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Evaluating an Oral Draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk

Jeremy N. Harrison

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ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the findings of a project in which I led a group of immigrants from South Sudan through the process of generating and evaluating an oral draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk. The aim of this project was to provide a substantive field test of an oral translation methodology conducted among immigrants living in the United States who speak a language that lacks a translation of the entire Bible. The project involved facilitating basic translation training and conducting an oral drafting process with a team of three Uduk speakers. This project also involved evaluating the draft from three angles: an exegetical analysis of the draft, a comprehension check with a group of three Uduk speakers who were not part of the translation team, and an interview with a Bible translation expert regarding the quality of the draft. The project occurred in a series of sessions that took place in September and October 2014.

Several key findings emerged from the study. The results affirmed the viability of the use of an oral translation methodology conducted among immigrants by succeeding in creating a natural, clear, and accurate draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk. The project also upheld that this translation process can be utilized effectively in full-scale translation projects. More specifically, this project has established the opportunity to conduct future translation work for portions of the OT that have not yet been translated into Uduk. While this project entailed a condensed simulation of what would transpire in an actual translation project, the overall findings of the project offer a positive evaluation of both the oral draft and the methodology used to produce it.
Evaluating an Oral Draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology
Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Jeremy N. Harrison

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate’s committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

Dean of the Graduate School

Date

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CHAPTER I
AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

This project addressed the need at Pioneer Bible Translators\(^1\) to explore an oral translation approach among immigrants in the United States. The aim of this project was to provide a substantive field test of an oral translation methodology among immigrants who speak a language that does not yet have a translation of the entire Bible. This goal was accomplished by producing and evaluating an oral draft\(^2\) of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk with South Sudanese immigrants living in the Dallas area.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the project by presenting an overview of the history, core values, and future vision of PBT. Chapter 2 outlines the theological framework for the project. The methodological approach to the project is provided in chapter 3 by describing the format of the project, participants, project sessions, and evaluation methods. An interpretation of the findings of the project through three angles of evaluation is provided in chapter 4. The final chapter of the thesis contains the conclusions and implications of the project’s findings as well as personal and theological reflections on the project.

\(^1\) Hereinafter “PBT.”
\(^2\) This is a draft produced orally through an audio recording interface, as opposed to a written draft. As will be seen, this draft was produced using an oral translation methodology. The oral draft exists as an audio file that can be edited, shared, transcribed, and reproduced in a variety of formats.
Title of the Project

The title of this project is “Evaluating an Oral Draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk.” The term “oral draft” serves to encompass the nature of the project as distinct from producing a written draft. I discuss this aspect of the project in more detail in the methodological section. The specific text and language were selected with an intentional rationale, as I delineate in the discussion of the purpose of the project.

Description of the Ministry Context

PBT began in 1976 with the purpose of using Bible translation as a strategy for church planting and church growth among unreached people groups. The founders of PBT recognized the need to bring the Bible translation and church planting movements into a harmonious, symbiotic relationship. PBT focuses its current efforts on bringing Scripture to the least-reached through a ministry of church planting that has been a part of its organizational makeup from its inception.

In light of these dynamics, PBT’s core values have emerged from a sense of the need for a holistic approach to world evangelization. The stated mission of PBT is “to disciple the Bibleless, mobilizing God’s people to provide enduring access to God’s Word.” While translating the Bible into a receptor language is an admirable goal, it is insufficient in and of itself to achieve spiritual formation and discipleship. PBT operates with the assumption that the task of Bible translation must include the local people as they use Scripture to transform lives and spread the message of the gospel in their

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3 For a more detailed overview of the history and founding of PBT, see http://www.pioneerbible.org/heritage.
language. Therefore, PBT considers its goal among a people group accomplished only when a network of churches exists that uses Scripture to grow and multiply.\(^5\)

The current scope of the ministry of PBT encompasses sixty-two translation projects in fifteen countries, with the potential to reach twenty-six million people with the gospel.\(^6\) While the corporate headquarters for PBT is in Dallas, the majority of the staff of PBT is composed of missionaries who are serving in an overseas context. PBT has at least one missionary in every major world region\(^7\) except South America, where local Bible translation movements are expected to finish the remaining task.

As PBT considers its future vision, it recognizes the need to start new translation projects that will fill current gaps in the Bible translation movement. One of these major gaps is that of least-reached Bibleless language groups\(^8\) who often live in restricted-access countries.\(^9\) While many countries of the world are open to receiving PBT staff, there are still areas of the world that remain closed to the presence of Christian missionaries. The reasons for these dynamics vary from country to country, but the most common factors are government restrictions and religious intolerance. Violence and civil unrest also limit travel to some countries. PBT is working constantly to explore the most viable strategies to gain access to such areas. One strategy that PBT is considering to mitigate the inaccessibility of these areas is leveraging the presence of immigrants in the

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\(^6\) Ibid., “About,” http://www.pioneerbible.org/about.

\(^7\) Due to security protocols, the names of certain countries of operation and staff members are not available to the public sector.


\(^9\) These are areas where missionary visas are prohibited or where alternate visa platforms (e.g., student, business, teacher, literacy worker) are difficult to obtain; and even when visas can be procured, there is often suspicion and scrutiny upon arrival. Restricted-access areas can also be regions that are unstable or unsafe due to civil unrest, conflict, and broad-scale violence.
United States who originate from restricted-access countries. These individuals could potentially serve as mother tongue translators for new translation projects in languages from restricted-access areas.

Another challenge for the Bible translation movement is that of non-literate peoples. While literacy is certainly an advantage and a major thrust of the Bible translation movement historically, PBT recognizes that literacy should not be the major strategy applied in some areas because oral approaches may resonate more readily with a greater portion of the population. An emerging strategy for generating Scripture products for non-literate is the use of oral translation methods. This paradigm for Bible translation allows non-literate people to serve as mother tongue translators through hearing a source text in a language they understand and then recording a translation of the passage into a receptor language. Such methodologies have the potential to expedite the completion of current translation projects as well as to launch translation projects in new receptor languages.

The Challenge of International Literacy

A critical factor in the assessment of whether an oral translation methodology is viable is the level of literacy in a given culture or among a particular group of people. The term “literacy” itself requires clearly defined parameters and metrics. For the purposes of this project, I adopted the definition of literacy proposed by the committee responsible for the International Adult Literacy Survey: “Literacy is using printed and

10 I am choosing to employ the term “non-literate” as opposed to “pre-literate” or “illiterate.” For my rationale for the use of this term, see Robin Green, An Orality Strategy: Translating the Bible for Oral Communicators (Dallas: Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, 2007), 14.
11 Hereinafter “IALS.”
written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” I selected this definition because it implies an active, functional literacy, as opposed to an ability to read that is lying dormant or underutilized.

The following findings related to adult literacy on the global scale are predicated upon this operational definition of literacy. Although the criteria and protocols of the IALS are too voluminous to list here, a summary of conclusions from the IALS falls within the scope of this project as offering a representative sample of the current global state of literacy. The scale of the most recent iteration of the IALS spans twenty countries using “nationally representative samples of the adult population aged 16-65.” The IALS reports that in fourteen of these countries “at least 15 per cent of all adults have literacy skills at only the most rudimentary level.” In the remaining six countries, “less than 15 per cent of adults find themselves at the lowest level of literacy.

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13 The Central Intelligence Agency defines literacy simply as “Age 15 and over and can read and write” in Central Intelligence Agency, “The Word Factbook,” https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html#136. This definition is too narrow given the purposes of this project, hence my adoption of a more robust, meaningful use of the term.

14 Kirsch’s report provides a detailed explication of the variables, content, context, materials, texts, processes, strategies, sample documents, evaluative criteria, and interpretation of data used in the IALS. See Kirsch, 8-38.

15 The first iteration of the IALS occurred in 1994 and was conducted in nine countries: Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. In 1996, five additional countries administered the IALS: Australia, Belgium, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Ireland. The third iteration occurred in 1998 and included the twenty countries listed in fn. 16.

16 Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and United States. Nancy Darcovich et al., *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey* (Paris: OECD, 2000), xiii.

17 Ibid., xi.

18 Ibid., xiii. These specific countries are Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
skills, but even in the country with the highest score on the test (Sweden) 8 per cent of the adult population encounters a severe literacy deficit in everyday life at work.”

It is admittedly a complex task to synthesize and interpret these figures. The IALS report itself concedes that the fact “that countries differ in their skill patterns from scale to scale suggests that different factors are at work in influencing literary outcomes.” However, one definitive conclusion that the report draws is that the twenty countries “differ markedly in the literacy attainment of their adult populations, but none does so well that it can be said that it has no literacy problem.” One conclusion, then, that the IALS illuminates is the trend that the “problem” of illiteracy has not been “solved,” even in developed, first-world countries.

Another major source of statistics pertaining to global literacy is the international literacy database managed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. The latest statistics available are from September 2014, and the UIS reports that the global literacy rate for adults is 84.3 percent. In this same report, the UIS estimates that seven hundred eighty-one million adults “still lack basic reading and writings skills.” According to the UIS, the lowest literacy rates in the world are predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, with literacy

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19 Darcovich, xiii. These specific countries are Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.
20 Ibid., 25.
21 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
rates below fifty percent in fourteen countries.²⁶ The country with the lowest reported literacy rate according to the UIS database is Niger at fifteen percent.²⁷ Unfortunately, the UIS report contains no literacy data for South Sudan due to the inability of field workers to gather data because of the recent conflicts and civil unrest.

The most recent literacy information available on South Sudan is from 2009 and is found in another major source for global literacy statistics: The CIA World Factbook. This report indicates that, according to the Central Intelligence Agency’s stated definition of literacy,²⁸ South Sudan’s literacy rate is twenty-seven percent.²⁹ This places South Sudan as the country with the lowest literacy rate in the world³⁰ in the latest version of The CIA World Factbook. While the definitions of literacy and data collection methodologies vary among these groups, this brief overview provides a glimpse into the current state of affairs pertaining to literacy.

While there are many implications that one could draw from these figures, two items surfaced as the most pressing for this project. First, Bible translation methods that rely on literacy limit the opportunity for sizable groups of people to hear the message of Scripture.³¹ The second implication grows out of this first—that the Bible translation

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²⁶ These specific countries are Afghanistan, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Sierra Leone.
²⁸ See fn. 13.
³⁰ Niger’s literacy rate is listed as 28.7 percent. Ibid.
³¹ A recent study conducted by the International Orality Network estimates that “there are 5.7 billion oral preference learners in the world.” Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, eds., Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013), 18.
movement should consider new methods and media if it is to achieve its stated task of “working together to maximize the worldwide access and impact of God’s Word.”

Statement of the Problem

The problem that this project addressed is the uncertainty of whether an oral translation methodology among immigrants living in the United States is effective. While PBT recognizes the need for embracing such approaches to fill certain gaps in the Bible translation movement, more concrete steps need to be taken to formulate intentional strategies along these lines. This project was an attempt at a solution in these areas by developing an approach that incorporates an oral translation methodology in collaboration with native speakers who reside in the United States and who originate from a country that is difficult to access.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to provide a substantive field test of an oral translation methodology among immigrant speakers of a language that does not have a translation of the entire Bible. This goal was accomplished by producing and evaluating a draft of Luke 8:4-15 in the Uduk language of South Sudan in cooperation with native speakers of the language who live in the Dallas area. This draft is a verse-by-verse oral translation of the passage.

The selection of Uduk as the receptor language for this project emerged from several factors. One of these factors is the fact that, while South Sudan is currently in a

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state of civil unrest. PBT has some partners working in that country. Having people in contact with the Uduk in South Sudan as well as in Dallas is advantageous because it will provide opportunities to have drafts produced in the United States checked by Uduk speakers in Africa.

Another key factor in PBT’s decision to approach this project is the fact that the Bible has not been completely translated into Uduk, which is a language of South Sudan that is increasing in size and vitality. Uduk is reported to have twenty-two thousand speakers worldwide, having grown from ten thousand speakers since 1978. While much of this increase could be attributed to natural population growth, Björn Jernudd makes the following observation regarding his research on vernacular languages in Sudan: “This report does not show that Arabic is replacing other languages. . . . From this evidence, it would be wrong to think that the use of ‘local’ languages would diminish with modernization. . . . To speak the language of one’s own group in its appropriate contexts is one characteristic that will remain. Sudan will be a vernacularly multilingual country beyond a period that it is possible to plan for.”

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33 Since South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan on July 9, 2011, various levels of civil unrest have been occurring intermittently. One can find a myriad of information and reports regarding the ongoing conflicts in South Sudan. Perhaps one of the most comprehensive sources is http://www.aljazeera.com, where a search for “South Sudan” yields an extensive list of the latest developments as well as a historical overview of the tensions between South Sudan and Sudan: http://america.aljazeera.com/topics/topic/international-location/africa/south-sudan.html.

34 There is currently a complete NT in Uduk as well as Genesis and Psalms. The rest of the OT remains untranslated.

35 The current categorization of Uduk using the EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) model is 5: “Developing,” which indicates that “the language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.” For a description of the EGIDS model, see http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status. For detailed statistics on the Uduk language, see http://www.ethnologue.com/language/udu.

36 Ibid.


Sudan, therefore, do not appear to be trending toward extinction and all indications are that their population appears to be increasing. While Arabic remains the *lingua franca* of South Sudan, vernacular languages such as Uduk are vibrant and growing. This fact highlights the need for Scripture in the heart language of Uduk speakers.

Another factor that led PBT to welcome this project is the presence of South Sudanese immigrants in Dallas. Some of these immigrants are Christians and are part of local congregations, thus allowing for a natural point of entry into the immigrant community. A final factor in the selection of Uduk is the low literacy rate in South Sudan, where literacy efforts have historically been unfruitful.

In summary, then, it is the convergence of these factors—the existence of partners in South Sudan, the need for additional Scripture products in Uduk, the stable nature of the language and its vitality, the presence of South Sudanese immigrants in the Dallas area, and the dearth of literacy in South Sudan—that led PBT to explore the possibility of an experimental translation project among Uduk speakers in Dallas.

The selection of Luke 8:4-15 as the passage to translate was a decision based on a few straightforward factors. One factor is that PBT wanted to select a passage that has already been translated and published in Uduk in order to engage a comparative analysis of the draft to published Scripture. Another factor is the issue of genre. While narrative discourse is readily appreciated by virtually a universal audience, stories such as parables

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39 The United States Department of State reports that 57 immigrants from South Sudan arrived in the United States in 2014. For this information and other detailed statistics on immigration, see http://www.wrapsnet.org/Reports/AdmissionsArrivals/tabid/211/language/en-US/Default.aspx.
40 Robert H. Hoppe provides a detailed discussion of the challenges, disruptions, and shortcomings of previous vernacular literacy programs in South Sudan in *Social Context of the Local Languages Literacy Project in the Southern Sudan* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1984), 54-67.
have special significance in the South Sudanese culture—especially a parable with an agricultural theme. A third factor is that the length, content, style, syntax, and grammar of this passage would yield a draft that provides a sufficient body of material for substantive evaluation and comparison.

Assumptions

This project operated with the following assumptions that impacted the chosen methodology and stated purpose of the project. One assumption is that Bible translation is a holistic ministry that is a key component in the mission of world evangelization. The project assumed that the task of translating Scripture into new languages is more than just a linguistic endeavor, but is a fulfillment of Christ’s mandate to reach all nations with the gospel. More specifically, Bible translation is a means of proclaiming the gospel as a testimony to all the nations (Matt 24:14) and a vehicle for making disciples through church planting, baptizing, and teaching (Matt 28:19-20). Additionally, Bible translation follows Paul’s missional strategy by proclaiming the message of salvation for all people (Rom 10:8-17) and advancing the gospel to new frontiers (Rom 15:14-21). Therefore, this project assumed that Bible translation is a crucial ingredient in reaching all nations with the gospel.

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41 “There are similar genre locally that are particularly appreciated even though they are not identical in features. For example, African folk tales usually have animals as characters that mirror human relationships and symbolize human interactions” (Greg Pruett, personal communication, July 3, 2014).

42 William Smalley observes that the history of the Bible translation movement “is a major manifestation of the Spirit of God working in the world and creating the church by means of and in spite of the imperfect human tools available.” William Smalley, Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1991), 38.

43 Richard Moore claims that “Bible translation is the most important missional activity in which any missionary can engage.” Richard Moore, “The Case for Bible Translation, Viewed in Historical Perspective,” The Bible Translator 65 (2014): 86.
Another assumption by which this project operated is that Bible translation is a viable cross-cultural enterprise. In the current postcolonial age, cross-cultural ministry and relief efforts have become laden with a burden of proof that the work they are doing will not hinder or interfere with the host culture (this is especially true of religious efforts that seek to make converts). As an exercise in contextual theology, Bible translation must operate in ways that are culturally sensitive by upholding the value and viability of all cultures, languages, and people. This project assumed that Bible translation, when performed properly, will enhance the lives of nationals and bring about positive change in their cultural milieu.44

**Delimitations**

This project functioned with the following delimitations that narrowed the scope of the project to a manageable level. This project employed an oral translation methodology limited to the performance of the draft only, not the ongoing refinement of that draft through the subsequent stages of translation that would yield a publishable version of Scripture. The project produced a draft and then evaluated what further steps will be needed to produce a finished Scripture product from that draft. The scope of this project, then, does not include the production of finished Scripture. The project focused exclusively on the Uduk language and was restricted to Luke 8:4-15. Due to the focus on orality in this project, I confined my research to “audio only” Scripture products, as

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44 Some benefits of Bible translation to a host culture are explicated in greater detail below, pp. 40-42.
opposed to Scripture products that include a visual component (e.g., films, websites, and videos).45

**Conclusion**

The task of translating the Bible into the remaining languages of the world lacking Scripture warrants a careful assessment of strategies and methods from all agencies involved. PBT has expressed a willingness to explore new approaches to completing the task of providing Scripture to every language community on earth. This project attempted to test the value of technological developments and emerging oral strategies as they help fill the current gaps in the Bible translation movement. This project generated a verse-by-verse oral draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk in collaboration with a group of local South Sudanese immigrants. It is my hope that this project will shed light on the validity and reliability of an oral translation methodology conducted among a local immigrant community.

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CHAPTER II
A THEOLOGY OF THE SPOKEN WORD OF GOD

Bible translation is a multifaceted work. Those who engage the process of translating Scripture cannot expect success without thorough preparation, including proficiency in linguistics, biblical languages, exegesis, anthropology, sociology, communication theory, and other related fields. These are key ingredients in the recipe of a successful Bible translator. However, as vital as such fields of study are for achieving quality results in a translation project, the crucial ingredients of a good Bible translator are theological in nature. One’s motives and rationale for bringing the words of Scripture into a new language must emerge from a solid theological foundation. While linguistics, biblical studies, and the social sciences certainly inform the Bible translation process, they are tributaries that ultimately converge with the river of theology, and all flow together to bring Scripture into a language for the first time.

The Nature and Purpose of Scripture

Scripture has always played a central role in the life of the church. Prior to the formalization of the NT canon, Christians used the OT along with other writings that they deemed beneficial and edifying. A thorough treatment of the topic of the nature and purpose of Scripture is not within the purview of this project. My focus here is to highlight two key aspects of Scripture that help ground the motivation of this project to make it available to people who do not presently have it: Scripture as descriptive of the nature of God and prescriptive for the people of God.
The Bible is a complex collection of documents by many authors, in different places, over several centuries. The writings contained in Scripture represent a plurality of genres such as history, prophecy, poetry, wisdom, apocalyptic, legal codes, rituals, genealogies, letters, parables, theology, visions, and diatribe. As such, Scripture is a multifaceted entity containing many voices and perspectives.¹ In one’s approach to the interpretation of Scripture, one’s ears must attune themselves to the particular inflection, tone, and timbre of each of these voices—for each genre has its own idiosyncrasies, rules, and unique contributions to the overall message of Scripture.

From this rich chorus of voices in the Bible, we hear echoes of God’s qualities, personality, and character as well as descriptions of God’s interactions with humanity. At one level, the Bible can be seen merely as a book—an intriguing work of literature.² For the Christian, however, Scripture stands as a sacred repository of divine revelation. Scripture, though, is more than a source of information about God—it is a vehicle through which God continues to be operative, revealing God anew to each generation.

God is a communicator. In the OT, God engaged in self-disclosure in order to be known and understood. In the NT, God’s revelation to humanity took on a new, more intimate form in the person of Jesus (Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:1-4). From this perspective, the Bible contains divine inspiration and power as something through which God speaks,

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¹ I find Christian Smith’s use of the terms “multivocality” and “polysemy” especially helpful to describe this aspect of Scripture. See The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011). Smith uses these terms throughout the book, but the most explicit explanation of these terms occurs on pp. 43-54.

² “Placing the Bible within the larger field of literature and admitting that it should be interpreted as any other book brought about the regression of perspicuity to a component of a general theory of language, criticism and history. . . . The loss of a confession of Scripture’s clarity is occasioned by a turn away from its uniquely Christian character to an implicit role in the isolation of the Bible’s words, grammar and history” (James Callahan, The Clarity of Scripture: History, Theology, and Contemporary Literary Studies [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 156).
acts, and works. As part of God’s ongoing voice in the world, Scripture is authoritative for the Christian and the church. N. T. Wright makes this point in what he dubs the central thesis of *Scripture and the Authority of God*: “The phrase ‘authority of scripture’ can make Christian sense only if it is a shorthand for ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised somehow through scripture.’” The starting point for our discussion of Scripture, then, is a recognition of its place as a unique and definitive source of humanity’s knowledge of God’s will, personality, desires, and hopes for the human race.

In addition to revealing the character of God to humanity, the Bible is a source of ethical imperatives for the people of God. Scripture serves as a moral compass for those who align themselves with the Christian faith. Reading Scripture should ultimately yield changed lives. Wright captures the spirit of this transformative aspect of reading Scripture as “to have one’s life reordered by the wisdom of God.” Proper reading of the Bible should compel us to align our thoughts, attitudes, and words more closely with the ideals that we find contained within its pages. Richard Hays offers a compelling vision of the church as “a community living in conformity to the paradigm of the cross and thereby standing as a sign of the new creation promised by God.” Hays captures here the essence of the distinctive morality that should emerge in the life of a Christian, demonstrating the role Scripture plays in forming behavior. Hays’s statement also highlights another crucial aspect of Scripture—that it is primarily meant to be read and interpreted in community.

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4 For an exploration of how the reading of Scripture can and should result in holistic spiritual transformation, see Jeff Childers, *Virtuous Reading: Aphrahat’s Approach to Scripture* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009).
5 Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 32.
Faithful reading and interpreting of Scripture is an activity of the community of faith, not just an individual enterprise. Scripture is, after all, a collection of writings by the people of God for the people of God. Reading Scripture theologically is “to read in order to hear what God is saying to the church.” Donald Juel reminds us that reading, hearing, and interpreting Scripture is a corporate event: “While private reading and meditation on the Bible is always appropriate, the major location for Scripture reading and interpreting should be within a group in which personal insights are challenged and supplemented.” Devotion and reflection on Scripture must occur on the individual level, but they must not stop there. Individual believers should bring their findings to the community of faith for refining, development, and constructive revision. Scripture is intended to be read, heard, and interpreted by the entire body of the church.

