

## Q&A: TRANSLATION DECISIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE

### Why doesn't the Christian Standard Bible capitalize pronouns referring to God?

The original text of Scripture does not distinguish pronouns referring to God by capitalization. Most Bible translations, historically and in modern times, have followed this example and have not capitalized pronouns that refer to God. For example, the King James Version, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, and the New Living Translation do not capitalize pronouns referring to God. In these and other Bible translations, words such as he, him, his, you, your, etc., are left in lower case even when they may refer to God.

Departing from this tradition, the HCSB chose to capitalize divine referents in an attempt to help make clear when God is the subject. After reviewing the HCSB's approach and drawing on feedback received through the years, the Christian Standard Bible's Translation Oversight Committee identified a number of concerns that led to the reversal of the HCSB's approach.

First, the original text of Scripture is not always clear about to whom a particular pronoun may be referring. Translators who capitalize any reference to a divine person are then forced into making unnecessary judgment calls.

One example is Ruth 2:20. The Hebrew is ambiguous about whether Naomi is praising God for God's kindness or praising Boaz for Boaz's kindness. The bolded "his" below is the rendering in question. The text in HCSB says: "*Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'May he be blessed by the LORD, who has not forsaken his kindness to the living or the dead.' Naomi continued, 'The man is a close relative. He is one of our family redeemers.'*" The HCSB includes a footnote stating "or His" since it is possible that God's kindness is in view. Still, the policy of capitalizing pronouns forced the translators to make an interpretive judgment that Boaz is the referent here, instead of God, a judgment that goes beyond the words in the original Hebrew.

Second, since Scripture sometimes includes prophecies that have double fulfillment, the choice to capitalize a pronoun can have the unintended outcome of erasing the additional, non-divine meaning.

Consider Psalm 2's references to the Anointed One, God's Son. Do these titles and pronouns refer to the current king or to David or to the Messiah? The answer is all three. But capitalizing the pronouns eliminates the first two possibilities, and not capitalizing them (in a translation that capitalizes pronouns for deity) eliminates the third possibility.

For these and other reasons, the CSB adopts the traditional approach of not capitalizing divine pronouns and referents in order to better ensure the accuracy of its translation choices. Nouns referring to members of the Trinity, however, are still capitalized, which is the universal approach in Bible translation.

### Why does Christian Standard Bible use "tongues" instead of "languages" in some texts?

A key translation aim of Christian Standard Bible is to use contemporary English while remaining faithful to the original meaning of Scripture. The HCSB rendered the *lalein + glossa construction* as "languages" rather than the traditional "tongues" because the translators saw "tongues" as an archaic way of referring to verbal communication. (For instance, people today write and speak of "the Spanish language" rather than "the Spanish tongue.")

The translators, representing a variety of denominations, did not intend by the use of "languages" to exclude charismatic views of ecstatic speech. The decision was made without reference to convictions about gifts of the Spirit, questions of cessationism versus continuationism, or any other theological concern. However, in the years after HCSB debuted, many readers assumed that the HCSB had intentionally excluded Charismatic viewpoints.

Because "tongues" is an appropriate translation and is the word used in every other major English Bible translation, the CSB Translation Oversight Committee elected to adopt the traditional rendering and avoid any appearance of theological bias.

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### Why did the Christian Standard Bible move away from the HCSB's use of "Yahweh"?

In the Old Testament, God gives his personal name more than 6,000 times. Known as the Tetragrammaton, the name is *YHWH* in the Hebrew text. It cannot be pronounced unless vowels are added.

Traditionally, English Bible translations have chosen not to supply vowels in order to make *YHWH* pronounceable; they simply render this name as a title (*LORD*). This practice shows sensitivity to some who believe that to call God by his personal name is too informal. There is also debate as to which vowels should be added to *YHWH* to make it pronounceable. The HCSB broke with tradition and rendered *YHWH* as "Yahweh" 656 times in the Old Testament. The intent was to share with the reader God's personal name in contexts where God was referring to his name.

Four considerations led the CSB Translation Oversight Committee to depart from the HCSB practice and come into alignment with other English translations.

First, the HCSB was inconsistent by rendering *YHWH* as "Yahweh" in only 656 of 6,000+ occurrences of *YHWH*. In many cases, a single verse contains multiple occurrences of *YHWH* in the Hebrew. As an example of inconsistency, the HCSB in Job 1:21 read: "The *LORD* gives, and the *LORD* takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh." Verses like this raised the question: what criteria did HCSB follow in choosing between "Yahweh" and "LORD"? Criteria were stated in the HCSB Introduction, but many readers felt that the approach should be fully consistent, rendering *YHWH* as "Yahweh" every time or else returning to the traditional "LORD."

Second, full consistency in rendering *YHWH* as "Yahweh" would overwhelm the reader. As an example, Numbers 9:23 would read as follows if HCSB had been fully consistent in its use of "Yahweh." "They camped at Yahweh's command, and they set out at Yahweh's command. They carried out Yahweh's requirement according to Yahweh's command through Moses."

Third, consistent feedback from readers showed that the unfamiliarity of "Yahweh" was an obstacle to reading the HCSB. For example, many reported that they felt "Yahweh" was an innovation, and they misunderstood the intent behind using the formal name of God. A translation that values accuracy and readability was thereby limited by a translation choice that did not provide clarity to the reader.

Fourth, when quoting Old Testament texts that include an occurrence of *YHWH*, the New Testament renders *YHWH* with the word *kurios*, which is a title (Lord) rather than a personal name. With this precedent in hand, most English translators have chosen to render *YHWH* as "LORD" rather than "Yahweh."

