



WOVEN

A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL



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Woven : A Holy Week Devotional

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This booklet has been designed using resources from Flaticon.com
Revised edition by Lydia Weight.

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It was just before the Passover Festival.
Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him
to leave this world and go to the Father.
Having loved His own who were in the world,
He loved them to the end.

John 13:1

PREFACE

Holy Week: the greatest week in all of history. Eight days woven into the fabric of countless lives changed forever.

This most special and significant of weeks gives us the opportunity, again, to pause, ponder, and journey through the final week of Jesus Christ's life – to enter into the story, placing ourselves in every scene; to remember His sacrifice for our sins on a Roman cross; to celebrate His victory over death as He burst forth from His tomb; to honour Jesus as the only Lord and Saviour who can and does restore what sin unravelled in Eden generations ago. We also have the opportunity to realise that God's story and our personal stories are interwoven.

The remarkable events, as told in such detail by the gospel writers, mean as much now as they did to Christ's disciples and the early church 2,000 years ago, as they lived out the reality of the awesome events they had participated in and the sights they had seen. For we are as much a part of this story as the early forefathers of our faith.

Our God is the master weaver, working on and rewriting our stories (as one who creates a beautiful tapestry) to fit in with his ultimate plans and purposes for our lives and for the world.

The heart of Woven is to show, through these short readings taken from the United Bible Societies 'BIBLE 2020' project, and accompanying devotionals, how this extravagant love, amazing grace, and death-defeating victory is God's desire for our lives too.

Don't let this greatest of all weeks pass you by. Join with us in this journey from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.

Over these next eight days, slow down. Get away from distractions. Quiet your soul and wait patiently upon the Lord. Pray as you read His Word and meditate on the truths contained within these pages, that our God would come and meet with you right where you are.

We pray as you do so that He will ground you in His love afresh, and weave the breadth and length, height and depth of it throughout every piece of your life's fabric.



THE SPIRIT OF THE SOVEREIGN LORD IS ON ME

ISAIAH 61:4

PALM SUNDAY

READ MATTHEW 21:2-9

"As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51)

The stage is set. The streets are lined; filled to bursting point with the throngs of Jewish people who have come to Jerusalem. They're in town to celebrate the Passover Festival; to remember God's dramatic and powerful intervention that brought their ancestors out of their Egyptian slavery (Exodus 12:31-42). It is an incredibly emotional time.

The atmosphere is charged, reaching fever pitch at what the assembled crowd see next.

Jesus, the one they have heard teach, seen do the miraculous, boldly claiming to be the Messiah, is entering town on the back of a donkey. The King has come – peacefully, humbly, and in triumph.

The crowds are raucous. Together they cheer and shout, "Hosanna", as they bless His name by spreading their cloaks and palm branches on the road before Him (v.8-9). They are adoring Him, submitting to Him and pleading with Him to save them.

It is the most astonishing red carpet welcome the world has ever seen.


Despite all that is going on around Him, however, Jesus' eyes are firmly fixed on the task that is before Him. He knows what is coming (Luke 18:31-33). He knows that being in Jerusalem means that His time to die has come (Luke 13:33). These final few days of His life are his resolute focus.

The events of Palm Sunday teach us all that will come throughout the rest of the week: His betrayal, arrest, false trial and crucifixion is no accidental miscarriage of justice.

No, this was a plan. A plan that had been set in motion and born out of love from the moment sin entered the world through the crunch of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). This was a plan to show us that we have a God who does not stand idly by; instead, He chooses to enter time and history to rewrite the broken story.

The time has come for Jesus to fulfil His mission – and He will do so willingly (John 10:18), with tears in His eyes (Luke 19:41).

As He enters Jerusalem on that donkey Jesus is choosing to lay down His life for our sake, so that we would know the incredible love our God has for every one of us.



LORD, OUR LORD, HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME IN ALL THE EARTH

PSALM 8:1

MONDAY

READ MATTHEW 21:10-17

The tension is palpable. This isn't the first time Jerusalem has been a city on a knife's edge, troubled to its very core. It is not the first time that Jesus is the main reason for such feelings being stirred.

As with Herod, when he heard the news of the birth of the king of the Jews from the seeking Magi (Matthew 2:3), the religious leaders are again stirred up and filled with fear and indignation at the sight of Jesus, as He enters Jerusalem to the acclaim of the masses.

For too long Jesus has been a thorn in the side of the religious leaders. The Pharisees and Saducees, amongst others, are determined that this prophet from humble Nazareth, who they fail to recognise, will have His life snuffed out before He can take from them their power and prominence (Matthew 26:3-5).

