

# Living Words

ISSUE  
NO. 15

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.



This year, we celebrate 60 years since the Wycliffe New Zealand council was first formed in 1963. As this causes us to reflect on all God has accomplished through us over the past 60 years, I find it also brings to the fore an opportunity to reflect and refocus on the main reason we exist as an organisation. Our name gives a seemingly straightforward impression: 'Wycliffe Bible Translators' — people who work to see God's Word translated for those who don't have it yet. And while this is true, there is a further emphasis to our name; as former Director, Wayne Freeman, liked to put it "we are called Wycliffe *Bible* Translators, not Wycliffe New Testament Translators".

Over the past 60 years, Wycliffe New Zealand members have faithfully worked to see the translation and dedication of many New Testaments and Scripture portions, and we will not neglect celebrating the powerful transformation in lives and communities that these projects have enabled. At the same time, however, it has been impressed upon me that throughout our 60 years of existence within the mission of Bible translation, it is only now that we are about to see a *complete* Bible dedicated with direct involvement from Wycliffe NZ members.

In the past, several limitations may have made seeing the translation of the Old and New Testaments an unattainable goal in one's lifetime. However, as has been highlighted in Issue 12 of Living Words, recent innovations are rapidly increasing the speed at which translation is accomplished, making whole Bible translation a much more realistic possibility. With the resources now available, more team-based approaches, along with greater involvement of local translators and greater ownership by local church communities, we are seeing a significant mindset shift towards the translation of the whole Bible.

In light of this, the current edition of Living Words will follow the theme: *Why translate the whole Bible?* While I could spend the next few pages giving you my take on this, I will let some of our members and partners with rich insights into Old Testament translation do the talking in the articles that follow. Each of our contributors were asked the same simple question: "what is the importance of translating the *whole* Bible to you?". They were not given specific direction as to what texts to draw from or reasons to focus on. The diversity of perspectives and experiences presented across these articles then serve as a testament to the complexity of the Old Testament's relevance in our lives. We are also delighted to feature and celebrate the Matigsalug whole Bible translation project in this issue, which is being printed and prepared for publication as I write!

It is my hope that your view of the whole Bible is enriched and challenged through reading these articles, and that you are inspired to engage with all of God and His Word in a new way. Thank you for partnering with us to see all of Scripture made accessible for all people.

With heartfelt appreciation for the Bibleless peoples

**Robert Lovatt**

Executive Director

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# Why translate the whole Bible?

BY MURRAY SALISBURY

Imagine getting just the last quarter of a book for Christmas. Before wrapping it for you, your friend had ripped out the first three quarters of its pages! Who would do that?

And who on earth would want to start reading a book three quarters of the way through? On the road to Emmaus, Jesus modelled beginning at the beginning: “*And **beginning with Moses** [the first five books of the Bible] and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in **all the Scriptures concerning himself**” (Luke 24:27).*

So, how can I stand before the Bible’s Author one day and say that I only gave people the last part of His book? Paul’s conscience was clear before the Ephesians: “*for I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole counsel of God***” (Acts 20:27).

An important reason for translating the whole Bible is that the people themselves are crying out for it. They want the whole story — **the whole revelation of God!**

Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations. Disciples, not converts. How can we make disciples without giving them the best discipleship resource ever written — the whole Word of God? After all, when Paul wrote that “***All Scripture** is God-breathed and is useful for ... training in righteousness”* (2 Timothy 3:16) he was talking (mainly) about the Old Testament because the New Testament had not yet been collated and canonised as Scripture.

It is easier for us Westerners to jump straight into the New Testament because our post-Christian societies are built on Old Testament **core beliefs**. We take them for granted but they are not universally held. We have the Old Testament to thank for concepts like freedom, justice, compassion, faith, individual rights, personal responsibility, history, linear time, revelation, ethics, impartiality, and absolute truth.

