

Every language has its particular idioms, and these, if literally rendered by the words of a different language, are apt to be quite meaningless. In addition, meanings and usages of particular words vary greatly in different languages.

It is important to remember that in ordinary language no word is a point. Every word actually represents an area. These areas of thought overlap very considerably. Thus the English word "earth" could mean the entire globe or it could be used to indicate a small amount of soil. The Hebrew word *eres* which is translated "earth" hundreds of times, is often used in the sense of country or land, as in "the land of Israel." The English and Hebrew usages are far from identical and a translator often has difficulty in selecting the word that will fit the particular context.

We speak of the Bible as one book, yet we also speak of the second book of Samuel. The word "book" can represent an entire volume or it can indicate a smaller unit.

The word "seal" occurs a number of times in the book of Daniel, as well as elsewhere in the Old Testament. In ancient times every important man had his own seal,² which he affixed to documents or letters to authenticate them³ as actually coming from him, thus corresponding to a modern signature. Even today the word "seal" is sometimes placed at the foot of a legal document to indicate where one should sign. Sometimes, however, the seal attached to a letter had an additional purpose, that of closing it up so that unauthorized persons could not see its contents before it reached the one for whom it was intended.⁴ Occasionally the Bible speaks of sealing up something so that it can no longer be used.⁵ It is often necessary, before understanding a passage in which this word occurs, to determine which of the various ideas is involved.

Context often affects the translation of a word, sometimes more than it should. It is desirable, in translating any word, to avoid bringing in an idea from the particular context, unless it can be clearly shown from its use in other contexts that the included idea is really involved in the particular word.