something in one line and then expresses that same thought in another line but using different words. This emphasizes the ideas in the parallel lines. For example, verse 2 has two halves that are saying basically the same thing.

I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out; you heard my voice.

Each half also has two parts. The first part of each half is saying the same thing as the other, and the second part of each half is also saying the same thing as each other. If your language would not repeat ideas like this in poetry, see: Parallelism for ideas for how to translate this kind of poetry.

Jonah 2:1 (#1)

"Yahweh his God"

Here, the author is using the possessive form to describe **Yahweh** as the God whom Jonah worshiped. The word **his** does not mean that Jonah owned God. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “Yahweh, the God to whom he belonged,”

See: Possession

Jonah 2:2 (#1)

"And he said"

Alternate translation: “Jonah said”

Jonah 2:2 (#2)

"I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me"

This is poetic language. If your language has a way to indicate poetry, you could use it here. This line

begins a poem describing Jonah’s experience in the fish, his prayer, and God’s answer. The poem describes these things from a time after they had already happened.

See: Poetry

Jonah 2:2 (#3)

"I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me"

In this poem that is also a prayer, Jonah refers to God in both the third person (using “he”) and the second person (using “you”). If this would not be natural in your language, you could use the second-person form throughout the poem. Alternate translation: “Yahweh, I cried out to you during my distress, and you answered me”

See: First, Second or Third Person

Jonah 2:2 (#4)

"and he answered me"

“The implication is that Yahweh answered Jonah’s prayer for help by helping him. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “and Yahweh helped me”” ”

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 2:2 (#6)

"From the belly of Sheol"

Here Jonah is speaking of the fish’s belly as if it were **Sheol**, that is, the place of the dead. Jonah is expressing that he believed that this is where he would die very soon. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “When I was almost dead”

See: Metaphor

Jonah 2:2 (#7)

"Sheol"

Sheol was the name of the place where they believed that people went after they died. It was thought to be a shadowy world located somewhere

under the ground. The New Testament equivalent seems to be "Hades," where the dead wait for judgment (see Rev. 20:13). If your language has a word for this place, you may want to use it here or borrow the word "Sheol."

See: How to Translate Names

Jonah 2:2 (#8)

"you heard my voice"

Here, **you heard my voice** is equivalent to the phrase "he answered me" in the previous line of poetry. In this context, Jonah is expressing that Yahweh both heard him and acted to save him. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "You heard me and acted to save to me"

See: Idiom

Jonah 2:2 (#5)

"I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me. From the belly of Sheol I called for help, and You heard my voice."

The two halves of this verse mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases in a way that would show that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: "I cried out to Yahweh from my distress, and he answered me; that is, from the belly of Sheol I cried out, and you heard my voice"

See: Parallelism

Jonah 2:3 (#1)

"into the heart of the seas"

Here the term **heart** is a metaphor for the center of something. To be in **the heart of the seas** means to be completely surrounded by sea water. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "under the sea water"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 2:3 (#3)

"and a current surrounded me"

Alternate translation: "and the sea water flowed all around me"

Jonah 2:3 (#4)

"your billows and your waves"

The terms **billows** and **waves** mean similar things. Both of these are disturbances on the surface of the ocean. Jonah is using the two terms together for emphasis. If it would be clearer for your readers, you could use a single term and express the emphasis in another way. Alternate translation: "your powerful waves"

See: Doublet

Jonah 2:3 (#2)

"the seas"

Here, Jonah refers to the sea by using the plural **seas** to intensify the idea. If it would be more natural in your language, you can use the singular and intensify the idea in another way. Alternate translation: "the vast ocean"

See: Unusual Uses of the Plural

Jonah 2:3 (#5)

"your billows and your waves"

Here, Jonah is using the possessive form **your** to describe the **billows** and **waves** because they were caused by God. If your language would not use the possessive form for this, you could say this in a more natural way. Alternate translation: "the billows and waves that you created"

See: Possession

Jonah 2:4 (#1)

"But I"

But I shows that there is a contrast between the actions of Yahweh, which Jonah had just talked about, and his own response, which he will talk about now. In your translation, indicate this contrast in a way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "On my part"

See: Connect — Contrast Relationship

Jonah 2:4 (#2)

"I have been driven out"

If your language does not use the passive form in this way, you can state this in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "You drove me out"

See: Active or Passive

Jonah 2:4 (#3)

"from before your eyes"

