



Christmas Greetings from Jos! Yesterday we had our office Christmas celebration not just with colleagues but with their families too. Our group has certainly kept growing over the last year. Last year's party met in our back garden. This time we met in a hall (on the compound we moved to in February) to enjoy scripture, songs, carols, prayer, games and food together. We'll write more about our office and colleagues in the new year. Apart from celebrating Christmas it's also the end of semester at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) where David has been teaching in the Bible Translation Dept.

**David:** I've come to the end of of the semester teaching 4 courses at TCNN. Added to my familiar load of 2 computer-related courses has been a general introduction to Bible translation and an 'exegesis' class digging into the meaning of Hebrew texts in preparation for translation with a particular focus on Exodus.

In Exodus of course, one of the major incidents is Moses out in the wilderness leading (or following) his sheep and suddenly seeing the burning bush. In Nigeria 'bush' means the great expanse of the wilderness or countryside, which often at this time of year is set alight (for reasons I don't quite understand). So seeing burning bush is nothing surprising but a voice couldn't exactly come from the bush. What I found interesting this time in the discussion in my classes

was the difficulty some translators have in persuading people that their understanding of what was going on has been wrong all along. It seems that universally in northern Nigeria people *know* that the whole 'bush' (countryside) was on fire. If a translation says something akin to a 'shrub' burning then people accuse the translators of getting it wrong, because they know (from the English) that it was the bush (countryside) that was on fire.

Perhaps it doesn't matter too much, but there are many more issues, and more substantial ones too, where Christians may have very firmly fixed misunderstandings of the scriptures due to the 'Chinese whispers' effect of using English as a language of wider communication. Hausa as a

language of wider communication has also led to similar problems.

We've also had some stimulating and I hope fruitful discussions with students about common objections to translating the Bible into local languages - including tackling fellow students who hold that the King James Bible is the authoritative version worldwide (!) or who argue that everyone knows English or Hausa anyway, or the popular view that having the Bible in many languages will divide the church. It's apparent that quite apart from the need to teach people how to understand the Bible properly and how to translate it appropriately, there's a great need to teach people how to think about the Bible. It's terribly tempting for many to adopt something of an Islamic view: considering scriptures to be some magical book that was



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1st Grads and 2nd years studying Translation Theory

written in heaven and dictated down to earth, a book whose words have magical power even in their exotic sounds, but which you don't need to understand so much as use as a treasury of feel-good slogans to get ahead in life. "What's in the Bible?" a Sunday school teacher asked. "Memory verses," came the reply. That's not really good enough.

Translation makes a lot more sense to people once we reclaim the idea that the Bible is a collection of writings bearing trustworthy witness to the God of heaven in his dealings with people, and in particular to his Son the living Word Jesus. But it seems that for many devout people their faith is not really based on such an understanding of the Bible as an understandable book.

Meanwhile at home Abigail insists on having 'Bible' read to her not just before bedtime at night but even for her midday nap! And as parents we are glad that Rebekah and Elizabeth can hear us read the Bible in an appropriate translation, ask sensible questions and understand what's going on, at least in part.

So we're glad for useful work here, even though it does sometimes feel a little like putting in the foundations after the church has been built.

We thank God that so many of God's people have a desire for the Bible in their language, even



Julie visited the Gworog translation office in October

though they never realise what a massive task they're taking on.

We thank God for sending us his Living Word Jesus and the written word that bore witness to him before and after his birth.

Praise God with us for keeping us safe not just from terrorist attacks but also on the roads and at home.

Give thanks for Bibles in 4 languages which after decades of hard translation work have finally been completed, printed and delivered here to Nigeria; 3 southern languages (*Ezaa, Ikwo and Izii*) and one in the north east (*Bura*). Two of David's TCNN students are from those languages and are thrilled to see this day.

Please pray for

- our friends in the north east who are under unrelenting violent attack particularly focussed on Christians, dislocating whole communities.
- David to mark the end-of-semester exams well and quickly.
- the *Izii, Ezaa, Ikwo* and *Bura* churches to be transformed as people study the scriptures.
- us to keep trusting our loving heavenly father and seeking first his kingdom.
- Julie as she continues to teach Rebekah and Elizabeth at home and deals with an ever more active Abigail.



Hebrew exegesis for translators: Exodus

- the Gworog Bible translation team as they raise local support and share Christmas story booklets hot-off-the-press.

Thanks for your support for us that keeps us going here, your concern for us when you hear of trouble nearby, and to all who keep in touch with cards, packages, emails and Facebook messages.

Love from David, Julie, Rebekah, Elizabeth and Abigail.

An official message follows:  
*After several months of quiet in the city of Jos, Nigeria, twin explosions on Thursday 11th December have yet again brought death and disruption to the city. Early reports suggest that as many as 30 may have been killed in the blasts which targeted a busy market area in the early evening. All staff are safe and the SIL office in Jos continues to operate as normal. Please pray for the nation of Nigeria in the lead up to National elections in February 2015. Pray also for the many Nigerians who have been forced from their homes by Boko Haram activities in the northeast of Nigeria. Ian Hollman, SIL Area Director For Anglophone West Africa*

