



Australia: Bible Translation

Overview

Bible Society Australia is committed to helping Indigenous Australian's Open The Bible in their heart languages. Working closely with local indigenous translators and their churches, as well as mission partner organisations, Bible Society

helps coordinate several translation projects. Amongst other things, BSA funds translation workshops and provides expertise through translation consultants.

The Need

Translating the Bible into Indigenous languages has always been, and remains, critically important. They are the heart languages of many people. A heart language is the language a person thinks and dreams in. Many Indigenous people speak some English, however much of what they read in English versions of the Bible can be confusing and complicated.

Since 1788, over 155 of the estimated 300 or more languages first spoken in Australia have disappeared, and the remaining 110 are critically endangered. In 2005 the National Indigenous Language Survey said, "all of Australia's Indigenous languages face an uncertain future if immediate action and care are not taken."

It is widely acknowledged that the Bible is the most important source of usable connected discourses in endangered Australian languages. Rev Dr John Harris, historian and author of 'One Blood' says, "This is not simply a biased religious perspective but an undeniable historic fact, the only people in the past who have cared enough about Aboriginal languages to translate anything substantial have been Christian linguists. In so many cases, their texts are the only real record of the language. Such texts are now highly valued in universities and other secular institutions as the only materials with which to revive and preserve a language."

Project Goals

Bible Society Australia's goal is to continue supporting the translation of Indigenous heart languages into Scripture. As part the overall Bible Translation Process, Bible Society will continue to ensure there are adequately trained and mentored Translation Consultants to check and endorse Scripture translations. This is crucial to ensuring that any translated resources convey the original meaning of Scripture as accurately as possible.

Bible Society is partnering with the Pitjantjatjara (Anangu) people of Central Australia to translate the Old Testament into Pitjantjatjara. Work continues steadily amid COVID restrictions. A final front translator workshop is scheduled for May and the final 2% of the front translation should be completed this year, in preparation for drafting.

Work also continues on the translation of the Gospel of Matthew into the Western Australian language of Nyoongar, in particular the Sermon on the Mount. Checks on the first drafts of Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 will begin this year. Another team of Nyoongar Translators have commenced work on translating the story of Jonah into a Children's Bible story along with revising the Gospel of Luke.

Impact

In the Pitjantjatjara Old Testament translation project, 98% of the Old Testament has now been 'front translated' in preparation for drafting. 79% of the Old Testament has now been first drafted, with 40% and 38% having had 2nd and 3rd drafts in preparation for community and consultant checks.

In the Nyoongar translation of the Gospel of Matthew, first drafts of chapters 5, 6 and 7 have been completed.

Testimonies

"It is an awesome thing for the Word of God to be in the heart language of the people because it is Jesus coming to become like an Aboriginal person, knowing the people, their feelings, the hurts, the pain, in their whole identity."

- Maratja Dhamarrandji, Djambarrpuyngu Translator

Prayer Needs

- Thank God for the many different languages that are spoken here in Australia, and for the early missionaries who learnt and translated many of these languages. Thank God also for the local mother tongue translators who shared their language with these missionaries, helping to make translation possible.
- Pray for the Indigenous languages of this nation, some are still spoken today but many have fallen asleep and are no longer heard. Pray that these languages may be preserved and revived through Bible translation.
- Thank God that we can continue to support the translation of Scripture into the Indigenous languages of Australia, that we can journey together with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, acknowledging them as the custodians of their languages.