It is out of this process of communal discernment and reflection on Scripture that true ministry flows from the community of faith to the world. For the church, then, Scripture is to be read “as a collection of voices that together communicate the main line of the redemptive action and invite readers to participate in its continuation.” When Scripture is read in this way, the Christian congregation becomes the locus in which theology is formed and the wellspring out of which praxis flows. Corporate reading of and reflection on Scripture becomes a means to the end of the church’s becoming an

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9 Vanhoozer, 75.
10 “Precisely because it has a key role in the mediation of special revelation, the Bible is central to the church’s deliberations on right belief and practice” (Douglas M. Koskela, “The Authority of Scripture in Its Ecclesial Context,” in Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church [William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 213).
agent of ministry in the world—the vehicle that propels the church to take an active part in ministering to the broken, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Here the church achieves its telos, its true aim.

As congregations deepen their awareness of God’s nature and desire to minister to the world, they should be moved to this type of incarnational service. A church formed by healthy communal discernment will be aware that “the engagement of the milieu in which theology is done is as such a dimension of the doing of theology.”11 Such ministry is the natural by-product of the church’s process of communal reflection on Scripture. Wright claims that “‘the authority of scripture’ is most truly put into operation as the church goes to work in the world on behalf of the gospel.”12 Therefore, in reading Scripture together, the church should draw closer to the heart of God and to each other and move beyond understanding to action.

Scripture, then, is a vital part of the health and life of the church. As an authoritative source of divine revelation, Scripture describes the personality and character of God as well as God’s involvement with humanity. As a source of moral imperatives for the people of God, Scripture prescribes ethical norms for Christians on both the individual and corporate levels—ultimately impelling the church to mobilize itself through incarnational ministry in the world.13 These realizations underscore the need for Christians and churches in all language groups to have access to Scripture in ways that are most suited for their particular context—including those for whom the spoken word

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13 The “four-horizon” missional hermeneutic developed by Shaw and Van Engen provides a helpful model for reflection and implementation of such engagement of the world. R. Daniel Shaw and Charles Van Engen, *Communicating God’s Word in a Complex World: God’s Truth or Hocus Pocus?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 83-98.
carries meaning over and above the written word as well as those for whom the written word is unintelligible.

Exploring a Missional Ecclesiology

Scripture calls the people of God to engage in holistic ministry to the world. A brief exploration of ecclesiology from a missional perspective will deepen the theological foundations for this project as it relates to the life of the church. The most prominent biblical image for ecclesiology is that of the church as the kingdom of God (Exod 19:6; Ps 103:19; Obad 21; Mark 1:15; Acts 28:23; Rom 14:17; Rev 1:6). Darrell Guder observes that the kingdom of God was both “a major theme of Jewish expectation”\textsuperscript{14} and “the very heart of the good news [Jesus] brought and embodied.”\textsuperscript{15} As Jesus declared the kingdom of God as both present and drawing near (Mark 1:15; Luke 11:20), the church is an expression, extension, and embodiment of the present and inbreaking kingdom of God. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen contends that the church is “the anticipation of the kingdom of God; therefore its essence is constituted by the kingdom, of which it is the sign.”\textsuperscript{16} However, the church “must not be equated with the kingdom,”\textsuperscript{17} but “stands in a position of dependence on and humble service to the divine reign.”\textsuperscript{18} Keeping the relationship between church and kingdom in mind is paramount to forming a full, vibrant ecclesiology.

\textsuperscript{14} Darrell Guder, \textit{The Continuing Conversion of the Church} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 35.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed., \textit{An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 117.
\textsuperscript{17} George Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God,” in \textit{Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America} (Darrell Guder, ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 98.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Such observations demand an exploration of what comprises the kingdom of God, what the kingdom looks like, and what the roles of the church and Scripture are. While George Hunsberger concedes that a definitive answer to the question “What is the reign of God?” cannot be given, he does suggest that a “sketch [of] some of its contours” is possible. He offers the biblical notion of *shalom* as foremost among these contours. He defines *shalom* as “envision[ing] a world characterized by peace, justice, and celebration . . . the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God’s demanding care and compassionate rule.” Such a picture of God’s rule among his people provides both a vision for God’s mission in the world and a clarion call for the church to be instruments of this mission as conduits of *shalom* in the world.

Closely tied to the concept of the kingdom of God is the biblical notion that God invites and allows humans to participate in the unfolding drama of his mission of reconciling all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph 3:10; Col 1:20). Inherent in this invitation is the notion of God choosing a people for this purpose. The original elect people of Israel served as a forerunner to the era of universal salvation extended through Christ. The church (i.e., all those who are “in Christ”) now stands as the bearer of this identity as God’s chosen people. Scripture uses numerous images to depict this identity, the most prominent of which is that of priesthood.

The priestly imagery is replete with implications for what it means to be the people of God. The high priests were intermediaries between the nation of Israel and

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19 Hunsberger, 90.
20 Ibid., 90-91.
21 The inception of this image is found in the appointing of Aaron as the first high priest over Israel, which established the priestly lineage of the Levites. Several NT passages employ the imagery of the church as the priesthood of God (most notably 1 Pet 2:5-9; Rom 15:16; Rev 5:10; 20:6), and this imagery still provides a relevant, helpful framework for approaching ecclesiology.
God—those who performed the sacrificial rites on behalf of the people, offered prayers of intercession for the people, and other priestly duties (Heb 7-10). In addressing some of the implications of the priesthood imagery, Mark Love states that Israel was to be “a priest to the nations.”

He offers insight on what this means by stating that “by living God’s way in the world, Israel will extend the blessings of God to all creation.” In this way, the nation of Israel was to be an intermediary between God and the nations of the world—and thereby a participant in the drama of salvation. Love claims further that Israel was to be “God’s partner in the world, the one who will help bring salvation to the nations.” Such observations provide a basic understanding of how the notion of priesthood first influenced the Jews of the ancient Near East.

As with ancient Israel, the church today is to be a light to the world. At the Festival of Pentecost described in Acts 2, the nucleus of the church was formed out of the “true Israel” (i.e., Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah) and others gathered there. Love describes the importance of the inception of the church: “The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost launched a missionary church—a community crossing boundaries for the sake of gathering a people suited for the Kingdom of God.” Approaching the church through this lens, then, is to discover that part of its vocation and mission in the world is to be a vessel through which God’s activity is made manifest in the social order.

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22 Mark Love, Douglas Foster, and Randy Harris, Seeking a Lasting City: The Church’s Journey in the Story of God (Abilene, TX: ACU, 2005), 22.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 38.
25 Ibid., 53.
The church, then, is to be missional. In its earliest days, the church was closely tied to the Jewish synagogue. Initially, Christians were thought to be a sect of Judaism, but the Jewish community alienated and, in some instances, persecuted the church. This drove Christian communities to use households as their primary gathering places. These congregations served as “mission outposts” in the fabric of society. Patrick Keifert describes the missional approach of this time as being “focused not so much on bringing people to church . . . but being the church in, with, and under the friends, neighbors, coworkers, and strangers in people’s everyday lives.” Therefore, the earliest missional efforts of the church centered on natural relationships, participation in the life of the world, and seeking to extend the koinonia of Christ to those with whom Christians interfaced. The church today should continue to hold such missional living as a defining, constitutive practice—a part of its habitus.

A poignant metaphor for this aspect of missional ecclesiology is that of the church as “a pilgrim people of God, called to visible unity under one God to spread the

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26 For my purposes in this project, I chose to adopt Alan Hirsch’s definition of missional: “A missional church is a church that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose as an agent of God’s mission to the world.” Alan Hirsch, The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 285.
27 “The early Christians did not believe that they were following a new religion. . . . For those early Christians, Judaism was not a rival religion to Christianity, but the same faith, even though those who followed it did not see or believe that the prophecies had been fulfilled. From the point of view of those Jews who rejected Christianity, the situation was understood in a similar manner. Christianity was not a new religion, but a heretical sect within Judaism” (Justo Gonzalez, The Early Church to the Present Day, vol. 1 of The Story of Christianity [Peabody, MA: Prince, 1999], 31-32).
28 Ibid., 32-33.
29 Patrick Keifert, We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2006), 28.
30 Ibid., 28.
31 Bryan Stone discusses missional living in the form of evangelism as part of the habitus of the church in Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 23-28, 311.
knowledge of Christ to all people.” 32 From this vantage point, one of the dominant motivations for the church in spreading the gospel is that the church is “hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one.” 33 In this way, the church is both evangelistic and eschatological as it spreads the gospel with a sense of urgency, bearing the parousia in mind as an impetus for the promulgation of Christianity.

These missional practices ultimately flow out of the church’s reflection on and embodiment of Scripture. As those who are hearers of the word of God, the people of God become bearers of the word of God as they testify to the gospel message found in Scripture through missional living in the world. In this way, Scripture lays the foundation for both the theological reflection and pragmatic activity inherent in a missional ecclesiology. The word of God provides the principal source out of which missional practices emerge.

Missional practices are natural by-products of the nature and purpose of the church as those who read, reflect on, and live out the message of Scripture. One such stream of approaching ecclesiology is the idea that “the essential nature of the church is missionary, rather than mission being a task given to the church.” 34 A missional ecclesiology, then, upholds the engagement of reaching out to the world as an inherent, core value of the church that results in ongoing missional activity as opposed to missional practices being relegated to ancillary, intermittent components of church life.

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32 Stone, 152.
34 Kärrkäinen, 151 (emphasis original).
Speech as a Medium of Divine Revelation

Scripture begins in silence. The opening scene of the Bible is that of an earth that is described as an empty, formless void enveloped by darkness. There is no sound, no motion. All is quiet and still. Then, a wind from God emerges, blowing across the face of the waters. This wind is the first sense of activity in the Bible—the first moment where something happens in real time in the opening pages of the divine drama. It is following this activity of the wind that God speaks, uttering the words “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). The voice of God breaks the silence and, in doing so, yields the first element of creation explicitly brought into being in the pages of Scripture. God’s words are efficacious.

Speech is a vital avenue of divine revelation throughout Scripture. There is something theologically significant about the spoken word as revelatory of one’s thoughts and the state of one’s heart. Verbal communication is certainly one of the dominant ways that humans impart their ideas, opinions, and feelings to one another. In the pages of Scripture, God speaks. The fact that God speaks is in itself a significant theological concept. God could have chosen not to break the silence—to remain shrouded behind the curtain in the unfolding drama of human history. God chose to speak, and God did so in order to reveal God to us. Words from the mouth of God, then, carry a singular

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35 While many major versions of the Bible translate the phrase \( \text{spirit of God} \) in Gen 1:2 as “the Spirit of God” (ASV, CEV, ESV, KJV, NAS, NIV, RSV), there are some versions that elect to translate this phrase as “a wind from God” (NRSV, NWT, and Jewish Publication Society) or “a divine wind” (New Jerusalem Bible). My interpretation assumes the flexibility of this phrase.

36 Stephen Webb makes a case for the primacy of speech in Scripture in *The Divine Voice: Christian Proclamation and the Theology of Sound* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004). He states that sound is “the most characteristic medium of biblical revelation and Christian mission” (14) and “the most fundamental category by which we can conceive of God” (31).

37 The following words of Christ describe this sentiment: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34, NRSV).
gravitas in revealing God’s thoughts to humanity. Stephen Webb observes that “the voice of God reveals God’s innermost purposes.” When God speaks, therefore, humanity should devote the full extent of its attention and intellect to that which is being disclosed.

The biblical record indicates several occasions where God speaks directly to individuals who would become prominent leaders of Israel (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David). The voice of God spoke into human history at key moments, communicating with specific people and with precise objectives. Although the particularities of each of these encounters vary, the people to whom God spoke ultimately responded to the voice of God in a way that recognized God’s power, wisdom, and sovereignty. God’s words are authoritative.

While the voice of God is the dominant source of divine revelation in Scripture, it is not the only one. God empowers and allows the human voice to join the chorus of divine revelation in beautiful, significant ways. It is noteworthy that the first spoken words in the biblical record attributed to a human being are a pronouncement of substantial theological importance: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken” (Gen 2:23). This declaration is a rich, profound statement of the nature of what it means to be human.

It is significant to note that this passage immediately follows the telling of God’s entrusting Adam with the distinct privilege of naming every living creature. Not only does God give Adam this responsibility, but God “brought [the creatures] to Adam to see

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38 Webb, 39.
39 “It is often suggested that the story of woman’s creation from man’s rib illustrates the meaning of [the] traditional kinship formula. . . . This formula sets man and woman on equal footing as regards their humanity, yet sets them apart from the animals” (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 [Dallas: Word Books, 1987], 70).
what he would call them” (Gen 2:19). God assumes the role of attendant and courier while Adam, presumably remaining in a fixed location,\textsuperscript{40} names each creature that God brings before him. This is a solemn, sobering scene. God could easily have named these creatures, but God allows Adam to be the one to do so. There is tremendous power in the naming of a thing,\textsuperscript{41} and it is theologically significant that God permits Adam to be the one who assigns these designations.

Therefore, when Adam is recorded as uttering the words, “This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman,” God is affording Adam the opportunity to ascribe value to something again by naming it—this time, however, not merely a member of the animal kingdom, but another human being, the “helper as his partner” (Gen 2:20). This is a pivotal moment in the opening pages of Scripture, for in this act God gives the human voice a central place in the cosmic drama of creation. In this sense, Adam’s voice becomes symbolic of the power and place of the human voice in the landscape of creation. Webb notes that “we can add our voices to the divine harmony because we are created in God’s image.”\textsuperscript{42} Wright contends that “one of the most powerful things human beings, God’s image-bearers, can do is to speak.”\textsuperscript{43} Being given a voice and being allowed to use one’s voice as an instrument in cooperation with the divine is a profound theological gift—and part of what it means to be human.

\textsuperscript{40} Although not explicit in the text, the construction נָפַל לְהוֹי אֵלָּה implies this.
\textsuperscript{41} Walter Ong makes the observation that “oral peoples commonly think of names . . . as conveying power over things.” Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (New York: Methuen, 1982), 33.
\textsuperscript{42} Webb, 15.
\textsuperscript{43} Wright, Scripture and the Authority of God, 36-37.
God continues to validate and utilize the human voice throughout the OT. In the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic periods of Israel’s history, God’s communication with Israel took place in a new paradigm—that of the collective voices of the prophets. This transition from direct revelation to indirect revelation signaled a significant shift in the importance of the public proclamation of God’s word. This is a vital stage in the historical development of divine revelation, both for the prophets and for the nation of Israel. For the first time in history, God was speaking through human intermediaries to disseminate God’s messages of repentance, warning, exhortation, and comfort to the entire nation of Israel. The OT prophets were, in a sense, the first preachers.

True proclamation of the word of God requires an audience—recipients of the message. God did not give the prophets messages that they were to contemplate in solitude. These messages were to be given life through being repeated in the presence of the people of God. While the prophets obviously played an indispensable role as vessels bearing the word of God, the people of Israel had a vital responsibility in the proclamation process—that of listening, hearing, and internalizing the message. It is not enough for hearers of God’s word merely to be physically present. The spiritually mature audience will engage the message proclaimed in their hearing with active listening and a spirit of contemplation. Webb declares that “Christians learn to speak the Word by

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44 For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I am using the term “Israel” as inclusive of both regions of the divided kingdom—Israel and Judah.
45 “When God raised up prophets to speak on God’s behalf . . . public speaking became the centerpiece of the divine drama” (Webb, 16).
46 Ong observes: “In the prophets, the sense of the word of God reaches particular intensity. The primacy of the Hebrew feeling for the word suggests a highly auditory sensorium, for word here means primarily the spoken word . . . The word is not an inert record but a living something, like sound, something going on.” Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 2.
hearing it, so a grateful listening is the habitual disposition that makes preaching possible.”

In this way, then, listening is a spiritual act.

The public proclamation of God’s word (דָּבָּר) is an oral event (דָּבָּר) that involves three seminal components: the messenger, the audience, and the message. It is out of the confluence of these three elements that true proclamation of the word of God emerges. If any one of these factors is minimized or eliminated, the proclamation process is stymied. The messenger must be diligent in the task of communicating the message faithfully; the audience must engage the message through attentive listening; and the message itself must be handled responsibly by both parties—for the messenger, this means delivering a message that is faithful, true, and coherent; for the audience, this means receiving the message with honesty, openness, and reflection. While these responsibilities are certainly incumbent upon the human participants, God is at work in these elements as well, guiding and shaping message, messenger, and audience alike. It is only in this dynamic interplay between the human and the divine that true proclamation of God’s word will occur.

The Oral Tradition of Scripture

The Bible stands as the collection of the definitive writings for the Christian faith. While views on the inspiration of Scripture are myriad, Christians generally regard the

47 Webb, 25.
48 “Before human thought and speech can respond to God’s word, they have to be summoned into existence and given reality by the creative act of God’s word. . . . The Word of God is the Word that God spoke, speaks, and will speak in the midst of all men. . . . In this Word, God’s work itself becomes speech” (Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963], 22-23 [emphasis original]).
49 “The notion that the special status of Scripture within Christian theology rests upon its divine origins, however vaguely this may be stated, can be discerned both in the New Testament itself and in subsequent reflection on it” (Alister McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction [Oxford: Wiley-
Bible as a credible, authoritative source for teaching, preaching, academic study, and personal devotion. Most Christians today accept the Bible in its final form at face value, but an appreciation for the oral tradition that led to the penning of the writings that would come to be called “Scripture” has largely remained a conversation restricted to the academic sector—and is a relatively new field of study even at that.50

One of the first major works among biblical scholars to point to oral tradition as source material for the final form of the Gospels was Rudolph Bultmann’s The History of the Synoptic Tradition.51 Bultmann was certainly not the first scholar to explore oral traditions behind written texts,52 but his work brought the discussion to a new level among biblical scholars. Although Bultmann’s emphasis in this work is form criticism, oral tradition plays a key role in his argument.

Bultmann’s major premise pertaining to oral tradition is the detection of a pattern of an evolutionary progression in many of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Bultmann saw evidence of a trend that led him to conclude that much of what the Markan Jesus says is a composite mosaic of single, independent sayings.53 According to Bultmann, these sayings grew together into story clusters (a natural development in a

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50 “That orality should seem to be a recent emphasis is ironic since it is an ancient reality” (Kenneth Thomas, Structure and Orality in 1 Peter: A Guide for Translators [New York: United Bible Societies, 2006], 2).

51 Bultmann’s The History of the Synoptic Tradition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1963) has a broad scope. I am limiting my discussion here to the contributions that Bultmann made toward understanding the place of oral tradition in applying form criticism.


53 Bultmann, 82.
primarily oral culture) that took on a life of their own, multiplying and being added to each other, eventually forming a collective body. It is this collective body of sayings, the final stage in a long process of oral evolution, that Bultmann proposes were written down into what has become the bulk of the sections of Mark that contain teachings and sayings of Jesus.

While Bultmann deserves credit for pointing to a notion of oral tradition, much subsequent scholarship has refined the particularities of his reconstructive scheme. More specifically, other scholars have made a case for a more robust degree of narrativity that was likely present in the earliest stages of oral transmission. Among the many scholars who have expanded on Bultmann’s work on oral tradition, Werner Kelber’s work has become arguably the most prominent. Kelber’s *The Oral and Written Gospel* essentially took one aspect of Bultmann’s larger discussion of form criticism—oral tradition—and made it his primary focus.

The technicalities of Kelber’s arguments are too extensive to treat fully here, but a brief summary of his position is that much of the Gospels stand as end products of a series of sequential iterations of oral recitation. Kelber contends that many of the teachings of Jesus (especially parables) and stories about his ministry originated as oral narratives and went through several retellings prior to being recorded in writing. As

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54 Bultmann, 91.
55 Ibid., 337.
57 Kelber extends his treatment of oral tradition to the Pauline corpus as well.
58 Kelber clarifies some of the more technical aspects of his position: “While it remains valid that the gospel is composed by frequent recourse to orality, it is not until the latter is uprooted and transformed that the textual construct can take shape. Strictly speaking, therefore, the gospel arises not from orality *per*
evidence of these claims, Kelber offers several “clues” that he proposes as indicative of this oral backdrop: use of the historical present, reliance on third person plural pronouns, folklore-based triads, and syntax that lends itself to an oral style.\(^{59}\)

It is fitting, then, to think of Scripture as “written remains”\(^{60}\) of the process of oral transmission that lies behind the text. The words that we read in the Bible are the *telos* of decades, perhaps centuries, of oral tradition. The pages of Scripture are our primary connection point to the multi-layered process of oral transmission that remains shrouded behind the veil of history. While we will never know the precise nature of the oral content that stands behind Scripture, we must recognize the printed words of Scripture as indebted to anonymous storytellers who spread the message of Christ with their voice long before scribes did so with their stylus.

This aspect of the composition of Scripture highlights another important point regarding oral tradition: that it should not necessarily be viewed as a preceding step in the transmission process of Scripture, but as one that eventually overlapped with the writing down of the stories that would become canon. Holly Hearon argues that the oral and written traditions were most likely linked in an ongoing, interrelated process: “There is, indeed, an *expectation* that oral traditions will appear in written texts and written traditions will be heard in oral texts. . . . [This insight] points to the reality that both oral and written versions of the same text may have been in circulation at the same time.”\(^{61}\)

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59 Kelber, 64.


61 Ibid., 9 (emphasis original).
Any lines, therefore, distinguishing an exclusively oral phase of transmission and an exclusively written phase of transmission become quickly blurred. This realization should enable us to hear the texts of Scripture in new ways: as orally captivating pieces of a larger fabric aimed at proclaiming truth and gospel in their context as well as our own.

The work of Bultmann, Kelber, and other scholars inform this project by highlighting the vital, often overlooked role of oral tradition that lies behind the text of Scripture. In doing so, these scholars remind us the world of antiquity was a predominantly oral world, a culture in which literacy could be scarce and stories were disseminated, passed down, and stored in a group’s collective conscious by means of oral transmission. These observations begin to illuminate the key role of orality in the process of the transcription and transmission of Scripture. How, then, did the early church use and incorporate Scripture? What role and function did the oral narratives that became written Scripture play in the earliest centuries of Christianity? I turn now to these questions in order to continue to explore the validity of the oral translation approach that this project proposes.

