

An Update on CBE's Translation Project

by Jeff Miller

As some readers of *Mutuality* may know, CBE is engaged in a Bible translation project. The initial task was to identify passages that, due to poor or even biased translations, have been used to bolster the silencing and even abuse of women. This resulted in a select, representative list of texts totaling approximately 500 verses. From 2019 to 2024, a team of nine scholars has been translating these passages with an eye to addressing any bias against women that has accrued over time. Each entry includes a fresh translation that faithfully communicates its meaning today. These translations are accompanied by notes that explain the translation choices and make extensive comparisons with various modern Bibles.

Below are two examples, given here as they appear in the project itself. First, we see the new translation, followed by the explanation for that translation choice and comparison with other translations.

El Shaddai, "God Almighty"

GENESIS 49:24–25

- 24 Yet his bow remained steady,
And his arms were made skillful,
By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
By the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.
- 25 Because the God of your father helps you,
Shaddai blesses you,
With blessings of the heavens above,
and blessings of the deep that lies below,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.



Significant in this text is the wordplay between the name of God and feminine imagery. God is called *Shaddai* or *El Shaddai* in about fifty places throughout the Old Testament, including here in Genesis 49:25: “Shaddai blesses you.” *Shaddai* is usually rendered “Almighty.” Other renderings of *Shaddai* are equivalent in meaning: “God-All-Powerful” (CEV) or “Sovereign God” (NET). *Shaddai* is retained as such in a handful of lesser-known English translations.

The theme of the verse is a blessing for fruitfulness. In an agrarian economy, fertility is evident in three areas—in the field, in the barn, and in the home. Of these, the most precious is fertility in the home, resulting in children. So, when Jacob, here in his deathbed blessing, speaks of “blessings of the breasts and of the womb,” he is referring to infants being

birthed and suckled. The Hebrew word *shadayim* can be rendered “breast” (NIV) or more commonly, “breasts.” That is why NIV translates: “He blesses you with children and with a mother’s milk.”

The biblical author’s choice of *Shaddai* for God in a verse which also uses *shadayim* (“breasts”) brings up motherly images for Israel’s God. What Israelite mothers are to their babies, God is to Israel. This is startling, especially since the previous verse includes masculine imagery. There, God participates in battle, steadying the hands of the archer. The two contrasting images taken together complete the experience of God. So, retaining the word “Shaddai” highlights the wordplay and invites the reader to picture God’s provision in both masculine and feminine terms.

Wife or Spouse? Brothers or Siblings?

1 CORINTHIANS 9:3–5



This is my defense to those who are criticizing me: ⁴ Don't we have the right to receive food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to travel with a **spouse** who is a believer, like the other apostles, the Lord's **siblings**, and Cephas do?

This passage is included in our work for two reasons. First, it uses the double description “a sister a wife” (*adelphēn gunaika*), which calls for explanation. Second, it shows that Simon Peter and certain other early Christian leaders traveled and ministered as husband-wife teams.

Concern with personal rights or authority runs through this section of 1 Corinthians (see 7:37, 8:9, 9:12, 9:18). Here Paul defends “the right to receive food and drink” and “the right to travel with a spouse who is a believer.” The first issue, food and drink, is about receiving hospitality as gratitude and compensation for the work of ministry. We have seen in Romans 16, for example, that Paul receives hospitality from his host, Gaius, and that he expects the Christians of Rome to extend the same to Phoebe.

Concerning the second issue, “a spouse who is a believer” is the New Testament Team’s translation of “a sister a wife.” In the New Testament, “sister” is a common way to refer to a Christian woman (as in Romans 16:1, for example), reflecting the strong sense of family among early believers. Most translations, including ours, do not use the word “sister” here because a phrase such as “sister wife” could easily be misunderstood. Common options are “a believing wife” (CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSVue) or something similar, such as CEB’s “a wife who believes.”

Paul is unmarried; he says so two chapters earlier, in 7:8. We use “spouse” rather than “wife” to avoid the implication that he is arguing for his own rights, or only for men’s rights, as opposed to advocating for all members of his missionary team.

To understand our choice of “spouse,” recall the apostles Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7. Each of them has the right to travel and minister with the other. Paul’s wording here in 1 Corinthians 9:4 is prompted by the question he is answering and the way he answers, which includes using Cephas as an example. His word choice here does not mean that Junia or Phoebe, for example, would not have the right to take a believing husband on their ministry travels. “Wife” is overly restrictive and doesn’t account for all the people included in Paul’s explanation (“the other apostles, the Lord’s siblings, and Cephas,” verse 5), but “spouse” covers them all.

“Siblings” in verse 5 translates *adelphoi*, and we have explained earlier that this word can mean “brothers” or “siblings” depending on context. We know from Matthew 13:55–56 and Mark 6:3 that Jesus had four brothers and also sisters (probably more than two, since Matthew refers to “*all* his sisters”). Matthew 12:47–48 twice mentions Jesus’s *adelphoi*. Because we know Jesus had sisters, and because Matthew himself makes that clear in the following chapter, *adelphoi* in this passage should be translated “siblings,” or “brothers and sisters,” or “sisters and brothers.” Then, in Matthew 12:49, Jesus changes to a metaphorical use of *adelphoi* in reference to his disciples. Again, because we know that Jesus’s disciples include women, *adelphoi* in 12:49 should be understood and translated to include both sexes.

As noted above, Paul mentions Cephas, the Aramaic equivalent of “Peter” (both words mean “rock”). Cephas—that is, Simon Peter—travels with his wife, who is a believer. That Peter has a wife is clear also from mention of his mother-in-law in Matthew 8:14, Mark 1:30, and Luke 4:38.

The examples above are among the shorter texts in the project. Longer passages, such as the controversial 1 Timothy 2 and Ephesians 5, are also included. Watch for further updates on CBE’s website and the *Mutuality Matters* podcast.

The translation team, together with the leadership of CBE, hopes that reading these translations and their accompanying commentary will be “like seeing a familiar picture after it’s been cleaned” (quoting C. S. Lewis upon reading Colossians from J. B. Phillips’s *The New Testament in Modern English* in 1943).



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