

# A Study of the Translation of Malachi 2:15

Note: JTB refers to the author, James T. Bartsch

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Version	Translation, First Segment
NASB	<p>“But not one has done <i>so</i> who has a remnant of the Spirit.” (Footnote: “Or <i>Did He not make one, although He had the remnant</i>”) [JTB: The editors are stating that, though many Israelis divorced their wives (Mal. 2:14), “But not one person who has a residue of the Holy Spirit has done so.” In other words, there were some noble exceptions.</p> <p>The NASB translators have, correctly, in my opinion, determined that the adjective “one” <i>echad</i> (259) modifies the unstated subject of the sentence, as in “one <i>person</i>.” They have accurately reflected in their translation that the negative particle “not” (<i>lo</i>, which is excluded from Strong’s Lexicon) modifies “one” <i>echad</i> (259). This is precisely the word order that begins the Hebrew text of this verse. These three English words, in Hebrew, are either affixed to one another, as in “Butnot,” or “Andnot,” or are joined together by the Hebrew <a href="#">Maqqef</a>, which serves as a hyphen, as in “Butnot-one,” or “Andnot-one.”</p> <p>The translators have determined that the exceedingly fluid Hebrew verb <i>asah</i> (6213), which appears in its Qal stem, should be translated as “has done so,” rather than “has made.” Both are lexically possible. The context must determine the appropriate translation. The translators have determined that “has done so” is the predicate that completes the initial nominative or subject, “Butnot-one.”</p> <p>Moreover, the editors have determined that the noun <i>shear</i> (7605) should be translated as “remnant.” This is almost universally as the NASB translates it. The editors have determined that <i>ruach</i> (7307), “spirit,” refers to the Holy Spirit. That is a “line call,” for in the Hebrew text “spirit” has no article, “the.” <i>Ruach</i> could as easily refer to the human “spirit” of the person. “Who has” correctly identifies that there is a possessive element attached to the word “spirit.” The Hebrew text reads “spirit to him.” (See the author’s literal translation below.)</p> <p>Notice that the footnote of NASB, in its footnote, offers an alternative, but obviously less preferred, translation. Presumably the text continues, “although He had the remnant of the Spirit.” In this alternate reading, the NASB translators have determined that God possesses the remnant of the Spirit. But what is that supposed to mean? To me, that translation becomes unintelligible. In what possible way can God possess merely a remnant of the Spirit?</p> <p>All of these different grammatical possibilities are what make this perhaps the most difficult verse in all of Malachi to translate into another language. There are so many options.</p>
NKJV	<p>“But did He not make <i>them</i> one, Having a remnant of the Spirit?” [JTB: The NKJV translators, following the lead of the KJV, translated <i>asah</i> (6213) as “make.” But immediately they had to start taking liberties with the remaining text, using the plural 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun “them,” which does not appear in the original. The correct translation is “to him” (3<sup>rd</sup> Masc. Sing.). And immediately another problem develops. Who had a remnant of the Spirit, according to this translation? God? That seems incomprehensible. The couple? How could Adam and Eve be said to have, in their unfallen state, only a remnant of the Spirit?]</p>