The Voice of Scripture in the Early Church

The earliest Christians did not have access to the entire corpus of writings that most of the Christian church has come to know as Scripture. The NT canon in its present form was established by the fifth century, thus formalizing the collection of writings that comprise Scripture. One of the major reasons early Christians began to transcribe, copy, and collect various writings that they deemed authoritative was the need to define what constituted orthodox Christian beliefs as a response to and defense against teachings that
were deemed heretical. Henry Chadwick describes the rationale behind the development of a written tradition of Scripture:

In the first century the Christian Bible had simply been the Old Testament. Authority resided in this scripture and in the words of the Lord, which long circulated in oral tradition. . . . The authoritative standing of this oral tradition continued to be high even after the saying and doings of the Lord had been written down. . . . But the controversy with Marcion and the Gnostics gave a sharp impetus to the control of authentic tradition which a written document possessed and which oral tradition did not.62

In this way, the increasing role of divergent and controversial teachings fueled the development of an authoritative collection of writings in order to mitigate the influence of these perceived threats to the heart of Christianity.

It is naturally difficult for Christians today to conceptualize Christendom without Scripture as we know it—and even more difficult to conceive of these writings as independent documents circulating regionally among congregations. This difficulty is understandable due in part to the historical gap between us and the early church as well as our deep appreciation and reverence for Scripture. However, while textuality certainly played a seminal role in the development of the early church, the church did not have access to the complete canon of Scripture for the first several centuries of its existence.63

Despite the lack of a universally recognized body of authoritative writings, the church grew and thrived in the midst of persecution and marginalization. Though a plethora of factors can be unearthed and explored in this period of the church’s history, I am concerned here primarily with the following two questions: What did conversion look

like prior to the canonization of Scripture? What resources were used in the proclamation of the gospel to prospective converts? The issues raised by these questions will inform a theology of the spoken word of God more fully.

A key area to explore in addressing these questions is the function that reading Scripture publicly has played in the Judeo-Christian heritage. The public recitation of Scripture has a long, rich history. Writings that are now part of the OT were read aloud in Jewish synagogues before the time of Christ (Acts 13:15). Paul instructed Timothy to give special attention to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13). The phrase πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει has yielded a variety of satisfactory translations. The verb προσέχω is primarily used with the dative, where its dominant meaning is “pay attention to, follow, listen to.” In the Gospels, προσέχω has the meaning “watch out” or “be on guard.” Other acceptable renderings of προσέχω include “apply oneself to, look after, observe, occupy oneself with, engage in.” The term appears only four times in the Pauline corpus, all of which occur in 1 Timothy. In whatever way one interprets προσέχω in the context of 1 Tim 4:13, it is clear that Paul is admonishing Timothy to be diligent in observing the practice of reading Scripture aloud in the hearing of the congregation.

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64 Here is a representative sample from current major translations: “give attention to the public reading of scripture” (NRSV, NAS, NET), “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (NIV), “give heed to reading” (ASV), “attend to the public reading of scripture” (RSV), “give attendance to reading” (KJV), “continue to read the Scriptures to the people” (NCV), “give attention to reading” (NKJV), “focus on reading the Scriptures to the church” (NLT).
66 Ibid., 3.169.
67 Ibid., 3.170.
68 The NT records two other explicit examples of the public reading of Scripture: Acts 13:15 and 2 Cor 3:14.
The NT presents the early church reading Scripture publicly as a regular part of its assemblies (1 Tim 4:13). Justin Martyr provides a glimpse into a typical Christian assembly in the mid-second century: “And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits.” In the Middle Ages, the Bible was presented to people primarily through oral readings. The public reading of sacred texts, therefore, has a central place in the history of the Judeo-Christian faith.

One major reason for the widespread practice of public reading of Scripture in the Christian movement was the lack of literacy among most of the general population in antiquity. William Harris’s comprehensive study of literacy in the ancient world estimates that the average rate of literacy in antiquity was about ten percent. Harry Gamble offers the following comment on the state of literacy in the ancient world: “We must assume . . . that the large majority of Christians in the early centuries were illiterate, not because they were unique but because they were in this respect typical.” Even reading audibly to oneself in private was a common practice in the ancient world. In

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71 William Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 141. Harris elucidates that in some urban cities the rate of literacy might have reached twenty to thirty percent.


73 Of special interest here is Augustine’s commentary on his discovery of Ambrose reading silently to himself. This was such a notable, unusual occurrence that Augustine was compelled to record it, as well as speculate on the reasons for this oddity: “When he was reading, his eyes ran over the page and his heart perceived the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. . . . We wondered if he read silently perhaps to protect himself in case he had a hearer interested and intent on the matter, to whom he might have to expound the text. . . . Besides, the need to preserve his voice, which used easily to become hoarse, could have been a very fair reason for silent reading.” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92-93.
such a cultural milieu, then, it is only natural that the public reading of Scripture was the primary way that people heard the word of God.

A natural corollary that emerges from the discussion above regarding literacy rates in antiquity is that evangelism in the early church was primarily an oral phenomenon. However, even with the preponderance of orality in the life of the early church, it was predominantly the reading of sacred texts that provided the source material for such oral proclamation. In Gamble’s treatment of the interplay of literacy, orality, and textuality in the early church, he claims that “from the outset Christianity depended heavily on Jewish literature, and particularly on the scriptures of Judaism. . . . There were [groups of Christians] who devoted themselves to the close study and interpretation of Jewish scriptures . . . and making those texts serviceable for Christian preaching, apologetics, and instruction.”

The OT played an indispensable role as the corpus that the earliest Christians utilized for preaching and teaching, but over time, the church naturally began to incorporate writings that emerged among communities of faith throughout the ancient world. Some of these were the familiar writings we know today that were eventually canonized, but others were not—such as collections of sayings of Jesus, letters to churches, and testimonies.

Returning to the two questions that frame this section (the nature of conversion prior to canonization and resources used in spreading the gospel), it is evident that the oral proclamation of sacred texts—including the OT as well as writings emerging from

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74 Gamble, 23-25.
75 N. T. Wright claims that “all early Christianity was Jewish Christianity.” The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 453.
76 “The New Testament can only be properly understood if we recognize that it is a collection of writings from precisely [the early Christian] community. . . . The writing of the books that now form the New Testament arose naturally from within the daily life of the early church” (ibid., 469).
77 Gamble, 21.
the burgeoning early church—holds primary status in the promulgation of the gospel in the early period of Christian history. The spread of the gospel, then, began primarily as an oral phenomenon. Therefore, an oral approach to propagating the message of Christ has a well-established place in the history of the church and still deserves a place today in areas and cultures where literacy is not a dominant value.

Implications of Orality for Bible Translation

As an admitted departure from traditional written Bible translation approaches, an oral translation methodology will require an informed perspective regarding the implications of orality for the translation task. For the purposes of this project, I used Ernst Wendland’s definition of orality as “the characteristic modes of thought and expression in societies that depend for communication essentially upon the spoken word, accompanied by various associated non-verbal techniques, such as gestures, facial features, and body movements.” I selected this definition based on its emphasis on orality as a viable communication mode and how it addresses the relationship of orality vis-à-vis literacy.

The key figure for my treatment of orality is Walter Ong, a Jesuit priest who taught English literature at Saint Louis University. While Ong’s contributions to the field

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79 Wendland expands this definition on subsequent pages: “The notion of orality may be taken to refer in general to semiotic behavior and the various verbal and non-verbal attributes, including the exceptional sensory perceptiveness, memory capacity, and performance skills, of an entire society. Its members thus normally prefer in large measure to orally communicate texts of all types. . . . More specifically, orality refers to the distinctive oral-aural properties of language that characterize the diverse verbal genres of a given speech community . . . which are originally composed and transmitted orally. . . . Most specifically, orality refers to the prominent oral structural and stylistic features that remain in evidence (“voiceprints”) when particular oral texts . . . are written down for dissemination and/or preservation. The term may also designate those characteristics which are typically reproduced when written texts are composed with eventual oral utterance (“performance”) in mind.” Wendland, 18-19.
of orality stand on the shoulders of his predecessors and contemporaries,\(^80\) his voice has emerged as one of the most dominant in the conversation. As a leading figure in the field of orality, Ong has made vast contributions and, as will be seen, his views on certain issues modified over the passage of time.

In the early stages of his career, Ong focused on the speech act as a dynamic process, not merely a moment in time.\(^81\) Paramount to Ong’s conclusion here is his understanding of sound as an ephemeral element: “Speech itself as sound is irrevocably committed to time. It leaves no discernible effect in space, where the letters of the alphabet have their existence. Words come into being through time and exist only so long as they are going out of existence.”\(^82\) He elucidates this perspective by claiming, “Sound is psychologically always something going on, something active, a kind of evanescent effluvium which exists only so long as something or someone is actively producing it. Sound implies movement and thus implies change.”\(^83\) Ong’s work along these lines refined the notion of verbal communication in primary oral cultures as an oral event.\(^84\)

Ong’s initial research also highlights the communal nature of the speech act in oral cultures. He points out that the communication event bound the community of hearers by the performance of the spoken word: “The formulary character of oral performance is responsible for the development of the doctrine of commonplaces or loci

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\(^81\) “The word is something that happens, an event in the world of sound through which the mind is enabled to relate actuality to itself” (Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 22).

\(^82\) Ibid., 40.

\(^83\) Ibid., 42. Ong also refers to a Latin proverb as indicative of this aspect of sound: *Verba volant, scripta manent* (“Words fly away, what is written stays put”), ibid.

\(^84\) “[An oral-aural culture] can never get far away from the word as a vocalization, a happening. The expression of truth is felt as itself always an event” (ibid., 33).
communes which dominated skilled verbal performance from oral-aural times until the maturing of the romantic age.”

For Ong, the verbal interchange is more than a transfer of information, but serves to “establish and deepen human relations.” Therefore, Ong contends that meaningful human encounters occur primarily through verbal exchanges.

Based on these properties of the speech act, Ong places sound above the other components of the human sensorium: “The necessary progression of sound through time appears to be one of its central properties, differentiating it from the objects of the other senses.” Throughout *The Presence of the Word*, Ong argues that sound is superior to the other senses. The final sentence of the book provides a summary statement of Ong’s view of the privileged position of sound: “But the mystery of sound is the one which in the ways suggested here is the most productive of understanding and unity, the most personally human, and in this sense closest to the divine.”

Perhaps overstating his case for effect, Ong makes his position regarding the relationship of sound to the other senses quite clear.

It is no surprise then that Ong’s earlier work displays a pejorative attitude toward literacy and print media. Ong castigates literacy by claiming that, in some linguistic settings, “literacy is not only irrelevant but is a positive hindrance.” He blames the advent of writing for what he considers a societal breakdown: “The development of writing and print ultimately fostered the breakup of feudal societies and the rise of individualism. Writing and print created the isolated thinker, the man with the book, and

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85 Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 31 (emphasis original).
86 Ibid., 92.
87 Ibid., 41.
88 Ibid., 324.
89 Ibid., 21.
downgraded the network of personal loyalties which oral cultures favor as matrices of communication and as principles of social unity.”

Ong holds the invention of the alphabet responsible for “the fragmentation of consciousness” and “an intensity of self-possession on the part of the human race.” In making such observations, Ong is both romanticizing oral cultures and exaggerating the perceived detrimental role of literacy in human society.

It is here that the notion of Bible translation as a viable cross-cultural enterprise warrants further exploration. Valid concerns can be raised regarding imperialistic attitudes in any cross-cultural endeavor—from overseas tourism to international relief efforts. Religious enterprises that seek to make converts are especially susceptible to charges of imperialism. Many voices have raised suspicion and warnings regarding what they deem a lack of objectivity in the Bible translation movement. One of the most critical appraisals comes from Robert Carroll, who states, “Every translation of the Bible is an attempt to provide as accurate a translation as possible within the constraints set by the prevailing ideology of the group translating and publishing the Bible.” Others who have voiced concern about the motives and methods of Bible translation include R. S. Sugirtharajah, who sees Bible translation as “implicated in diverse imperialist projects,” and Gosnell Yorke, who claims that “Bible translation, to a large extent, is ideologically

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91 Ibid., 321.
92 Ibid.
These are voices that raise valid concerns and that warrant a response from the Bible translation movement.

One of the leading voices regarding the positive impacts of Bible translation is Lamin Sanneh. He claims that, in postcolonial Africa, “Bible translation became the catalyst for profound changes and developments in language, culture, and ethnicity, changes that invested ethnic identity with the materials for a reawakened sense of local identity.” Sanneh argues for the positive impact of Bible translation on culture as a whole. Another key proponent of the beneficial aspects of Bible translation is James Maxey, who describes Bible translation as a twofold enterprise in terms of liberation and inculturation. Grant Lovejoy describes the impact of the gospel in Odisha, India: “In a state notorious for beating Christian pastors, burning church buildings, and destroying Christians’ homes, the gospel has spread rapidly and brought peace. The local people no longer fear Christianity as a foreign religion that will destroy their culture.” Bible translators must respect the dignity of all people and, when necessary, defend the rights of those whom they are serving. Bible translation, therefore, can play a vital role in redeeming and benefiting a given cultural context.

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97 Sanneh challenges the notion of mission as destructive of host cultures through an overview of the history of the mission movement in various cultures and the benefits of mission in those cultures in *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).
99 Chiang and Lovejoy, 184.
100 R. Daniel Shaw casts a vision of how the gospel can impact a culture: “The more cultures are transformed by His Word, the freer people will become. Human culture at its integrative best still falls far short in its ability to perform this liberating function. Therefore, the first step in the communication of the
Returning to Ong, we find that his later work displays a more balanced approach to orality and literacy. We should consider the following assessment of the relationship between writing and orality from *Orality and Literacy*, the last of his major works:

“Writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organize the ‘principles’ or constituents of oratory into a scientific ‘art’, a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various specific effects.”

Ong goes on to claim that “without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials” and affirms literacy as “absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself.”

In another of his later works, Ong upholds that “writing has made possible the vast evolution of human consciousness that marks the later stages of human history.”

Therefore, Ong ultimately brings orality and literacy into focus as mutually inclusive elements in the landscape of linguistics.

What emerges as the most relevant implications for Bible translation methodologies from Ong’s work is twofold: his postulation that literacy changes the way people think and his emphasis on orality as a performative event. As to the former, Ong is
insistent that a substantial difference exists in the way literates and non-literates process information. Perhaps it is here that we find Ong’s major contribution to the field of linguistics: heightening our awareness that literacy changes the way people think, learn, and communicate.\textsuperscript{106} Although this claim is not without critics or counter voices,\textsuperscript{107} Ong’s view here has provided the basis for much subsequent research and discussion among linguists.

The second major implication for Bible translation from Ong’s work is that of his declaration that verbal utterance is an oral event. Although Ong’s declaration that “oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth”\textsuperscript{108} centers on epics, poems, and other folktale, the leap to the genre of biblical content (especially narrative) is a natural one. Since non-literate place a high value on oral performances of anecdotal and secular material, Bible translation enterprises among such people should reflect these dynamics. Bringing the word of God to oral cultures should be more than a reading of the text; it should be an oral event in which the text takes on new life as a performance.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{106} “Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form” (Ong, \textit{Orality and Literacy}, 78).

\textsuperscript{107} Foremost among those critical of Ong’s view here is Douglas Biber, who claims that “there is no single, absolute difference between speech and writing in English; rather there are several dimensions of variation, and particular types of speech and writing are more or less similar with respect to each dimension.” Douglas Biber, \textit{Variation across Speech and Writing} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 199.

\textsuperscript{108} Ong, \textit{Orality and Literacy}, 14.

\textsuperscript{109} This does not necessarily mean that multiple speakers or “parts” are needed; this can be an individual who responsibly handles the multi-voiced nature of a text (Ong calls such individuals “oral poets,” \textit{Orality and Literacy}, 59).
In May 2014, I went to a country in Southeast Asia to observe an oral translation pilot project. The translation team was comprised of seven nationals, all of whom were literate, but who came from a village where orality is normative. When the nationals recorded Scripture, they would stand reverently with their eyes closed, focusing intently on the words of life they were speaking. They spoke with clarity and precision, re-recording meticulously until they felt the final product was perfect. Their reverence and conscientious approach to the task of translation was touching and inspiring. When I watched these individuals record Scripture, I felt that I had experienced an oral event.

This observation leads to the notion of performance of the biblical text. For my purposes here, I am using the term performance to refer to “a public communication event whereby one or more speakers present a verbal text, whether originally oral or written, in dramatic or documentary (plain, unembellished) form and in the presence of a communal listening audience.” The topic of performance criticism is a broad area of study. While there are many types of oral performance, my treatment of the topic for the scope of this project is focused on the public retelling of Scripture stories (and, in some cases, reading of Scripture itself) that is prevalent in oral cultures. Oral

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110 This project was a collaborative effort between PBT, whose missionaries on the field hosted and recruited nationals for the project, and Faith Comes by Hearing, who sent an orality expert to conduct the project itself. I was invited to attend given my interest in orality as well as for the experience of observing an oral Bible translation project in a mission context.

111 Ong defines such a cultural context as having “secondary orality.” For his discussion of this term and its implications, see Orality and Literacy, 135-37. For more on the notion of secondary orality, see Lovejoy, “The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update,” 14-15.

112 Wendland, 29.


The performance of biblical material should not be seen as a means to the end of a Scripture “product,” but as an end in itself as an oral event in which the gospel is proclaimed—and for the purposes of this project, translated—through dramatic reenactment of the Bible.\textsuperscript{116}

An important observation pertaining to oral performance is that written texts are “fixed,” whereas oral texts are flexible and have no existence outside of the performative event.\textsuperscript{117} At this point, the prominent role of memory and recall in oral cultures begins to surface. Looking back momentarily at Kelber’s work on the oral tradition behind the NT, we glean the key insight that “verbatim memorization as a key factor in oral transmission has been abandoned by the majority of experts, who now admit the inevitability of change, flexibility, and degrees of improvisation.”\textsuperscript{118} This observation, which sheds light on the likelihood that there were different versions of the stories that came to be written down as “gospel,” sets the stage for how we approach performance criticism.

Since the human mind is the sole repository where information is stored in oral cultures, it is essential that due attention be given to the role of memory and recall in these societies.\textsuperscript{119} Ong provides the following seminal insight along these lines: “Oral cultures thus think by means of memorable thoughts, thoughts processed for retrieval in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Maxey, xii.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Maxey provides a detailed discussion regarding the relationship between biblical performance criticism and Bible translation in \textit{From Orality to Orality}, 132-66.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Hearon, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Kelber, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Jon Miles Foley, “Memory in Oral Tradition” in \textit{Performing the Gospel}, 83-96, provides an initial introduction to this topic by exploring three specific examples of poetry formed out of oral tradition from different time periods and languages.
\end{itemize}
various ways, or, in other words, fixed, formulaic, stereotyped. . . . Oral cultures think in formulas, and communicate in them.”120 This means that rote, verbatim memorization for performance purposes is unlikely121 and that no two separate performances of the same biblical text or story will likely be identical.122 In this way, the oral performance of Scripture is truly an art form, the efficacy of which is contingent on the skill and ability of the performer.

Despite possessing this inherent artistic quality, oral performances are not categorically unreliable or unduly free. Hearon argues for the credibility of oral performances by stating that they “conform to certain structures and formulas.”123 Julian Sundersingh reminds us that oral societies “depend entirely on knowledge stored in memory, and therefore, repeating stories again and again becomes a necessary exercise in retaining information. It is precisely for this reason that sacred texts of ancient times were recited in worship so that people could remember what was said. . . . Oral cultures repeat what they have learnt by word of mouth over and over again so as to remember their knowledge and heritage.”124 Oral dramatizations or recitations of Scripture have played a vital role in the dissemination of the gospel throughout history, and they can and should continue to play a similar role in primary oral cultures today.

Another observation regarding the performance of oral texts has to do with the nature and purpose of printed material in antiquity. While reading in the West today is

120 Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, 104 (emphasis original).
121 Ward and Trobisch provide a discussion of the differences among “rote recitation,” “memorization,” and “internalization” in *Bringing the Word to Life*, 69-71.
122 Klem discusses the concepts of the flexibility and artistic creativity of oral performances at length in *Oral Communication of the Scripture*, 118-25.
123 Hearon, 12.
primarily a solitary activity done in silence, published material in the ancient world was “intended to serve as a script to be interpreted to an audience by a performer.” 125 This intimates a sense in which the biblical text “comes alive” in an oral culture. A skilled performer (or group of performers) can present biblical material in powerful ways that breathe new life into the text and make the performance a dramatic, memorable experience. Therefore, the presentation of Scripture products among oral cultures should adopt a performative approach when possible for increased effectiveness.

The final implication of orality that I will mention is that it can and should impact how we translate Scripture. As we have seen, the final form of the text itself stands as a product of oral transmission and, as such, contains many oral features. Therefore, the astute Bible translator will be attentive to these features and allow the “identification of these features and their function in the original text [to guide] the inclusion of similar or equivalent features in a translation.” 126 Translations should therefore reflect some of the elements of orality that stand behind the source text. Examples of such features include repetition, discourse markers, stylistic cues, word order, and rhythm. There are a variety of ways to incorporate oral elements into a translation of Scripture, 127 and those who are engaged in the translation task among oral communicators should avail themselves of this array of possibilities.

**Conclusion**

The theological framework of this project finds its basis in the spoken word of God. Scripture reveals the character of God and prescribes ethical norms for the people

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125 Ward and Trobisch, 54.
126 Thomas, 3.
127 Green provides some suggestions along these lines in *An Orality Strategy*, 77-101.
God, including the call to be a missional presence in the world. As Scripture discloses these elements, the prominent role of speech—both divine and human—surfaces in its pages. The oral tradition that lies behind Scripture paints a picture of the nature of orality and its role in the formation of the written documents of the NT. The primacy of the public reading of Scripture in the life of the early church clarifies the oral nature of conversion in the first few centuries of Christian history. The work of Bultmann, Kelber, Ong, and others highlights critical findings for the task of translation, especially pertaining to the notion of an oral translation. The key role of orality has numerous implications for Bible translation, including the reading of Scripture as an oral event, the communal nature of the speech act, the importance of performance criticism, and capturing the oral nature of texts in the translation itself.
CHAPTER III
AN ORAL TRANSLATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this project flowed naturally from the theological foundation laid in chapter 2. Based on the theology of the spoken word of God I have explored, this project employed a verse-by-verse oral translation methodology, incorporating a qualitative research approach.¹ The methodology of this project also implemented participatory action research² by collaborating with a group of immigrant translators. These particular components and approaches represent the most effective means for implementing the project, for generating optimal results, and for evaluating the outcomes of the project.