Here, **eyes** is a metonym meaning seeing, and seeing is a metonym for the knowledge, notice, and attention of God. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "from before you" or "from your presence" or "to where you do not notice me"

See: Metonymy

Jonah 2:4 (#4)

"yet"

Here, **yet** indicates a contrast between Jonah being driven away from God and Jonah's hope to see the temple again. In your translation, indicate this contrast in a way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "nevertheless"

See: Connect — Contrast Relationship

Jonah 2:5 (#1)

"Water had closed around me even as far as life, the deep was surrounding me"

These two phrases mean basically the same thing. The second emphasizes the meaning of the first by repeating the same idea with different words. If it

would be helpful to your readers, you could connect the phrases in a way that shows that the second phrase is repeating the first one, not saying something additional. Alternate translation: "Water had closed around me even as far as life; indeed, the deep was surrounding me"

See: Parallelism

Jonah 2:5 (#2)

"Water"

Alternate translation: ""The sea""

Jonah 2:5 (#3)

"even as far as life"

Here the Hebrew term **life** can also possibly mean "neck" or "soul." In any case, the water was threatening to end his life. Alternate translation: "up to my neck" or "as far as my soul"

Jonah 2:5 (#4)

"the deep was surrounding me"

Alternate translation: "deep water was all around me"

Jonah 2:5 (#5)

"seaweed"

The word **seaweed** means a kind of long, stringy plant that grows in the sea.

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 2:6 (#1)

"The earth with its bars were around me forever"

Here Jonah is speaking of **the earth** under the water as if it had **bars** like a prison. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "the earth was like a prison that was about to lock me in forever"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 2:6 (#3)

"but you brought up my life from the pit"

Here, the term **pit** has a double meaning. Jonah is in a deep place that could be called a pit, and this is also a word that is used in poetry for the place of the dead. Jonah is expressing that he felt certain that he would die in this place. Alternate translation: "but you saved my life from the place of the dead"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 2:6 (#4)

"Yahweh, my God"

If it would be more natural in your language, you could put this phrase at the beginning of the sentence after **but** or **you**.

See: Information Structure

Jonah 2:6 (#2)

"my life"

Here, **life** represents Jonah himself. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "my very being, alive"

See: Metonymy

Jonah 2:6 (#5)

"my God"

Here, Jonah is using the possessive form **my** to describe **God**. If your language would not use the possessive form for this, you could use a more natural expression. Alternate translation: "the God to whom I belong"

See: Possession

Jonah 2:7 (#1)

"When my life fainted upon me"

This phrase could mean that: (1) Jonah was already in the process of dying when he remembered Yahweh. Alternate translation: "when my life was fainting away from me" (2) Jonah had given up hope of being rescued and resigned himself to the fact that he would die. Alternate translation: "when my spirit inside me had fainted"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 2:7 (#2)

"I remembered Yahweh"

The implication is that when Jonah **remembered** Yahweh, he also prayed to him. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "I thought of Yahweh and asked him to help me"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 2:7 (#4)

"and my prayer came to you, to your holy temple"

Jonah speaks as if his **prayer** could travel to God and his temple. This means that God heard his prayer and responded to it. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "then you in your holy temple heard my prayer"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 2:7 (#3)

"I remembered Yahweh"

Jonah changes to talking about Yahweh in the third person here and then continues to talk to him in the second person in the rest of the prayer. If this would not be natural in your language, you could use the second-person form here. Alternate translation: "I remembered you, Yahweh"

See: First, Second or Third Person

Jonah 2:8 (#1)**"Those who give attention to empty vanities"**

Here the term **empty vanities** is probably an idiom referring to idols of false gods. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "Those who give attention to useless idols" or "Those who pay attention to useless gods"

See: Idiom

Jonah 2:8 (#2)**"forsake their covenant faithfulness"**

Here, **covenant faithfulness** could refer to: (1) the faithfulness of God to his people. Alternate translation: "are rejecting you, who would be faithful to them" (2) the faithfulness of the people to God. Alternate translation: "are abandoning their commitment to you"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 2:9 (#1)**"But I"**

This expression shows that there is a contrast between Jonah himself and the people about whom Jonah had just spoken. They paid attention to useless gods, but he would worship Yahweh. In your translation, indicate this contrast in a way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "But as for me"

See: Connect — Contrast Relationship

Jonah 2:9 (#2)**"with a voice of thanksgiving"**

The phrase **with a voice of thanksgiving** is an idiom that means "while praising God." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. It is not clear whether Jonah planned to thank God by singing or shouting joyfully. Alternate translation: "while praising you out loud"