NIV 1984	“Has not <i>the LORD</i> made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.” [JTB: Note that the NIV 1984 translates <i>asah</i> (6213) as “has made.” That is legitimate. However, the translators immediately began tinkering with the Hebrew text. “ <i>The LORD</i> ” does not appear in the Hebrew text, and neither does “them.” The pronoun in Hebrew is 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular, not plural. Moreover, the translators rendered <i>shear</i> (7605) as “flesh,” while the 2011 version translates it as “body.” But the Hebrew word translated “flesh” (1984) and “body” (2011) is <i>shear</i> (7605), which is almost universally translated as “remnant” in NASB.]
NIV 2011	“Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit.” [JTB: Like the 1984 version, the 2011 version translates <i>asah</i> (6213) as “has made.” But note the dramatic changes in translation from the NIV 1984 to the 2011 version. The name “God” does not appear in the Hebrew text. The translators have changed the adjective “one” <i>echad</i> (259) from a modifier in the predicate to a modifier of a presumed subject, God. The plural 2 <sup>nd</sup> person pronoun “you” does not appear in the Hebrew text. The translators have employed it incorrectly, not only once, but twice! Here, the translators have rendered <i>shear</i> (7605) as “body,” a dubious translation.]
ESV	“Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?” [JTB: The editors have determined that <i>asah</i> (6213) should be translated as “make ... one,” as opposed to “did” or “has done.” That is lexically permissible. However, immediately, the editors supplied a non-existent 3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural preposition, “them.” They followed it up with an unwarranted “in their union?” – a translation that is more of a paraphrase than a translation. The words do not appear in the Hebrew text. The ESV is normally a literal translation, and the efforts here are, in my view, disappointing.]
NetBible	“No one who has even a small portion of the Spirit in him does this.” (NetBible Footnote: The Hebrew reads, “and not one has done, and a remnant of the spirit to him.” The very elliptical nature of the statement suggests it is proverbial. The present translation represents an attempt to clarify the meaning of the statement (cf. NASB).”) [JTB: The editors of NetBible are attempting to reflect accurately the word order and the sense of the Hebrew text, in my opinion. I agree with their translation and footnote.]
JTB Literal	“And not one did and remnant of Spirit to him.” Or, perhaps, “And not one did and remnant of spirit to him.”
JTB Comments	In Hebrew, the words “Not” and “one” appear at the beginning of the sentence. They are inseparably linked by the Hebrew <i>Maqqef</i> , which functions much as a hyphen in English. Therefore “Not one” functions as the subject of the Hebrew sentence, not as some sort of predicate – “Did He not make them one?” The translations of NASB and NetBible best explain the first two lines. Mal. 2:14 states that many Israelis had dealt treacherously with the wives of their youth. Mal. 2:15 immediately counters, “But not one person who had the remnant of the Spirit had done so.” If one takes the NKJV rendering, the first part, “But did He not make <i>them</i> one?” must supply the pronoun “them,” which does not appear in the original. Furthermore, the subsequent line, “Having a remnant of the Spirit” becomes almost non-sensical. Who had a remnant of the Spirit? God? That is almost implied, but what sense does that make? If it is the man “the Hebrew text says “to him,” how could his having been made one with an unidentified female in any sense be consistent with having a remnant of the Spirit. The NIV 1984 and 2011 and ESV translations all encounter similar problems. Again, the NASB and NetBible translations conform most closely to the original and make the most sense.

