

Toward Translating “Evangelize” as “Evangelize”: An Analysis of the Holman Christian Standard Bible

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The translation, layout, and printing of Bibles have been greatly assisted by advances in computer technology. Numerous Bible versions are available in software format; research texts on the original languages are readily available; word processing makes incorporating changes more simple; email allows persons from across the world to share files quickly; and disk-to-printer technology is revolutionizing the print-on-demand industry. These simplifications may play an important role in the sudden surge of new Bible translations. Yet, in all these translations the translation of one word remains elusive, *viz.* the translating of “evangelize” (εὐαγγελίζω) as “evangelize.”

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (CSB), however, has broken new ground. One of the positive innovations incorporated into the text of the CSB regards the translation of the verb εὐαγγελίζω. The CSB is the first English translation of the Bible since Wycliffe’s first edition of 1382 to translate the verb εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize.” I will cite the six examples:

Then, after they had testified and spoken the message of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, evangelizing the many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25, CSB).

Philip appeared in Azotus, and passing through, he was evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40, CSB).

And they kept evangelizing (Acts 14:7, CSB).

After they had evangelized that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch (Acts 14:21, CSB).

After he had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelize them (Acts 16:10, CSB).

So my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not be building on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:20, CSB).

I was quite excited to read this translation of these verses. No other Bible in the English language translates *any* of the 54 uses of εὐαγγελίζω in the New Testament as “evangelize.” The NET Bible, the English Standard Version, the NASB (1995), the NIV, etc. do not translate εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” anywhere. If the translators of the CSB were to consider translating this one verb literally (in most of the 54 uses), it would truly differentiate it from every other English translation in existence since Wycliffe's first edition of 1382. I find this to be incredible.

Please allow me to briefly share how I came to this discovery. Back in 1988, I became aware of David Barrett's *Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept*, published by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. In reading this text, I came across the following words regarding the origin of the word “evangelize” in English:

In 1382 in England, John Wycliffe completed the first translation of the whole Bible in the English language, using the Latin Vulgate. In the earlier of his 2 extant versions, Wycliffe translated almost all usages of the Latin *evangelizare* (and hence of the Greek *euangelisein*) into the new English word ‘euangelisen’ (in some orthographies ‘evangelisen’). Here are some instances, in the actual spelling used in the 1382 version:

Isaiah 40:9, ‘Thou that euangelisist to Sion’

Luke 1:19, ‘I am sent to thee for to speke, and to euangelise or telle to thee thes thingis.’

Luke 8:1, ‘Forsoth ech day thei ceesiden not in the temple, and aboute houses, techinge and euangelisynghe Jhesu Crist.’

Acts 8:4, ‘euangelisynghe the word of God’

Acts 14:20, ‘And whanne thei hadden euangelysid to the ilke cite, and taught manye, tehi turneden again to Listris.’

Acts 15:35, ‘teachinge and euangelysinge the word of the Lord’

In this *Holy Bible*, Wycliffe employed as English words ‘euangelie’ (gospel), ‘euangelisen’ (to evangelize), ‘euangeliseris’ (preachers), ‘euangelisist’, ‘euangeliside’ (Luke 3:18), ‘euangelizinge’ (Nahum 1:15), ‘euangelysinge’ (Luke 8:1), and variants. He employed the verb ‘euangelisen’ in the intransitive (without an object) and the transitive, and so the exact modern equivalent of his ‘euangelisen,’ as we can see from his Acts 5:42 and 8:4 above, is ‘evangelize concerning’ A to B, where A equals the subject matter (Jesus Christ, the word of God), and B equals the recipient (Sion, the city, the Jews, etc.). Wycliffe did not use any transliteration of the nouns *euangelismos* or *euangelisatio*.