See: Idiom

Jonah 2:9 (#3)**"Salvation belongs to Yahweh"**

Here, **Salvation belongs to Yahweh** is an idiom that means "only Yahweh can save." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "Salvation comes from Yahweh" or "Yahweh is the One who saves"

See: Idiom

Jonah 2:9 (#5)**"Salvation belongs to Yahweh"**

If your language does not use an abstract noun for the idea of the word **Salvation**, you can express the same idea with a verbal form such as "save." Alternate translation: "Yahweh is the one who saves people"

See: Abstract Nouns

Jonah 2:9 (#4)**"Salvation belongs to Yahweh"**

Here Jonah makes a statement about Yahweh in the third person as part of his prayer to Yahweh. If this would not be natural in your language, you could add "you" to make it the second-person form. See also the Note concerning the phrase "I cried out to Yahweh from my distress ... " in [2:2](#). Alternate translation: "Salvation belongs to you, Yahweh"

See: First, Second or Third Person

Jonah 2:10 (#3)**"onto the dry land"**

In some languages it would be unnecessary or unnatural to express that the **land** was **dry**. If this is true of your language, you could use a more natural expression for the land at the edge of the sea. Alternate translation: "upon the ground" or "onto the shore"

See: Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit

Jonah 2:10 (#1)

"And Yahweh spoke to the fish"

The content of what **Yahweh spoke** was a command to vomit up Jonah. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "And Yahweh told the fish to vomit up Jonah onto the land"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 2:10 (#2)

"And Yahweh spoke to the fish"

If it would be more natural in your language, you could express this as a direct quotation. Alternate translation: "And Yahweh said to the fish, 'Vomit up Jonah onto the dry land'"

See: Direct and Indirect Quotations

Jonah - Chapter 3 Introduction

Jonah 3 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

This chapter returns to the narrative about Jonah.

Special Concepts in this Chapter

Animals

According to the king's proclamation, the animals had to participate in the fast which he had ordered. This was unusual and probably indicates that the king wanted God to see that all of Nineveh was taking his proclamation of destruction very seriously. There is nothing in the law of Moses that instructed the people to have their animals participate in fasting. (See: Law of Moses)

God Repenting or Relenting

The last verse of this chapter says, "So then God relented in regard to the evil that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." This concept of God changing His mind may seem

inconsistent with the fact that God's character and his plans do not change.

However, God's actions of punishment or mercy depend on human actions. God often changes his action from punishment to mercy in response to humans who repent of their sins, because he prefers to be merciful. Because the Ninevites repented, God did not follow through with the judgment that he told Jonah to proclaim, and Jonah described that in a human way as "relenting" or as some versions say, "changing his mind." The reader understands that this was God's plan from the beginning.

God Planning Evil

The Hebrew word translated as "evil" in the ULT is very broad, including moral evil, physical evil, and everything that is bad. So in verse 10, the author uses the same word for God's planned destruction of Nineveh as he used for the people's wicked behavior. The ULT translates each of these uses as "evil" to show the user that it is the same Hebrew word in each place. By using the same word, the author is showing that when people repent of moral evil, God relents from doing physical evil (punishment). God never does moral evil. If your language would not use the same word for both of these, you will want to use different words for them.

Other Possible Translation Difficulties in this Chapter

Size of Nineveh

The ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh that have been uncovered are about 8 miles or 13 kilometers around. So, although Nineveh was a very big city in the ancient world, it was not as big as most modern cities. The description of Nineveh as "a journey of three days" seems to mean that it took three days to walk through it, although that seems to be more time than would be needed to walk through a city of that size. Of course, it depends on several factors: what a person is doing while on this journey through the city, and that there may have been extensive settlements outside the city walls. Also, the length of time given is probably only a general approximation. Translators should simply translate the text and not try to reconcile it with what modern archeologists think that they know about ancient Nineveh and the people who walked through it.

A City Great to God

Verse three in the ULT describes Nineveh as “a city great to God.” In Hebrew, saying that something is “to God” or “of God” is an idiom that means that it is an extreme example of that thing. For example, in Genesis 30:8, Rachel describes the struggle she has had with her sister as “a struggle of God,” meaning “a mighty struggle” or “an extremely difficult struggle.” Other examples of this idiom in the Bible are found in Genesis 23:6, Exodus 9:28, 1 Samuel 14:15, Psalms 36:6, and Psalms 80:10. In Jonah 3:3, this idiom probably means that Nineveh was an extremely large city. See how this is translated in the Bible that is most commonly used in your area. You may want to follow how they translated this idiom.