These ideas are not just taught in the abstract. They come to life in the stories and experiences of real individuals. For many peoples around the world, seeing God act in the lives of real people is a much more effective way to learn what He is like. Paul could use more abstract teaching because his audiences included many who already knew the Old Testament context.

Let me surprise you: I personally know individuals who were first captivated by either Ecclesiastes or Job — and then wanted to read more. Dare we presume to predict which parts of Scripture will do this for others?

*The Binumarien people of Papua New Guinea only became interested once the very last part of the New Testament was translated. Kiwi translator Des Oatridge had left the genealogies of Jesus to the end because he knew they did not keep their own genealogies. But when Des and his team had finished the long list of foreign names, the team hurried away to call the whole village to hear it read. They all became more and more excited the longer the list went on. “Wow! All the rest of this book must be true after all,” they said. “Because no one would take the trouble to list all these ancestors if they were not talking about a real person.”*

Surely, the above motivations are already enough. But here are four more big reasons...

- New Testament writers — and Jesus Himself — clearly teach that the New Testament was not meant to supersede the Old Testament but to complement it and fulfil it.
- New Testament writers also confirm the ongoing **authority** of the Old Testament

by regularly quoting it as their authority for what they are teaching.

- Prophecies about 300 details in Jesus’ life and death, written down hundreds of years before He came, **powerfully testify** that the Christian faith is true. No other religion can do that!
- The Old Testament gives us the **context** for a fuller understanding of the New Testament. It adds essential information about the history, culture, and religious practices of the people of Israel. Without the Old Testament, readers of the New Testament have no framework to understand what is meant by God’s covenant, the law, sacrifice, purification, priests, the tabernacle, the temple, and circumcision.

For all these reasons, and more, the demand for Old Testament translation is increasing faster than any of us can keep up with. There is still much to do even though I have spent the last 33 years:

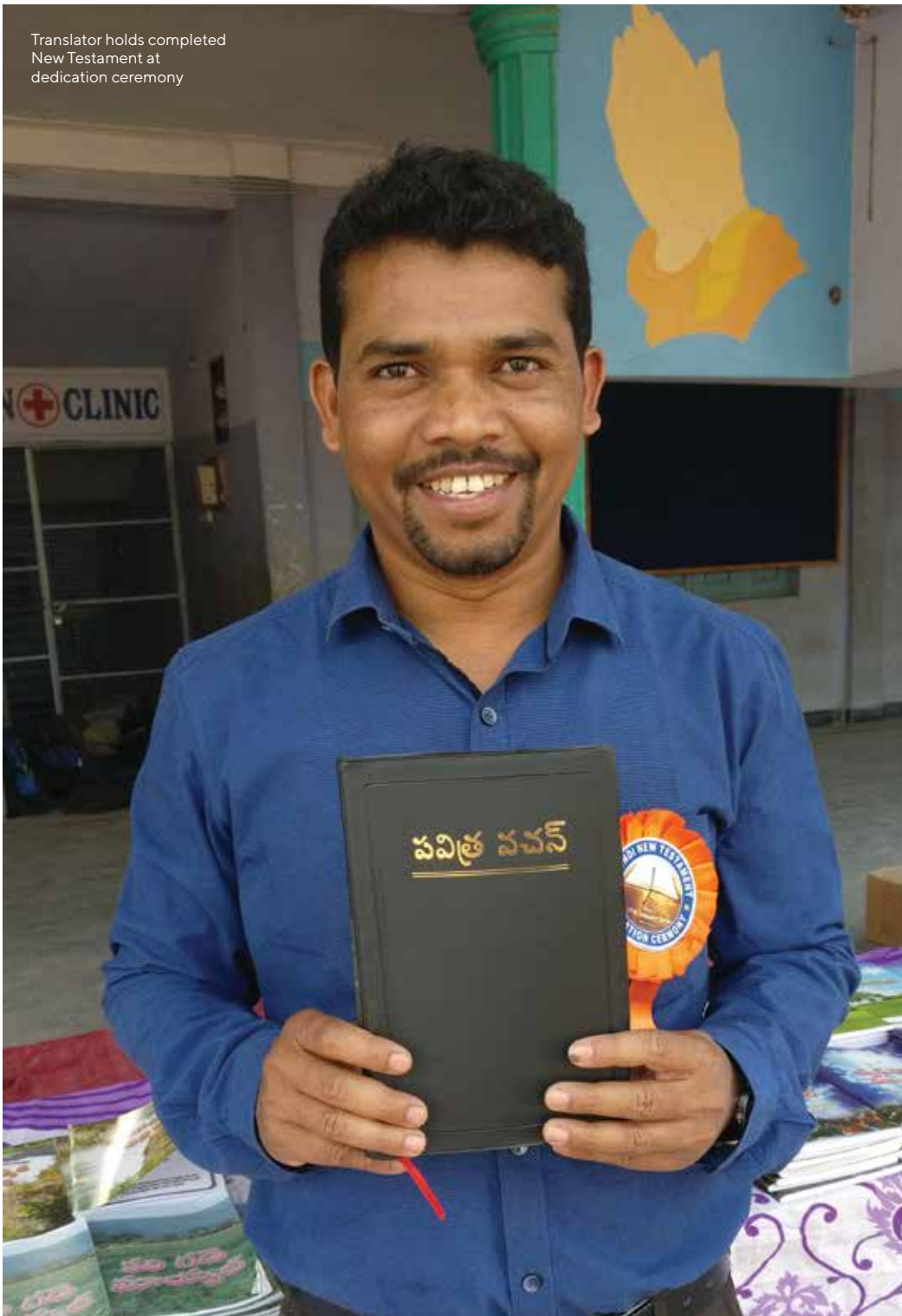
- Retraining New Testament translators for Old Testament translation — in Jerusalem and other places
- Teaching 137 courses and workshops to about 1700 people — online and in 46 countries around the world
- Instructing and mentoring dozens of qualified consultants to do the same.