The phrase “oral translation” is a relatively new term in the field of linguistics.³ As such, what precisely constitutes an oral translation is still being defined, clarified, and refined.⁴ There are a variety of Scripture products that can be properly called an oral translation in some sense of the term: oral Bible stories,⁵ versions of The Jesus Film,⁶ and

¹ Of special relevance to my particular approach are Joseph Maxwell’s model of five components of qualitative research (4) and his discussion of the value of experiential knowledge (44). Joseph Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).
² I used the following as my operational definition of this term: “An intervention, involving the researcher in an active role with other organizational participants in bringing about some change, however small, in the working of that organization.” Richard Thorpe and Robin Holt, The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Management Research (London: Sage, 2008), 17.
³ Green’s An Orality Strategy, written in 2007, contains the earliest known use of this term related to Bible translation.
⁴ Green discusses some of the elements and benefits of an oral translation in An Orality Strategy, 7-12.
⁵ An approach that essentially paraphrases portions of Scripture.
⁶ An edition of the 1979 film with the audio translated and re-recorded into a receptor language, the text of which contains roughly one-third of the Gospel of Luke.
dramatized audio renditions of Scripture portions. By generating a verse-by-verse oral draft of a portion of Scripture, this project reflected the translation approach of PBT as an agency dedicated to bringing the entire Bible to people in ways that are intelligible to them.

Use of Audio Scripture Products among Oral Communicators

The theological framework discussed in chapter 2 provides a foundation for the preferred use of audio Scripture products among oral communicators. A robust theology of the spoken word of God emphasizes the significance of oral proclamation and the role of hearing Scripture read aloud. The exclusive use of printed Scripture material will exclude non-literate people from gaining personal access to the Bible. Therefore, written Scripture products are inadequate to communicate the gospel to non-literate people groups. The confluence of these factors with the high value that non-literates place on orality lays the groundwork for a substantiated claim that audio Scripture products are an essential part of reaching oral communicators with the gospel. In what follows, I explore the need for audio Scripture products and show that they are reliable, credible resources for the presentation of the gospel among oral cultures.

Communication at its most basic level takes place in the context of some form of an association or connection between two or more individuals. The word communication itself connotes a sense of relationship. The English term “communication” derives from the Latin communicare, which means “to share; to unite, link; to impart; to discuss together; to plan together.” Other English derivatives carry the same connotation of

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1 A performative reading of a written translation accompanied by relevant sounds, music, and other effects.

relationality: commune, communal, communion, and community. Viggo Søgaard declares that it is “impossible to separate the word communication from implications of mutual involvement and relationship, the development of commonality between peoples.” Communication does not occur in a vacuum. Any act of communication involves some level of connectedness to another individual.

Oral communication in particular is well-suited to fostering a sense of community and belonging. While this statement is admittedly a generalization, oral communication necessarily involves meaningful interaction among those involved. Ong asserts that the very nature of oral utterance “encourages a sense of continuity with life, a sense of participation, because it itself is participatory.” Performer and audience interact expectantly in the oral event; they are brought face-to-face and bound up together in the communication moment. In this way, oral communication tends to create a deeper sense of community among people.

The incarnation of Jesus stands as the ultimate demonstration of God’s desire to communicate clearly with humanity. In the language of communication theory, the act of the incarnation of Jesus is God engaging in receptor-oriented communication. This type of communication considers the needs and situation of the recipient(s) of a message to be

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4 Ong develops this theme more fully in *Orality and Literacy*, 69-73.
6 “The incarnation of Jesus sets the stage for perfect communication between God and us” (Søgaard, 13).
7 Ibid., 16.
of primary importance. In choosing Jesus as a human medium for divine revelation, God exhibited the utmost consideration for the human condition.

There are, however, some who resist the use of the incarnation as a model for congregational ministry or human communication. These individuals see the incarnation as too sacred to emulate and therefore react negatively to the incarnation’s being held up as an exemplar for the church. John Starke claims that “the language of incarnation is precious to the solidarity of Christians throughout history in holding up the glories of the person of Christ and maintaining the truthfulness of his gospel. This is a good reason to avoid using the term as it relates to Christ, even adjectivally, to characterize our mission.” Andreas Kostenberger provides an even stronger critique of the use of the incarnation as a model for ministry: “The Fourth Gospel represents the Word’s incarnation as unique . . . and the incarnate Jesus’ work as complete. . . . The disciples cannot and are not commanded to reproduce Jesus’ incarnation or even model their own mission after it.” While I attend to these voices and must give them a fair hearing, it is my conviction that the incarnation does and should serve as paradigmatic of how the

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8 “Perhaps the most difficult task for any translator is to think of the message in terms of the receptor-language frame of interpretation based on the presuppositions and values of the culture” (Eugene Nida and William Reyburn, Meaning across Cultures: A Study on Bible Translating [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981], 21). Some other key resources along these lines are Charles Kraft, Communication Theory for Christian Witness (Nashville, Abingdon: 1983); Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); and Carley H. Dodd, Dynamics of Intercultural Communication (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998).

9 The incarnation “has tremendous theological significance for this study as it analyzes media options and use of language in communicating Scriptures. . . . The model of God’s communication as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ is personal and relational” (Sundersingh, 44).


church is to engage society, including the manner in which Scripture is presented and communicated. The fact that God lived among us in the person of Jesus provides a paragon for the church’s incarnational involvement in the world.

As servants of the gospel and imitators of Christ, then, Bible translators should embody the quintessence of cultural sensitivity to the needs and situation of the recipients of their message. In the context of an oral culture, this means giving careful thought to what types of media will communicate Scripture most effectively to non-literate groups. Critics of audio methods ask a valid and important question that warrants a response: Why not just teach people how to read? The traditional Bible translation model that relies on literacy is certainly a plausible strategy and, in fact, may be the optimal strategy in many contexts.

Although teaching non-literate people how to read is an admirable goal, it is not always the most effective approach. Søgaard offers the following charge to Bible translators: “No matter how fond of reading some of us may be, communicating with people is a matter of reaching out to where they are and accepting them in the way they are. That means, for the church, resisting the temptation to make literacy a requirement for salvation and spiritual development.” Further, literacy is often not a realistic or attainable goal in some contexts. In many areas where literacy is low or absent, the local people are engaged in manual or agricultural labor for ten or more hours per day. These

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12 An in-depth example of cultural sensitivity in a missions setting comes from Christopher L. Flanders, *About Face: Rethinking Face for 21st-century Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). Flanders addresses the cultural, missiological, and soteriological implications of the concept of “face” (in terms of interpersonal social honor) in Thai culture and how missionaries can be sensitive to these dynamics. While Flanders’s work here addresses a specific issue in a specific context, the principles of his research can be applied to a variety of mission contexts. For example, his research readily applies to those issues that a given culture values as signifying honor as well as expressing shame.

13 Søgaard, 176.
people lack both the time and the energy for literacy classes. In some contexts, poor infrastructure and inaccessibility of people groups make facilitating literacy classes a virtual impossibility.

The drive to teach literacy, when taken to an extreme or insistent form, can be seen as a form of monoculturalism or ethnocentrism. This unhealthy imposition of literacy onto a host culture can stem, even subconsciously or unwittingly, from a view that non-literate are in some way deficient or inferior to literates. It is morally incumbent on Bible translators to affirm the value of all cultures. When one assumes that literacy is categorically superior to orality, one violates the Christian virtue of the equality of all people. While literacy can provide certain benefits and advantages to a society, it is imperative that Bible translators exhibit humility in their approach to working with non-literate people groups.

In assessing how to present Scripture most effectively among oral communicators, therefore, one must look beyond traditional print media. Audio Scripture products in both hard copy and digital format (such as CDs/DVDs, micro SD cards, mp3 sticks, solar/crank-powered audio devices, and cell phones) and online format are

14 Gailyn Van Rheenen defines ethnocentrism as occurring when those who live and work in cross-cultural settings “interpret reality through their own cultural assumptions . . . [and] presume that their ways are superior and thus arrogantly reject new perceptions of reality.” Gailyn Van Rheenen with Anthony Parker, Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 260.

15 “God has placed within all cultures the culturally appropriate elements and methods for successful communication, including communication of the gospel. In other words, God willingly ‘uses culture’ as a vehicle for his message” (Phil Thornton, “Constructivism, Cross-cultural Teaching, and Orality,” Orality Journal 3.1 [2014], 32).

16 For examples of such devices, see http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/audio-bibles/resources.

17 “Oral learners are finding new ways to communicate important things through the media they value most. They don’t need to give up those values in order to talk to another culture’s values. . . . The web is providing people with a way to aggregate all sorts of cultural literacies in order to communicate the scripture text to all people, languages, nations, and media preferences” (Gilles Gravelle, “Literacy, Orality, and the Web,” Orality Journal 2.1 [2013], 23).
becoming increasingly available as options to reach oral communicators with the message of Scripture. The rise of audio Scripture products necessitates questions of the viability, reliability, and credibility of such methods. Any Bible translator would be irresponsible to adopt the latest technological developments *prima facie*. Translators must therefore explore such emerging possibilities critically and with thoughtful analysis.

Audio Scripture products have been used with great success on the mission field. Sundersingh’s *Audio-Based Translation* provides a detailed evaluation of his use of audio Scripture products in India in the 1990s. His findings were that eighty-one percent of those involved in the scope of his research project preferred the oral Scripture to the printed text.¹⁸ Herbert Klem, reflecting on his use of oral Scripture in Nigeria, asserts that “it is more constructive to view the perseverance of the oral communicational system not as a retreat from literacy or resistance to literacy, but as an indication of the vitality of an indigenous communicational system that lies at the heart of African culture.”¹⁹ In his remarks regarding the findings of his research, Klem concludes, “Therefore, in a predominantly oral society the church ought to minister and teach primarily through indigenous oral media. Then the church will have an indigenous communicational image, and the majority of the people will be able to employ their present communicational skills as the basis for their growth in the faith.”²⁰ Greg Pruett’s research among the Yalunka people of Guinea revealed that the local people preferred dramatized audio NTs over

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¹⁸ Sundersingh, 155.
²⁰ Ibid., 180.
printed Scripture in either Arabic or Roman script.\textsuperscript{21} Audio Scripture products, then, in these cases, have served as effective media in oral cultures.

Another reason that an oral translation approach should be employed among oral communicators is that there are many areas where Bibles that have been translated into a receptor language remain boxed in storage or forgotten in the corner of an office or church building. Margaret Hill paints a picture of this disturbing trend: “There are a number of houses and offices in various parts of Africa today that are piled high with New Testaments and Bibles. . . . They are covered with dust, and no one has bought a copy for years.”\textsuperscript{22} Surely even staunch proponents of literacy and written translation approaches can agree that this is a tragic waste of resources—from the time and energy invested by those who worked diligently for years to produce the translation to the high cost of printing and shipping these copies of Scripture. These unused Bibles stand as silent reminders of the regrettable ineffectiveness of attempts to instill literacy in such places. One cannot help but wonder whether an oral approach might have yielded a more lasting Scripture product among these particular people groups.

Another advantage of using audio Scripture resources in oral cultures is that they provide greater access to the material. When Scripture is available to people in media that are immediately accessible to them, they will internalize the message much more expeditiously. Klem states that “the use of indigenous media allows the people to approach the material with existing skills. An indigenous definition of learning allows

\textsuperscript{21} Greg Pruett, \textit{Barriers and Bridges for the Gospel among Yalunka Folk Muslims in West Africa} (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary Press, 2014), 87.

those who expect to memorize what they learn to feel fulfilled.”

These resources also allow private study and in-home listening, which can be especially important in high-security areas. Audio Scripture resources thus warrant serious consideration as a viable, perhaps even the optimal, initial strategy among non-literate people, while allowing literacy to be maintained as a future possibility.

An Overview of the Bible Translation Process

There are numerous acceptable models, theories, and approaches for how to go about the process of Bible translation. I do not intend to debate the merits and weaknesses of these various approaches here, but will limit my scope to elucidating an approach commonly used by PBT and other Bible translation agencies. The basic process that PBT uses as the operative paradigm for its Bible translation projects has five steps prior to publication: drafting, exegetical check, comprehension check, back translation, and consultant check. An implicit component of each of these steps is that of making whatever revisions surface within the given step before proceeding to the next step. This project performed the first step of drafting and then emulated the next four of these steps: exegetical check, comprehension check, back translation, and consultant check.

23 Klem, xxiii.
24 Three resources that provide concise overviews on the most prominent Bible translation theories and models are Timothy Wilt, ed., Bible Translation Basics: Frames of Reference (Northampton, MA: St. Jerome, 2002); Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation (Leiden: Brill, 1969); and John Beekman and Jon Callow, Translating the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).
26 Two resources that provide excellent overviews to these specific steps are Harriet Hill et. al., Bible Translation Basics: Communicating Scripture in a Relevant Way (Dallas: SIL International, 2011), 258-64; and Mildred Larson, Meaning-Based Translation (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 46-50.
27 This is a translation from the receptor language back into the source language (in this case, from Uduk to English). This is a common practice when the consultant does not know the receptor language well enough to provide an accurate check.
Exegetical Preparation for the Project

In order to be more adequately prepared for the project sessions, I engaged in an exegetical analysis of Luke 8:4-15. This analysis consisted of establishing the text’s external and internal boundaries, conducting a series of word studies on several Greek terms found in the passage, and consulting several commentaries on the passage. I do not intend to provide a full exegetical treatment of the passage here, but will touch on a few highlights from my analysis.²⁸

One of the first things that is clear from the immediate context of the passage is that the parable is the initial teaching recorded in the tour of itinerant preaching that Jesus begins in Luke 8:1-3. It is significant that the first teaching given, the parable in Luke 8:4-15, emphasizes the need to be attentive to the word of God and receive it fully and wholeheartedly. This parable, then, sets the tone for the subsequent teachings, miracles, and events that take place on Jesus’s preaching tour in 8:16-56. Our parable focuses the reader of Luke on the importance of opening one’s ears and heart to the message of Christ. The presence of this theological concept in the passage is especially fitting for a project centered on orality.

An example of a salient finding from the word studies I conducted surfaces from the term καρποφοροῦσιν in verse 15. The notion of bearing fruit here is “associat[ed] with the idea of deed and result; . . . it is used with reference to human conduct.”²⁹ In this particular parable, the idea of bearing fruit has specific implications for “accepting the missionary word . . . those who hear the word and accept it and thus bear fruit

²⁸ See appendix B for the complete notes from my exegetical analysis of the passage.
²⁹ Balz and Schneider, 2.251.
This is a key point in grasping the basic meaning of the parable, and it will be critical that the oral draft communicates this message clearly.

Another example representative of my findings from these word studies is how the concept of λόγος is treated throughout the parable. The term λόγος/ν appears four times in the passage (vv. 11, 12, 13, and 15), each time in reference to the seed being sown by the farmer. This is a rich, multi-layered term in Greco-Roman thought, and it is used with a myriad of senses. For the purposes of our selected passage, λόγος can best be viewed as emerging from both the preaching and ministry of Jesus, specifically from his utterance of this parable. The λόγος, then, is “connected not only with Jesus’s proclamation as spoken word, but also equally to his person and work.” It is noteworthy to observe that this parable (including its Markan and Matthean counterparts) is the only time that λόγος is found in the spoken words of Jesus. Therefore, the concept of λόγος carries special weight in this text and must be given due attention.

In this passage and its immediate context, it is clear that λόγος is used with respect to the missionary preaching of Jesus. Again, this parable is the first formal teaching element of Jesus’s missionary tour that began in Luke 8:1. Therefore, his proclamation of the gospel and emphasis on the subsequent response of the human heart occupy primary status in the initial teaching he presents on this itinerant journey. The use of λόγος in this parable is “portrayed with parenetic intent” in that it warns hearers of the dangers of rejecting the gospel (or only accepting it superficially) as well as the

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30 Balz and Schneider, 2.252.
31 Ibid., 2.357-58.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 2.358.
benefits of receiving it fully into one’s heart. In this way, the parable is “intended to give encouragement in the presence of failure and to make an appeal to have faith.” Because Jesus’s use of λόγος is connected to preaching about the reign of God, λόγος became associated with the sense of missionary proclamation in early Christianity.35

The commentaries that I consulted on this passage prepared me to look for specific themes as I interacted with the translation team and focus group. I offer here a few representative examples from these commentators. John Nolland conjectures that the main point of the parable is “the need for a proper response to the word from God that Jesus is proclaiming.”36 Joel Green’s approach to the parable contends that “authentic hearing is thus presented as hearing that leads to faith, and faith that leads to behaviors consistent with the word of God.”37 I. Howard Marshall views the parable as making the claim that “hearing the word must lead to the production of fruit, or else the hearing is in vain.”38 One thematic element that emerges from the synthesis of these interpretations is that this parable centers on eliciting a proper response to the hearing of God’s word, which is ultimately evidenced by the fruit of good deeds and obedience in one’s life. This brief exegetical research prepared me to anticipate some of the issues, questions, and concerns I could expect to encounter during the project sessions themselves.

Description of the Project Sessions

This project consisted of three sessions on consecutive Saturdays: September 6, 13, and 20, 2014. The first two of these sessions were five hours each (9:00-2:00), and
the third session was two hours (10:00-12:00). These sessions are described in greater
detail below. I provided snacks and lunch for each of these sessions. The location was the
conference room at Lake Highlands Church in Dallas. Those present with me were the
members of the translation team (first two sessions only) and focus group (third session
only). The selection of the translation team and focus group was conducted through
purposive sampling\textsuperscript{39} based on the following criteria: members of a local church, age,
gender, Uduk as first language, and previous translation experience.\textsuperscript{40} PBT’s area director
for Africa\textsuperscript{41} served as a key informant\textsuperscript{42} to connect me with Randy and Gloria Moore,\textsuperscript{43}
who lead the international ministry at Lake Highlands Church. The Moores’ role
therefore positions them as natural gatekeepers\textsuperscript{44} to a host of immigrants, including this
group of local Uduk speakers. They played a crucial function by assisting me with
coordinating meetings with members of the immigrant community, the selection of the
translation team, and the logistics of reserving work space at Lake Highlands Church.

The first session began with an overview of the project in terms of its scope,
purpose, and goals. After this introduction, I took the translation team through a brief

\textsuperscript{39} “Purposive samples select people who have awareness of the situation and meet the criteria and
attributes that are essential to your research” (Tim Sensing, \textit{Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods
Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses} [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011], 83 [emphasis
original]). Subsequent pages provide a synthesis of various factors that influenced my selection criteria.

\textsuperscript{40} As it turned out, none of the Uduk speakers in Dallas has had any previous formal translation
experience, so I was forced to concede this particular criterion.

\textsuperscript{41} This person has requested to remain anonymous for security reasons.

\textsuperscript{42} “A local person who is a resident expert who provides important background or current
information about the community. Key informants assist the researcher to understand the people and the
context of the project. They also can facilitate the researcher’s access to resources, organizations,
gatekeepers, and others who might not otherwise be available. Finally, key informants can facilitate wise
decisions in many areas of the project (e.g., participant selection, problem analysis, interpretation of data,
etc.)” (Sensing, 13).

\textsuperscript{43} Names used with written consent in an e-mail from Randy on August 18, 2014.

\textsuperscript{44} “A person whose position in the community affords him or her formal or informal access to the
power to make decisions, open doors, or facilitate processes necessary for the researcher to complete her
work” (Sensing, 13-14).
training, orienting them to some basic translation principles in Luke 8:4-15. Once we covered these items, we spent the rest of our time together producing an oral draft of Luke 8:4-12. The source text that I used is the New Living Translation. The basic formula for the oral drafting process consisted of my reading aloud Luke 8:4-15 from the NLT twice for orientation and context. Then, I went back and read verse 4 twice, breaking it down into phrases. After this, the translation team discussed the best way to say the given phrase in Uduk. When they reached a consensus, we then recorded the translation using digital recording software. This process continued verse-by-verse, phrase-by-phrase until we had an oral draft of verses 4-12.

The oral drafting process itself was quite dynamic and interactive. There was much dialogue between the translation team and me as they navigated the linguistic contours of the passage together. This particular group of translators was meticulous, asking for things to be repeated several times in order to be certain they grasped the sense of the phrase. We worked through some verses quickly, whereas others took significantly longer. Those verses that took longer were generally due to questions about a particular term, construction, or usage. Many of these questions led us back to the training module

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45 The source material for this training is Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles* (Dallas: SIL International, 2002). See appendix C for an outline of the training module that I conducted.

46 See appendix D for the specific key terms that we discussed.

47 Hereinafter “NLT.” This version was chosen in conjunction with Dr. Greg Pruett, secondary advisor to this project. We selected this version due to its comparatively natural vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Two other factors that affected our decision were the accessibility of this version for people for whom English is their second language and the availability of this version in audio format.

48 My notes indicate that the verse that took the least time to complete was verse 4, which took approximately eleven minutes; and the verse that took the longest time to complete was verse 10, which took approximately thirty-three minutes.
and key terms discussion. The oral drafting of this passage was lively and conversational, with input from all parties throughout the process.

The second session consisted of translating the remainder of the pericope (Luke 8:13-15) and generating back translations of the oral draft and the passage from the Uduk NT into English. This session followed the same pattern of reading, discussing, translating, and recording as described for the first session. The third session involved an evaluation of the oral draft of Luke 8:4-15 through a comparative analysis with the version of the same passage from the published Uduk NT. This evaluation took place in a focus group of Uduk speakers who were not involved in the drafting process. As I am unable to read Uduk, I played an audio version of Luke 8:4-15 from the Uduk NT for the focus group and asked them a series of questions about the passage. I then followed the same procedure using the oral draft version of the passage. As I conducted the sessions with both the translation team and the focus group, there were no print media involved aside from the source text I had read during the drafting sessions. The translation team and the focus group therefore only heard the word of God—at no point in the process did they see a Scripture product in either English or Uduk. This was done in order to test a translation methodology based on orality to the fullest extent possible.

49 See appendix E for the transcription of the oral draft. The audio recording of the oral draft in CD format is included with this project.
50 See appendix F for Luke 8:4-15 from the Uduk NT.
51 Sensing provides suggestions and procedures for focus groups as “group interviews” in Qualitative Research, 120-24.
53 See appendix G for the specific questions I asked the focus group.
Following these sessions, I met with Jeff Wilhoit, an experienced Bible translator, for an interview on October 8, 2014, regarding the exegetical quality of the draft through comparing the back translation of the draft with a back translation of the same passage from the Uduk NT. For the first part of this interview, I did not reveal to Wilhoit which back translation was which. This was done in order to receive the most objective feedback possible from Wilhoit regarding the quality of both back translations. At a certain point in the interview, I disclosed to Wilhoit which back translation was from the draft and which was from the published Uduk NT.

Having gathered the data from this process (the oral draft, the back translation of the draft, my exegetical analysis, the answers from the focus group, and the answers from the interview with Wilhoit), I then engaged a comparative analysis of the data from three perspectives: researcher, insider, and outsider. My exegetical analysis of the back translation serves as the researcher perspective. I engaged an exegetical analysis of the back translation. I did not finish the exegetical check by applying the comments to the text and refining an improved version of the text because that is outside the scope of the

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54 Mary Clark Moschella’s work provided me with helpful advice regarding the quantity and type of questions to ask in a qualitative research interview, the setting and duration of the interview, and how to document and interpret the data from the interview. See Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim, 2008), 66-68.

55 See appendix H for the specific questions I asked Wilhoit and the precise timing of the “blind” versus “revealed” back translations.

