

# 'Pass it on' campaign

7 Feb 2014 Jane Butcher

The Bible Society are launching the 'Pass it on' campaign to promote reading of Bible stories with children following a report that shows that a vast majority of children are unaware of the origin of some of the most famous biblical stories that have featured in blockbusters, or have never seen or opened a Bible.

The aim of the campaign is not to promote religious teaching - but rather to introduce children to the drama and adventure contained in the Bible, and promote awareness of the importance of many of the stories in the development of western art, literature and music.

A series of studies indicate:

- fewer and fewer parents are reading stories to their children
- British adults who recognise themes... from the scriptures in films, music... are in the minority
- only just over one-third of adults think that an understanding of the Bible is important to young people
- when introduced, Bible stories still carry a strong resonance with both parents and children

The launch of this campaign by the Bible Society coincides with the forthcoming release of several biblical blockbusters and is featured in an article in [The Telegraph \(7 February 2014\)](#) as well as on the [BBC News](#). The Bible Society are running several initiatives to help promote the aims of this campaign.

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## Read Bible favourites to children, parents urged

**A new campaign, an initiative of the Bible Society, urges parents to read tales from the Old and New Testaments to their children**



Organisers are hoping to introduce a new generation of British children to stories from the Bible with which their grandparents would have been instantly familiar Photo: ALAMY

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It might not feature boy wizards, magic wardrobes or Hobbits, but its epic cast list does include a giant, a talking snake and a man who lived for 969 years.

Now parents reading stories with their children are being urged to mix favourites such as Harry Potter or the Narnia books with tales from the Bible as part of a new campaign aimed at a million young people.

The initiative is timed to coincide with the release of a string of blockbuster Hollywood adaptations of stories from both the Old and New Testaments.

Organisers are hoping to introduce a new generation of British children to stories from the Bible with which their grandparents would have been instantly familiar.

They fear that ignorance or open hostility towards religion by some parents could lead to a generation of children growing up unaware of many of the stories which have formed a foundation of western art, literature and music.

The campaign also follows a series of studies suggesting that fewer and fewer parents are regularly reading stories to their children at all.

The campaign, an initiative of the Bible Society, aims not to promote religious teaching but simply to introduce a new generation of children to the drama and adventure contained in the Bible.

Research commissioned by the charity found that British adults who recognise themes and stories from the scriptures in modern films and music are in the minority.

The study, which will be published this month, also found that only just over a third of adults think that having an understanding of the Bible is an important part of young people's education.

However, it found that where they are introduced, Biblical stories still carry a strong resonance with parents and children alike. Separate polling conducted for the campaign identified the nativity as the nation's favourite Bible story for both children and adults, followed by Noah's Ark and the life of Joseph.

But there was then a divide along gender lines. The story of David and the giant Goliath ranked fourth among boys, while for girls it was Adam and Eve, which featured the talking snake. The story of Methuselah – who lived to the age of 969 – did not feature.

The organisers of the "Pass It On" campaign are understood to be working on a new app for iPads and other tablet computers containing a selection of Bible stories designed to be read to or by young children.

They are also in talks with popular children's authors to come up with their own exciting retellings of once familiar Biblical stories.

"Despite being the world's all-time bestseller, the Bible today faces its greatest challenges in the UK for centuries," said James Catford from the Bible Society.

"Its stories open the door to understanding much of our history, as well as our cultural and literary heritage. But many of us have never opened its pages and only a tiny minority read it regularly."

The campaign hopes to capitalise on a string of Biblical blockbusters, including Ridley Scott's Exodus starring Christian Bale as Moses, and Russell Crowe's forthcoming appearance as Noah.

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# Children and parents 'unaware of Bible stories'

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Many of the children asked did not know that the story of the Nativity came from the Bible

Widespread ignorance exists among children and parents about the contents of the Bible, research has suggested.

Surveys for the Bible Society found almost three in 10 young people were unaware the story of the birth of Jesus came from the Bible.

A similar number of children had never read or heard about tales of the Crucifixion or Adam and Eve.

The report was based on a poll of 800 children aged eight to 15 and about 1,100 parents.

Good values

The study revealed a generation of children with little knowledge of the most important stories forming the basis of Christianity, and parents who often knew little more.

**"Too few children have the opportunity to hear and reflect on what this life-changing book contains"**

Dr Richard Chartres Bishop of London

Of the children who were questioned, more than a third failed to identify either the Good Samaritan or David and Goliath as Biblical stories.

Many of the parents who responded saw the Bible as a source of good values for their children.

But almost half did not recognise the story of Noah's Ark as coming from the Bible, and many confused Biblical stories with plotlines from well-known films such as Harry Potter.

The Bible Society commissioned the study as part of its Pass It On campaign to encourage parents to give the stories to their children.

The group said the findings were "symptomatic of the fact that many children indicate they have never read, seen or even heard these stories".

### **'Immense contribution'**

In a foreword to the report, Bishop of London Dr Richard Chartres said sharing Bible stories "is as vital now as it has ever been".

"Too few children have the opportunity to hear and reflect on what this life-changing book contains," he said.

"Even those that do when they are young often take its awesome stories for granted when they become adults. There is work to be done."

James Catford, group chief executive of the Bible Society, said: "It's clear that parents want to give their children the best start in life.

"The Bible's contribution to our culture - language, literature, the visual arts and music - is immense. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from.

"The Bible enriches life, and every child should have the opportunity to experience it."

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