*“Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers”* (Matthew 9:38) to join the task of giving the **whole Word** to the **whole world**.

For His glory. Amen.

Murray is a Wycliffe NZ member, Bible translation consultant, and instructor from Rotorua, currently working out of England with his wife Ruth.

Translator holds completed  
New Testament at  
dedication ceremony



# 'It is Written'— But where?

BY JOANNA PENNY

Imagine you have the first book of the New Testament in your language for the very first time! You are excited to read God's Word for yourself in a form you can understand. You start at Matthew 1:1.

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac was the father of Jacob, Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar...*

"Great!" you think. "In my culture a genealogy authenticates that the person is a historical figure. This is a true story about Jesus. I wonder who these other people are though. What are their stories?"

In Matthew 1:22-23 and 2:4-6,15 you read some words of "the prophet".

You wonder, "Who is the prophet they are referring to? What was the original context in which he spoke?"

In fact, there are many different prophets quoted in these chapters. Isaiah, Micah, Hosea and Jeremiah all speak of the Messiah, and Matthew points out that Jesus fulfils their prophecies. Later in Matthew 8-9, when Jesus heals people, Matthew 8:17 explicitly states: This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."



You read on. When Jesus is tempted by Satan in Matthew 4, he resists by quoting an ancient text; “It is written” he says three times.

**“Where is it written?” you ask. “Why don’t I have that book in my language?”**

Matthew 5–7 contains some wonderful teachings of Jesus. He is explaining the true meaning of the Law of Moses.

“I wonder what laws those people had. Are they like ours? Why does Jesus obey Moses’ laws? Who was Moses anyway?” The confusion grows. There seem to be too many bits missing to properly understand the account of this amazing man, Jesus.

