

Lesson 1: Introduction to MAST

Part A

This lesson introduces you to the MAST strategy, explaining what it is and how it fits with Bible translation methodologies of the past. It introduces you to the key elements of the strategy and the steps in the process, which are further explained in subsequent lessons.

What Is MAST?

MAST stands for Mobilized Assistance Supporting Translation. It is a new strategy to serve and support Christians as they work to translate God's Word into their own language by training them to work as a team.

Previously most Bible translations have been done by a very *small* group of bilingual speakers working *sequentially* through scripture, translating over a *long period of time*. In contrast, MAST can engage a *large* number of bilingual speakers working *in parallel* to draft and check scripture in a much *shorter period of time*.

One key aspect of MAST is that the local churches have final authority over all decisions. We are simply servants to assist them.

Seeing the Big Picture

To grasp how MAST fits into God's overall plan, it's important to understand what He's doing in the world. Bible translation is both a sacred responsibility and a precious opportunity. It is a gift of God that He calls us to be part of spreading His truth to the nations.

Bible translation has been taking place for centuries, but we cannot assume that this highest of all callings will be accomplished throughout time by using the same methods and principles. For example, John Wycliffe himself did not use modern methods that are now considered essential for a good translation.

Regardless of methodology, we must understand that Bible translation is God's mission, and so is dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit. We must rely on *God's* power and *His* Spirit to give us wisdom. We are uniquely designed and called by God to be instruments in this process.

Paradigm Shifts in Bible Translation

Over the past several hundred years, there has been a shift in the philosophy and methodology of Bible translation.

The Historical Era

In the early days, individuals translated the Bible into their own languages, led by such pioneers as John Wycliffe in the 14th century and Martin Luther in the 16th century. At first, such

translators experienced resistance and persecution by the established church, who wanted to keep the populace ignorant of what the scriptures actually said and feared that their power would be lessened if people could read the truth of scripture for themselves. In spite of persecution, however, the Bible did get translated into 40 languages, with another 27 having at least some scripture. This period can be referred to as the *historical era* of Bible translation.

After the historical era, Bible translation has progressed through three stages, or paradigms.

Paradigm 1.0

The early 1800's saw a revival of interest in missions, and as part of this movement, Bible societies and other parachurch organizations were established to translate the Bible into the languages of places where missionary activity was taking place. People would spend many years learning a second language and translating scripture into that language. This can be thought of as Paradigm 1.0 of Bible translation.

Unfortunately, in many cases the natives of a locality did not accept the translations to which missionaries had dedicated their lives. They sometimes viewed it as "the white man's Bible," and these translations would sit on a shelf, not being used.

However, by 1982 the entire Bible had been translated into 279 languages, the New Testament into 551 more, and at least some portion of the Bible into 93 additional languages.

Paradigm 2.0

In the 1980's, a push for greater involvement of native speakers began. While translation projects were still directed and funded by outside organizations, the translation itself was done more and more by native speakers. This resulted in wider acceptance of the translations and a reduced time for completing them.

This accelerated rate of translation resulted in the entire Bible being translated into 471 languages, the New Testament into 1233 more, and another 1002 languages receiving at least a portion of scripture by 2011.

Paradigm 3.0

Assisted by advances in technology, especially in the area of mobile devices, the local church has been able to take greater control of Bible translation projects in both initiating and directing them, with assistance from expatriate parachurch organizations such as Wycliffe Associates. This ensures that the translated scriptures get into the hands of the people groups that most desire them, rather than such decisions being made only on the basis of a cost/benefit analysis as has been done in the past.

It should be noted here that the time periods shown for the different paradigms are the periods where a particular paradigm was the predominant pattern for that era, but it does not mean that this pattern ceased to exist after that time. For example, there are still Paradigm 1 Bible translation projects in process, although most new ones being started use Paradigm 2 or 3 as a model.

Comparing Paradigms

When you compare the paradigms, you can see the following trends:

- Mother tongue translators, rather than foreigners, increasingly involved in translation, with parachurch organizations taking a more advisory role
 - Increased role of the national local churches in controlling translation projects
 - A greatly accelerated timeframe
 - More frequent revisions
 - Increased use of digital media
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Other trends are:

- Progression from copyrighted, restricted distribution material to free and unrestricted
 - Inclusion of any languages as determined by the needs of the local churches
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Living in the New Paradigm

The Great Commission, along with John's vision in the book of Revelation, indicates that God wants His Word to reach every people group. However, there are still over 4,000 languages that have no translated Scripture, over 2,000 with only a partial Bible, and another 400-500 Bible translations that are in need of revision.

The new paradigm of local church ownership of and authority over Bible translation promises to exponentially increase the reach of God's Word to the nations. Instead of being dictated by cost and resource availability from an outside organization, decisions about initiating Bible translation projects come from those who best know the needs of the local areas: the local churches. Organizations such as Wycliffe Associates can come alongside and help them at a much lower cost than previously.

There are over 3500 languages that are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people each – 8 million people in all. There are approximately 1800 languages spoken by 10,000 to 100,000 people – 61 million people in all. In Paradigm 2.0, these languages would be a lower priority for Bible translation. Paradigm 3.0 ensures that even languages spoken by a small number of people can receive translation assistance.

Removing Barriers to Translation

The essence of MAST is to remove barriers to translation by changing the translation process. Prior models required expertise in such fields as linguistics, language study, exegetical study, experience, and consultant training. MAST removes those barriers and focuses primarily on language skill (fluency and expression). If humans are able to use their God-given language ability, they are able to draft scripture, edit scripture, and revise scripture in natural ways.

Please proceed to Part B of Lesson 1
