



On your marks

2011 was the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Although there had been Bibles in English before this time, the appearance of the Authorised Version, as it is also known, was a landmark moment. The greater availability and accessibility of the Christian's special book had explosive consequences for individuals, the nation and the world. Now anyone could hear or read its stories for themselves and respond to its good news about God's love.

Get set

The following idea is a way into exploring why Christians regard the Bible as a special book and could be used as the introduction to a short series with a children's group or as part of an all-age service that focuses on the Bible. This material would also work as an outline for Collective Worship in school, perhaps as part of a special series of assemblies to celebrate the Bible.

This idea is a part of a series of four. See also: [What is the Bible? What's in the Bible? What's so special about the Bible?](#)

You will need: a King James Bible; a piece of Latin to read (see below); the beginning of Genesis in Hebrew and the beginning of John's Gospel in Greek (see 3 below); you will also need to hide a few Bibles around the assembly hall/church or meeting room (make them as hard to find as possible!); five cards with symbols on, hidden in your King James Version Bible (see 5 below); and finally the eight versions of Psalm 23:1 written out for readers as in 7 below.

Go!

1. Start by saying that you are going to read a story from the Bible today, and you need everyone to listen carefully so you can all talk about it together afterwards. Now open a Bible and start reading the following from Luke 2!

ascendit autem et Ioseph a Galilaea de civitate Nazareth in Iudaeam civitatem David quae vocatur Bethleem eo quod esset de domo et familia David ut profiteretur cum Maria desponsata sibi uxore praegnate factum est autem cum essent ibi impleti sunt dies ut pareret...

Well, what do you think? It was an important story, wasn't it? Which part interested you the most? Did you find anything puzzling?! Is there a problem?

2. It was in Latin, which was the language of the Bible for hundreds of years. It was OK at the beginning because lots of people spoke and could read Latin but gradually with time it was only the very educated who understood it and they would tell the rest what it meant.

But that was so frustrating! All the Bible stories came to them second hand. And if you went to church, it was all in an unknown language. It sounded very mysterious, and ordinary people didn't



really know what was going on!

How would you feel if the lessons at school or the church service was always in Russian or Kiswahili? Canvass some opinions! Is it fair that some can understand but most can't? I wonder why those who could understand in the past weren't, on the whole, keen to change things? Do you think it was better that way? And if so, why?

3. The Bible hasn't always been in English. The stories didn't start in our part of the world and even if it had, the English language has changed and developed a lot since those days.

The Old Testament of the Bible started off in Hebrew and the stories of Jesus were in Greek. Here's the beginning of Genesis and of John's Gospel in the original languages.

Show verses [in Hebrew and Greek](#) (opens as PDF).

Later it was all turned into Latin, which was the main international language of the Church for centuries. People who didn't speak Latin did get to know the stories a bit from local poems and plays in English based on the Bible but it wasn't until the Middle Ages that the first translations began to appear. But the translators weren't always popular with the Church authorities and the rulers at the time. The translators risked their lives to put the text into English and some, like William Tyndale, were killed. At one stage his Bibles had to be smuggled into the country from abroad. I have smuggled a few Bibles into the hall/church/room today. Can you find them?

Challenge some adults and children to find the hidden Bibles. Give them some clues, indicating whether they are 'warm' or 'cold'.

4. Finally, after more and more translations began to appear, King James VI of Scotland (James I of England) commissioned a standard national Bible translation in English, which was published in 1611 - 400 years ago.

Hold a King James Version Bible in your hands and the slowly open it.

Just imagine being able to read and hear the words now in your own language. It was a breakthrough. It was like the first time our generation could click onto the Internet. Suddenly the stories of this special book were readily available and in words that ordinary people could understand for themselves!

Can you imagine how excited people were?

And because of the invention of mass printing, lots of copies could be made and easy-to-carry editions could be produced too, so you could take it and read it anywhere, not just in a church. It must have been like owning a smart phone today!

Now ask someone to read the same passage with which you began this outline: Luke 2:4-5.



Now we can all understand it!

5. The Bible in English meant that people could get into this book, open its vast library of stories and hear God speaking for themselves, and this had a huge impact.

For each of the following statements, draw out a simple visual from your KJV Bible that goes with each one.

- *A speech bubble with a musical note on it:* it gave them beautiful and new words to worship and sing about God.
- *A card with arrows pointing this way and that around a world:* it encouraged them to obey God's commands to go into all the world and share the story.
- *A speech bubble with a big question mark and exclamation mark on it:* it made them question things that weren't fair and led them to challenge injustices.
- *A card with lots of ordinance survey-style symbols for churches all over it (crosses, crosses on squares; crosses on circles):* it led to lots of new types of churches and more people having faith in God.
- *A card with road traffic signs for a hospital and for elderly people crossing the road:* it led to new charities being formed and new ways to care for the poor and weak.

The Bible was let loose to become the explosive book it was always meant to be.

6. Ever since then Christians have worked hard to put the Bible into as many languages as possible, so everyone can have the chance to hear God speaking through this book. And they are always trying hard to find the right translation that is both accurate and helpful. That isn't always easy.

The first translators of the King James Bible were a big team and, to assess their work, they used to read the English out loud to each other to hear how it sounded, as well as checking that it really said what the Greek or Hebrew original was trying to express. Let's try a translation sound test of our own!

7. One of the ways that God is described in the Bible is as a shepherd who cares for us like his sheep. Psalm 23:1 says just this, but what sounds best today, especially as not everyone sees sheep that often or understands what a shepherd does?

Involve eight adults and/or children in reading eight different possible translations or versions of this verse from the list below. Take a vote on which one everyone like best and maybe also try and find out why!

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want (KJV).

You, Lord, are my shepherd. I will never be in need (CEV).

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing (The Message).



The Lord is like a shepherd; he'll always take care of me.

With God as my teacher, there's nothing I can't learn.

The Lord God is my guide; he'll never let me get lost.

The Lord is my pilot; I shall not drift.

The Lord God is my pace-setter; I shall not rush.

8. Everyone has a favourite version, either because it was the one they were brought up with or one which became especially meaningful to them at a certain time in their life. The most important thing Christians say about all these versions is that God can speak through the words if we are really prepared to listen. And this still happens today, for example:

- David Suchet, the British actor, who plays Poirot in the Agatha Christie murder dramas, began his journey of faith after he began reading a Bible in a hotel room, while on tour in the USA.
- Dame Cecily Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement, began searching for God after seeing the committed faith of her friends. It was on holiday with these friends and when she was invited to join them in their Bible studies that everything suddenly began to make sense and she became a Christian.
- Kris Akabusi, a British athlete in the 1980s, came to faith at the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh when he read a copy of the New Testament left in his hotel room.
- Kaka, the talented Brazilian footballer who makes no secret of his Christian faith, is outspoken about his belief in 'the God of the Bible'. And having read there the words of Jesus about feeding the hungry because doing so (says Jesus in Matthew 25) is a way of feeding him, he became an 'Ambassador against Hunger' on behalf of the World Food Programme of the UN.

9. And what does the Bible say about itself?

Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live (2 Timothy 3:16, CEV).

And the Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us by giving us hope (Romans 15:4).

The Bible is certainly an explosive book and still going strong in this anniversary year.