The remaining chapters of Matthew have multiple quotations from the Old Testament books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, and Malachi. (In fact, there are 340,000 direct cross-references between the Old and New Testament!)<sup>1</sup>

As you continue reading the first book of the Bible that exists in your language, you find these repeated references to people, customs, events, instructions, sayings, and prophecies in the Old Testament. You are curious. You want to understand the message fully. **You want the whole Book!**

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Traditionally, first the New Testament is translated for a language group. But reading only the New Testament is like reading the second part of a book. You get the climax of the story, but you don’t have the background context. The resolution is there, but what was the original problem? **We need to understand sin before we feel the need for a Saviour.**

“The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed,” is how Bible teacher Chuck Missler explains their interdependence.<sup>2</sup>

The whole Bible is necessary for the fledgling church in a community to grow to maturity.

We have found through working with language communities in South Asia that their cultures and customs are similar to Old Testament peoples.



Consultant checking an Old Testament book. A villager reads a portion of Scripture for the first time.

They have many religious connections with idol worship, sacrifices, a system of priesthood, and supernatural happenings. They have stories of human origins which inevitably feature Creator God and a flood event. They have an oral culture of learning through parables, riddles, proverbs, songs, and narratives, rather than linear argument. They have festivals based on seasons and a close connection to the land.

We knew one translator in India who found that the book of Proverbs was the key to the people group he worked with. Because they highly valued proverbs in their own language, they quickly adopted the proverbs of the Bible and it transformed their culture.

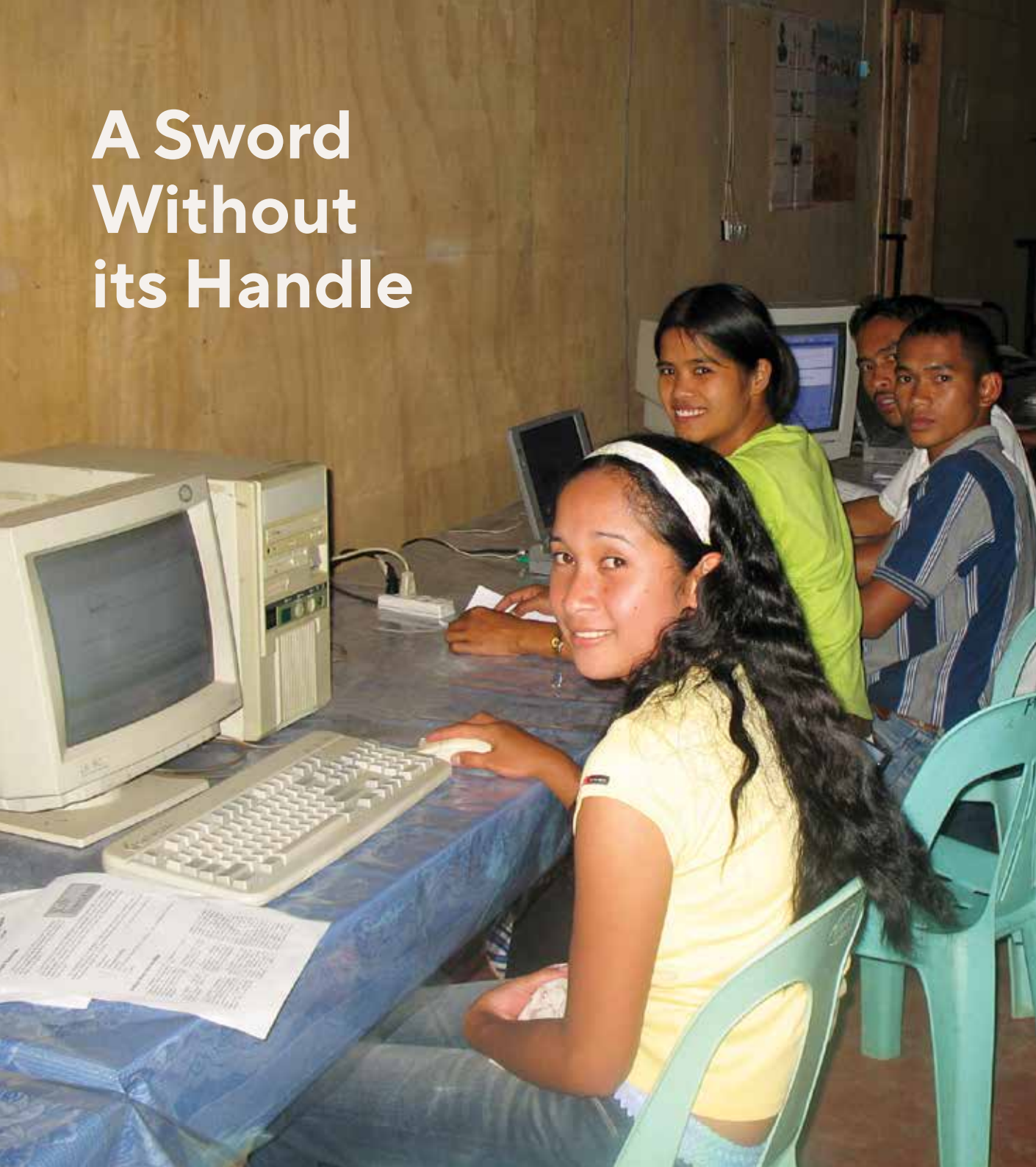
Another people group put the Psalms to music and dance, and rejoiced at the way this enhanced their worship of God. Another group treasured the book of Ruth, as it mirrored their own culture and values.

