

Translation of Old Testament Idioms  
compiled by Wayne Leman

This study evaluates whether the English words used to translate Old Testament idioms translate the figurative or literal meanings of those idioms.

A wording is evaluated with "1" if it translates the figurative meaning. It gets a "0" if it does not, even if English has the same idiom.

**PLEASE NOTE: This study does NOT evaluate whether or not the Old Testament idiom SHOULD be translated figuratively or literally.** The answer to that question depends on a variety of factors including how much those using a particular Bible version want to know how a biblical idiom was literally expressed and whether or not they have the resources or training to understand the figurative meanings of idioms which are translated literally.

**ALSO, this study does not evaluate whether a specific translation is accurate.**

I am indebted to my colleague Bob Bascom for sharing his list of Hebrew "heart" idioms with me.

Corrections, different assessments, additions, and other comments are welcome; email: wayne-leman at netzero.com

**This is work in progress.**

Study last updated: May 26, 2007

V E R S I O N S

I D I O M S

KJV NKJV RSV ESV NRSV NASB NJPS Alter REB NIV TNIV NAB NJB HCSB NET ISV NLT TEV CEV NCV GW

Gen. 4:1 know = have sex with



	KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW		
																						0	Adam knew his wife Eve intimately
																						1	the man had marital relations with his wife Eve
																						1	Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve
																						1	Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve
																						1	Adam had intercourse with his wife
																						1	Adam and Eve had a son.
																						1	Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve
																						1	Adam made love to his wife Eve.
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 6:8 in the eyes/sight of the Lord = by the Lord
0																							Gen. 9:11 cut off = destroyed
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 11:4 make name = become famous ("make name for self" is OK)
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 15:15 Go to your fathers = die
																						1	Gen. 17:1 walk before = obey
																						1	Gen. 19:33 lay with = have sex with
																							Gen. 20:5 full heart = clear conscience
0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ge. 22:17 seed = descendants
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 24:60 possess gates = capture cities
KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW			
																							Gen. 24:63 lift up eyes = look upward
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 27:38 lift up voice = loudly
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 27:41 said in his heart = thought / said to self
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 29:1 lift feet = continue journey
																							Gen. 29:2 mouth of the well = opening of the well
																							Gen. 29:17 tender eyes = lovely eyes
																							Gen. 30:3 go in to = have sex with
0		0	1	0	0																		Gen. 30:3 upon knees = surrogate mother for
																							Gen. 30:3 built up = have children
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 30:30 at my feet = wherever I turned
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 31:26 steal heart = deceive
KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW			
																							Gen. 31:35 the way of women = menstruation
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Gen. 32:20 lift up face = accept
																							Gen. 34:26 mouth of the sword = edge of the sword
																							Gen. 37:27 flesh = close relative
0																							Gen. 38:8 seed = seminal fluid
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Gen. 40:13 lift up head = restore to honor
																							Gen. 41:44 lift up hand or foot = take any action

KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW		
0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Gen. 49:11 blood of grapes = wine
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	Ex. 1:5 persons from loins = descendants
0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ex. 3:8 flowing with milk and honey = fertile
																						Ex. 3:19 strong hand = strong force
																						Ex. 4:10 heavy of mouth = slow of speech
																						Ex. 17:13 mouth of sword = edge of sword
																						Ex. 7:23 set heart to = have concern for
0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ex. 12:5 son of a year = yearling
																						Ex. 13:2 open the womb = be born
																						Ex. 14:5 change heart = change mind
																						Ex. 18:24 listen to the voice of = heed
																						Ex. 29:29 for filling the hands = ordained
KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW		
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ex. 32:19 anger burned = very angry
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ex. 34:6 long of anger = slow to get angry
																						Lev. 15:2 discharge from flesh = discharge from penis
																						Lev. 19:17 hate in heart = hold grudge
0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	Lev. 20:18 unwell = menstruating
																						Lev. 25:26 his hand reaches = he prospers
																						Lev. 26:36 faint heart = despair
																						Lev. 26:41 uncircumcised heart = rebellious
																						Lev. 26:41 humble heart = humility
0		0	0											0		1	1	1				Num. 5:22 thigh fall away = womb shrivel (?)
																						Num. 6:25 face shine = smile
0		0	0																			Num. 12:8 mouth to mouth = face to face
1		1	1																			Num. 14:14 eye to eye = face to face
													1									Num. 22:4 lick up = devour
																						Num. 31:26 take up the head = take a count of
KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW		
																						Deut. 2:30 obstinate heart = stubborn
																						Deut. 4:9 depart from heart = forget
																						Deut. 4:39 bring back to heart = remember
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	Deut. 5:6 house of slaves = slavery
																						Deut. 6:6 upon heart = memorize
0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	Deut. 8:14 heart lifted up = proud
																						Deut. 15:7 hard heart = selfish / stubborn
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	Deut. 15:7 close hand = selfish

