

Frequently Asked Questions About New Testament Names (NTN)

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1. General

1.1. Some relationship information (children, spouses, places visited) seems to be missing: how come?

NTN is a work in progress, and while the most recent release ([see here](#)) should include all the individuals, much of the relationship data is still incomplete. I'll make it clear once i have a complete first pass, and then i'll invite feedback.

2. Standards

2.1. Why is Israel listed as an instance of Man rather than Nation?

This is an example of what linguists call *metonymy*, where a particular instances of a class or group is used to refer to the group as a whole. Since the nation of Israel derived its name from the man Israel, the latter sense is considered more fundamental.

2.2. Why can't I find Cleophas (or other names)?

Many names are spelled differently in various Bible translations, particularly between modern translations and the King James Version. For example, "Cleophas" is the KJV spelling of the name in [John 19:25](#), but most modern versions use "Clopas". NTN is standardized on the spellings used in the English Standard Version: [here's a complete list](#). At some point in the future (Phase 4 on the [Development Roadmap](#)), I hope to incorporate a mapping back to KJV spellings, since many people are more familiar with those. Please contact me if you already have such a list.

2.3. Many Bible names are homonyms, like Mary, John, James, etc. How is this handled in NTN?

It's an important part of NTN's design to give each unique person/location/etc. a unique identifier: when you look for "Mary", you want to distinguish Jesus' mother from Mary Magdalene, from Clopas' wife Mary who seems to be mother of James and Joseph, from the four other Mary's referenced in the New Testament. It's also good design to construct identifiers that bear some resemblance to their actual names and identities: "MaryWifeOfClopas" is more user-friendly than "genid:ARP2147041".

I'm not aware of any standard scheme for constructing these identifiers. The principles i've used, stated informally, are the following:

- The most basic name forms should be used for the most common names: so "Mary" is the mother of Jesus, "John" and "Simon" are Jesus' disciples.

- Traditional or conventional names are used whenever possible (e.g. "JohntheBaptist"), with the usual camelcase convention. For example, the four Herod's mentioned in the New Testament are "HerodAgrippaI", "HerodAgrippaII", "HerodAntipas", and "HerodTheGreat".
- Names from the two genealogies of Jesus (Matt.1.1-16, Luke.3.23-28) which often have little additional information, are disambiguated when necessary by including their parent's name (so "Alphaeus" is distinct from "AlphaeusFatherOfLevi", and "CainanSonOfEnosh" is distinct from "CainanSonOfArphaxad").
- Functional descriptions are used for other distinctions: "AlexanderTheCoppersmith" is distinguished from "AlexanderOfTheSanhedrin" and "AlexanderTheHeretic".
- If no other distinguishers are available, native place is used, e.g. "SimonOfCyrene", "AlexanderOfEphesus".

I don't claim to have a fully consistent or worked-out approach: please [email me](#) (replacing "babble" with "bible") if you have suggestions. The W3C provides [additional information on identifiers and URIs](#).

3. Information

3.1. I've heard that Apelles was a bishop: why isn't that occupation listed in NTN?

While some scholars believe this, there's nothing in the text itself that describes Apelles this way. I've taken some care to not go beyond what is explicitly stated in Scripture itself.

4. Other Related Work

4.1. How does this approach compare to the New Testament Lexicon According to Semantic Domains by Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida?

Louw and Nida's work is a huge contribution to a clear understanding of the language of the New Testament, and provides many foundational ideas that are incorporated here. However, there are some important differences.

Ontology, not taxonomy:

A taxonomy like Louw-Nida provides a categorization of information: it does not describe the properties that relate on category to another.

Web-based and standards-based:

NTN makes this information web-accessible through standards like XML and OWL, so other works can build directly on NTN, and the data can be easily reused.

Entity, not term, based:

Louw-Nida is a lexical resource which describes terms from the Greek New Testament. NTN, on the other hand, represents concepts and their properties, and instances of those

concepts. So while Louw-Nida describes the word normally translated into English as Timothy (##μ#####), it does not represent the information that Timothy was an associate of Paul, that his mother was a Jewish woman named Eunice, that his father was Greek (we don't know his name), or that his grandmother's name was Lois.

4.2. How does this approach compare to other Bible dictionaries like Easton, New Bible Dictionary, etc.?

Dictionaries (and HTML representations of them) are made for human readers, and they take advantage of the richness of human language and understanding. However, the richness, subtlety, and imprecision of human language makes it a poor choice for machine processing: for that, far more rigorous specifications are required. The main goal of NTN is provide a machine-processable, reusable information resource.

5. OWL and Ontologies

5.1. What's an ontology?

An ontology is a structured representation of a body of knowledge. [Ontology Development 101](#) by Noy and McGuinness provides a good introduction to ontologies and their role in "sharing common understanding of the structure of information among people or software agents." While NTN is limited enough that you probably don't need a software agent to search it, it still serves to make our understanding of Scriptural information more explicit.

5.2. There are numerous other OWL ontologies available (FOAF, Rel, Geo, etc.) which represent information about people and locations. Why have you created your own instead of importing and re-using them?

Ontology re-use is an important enabler of the Semantic Web, but it represents both a cost and a benefit, since each ontology brings its own assumptions about how knowledge is organized. For example, FOAF would bring along many properties that aren't relevant to historical persons (like their email addresses and webpages), without incorporating other properties that seem crucial to NTN (like nativePlaceOf: many people are identified by where they were born). Earlier on, i used many of the elements of the [Relationship vocabulary](#) to capture inter-personal relationships (spouse, child, etc.): but one commentator helpfully pointed out that it might not be appropriate for me to redefine and extend terms from some else's ontology.

So for the time being, NTNames stands alone as an ontology. I've tried to use terms that are consistent with other ontologies (particularly Relationship and [IEEE SUMO](#)) wherever possible, to facilitate a future integration, but i'm not directly importing these ontologies.