“

Jonah 3:1 (#1)**“Then the word of Yahweh came”**

This phrase introduces the second half of the story of Jonah. The same phrase introduced the first half of the story in [1:1](#). See how you translated it there.

See: Introduction of a New Event

Jonah 3:1 (#2)**“Then the word of Yahweh came”**

This is an idiom meaning that Yahweh spoke in some way. See how you translated this in [1:1](#). Alternate translation: “Then Yahweh spoke his message”

See: Idiom

Jonah 3:2 (#2)**“the great city”**

Here, as in [1:2](#), **great** means both large and important. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: “the large and important city”

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:2 (#1)**“Get up”**

Get up is an idiom that means that Jonah should take action and obey the next command, which is “go.” If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. See how you translated this in [1:2](#) and [1:3](#). Alternate translation: “Look alive” or “Prepare yourself”

See: Idiom

Jonah 3:2 (#3)**“and call out to it the proclamation that I tell to you”**

Here, the pronoun **it** refers to the city of **Nineveh**, which represents the people who live there. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “and tell the people there what I tell you to tell them”

See: Metonymy

Jonah 3:3 (#1)**“So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh”**

Here the words **got up** mean that Jonah “took action” in response to God’s command to go as he did in [1:3](#), but this time he obeyed instead of disobeying. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have that meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: “This time Jonah obeyed Yahweh and went to Nineveh” or “So Jonah left the beach and went to Nineveh, as Yahweh had commanded him”

See: Idiom

Jonah 3:3 (#2)**“according to the word of Yahweh”**

Here, **the word of Yahweh** represents Yahweh himself. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your

language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "as Yahweh had commanded him"

See: Metonymy

Jonah 3:3 (#3)

"Now Nineveh was a city great to God, a journey of three days"

This sentence provides background information about the city of Nineveh to help readers understand what happens next in the story. In your translation, present this information in a way that makes it clear that this is background information, such as introducing it with a word such as **Now**.

See: Background Information

Jonah 3:3 (#4)

"city great to God, a"

Here, because of the phrase **a journey of three days**, the focus of **great** seems to be the size of the city. The phrase **great to God** is an idiom that means "extremely large." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "an enormous city"

See: Idiom

Jonah 3:3 (#5)

"a" - "journey of three days"

This could mean: (1) that a person had to walk for three days to completely go through the city from one side of the city to the opposite side. Alternate translation: "a city so large that it would take a person three days to walk through it" (2) that it took three days to see the whole city. Alternate translation: "a city so large that it would take a person three days to see it all"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:4 (#1)

"So Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he called out"

The phrase **a journey of one day** could mean: (1) Jonah walked a day's journey into the city and then he started calling out. Alternate translation: "So Jonah walked into the city for one day, and then he called out" (2) while Jonah was walking through the city on the first day, he started calling out. Alternate translation: "So Jonah began walking into the city for one day, and as he went he called out"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:4 (#2)

"and he called out and said"

The expression **called out and said** contains extra information that would be unnatural to express in some languages. If this is true of your language, you could shorten the expression. Alternate translation: "and he proclaimed" or "and he shouted"

See: Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit

Jonah 3:4 (#3)

"Still 40 days"

Alternate translation: "After 40 days" or "When 40 days have passed"

Jonah 3:4 (#4)

"then Nineveh will be overthrown"

If your language does not use this passive form, you could express the idea in active form or in another way that is natural in your language. If you need to say who will do the action, it is clear from the context that it will be God. Alternate translation: "then God will overthrow Nineveh"

See: Active or Passive

Jonah 3:5 (#2)

"And they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth"

Both fasting and wearing coarse cloth were symbolic actions that showed sadness or devotion to God or both. If this would not be clear to your

readers, you could explain the significance of these actions in the text or in a footnote. Alternate translation: "they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth to show that they were sorry for having sinned"

See: Symbolic Action

Jonah 3:5 (#3)

"from the greatest of them even to the least of them"

Alternate translation: "from the most significant to the least significant people" or "including all of the people, whether important or unimportant"

Jonah 3:5 (#1)

"the men of Nineveh"

Although the term **men** is masculine, here it has a generic sense that includes both men and women. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use a phrase that makes this clear. Alternate translation: "the men and women of Nineveh"