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0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	Deut. 15:9 word with heart = thought Deut. 15:10 sad heart = sad Deut. 17:17 heart turn aside = change loyalty Deut. 19:6 hot heart = angry Deut. 20:3 weak heart = afraid Deut. 20:8 heart melt = fear Deut. 21:17 beginning of his strength = his firstborn Deut. 22:8 blood on your house = your own fault Deut. 23:13 sit down = defecate
0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	Deut. 28:28 bewildered heart = confused Deut. 29:19 walk in the stubbornness of my heart = live my own stubborn way Deut. 30:6 circumcise heart = make obedient Deut. 34:10 face to face = face to face
0	1	0	0	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Josh. 10:6 drop hand = abandon Josh. 14:7 a word just as with my heart = an honest report Judges 4:24 hand press harder = become stronger Judges 18:10 broad of hands = spacious Judges 18:20 good of heart = happy Judges 19:9 day sink to dark = become evening Judges 19:11 day descend greatly = become very late 1 Sam. 19:5 innocent blood = innocent person
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Sam. 24:3 covered feet = relieve oneself
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Sam. 25:22 one who urinates against a wall = a male 1 Sam. 25:37 heart died = stroke? 1 Sam. 25:38 strike = kill
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	2 Sam. 1:12 house = nation 2 Sam. 1:16 blood on own head = be own fault 2 Sam. 3:1 go strong = become stronger 2 Sam. 14:1 heart be on = think about 2 Sam. 15:6 steal heart = gain loyalty 2 Sam. 15:13 heart be with = loyal to
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	2 Sam. 18:25 good news in mouth = bring good news
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ki. 2:10 lay with his fathers = died
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ki. 8:17 with the heart = desire to do
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	2 Ki. 2:3 sons of the prophets = group of prophets 2 Ki. 3:13 what to me and to you = it's not my concern

KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW	
0																					2 Ki. 8:38 plague of heart = sorrow
0																					2 Ki. 8:58 incline heart = make obedient
0																					2 Ki. 9:32 lift up face = look up
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 n/a	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	2 Ki. 19:26 short of hand = weak
0																					2 Chron. 7:16 eyes and heart = attentiveness
																					2 Chron. 16:9 eyes run to and fro = searches for
																					2 Chron. 19:10 between blood and blood = homicide
																					2 Chron. 36:13 stiffened neck = became stubborn
																					2 Chron. 36:13 hardened heart = refused to obey
																					Josh. 2:19 blood on his head = death be his own fault
0	1	0	0	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Esther 1:14 saw his face = had access to him
0	0	0	0	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Esther 2:21 send a hand against = assassinate
																					Job 1:8 set heart = consider
1																					Job 12:3 have a heart like = know as much as
0																					Job 12:24 remove heart = make foolish
																					Job 19:10 skin of teeth = barely
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	0 Job 31:10 kneel over = have sex with
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	0 Job 33:16 uncovers the ear = informs
0	1	0	0	1	0	1	n/a	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1 Job 35:8 son of man = other humans
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1 Job 38:3 gird up loins = get ready
KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0 Ps. 5:9 throat is an open grave = speak deceitfully
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ps. 6:7 eye is consumed = vision is blurred
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0 Ps. 7:3 iniquity is in hand = guilty
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ps. 7:9 hearts and kidneys = thoughts and emotions
0	1	0	0	1	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ps. 10:5 snort = scoff
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0 Ps. 11:6 cup = destiny
																					Ps. 22:7 separate lip = mock
																					Ps. 22:7 shake head = taunt
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0 Ps. 24:4 clean hands = act right
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0 Ps. 25:1 lift up soul = pray
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0 Ps. 27:8 seek my face = seek me
																					Ps. 32:4 hand heavy on = torment
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0 Ps. 33:18 eye is on = watches over
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 Ps. 41:9 man of my peace = my trusted friend
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0 Ps. 41:9 lift heel against = turn against

	KJV	NKJV	RSV	ESV	NRSV	NASB	NJPS	Alter	REB	NIV	TNIV	NAB	NJB	HCSB	NET	ISV	NLT	TEV	CEV	NCV	GW		
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 62:8 pour out heart = tell all troubles
																							Ps. 72:9 lick the dust = fall on the ground
																							Ps. 73:9 tongue struts through the earth = orders everyone around
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 75:5 lift horn = defy God
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 89:13 right hand = might
	0	0	1	1	1	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 89:22 son of wickedness = wicked person
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	Ps. 90:12 number days = use time wisely
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 94:9 plant = create
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	Ps. 102:2 hide face = ignore
																							Ps. 102:27 years will never end = live forever
																							Ps. 104:15 sustain heart = nourish life
	0		1	0	1	0											1						Ps. 119:32 enlarge heart = increase understanding
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	Ps. 124:3 swallowed alive = killed
	0																						Prov. 9:16 lack heart = lack understanding
	0	0	0	0	1	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Prov. 15:30 fattens the bones = brings good health
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Prov. 17:22 dries bones = drains strength
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Prov. 18:20 fruit of the mouth = what is said
																							Prov. 22:9 good eye = generous
																							Prov. 22:24 master of anger = angry person
																							Prov. 23:2 put knife to throat = curb appetite
																							Prov. 23:2 master of appetite = large appetite
			0																				Prov. 24:12 weigh heart = know thoughts
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	Prov. 24:20 lamp go out = die
																							Prov. 31:6 bitter of soul = anguished
																							Prov. 31:17 makes arms strong = works hard
																							Prov. 31:27 eat bread of idleness = lazy
	0	0	0	0	1	0	n/a	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	Song 2:4 banner is love = loves very much
	1	1	0	0	0	1	n/a	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Song 2:17 until the day breathes = until dawn
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	Song 4:2 bereaved = missing
	0																						Is. 6:5 unclean lips = sinful speech
																							Is. 9:9 greatness of heart = arrogance
																							Is. 13:8 pain will seize = feel pain
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Is. 57:4 open mouth wide = sneer
	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	Is. 60:16 suck the milk of nations = receive the wealth of other countries