However, before they can set their plan in motion, Jesus is on the move, headed for the temple. Jesus enters, flipping over tables and tossing money to the floor, without even a sideways glance or a moment's pause.

The King, who arrived peacefully on a donkey just the day before, is now acting with holy authority as He drives the sellers out of the temple with the message echoing loud and

clear in their ears, "My house will be a house of prayer, but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (v.13). I'm sure Palm Sunday's crowds were stunned by what they were seeing.

But it's what Jesus does next that is even more stunning: a truly astounding and beautiful reflection of his Kingdom. He welcomes the blind, the lame, and the children to His side, healing, and assuring them of their place with Him (v. 14-15).

The proud, the profaners, and those who have made worship all about themselves are cleared out (v.12). They are swept away to make room for those who come humbly, just as they are, with all their sin and self laid bare.

And as He did in those days so He does with us today. Our Saviour looks upon us and hears our cries; and He does not ignore them, instead meeting us with abundant grace.

Through His life and sacrifice, Jesus instigates a beautiful exchange – giving to us beauty instead of ashes, joy rather than mourning, praise instead of despair (Isaiah 61:3). Jesus will also give us a new life, identity, and inheritance in Him; a hope for the ages, the assurance of His presence with us always, and so much more.

A person wearing a red backpack stands on a grassy hill, looking out over a vast landscape that includes a lake and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

A MAN OF SUFFERING AND FAMILIAR WITH PAIN

ISAIAH 53:3

TUESDAY

READ MATTHEW 26:36-39

Jesus is on a collision course with the ultimate goal of His mission to seek and save the lost: the cross and the tomb.

As we journey through Holy Week, our Saviour makes the most of these final few days with His disciples and the crowds gathered around them.

Jesus teaches on faith (Matthew 21:21), pronounces judgment on the religious establishment (Matthew 23:1-7; 24-33), prophesies about the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-28); and He speaks in parables, warning of His second coming and the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus words are powerful and personal.

Yet Jesus also makes time and space to retreat. He gets away to Bethany (Matthew 26:6), that place made famous by Lazarus' resurrection (John 11:1-44), to prepare Himself for the Passover Festival and everything else coming His way, as the story takes a sombre turn.

The week flies by in a whirlwind of examples on 'how to love,' culminating in Jesus washing His disciples' feet (John 13:1-17); and in a Last Supper that Jesus himself will soon fulfil, as His body is broken and his blood is shed in sacrifice for us, for our freedom (Luke 22:7-20).

It is here, as Jesus moves on from this upper room, that we find ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane, staring at our Saviour as He agonisingly wrestles over the cup bearing His name.

His struggle, as He prays three times for the cup to pass Him by, is deeply human. We glimpse Jesus here facing the full range of emotions and experiences we too endure; and admitting to how overwhelming it all is (v.38). How comforting that He knows what life can be like, what it is to be human.

Yet, where we might continue to pray for our escape until God provides an alternative, Jesus chooses to surrender (v.39). He trusts the plans of His Father, because He knows that the ultimate joy of the victory He will soon gain will be greater than the torment and anguish He is about to endure on the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

And so, strengthened by an angel (Luke 22:43), Jesus stares the cross in the face; choosing again to set His sights on that hill outside Jerusalem. Jesus knows that soon, through all He will accomplish on that old rugged cross, He will unashamedly be calling all those who seek Him and call upon His name, including us, His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11).



EVEN MY CLOSE FRIEND HAS TURNED AGAINST ME

PSALM 41:9

WEDNESDAY

READ MATTHEW 26:47-50

"What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him over to you?" asks Judas (Matthew 26:14).

The above is the question that sets in motion the act that will ultimately come to define Judas' life. As Jesus agonisingly wrestles with His Father, and His other disciples lie exhausted around Him, Judas Iscariot is seeking His time. He is watching and waiting, the moment of His betrayal approaching.

As Judas enters the garden that night, surrounded by a large crowd armed with swords and clubs (v.47), it is easy to feel anger towards him.

Here is a man who was called by Jesus, and filled with power and authority (Luke 9:1); a man who gave up everything to follow the Messiah (Luke 6:16); a man who, for three years, walked every road with Jesus; hearing His finest teachings (e.g. Matthew 5-7), and witnessing incredible, wide-ranging miracles (e.g. Mark 6:30-34, Luke 7:11-17).

Judas was a man sent out with the other eleven to present these same incredible acts (Luke 9:2). This was the man trusted to manage the money collected to support them all (John 12:6).

Yet, despite all of this: here he is now choosing to turn his back on the one who is the hope of all the world.