The second version of Wycliffe’s Bible, a revision of his earlier work that was produced by his followers shortly after his death, contained a drastic change. It replaced all of these English words commencing ‘euangel-’ by, in most cases, ‘preching,’ and sometimes by synonyms like ‘schewinge the Lord Jhesu.’¹

The sad tale of the changes made after the death of Wycliffe had a dramatic effect upon *all* English Bible translations up to the CSB. Barrett continued,

This replacement continued throughout the subsequent early translations of the Bible. When in 1525 Tyndale produced the first printed New Testament in English, he retained ‘preach’ instead of ‘euangelisen,’ and this usage has been perpetuated in all subsequent Bible translations up to the present day.²

While quite a number of English Bible translations have come out since 1987, none of them have addressed the proper translation of the word εὐαγγελίζω, with the exception of the CSB. In fact, the only other Bibles that I have found that transliterated εὐαγγελίζω are the French J. N. Darby (c. 1840, at least three uses), Louis Segond, Révisée (1910), Segond Révisée, Génève (1975), and the Segond Révisée, la Colombe (1978). These French Bibles transliterate εὐαγγελίζω in Acts 8:40 and sometimes in Acts 8:25. Several Spanish and Portuguese versions also transliterate εὐαγγελίζω in Acts 8:25 and 40.

The Greek New Testament, however, contains 54 uses of εὐαγγελίζω (“evangelize”) and, by way of comparison, 61 uses of κηρῦσσω (“preach”). In current practice these are both translated synonymously as “preaching.” The English reader is not able to make a contextual analysis of the intended meaning of the term—as he always reads 115 uses of the word “preach.” It must be noted that a seminary class on “preaching” and one on “evangelism” cover very little similar material.

My burden is that it might be possible to consider translating most or all of the 54 occurrences of εὐαγγελίζω as some form of “evangelize.” My thinking is that the actual words of a Bible translation feed our souls (cf. Deut 32:46-47), and that the use of “evangelize” may well fuel a movement of New Testament evangelism within our churches. The remainder of this article will seek to show you (1) how this will greatly improve the understanding of the text; (2) four arguments against translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize”; (3) how it corresponds with the

¹ David B. Barrett, *Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, © Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1987), 22.

² *Ibid.*

Southern Baptist Great Commission hermeneutic; and (4) how it may benefit the translation.

Let me begin by giving an overview of the New Testament's 54 uses of εὐαγγελίζω. Usage of εὐαγγελίζω by book is as follows (parentheses indicate times used): Matthew (1); Luke (10); Acts (15); Romans (3); 1 Corinthians (6); 2 Corinthians (2); Galatians (7); Ephesians (2); 1 Thessalonians (1); Hebrews (2); 1 Peter (3); Revelation (2). Usage of εὐαγγελίζω is splattered throughout Luke-Acts (25), the Pauline Epistles (21), as well as in other books of the New Testament. When one begins to examine the particular uses, patterns emerge. For example, in Luke, first the angels evangelize (1:19 and 2:10); John the Baptist evangelizes (3:18); Jesus evangelizes (4:43, 8:1, and 20:1); and then the twelve disciples evangelize (9:6). Also, the evangelizing of Jesus is a fulfillment of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61 (Matt 11:5; Luke 7:22).

Following are five of the ten uses of εὐαγγελίζω in Luke following the translation style used in the CSB:

Then, along with many other exhortations, he (John the Baptist) evangelized the people (Luke 3:18).

But he (Jesus) said to them, "I must evangelize the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).

Soon afterwards He (Jesus) was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1).

So they went out and traveled from village to village, evangelizing and healing everywhere (Luke 9:6).

One day as He was teaching the people in the Temple complex and evangelizing, the chief priests and the scribes, with the elders, came up (Luke 20:1).

In the book of Acts, there are two concentrations of the word εὐαγγελίζω, four uses in Acts 8 and three uses in Acts 14. In Acts 8, the chapter that exemplifies the ministry of Philip, the only named evangelist in the Bible (cf. Acts 21:8), one use is ascribed to those who are scattered (8:4), three to Philip (8:12, 8:35, and 8:40), and one to Peter and John (8:25). Acts 8:12 provides an excellent example of evangelizing a city, and 8:35 is an example of personal evangelism. In Acts 14 we find three uses of εὐαγγελίζω: Paul and Barnabas evangelize (14:7); it is used in Paul's preaching (14:15); and again Paul and Barnabas evangelize and make disciples (14:21).