We don’t know which book of the Bible will open the way to a particular people accepting the gospel. But when that key is unlocked, the entire Bible is relevant.

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14*

1. <http://www.openbible.info/blog/2010/04/bible-cross-references-visualization/>  
 2. Koinonia House. (2016, September 11). Learn the Bible in 24 Hours - Hr 2 - Small Groups - Chuck Missler [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Jd3crAKC3M&t=7s>

# A Sword Without its Handle



BY ROBERT HUNT

We joined Wycliffe NZ back in the mid-1980's, expecting to be sent to another country to translate the New Testament (NT). However, during our Bible correspondence study and then our time at Bible college, an interest in the Jewish cultural background of the Scriptures meant that we also took the opportunity to study Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament (OT)) as well as Koine Greek (the language of the New Testament).

After our Bible and translation and literacy (and more) training, we were indeed sent to the southern Philippines to work with the Matigsalug tribe (as they call themselves). When we arrived and started learning their language, we were totally stunned to find out that they didn't care about their own language because of the way they had been mocked by the mainstream culture, and only wanted us to teach them English. However, because we knew that God had clearly sent us there, we decided to go ahead and help them to translate four Bible books into their language: *Genesis*, the beginning of everything; *Luke*, a gospel; Acts, the beginnings of the church; and *Hebrews*, about no longer requiring animal sacrifices.

Note that we included *Genesis* in that list. That's because it became increasingly obvious to missionaries (and evangelists too) over the years that you couldn't fully understand the gospel message about the forgiveness of sin if you didn't understand the concept of sin itself and its origin. You couldn't fully understand about being born again and living forever if you didn't understand the origin of death.



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*Completing the NT was already way beyond our initial expectations for the language group, but over the decades their thinking had changed, and now they also wanted the entire OT in their language.*

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Then we realised that in our own culture (and now also widely around the world), the marketing of the big bang and Darwinian-type evolutionary theories as scientific is being used to encourage young people to reject the Bible and thus to also reject the good news offered in the New Testament. So in our personal ministry to young people, we realised the vital importance of the Old Testament narrative books.