We ask ourselves: why would he do this? Greed? Disillusionment that Jesus wasn't the Messiah he grew up expecting? Fear for his future?

Whatever the reason, and whatever anger we may have towards him, it is safe to say that when Judas betrayed Jesus, he made the biggest mistake anyone has ever made, or ever will.

We live and worship Jesus in a world that seeks to draw us away from Him with many distractions. Such distractions appear satisfying at the time; however, we quickly discover, as Judas did with his bag of silver, that they are anything but.

And here is where we find incredibly good news for us. Although Judas succumbed and fell to his own desires, we live in the light of a Father's mercy: a mercy that is freely available to us, no matter our past, or how grievous our sin. God's mercy exceeds his condemnation; and gives us a starting place as we seek to remain rooted in Christ, guarding our hearts through the treasure of His Word.



HE WAS LED LIKE A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

ISAIAH 53:7

THURSDAY

READ LUKE 23:13-21

Judas has acted, betraying and sealing Jesus' fate with a kiss. Amidst the darkness of the late night hour, soldiers and servants seize Jesus; their faces etched with triumphant smiles. As disciples scatter, Peter, filled with anger, draws a sword and swings it at those nearest Jesus. He claims an ear; but, in exchange, receives a stinging rebuke from His Master (John 18:10-11.).

The leaders' show of force has worked. Jesus is finally in their hands. Having waited years for this moment they will not let Him slip away as He has before.

Firmly in their grasp, Jesus is unceremoniously led back through the garden to the house of Annas (John 18:12-14, 19- 24), a former high priest, to begin the first of His six trials.

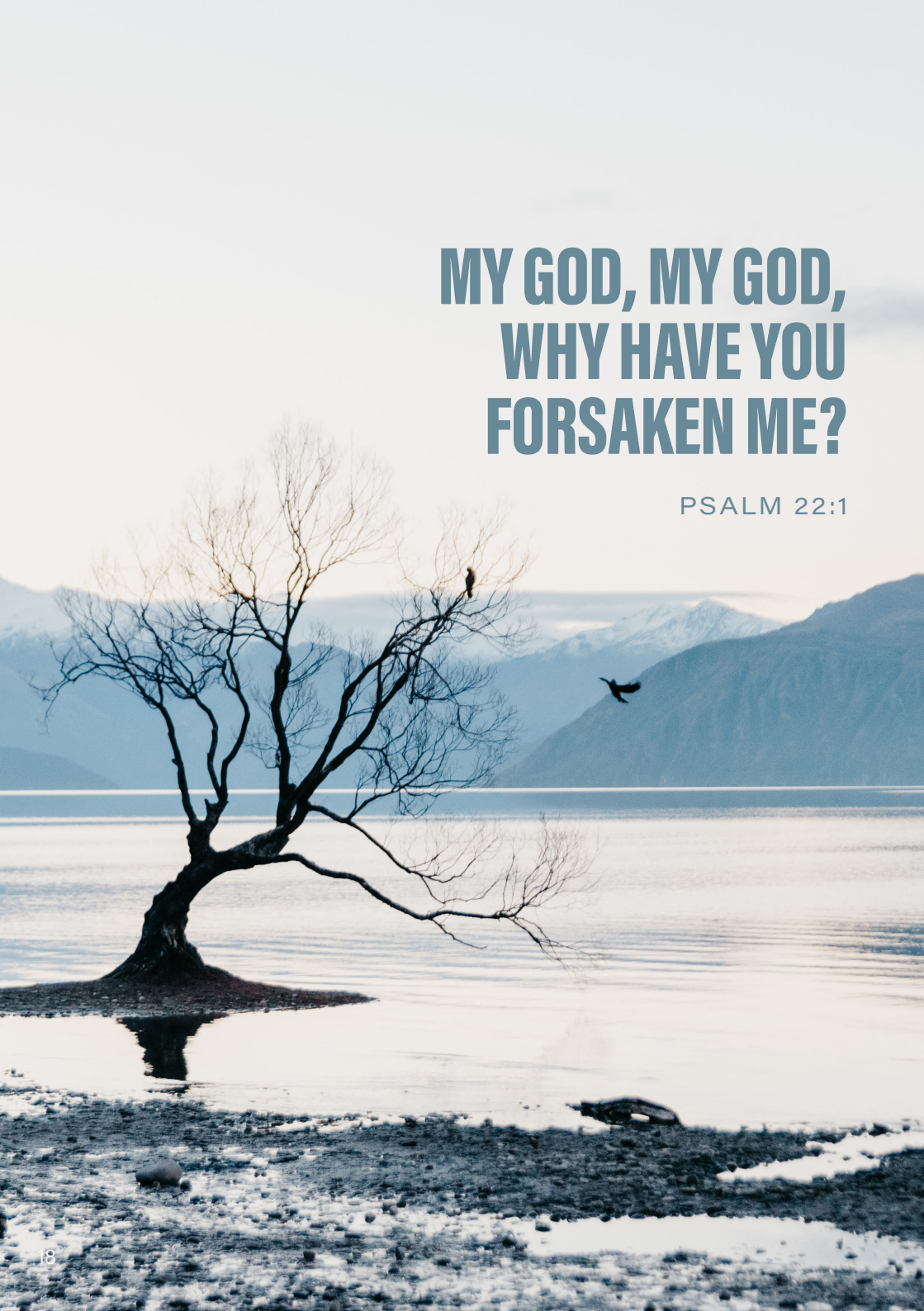
The trials get underway rapidly. The trials have to be conducted so as to ensure a damning verdict by daybreak. Passed on from a frustrated Annas to Caiaphas, the current high priest, Jesus is declared guilty of blasphemy as He breaks His silence (Matthew 26:57-68).