	Translation, Second Segment
NASB	<p>“And what did <i>that</i> one <i>do</i> while he was seeking a godly offspring?” [JTB: The NASB correctly accounts for the fact that the second occurrence of “one,” <i>echad</i> (259), appears with the article “the” prefixed. The translation acknowledges the word “that” does not appear in the text (so “that” appears in italics). But it correctly acknowledges the existence of the article “the” before “one.” In other words, in the first part of Mal. 2:15, Malachi was making a more general reference – as in “And not one did so who had a remnant of the Spirit...” But in the second part of this verse, the author is singling out a particular, unnamed person, “the one”. Who is that one person? The Hebrew text does not identify him. Some translations supply “God” as “the one.” The NASB correctly leaves to the exegete to explain who “the one” is. This translation also acknowledges that the word “do” does not appear in the Hebrew text, which, frankly, is very elliptical. The editors have included it with italics. “While he was seeking” correctly accounts for the fact that <i>baqásh</i> (1245) appears as a <u>Piel</u> Participle. The editors have not capitalized “he,” indicating that it is a human in view here, not God Himself. “Godly offspring” interprets the more literal, “seed from God.”]</p>
NKJV	<p>“And why one? He seeks Godly offspring.” [JTB: The translators have already (incorrectly, in my opinion) decided that the previous occurrence of “one” refers to the marriage union – “one flesh.” So they are forced to continue with that interpretation. What they mean here is, “And why (did God make them) one (flesh)?” This interpretation [incorrectly, I believe] makes “one” part of the predicate instead of the subject. The words, “And why one?” ignore the fact that in Hebrew, there is an article prefixed to the word “one,” as in “the one.” A more accurate translation here would read, “And why the one?” Of course that would destroy the view of the NKJV translators that “one” is referring to “one flesh.” It is not. It is referring to a particular person. This whole discussion, in my opinion, further invalidates the NKJV line of thought. The editors have capitalized “He,” which leads one to believe that it was God who was seeking offspring. But that is by no means clear. A literal rendering is, “while he was seeking seed from God.” So in my opinion, the NKJV translation continues to fall short on a number of counts.]</p>
NIV 1984	<p>“And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.” [JTB: Almost every criticism that could be directed against the NKJV can be directed against the NIV 1984. The lone difference is does not identify God as the unnamed person who is seeking a godly offspring. In that regard, I believe the NIV 1984 is correct.]</p>
NIV 2011	<p>“And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring.” [JTB: The NIV 2011, the reader will observe, has dramatically altered its 1984 translation of the Hebrew text. The editors are correct, I believe in making “one” a part of the subject instead of the predicate. However they have inserted the name “God” (as in “the one God seek?”) into the translation. The name “God” does not appear in the Hebrew text. Furthermore the translation does not reflect that seek is a participle, not a straightforward verb. I believe “the one” who is seeking is a human being, not God.]</p>
ESV	<p>“And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.” [JTB: For all practical purposes, the critique that is levied against the NIV 2011 can be assessed to the ESV.</p>

NetBible	“What did our ancestor do when seeking a child from God?” [JTB: The NetBible editors have taken some liberties with the text by inserting “our ancestor” into their translation. It does not appear in the text. In that regard “our ancestor” is more of a paraphrase / commentary than a translation. That having been said, I think the editors are on the right track as far as Malachi’s sense is concerned. “Our ancestor” translates “the one;” “when seeking” acknowledges the fact that <i>baqásh</i> (1245) appears as a <a href="#">Piel</a> Participle. Malachi assumed his readers would know about whom he was speaking. For us living today, it is more of a guess.]
JTB Literal	“And what did the one do when seeking seed from God?”
JTB Comments	Following the lead of Keil and Delitzsch, I conclude that it seems Malachi brought forward a particular person, “the one,” who had put away a wife. Presumably that well-known person was Abraham. The writer seems to be acknowledging that there is a particular person who appears to violate his previous statement that not one person who had a remnant of the Spirit divorced his wife. That particular person would probably be Abraham, who divorced his wife, Hagar. So Malachi has to explain the reason behind this notable exception by a very godly, spiritual person, Abraham. Malachi is contending that Abraham was justified in putting Hagar away in obedience to the instruction of God, because he was seeking a seed from God – in other words, Isaac. Here, the translations of NIV 2011 and ESV, “the one God,” seem completely out of place – supplying the word “God” where it does not exist.
<b>Translation, Third Segment</b>	
NASB	“Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.”
NKJV	“Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.”
NIV 1984	“So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”
NIV 2011	“So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.”
ESV	“So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.”
NetBible	“Be attentive, then, to your own spirit, for one should not be disloyal to the wife he took in his youth.”
JTB Literal	“So be warned in your spirit; and to the wife of your youth, do not act treacherously.”
JTB Comments	Essentially all translations say approximately the same thing. The most accurate translations are NASB, NIV 1984, ESV, JTB Literal. A couple of them (NKJV, NetBible) mistranslate “your (2 <sup>nd</sup> person) youth” as “his (3 <sup>rd</sup> person) youth.”

	<b>Conclusion</b>
JTB Comments	The NASB seems to be the most accurate translation of a very difficult verse. It is the most defensible, because it most accurately follows a literal translation of the Hebrew text.