Following are ten of the fifteen uses in the book of Acts (five are already translated "evangelize" in the CSB):

Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes, they continued teaching and evangelizing that the Messiah is Jesus (Acts 5:42).

So those who were scattered went on their way evangelizing the message (Acts 8:4).

But when they believed Philip, as he evangelized the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).

Then, when they (Peter and John) had testified and spoken the message of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25, as in CSB).

So Philip proceeded to evangelize him about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture (Acts 8:35).

Philip appeared in Azotus, and passing through, he was evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40, as in CSB).

But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking and to the Hellenists, evangelizing the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:20).

And there they (Paul and Barnabas) kept evangelizing (Acts 14:7, as in CSB).

After they (Paul and Barnabas) had evangelized that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch (Acts 14:21, as in CSB).

But Paul and Barnabas along with many others, remained in Antioch, teaching and evangelizing the message of the Lord (Acts 15:35).

After he (Paul) had seen the vision, we immediately made efforts to set out for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to evangelize them (Acts 16:10, as in CSB).

As exciting as translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” in the Gospels and the Book of Acts is the prospect of translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” in the other books of the New Testament. A professor once told me that while the Gospels and the book of Acts speak of the Great Commission, the epistles do not speak of the Great Commission. Rather he felt that the epistles deal *only* with discipleship. How wrong he was and is! Perhaps he fell prey to past English resistance to translate the 21 uses of εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” in the epistles.

Following are 14 of the 21 uses of εὐαγγελίζω in the Pauline Epistles (by the way, the Pauline Epistles contain only 19 uses of κηρύσσω, “preach”; εὐαγγελίζω does not appear in the Pastorals).

So I am eager to evangelize you also who are in Rome (Rom 1:15).

So my aim is to evangelize where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not be building on someone else's foundation (Rom 15:20, as in CSB).

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to evangelize—not with clever words, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its effect (1 Cor 1:17).

For if I evangelize, I have no reason to boast, because an obligation is placed on me. And woe to me if I do not evangelize (1 Cor 9:16)!

Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel by which I evangelized you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message by which you were evangelized—unless you believed to no purpose (1 Cor 15:1-2).

So that we may evangelize regions beyond you, not boasting about what has already been done in someone else's area of ministry (2 Cor 10:16).

But even if we or an angel from heaven should evangelize you other than how we evangelized you, a curse be on him! As we said before, I now say again: if anyone evangelizes you contrary to what you received, a curse be on him (Gal 1:8-9)!

Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel which I evangelize is not based on a human point of view (Gal 1:11).

They simply kept hearing: “He who formerly persecuted us now evangelizes the faith he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23).

This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints!—to evangelize to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of the Messiah (Eph 3:8).

While time and space do not permit me to translate each of the 54 verses with the term εὐαγγελίζω, it is hoped that these examples will give a taste of the power of this word in context. Another example of εὐαγγελίζω in the epistles is pertinent: “. . . but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word by which you were evangelized” (1 Pet 1:25).

Seemingly, four arguments are usually offered against translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize”: (1) possible confusion of what “evangelize” means; (2) illegitimate differentiation between evangelizing and preaching; (3) synonymous usage of εὐαγγελίζω and κηρῦσσω; and (4) Septuagintal use of εὐαγγελίζω. As for the first consideration, the aim of translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” in context is to clear

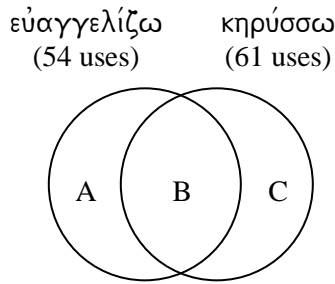


Fig 1. Possible Semantic Ranges of εὐαγγελίζω and κηρύσσω

up this confusion. Most scholars of missions and evangelism are aware of the pluriform definitions of either “mission,” “missions,” “evangelism,” or “evangelize.”³ Seeing “evangelize” in its biblical context may help eliminate this confusion. Readers of the English Bible could differentiate when and how “evangelize” is used in its own context.⁴