His face streaked with blood, Jesus is sentenced to death; however, only Rome can sanction a death sentence. And so, Jesus must have an audience with Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea to decide His fate.

Yet Pilate finds no guilt in Jesus; neither does Herod Antipas (Luke 23:4-12). None of this serves to satisfy the religious council's deathly agenda, as Jesus' sixth and final trial begins.

Pilate wants to punish and release Jesus as the Passover-pardoned prisonee; but the crowd want Barabbas rather to be released to them (v.18). The Roman governor tries another move – flogging and humiliating Jesus; nevertheless his detractors want Jesus' body broken and His blood shed on a cross because "He claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). One more time, Pilate weakly tries to release Jesus; and one final time, the leaders stand in his way: "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar." (John 19:12). Jesus' enemies have Pilate where they want him: cornered – he cannot argue.

And there we have it. Jesus, the only perfectly innocent one who can grant life to the supremely guilty, is sentenced to die. Not by Pilate's decision, nor per the religious leaders' scheming, nor even through the crowd's frenzied screaming; but ultimately, Jesus, by His own authority and willingness, laid down His life down for you and me. It was always His decision; this was always God's will. We are about to witness the most powerful demonstration of God's love in action.



MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?

PSALM 22:1

GOOD FRIDAY

READ LUKE 23:13-21

The longest night gives way to morning as Jesus, beaten beyond recognition, and bleeding from head to toe, staggers totally strengthless under the weight of His own cross towards the crucifixion site at Golgotha (Mark 15:22).

Moments later Jesus, nails driven through His wrists and feet, is raised up on His cross. This was one of the cruellest means of torture mankind has ever devised; the one labelled the King of the Jews (Mark 15:26) is in agony.

Jesus' crucifixion is a very public spectacle. The same crowd who had been whipped into a "crucify Him" frenzy by the religious leaders merely minutes before, has now gathered around Jesus to continue their mocking.

One of the thieves crucified alongside Jesus joins in with the crowd who insult and mock him for His inability to save Himself. They do not comprehend their own fate should this King save himself: their only hope of salvation would be lost. The other thief, however, sees Jesus for who He really is. As He dies, this thief receives the gift of life when he asks the Messiah to remember him (Luke 23:39-43). Salvation is coming.

At midday, the skies above the crosses darken (Mark 15:33).

Jesus, the Son of God is embracing the full wrath of His Father, so that we might taste eternal life. He has become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), crying out in a loud voice of desolation, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, Psalm 22:1). Jesus' death is the single greatest display of love and surrendered obedience the world has ever seen and will ever see.

Shortly after, having drained the cup He prayed would pass him by, and having experienced the full curse of sin, Jesus willingly gives up His life, uttering three words that inextricably weave together our past, present, and future; and still echo into eternity to this day:

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

As Jesus commits His spirit into the hands of His Father and dies (Luke 23:46), the temple curtain is torn from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). What once separated us from God's holy presence is forever gone, overcome by grace. For on this, the darkest day in history, our Saviour has made a way back to the Father for all humanity. Jesus restored on the cross the sin unleashed in the garden. "Surely this man was (and is) the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).

Salvation has come. Salvation is here!



BY HIS WOUNDS YOU HAVE BEEN HEALED

1 PETER 2:24

SATURDAY

READ MATTHEW 27:57-61

Saturday –the Sabbath. Jesus Christ is buried, having been vanquished to death on a Roman cross through an outrageous series of betrayal, weak and jealous leadership, false trials, public mockery. and, finally, by the weight of all humanity's fallenness and sin.