56 I recorded the data from the translation sessions onto my laptop using Audacity. I recorded the data from the focus group and the interview with Wilhoit on paper initially, then entered the data into an electronic document on my laptop.

57 The protocol that I used for analyzing the data is the rubric of the three analytical frames of themes, slippage, and silences. Sensing provides an overview of the nature and purpose of this particular approach to data analysis in *Qualitative Research*, 197-202.

58 Ibid., 74.

59 My analysis is adapted from the exegetical model for Bible translation provided by Wendland in *Orality and Scripture*, 302-22.

60 My specific language competencies for the sake of this project included a working reading knowledge of NT Greek, which allowed me to provide exegetical insight into the draft. I am unfamiliar with Uduk and therefore used English during the oral drafting process. The back translations provide the bridge between Uduk and English, helping me overcome this deficiency.
project as defined above (p. 12). For an insider perspective, I conducted a comprehension check with a focus group of Uduk speakers who had not been involved in the drafting process. I did not finish the comprehension check by applying the comments to the text and refining an improved version of the text because that is outside the scope of the project as defined above (p. 12). For an outsider perspective, I conducted an interview with Jeff Wilhoit, an experienced Bible translator, for an expert opinion of the draft. I intended this part of the project to emulate the consultant check step of the translation process. I did not apply the comments collected during this step to create a further refined version of the text because that is outside the scope of the project as defined above (p. 12). In this way, the project emulated the steps of translation creating a draft and then giving a sense of what further work would be necessary to complete the process without going through those steps completely to produce a finished Scripture translation.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to determine whether an oral translation approach among immigrants living in the United States is effective. I attempted to accomplish this purpose by leading a team of South Sudanese immigrants through the process of translating and evaluating an oral draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk. This process consisted of three sessions (two with the translation team, one with the focus group), my own evaluation of the draft, input from the focus group regarding the draft and the oral translation process, as well as consultation with a Bible translation expert regarding the quality of the draft. I hope that this project will help PBT determine whether such a translation approach is worth continuing in Uduk and implementing in future translation projects.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This project was designed to provide a substantive field test of an oral translation methodology among immigrant speakers of a language that does not yet have a translation of the entire Bible. I evaluated the data collected from the project through the analytical framework of themes, slippage, and silences.\(^1\) This rubric of analysis was applied to the three frames of triangulation. My exegetical analysis of the back translation represented my perspective as researcher. The comprehension check with the focus group represented the insider perspective. The comparative analysis of the two back translations by Jeff Wilhoit, an experienced Bible translator, represented the outsider perspective. This chapter provides an overview of the results of this analysis as well as my interpretation of these findings. The aim of this analysis is to test for consistency and cohesion among the themes, slippage, and silences that surfaced from the three angles of evaluation.\(^2\)

Description of Results

The method for reporting the data from the project I am using will highlight the themes, slippage, and silences as they emerged from each of the three angles of evaluation. I am therefore combining and synthesizing the data from these angles and

\(^1\) Sensing, 197-202.
discussing them collectively from a thematic standpoint. It is my hope that this scheme provides for a more cohesive, intuitive presentation of the data than looking at each angle separately.

**Themes**

The search for recurring patterns among the three angles of triangulation has the potential to highlight critical findings from the data. The approach to synthesizing themes that I chose to implement for this project is “a sorting, organizing, and indexing of the material that enables [one] to locate internally consistent patterns that often fit within existing knowledge.” After reviewing and arranging the data from each angle in this way, I determined that the following major commonalities emerged as the most instructive themes for the purpose of this project.

**Naturalness and Clarity of the Draft**

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from all three angles of evaluation is that of how natural and clear the oral draft is, which is accessible to me only through the back translation given my lack of proficiency in Uduk. My initial impression of the back translation of the oral draft was that it reads smoothly and demonstrates flexibility and freedom on the part of the translation team. For example, the use of direct speech in verse 9 (“And then, his disciples heard this and asked, ‘What does this parable mean?’”) shows that the team was willing to deviate from the original structure and the

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1 Sensing, 198.  
2 The Greek text here contains indirect speech, as do many English translations: “His disciples asked him what this parable meant” (NIV, NRSV, NLT); “Jesus’ followers/disciples asked him what this story meant” (NCV/CEV, GNT); “And his disciples asked him what this parable might be” (NAS). Note that some versions also render this phrase with direct speech: “And his disciples asked him, saying, ‘What might this parable be?’” (KJV, NKJV); “His disciples asked, ‘Why did you tell this story?’” (MSG).
source text in order to create a more natural sounding Uduk translation. This aspect of the back translation also emerged in how the group rendered the words of Jesus in verse 8: “Whoever has an ear to hear, listen to what I say.” Again, this translation demonstrates naturalness in its willingness to supply additional information (in this case, “to what I say”) in order to increase clarity and understanding.

Another example of the level of naturalness and clarity of the draft is the translation team’s decision regarding the Uduk word they chose to use for the key term “parable.” In our discussion of key terms, the translation team preferred ‘bi’th/e, which is a more natural Uduk word for a story with a special meaning (similar to fable or allegory) over paraban, which is a transliterated loan word. The term παραβολή occurs four times in the passage (vv. 4, 9, 10, and 11), and the draft contains the word ‘bi’th/e in each of these instances. Therefore, the translation team’s use of ‘bi’th/e at each occurrence of παραβολή displays a desire to produce a natural, clear translation.

The comprehension check with the focus group also revealed that the oral draft exhibits naturalness and clarity. This was evidenced in part by the fact that the group clearly grasped the meaning of the parable. One of the team members identified the seed as “the word of God being spread.” Another member of the focus group observed that the soils represent “different places—some good, some bad.” The parts of the story that were most meaningful to them were “hearing about the good seed growing and bearing fruit” and that the parable represents “reality and the problems of life.” The fact that the focus group ascertained the meaning of parable readily at face value as well as the underlying spiritual meaning of the parable stems from how natural and clear the draft is.

3 Note that this was one aspect of the training covered in the first session prior to translation; see appendix C for the complete training module.
A deeper level of naturalness and clarity of the draft emerged when I asked the focus group how the two stories were different and which one they would use in church. Their responses here indicated a strong preference for the oral draft version of the passage. When I asked them why they preferred the oral draft, one of the women said, “It connects to me.” Another of the women said, “I know it in my heart.” Still another woman said, “I love it. It’s us.” Therefore, all three women indicated a deep, emotional bond with the version of the parable from the oral draft. Perhaps it is this last statement (“It’s us”) that best captures the spirit of how they received the draft. The language they used in describing their preference is evocative and compelling, and such a response flows in part from how natural and clear the words of the oral draft fell upon their ears—and upon their hearts.

After reviewing both of the back translations, Wilhoit observed that back translation A generated from the oral draft; hereinafter “A”; see appendix I for the complete back translation; demonstrated more naturalness than back translation B. In general terms, he stated that A “doesn’t seem to be as tied to the original form as” B. He also cited the use of direct speech in verse 9 as an example of the translation team’s demonstration of the ability to incorporate more natural sounding Uduk. Wilhoit inquired about the use of the plural “thorns” in A as opposed to the singular “thorn” in B. I had asked the translation team about this issue during the translation session, and they informed me that, in this case, the singular form communicates a collective group. Thus, while “thorn” is acceptable, proper Uduk, Wilhoit observed that A, containing the plural form, shows an astute sensitivity to naturalness in the back translation.

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4 Generated from the oral draft; hereinafter “A”; see appendix I for the complete back translation.
5 Generated from the Uduk NT; hereinafter “B”; see appendix J for the complete back translation.
One caveat that Wilhoit offered is that both of these back translations are perhaps too natural. He said that “a good back translation for a consultant is very literal.” He explained that this is because it helps the consultant see what is happening in the receptor language more clearly. While he did credit the translation team for their willingness to be creative where required, he claimed that these back translations “would need to be more literal to be of better use to a consultant.” Wilhoit surmised that part of these dynamics may be inherent in the idiosyncrasies and style of this particular back translator and that the oral draft might in fact be more literal than we are able to discern without knowing Uduk. While a natural rendering in Uduk is important to achieving a good translation, a literal back translation is necessary for the consultant to be able to perceive what devices the translation uses to communicate the meaning of the passage.

In summary, all three angles of evaluation reveal that the oral draft and back translation of the passage display a clear, natural translation marked by an approach that allows deviation from the source text where deemed appropriate. This is one of the major strengths of the draft and is indicative of a diligent, intelligent translation team. The first major theme to emerge from my analysis of the data for this project, then, is the naturalness and clarity of the oral draft and the back translation of that draft.

**Faithfulness of the Draft to the Original Language**

Another major theme that emerged from my analysis of the back translation is the faithfulness of the draft to the original language. An example of this strong literal sense of the draft is the use of the term “scatterer” in verse 5, which displays a highly

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6 Hereinafter, unless otherwise specified, the phrase “the back translation” refers to the back translation of the oral draft (i.e., back translation A).

7 For the sake of clarity, I am using the term “original language” to refer to Greek and “source language” to refer to English.
literal translation of ὁ σπείρων. I found it especially interesting in my analysis of the back translation that the use of “scatterer” displays an even more literal translation than the source text, which renders this as “farmer.” As this is the case, it seems that the most logical explanation is that the translation team took cues here from our key terms discussion, in which I described to them the nature of ὁ σπείρων and the subsequent repetition of two other forms of this word later in the verse (σπεῖραι and σπόρον). Such decision making on their part reflects a desire to remain as faithful to the original as possible while still communicating the meaning clearly.

Another example of the translation team’s displaying faithfulness to the original language is found in the way they chose to translate κατέχουσιν (which is unique to the Lukan version of this parable) in verse 15 as “cling.” Although this word was not one of the key terms I selected for this passage, we had some significant discussion about this word during the translation session. The translation team was initially unclear about the meaning of the word “cling” that is used in the source text. I explained to them that κατέχω can take meanings such as “hold firm, hold fast, keep, retain.” In order to help them think of an everyday example of the sense of κατέχω, I invited them to imagine that they were drowning and someone threw a rope to them. I asked them what kind of word they would use to describe the type of grip they would have on the rope. They nodded their heads and even laughed a little at this, showing their understanding of this sense of the word. After this conversation, they chose to keep the literal sense of the word indicated by the source text.

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5 Note that the back translation of the passage from the Uduk NT also contains the word “farmer.”
9 Note that other major translations also render κατέχω as “cling” (ASV, TLB, NET).
10 Balz and Schneider, 2.272.
11 Note that the back translation of the passage from the Uduk NT renders κατέχω as “keep.”
Still another example of the faithfulness of the draft to the original language is the translation of the phrase “they have not grown mature” in verse 14. The source text renders the phrase οὐ τελεσφοροῦσιν as “they never grow into maturity,” which is certainly a valid translation. However, since τελεσφοροῦσιν is a verb, a translation that captures the verbal force of τελεσφοροῦσιν is preferable to one that renders it as a noun (i.e., a state of being mature or reaching maturity). Therefore, I was impressed that the translation team elected to employ an Uduk phrase that they told me is used to describe a child developing into a young adult, which indicates a sense of “to mature.” This particular gloss reflects the verbal aspect of τελεσφοροῦσιν nicely and lands a step closer to the original language than either the source text or the back translation from the Uduk NT.

While the interview questions I asked Wilhoit surfaced suggestions, revisions, and improvements to both the draft and the translation process itself, he communicated an overall positive appraisal of the quality of the draft: “I would say that [the draft] is above average for the quality and faithfulness that I would expect for a rough draft that has not gone through an exegetical check and revision, especially for the first attempt by novice translators.” In the closing portion of the interview, Wilhoit stated that most of his suggestions were “admittedly minor issues” and that many were “battles he might not choose to fight.” After the interview proper had concluded and I was packing up my

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12 Note that several other major translations also use “maturity” here (NAS, NKJV, WEB, LEB).
13 “Jai git mo.”
14 Respectively, “so they never grew into maturity” and “not letting them produce the crops.”
15 In a follow-up conversation with Wilhoit in which I asked him to proofread this chapter of the thesis to ensure that he thought I had represented his views fairly, he added, “I would want to see some of the more important changes applied during the revision process before I would say that it is ‘faithful to the original language.’” Sensing refers to this type of follow-up on the way in which results and evaluations are reported as “reflective confirmation” and “member checking.” Sensing, 221.
notes and belongings, he said to me, “This is better than I expected.” I took this statement as an affirmation of the general validity of the draft and its overall reflection of the original meaning and intent of the passage.

Omissions and Other Inaccuracies

A third theme that emerged from Wilhoit’s and my analysis is that of omissions from the back translation and other inaccuracies. Mistakes are an expected part of the translation process due to human error, which can be caused by inattentiveness, fatigue, distractions, and other factors. However, such mistakes can be instructive and constructive in surfacing necessary revisions to both the draft and the translation process. I will begin with those omissions that are relatively minor in nature and appear to be oversights. The first mistake I noticed in my analysis of the back translation is in verse 4, in which there is no mention of the towns, cities, or region. Another omission is in verse 5, where the phrase “the seed was stepped on” simply did not make it into the back translation. Verse 14 contains only the word “riches” and does not reflect any notion of the words “cares” and “pleasures” that are part of the source text. While these particular omissions are admittedly minor, they need clarification and revision so that the translation captures the complete content and message of the parable.

Other omissions are more substantial and warrant closer attention. The first such omission that caught my attention is the absence of the phrase “the kingdom of God” from verse 10. This omission is surprising and troubling because it was one of the key terms that we covered prior to translating the passage. Further, this is a significant

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16 I attribute these particular omissions to my lack of knowledge of Uduk. While proficiency in the receptor language is not necessary to engage an oral drafting process, an awareness of the language can certainly minimize such errors, leaving less work to do in the revision stages of the translation process.
theological concept and its function in this parable is particularly striking. Nolland’s perspective on the role of the phrase τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ in this passage is that “all hear the teaching and experience the ministry of Jesus, but only some become insiders into the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” Jesus is making a key statement about the privileged position of the disciples as opposed to τοῖς λοιποῖς, from whom the mysteries of the kingdom of God are hidden. While the back translation does capture the spirit of the difference between the two groups to a degree, it fails to reflect the theological rationale and import for this distinction. This omission, then, is a critical one and would require attention during the exegetical check in a full-scale translation project.

The second significant omission that I detected in my evaluation of the back translation is the lack of the term “salvation” from verse 12. Again, as with “kingdom of God,” this is puzzling because this was a key term that we covered prior to translating. In what can only be approached with a sense of irony, the phrase “kingdom of God” appears here instead of “salvation.” This inaccurate substitution compounds and results in the further omission of any sense of the word πιστεύσαντες in the back translation. We find the phrase “the evil one keeps them from understanding the kingdom of God” instead of something along the lines of what we would expect given the source text’s phrase “prevent them from believing and being saved.” Therefore, not one but two key theological concepts are absent from this passage. Perhaps this situation is the result of a miscommunication in the back translation process, but this omission and inaccurate substitution would certainly warrant careful inspection during the exegetical check.

17 Nolland, 379.
18 “For some people, this parable was hidden.”
A third substantial omission from the back translation is that any notion of the phrase οιτινες ἐν καρδιᾳ καλὴ καὶ ἅγαθη from verse 15 is completely absent.\(^{19}\) While none of these particular words were covered in our key terms discussion, the fact that they have fallen out of the back translation is disappointing. In his final sentence explaining the meaning of the parable, Jesus makes an emphatic\(^{20}\) pronouncement regarding the state of the hearts of those who represent the good soil. Since the parable as a whole can be seen as an allegory in which the four soils represent four different conditions of receptivity of the human heart towards the gospel, it is unfortunate that the back translation fails to incorporate this critical component of Jesus’s explanation of the parable.

Another key omission that Wilhoit caught is the lack of the word “secret” from verse 10, which was part of our key terms discussion. While the back translation does include some sense of the secretive nature of the meaning of the parable,\(^ {21}\) there is no explicit statement that one would expect with the word “secrets” being used by the source text. Regarding this omission, Wilhoit said, “It’s hard to know whether there are weaknesses in the translation [itself] or in the process of back translation. In an actual consultant check, I would consult the Uduk text and see if the word ‘secret’ is in verse 10.” Similar to the transposition of “kingdom of God” above, it is ironic that the back

\(^{19}\) It is noteworthy that the back translation of the passage from the Uduk NT lacks any sense of this phrase as well.

\(^{20}\) Note the construction καλὴ καὶ ἅγαθη. On the significance of this phrase, Richard Blight offers the following insight: “Luke used the two adjectives here because he had used both in describing the soil. Both adjectives have been used to describe the soil as being good, ἅγαθος in 8:8 and καλὸς in the first part of this verse, and now both adjectives are combined to describe the heart. The first adjective means excellent for its purpose and the second means good in the sense of being beneficial. This is a pair of nearly synonymous adjectives and mean truly good, really good, and very good.” Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of Luke 1-11* (Dallas: SIL International, 2007), 345.

\(^{21}\) “This parable was hidden.”
translation contains the word “secret” in verse 11, where the term is absent in both the source text and the Greek text. This would certainly be something to inquire about and revise during the exegetical check.

Wilhoit also noticed the absence of any sense of διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ἑκμάδα from verse 6 in either back translation. He was perplexed that neither translation carried the sense of “lack of moisture” found in the source text and that both supplied a different reason for the seeds not flourishing here. 22 Whether this gloss is indicative of a translation error or a mistake in the back translation process, Wilhoit said this would certainly be an issue to explore further in the exegetical check.

The omissions from the back translation discussed so far represent only part of the problem—many of the words and phrases omitted appear in later verses, transposed in the wrong context. For example, the above examples of the term “secret” appearing in verse 11 instead of verse 10 and the phrase “kingdom of God” appearing in verse 12 instead of verse 10 warrant a closer examination of the interchange among the oral draft, the source text, and the back translation. Several key questions would need to be addressed in a revision session: Where do these terms occur in the oral draft? If they are in the correct position in the draft, then why have they been transposed elsewhere? If they are not in the correct position in the draft, then do we need to draft these verses again? Exploring such questions would illuminate some of the underlying issues to why these theologically salient terms appear in the wrong places as well as provide corrective measures for placing these terms in the appropriate locations.

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22 The back translations read “because it does not have roots” (A) and “because the soil was shallow” (B).
Highlighting a similar example, Wilhoit commented on the use of “path” in verse 5 and “long path” in verse 12, when both the source text and the Greek text use the same words in these instances.\(^{23}\) He explicated this issue by saying that “this makes me suspicious of A because these terms are reversed in B.”\(^{24}\) It would again be warranted to explore the exact Uduk term(s) used in these two verses to see precisely what is taking place.

The most significant error that Wilhoit mentioned in the interview is that verse 11 reads “the parable, it is the word of God” when both the source language and the original language both contain the word “seed” where the back translation has the word “parable.” This mistake represents a potentially deficient understanding of one of the central features of the allegorical symbolism of the parable: that the seed represents the proclamation of the word of God. As Wilhoit said, “This is one issue I can’t ignore . . . and [this] would be a battle I would choose to fight.” I concur that this is a crucially important issue to explore.\(^{25}\)

Wilhoit noticed two minor errors in the areas of logic and timing. The first of these errors is found in the two occurrences of the word “because” in verse 14. Regarding this mistake, he observed, “The second of these isn’t needed. This is more of a result of the seeds being choked out.” The redundancy here could potentially cloud the meaning of the passage from a cause-effect standpoint: for example, the passage could then be misread to say that these seeds were being choked out because they had not grown mature. Such a reading fails to capture the true meaning of the passage: that these seeds

\(^{23}\) Respectively, “footpath” and ὀδὸς.
\(^{24}\) Note that B has “long path” in v. 5 and “path” in v. 12.
\(^{25}\) I explore this particular issue further as one aspect of “slippage” in the project data, pp. 80-81.
did not grow mature because chasing after the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life choked out the gospel. In my exegetical analysis of this passage, it seems clear that Jesus is portraying a group of people who heard the gospel and initially received it with joy, but whose passion soon cooled in the pursuit of distractions. As Nolland’s interpretation of this verse states, “Luke pictures an arrested development, a goal not reached.” Therefore, the final phrase of this verse would need to be restated to reflect the true intent of Jesus’s words more faithfully.

An error in timing in the narrative that Wilhoit surfaced is the description of the seed that “fell into good soil and produced multiple crops as it was scattered” in verse 8. Aside from the awkward syntactical construction, this statement taken at face value represents an agricultural impossibility—seeds that bear fruit during the scattering process. While common sense tells us what is truly taking place here (that the seeds bore fruit after being scattered and taking root in the good soil), this phrase as it stands needs to be revised to remove this potentially clumsy reading.

In this same verse, Wilhoit also commented on what he deemed a lack of clarity pertaining to the phrase “produced multiple crops” as opposed to “putting a number on it” as the source text does. He views this construction as somewhat ambiguous and said, “While saying ‘one hundred’ is not important, when I read it, I wondered if it meant several crops in succession as opposed to its initial, single large harvest.” While he admitted this is clear to those of us who are familiar with the parable, he contends that it might be unclear to a first-time hearer of the story.

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26 Nolland, 386.
27 “Produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted.”
An example of confusion of terms surfaced from the interview with the focus group. During their initial retelling of the oral draft, one of the group members described one of the four places where the seeds fell as a “mountain.” I made a note of this as a potential deviation from the source text, but I held that it might have just been a slip of the tongue. In their answer to the third question (“What do the four different kinds of soil represent?”), this same group member again mentioned a “mountain” as one of the “bad places where the seed fell.” This second utterance of the term “mountain” made me virtually certain that confusion of terms was occurring at some level—either between the oral draft and the focus group, or between the source text and the oral draft (or perhaps both). An inquiry as to the term used in the oral draft would be needed to assure clear comprehension of the precise terms being used.

While the omissions and other errors I have outlined here are not exhaustive from Wilhoit’s and my analysis of the back translation, they serve as representative examples of the kind of mistakes that we discovered. These are, of course, the most significant and important of the issues that surfaced from our findings. It is my intent that these examples yield a clear understanding of the type of mistakes that were most common in both the drafting and back translation processes.

Summary

The back translation stands as the closest rendering of the oral draft in Uduk for English speakers. A careful analysis of both the oral draft (from the focus group) and the back translation (from Wilhoit and me) revealed three key thematic elements. First, the draft and the back translation possess a high degree of naturalness and clarity. This aspect of the data surfaced from all three angles of evaluation. Second, both the oral draft and
the back translation display faithfulness to the original language and the source text.

Wilhoit and I both noted several examples where this is the case. Third, the back translation contains several omissions and inaccuracies that are to be expected and are in fact instructive. These mistakes serve as a “to-do list” for subsequent stages of refining the draft. These three themes provide a comprehensive overview of the quality and nature of the draft, as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

**Slippage**

Any honest evaluation of data will seek incongruences, inconsistencies, and contradictions among the data. Sensing terms such tensions in one’s findings “slippage” and defines this term in part as “disconfirmation of findings” and “a search for rival explanations.” Unearthing and highlighting these types of polarizing findings in one’s data is crucial for illuminating potential problem areas and bringing to light any possible lack of objectivity from among the three angles of triangulation. As in the section above, I will present these findings thematically as opposed to treating each angle of evaluation separately.