Secondly, if εὐαγγελίζω is translated as “evangelize,” some may be confused that “evangelize” is something different than preaching the gospel. Precisely. The English verb “preaching” carries the connotation of a formal homiletical setting. Figure 1 seeks to illustrate the issues involved. Three separate semantic alternatives are considered in Figure 1: (A) where εὐαγγελίζω has a unique meaning; (B) where εὐαγγελίζω and κηρύσσω overlap in meaning; and (C) where κηρύσσω has a unique meaning. The semantic range of the English “preach the gospel” for εὐαγγελίζω limits its 54 uses to semantic range “B” in the above figure. Similarly, there are examples where κηρύσσω is not used uniquely for the concept εὐαγγελίζω, but since εὐαγγελίζω is always translated something like “preach the gospel,” its meaning becomes blurred with meaning “C.” “B” and “C” are always read synonymously by English readers (115 times), without any possibility of ever reading meaning “A” for εὐαγγελίζω (perhaps implying open-air, street, or door-to-door evangelism). However, my class in evangelism is quite different than most seminary classes on preaching. In fact, they are often in different academic departments and they are considered different academic disciplines. Thus if εὐαγγελίζω is translated “evangelize,” the

³ David Bosch expressed this view: “Instead of trying to formulate one uniform view of mission we should rather attempt to chart the contours of ‘a pluriverse of missiology in a universe of mission’” (*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991], 8; Bosch quoted G. M. Soares-Prabhu, S. J., “Missiology or Missiologies?” *Mission Studies* 6 [May 1969], 87).

⁴ For example, David Bosch wrote, “Evangelism is not proselytism” (*Transforming Mission*, 414).

61 uses of κηρύσσω in the New Testament could be differentiated from the 54 uses of εὐαγγελίζω. Rather, in the current situation in English (up to CSB), the obvious difference has been blurred.

The distinction of κηρύσσω from εὐαγγελίζω provides at least two potential positive hermeneutical results. First, the audience for εὐαγγελίζω seems to be lost people. Κηρύσσω, however, focuses on the saved (cf. 2 Tim 4:2), as well as on the lost (cf. Mark 16:15). Recognizing this distinction in context will allow readers of the English to deepen their understanding of each. Secondly, whereas women are not to preach or even speak in the church meeting (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35), this prohibition may not relate to their involvement in evangelizing lost people outside of the church. The proper translation of εὐαγγελίζω may prove a real biblical encouragement to evangelism among women.

Thirdly, another argument against translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” is that Paul used this term synonymously with “preach the gospel” (κηρύσσω τὸν εὐαγγέλιον). For example, Paul’s use of εὐαγγελίζω in Galatians 1:8 parallels his construction in Galatians 2:2, which uses the verb κηρύσσω. Thus, synonymous usage and certain freedom in translation guide the scholar to verbatim translate every use of εὐαγγελίζω as “preach the gospel”—for which there is a clear Greek equivalent (κηρύσσω τὸν εὐαγγέλιον). This argument is weak since there is great usage of synonymous terminology throughout the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament book of Acts. If all synonyms were translated similarly, just because they were synonyms, the result would be a simplified and vanilla Bible, much like Chairman Mao’s simplified Chinese.

Fourthly, does not the Septuagintal usage of εὐαγγελίζω prove that it does not have the technical meaning that is implied by the English word “evangelize?” Approximately twenty usages of εὐαγγελίζω are in the Septuagint. While this fact argues for a certain semantic range for the term, it also proves that the New Testament borrowed a term already in use (which is common for every word in the New Testament), and that the Old Testament term has a different hermeneutical nuance than the New Testament term. This difference is to be expected due to biblical theology. Old Testament terms normally have a different nuance than their New Testament counterparts. In actuality, some of the Septuagintal uses of εὐαγγελίζω could very well be translated “evangelize” in the English Bible, such as Psalm 40:9 and 68:11, as well as Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; and 61:1. This translation would match with the efforts of the Pharisees in the work of conversion (cf. Matt 23:15).

