



READINGS FOR THE ASSEMBLY (EMENDED), 2022–2025

PRINCIPLES FOR EMENDATION

The 2002 ELCA document entitled *Principles for Worship*, “Language and the Christian Assembly,” declares, “In worship, the biblical readings are proclaimed using a translation that is faithful to the original, appropriate to the assembly, and suitable for public reading” (Application L-7G). These principles supported many congregations in their choice of the 1989 New Revised Standard Version of the Bible for public liturgical reading.

One goal of the NRSV translation was to eliminate so-called generic speech, that is, male language that was thought to include all people, as far as that elimination could be carried out without misrepresenting the historic androcentrism of biblical cultures. As stated in “Language and the Christian Assembly,” “Translation from one language to another always involves some degree of interpretation and cultural adaptation” (Background L-7F), and “some churches are working to expand the language of worship beyond predominantly masculine words and images” (Background L-8F). In the decades since the publication of the NRSV, many Christians have moved to reduce masculine designations and pronouns for humans that occur in biblical Hebrew and Greek. Furthermore, judging that in our time such use of inclusive language is necessary for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be understood in our cultural moment, there has also been a move to reduce or eliminate masculine language for God that occurs in biblical Hebrew and Greek.

Thus “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action,” the ELCA social statement adopted in 2019, encourages the use of worship resources that are characterized by inclusive language both for humans and for God, including in the proclamation of scripture in the assembly (par 27). Many hymn texts in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006) were retranslated from the original language to accord with inclusive speech and to avoid multiple masculine references to God. One example of this endeavor is the liturgical version of the psalms as included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, that while based on the historic translation crafted by Miles Coverdale in the sixteenth century, carefully eliminates all masculine pronouns for God, using a variety of strategies to do so (see *Principles for Worship*, Application L-8G). An earlier example of this endeavor is *Readings for the Assembly*, based on the NRSV and published in three volumes (1995–1997), which aims to apply principles similar to those present in that Psalter to the whole lectionary.

In December 2021, an updated edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue), was released by Friendship Press. The purpose of this updating was to make use of the current scholarly consensus concerning the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and to register recent changes in the English language. During 2022–2025, an emended version of *Readings for the Assembly* is available for temporary use via a subscription to SundaysAndSeasons.com. This version introduces the new renderings in the NRSVue throughout all the lectionary texts that are appointed in the Revised Common Lectionary. *Readings for the Assembly (Emended)* continues the search for maintaining accurate biblical translation while attending

to contemporary patterns of inclusive speech as proclaimed during assembly worship. Thus, attention has been paid to euphony as well as to linguistics, to how the text is heard in worship. Language for humans is approached with current gender concerns, and language for God in accord with orthodox Christian understanding, which since the earliest Christian theology has affirmed a God who is not sexually a male, regardless of ancient androcentrism. *Readings for the Assembly (Emended)* is a liturgical translation intended for use in worship, rather than as a text for historical biblical study.

None of these emendations has been made mechanically. In each case, the context, the original meaning of the biblical language, euphony, and the Christian intention in assembly worship has been considered, with various nuanced solutions sought. Here are listed the usual principles of translation guiding *Readings for the Assembly (Emended)*:

