

Australia



Noongar Translation

Overview

Bible Society is supporting the Noongar people in the south-west of Western Australia translate the Bible into their language.

The Need

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. 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. Dr John Harris, Bible Society Australia's Translation Consultant, says, "Even though Noongar people read English, it's not the language to which their emotions, their feelings and identity are attached. Even those who don't speak Noongar well know they are Noongar people. The English Bible is the language of the invader."

Noongar is the official language of the Aboriginal people of the south-west of Western Australia. Many Noongar people of today grew up speaking English in school and Noongar at home. The children who were taken away – the Stolen Generations – were forbidden from speaking Noongar. Speaking Noongar reinforces group identity; it is a statement of who Noongar people are. The Noongar people are working hard to restore their language; it speaks to the core of their being, their culture and their understanding of themselves. It is the wisdom of their hearts.



155

of the estimated 300 or more languages first spoken in Australia have disappeared.

110

languages are critically endangered of the 145 languages left

443

Noongar speakers
(2016 ABS census)

Goals

Work continues on the translation of the Gospel of Matthew into the Western Australian language of Noongar. After this has been translated, the ultimate goal is to do the book of James and then go back to the beginning and translate Genesis.

Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 were translated and checked in 2022, and another team of Noongar Translators completed the translation of the Story of Jesus' Birth for Children. The *Jesus in Born* Children's Christmas story was launched and made available to Noongar speakers in late 2022.

The Noongar Translation Team are also working on translating the Children's Bible Storybook, *Jesus and the Storm*, and plans are in place to publish *Jesus and the Storm* in Noongar in 2023.

Impact

Census figures show the number of Noongar speakers is at 443 speakers, however the numbers of people who identify as Noongar is much higher, and as revitalisation efforts increase, in the future the number of Noongar speakers will continue to grow as will the demand for Scripture resources in this language.

Another team of Noongar Translators have completed work on translating the story of Jesus' birth into a Children's Bible story and plans are underway to translate more children's stories into Noongar, due to demand for further church resources in the Noongar language.

Testimonies

"The story which just blew me away was ... Pastor Len Wallam from Bunbury who was our elder statesman in our translation project. He was one of those whose language had been taken from him and so he spoke and preached in English. We all loved Len, but...[he] was an angry preacher who preached with his fists clenched. After he began to have some Bible verses in Noongar, he began using those phrases in his sermons. And he began to preach with open hands, his palms outstretched to his people. He had been given back his language and his anger had been taken away."

Dr John Harris, BSA Translation Consultant.

Prayer Needs

- Thank God for the mother tongue translators of Noongar who are making translation possible.
- Thank God for the Gospel of Luke and the book of Ruth, which have been translated into Noongar. Pray that these Scriptures would have an impact on those who read them in their heart language.
- Pray that Noongar 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.