

State of the Bible 2023 report text

A year of dramatic progress in Bible translation

It's been another year of firsts and new records in Bible translation activity.

In this *State of the Bible 2023* report, Wycliffe Bible Translators is excited to report that acceleration continues to gather pace in many areas, and that the future looks even brighter as technology – and especially Artificial Intelligence (AI) – has a bigger and bigger impact.

The acceleration is exciting. Even more exciting is that in this past year, more people have been given the opportunity to read or hear God's word in their own language for the first time, and more translation projects have started than ever before – some of which don't even have their language written down yet.

That promises many more years of good news to come!

For all this, we are thankful to God and to our supporters. Together we are helping create a world where everyone can know Jesus through the Bible.

Read on for the highlights...

Extraordinary growth

In another year of extraordinary growth, highlights include:

- **A newly translated Bible is being launched at the rate of one a month** – that's 12 in the last year, translated for a population about the size of England (55 million).
- **A people group is receiving the New Testament in their language at a rate of one a week** – 53 New Testaments were completed last year, a record for one year!
- **More Bible translation work began last year, than ever before!** A total of 370 languages saw Bible translation work begin – that's at a rate of over one a day.
- **A tipping point has been reached:** for the first time in history, the number of languages with work in progress (3,742) has exceeded the number of languages without work in progress (3,652).

James Poole, Executive Director of Wycliffe, says: 'We are seeing something extraordinary in world mission, as we see this rapid acceleration of Bible translation. Today, more than ever before, more people can access the Bible in the language that speaks to them best.'

What this means: transformation

These statistics are exciting; what they mean is even more exciting.

In the past year, a population roughly equivalent to the size of England (55 million) has been given the full Bible in their own language for the first time.

In addition, 26 million people now have the good news of Jesus in the New Testament in their language for the first time. That's equivalent to the population of Australia.

As a result of this increased access to his word, God is transforming individuals and communities.

The massive increase in new and in-progress translations of Scripture will mean a future where many more people will come to know Jesus through the Bible.

With the advent of AI, this current rate of acceleration is predicted to increase considerably.

James says: 'At Wycliffe Bible Translators we dream of a world where everyone can know Jesus through the Bible. And with increasing numbers of people praying and giving to support dedicated Bible translators around the world, together we are serving them as they bring God's word to their communities in the language that speaks to them best.'

Driving the acceleration

Three factors are especially driving the surge in Bible translation.

More people

There's a growing realisation in churches globally that Bible translation is vital and effective. This is leading to Western believers giving and praying more, and churches around the world increasingly starting their own translation programmes (with behind-the-scenes assistance from organisations like Wycliffe Bible Translators).

Local translators now take on the bulk of the effort in many programmes, which is enabling the work to move much faster.

Better technology

From the 15th-century printing press to 21st-century smartphone apps – technology has been crucial in getting the word of God into the hands and hearts of more people more quickly.

And now comes another key technological moment. The advent of AI is set to have an incredible impact on Bible translation, enabling local Bible translators to produce high-quality translations quicker than ever. Mundane tasks are being sped up, allowing translation teams to focus more on the areas that require their human skill and insight.

As a result, the time taken to translate the Bible is predicted to come down by up to a half – without sacrificing quality! It means many more people will be able to access the good news of Jesus through the Scriptures much sooner.

Increased support

In the UK and Ireland, we're seeing more and more people praying and giving to support Bible translation through Wycliffe Bible Translators. And more funding means more translation teams can be supported! This is possible thanks to ordinary Christians who read their Bible and want others to have that same privilege too.

Wycliffe Bible Translators and our partner organisations are involved in over 75% of Bible translation work worldwide. With a new translation starting at the rate of one a day, funding needs are expected to continue to grow, and so it's the task of the Church to keep up with the ambition that Bible translators have for their people.

James says: 'All this is unprecedented: it seems that God is doing something remarkable in our time, and we praise him for raising up so many more people to take part.

'My hope is that as the message of what God is doing spreads, so more and more people will be motivated and get involved in what is the key mission movement of this age. This is vital, urgent work.'

