
Choosing Relevant Scriptures¹

By Rick Brown

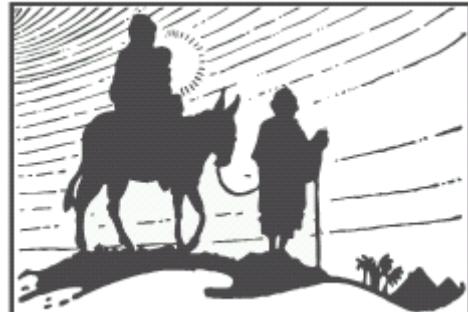
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Crossing worldview bridges

It is important to give the audience time to become comfortable with the Word and to be convinced, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, that God is speaking to them through it. To this end it is helpful to begin with portions that seem relevant and interesting to them. It also helps to begin with portions that share cultural similarities with the audience, as this makes them comfortable with the story and helps them identify with its characters.

For example, nomadic peoples find it easy to identify with the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because of their pastoral culture and simple religion. Traditional settled people identify well with the tribe- and clan-based social structure, the agricultural festivals, concerns about honor, purification, blessings, curses, and the importance of having heirs. Household servants and members of large families can identify with Joseph and the sibling rivalry that he faced.

Women can identify with the problems of Sarah, Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah. Many monotheistic people groups in the 10/40 Window identify with Abraham's devotion to God, with the strict monotheism of Moses, and with the establishment of rule by law. They are also familiar with the names of many of the heroes of the Bible and are interested in knowing more about them. These points of common affirmation are sometimes called "bridges" because they facilitate cross-cultural communication. It is usually wise to select portions that have many bridges and few barriers as the first portions to be translated and distributed.



Emphasizing door openers

Another kind of bridge involves differences that appeal to the audience. These may be called "door openers" because they appeal to people and encourage them to open their minds and

¹ This article is a revision of: Brown, Rick. 2004. "Choosing Relevant Scriptures." *Scripture in Use Today* 8:7-9. Excerpt taken from "Selecting and Using Scripture Portions Effectively in Frontier Missions." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 18(4):10-25.

hearts to hear the message. In some places, for example, readers and listeners have been impressed that Joseph forgave his brothers; this is a new value to people who emphasize honor through vengeance. They are also impressed that God was working in Joseph's life to bring good out of the bad things his brothers did. This is a new concept of God for some people, because they have not viewed God as managing events for the ultimate good of his people and for the building of faith and righteousness in their lives. Yet this appeals to them and opens the door for them to hear more of the Word. Some people, having heard only the story of Joseph, have begun reading the whole Bible in an available language, or have approached Christian believers, asking them to tell them more about finding forgiveness from God.

To give another example, some newcomers to the Bible have been shocked at the personal interest God takes in Abraham and the friendly relationship he has with him in spite of Abraham's faults; yet this appeals to them and gives them hope that perhaps God really does take an interest in them. Women are surprised that Ruth and Rahab were able to decide for themselves what their religion would be; this gives them freedom and dignity. These door openers draw people to the Word as a source of light and good news.

It is wise for the sponsors of a new translation project to identify biblical stories that both challenge and attract their audience, and to select some of them for early translation and distribution. While it is true that God uses any number of ways and means to attract people to His Word and draw them to Himself, we should give specific attention to certain themes and portions of the Bible that are particularly appealing door openers to some audiences:

- God's goodness, love, reliability, and care for his servants, as seen in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, the Exodus, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostles.
- God's benevolent management of history as He works through events to oppose evil; to train His servants in righteousness and truth; and to fulfill His good purposes for His people. This is clearly seen in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Jonah, Daniel, Job, and in the book of Revelation.
- The love and forgiveness exhibited by true followers of Jesus, seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in the lives of saints today. A similar theme is present in the life of Joseph.
- The logical consistency of the Bible, together with an inner witness by the Holy Spirit that God speaks to us through the Bible.
- The portrait of Jesus himself— His kindness, devotion, wisdom, power, and ongoing reign as king.
- The offer of personal forgiveness and acceptance by God, as presented in the Gospel and Acts.
- The offer of a personal relationship with God, fully realized in the next life.

- The offer and example of grace to live through the strengthening and guidance of the Spirit, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles and in some of the Epistles.
- Power to resist and repel Satan and evil spirits in Jesus' name, as seen in the Gospels and Acts.

Many of these biblical themes challenge the current worldviews of many audiences, but they also present them with fresh hope and understanding. So it could be wise, early in the program, to translate and distribute portions that present appealing themes.