**Potential Weaknesses of the Oral Drafting Process**

Oral drafting is not a flawless process. With all the strengths and advantages it offers, it certainly has weaknesses and shortcomings. The omissions and errors enumerated above represent a form of slippage in that such inaccuracies are normal and to be expected during the process of generating an oral draft. This type of slippage demonstrates the complexity of oral drafting and does not undermine the process or its viability.

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28 Sensing, 200.
29 Ibid.
One example of the type of slippage that can occur comes from the error described above of “parable” appearing instead of “seed” in verse 11. Due to the importance of this issue, I felt compelled to do further research on this particular issue after the interview. I thought perhaps I had made a mistake in the process of typing the back translation, resulting in a slippage of my own making. I went back and listened to this verse from the oral draft and, indeed, the word for parable does occur twice and the word for seed does not occur. However, I did not want to rest such an important matter on my own assessment. Therefore, I set up a time to call one of the members of the translation team to discuss this specific verse with him. This individual is the natural leader of the group, has the strongest English among the group, took a lead role in the project, and served as the voice for the recording. Without tipping my hand as to exactly what I was after, I played verse 11 from the oral draft for him over the phone and asked him to back translate the Uduk into English for me. His back translation over the phone confirmed that the word “parable” occurs twice in the recording. I then asked him if the word “seed” occurs in the verse, and he confirmed that it does not. Therefore, this substitution of “parable” for “seed,” even if unwitting or subconscious, stands as the most significant error in the back translation and would demand top priority attention in the exegetical check. This error is illustrative of the kind of slippage that can take place in the oral drafting process itself.

Another potential weakness in the oral drafting process is the method of making revisions. In a traditional written translation project, corrections can be made by simply

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30 ‘bi’t/h/e.
31 ‘Ka’bany.
32 This is another example of “reflective confirmation” and “member checking.” See Sensing, 221.
replacing the appropriate word(s) in the draft document. The process of revising an oral
draft generally entails re-recording each sentence or phrase in its entirety. This
methodology can be cumbersome depending on the audio editing software being used
and the technical acumen of those involved in the project. Making corrections to an oral
draft is admittedly a more complex, time-consuming process than in a written translation
project.

Theological Incongruences

The type of slippage discussed so far has dealt with grammatical and logistical
aspects of the data from the project. I found a deeper level of slippage as I compared my
notes from the translation sessions with those from the focus group. This type of slippage
is theological in nature—cases in which a core meaning from a particular part of the
passage was clouded, distorted, or missed entirely. These issues demand a thorough
exploration and evaluation in order to attempt to clarify and rectify the problems.

One of the most notable of these examples came from a focus group member who
claimed that one of the most meaningful parts of the oral draft to her was “the part where
the birds come and take your soul away and leave you empty.” I was quite surprised to
hear these words, as this line of interpretation does not square well with my own
exegetical analysis as well as several leading commentaries on the passage.33 While the
birds eating the seeds is certainly a striking image, neither Jesus nor Luke attribute any
such “soul-stealing” power or ability to the birds. The terminology here (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ
ὄρανοῦ) is simply used “to designate wild birds in contrast with domesticated birds such

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33 In addition to Nolland, Green, Marshall, and Blight mentioned previously, see also Robert G.
as chickens.”34 Jesus does not mention the birds in his explanation of the seed that fell on the path in verse 12. If the birds have any function in the parable, it is to prefigure and foreshadow the role of the devil as the one who “takes away” the message of the gospel from those on the path in verse 12. Therefore, it seems that unduly assigning spiritual power to the birds is an extrapolation that extends beyond the intended meaning of the parable.

However, I do not want to be categorically dismissive of this focus group member’s statement. While I would neither teach nor endorse this angle of interpretation, I would be interested in asking questions to explore the underlying reasons for her perspective. For example, I would ask her if there are birds (or other creatures or people) with this ability in her own worldview. While this is an issue that I would raise in an exegetical checking session, I would maintain my focus on evaluating the translation, being careful not to disallow or invalidate her experience and interpretation of the passage.

Another area of possible theological concern was found in how the focus group interpreted those in the parable who did not bear fruit. They claimed that those who failed to bear fruit “can’t grow because they don’t have God.” While this is true at one level, I did not get the sense that the members of the focus group saw this “lack of God” as a result of the choice of people who reject the gospel. The tone and sense of their words left me thinking that they believed that it was God who had abandoned or rejected them. For the exegetical checking session, I would query the group in order to attempt to

34 Blight, 332.
understand if this idea came from a particular word or phrase in the text that needs clarification.

Summary

A comparative analysis of the three angles of data evaluation brings to the surface themes and patterns as well as inconsistencies and translation errors. The few examples of slippage that I have noted here are beneficial and important to highlight because they provide some of the first steps that would need to be addressed in an initial revision of the draft. Such instances of slippage become the starting point for taking measures to improve and refine the data established by the initial translation.

Silences

While exploring and analyzing the data that have been generated by the translation project, I must investigate what issues did not come through in the data—the areas of silence from the data. As Sensing states, “The question that silence asks is ‘What is left unsaid that needs to be examined?’”35 The quest for what is missing or absent from the data can admittedly be a difficult undertaking and requires objectivity on the part of the researcher, but this search is vital to authenticate the data on a comprehensive scale. Peeling back the layers of silence will also illuminate areas needing further research and exploration in order to provide a holistic assessment of the data.

Potential Disadvantages of Translation among Immigrant Communities

One of the foremost unspoken issues in this project is the potential negative impact of the socio-linguistic separation of the immigrant community from the Uduk community in Africa. The time of entry into the United States for the members of the

35 Sensing, 200.
translation team and focus group ranges from ten to fifteen years ago. In that time, what degree of cultural and linguistic change has occurred? How effectively would the oral draft produced by this project communicate to Uduk speakers in South Sudan today? Such a check is outside the scope of this project and therefore remains a major area of silence regarding the quality of the oral draft.

**Possible Role of Marital Relationships and Shame**

Due to the limited number of Uduk speakers in Dallas, the pool of available volunteers for this project was quite small (eight first-language Uduk speakers, represented by four couples). An inevitable consequence of these dynamics was that some of the volunteers for the project were married to other team members. More specifically, two of the members of the focus group are wives of two of the members of the translation team. As I was conducting the focus group interview, I was mindful of the fact that the work we were evaluating was performed by the husbands of two of these women.

Therefore, an honest assessment of the data requires me to explore the area of silence here by asking some key questions: Was the focus group feedback entirely objective? Were these women less prone to offer constructive criticism and negative feedback on the draft that their husbands had worked so diligently to produce? What role does shame play in their culture? Was I getting honest, sincere feedback from them? Were their responses a “cover story” they were presenting at some level? I still wonder about these questions even as I write this assessment of the project. These are extremely

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36 Sensing defines this as a story “we believe will be acceptable to society.” He goes on to say, “We often silence the stories we believe will be unacceptable even when they are deemed more ‘real’ or authentic to our experiences.” Sensing, 201.
subjective questions that can likely never be answered fully, but they must be held in tension with the data from the focus group.

**English Proficiency of the Focus Group**

Another area of silence worth exploring is that the members of the focus group were noticeably less proficient in English than the translation team. This is not a judgmental or condescending statement regarding the focus group members, but is an objective observation regarding the project and its data. One of the focus group members rarely spoke in English (there was, of course, much discussion among the team members in Uduk); and, when she did, it was only after I asked her by name to respond (in order to get feedback from all team members). Even the focus group member with the strongest English seemed to have difficulty communicating her thoughts to me, as evidenced by numerous pauses and restating what she was saying multiple times.

I am deeply grateful to the team members for giving of their time and engaging in a conversation with me in what is likely their third or fourth language. They have given the Uduk community and me a great gift through their willingness to participate in this project. I want to make sure that my comments here are taken in the spirit in which I intend them. Overall, the focus group was able to communicate their understanding of the parable and offer helpful insights into the quality of the draft. That being said, this is still an area of silence that I feel must be raised in a complete, thorough analysis of the project data.

**Researcher Objectivity**

Now that I have scrutinized the objectivity of the focus group, I turn this same lens of evaluation on myself regarding my own objectivity as the researcher. As someone
who invested in planning, coordinating, leading, and analyzing this project, I was obviously deeply enmeshed in the process; and as someone who longs to see Scripture in the heart language of the Uduk people, I am hopeful and prayerful regarding the success and outcomes of the project. This project stands as the most extensive undertaking of my professional and academic career, and I obviously want to generate positive results that lead to further work among the Uduk people as well as a favorable response from those who review the project’s findings.

Therefore, I must face the issues and questions related to my own objectivity honestly. As someone who was so involved in the project, am I seeing and hearing what I want to hear? As someone who wanted the project to succeed, am I evaluating the data in a fair, unbiased way? Am I presenting the findings of the project with honesty and integrity? While my role as the project researcher entails an unavoidable degree of subjectivity, the two other angles of evaluation serve to affirm my research as generally objective. More specifically, the responses from the focus group and the interview with Wilhoit confirm and support the findings that I reached regarding the quality of the oral draft and the translation process used to generate it. While complete objectivity is an impossibility for any researcher, I have attempted to be as neutral as possible throughout the process in order to present a project that is valid, credible, and reliable. As I read the data, the evaluations confirm an adequate measure of success in my attempts to be objective.

Communication Gaps in the Translation Process

Another area of silence that Wilhoit brought to my attention is that of communication gaps in the translation process that could possibly occur between the
source language and the receptor language as well as in the back translation process.\textsuperscript{37} Wilhoit observed, “This is a silence that is compounded because no one is going to speak up about them unless we prompt them, and we can’t always hear those missing voices, especially since the processes used for this exercise were limited.” Due to the dynamics at work in the translation process, such communication gaps could therefore go virtually unnoticed by either the translation team or me.\textsuperscript{38} Paying special attention to and discussing such communication gaps with the translation team would be a critical aspect of any subsequent refinement to the draft.

\textbf{Summary}

The silences and gaps present in any body of data are critical areas of evaluation. The particular areas of silence that I have described here represent the kind of unanswered questions that lie behind the data from the project. While these issues and the questions that they raise are not readily answered, I must keep them in mind while assessing the project and its findings. I admit fully that there may indeed be other areas of silence that I have not yet seen from my vantage point as researcher that may become clear to me upon further reflection.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In my assessment of the findings and results of the project data, several key themes emerged: the overall naturalness and clarity of the oral draft, the general

\textsuperscript{37} “Mismatches occur when: 1) audiences do not recognize a concept or context they share with the first audience, and therefore do not use it to understand the intended meaning, 2) audiences access an unintended context and do realize they have misunderstood, or 3) audiences do not share any context with the author and cannot understand anything from the communication. These will lead to miscommunication” (Hill, \textit{Bible Translation Basics}, 154).

\textsuperscript{38} “Though most national translators have an excellent grasp of their own language, their knowledge is often not systematic. They know what sounds right, but they often do not know why this is so . . . Hence, they may not understand all the implications of some renderings” (Nida and Reyburn, 60).
faithfulness of the draft to the original language, and errors of varying degrees of severity from the draft. The most prominent instances of slippage in the project data are the potential weaknesses of the oral drafting process and theological incongruences. The primary areas of silence from the project data include the possible role of marital relationships and shame, the English proficiency of the focus group, researcher objectivity, and basic communication gaps in the translation process. This analysis of the themes, slippage, and silences provides both an overview of the project data and a foundation from which to draw conclusions and implications regarding the findings and results of the project.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This project aimed at field testing an oral translation methodology among immigrants who speak a language that lacks a translation of the complete canon of Scripture. I wanted to generate and evaluate an oral draft of a test passage that has already been translated into Uduk in order to engage in a process of comparative analysis between the draft and the published text. The project consisted of two sessions with the translation team, one session with the focus group, and an interview with an experienced Bible translator. The back translations of the draft and the published text were evaluated for naturalness, clarity, faithfulness to the original language, and exegetical accuracy.

This final chapter will focus on my conclusions regarding the project, including the reliability of the project data, the trustworthiness of the information developed, and my reflections on the personal, theological, and ecclesial significance of the project.

**Interpretations**

I conclude, based on my interpretation of the data, that the oral draft produced by this project succeeded in creating a natural, clear, and accurate draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk that could be refined and revised to the level of quality necessary for publishable Scripture. I conclude further that both this process and this translation team can be utilized in a full-scale translation project for portions of the OT that have not yet been translated into Uduk. While the process I enacted was admittedly a condensed simulation of what would transpire in an actual translation project, the three angles of evaluation
converge to offer a positive appraisal of the work of the translation team. In what follows, I hope to “invite [the] readers into the interpretive act”\(^1\) by providing a transparent discussion of my own thought processes in analyzing the data and my rationale for reaching these conclusions.

As I began to sift through the data from the angles of triangulation for the project, I was initially pleased with the results. My own exegetical analysis revealed that the back translation reflects a robust grasp of the primary intent of the passage. One of the primary aspects leading to this conclusion was the faithfulness with which the back translation generally rendered the key terms.\(^2\) In addition to checking for the proper sense and connotation of these words in their English usage, I cross-checked the key terms with the Greek word studies I had conducted as part of the exegetical analysis of the passage.

As I interacted with the focus group, I was looking for input that was consistent with reading the parable from this perspective. I was pleased to find that such a reading of the parable came through naturally in both the back translation\(^3\) and the focus group. The focus group members agreed unanimously that this parable is about “the word of God being spread” and “the good seed growing and bearing fruit.” These responses show a clear grasp of the primary meaning of the parable. An especially memorable statement from one of the focus group members was “If you believe in God, you will grow the good stuff.” Therefore, I deduced from these findings that the data from the focus group bear out a proper hearing of the parable, a fact which, in part, led to my conclusion that the oral draft is a natural, clear, and accurate translation of the parable.

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\(^1\) Sensing, 213.
\(^2\) With the two primary exceptions discussed on pp. 74-75.
\(^3\) I am especially thinking here of verse 15, which reads, “Some seed fell on the good soil. It is about who heard the word, obeys, then clings and multiplies crops in harvest.”
My interview with Wilhoit refined and clarified my perspective on the back translation of the oral draft. As seen in Wilhoit’s initial impression of the back translation discussed above, he viewed it as a natural, clear rendering of the passage. He formed this opinion after reading through the back translation carefully and checking it against a highly literal English translation⁴ as well as the Greek text for certain key terms. He was especially struck by the freedom and flexibility that the translation team demonstrated on several occasions, most specifically the ones discussed above. Wilhoit admitted that most of his questions were minor issues related to syntax, word order, and grammar (with one exception: the substitution of “parable” for “seed” in verse 11). Based on these observations from the three angles of evaluation, I conclude that the oral draft is clear, natural, and accurate enough to represent a practical and useful approach in Bible translation.

Trustworthiness

It is crucial to address the validity and reliability of the data and interpretations that I have presented. I collected reliable data in this project that provided valid information that led me to viable conclusions. In this section I seek to show my work to be applicable, dependable, credible, and reflexive.

Applicability

One measure of the worth of a qualitative research project is whether it can “outlive itself” by finding other uses both within and beyond its original context. An oral methodology implemented among immigrants can serve other needs at PBT. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the use of an oral translation approach by overseas

⁴ Wilhoit selected the RSV for this purpose.
missionaries in areas where literacy is low. Another application of this project within PBT is the potential use of audio Scripture products by overseas missionaries as a primary means of reaching non-literate with the gospel. An oral translation methodology and audio Scripture products could be used in traditional written translation projects as supplementary helps at various stages in the process (e.g., comprehension check, peer review, and consultant check) to enhance the overall quality of the translation and expedite the progress of the project. Still another way this project can be applied is to locate and work with other immigrants in the United States who speak languages lacking the complete canon of Scripture. These are just a few examples of ways in which the method implemented and refined in this project could find other uses within PBT. Creative and innovative thinking on the part of our overseas missionaries and other staff would likely surface additional possible uses.

Another key way to gauge the value of qualitative research is the degree to which it possesses applicability to other contexts. Michael Patton’s principle of proximal similarity⁵ holds that the most immediate and generalized applications of qualitative research are to those settings and contexts most similar to the one in which the original research was conducted. Given that this project was bound by certain deliberate delimitations, a direct one-to-one correspondence between contexts is likely not possible, but it is my hope that a “degree of resonance [that] can evoke a sense of identification and fittingness”⁶ can be found in this research for use in other related contexts. While certain modifications would need to be made to adapt the methodology to the respective context, the oral translation methodology employed in this project could be embraced by

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⁵ Patton, 581.
⁶ Sensing, 216.
other Bible translation agencies, audio Scripture production companies, world literacy agencies, linguistics students, and others interested in the field of Bible translation. These are just a few ways in which this project could find other pragmatic uses.

The results of this project also suggest academic uses in related areas of the social sciences. For example, the notion of orality informs psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies by deepening the ways in which we understand how non-literates learn, process, and remember information. Further application of the methods of this project could serve as a catalyst into the deeper waters of orality that can guide those whose research and work is among non-literates. Ongoing use of the method could provide further opportunities to study orality and what it means for humans to be given a voice, thereby illuminating more fully how social cohesion and relationships are formed in non-literate societies. The project’s brief discussion of performance criticism could serve as a launching pad for further research in music, arts, drama, and speech. Therefore, I see a variety of ways in which seeds from this project could be cross-pollinated in other fields of study. I hope that others who consult this project will envision further uses beyond those I have described here. However, the principal and most obvious applicability of the project is to the task of bringing Scripture in audio form to underserved languages and people groups.

*Dependability*

In addition to finding general applicability to other contexts, qualitative research must demonstrate that it is dependable. However, as with any research project involving human subjects, “reliability is problematic . . . simply because human behavior is never
static.” Therefore, external auditors of qualitative data must seek to determine not if their findings would be precisely the same as those that I have posited, but if the findings I have presented are consistent with the given data.

The qualitative data and subsequent findings in this project are presented in a way that fosters a sense of responsible, reliable research. Sharan Merriam offers the following insight regarding the interpretation of qualitative data: “Dependability and confirmability are provided through an audit trail that clearly describes the processes of collecting and analyzing data and provides the means by which readers may refer to the raw data.”

Whether an outside examiner of this project agrees with my interpretations and conclusions, it is my hope that I have explained and presented the data and my findings in ways that are clear, concise, and accessible.

Credibility

Another key component in presenting reliable, dependable qualitative research is establishing the credibility of the methodology, data, and findings. Sensing’s question pertaining to the credibility of one’s research is crucial: “Can you demonstrate confidence that the conclusions are reasonable and that another researcher facing the same data would reach a conclusion that is generally equivalent or at least consistent?” While Sensing’s words here might initially sound daunting, if the researcher is honest and the data are objective, this question should affirm and validate the project’s findings.

The oral translation methodology used in this project is a valid, credible way of implementing a Bible translation process. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, an oral

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7 Sensing, 219.
8 Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), 205.
9 Sensing, 219.
translation methodology should reflect and give credence to the human voice as the primary instrument of communication. This emphasis on orality should hold literacy as a non-essential ingredient in the recipe of translation. While the translation team does possess varying degrees of literacy, this project provided an authentic simulation of an oral translation approach by presenting them only with audio Scripture products.

One of the major avenues of establishing the credibility of this project is the triangulation of the three angles of evaluation. While this interpretive schematic is admittedly “still limited and bounded by context,” it does provide a more balanced, nuanced approach to qualitative data analysis by “allow[ing] the researcher to substantiate the picture that is being seen and interpreted.” Therefore, although triangulation is not a perfect interpretive rubric, it is an effective means of corroborating data from different perspectives.

The interpretation of the data from all three angles as presented in the previous chapter is an attempt to offer a “thick description,” a more robust, holistic presentation of the data. What I have presented here is not merely my own interpretation of the data as researcher but includes insider input from the focus group as well as outsider input from Wilhoit. As an additional measure of credibility, I solicited feedback from Wilhoit regarding my presentation of his interview responses. Therefore, I have utilized the method of triangulation of the data to refine and guide my own interpretation of the

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10 Sensing, 220.
11 Ibid.
12 An important caveat to bear in mind regarding the analysis of qualitative data is that “the ‘whole picture’ is impossible to ascertain” (ibid.).
13 Ibid., 195-96.
14 Sensing refers to soliciting this type of feedback from those involved in the project as “reflective confirmation” and “member checking.” Ibid., 221.
findings and results of the project. This has been done in part to establish credibility for the conclusions and implications that I have presented.

Reflexivity

I am also mindful of my own role as the researcher for the project and to what degree I influenced the data, findings, and results. Several key questions emerge as vital here. How did my presence, personality, and leadership affect the project? Was I able to be completely objective in what I saw and heard during the project sessions and interview? How did my feelings and emotions throughout the process impact the project and my interpretations? Patton’s axiomatic observation that “the researcher is the instrument”\(^\text{15}\) issues a clarion call for honesty as I engage this vital process of self-reflection on the project.

This project emerged out of a desire to see the word of God break new ground by producing a natural, clear, and accurate draft of a portion of Scripture in a language lacking the complete Bible. I wanted the project to be successful even from its embryonic stage. I see this optimism as a strength that fueled me as I worked through the project and the writing of this thesis. It is difficult to assess whether this positive attitude had an undue influence upon the data. The triangulation of data and my own attempt to remain objective while maintaining this optimism resulted in a generally reliable presentation and interpretation of the data, but those who read and consult this project must form their own opinion in this matter.

While a researcher can never remove himself or herself from the equation completely, it is imperative that “the research has been carried out rigorously, that the

\(^{15}\) Patton, 14.
procedures and processes of inquiry have minimized the possibility that the investigation was superficial, biased or insubstantial.” I have attempted to embody an objective, comprehensive approach to this project by presenting primary data in the appendices as well as allowing the reader into my own thought processes and rationale as to how I interpreted these data. It is my hope that such honesty and transparency create an ethos of trust with those who read or consult this project.

**Significance and Implications**

After the data have been analyzed, interpretations have been reached, and conclusions have been posed, a substantive, meaningful project is, in one sense, just beginning. My goal for this project is that it would take on a vibrant life of its own for me, those who were involved in the project, and those who read or consult the project for either personal or professional reasons. In this section, I explore what I hold to be the lasting implications of this project through reflecting on its sustainability as well as its significance on personal, ecclesial, and theological levels.

**Sustainability**

For work toward the ongoing translation of Scripture into Uduk to cease after the completion of this project would be a disappointment. This project was designed, as its optimal outcome, to catalyze an ongoing process of translating portions of the remainder of the OT into Uduk. Therefore, I envisioned this project as an initial step in a long-range plan to continue translating God’s word into Uduk. For this to happen, subsequent action must be taken with intentionality and with this specific goal in mind. As Ernest Stringer warns, “Unless research participants take systematic steps to incorporate changed

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16 Sensing, 224.
procedures into the ongoing life of the organization, changes are likely to be short-lived and to have little impact." Therefore, I hope that this project carries a broader impact and a lasting legacy in the years to come.