- ▶ Gendered pronouns referring to God are eliminated. A variety of techniques is employed: for example, participial constructions have been introduced, nouns appropriate to the context supplied, or sentences cast in the passive voice. “They” has not been used to refer to God, since it easily suggests polytheism. In biblical constructions that employ the divine reflexive of “God himself,” the phrase “that very God” may occur.
- ▶ The dual rendering of LORD as the translation of YHWH and Lord as the translation of *Adonai* and *Kyrios* has been retained. These words are deeply embedded in Christian prayer and custom, while, being taught by the Bible itself, Christians know that God is not a “lord” in any conventional sense. The retention of LORD and Lord means to accord with the classic Christian doctrine that the titles for God came to be applied also to Jesus. “Yahweh,” a name for God that devout Jews consider too holy to pronounce, has not been used.
- ▶ Father and Son language has been retained for trinitarian titles. When “father” appears in apposition to “God,” commas are inserted to distance the word God from the title Father. Jesus’ calling God Father in the gospels has been retained.
- ▶ When “king” refers to God, it has often been translated “sovereign” or “ruler,” given that “king” is a masculine title and, in the United States, seldom is heard as a title of honor. “God’s kingdom” often becomes “God’s dominion” or “reign.”
- ▶ Masculine pronouns for Jesus have been reduced, but not eliminated. For clarity in aural understanding, often the name Jesus replaces “he.” Following the classical christological understanding, little distinction has been made between Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ.
- ▶ In passages from the Hebrew Scriptures which speak of the davidic messiah, originally cast in the masculine and interpreted by Christians as signaling Christ, masculine references have been similarly reduced, but not wholly eliminated.

- ▶ The title “Son-of-Man” is printed with hyphens included, to make clear at least to the reader that this phrase conveys a single idea, representing what was originally a single Aramaic word, *barnasha*, a word used both for a late Jewish apocalyptic figure and as a polite way for a man to say “I.”
- ▶ In sustained conceits, as in the Wisdom or the city of Jerusalem poems in which the virtue of wisdom or the human city has been cast as a female, the gender imagery is sometimes retained but minimized.
- ▶ To avoid the dominance of gender binaries such as “brothers and sisters,” the Greek *adelphoi* is sometimes rendered as “dear family,” “kin,” “the community,” or “siblings.”
- ▶ Emendations reduce the occurrences in which the biblical text assumes occupational titles or human designations to be masculine. A “watchman” becomes a “sentry,” a “forefather” becomes an “ancestor.” Sometimes, as in common American English, the sentence has been recast from masculine singular to the inclusive plural. “Men” has been added to ethnic references to “the circumcised.”
- ▶ Many biblical passages alternate between second person (you) and third person singular (he). Some such passages have been rendered with a more contemporary consistency, using either the second person or the third person plural throughout, thus reducing the use of the masculine third person singular.
- ▶ In narrative and parable, no attempt has been made to generalize the gender of specific persons or to include persons of another gender in a desire for balance. Christian teaching holds that Ruth and Mary Magdalene, David and Peter, the importunate widow and the son of the widow of Nain each stand for us all.
- ▶ Constructions such as “the blind,” when occurring in narrative, are rendered “blind persons” or “those who are blind,” but may be retained in poetic metaphors.
- ▶ Care is taken that the word “black” not function as a negative description.
- ▶ In order to avoid the misperception that especially the passion narratives are anti-Semitic, the persons referred to by the biblical word *loudaioi*, commonly translated as “the Jews,” are often rendered as “the Judeans.” In some places, an appropriate identification such as “the temple authorities” is provided.
- ▶ When personal names such as Jacob or Israel are used as collective nouns, they are dealt with as plurals. Sometimes proper names replace pronoun reference in narratives in order both to reduce the use of “he” and to assist the listener in following the story.

- ▶ Supernatural beings, such as angels, demons, and Satan, have been rendered as asexual beings. “Gods,” since there are also goddesses, may be rendered as “deities.”
- ▶ In the case of an extremely familiar passage that the NRSVue renders in a novel way, *Readings for the Assembly (Emended)* has on rare occasion altered the syntax so that the emendation does not sound like a mistake, or has offered a different translation. For example, the NRSVue text of Luke 2:7, “and laid him in a manger because there was no place in the guest room,” is instead rendered as “and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the lodgings.”

It is hoped that *Readings for the Assembly (Emended)* will be received as a conservative emendation for trial use, careful with biblical meaning, disciplined to liturgical intention and to theologically grounded inclusive language, and created for ecumenical Christian use. The goal is not to rewrite the biblical texts, but rather to make it possible for us to hear them more clearly, in all their admonition, grace, and surprise. May this lectionary assist worshipping assemblies in the proclamation of the word and the preaching of the holy gospel.

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