Therefore, it is clear that the arguments for not translating εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize,” while they have certain validity, do not conclusively prove that it would be a misrepresentation of the original

text. In fact, if David Barrett is correct in his analysis of the term, the English word “evangelize” was coined by Wycliffe for the very purpose of providing an English word to translate the Latin *evangelizare*, which was a transliteration of the Greek εὐαγγελίζω. In fact, as noted in English translations, the historical context of Wycliffe within the Anglo-Catholic Church did not find the Wycliffite concept of evangelization (the street preaching of the Lollards) positive for Christianity.⁵

Charles S. Kelley, Jr., in his book, *How Did They Do It? The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism*, titled his first chapter on theological distinctives of Southern Baptists, “A Great Commission Hermeneutic.” In this chapter, Kelley quoted a 1918 resolution of the Southern Baptist Convention:

We must not forget that the main and primary task of all of our agencies, preachers, churches, Sunday schools, denominational schools, Seminaries, Boards and all is [to] press a saving gospel to the hearts of men in heaven’s power. We must remember that primarily we are fighting a battle for freedom to win men to Christ. The winning of the war is a means to the greater end of winning the whole world to Jesus Christ.⁶

Kelley continued by noting that the Great Commission hermeneutic permeated and must permeate every agency of the SBC. The translation of εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize” is another step in this direction. It will assist members of Southern Baptist churches to correctly identify and interpret εὐαγγελίζω in its context, and give opportunity for the work of

⁵ For example, Thomas More explained his preference for apologetic education to proclamational evangelism in his *Utopia*: “By degrees all the Utopians are coming to forsake their own superstitions and to agree upon this one religion that seems to excel the others in reason We told them of the name, doctrine, manner of life, and miracles of Christ, and of the wonderful constancy of the many who willingly sacrificed their blood in order to bring so many nations far and wide to Christianity Whatever the reason, many came over to our religion and were baptized Those among them that have not yet accepted the Christian religion do not restrain others from it or abuse the converts to it. While I was there, only one man among the Christians was punished. This newly baptized convert, in spite of all our advice, was preaching in public on the Christian worship more zealously than wisely. He grew so heated that he not only put our worship before all others, but condemned all other rites as profane and loudly denounced their celebrants as wicked and impious men fit for hell fire. After he had been preaching these things for a long time, they seized him. They convicted him not on a charge of disparaging their religion, but of arousing public disorder among the people, and sentenced him to exile” (Thomas More, *Utopia* [1516; Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing, 1949], 70-71).

⁶ Charles S. Kelley, Jr. *How Did They Do It? The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 1993), 128.

evangelism to have its rightful place in the church. Not only would the use of “evangelize” unearth this buried concept to the English audience, and fit a Great Commission hermeneutic, it would also make the CSB unique since Wycliffe’s 1382 edition of the English Bible.

Following is a summary list of the potential benefits of translating the word εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize”:

Benefit the CSB from the findings of Barrett.

Allow a biblical perspective on the relationship of evangelizing and discipling.⁷

Provide an English distinction between κηρύσσω τὸν εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω.

Encourage women to evangelize with all boldness.

Allow students of the English Bible to study New Testament evangelism in its context, within a Great Commission hermeneutic.

Correspond with a belief in verbal inspiration and biblical inerrancy.

Dovetail with the F.A.I.T.H. evangelism program.

As God’s spiritual seed, encourage a groundswell of New Testament evangelism and keep the Great Commission in its rightful place in the church.

Allow God the Father to “send out (more) laborers into his harvest.”

Prayerfully lead to the harvest of thousands and tens of thousands of souls through Christians humbly obeying God’s word as revealed through His use of εὐαγγελίζω in the New Testament.

Make the CSB completely unique from *every* other English translation since Wycliffe’s 1382 translation.

For these reasons, it may be advantageous for the CSB and subsequent English translations of the Bible to consider translating most or all of the 54 New Testament uses of εὐαγγελίζω as “evangelize.”

⁷ Bailey Smith addressed this distinction and the problems of overemphasizing discipleship in his chapter, “The Dangers of Deceptive Discipleship” (*Real Evangelism* [Nashville: Broadman, 1978], 11-28).