

Today is Bible Sunday, which may perhaps explain the somewhat eclectic mix of readings. They represent the contents of the Bible well – Ezra reading the Torah, Paul at his best and Jesus being a trifle mysterious.

This morning, I've brought along some of my Bible collection, in the hope that this will raise some questions to ponder now and also to take away. I'm not giving any answers.

The Bibles are in the order I got them – so let's start with my first Bible, a 'Good News' given to me, at my request, for Christmas when I was 16. Now probably many life-long Christians were brought up in households which already contained a copy of the Bible. But ours wasn't like that, so until I asked for one my home didn't have one.

Published in the mid-1970s, the Good News Bible is written in standard, everyday, accessible English. It also has some beautiful very simple illustrations – if I showed you any one of them, you would immediately know what part of the Bible it referred to without any further explanation.

So, here are the first of many questions.

Can you think of an individual or household which might need a gift of a Bible?

What version of the Bible do you use and why?

Is imagery important to you? Do you prefer to access the word of God through pictures, or music, rather than the written text?

This a King James Bible, it was a baptism present to my son Richard James. Published in 1611, it has been said to be "the most influential version of the most influential book, in what is now its most influential language". It was not the first attempt to translate the Bible into English by any means, nor is it the most accurate translation. But it wasn't intended to be. It was written to be accessible and to read well in English, which probably explains its lasting popularity. It was famously written by committee – which is fitting given the original texts were written by a whole host of authors.

So, some questions.

Do you prefer to encounter the Bible as a literary work of art, or do you feel that the words should stick to the original meaning? And if we allow human interpretation, does this affect the Bible's status as the Word of God?

My next Bible is The Children's Bible in 365 Stories and was bought for my twins Hatti and Lizzie on their baptism. By this point I had realised that neither the Good News nor the King James was child-friendly.

The interesting thing about this version is that by offering only 365 highlights, it allows the reader to see the narrative shape of the whole Bible more clearly. Reading the entire Bible from cover to cover is a labour of love. Many bits are repeated or even contradicted, and while the narrative thread is there, it is heavily disguised. This version lays it bare and if you've never read the whole Bible and have no wish to, you could do far worse than read this version which is not childish, but just simplified.

So, here's my questions.

Is it ok to read the edited highlights only, as adult Christians, and how do we decide which bits we are going to avoid?

Do we read the Bible daily –this version has 365 stories for good reason? If we don't, why not?

My Bible number four is a lot smaller, because it's just the New Testament and the Psalms. This was given to me by the Bishop when I was ordained Deacon.

By this time I already had a Bible or seven, but the gift is symbolic of the calling in ministry to read and preach the word of God. A calling every single one of us has. It giving did cause some merriment, were we not being trusted with the Old Testament just yet? Was it too difficult for a fledgling curate?

But here's my questions to you:

Do you, secretly, feel that the New Testament is more important than the Old?

Do you, consciously or unconsciously, neglect the Old Testament in your reading?

What is lost by removing the Old Testament, aside from a lot of pages?

This is the Bible I was given by the Bishop when I was priested. The whole thing at last! This is a New Revised Standard Version or NRSV, and it's this translation which is used in our Church of England lectionary because it is generally accepted as an accurate translation, using contemporary language where possible. It is translated from the original Hebrew and Greek sources.

No matter how hard we try, no translation is entirely accurate. If we take the second verse of the Bible in Genesis 1 – it reads 'the spirit of God was moving over the water'. But the word 'moving' can with equal validity be translated as 'hovering' or 'brooding'. So, we have three subtly different versions.

'the spirit of God was moving over the water'.

'the spirit of God was hovering over the water'.

'the spirit of God was brooding over the water'.

All correct, yet all different.

Here's my questions:

Do you read the Bible with curiosity? Like Ezra's listeners, do you read for understanding and seek interpretation?

Here's my final Bible – a toddlers' version I bought recently to use at Early Years assemblies in the schools in my parishes. Early Years are nursery and reception.

This Bible contains a few simple stories and lots of pictures. However, the main aim of our assemblies is not to impart knowledge of the Bible. What we want those small children to learn, from these stories, is two simple yet profound truths:

That God is always with us.

That God loves them, this much.

We all know that frequently small parts of the Bible have been (and still are) selectively used for people's own ends. Scripture has been used to subjugate women, reinforce prejudice, support injustice and harden views which ignore God's message of love and peace. A few verses here or there have overridden the overall narrative. The Bible when taken as a whole tells us that:

God is always with us.

And God loves us, this much. Enough to stretch out his arms on a cross. Enough to welcome us back in his arms when we stray.

So, a final question. Using this Bible, I share the message of the Bible with some children. Who could you share that message with?

I've given you a lot of questions to ponder today. Perhaps one stayed with you? I'm sending the sermon to Jenny to put on the website if you need to look at it again.

Today is Bible Sunday.

Why not celebrate by gifting a Bible to someone through the Bible Society or personally.

Why not celebrating by deciding to dip into this treasure trove of a book more often.

Why not celebrate creatively – by listening to some music based on scripture or finding an image to inspire your thoughts.

Why not celebrate by looking at your own Bible and thinking about what it means to you and why.

Whatever you do, I hope you continue to find our Holy Book fascinating and inspirational and pray that in it, you hear the voice of God.

Amen