Looking forward

James comments: 'It is amazing to see the progress that has been made again this year. If progress continues to accelerate, then in the next 10–15 years we could find ourselves in the position where 95% of the world's population has the full Bible in their language, and everybody can access at least a portion of Scripture. That would be a tremendous moment in world history!

'Even with this progress, however, today still 1 in 5 people do not have access to the Bible in their language. It's why translation teams worldwide continue to work with

urgency. It's also why we continue to support them in their work so that God's word will be available to all people in their own language.'

Play your part

The record-breaking progress in translating God's word for people who do not have it in their language is a team effort. A vital part of this team work is the generosity and prayers of people like you. We are so grateful for your support.

But 1 in 5 people still do not have the Bible in their language. There is much to do and many people waiting, and the work of Bible translation is as vital and urgent as ever.

Please do consider supporting us through giving and prayer.

To keep up to date with the latest from the world of Bible translation, please sign up to receive our emails if you haven't already:

wycliffe.org.uk/email

Thank you for your support for and interest in the work of Bible translation.

Pull quote

In Nigeria, in the past year the number of people groups with no Scripture has dropped from 169 to 111! That's 58 languages where Bible translation work has started.

Quotes/captions

Two Bashkir women with their Bashkir New Testament (green) and Bible (right) at the launch of the Bashkir Bible in Russia on 19 June 2023

Number of New Testaments in one West Asian country doubled in 2023!

Seven New Testaments have been launched in one West Asian country in the past year. This means about 36 million more people now have the New Testament in their language.

This includes the Leoma* people, who number over 15 million and which is a project supported by Wycliffe.

*name changed for security reasons

‘When I preach in Nyiha language people get so quiet. It’s because they understand very well. And when they understand, they repent and change. So many people ask me to come and preach. They are very anxious to hear the word of God in their language.’

‘Now I am happy to know that God speaks to all people in their own languages. He speaks all of our languages!’

Wilhelm Mwakavanga, Nyiha Bible translator and pastor

The Nyiha New Testament was launched in Tanzania on 17 May 2023 in Tanzania

Last Christmas

Last Christmas (2022), people who speak the Nelayan* language in East Asia read or heard the Christmas story in their own language for the first time!

This is the first Scriptures in their language!

On being given the Christmas story booklet, one Nelayan woman began reading and said:

‘This is so easy to understand compared to the Bible in the national language.’

One of the primary-school child (pictured) said: ‘It is so easy to understand’ after reading the story. She is not a Christian yet but she enjoyed reading it, she said.

*name changed for security reasons

‘It’s important for us to have the Scriptures in Romani. It’s more powerful for me than using the Romanian version – it brings me closer to God, it touches deeper into my heart and mind.’

Daniel Petrilă (here reading from the Standard Romani Gospel of John), a member of the Standard Romani Bible translation team

The Standard Romani team has translated the Gospel of John and is currently translating the book of Acts.

‘Jesus knows our name!’

A Bible study in an Australian women’s prison has been read through the Plain English Version (PEV) of the Gospel of John.

Elanora* completed reading the book and was so happy she’d finished it – a big achievement for her. The study leaders asked her what she’d especially liked.

‘Jesus knows our name!... The Holy Spirit is with us... I’m not even hungry now because I am reading the Bible and that feeds me.’ Elanora now plans to read the PEV Gospel of Mark.

The PEV Mini-Bible is an English translation of the Bible designed specifically for Aboriginal Australians who speak English as a second language. It contains around 70% of the New Testament, half of Genesis and parts of 1 and 2 Samuel.

*name changed for security reasons

‘The introduction of the word of God to us has helped our community to change our habits and our character, and taught us how to be closer to God... Jesus is now a native of Lindu. Why? Because we hear him speaking to us in Tado.’

Tado Bible translation team member

The Tado New Testament was launched in Lindu, Indonesia, on 22 October 2022

‘I’m really happy, God has given us the New Testament in Ikoma. I can read it with my children, we can read it together. It’s the work of God! God is good!’

Neema, an Ikoma speaker at the launch

The Ikoma New Testament was launched in Tanzania on 10 March 2023

‘As the community receives the word of God in their language today, may it become a light to their feet for a great spiritual, social and economic transformation.’

Rev Dr Robert Lang’at at the launch of the Ilchamus New Testament in Kenya on 8 October 2022