Also you can't read Matthew or other parts of the New Testament without the writer referring to the prophets like Isaiah or quoting the Messianic prophecies from the Psalms, etc. **If a people group only has a New Testament, then they don't have easy access to that important background prophetic information which confirms that God had announced a plan through the prophets, which is then fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.**

When the New Testament was published by the Matigsalug team, we all called it the "NT+". The plus referred to the fact that it also contained four OT books, including Genesis of course. However, we still weren't ready for the shock when

the team approached us at the dedication in 2010 and asked us: **"What use is a sword without its handle?"** pointing out that even a NT+ is not a whole Bible. Completing the NT was already way beyond our initial expectations for the language group, but over the decades their thinking had changed, and now they also wanted the entire OT in their language!\*

There's another reason why language groups don't just want a New Testament. Imagine that you go to a church where some people have whole Bibles, and other people only have a NT. Then the pastor preaches from the OT. Might as well have left your NT at home, and indeed, that's what happens. Who would bother to only carry a NT to church?

So now with hindsight it's easy to state the obvious: The emphasis on NT translation (it's just one-quarter of the entire Bible) was purely for the convenience of the missionaries, but quite misguided when the needs of the language communities are properly considered. But ouch! It took us 21 years to learn the language and culture and train a team to translate the NT while training other teams to teach their own people how to read and write. Would it take three times as long again to translate the rest of the Bible?

Fortunately, **with the team already trained and motivated, they were able to complete their own Old Testament in just ten years, and it's now being typeset and is in the process of being printed.**

None of this could ever have happened without the support of our extended community of partners: those who

supported us and the project financially and in prayer, as well as Wycliffe NZ and other administrators who work tirelessly, often unnoticed, behind the scenes to enable teams to operate in other countries (or now with the internet, to work from home as happened with the Matigsalug OT translation). We are so grateful that God did far more than we could have imagined:

"Now we offer praise to God in the church and for all the generations to come and to Jesus the Messiah — God who, through the power that works in us, **is able to do far more than we can ask for or even understand.** May it be so." Eph 3:20-21 (OET-RV).

## Growing the less than 10%

When Wycliffe NZ members Robert and Margaret Hunt arrived in the Matigsalug area (southern Philippines) in 1989 as the third translation team to come to the project, the people had already become discouraged at the thought of ever getting the New Testament in their own language. However, ten years on from the dedication of the New Testament in 2010, the Matigsalug Old Testament was completed as well! With the typesetting and publication process well underway, the Hunts hope to start planning a dedication of the Matigsalug whole Bible for later this year (2023), once they receive a shipping date.

The Matigsalug translation is a huge accomplishment, and the first *whole* Bible translation to be completed with direct Wycliffe NZ member involvement! With there still being less than 10% of the world's languages with a full Bible,<sup>3</sup> we are delighted that the Matigsalug translation can be added to this number.

Who would have believed that when a Wycliffe language surveyor first visited that Matigsalug village in March 1957, God would honour his promise to bring the Scriptures to them in their language, and that more than six decades later, they would become one of the less than 750 languages in the world to have the complete Bible. God is good!

3. <https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics>

● To hear more about the Matigsalug people's journey to valuing their culture and language, culminating in wanting the whole Bible translated, see Robert tell the story on our Story of Hope podcast: Episode 18, 28:45–35:07. [wycliffenz.org/podcasts](https://wycliffenz.org/podcasts)



# Finding a Home in Chinantec

BY WILF FLORES

I grew up watching my dad and members of Wycliffe Bible Translators New Zealand translating the New Testament into my language. I witnessed many changes take place in the community as a result of God's Word becoming available, and saw how those who learned how to read in Chinantec were able to understand the message of salvation clearly. However, I did not appreciate the importance of those changes in people's lives until I later came to believe in Christ as my Saviour.

When I realised that God was calling me to become a Bible translator as well, I considered the possibility of going to another part of the world to learn another language so I, too, could serve in the translation of a New Testament. However, **God eventually made me realise that my own people still didn't have the whole Bible.** Talking with people and members of my own family, it became clear to me that many of the Biblical stories from the Old Testament were not available in my language. People in my community had questions about creation and the many characters in the Old Testament that are only mentioned briefly in the New Testament.