See: When Masculine Words Include Women

Jonah 3:6 (#1)

"the word"

The author assumes that his readers will understand that this **word** is Jonah's message from God. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Jonah's message"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:6 (#2)

"and he rose up from his throne, and he took off his robe from being on him"

That the king **rose up from his throne and he took off his robe** shows that he was acting humbly. The throne and the royal robe were both symbols of his authority and power as king of a powerful nation. If the meaning of these actions would not be clear to your readers, you could explain it in the

text or in a footnote. Alternate translation: "and he left his royal throne and removed his royal robe"

See: Symbolic Action

Jonah 3:6 (#3)

"from his throne"

A **throne** is a a special, ceremonial chair that a king sits on when performing his official duties as king. It is reserved for the king only. If your readers would not be familiar with this type of royal seat, you could use the name of something similar in your area or you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: ""his royal chair"""

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 3:6 (#4)

"and he covered himself with sackcloth and sat down on the ash heap"

"The acts of putting on **sackcloth** and sitting **on the ash heap** are symbolic actions meant to show deep sorrow and repentance. If this would not be clear to your readers, you could explain the significance of these actions in the text or in a footnote. Alternate translation: ""and he covered himself with sackcloth and sat among the ashes to show his deep sorrow and repentance"""

See: Symbolic Action

Jonah 3:7 (#1)

"And he proclaimed and spoke"

The expression **proclaimed and spoke** contains extra information that would be unnatural to express in some languages. If this is true of your language, you could shorten the expression. Alternate translation: "And he proclaimed" or "And he announced"

See: Making Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information Explicit

Jonah 3:7 (#3)

"from a decree of the king and his nobles"

Alternate translation: "a command with the full authority of the king and his officials"

Jonah 3:7 (#4)

"and his nobles"

The term **nobles** refers to important men who helped the king rule the city. If your readers would not be familiar with this type of person, you could use the name of something similar in your area or you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: "and his officers"

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 3:7 (#5)

"herd or flock"

This refers to two groups of animals that people care for. A **herd** is made up of large livestock (such as oxen or cattle) and a **flock** is made up of small livestock (such as sheep or goats). If your readers would not be familiar with these terms, you could use the name of something similar in your area or you could use a more general term. Alternate translation: "cattle or sheep"

See: Translate Unknowns

Jonah 3:7 (#2)

"And he proclaimed and spoke"

The implication is that the king sent messengers to make this proclamation. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "And he commanded his messengers to proclaim"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:8 (#1)

"and the beast"

The implication is that these are the people's domestic animals. They are not wild animals. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: ""and every animal that they own"""

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:8 (#2)

"and they must cry out to God with strength"

The writer assumes that his readers will understand what the people were to pray for. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "and they must cry out loudly to God and ask for mercy" or "and they must pray earnestly to God that he would be merciful to them"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:8 (#4)

"the violence that is in his hands"

Here, **hands** represents ""doing." This refers to the violence that the people of Nineveh were doing. If it would be helpful in your language, you could use an equivalent expression from your language or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "the violent things that he has done""

See: Metonymy

Jonah 3:8 (#3)

"and they must cry out"

The pronoun **they** probably refers to the people, not to the animals. If this is not clear for your readers, you could include this information. Alternate translation: "and the people must cry out"

See: Pronouns — When to Use Them

Jonah 3:9 (#1)

"Who knows"

The king used this rhetorical question to get the people to think about something that is possible but uncertain: that if they would stop sinning, God might not kill them. It could be translated as a statement: "We do not know." Or it could be stated as an initial word and be part of the next sentence: "Perhaps"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 3:9 (#2)

"This god might turn back and have compassion"

Here the author speaks of God changing his mind about bringing judgment as if God were turning around and walking in the opposite direction. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "This god may decide instead to have compassion" or "This god may do the opposite of what he said and be merciful"

See: Metaphor

Jonah 3:9 (#3)

"from the burning of his nose"

Here **the burning of his nose** is an idiom meaning that the person is angry. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "from the fire of his belly" or "from his anger"

See: Idiom

Jonah 3:9 (#4)

"so that we will not perish"

If it would be clearer in your language, you could use a positive expression to translate this double negative that consists of the negative particle **not** and the negative word **perish**. Alternate translation: "so that we will live" or "and spare our lives"

See: Double Negatives

Jonah 3:10 (#1)