Appointed guards stand by the tomb where the body of Jesus lies, sealed with a stone owned by Joseph of Arimathea the night before.

There is no doubt, as Mary Magdalene and the other Mary look on, that Jesus Christ is dead.

The deafening silence of a community deep in Sabbath rest and the stillness of the streets that hours before had been a cacophony of jeers, cheers and tears, only compounds this truth.

Every memory and moment the remaining disciples had experienced in their three-year apprenticeship with Jesus has been replaced with tears of anguish, the lament of broken dreams, a crushing weight of hopelessness, a crippling sense of fear, and the question of "what next?" (Luke 24:21). We can, perhaps, imagine and feel the sense of finality of their situation.

In the rawness of the events of Good Friday and in the impatience of having to be still on the Sabbath, Sunday and all that Jesus ever spoke of regarding this idea of a three day temple rebuild (John 2:19) and resurrection seems far off.

And yet today, on this most holy of days, God is in the story working something incredible as war is waged on both death and grave.

He is weaving something those first disciples could scarcely imagine but we can see on this day for ourselves. Out of all the tears and pain, lament, fear and hopelessness, we can, through the events of Good Friday, know and enjoy access to our Father in heaven.

As we wait on all that Sunday will bring (promises fulfilled, celebration untold and hope rebirthed), we can today also accept the incredible invitation offered to us to "draw near" (Hebrews 10:19-22) and have fellowship with our God. Because of Jesus, we no longer have to settle for God at a distance. Instead, we can know the near and present reality of the God of the universe in our lives when we direct our hearts to Him. Finality gives way to opportunity. He is calling you to come and draw near.



**IT IS FOR FREEDOM
THAT CHRIST HAS
SET US FREE!**

GALATIANS 5:1

RESURRECTION SUNDAY

READ JOHN 20:1-10

She runs. With every step panic and confusion accompany her, as do the devastating memories of the previous few days. As her eyes well up again, she replays in her mind the moment she watched Joseph bury Jesus and seal the tomb with a stone (Matthew 27:60-61).

Arriving back where the remaining disciples are housing themselves, Mary finds that none of what she has witnessed in the very early morning light makes sense. Breathlessly, Mary Magdalene shares her news – the tomb is empty, the body contained within it gone; where it is now she doesn't know (v.1-2).

Before questions can even be asked, Peter and the other disciple are on the move, retracing Mary's route to the garden. The empty tomb greets them as they look in and see only sheets of linen where the body had been laid (v.6-7). What has happened? Where is Jesus?

Confusion reigns as the disciples remain clueless about the cataclysmic event that has taken place in the garden tomb on that morning. Jesus had often spoken to them about what would take place (Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22), but they had never fully grasped the truth of it.

Yet it is here, in this garden amidst confusion, fear and devastation, that come the words from an angel that alter their story and ours forever. Words that weave heartbreak into joy:

"Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." (Mark 16:6)

Christ is risen! Death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54). The enemy is defeated. The darkness has given way to the Light. Sin is consumed by amazing grace. There is hope for all.

What we celebrate annually on this day is our dress rehearsal for that great and coming day when we will join the triumphant song of heaven's multitude proclaiming all glory and honour and worth to the victorious Lamb of God! This Resurrection Sunday is a little taste of the eternity that awaits.

So we press on, living in the knowledge of this. Knowing that the empty tomb exclaims to us Jesus is alive. A new age has begun. This life is not all there is. There is victory. There is joy. There is more. For all time.



**BLESSED ARE THOSE
WHO HAVE NOT SEEN
AND YET HAVE BELIEVED**

JOHN 20:29

ABOUT BIBLE SOCIETY NEW ZEALAND

At Bible Society New Zealand, we really care about the Bible.

We are passionate about “Reaching everyone with God’s Word”, believing wholeheartedly that the Bible is a gift for people of all ages and in every place, no matter their gender, socio-economic background, life story, or their learning ability.

As a Society, our heart is for people here in Aotearoa New Zealand, and also overseas, to have the chance to access, engage with, and respond to the Word of God in a language and format they can understand. We do this so that people may be transformed as they encounter Jesus, and discover His incredible purpose for their lives.

To that end, we are one of over 150 Bible Societies worldwide who form part of the United Bible Societies Global Fellowship.

As a local Society within this international community we raise both prayer and financial support for other Bible Societies around the world supporting:

- Bible Translation
- Bible Production
- Bible Distribution
- Bible Engagement
- Bible Literacy
- Bible Advocacy

Throughout each year we also support Bible projects here in New Zealand; working in partnership with churches and organisations to help people engage more with God’s Word in their everyday lives.



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