Above: Wilf's dad Marcelino and Victoriano in a workshop looking at difficult passages from the book of Isaiah.  
Left: Wilf looking at lesson a plan during a translation principle workshop.

In the Old Testament we find accounts that are well known to those who have access to it. For example, the accounts of King David's life, his failures and repentance, as well as the many psalms that he composed. The book of Psalms teaches us how to pray and worship God whether as individuals or corporately, while Proverbs teaches us how to live a life that honours God and illuminates what our relationship with God and people should look like. The book of Job, on the other hand, helps us understand and provide counsel in order to persevere through trials, which complements the encouragement we get in New Testament passages such as:

*"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* James 1:2-4 ESV

**All the stories contained in the Old Testament, once translated accurately, find a home in Chinantec.**

Chinantec, being a language with oral tradition, sees adults and children alike enjoying listening to those stories, and they can relate to them so much better because many Old Testament stories are set in a rural world, much like the Chinantec world. Many of the stories that are taught in Sunday schools come from the Old Testament, stories that help children and adults understand how God continues to care for humanity and calls people to have a personal relationship with Him.



Teaching Chinantec children how to read and write their language.

**I believe God wants all people to have the Bible in the language they understand best, and I also believe people need to have the whole Bible so they can accurately understand the message of salvation.** The Old Testament is the background information that we need to have in order to understand why Christ's death and resurrection is the only way to salvation.

Wilf is a Wycliffe New Zealand member and Chinantec speaker from Mexico who is currently working on the Old Testament translation in Sochiapam Chinantec.

● Check out episode 12 of our Story of Hope podcast to hear more of Wilf's story. [wycliffenz.org/podcasts](https://wycliffenz.org/podcasts)





# Conversations on the Road to Emmaus

BY BRYAN HARMELINK

Have you ever wished you could have been one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus? They asked themselves: “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32) What would have been your reaction or response if you had been one of the disciples Jesus appeared to that day? Imagine hearing an explanation of the Scriptures by the Master himself!

This might seem painfully obvious, but it’s important to realise that the Scriptures Jesus explained to the two very fortunate disciples were what we refer to as the Old Testament. “Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). How privileged they were to hear directly from Jesus how the Old Testament points to Him.

**Jesus could have chosen to remind the disciples of what He had done during His ministry, but He chose instead to go through the writings of Moses and all the prophets to help them understand what had taken place in Jerusalem.** Of course, Jesus often referred to Moses and the prophets in his teaching, but this was a unique lesson by the one who didn’t come to do away with the Law, but rather to fulfil it — to fully embody the Scriptures. This is why, when Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue, he could legitimately say “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!” (Luke 4:21) The time of the Lord’s favour had come because he had come! We have a fuller picture of who Jesus is with the whole Scripture. One aspect of why the whole Bible is important is to have the whole context of what is quoted from the Old Testament in the New Testament books.

Another aspect of the importance of the whole Bible is how it is all interconnected. Many parts of the Bible echo other parts. When we have the whole Bible, we have the “whole story.” But the Old Testament is not merely background to the New, but is itself Scripture that is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and equip us to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). For example, John’s Gospel starts with “In the beginning...” echoing the first part of Genesis. This is not just some coincidental repetition of that phrase. There are other thematic connections as well, since John 1:3 says everything was created through the Word and nothing was created except through Him. The opening part of John’s Gospel is about creation — about the Creator who was made flesh and came to live among us! This is why it is so shocking that the very world He had created didn’t recognize Him and His own people rejected Him (John 1:10-11). When we have the whole Bible, we understand the whole story better.