"And God saw their deeds, that they turned away from their evil ways"

Alternate translation: "God saw that they stopped doing evil actions"

Jonah 3:10 (#2)

"they turned away from their evil ways"

"Here the author is speaking of them stopping their sinning as if they **turned away** from walking on a path toward **evil ways** and started walking in the opposite direction. If it would be helpful in your language, you could state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: ""they repented from doing evil"""

See: Metaphor

Jonah 3:10 (#3)

"in regard to the evil"

The word translated as "evil" here is very broad, including moral evil, physical evil, and everything that is bad. It is the same word used in the previous sentence (and verse 8) to describe the actions of the Ninevites. The author is showing that when people repent of moral evil, God relents from doing physical evil (punishment). God never does moral evil. If this is clear in your language, you may want to use the same word in both sentences. If that is not clear, you may want to use different words. Alternate translation: "in regard to the punishment"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:10 (#5)

"and he did not do {it}"

Here, what God **did not do** could be made explicit if it would be helpful in your language. Alternate translation: "and he did not punish them" or "and he did not destroy them"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 3:10 (#4)

"the evil"

Here the author is using the adjective **evil** as a noun to refer to an evil thing. Your language may use adjectives in the same way. If not, you could translate this word with an equivalent phrase. Alternate translation: "the evil thing" or "the terrible action"

See: Nominal Adjectives

Jonah - Chapter 4 Introduction

Jonah 4 General Notes

Structure and Formatting

Jonah continues the narrative and brings the book to an unusual conclusion, ending it with a question from God. This emphasizes that the book is not really about Jonah. It is about God's desire to be merciful to everyone, whether Jew or Gentile. (See: Mercy)

Special Concepts in this Chapter

Prophecy delayed

According to the law of Moses, a prophet must prophesy what Yahweh tells him to prophesy, and his words must come true. If that did not happen, the penalty was death, because that unfulfilled prophecy shows that the man was not a real prophet. But when Jonah told the city of Nineveh that it was going to be destroyed in 40 days, it did not happen at that time. This is because God reserves the right to be merciful. (See: Prophet and Law of Moses)

Jonah's anger

When God did not destroy Nineveh, Jonah was angry with God because Jonah hated the people of Nineveh. They were enemies of Israel. But God wanted Jonah and the readers of this book to learn that God loves all people.

Characteristics of God

In verse 2, Jonah attributes a series of characteristics to God. A Jewish reader of this book would recognize this as the description that God used about himself when speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai (See [Exodus 34:6–7](#)).

God's grace

When Jonah went outside the city, he got very hot; God graciously provided some relief through the plant. God was trying to teach Jonah that he is a merciful God through this object lesson. (See: Grace)

Important Figures of Speech in this Chapter

Rhetorical questions

In this chapter, Jonah uses a rhetorical question to show how angry he is at Yahweh. Yahweh then uses

a series of three rhetorical questions to teach Jonah about the attitude that he should have. If your language would not use rhetorical questions for these purposes, then use a more natural form. (See: Rhetorical Question)

Other Possible Translation Difficulties in this Chapter

Evil

The Hebrew word translated as "evil" in the ULT is very broad, including moral evil, physical evil, and everything that is bad. God never does moral evil. In verse 1, the author says that Jonah considered God's act of mercy in sparing the people of Nineveh to be evil. In verse 2, Jonah describes God as "relenting from evil." In verse 6, Jonah's situation and attitude are described as evil. This is after the actions of the Ninevites are described as evil in [1:2](#), [3:8](#), and [3:10](#), and the situation of the sailors in [1:7](#). The ULT translates the word as "evil" in each place to show the irony that the author wants to convey by using the same Hebrew word for each different bad thing in the book and for one good thing—God's mercy on Nineveh (from Jonah's perspective). If your language would not use the same word for both moral and physical evil, you will want to use different words for each of them.