For these reasons, CSB is in line with the majority of English translations in its rendering of *YHWH* as "LORD." In places where God introduces or emphasizes his covenant name, CSB has a footnote, saying, "Lit Yahweh."

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### What is the CSB's Approach on translating gender?

The Christian Standard Bible retains a traditional approach to translating gender language into English. Masculine terms (Father, Son, King, etc.) and pronouns (he, him, his) are retained whenever they refer to God. Likewise, when Scripture presents historical accounts and parables referring to male humans, the Translation Oversight Committee retained masculine terms and pronouns.

To improve accuracy, the Translation Oversight Committee chose to avoid being unnecessarily specific in passages where the original context did not exclude females. When Scripture presents principles or generic examples that are not restricted to males, the CSB does not use “man,” “he,” or other masculine terms. At the same time, the translators chose not to make third person masculine pronouns inclusive by rendering them as plurals (they, them), because they believed it was important to retain the individual and personal sense of these expressions.

The following examples demonstrate the CSB translation philosophy regarding gender language:

- The Hebrew *’ish* or *’enosh* usually imply a man, while *’adam* or *ben ’adam* often call attention to the mortality of humanity, so the latter are often translated “human” or “(mere) mortal.”
- In Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1 the Translation Oversight Committee translated Hebrew *’adam* as “man” since the passage goes on to define it as male and female. It is clear in the context that “man” includes male and female.
- The Greek *anthropos* is usually rendered as “person” or some equivalent since it doesn’t refer exclusively to males but to human beings. In some instances the Translation Oversight Committee rendered it “man” or “men” for contextual reasons. The plural *anthropoi* is usually rendered as “people.”
- The Greek *anēr* most often refers to males, where it is rendered as “man” or “men.” However, there are some contexts where it refers to both men and women (e.g., Acts 17:34; Eph 4:13; James 1:8), and there it is rendered in a way that makes clear that men and women are in view. In all cases, the context determined the most accurate rendering.
- When referring to Christians, the traditional rendering “brothers” for the plural Greek *adelphoi* suggests to English readers today only male believers. But in the vast majority of instances the term refers to both male and female believers. Therefore, the Translation Oversight Committee translated it as “brothers and sisters” in those cases.
- If the context indicates that both male and female believers are in view, the Greek singular *adelphos* is rendered inclusively (e.g., 1 John 5:16) or as “brother or sister” (e.g., Matt 5:22; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 8:13; 1 Thess 4:6; Heb 8:11; 1 John 2:9-11). But if such a rendering would be too cumbersome in a given context, the singular “brother” is retained (e.g., Matt 18:15; Luke 6:41-42; 1 Cor 6:6).
- The singular Hebrew and Greek words for “father” and “son” are generally retained. In addition, the plural “fathers” and “sons” are generally retained (e.g., Rom 8:19; 15:8; Gal 3:7; Heb 1:1; 12:5). Depending on the context, the plural “fathers” is sometimes rendered as “ancestors” (e.g., Acts 24:14; Rom 9:5) and the plural “sons” is sometimes rendered inclusively as “children” (e.g., Eph 2:3).
- The Christian Standard Bible has retained the phrase “son of man” where it may have messianic implications (Dan 7:13; Heb 2:6), as Ezekiel’s epithet (Ezek 2:1), and as Jesus’s self identification in the Gospels. The phrase is also retained in cases where human mortality is in view (Ps 8:4; Isa 51:12); however, it might also be translated “human (being/race)” (Ps 12:1; Jer 49:18) or “(mere) mortal” (2 Sam 7:14; Eccl 12:5). In some cases the plural is translated “children of Adam” to bring out the connection to the progenitor (Eccl 3:10-21); in other cases there is a footnote indicating that possibility (Gen 11:5; Eccl 1:13).

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### Why does the CSB move away from the HCSB's rendering of *doulos* as "slave?"

In verses where Christian discipleship is in view, the HCSB rendered *doulos* as "slave" rather than the traditional "servant" or "bond-servant." An example is Titus 1:1: "Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." This rendering is accurate from a lexicographical standpoint, and it conveys an important theological truth: we are bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The HCSB's use of slave met with mixed assessment from scholars, pastors, and everyday readers. Positive comments centered on the theological picture conveyed by slave. The weight of the feedback, however, tilted significantly toward a different approach in CSB. Factors commending a change included the following.

Sensitive Connotations: In our context, the word "slave" primarily brings to mind our history of race-based slavery. The theologically appropriate connotation of the word is lost on most readers. In light of this obstacle, it seemed best to the Translation Oversight Committee to choose a word that is less apt to cause distraction and misunderstanding.

"Servant" and the Old Testament 'eved: The choice to render *doulos* as "servant" rather than "slave" aligns with the OT usage of *'eved* in reference to followers of God, such as Moses. Joshua 1:1 is an example. In CSB, it reads: "Moses the LORD's servant." If the OT chose a word meaning "servant" to refer to followers of God, and if the NT word *doulos* can be rendered either "slave" or "servant" accurately, the choice to render it as "servant" is well supported.

New Testament Precedent: The NT itself presents precedent for the approach taken in CSB when it quotes OT passages or uses a Greek word specifically meaning "servant" rather than "slave" for references to followers of God. Hebrews 3:5 is an example. In CSB it reads: "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's household."

The CSB retains use of "slave" in contexts where slavery or a slave are clearly in view, but for references to Christian discipleship, "servant" is used.

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January, 2017