The whole Bible is also important for the life of the whole Church. **All the stories of God’s people from centuries past are connected to our story as part of what God has been doing and continues to do to reconcile the whole world to Himself.** Throughout the centuries, the Psalms have been a source of comfort, reflection and

Bryan is a translation consultant and is involved in several training initiatives focused on biblical-theological understandings of translation and the need for whole Bible translation. He and his wife Joan have worked with Wycliffe for over 40 years with Bryan currently serving as the Director for Collaboration in the Wycliffe Global Alliance.

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*We have a fuller picture of who Jesus is with the whole Scripture.*

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worship, as well as expression of the full range of human emotions as His people have sought to grapple with the realities of life in a broken world. The narratives, psalms, proverbs and wise sayings, prophecy, history, and letters speak to different people in various ways—and all of this was given for our instruction! The Church needs the whole Bible to have the full counsel of God. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, disciples in the 21st century will have their hearts burn within them as they learn how all the Scriptures point to Jesus, the Living Word.

There are still many places, however, where the whole Bible does not yet exist and it’s not yet possible to have this kind of discipleship conversation. **The whole Church needs the whole Bible**, and this is why it’s so crucial to translate the whole Bible for the Church everywhere so that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord can continue to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

# The Title of our Mission

BY KEMP AND ANNE PALLESEN



A Sama village, captured during Kemp and Anne's early years there.

Anne's and my experience as Bible translators began in 1963, in the watery deep south of the Philippines. Since then we have had the privilege and satisfaction of being involved in the translation of the New Testament into the Central Sinama language; and even more satisfying, to see it published and used today by followers of the Lord Jesus.

That was the first and most exciting phase of our involvement with these people and their language. We and our three daughters enjoyed living over the sea in a "pole" house on the seaward edge of a Sama village. As a family we learned the language and something of the culture, and were blessed to see the publication of the New Testament and numerous Old Testament selections.

**After 20 years of pastoral work back in New Zealand, at a time when Islamic leaders were becoming concerned about the growth of Christianity among the Sama, we received letters from Sama believers requesting help with the Old Testament translation.** We responded to the call, rejoined Wycliffe, and for several years made twice-yearly trips to the southern Philippines, training Sama Christians to be the primary translators.

The revised New Testament and a third of the Old were published in 2008. The translation of the remaining two thirds of the Old Testament into the Central Sinama language is moving along famously these days, the work of an amazing multicultural team made up of four (and sometimes five) mature Sama believers (women and men), and a wonderful couple from Wisconsin USA and Northern Ireland. Anne and I continue to be involved in this enterprise, working from our home here in Hamilton NZ.

It has been suggested in the past that we consider re-naming ourselves "Wycliffe New Testament Translators", since that is what many of us manage (and expect) to do. The translation of the New Testament alone into many of the world's 7,000 languages has led to many people becoming followers of Jesus. A question that needs to be asked is this: why is it so important now to be translating the ancient texts of the Old Testament into minor languages with five or fifty thousand speakers? Surely the New Testament is enough? True, the New is complete, but it's not the whole or only story. **During one of our visits to a Sama community the pastor came out holding some tattered booklets and asking, "I have heard that there are more books about God and what he says. Where are they?"**

The Old Testament, like the New, is God's word, inspired, rich in facts, surprises, and promises that still motivate the people of God. Both Testaments are God's Holy Word; both address the human condition and God's merciful response. The writers of the New Testament were first of all readers of the Old, men who saw with their own eyes the Messiah who had been promised.

The 'Kitab Awal Jaman' (OT), currently being translated into Sinama, is also relevant and significant for people like the Sama. Like God's Old Testament people, they too live under more dominant cultures, own no land, and frequently have to move about from one anchorage and water source to another. It is also important for them, in a Muslim environment where Old Testament names are familiar, to have in their language the full story of God's dealings with people like Abraham, Isaac and King David.

This is why the Central Sinama translation team, and minority people groups worldwide, are so committed to translating the Old Testament into their language. **This is why 'Wycliffe Bible Translators' is still an appropriate title for our mission.**

# We believe in universal access to God's Word

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