Jonah 4:1 (#1)

"But this was evil to Jonah"

This sentence introduces the next part of the story, in which Jonah responds to God because God saved the city of Nineveh. Use a word, phrase, or other method in your language that is natural for introducing a new event. Alternate translation: "Now this was evil to Jonah" or "But for Jonah, this was evil"

See: Introduction of a New Event

Jonah 4:1 (#4)

"and it burned to him"

The phrase **it burned to him** is an idiom that speaks of Jonah's anger as if it were a fire burning inside him. Alternate translation: "and he was very angry"

See: Idiom

Jonah 4:1 (#2)**"But this was evil"**

The pronoun **this** refers to the fact that God did not destroy Nineveh. If this is not clear for your readers, you could say that here. Alternate translation: "But the fact that God spared Nineveh was evil"

See: Pronouns — When to Use Them

Jonah 4:1 (#3)**"But this was evil to Jonah, a great evil"**

Here, **this was evil to Jonah, a great evil** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that both come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. Alternate translation: "But this was exceedingly evil to Jonah"

See: Poetry

Jonah 4:2 (#1)**"Ah"**

This is an exclamation that is emphasizing intense frustration. Use an exclamation that would communicate that meaning in your language. Alternate translation: "Oh" or "I knew it"

See: Exclamations

Jonah 4:2 (#2)**"Yahweh, was this not my word while I was in my country"**

Jonah used this rhetorical question to tell God how angry he was. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "Yahweh, this is what I said when I was still in my own country!"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 4:2 (#3)**"Yahweh, was this not my word while I was in my country"**

The implication is that Jonah correctly foretold what would happen. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Yahweh, when I was still in my own country, did I not say that if I warned the people of Nineveh, they might repent, and you would not destroy them"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:2 (#4)**"long of nostrils"**

The phrase **long of nostrils** is an idiom meaning that Yahweh does not get angry quickly. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "with a cool head" or "slow to get angry" or "very patient"

See: Idiom

Jonah 4:2 (#5)**"and abundant in covenant faithfulness"**

Alternate translation: "and very faithful" or "and full of love for your people"

Jonah 4:2 (#6)**"and one who relents from evil"**

Here, **evil** refers to the physical destruction of the city of Nineveh and its people. It does not refer to moral evil. In this context, this phrase means that God feels sadness about causing bad things to happen to people who sin, and he acts differently when sinners repent of their sin. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. See the discussion about evil in the chapter introduction, and see how you translated this word in [4:1](#). Alternate translation: "and you decide not to punish sinners who repent"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:3 (#1)**"I beg you, take my life from me"**

The implication is that Jonah wanted to die because God will not punish his former enemies. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "since you will not destroy Nineveh as you said you would, please allow me to die"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:3 (#2)**"for my death is better than my life"**

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **death** and **life**, you could express the same ideas in other ways. Alternate translation: "for I would prefer to die rather than to live" or "because I want to die. I do not want to live"

See: Abstract Nouns

Jonah 4:4 (#1)**"Is it right that it burns to you"**

The phrase **it burns to you** is an idiom that speaks of Jonah's anger as if it were a fire burning inside him. If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. See how you translated it in [4:1](#). Alternate translation: "is it right for you to be angry about this"

See: Idiom

Jonah 4:4 (#2)**"Is it right that it burns to you"**

The reason for Jonah's anger can be made explicit. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Is it right for you to be angry that I did not destroy Nineveh"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:4 (#3)**"Is it right that it burns to you"**

Yahweh is using the question form to teach Jonah that he is not right to be angry. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "It is not right that it burns to you!"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 4:5 (#1)**"what would be within the city"**

The implication is that Jonah wanted to see whether God would destroy the city or not. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "what would become of the city" or "what God would do to the city"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:6 (#1)**"from over Jonah to be a shade over his head"**

Alternate translation: "over Jonah's head for shade"

Jonah 4:6 (#2)**"in order to rescue him from his evil"**

Here the term **evil** could be referring to one of two things (or both at the same time). It could be referring to: (1) Jonah's physical discomfort or distress, meaning the intense heat of the sun shining on Jonah's head. (2) Jonah's wrong attitude concerning God's decision not to destroy Nineveh. If both meanings can be preserved by using a general term, that is preferable. Alternate translation: "in order to save Jonah from his bad situation"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:6 (#3)**"And Jonah rejoiced with great rejoicing"**

Here, **rejoiced with great rejoicing** is an emphatic construction that uses a verb and its object that come from the same root. You may be able to use the same construction in your language to express the meaning here. Alternatively, your language may have another way of showing the emphasis. Alternate translation: "And Jonah was extremely pleased"

See: Poetry

Jonah 4:7 (#1)

"Then God appointed a worm"

Alternate translation: "then God sent a worm"

Jonah 4:7 (#2)

"and it withered"

The implication of **it withered** is that the plant became dry and died and would no longer shelter Jonah from the hot sun. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "so that the plant died"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:8 (#1)

"And as soon as the rising of the sun happened"

