



BSM CONNECT

The Bible Society of Malaysia

2/2015 Edition

Message from General Secretary

The Word of God and the People of God

(Nehemiah 8 : 1-8)

Introduction

Our God is a living God and He loves to communicate to His people. I think most of the Christians will believe it and the existence of the Bible is a solid proof of this statement. From the first book of the Old Testament (Genesis) to the last book of the New Testament (Revelation), God has spoken and is still speaking to us through His written words (Bible). It is not surprising to take note even the names of the first and the last books of the Bible reveals this fact. The word, Genesis, means 'beginning', and thus, we have 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. But how did God create? By what means? From the start, it is clear that God created all things by His words ('and God said...and it was so'). The word, 'Revelation', means 'unfolding secrets or mystery' and thus in the Book of Revelation, God is revealing the events that will take place before the return of His Son Jesus Christ. How does he reveal? We read from this book that before the author of the book John prophesied, he was asked to eat a scroll (Rev 10:8-11), a similar experience that Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet of vision were asked to do (Eze 3:1-3). Both of them (Ezekiel and John) received vision of restoration and both were asked to eat a scroll before prophesying. It is indeed 'God's word' through the mouth of his servants! Quintessentially, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, God is speaking, and His word brings creation, restoration and hope.

The People of God In Need of the Word of God

Nehemiah chapter 8 begins with the people of Israel settling down in their towns after the return from Exile. We know well that our ancestor came from other lands and settled down in Malaysia many years ago. By their hard work and diligence, we have what we are today. However, being settled down physically is not final! The same can be said of the people Israel who returned from exile.

Physically they might have settled down in their towns, but how about their souls and their heart? It is clear from the reading of Nehemiah chapter 8 that their souls did not find rest and their heart far from settling down. Thus, the Bible continues to tell us that 'all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate' (verse 1). The location of this gathering is very significant because in the ancient Near East including Israel, the square in front the city gate is normally a place for settling dispute and dissemination of messages. Here in Neh 8 :1, the text shows us that they were gathering there, at the square before the city gate to listen to God's Word. Their souls did not find rest, until they were enriched and nurtured by the Word of God.

Recently I read again the story of Mary Jones, the Welsh young girl, who inspired the establishment of the first Bible Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society. We are told that she walked 25 miles barefooted to buy a Bible from then the Scripture circulator, Rev Thomas Charles. What was the force moving her to do so? Nothing but the desire to read the Bible by herself! Thus, we as the Bible Society hold a strong conviction that the people of God are always in need of the Word of God. The gathering of the people of Israel in Nehemiah's time and the 25 miles walking by Mary Jones was prompted by the same need, the need to receive God's Word.

The Engagement with the Word of God

The need of God's Word is to be followed by the engagement with it. In Nehemiah 8:1-8, the people of Israel did a few things for this engagement with God's Word. First of all, there is an invitation. They invited Ezra the scribe to bring the law of Moses to them. Then, he was to read it to all who could understand by standing on a wooden platform made for the purpose of this reading. In reading the law, they were at the same time worshipping the Lord (verse 6). Finally, they were given the task of making the law understood by those who listened to it.



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On this last point, the Bible (NRSV) makes it clear: 'So they read from the book, from the law of God, with **interpretation**. They gave the **sense**, so that the people **understood the reading**.' (verse 8 with emphasis by the red letters)

As the Bible Society, we are endowed with the same task of making the Word of God clearly understood by God's people. Thus, we engaged with bible translation, making the Bible available to different peoples, such as Chinese, English, Iban, Kayan, Murut Tagal, Murut Timugon, Rungus, Biatah. However, our task does not end at bible translation. We move a step further, by engaging God's people to know the sense of the Bible through the publication of the Study Bible. For instance, at the moment, we have two Iban Bible translations, one is the Bup Kudus and another Bup Kudus Baru (targeting at different groups of readers). To help the reader understand the reading, we are now planning to embark on producing an Iban Study Bible that we aim to enable the Iban Christians to know clearly the cultural and religious background of the Bible text. For instance, the concept of 'covenant' in the Old Testament may not be fully and clearly understood by our Iban believers. Thus, we need to provide study notes to explain its ancient Near Eastern background. Likewise, in the book of Hebrews, we are told that Jesus Christ is designated as 'the High Priest'. We may need a note to inform the readers how Christ the High Priest is to be understood in comparison with the priesthood system in the Old Testament.

We need your prayer and support to make this a reality: Engaging God's people with God's Word, as the Bible Society is a mission partner of the Church in dissemination of God's Word to God's people.

Dr Daniel See ,
Acting General Secretary,
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Beibl i bawb o bobl y byd ("A Bible for all the world's people"), from Welsh poetry.

Nehemiah 8: 8 (NRSV)

So they read from the book, from the law of God, with Interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.



In Memoriam

In our Society our beloved ones are fondly remembered. Sweet memories cling to their name and those who loved them in life sincerely still love them in death just the same.

We remember:

Late Rev Ezra Loke Cheng Wah, our first General Secretary (1984-2000) for his past contribution to the Society. He passed away on 11 May 2015

Mrs Thankamma Benjamin, the wife of our Council member Dr George Benjamin who passed away on 22 July 2015.

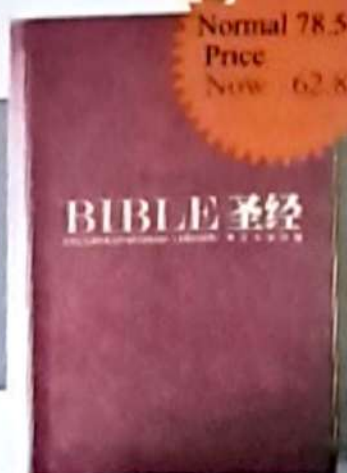




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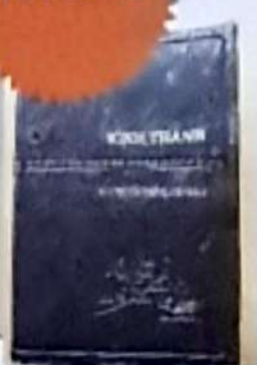
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NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION PROJECTS

We are currently planning to launch a few new translation projects, such as Iban Study Bible, Penan OT, Jahut OT, If your Church would like to participate and support in our Bible ministry, we will be pleased to share about the Bible Ministry at your Church.

Please send us a email to :

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