This project, in my estimation, served to validate the effectiveness of an oral translation methodology conducted among immigrants. Therefore, further work utilizing this methodology should be pursued. More specifically, additional translation work with this Uduk population is a warranted, substantiated need based on the findings of this project. As an outgrowth of this project, PBT is already making plans to engage in a second experimental translation project utilizing an oral translation methodology with this group of Uduk speakers. The tentative plan for this project is to draft the book of Jonah in March 2015. This is an exciting development for me as it already shows this project bearing fruit beyond itself and advancing the word of God into the Uduk language. It is my hope that this second experimental project would be the first of many subsequent steps to sustain and develop the process of translating the rest of the OT into Uduk using an oral translation methodology. It yet remains to be shown that these Scriptures will be suitable to the Uduk people in their home area, so all of this work is admittedly still experimental.

**Personal Significance**

This project has impacted me tremendously and helped me develop significantly in both personal and professional ways. As someone who is relatively new to the field of

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18 This project will be a collaborative effort with Faith Comes by Hearing and The Seed Company. The primary intent of our partners is to field test an oral translation software product that they are currently developing. PBT’s primary interest in the project is to conduct a pilot project with an oral translation approach among this group of Uduk speakers involving a passage that has not yet been translated into Uduk. Therefore, this second pilot project will allow these agencies to explore new ground in line with their respective missions and visions.
Bible translation, I have gained invaluable training and experience from this project that would not have otherwise been accessible (at least not at this level of depth and intensity). The planning, coordinating, and implementing of this project have helped me learn some of the key skills and competencies required to be a productive, effective Bible translator. While I had observed one translation project in person prior to this project, leading this project was a much more meaningful and informative experience. Wilhoit’s feedback also played a key role in helping me see things that I would have missed on my own.

Executing this project also enhanced my cross-cultural leadership and teaching skills. Working with people from another culture who have a different first language from one’s own requires additional preparation and sensitivity to these cross-cultural dynamics. While I have had several cross-cultural experiences in my life, this project placed me in a more focused, intensive leadership role than any of my previous cross-cultural settings. I am reminded of the following anecdotal piece of advice: “When teaching cross-culturally, the ideal is to become less American (75 percent) and more like those we teach (at best 75 percent) and therefore 150-percent persons.”19 While it is difficult to quantify the degree to which one has attained such a goal, these words echoed in my mind as I interfaced with the translation team and focus group, and I am a more effective cross-cultural teacher because of this project.

In addition to helping me develop relevant professional skills, this project also fostered a deeper appreciation within me for the need for Bible translation and for the beauty and importance of the work itself. Prior to joining PBT, I was largely unaware of

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19 Lingenfelter, 23.
the scope and breadth of how many people and language groups lack Scripture. At the current time, it is estimated that “at least 1.3 billion people do not have the full Bible available in their first language”\(^\text{20}\) and that “around 180 million people speaking at least 1,860 languages are understood to ‘likely need Bible translation to begin.’”\(^\text{21}\) Such information is staggering and has helped me cultivate a deeper sense of gratitude for the fact that I have Scripture available to me in my heart language. These statistics have also fostered within me a burden and sense of responsibility to serve these Bibleless people and language groups through the ministry of Bible translation. Interacting with these South Sudanese immigrants and hearing their stories has touched my heart and compels me to work diligently to bring the complete body of Scripture to the Uduk people.

**Ecclesial Significance**

This project also has implications and significance for the life of the church. Chapter 2 presented a brief sketch of the nature and purpose of the church as a missional entity comprised of priestly participants in the kingdom of God who serve through authentic, natural engagement of society. It is against the background of this missional ecclesiology that I frame my reflections on the ecclesial relevance of this project.

The church today exists in an unprecedented preponderance of immigrant populations, especially congregations located in urban centers. While the United States has experienced a dramatic increase in the influx of refugees, nations throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia are also seeing a rise in the number of immigrants.\(^\text{22}\) The presence and

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\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) See the Migration Policy Institute’s database with a myriad of graphs, maps, and other statistics pertaining to international immigration: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/international-migration-statistics.
proximity of people from such a diverse array of cultures presents churches with advantageous opportunities to engage and minister to these groups. While the linguistic treasure trove represented by these groups has obvious interest for Bible translation agencies, this project demonstrates one way in which the church can be involved in Bible translation.\textsuperscript{23} The project also suggests other missional opportunities presented by the presence of these international neighbors.

One specific missional practice that bears special relevance to the situation of the immigrant is that of hospitality. As members of the host culture, American Christians have a valuable opportunity to welcome and surround those who have come to our nation with love and generosity. Christine Pohl asserts that “hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith.”\textsuperscript{24} Love for the stranger is the primary motivation for the hospitable Christian.\textsuperscript{25} However, for the Christian, hospitality is more than just philanthropic generosity. Christian hospitality “both participate[s] in and anticipate[s] God’s hospitality. . . . Hospitality [is] connected to the promises of God and to the presence of Christ.”\textsuperscript{26} Pohl claims that hospitality “is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us.”\textsuperscript{27} Therefore, hospitality flows from the

\textsuperscript{23}An emerging paradigm is the increasing involvement of the global church in the Bible translation movement. Tim Jore provides an extensive treatment of this topic in “Bible Translation 3.0: equipping the Church to translate the Bible into every language, without exception,” Distant Shores Media, last modified December 23, 2014, http://distantshores.org/resources/whitepapers/bible-translation.

\textsuperscript{24}Christine D. Pohl, \textit{Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

\textsuperscript{25}Pohl notes that “one of the key Greek words for hospitality, \textit{philoxenia}, combines the general word for love and affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (\textit{phileo}), and the word for stranger (\textit{xenos}). Thus etymologically and practically, in the New Testament, hospitality is closely connected to love. Because \textit{philoxenia} includes the word for stranger, hospitality’s orientation toward strangers is also more apparent in Greek than in English.” Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{26}Pohl, 33.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 172.
presence of Christ in the lives of believers. Given this distinctive source of hospitality, the motives, methods, and means of Christian hospitality should be markedly different from those of the world.28

The Lake Highlands Church in north Dallas, where these four Uduk families worship, is exemplary of the fruit that can emerge from reaching out to immigrant populations. One especially meaningful result that came out of the project is that I was invited to bring my family to Lake Highlands one Sunday for a “ministry highlight” of the translation project. Therefore, my family and I attended Lake Highlands Church on October 19 and enjoyed a time of worship and fellowship with the Uduk families.

Near the end of the service, we were all called on stage and I was asked to explain the nature of my work and some details about the project. Two of the Uduk men were also given the chance to speak a few words about their experience with the project and their feelings about it. One of these men led a prayer in Uduk, which was a touching moment. After this prayer, some leaders of the congregation came on stage to lay hands on us and pray for the continued success of the project. There was an energetic response of applause when the prayer concluded and many of us exchanged hugs as we left the stage. This experience warmed my heart, encouraged me, and showed me how Bible translation can inspire and ignite missional impulses within a congregation.

I also learned on this visit that Lake Highlands also has members who are immigrants from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Kenya. These people worship at Lake Highlands because the church has engaged them intentionally as a population with

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28 Pohl discusses the notions of pagan hospitality as having the ulterior motives of seeking reciprocity, currying favor, and hoping for repayment. See Pohl, 18-20 for more on the distinctiveness of Christian hospitality.
unique ministry needs. By recognizing the missional opportunities around them in the local immigrant population and taking active measures to reach out to these people, Lake Highlands demonstrates what missional ecclesiology can look like in a modern urban setting. The cultural diversity of the audience was remarkable and was a feature of the congregation that captivated my heart as we sang and fellowshipped with these brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. I applaud the leadership of Lake Highlands and am thankful for their example in making missional engagement of the local immigrant population a priority and a core value.

In addition to a missional ecclesiology, this project commends to communities of faith the notion of the spoken word of God as an important ingredient in the shared life of faith. One application here for the church is a recovery or renewal of the public reading of Scripture in the assembly. Such reading could take on a variety of forms, frequencies, and functions. I will refrain from offering specific prescriptive measures here, but entrust church leaders to discern which particular practices will serve their communities of faith best.29

An offshoot from the public reading of Scripture is the shared experience of Scripture in community beyond the assembly. The practices of lectio divina30 and “dwelling in the Word”31 provide excellent starting points for incorporating such

29 Some resources that may be helpful along these lines are Audrey Williamson, The Living Word: Reading Scriptures in Public (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1987); Max McLean and Warren Bird, Unleashing the Word: Rediscovering the Public Reading of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); and Jeffrey Arthurs, Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture: The Transforming Power of the Well-Spoken Word (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012).
30 To learn more about this practice, see Christine Valters Paintner, Lectio Divina—The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-Centered Prayer (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths), 2011; and Thelma Hall, Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist), 1998.
31 For an excellent introductory overview of this practice, see Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations), 2011.
experiences in small groups, retreats, and other settings. Depending on the particularities of one’s context, some initial groundwork may be required to acquaint members of the congregation with the nature and purpose of these practices, whereas people in some traditions will likely already be familiar with them. Again, leaders of communities of faith will want to reflect on which specific practices are most fitting for their particular context. The important point here is that communities of faith create and cultivate methods of engaging Scripture in meaningful, experiential ways together beyond readings in the setting of a public assembly.

*Theological Significance*

Reflecting on this project from a theological perspective surfaces several relevant theological themes and touchstones. While a plethora of viable models for theological reflection exist, the framework through which I approached the theological significance of this project most closely aligns with the model of starting from a standpoint of divine revelation and engaging in reflection of a parallel synthetic nature. Utilizing this type of model for theological reflection, I was able to discern several themes and trends related to the theological significance of this project.

Perhaps foremost among these themes are those that emerge naturally from coupling this process of theological reflection with the theological foundations described in chapter 2. One such theme is the power of the spoken word of God as revelatory in ways that are both prescriptive and descriptive. This theme emerged as I reflected on the

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32 “Theologies with a revelatory starting point typically begin by focusing on the message of God as revealed in Scripture and/or tradition, only then moving on to explore its human implications” (Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 56).

33 “Parallel synthetic thinking sees the total picture or *gestalt* and the interrelatedness of its parts. . . . It is able to see the interrelationships of a number of factors at the same time without sequentially ordering them” (ibid., 60).
acts of hearing and speaking the text aloud together in the translation sessions. While I have read this parable many times in solitary, silent reading, certain features of the text (such as the parallelism in the parable) came to take on new meaning through the process of hearing and reading the parable aloud. In this way, through the power of orality and aurality, the parable came alive in our midst in ways perhaps not as readily ascertainable through private devotional reading. There is great power in the spoken word of God.

A theme that overlaps with that of the power of the spoken word of God is that of communal participation in Scripture. At one level, the simple shared experience of hearing God’s word together had an impact on how we received and perceived the message of the text. Listening to this parable with three men who are refugees from South Sudan surfaced meanings that would have remained closed to me if I had been sharing the same experience with three people from my own cultural background. At another level, as the translation team and I worked together through the details and complexities of the translation process, we were forming a bond through sharing in God’s word at a deep, sometimes even technical level. Taking a quick look back at the theological framework laid out in chapter 2, Scripture is a book by the people of God and for the people of God. There is great power in the shared word of God.

Another related theme that emerged as I reflected on the power of the spoken word of God is the validity of orality as a means of human communication, cognition, and learning. While literacy brings certain opportunities otherwise barred from non-literate, they are no less human or valuable due to their style of communication and processing information. While the members of the translation team and focus group possess some degree of literacy in both Uduk and English, it is not such proficiency that
makes them valuable, important, or gifted. Oral communicators are fully invested with the *imago Dei* and the cultures in which they live stand as valid expressions of human experience.

A final theological theme that I will mention is that of embracing the “other” within our midst. This ties back closely to the missional practice of hospitality described above, but I would like to nuance this practice theologically from the perspective of how we view the strangers among us. The theological basis here is “recognizing Jesus in every stranger.” This move requires us to broaden our definition of exactly who is our neighbor in terms of extending the neighborly love Jesus explicates in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Pohl contends that one of Jesus’s points in this teaching is that “the scope of our responsibility to care includes anyone in need.” In terms of this project, it is morally and theologically incumbent upon Christians to look upon the immigrant population as our neighbors and to serve them in love out of this perspective.

**Questions for Further Research**

The limited scope of this project necessitates the exploration of future questions and issues related to orality, a theology of the spoken word of God, Bible translation, and ministry among immigrant populations. As a student and a researcher, I have my own questions regarding the future of orality and its relationship to Bible translation. This project has helped me refine and formulate some of these issues, but it has also surfaced new questions and related issues. I expect that others who read or consult this project will have questions of their own. I hope to engage in constructive dialogue with others who share an interest in Bible translation and that, out of such conversations, our collective

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34 Pohl, 67.
35 Ibid., 75.
input could sharpen and refine our mutual contributions to the field of Bible translation and our proficiency as Bible translators.

The most prominent question for my immediate context is how to improve and enhance the oral translation methodology I have used in this project. Wilhoit offered several key suggestions along these lines. One such suggestion is to include an exegetical check as part of the process. Wilhoit claimed, “Some of this theoretically could be done during the drafting process if there was [an exegete] there with knowledge of the target language.” He also urged me to appoint someone on the translation team to “make sure that nothing is missing” along the way. Wilhoit surmised that this could perhaps take the form of a peer review process. Another suggestion that he had was to play an English version of the passage (along with the oral draft and Uduk version) for the comprehension check team. These suggestions make excellent revisions and next steps for future oral drafting projects.

Another penetrating question that I have is how viable this oral draft would be if field tested in South Sudan. Does the language and style of this group communicate intelligibly in their mother country today? These Uduk families have been in the United States ranging from ten to fifteen years. Has their language or their competence with the language changed any from being out of their home country for so long? The best way to answer these questions would be to conduct a comprehension check among Uduk speakers in South Sudan. While such check is outside the scope of this project, it is possible that this step could be conducted in the future in cooperation with partners who work near the Uduk in South Sudan.
A final question I have is how oral translation approaches can be implemented most effectively by Bible translation agencies. In the current landscape of linguistics, not all are open to the benefits and advantages of oral translation methodologies. How will PBT continue to utilize this methodology in the future? Will other agencies welcome this type of approach? How can I empower and encourage the use of an oral translation approach among my colleagues? These are questions that will be answered in time. I remain hopeful that oral translation methodologies will become more prevalent among those who are striving to bring the word of God to every language group on earth. May we labor diligently and wholeheartedly until all people have the chance to hear about the love of Christ in their heart language.

**Conclusion**

This thesis describes and presents a doctor of ministry project aimed at testing an oral translation methodology among immigrants by producing and evaluating a verse-by-verse oral draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk with South Sudanese immigrants living in Dallas. My primary goal in this project was to determine the validity and effectiveness of an oral draft conducted in an experimental Bible translation project. The three project sessions (two with the translation team, one with the focus group), the interview with an experienced Bible translator, and my own evaluation served as the primary data for the project. The analysis of these data from the angles of researcher (me), insider (focus group), and outsider (interviewee) reveals a consistent validation of the oral draft as a natural, clear, and accurate translation. While the project certainly surfaced ways to improve both the draft and the translation process used for this project, the overall results indicate that the project was successful in determining that an oral translation
methodology conducted among immigrants can serve as an effective way to translate Scripture.
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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

August 14, 2014

Jeremy Harrison
Graduate School of Theology
ACU Box 29422
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mr. Harrison,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Evaluating an Oral Draft of Luke 8:4-15 in Uduk" has been approved for a period of one year (IRB # 14-070).

If this project is continued beyond a one-year period, you need to submit an additional request for review. Please notify this office when you have completed your study.

If any problems develop with the study, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs promptly.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Mark Billingsley, M. A.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Cc: Dr. Jeff Childers
APPENDIX B

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF LUKE 8:4-15

1. Establish the external boundaries of the text plus any text-critical issues
   • Immediate context of 8:1-3 initiates a summary/overview of Jesus tour of itinerant preaching
   • 8:16-56 provides other teachings, miracles, and events on the itinerant tour
   • Textual variant in v. 5: “The absence of τοῦ ὑπάρχοντος in several witnesses, chiefly Western (D W ita,b,d,e,ff2,1,q syrC,s,p), is either due to scribal assimilation to the parallels in Mt 13.4 and Mk 4.4, or to deliberate excision because the words seemed inappropriate in an allegorical reference to the devil (compare ver. 12).”

2. Locate the internal boundaries within the passage
   • 8:4-8 is the parable proper; provides the initial teaching block on this journey
   • 8:9-10 provides a brief comment on the nature of the secrets of the kingdom of God
   • 8:11-15 gives an explanation of the parable

3. Conduct a lexical-semantic study of key terms
     i. “The subject matter of the Synoptic παραβολαί is taken from the daily world of Jesus’ audience, some from nature . . . some from the multitude of social relationships. The subject matter and its formal presentation are determined by Jesus’ rhetorical objective. Like the rabbis, Jesus uses contemporary metaphors (king, servant, vineyard, etc.), through which parables gain slightly allegorical

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2 Balz and Schneider, 3.15.
ii. “Jesus’ parables are thematically distinct from those of the rabbis, which primarily serve to expound the law. The objective of Jesus’ parables is discernible from their indicative and imperative elements (address and demand): Their intent is to transform the hearer. Therefore, they are more than pedagogic aids, since Jesus’ message functionally required the parables and Jesus’ life gave the parables practical commentary.”

iii. “The post-Easter Church knew that Jesus’ parables were only accessible to those who listened attentively . . . The apostolic Church claimed that it alone was entrusted with the key to understanding the parables or the *mysterion* of the kingdom of God, while ‘those outside’ encounter them as mere obscure, enigmatic sayings that cause continued hardening.”

- **σπείρων/σπόρον (v. 5):**
  - i. “The original metaphor of sowing is concerned with the coming of the kingdom of God, but in the interpretation of the conduct of believers is the focus.”
  - ii. “Σπορα originally referred to the activity of sowing, then also to that which has been sowed (i.e., the seed).”
- **κατεπατήθη (v. 5):** crush, trample with the feet; used fig. (of swine); Matt 7:6; pass. in Matt 5:13; Luke 8:5.
- **κατέπεσεν (v. 6):** fall down, fall; only 3x in NT, all by Luke (Luke 8:6; Acts 26:14: we all fell down on the earth; 28:6; fall down dead).
- **φυὲν (vv. 6, 8):** “Only intrans. in NT: Luke 8:6, 8, of the *emergence* of seed.”
- **συμφυεῖσαι (v. 7):** “Luke 8:7, of thorns that grew together with the sown seeds and choked them.”
- **καρπὸν (v. 8):** 66x in NT; 12x in Luke.
  - i. “Fruit in the OT is spoken of as the result of planting and growth, and is associated with trees, crops, and eating. Because of its association with the idea of deed and result, it is used in reference to human conduct.”

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1 Balz and Schneider, 3.16.
2 Ibid., 3.16.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 3.263.
5 Ibid., 3.266.
6 Ibid., 2.265.
7 Ibid., 2.266.
8 Ibid. 3.445.
9 Ibid., 3.290 (emphasis original).
10 Ibid., 2.251.
ii. “In the parable of the sower . . . it associates fruitbearing with accepting the missionary word . . . those who hear the word and accept it and thus bear fruit abundantly.”\(^{11}\)

- μυστήρια (v. 10)
  i. “In classical Greek [the word] is composed of the suffix –τήρια, denoting the place where an action occurs, plus the onomatopoetic verbal root μυ-, “make an inarticulate sound with closed lips; keep one’s mouth shut. It refers to the content of the cultic ceremony, which is ineffable because it is inaccessible to discursive reason.”\(^{12}\)
  ii. “The metaphoric use of μυστήρια begins with Plato . . . Understanding a matter more deeply by talking about it is compared to a μυστήριον. Through this metaphoric use, the connotation of μυστήριον came to mean something more casual and arbitrary until it became purely secular.”\(^{13}\)
  iii. “In the LXX, μυστήριον appears only in texts from the Hellenistic era . . . In contrast, the theologically understood μυστήρια which ultimately designate the creative activity of God, are not private matters but should be recognized and proclaimed by the godly. In Daniel, μυστήριον is the translation of the Persian loanword rāz. In 2:18, 27, it indicates the content of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, a veiled disclosure of the future events intended by God (2:28-30). Only God can divulge the hidden meaning (2:28, 47), and he does so only to the one inspired by him (4:9 Theodotion). Here, for the first time, μυστήριον is understood as eschatological secret.”\(^{14}\)
  iv. “In apocalyptic literature, the profound and innumerable mysteries of God (1 Enoch 63:3) are viewed as existing in heaven (106:9); they are the hidden, transcendent basis for all this is and occurs, esp. of that which will be revealed at the end of time (103:2f.; 38:3; 83:7).”\(^{15}\)
  v. “In the 28 NT passages in which μυστήριον is found it has neither a cultic nor a purely secular meaning . . . From the Greek concept of μυστήριον comes a strictly esoteric sense of an experience that is inaccessible to human reason, as well as the theme of life from death. Out of the Jewish tradition comes a less stringently esoteric and the transcendent, humanly inaccessible mystery of God, which is historically set in action by God himself in his acts of salvation and judgment in the past, present, and future, which already now

\(^{11}\) Balz and Schneider, 2.252.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 2.446.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 2.447.
\(^{14}\) Ibid. (emphasis original).
\(^{15}\) Ibid. (emphasis original).
has been made evident to the one who is called and will be made evident to all on the last day. In terms of content, μυστήριον refers primarily to the saving acts of God in Christ.”

vi. “In the Gospels μυστήριον is found only in Mark 4:11 . . . The saying uses μυστήριον to describe the experience of the breaking in of God’s rule in the words and works of Jesus. It is basically still hidden, to be revealed in all its glory only in the end times, but is made accessible (pass. δέδοται) already now to Jesus’ disciples and can be experienced and comprehended by them in faith, while to those who stand on the outside it remains a puzzle (→παραβολή) and therefore hidden.”

vii. “The parallels in Matt 13:11 and Luke 8:10 (γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια for τὸ μυστήριον) focus not so much on the fact of the breaking in (sg. μυστήριον) as they do on the presence of the kingdom of God in the comprehensive sense, the proclamation of which is understood by the disciples.”

viii. “Fundamental to the use of μυστήριον in the NT is the basic meaning of the Greek word: “that which is unspeakable,” i.e., inaccessible to natural reason (but accessible to faith). As a result, the term is ambiguous; assertions of its specific content must be made on the basis of the respective content. The conceptual tradition of Jewish apocalyptic (the hidden and then the revealed mystery) plays a prominent role here. The Greek elements that the word bears also must be considered, for they are retained even when the word is a translation for Hebrew terms.”

• βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 10)
  i. “In secular Greek the meaning of the word alternates between a functional sense—royal sovereignty, monarchy, royal dignity, royal office—and the geographical sense of kingdom or realm.”
  ii. “Jesus proclaims the KG as an event. This is evident from the many temporal references associated with the βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ. There are statements in which the coming of the KG is expected in the future (Matt 6:10; Mark 14:25; Luke 6:20b with v. 21); elsewhere a summarizing formula appears: “the KG has come near” (Luke 10:11, etc.).”
  iii. “The particular character of Jesus’ terminology demonstrates that his concern is with the present coming of the eschatological,
cosmic KG, which comes from beyond and is created by God himself. The βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ is not only the sovereignty of God in a functional sense; it is also a particular place, in which one can be (Matt 8:11f; 11:11; Mark 14:25) or into which one can enter (Mark 9:47; 10:25; cf. Matt 21:31; Mark 12:34). In comparison with the Jewish texts it is striking that Jesus, in many cases, speaks of the KG in the same way that the rabbis speak of the coming aeon (the eschatological meal, to be great in the KG, to be admitted to the kingdom, to inherit it, to be prepared).”

iv. “In contrast to Judaism the decisively new element in Jesus’ proclamation of the KG . . . is the interpretation of the concept of the kingdom as the unlimited, boundless love of God esp. toward the despised and disenfranchised of Israel—the poor, women, sinners, Samaritans, etc. This love of God is defined by its connection with the eschatological KG.”

v. “The distribution of the expression in Luke (46 times) and Acts (8 occurrences) demonstrates that βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ is an important key word in the teaching of Jesus . . . Luke interprets the KG christologically as the sending of Jesus . . . βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ becomes the central cipher for the content of Christian proclamation (Luke 8:1) . . . We can say that for Luke the KG is historically present in Jesus . . . and its character as far as content is concerned is determined by Jesus.”

• λόγος (vv. 11, 12, 13, 15): 330x in NT (32x in Luke; 65x in Acts)
  i. “The great variety of meanings for λόγος —word, speech, language, narrative, statement, pronouncement, question, report, account, sermon, teaching, call, sense—can be accounted for esp.: a) on philological ground and b) on theological grounds.”
  ii. “The root λέγ- represents a comprehensive and overarching unity of meaning: gather, collect, select, report, speak.”
  iii. “The theological background arises from tr. of Heb. dāḇār by λόγος and by ρήμα. The “word of God theology” that proceeds from the creation story and the prophetic revelatory event leads further to the wisdom literature.”
  iv. “The breadth of possible meanings for λόγος in the NT extends from everyday usage (e.g., 2 Pet 2:3: “with lying words”; Eph 5:6:

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23 Balz and Schneider, 1.202.
24 Ibid., 1.203
25 Ibid., 1.204.
26 Ibid., 2.357 (emphasis original).
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.

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“with empty words”) to the deepest christological terminology in the Johannine prologue.”  

v. “In Jesus’ preaching the message of “the kingdom of God” stands at the thematic center . . . Hearing this word of the final salvation of humankind and the world is not sufficient; the human response to God’s saving call is faith, which gives an altogether new motivation to human activity.”

vi. “The approaching rule of God is connected not only with Jesus’ proclamation as spoken word, but also equally with his person and work.”

vii. “The extent to which the theological program of Luke gives priority to hearing the word and to the resulting action can be seen in redactional comments in Luke 5:1; 8:21; 11:28.”

viii. “The parable of the different soils . . . is followed by an allegorical interpretation (similar to what is seen in apocalyptic literature) already in the pre-Markan collection of parables. Here—the only occurrence of λόγος in the mouth of Jesus—the word is the missionary proclamation. The fate of the gospel is portrayed here with parenetic intent. Thus there is a description of both its failure and its missionary success in terms of qualitatively different soils (those who hear). Thus the parable is intended to give encouragement in the presence of failure and to make an appeal to have faith. In early Christian missionary terminology ὁ λόγος became a t.t. for missionary proclamation.”

διάβολος (v. 12)

i. “The LXX uses the noun διάβολος to render the Hebrew designation for the adversary (שָׂטָן). Διάβολος appears 34 times in the NT with this meaning.”

ii. “In the dualistic worldview that the NT shares with ancient Judaism, the heavenly βασιλείας stands in opposition to that of the demons (δαίμόνιον). The devil is the highest sovereign of the demons; the demons are his “angels” (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7, 9). In accordance with ancient Jewish demonology the NT traces the διάβολος and his ἄγγελοι as creatures of God back to the fall of the angels in Gen 6:1-4 (Rev 12:9, 12).”

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29 Balz and Schneider, 2.357, (emphasis original).
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 “Technical term,” as used by Balz and Scheinder.
34 Ibid., 2.358.
36 Ibid., 1.297.
iii. “The διάβολος is—by God’s mandate—lord of the demons of sickness (Acts 10:38; cf. 2 Cor 12:7-9) and of death (Heb 2:14; cf. Rev 20:10, 13f.). Through temptations (cf. Job 1:6-2:7) he desires to entice mankind to apostasy and disobedience toward God; [1.297-98]; he sows the weeds (Matt 13:39) and steals the good seed of the word of God (Luke 8:12).”

- τελεσφοροῦσιν (v. 14): “Luke 8:14 refers to the seed that falls among the thorns; it is like those who hear the word but are “choked” by their own ends.”

- κατέχουσιν (v. 15): 17x in NT; 3x in Luke. “Κατέχω is used in the physical sense to mean: 1) hold fast, in the attempt (impf.) of the people to prevent Jesus from leaving (Luke 4:42); keep, retain, of Onesimus (Phlm 13), 2) have, possess (1 Cor 7:30; 2 Cor 6:10); take one’s place (Luke 14:9) . . . The vb. is more frequently used figuratively: 1) negatively, of those who “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18) . . . 2) positively in the parenetic direction to hold fast “the word” (Luke 8:15; not in the par. Mark/Matthew).”

4. Posit a structural-thematic outline for the text
   - The most common division of the text in the sources I consulted is along the following lines:
     i. The Parable of the Sower (8:4-8)
     ii. The Purpose of Parables (8:9-10)
     iii. The Meaning of the Parable of the Sower (8:11-15)
   - Those who deviate from this do so with the slight modification of ending the first section at v. 8a, and therefore beginning the second section at v. 8b.
   - The UBS 4th ed. and the NAS 28th ed. agree in paragraph divisions and other structural breaks.
   - Therefore, I offer the following as my outline of the pericope:
     i. The Parable of the Soils (8:4-8)
     ii. The Reason Jesus Teaches in Parables (8:9-10)
     iii. The Parable of the Soils Explained (8:11-15)

5. Identify the major oral-aural characteristics of the text

37 Balz and Schneider, 1.297-98.
38 Ibid., 3.346.
39 Ibid., 2.272 (emphasis original).
40 Cf. Blight and Nolland.
41 I am choosing to use this terminology because I see the main thematic of the parable being on the four different types of soils as they stand as analogues to the various responses of the human heart to the message of the gospel.
42 I contend that v. 8b belongs with v. 8a thematically as the conclusion of the parable proper, not as an introduction to v. 9.
• This pericope is comprised primarily of direct speech in the form of Jesus teaching his followers through the parable (8:4-8), a brief word about why he teaches in parables (8:9-10), and an explanation of the parable (8:11-15).

• The parallelism of the parable and the explanation is striking in terms of the series of four present in both.

• Jesus’s words in v. 9 (“Let anyone with ears to hear listen”) carry an innate sense of the oral-aural nature of this section, highlighting the need for a proper hearing of the word of God.

• It is also significant to note that this statement is given as a response to the question posed by the disciples earlier in v. 9.

• In the explanation of the parable, Jesus highlights the concept of orality-aurality by upholding those who “hear the word” (v. 15) and bear fruit as moral exemplars.
APPENDIX C

TRAINING MODULE IN BASIC TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

Literal vs. Meaning-Based Translation

A literal translation often appears too rigid and requires a restructuring of word order to be natural in the receptor language.

Mark 2:5  “Child, they are forgiven of you the sins.” [literal]
           “Child, your sins are forgiven.” [meaning-based]

A literal translation can also contain idioms or expressions that need to be modified in order to be intelligible in the receptor language.

2 Cor. 6:14  “The mouth of us is open towards you, and the heart of us is wide."
            “We have spoken honestly to you, and we love you with all our heart.”

Qualities of a Good Translation

- Accurate: expresses original meaning as closely as possible; nothing added, omitted, or changed.
- Clear: easy to understand; few difficult or awkward words/phrases
- Natural: everyday language; sounds like someone talking

Two Major Steps in Translation

1) Discover the meaning of the original text in the source language
2) Re-express the meaning into the receptor language

Meaning and Sense of Words

Greek has four words for “love,” each of which has a different connotation (“sense”) Different meanings of the word “foot” (body part, unit of measurement, or base of a mountain); also “nail” and “run.”

Symbolic Language

Simile: a figure of speech that involves an explicit comparison (“He ran like the wind”) Metaphor: a figure of speech that involves an implicit comparison (“You brood of vipers!”)

Analogy: a figure of speech where people, places, or objects in the story stand as symbols for something or someone else (e.g., parable of the prodigal son; the father represents God; the prodigal son represents a person/humanity prior to turning to God in repentance).
APPENDIX D

KEY TERMS FROM LUKE 8:4-15

Parable: Which word in Uduk most closely captures the essence of a parable?

Farmer: Which word in Uduk best describes the type of farmer in this parable?

Seed: Which word in Uduk best describes the type of seed in this parable?

Footpath: Which word in Uduk most closely describes this type of ground?

Fertile Soil: Which word in Uduk best describes this type of soil?

Crop: Which word in Uduk best describes the type of productive growth that Jesus is describing?

Secrets: Which word in Uduk best describes the sense of a hidden mystery?

Kingdom of God: What phrase in Uduk most accurately communicates the sense of the reign of God?

Devil: Which word in Uduk best describes the devil and/or Satan?

Being Saved: What phrase in Uduk most accurately communicates the concept of biblical salvation?

Maturity: Which word in Uduk best describes the type of growth in this parable?

Harvest: Which word in Uduk best describes this kind of abundance?
APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE ORAL DRAFT OF LUKE 8:4-15 IN UDUK

4) Ka cima kamu/ tani Yesus ṭorki gwo mo. Ki gwom 'bi’th/e mo. Ka cima kamu/ tani a’di ṭorki waambuhuny kwani gwo mo.

5) Amanyęka ḋa’bany to yaki’d ka pije/ mo mmoyeeka/ ka’bany to mo. Med jin yeğina a’di to mo tani kun tiya ta’kkini bway tur mo. Dhalı ’dii ṭ(th)kin mo dhalı los uni mo be.

6) ḋa’banyan tiya ṭakın mo e’ku wosh mo dhalı a’di cukid mo tani a’di sh’bil k’id mo, haali/ a’di dhara’d ka birman mo be.

7) ḋa’banyan tiya ṭakın mo e bwam ’de/ mo dhalı yan dhali ki uni cukid kin mo kun cakin mo tani uni çökki’d kin ma ’de/ mo be.

8) ḋa’banyan tiya ṭakın ’cesha ’borga/ mo tani dhali uni dho’thkin maman to kagahara/ mo ’peni me’d jin yekunu uni mo be. ’Peni me’d jin okina a’di gwo yansan mo tani a’di yuğki’da yuğ ka pije/ mo mmo o gwomo ki a’di yin jin tagi gu bwany’ce mo tani dhalkı a’di ciç gwo yan mo ma.

9) Imancık a’di gwo ṭu’dki’d mo dhalı a’di, dhalı o adi gwo mo ki gwom ’bi’th/e yan mo.

10) Dhalı ki a’di dho’thki uni gwo, gom am ki um dhalkunu bway mmo mish gwom ’bi’th/e yan’ban mo be. Aha/ torkina gwo yansan ki gwom ’bi’th/e mo. Gom unin tiya mo be. Ki gwo ma Arumgimis mi inu mii tim mo, dhalı ki uni parki a’di e mo tani ’koki nyith a’di mo be. Dhalı ki uni ciçki a’di mo tani uni ’koki mish a’di ’ban mo be.

11) ’Pemen ki gwo ’bi’th/e yan a’dan be: gwom ’bi’th/e a’di ta Arumgimis mo be.

12) ḋa’banyan tiya kun takina bway tur mo tani a’di ta ’pemen gwo gom uni kun ciçki gwo mo dhalı yan’ko’d a’di thus ’de/ yin ṭu’dki’d mo mmo ḋal gwom ’borga mo gom ’peni uni mo be. Dhalı a’di diki dhal uni bway mo gom bway gi mo woth mo be.

13) ḋa’banyan tiya uni takina ’ku wosh mo tani a’di ta uni kun ciçki gwo mo dhalı bu’th a’di gi bwaŋ ’kunyu’d mo dhalı yan’ko’d ki uni buth ki a’di ki arı momo tani ki mom
palki moy gam gwo is gu’dkî’d mo tani uni ṭakin mo be. Haali/ uni dharanka birman mo be.

14) Eman to tiya takina bwam ma ’de/ mo tani a’di ta uni kunki gwo mo dhali yan’ko’d ki jahaanu uni cako’d kunu mo ki jaro/ ki mog ’cesh yan mo be. Haali/ uni ’koki caa/ mo e mog gam gwo is mo be.

15) Eman to kun ta’kkina ’cesha ’borga/ mo tani ta uni kun cikki gwo mo dhali ha uni e mo dhali yan’ko’d uni dim kup mo dhali dho’th maman kagahara ey bwan mondhe/ mo be.
APPENDIX F

LUKE 8:4-15 FROM THE UDUK NT

4) Dhali ka waambuhany 'kwani pu’dkin mo mmonṭal ’de/ mo dhali ’kwani ’peni bampa/ gi bampa/ mo pu’dkin mo e a’di mo tani a’di ki ṭor uni gwo ki gwom ’bi’th/e mo ki:
5) Amonyeka ḷa’bany to a’di ya’d ka pije/ mo mmoyeka ḷa’bany tom piti mo. Dhali ki a’di yeği’l mo tani a’ka’banya tiya ta’kkini bway tur mo dhali uni yapkunu ki sho’k mo dhali ’dii kun ṭen e momis mo tani loski uni mo be.
6) Dhali kun tiya bitkin mo e mowosh mo. Dhali ki uni can mo tani uni shi’bilin mo hila/ haali/ mo ta toŋkor gom uni mo be.
7) Dhali unin tiya bitkin mo e bwam ma ’de/ mo dhali a’de/ can mo nyakki uni mo tani dhali a’di ki koṭh uni ’kup mo be.
8) Dhali kun tiya uni bitkina ’cesh kun ’bora’bor mo dhali uni can mo dhali dho’thkin ki iss ’kwanimpa imudhe’d mo e emen gi cwalmana ’de/ mo. Ki a’di o gwo yansan mo tani a’di yükk’i da yükk mo ki: A’di jin ta’d gi bwany’ce mo mmocik gwo mo tani dhalki a’di cik gwo mo ma.
9) Dhali ki imancik a’di gwo doṭki a’di gwo mo gom ’pemen gi gwom ’bi’th/e yan ta’da ta mo tani
10) a’di ki o uni gwo mo ki: E um mo tani um cikunu gwo mo mmomish gwo jin çinu ki jim bag mo gom Bampa/ ma Arumgimis mo, hili gom unin tiya mo tani uni ṭoru ki jim ’bi’th/e mo, wakan ki uni gwansan kun mishi mo mo tani mini ’koki mish mo mo dhali uni kun cikgi gwo mo tani uni mini ’koki mish gwo ’ban mo be.
11) Gwom ’bi’th/e a’di a’dihe/ mo be: Aḳa’bany to a’di ta gwo ma Arumgimis mo be.
12) Dhali unin tiya kun bitkin mo e bway tur mo tani uni ita uni gwansan kun cikgi gwo mo. Yan’ko’d tapa ma ruma ’cesh pu’dki’l mo dhali ’do gwo ’pena dum buni mo ki uni mini ’koki gam gwo is mo dhali ki uni minu ’koki woṭh mo be.

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1 Gwo ma Arumgimis jin Ta Gwon This mo. Gwo ma Arumgimis jin Ta Gwon Dhamo/ mo Ṭakwiin. Gway gi iDawuu’d (Bradentont, FL: Bible Alliance Mission, 1983), 214-15.
13) Dhali unin tiya kun biṭkin mo e mowosh mo tani uni ita uni gwansan, ki uni ciḳki gwo mo tani bu’th a’di ki bwanj ’kunyu’d mo hila/. Hili uni gwansan idar ga birman mo. Uni gam gwo is mo ari’ceenne/ mo dhali ki mo pu’dki’d jin paluwa pal mo tani uni ŭa’kkin mo be.

14) Dhali gom uni gun biṭkin mo e bwam ma ’de/ mo tani uni ita uni gwansan kun ciḳki gwo mo hili ki uni iikin mo e bway buni mo tani uni koṭha to gun noni ’twa/ mo dhali mo jin tanu pa gi pa mo dhali to kun se ’kwani ki ’pen mo e moŋ’ko, dhali maman buni ’koki is mo be.

15) Dhali gwo gom uni gun ŭa’kkin mo eya ’cesh kun ’bora’bor mo tani uni ita uni gwansan kun ciḳki gwo mo mmodhu uni ki ’bore/ mo ka duŋ gana/ mo dhali ka dum ’borga/ mo dhali uni ki dho’th maman ki mo jin ’kuçu/ bwa mo ki ’kari’th mo be.
APPENDIX G

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP

[After listening to the oral draft of Luke 8:4-15]

1. Please retell the story that you heard.
2. What do the seeds represent?
3. What do the four different kinds of soil represent?
4. What parts of the story were meaningful to you? What about this story touched your heart?
5. Which parts sounded like good, natural Uduk?

[After listening to an audio version of Luke 8:4-15 from the published Uduk NT\(^1\)]

1. Please retell the story that you heard.
2. What do the seeds represent?
3. What do the four different kinds of soil represent?
4. What parts of the story were meaningful to you? What about this story touched your heart?
5. Which parts sounded like good, natural Uduk?
6. In what ways did the stories seem different?
7. Which of these stories would you use in church? Why?
8. Do you think we could use this method to make a good translation of the entire OT?

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APPENDIX H

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW WITH JEFF WILHOIT, BIBLE TRANSLATOR

[Comparison of the back translation of the oral draft to a back translation of the same passage from the published Uduk NT; at first, Jeff did not know which was which]

1. How would you compare the translation quality of these two drafts?

2. What translation issues do you detect in these two drafts?

3. What exegetical weaknesses do you see in these two drafts?

4. What further information do you need to determine the validity of these drafts?

[At this point, I disclosed to Jeff which back translation was which]

5. What improvements would be necessary for this draft to be a valid, clear translation of the Parable of the Seeds?

6. Based on your analysis of these drafts, do you think we could use this method to make a good translation of the entire OT?

7. How do you think we could improve the method we used to make a better quality translation?

8. What further comments or observations do you have?
APPENDIX I

BACK TRANSLATION OF THE ORAL DRAFT OF LUKE 8:4-15

4) The next day, Jesus was telling this story in a parable to the crowd:
5) “The scatterer has scattered the seed. As he scattered the seed, some seed fell in the path, and the birds came and ate it.
6) Some seed fell on the rocky soil, then it grows among the thorns, and it dies because it does not have roots.
7) Other seed fell among the thorns and it grew, and then it got choked.
8) Other seed fell into good soil and produced multiple crops as it was scattered.” As he was speaking this, he called and said to them, “Whoever has an ear, listen to what I say.”
9) And then, his disciples heard this and asked, “What does this parable mean?”
10) And then he replied, “You can understand this parable because I told you this word in a parable. For some people, this parable was hidden so that the Scripture may be fulfilled: As they see, they do not recognize; as they heard, they do not understand.
11) This is the secret of the parable: The parable, it is the word of God.
12) Some seed fell on a long path, and it is about who hears the word. And then, the evil one came and took away from them what they heard. He keeps them from understanding the kingdom of God.
13) Some seed fell on the rocky soil. It is about who heard the word and received it in joy. For a short time, when it is the temptation about the faith, they fell away because they do not have root.
14) Some seed fell among the thorns. It is about who heard the word and then soon they were choked because of the riches of this world, because they have not grown mature.
15) Some seed fell on the good soil. It is about who heard the word, obeys, then clings and multiplies crops in harvest.”
APPENDIX J

BACK TRANSLATION OF LUKE 8:4-15 FROM THE UDUK NT

4) When the crowd arrived from different regions unto him, and he told them about the parable:
5) “The farmer went out and scattered his seed. As he scattered them, some fell on the long path and then they stepped on them, and the birds from the sky ate them.
6) Some seed fell on the rocky soil and it grew, but it did not grow mature because the soil is shallow.
7) Some of them fell among the thorn and, as the thorn grew, they grew together but the thorn covered them.
8) Some seed fell on good soil, and they grew and multiplied crops.” As he said this, he called to them, “Whoever has ears, let him hear this.”
9) As his disciples were asking about the meaning of the parable,
10) Then he said to them, “In you, you are given a parable to understand about the kingdom of God. For some, they were given this parable: ‘As they see, they do not recognize; whoever heard, but do not understand.”
11) Here is the meaning of the parable: some seed is about the word of God.
12) So some seed fell on the path. It is about whoever heard the word, then the evil one came and took away what was sown to them, so that they cannot believe in the word of salvation.
13) Some fell on the rocky soil. It is about who heard the word and received it with joy, but they do not have root, because they believe for a while; so when the temptation about the faith has taken place, they fell away.
14) Some seed fell among the thorn. It is about who heard the word, but they did not grow because of the riches of this world not letting them produce the crops.
15) Some seed fell on the good soil. It is about those who hear the word and keep them in patience and multiply crops what was sown to them.”
BRIEF VITA

Jeremy Harrison was born in Huntsville, Alabama. He graduated from Abilene Christian University in 1999 with a bachelor of arts in Bible. His first role in congregational ministry was serving as the preaching minister for Plainview Church of Christ in Colorado City, Texas from 1997-1999. Jeremy served as the campus minister for University Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas from 1999-2002 while working on a master of divinity, which he completed in 2002. From 2003-2005, Jeremy served campus ministries at the University of Tennessee and Valdosta State University. He moved to Fort Worth in 2005 to serve as the preaching minister for Hilltop Church of Christ. From 2006-2007, Jeremy worked as the director of church relations for Community Enrichment Center in North Richland Hills, Texas. He served as the associate minister for Heritage Church of Christ in Fort Worth from 2008-2012. In 2013, Jeremy joined the staff of Pioneer Bible Translators where he currently serves as a Bible translator. He also serves as an Associate Instructor of New Testament Greek at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics. Jeremy married Holly Willingham in May 2002, and they have two children: Luke and Alyssa. The Harrison family lives in Grand Prairie, Texas.