This clause provides background information about the time of day to help readers understand what happens next in the story. In your translation, present this information in a way that makes it clear that this is background information. Alternate translation: "And then, after the sun had come up"

See: Connect — Background Information

Jonah 4:8 (#2)

"then God appointed a hot east wind"

The implication is that **a hot east wind** will make Jonah very uncomfortable. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. If "wind" in your language can only mean cool air, then you can try this alternate translation: "God sent a great warmth from the east to Jonah"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:8 (#3)

"and the sun beat on"

Here, the author speaks of **the sun** as if it were a person who could **beat on** another person. If it would be helpful in your language, you could express the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "and the sun was very hot on" or "and the sun sent its great heat onto"

See: Personification

Jonah 4:8 (#4)

"on the head of Jonah"

The phrase **on the head of Jonah** may have a literal meaning or a figurative meaning. Perhaps Jonah felt the heat most on his head, or perhaps the phrase **the head of Jonah** means Jonah's entire body. Alternate translation: "on Jonah"

See: Synecdoche

Jonah 4:8 (#5)

"and he became faint"

Alternate translation: "and he became very weak" or "and he lost his strength"

Jonah 4:8 (#6)

"Then he asked his spirit to die"

If it would be more natural in your language, you could express this as a direct quotation either addressed to himself or, as in [4:3](#), to God. Alternate translation: "Then he told himself, 'I want to die'" or "Then he requested of God, 'Let me die'"

See: Direct and Indirect Quotations

Jonah 4:8 (#7)

"My death is better than my life"

If your language does not use abstract nouns for the ideas of **death** and **life**, you could express the same

ideas in other ways. See how you translated this in [4:3](#). Alternate translation: "I would rather die than live" or "I want to die; I do not want to live"

See: Abstract Nouns

Jonah 4:9 (#1)

"Is it right that it burns to you about the plant"

God is using the question form to lead Jonah to draw a conclusion about his selfish attitude. God is not seeking information. Since Jonah answers the question, it would be good to keep the question form if that would be natural in your language. But if you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement. Alternate translation: "It is not right that it burns to you about the plant!"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 4:9 (#2)

"it burns to you" - "it burns to me"

The phrases **it burns to you** and **it burns to me** are examples of an idiom that speaks of Jonah's anger as if it were a fire burning inside him. See how you translated this idiom in [4:1](#).

See: Idiom

Jonah 4:10 (#1)

"Then Yahweh said"

Here Yahweh is speaking to Jonah. You could include this information if that would be helpful to your readers. Alternate translation: "Yahweh said to Jonah"

See: Assumed Knowledge and Implicit Information

Jonah 4:10 (#2)

"it came as a son of a night, and it perished as a son of a night"

The expression **son of** describes a person or thing which shares the qualities of something else. This idiom, **son of a night** means that the plant existed only briefly. If it would be helpful, you could use an equivalent idiom from your language or state the

meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "it grew in one night and died the next" or "it grew quickly and died just as quickly"

See: Idiom

Jonah 4:11 (#1)

"So I"

This expression, **So I**, paired with ""You"" in verse [4:10](#), indicates a direct comparison between Yahweh's attitude toward the people of Nineveh and Jonah's attitude toward the plant. Indicate this comparison in a way that is natural in your language. Alternate translation: "So on my part" or "So as for me" "

See: Connecting Words and Phrases

Jonah 4:11 (#2)

"So I, should I not feel troubled about Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand, and many animals"

God is using the question form to emphasize his claim that he should have compassion on Nineveh. If you would not use the question form for this purpose in your language, you could translate this as a statement or an exclamation. Alternate translation: "I certainly should have compassion for Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand, and also many cattle!"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 4:11 (#3)

"in which there are more than"

To make this verse simpler, it can be divided into two parts. The first part, ending with **the great city**, can be ended with a question mark. The rest of the verse can then be a statement, ending with a period. To do that, begin the second part as follows: Alternate translation: "There are more than" or "It has more than"

See: Rhetorical Question

Jonah 4:11 (#4)

"120, 000"

Alternate translation: "one hundred twenty thousand"

See: Numbers

Jonah 4:11 (#5)

"who cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left hand"

This idiom means "who do not know the difference between right and wrong." If this phrase does not have that meaning in your language, you could use an idiom from your language that does have this meaning or state the meaning plainly. Alternate translation: "who do not know up from down" or "who do not know what is good for them"

See: Idiom