



In Search of the Source: A First Encounter with God's Word

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Up to his chest in the black current of an underground river, Neil Anderson was just hitting his stride.

In the eerie light of flickering torches, the wild hunting party was bringing down giant fruit bats with blow darts and killing them with their bare hands. The cave was full of yelling, splashing men,, screaming bats, and deadly darts.

That's when Anderson calmly suggested wading across the underground lake...and the party of former cannibals fell deathly silent.

Through the compelling story of Bible translators Neil and Carol Anderson, We relearn something we may have forgotten...the raw power of God's Word to wrench human lives from darkness and flood the heart with light, understanding, and peace.

In Search of the Source: A First Encounter with God's Word Details

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Connie Davis Johnson says

Reading about other cultures learning about God for the first time is convicting. There is an excitement over the rich stories in the Bible. As their eyes are opened, they can't wait to share with others. It makes me realize just how much I take my relationship with Christ and having the Bible at my fingertips along with immeasurable resources for granted. Really enjoyed reading how the Folopa overcame translation confusion and saw how God has been working on their village all along.

Valerie Kyriosity says

I am dying of the deliciousness of this book.

I'm about as fit to be a third-world missionary as I am to be a linebacker-astronaut-supermodel. But translation work makes my heart go pitter-pat, and this book provides a fascinating and glorious (and unromanticized) look at the process. The Folopa are really learning from scratch. Their cultural remoteness from the West, the ancient Hebrews, first-century Palestine, and the classical Greek world is an almost unbridgeable gap for a Bible translator. But not for the Word who created language, ordained Babel, became flesh, dwelt among us full of grace and truth, made His Talk known to the Folopa, and sent Neil Anderson to help them better understand it.

Anderson structures the book around various challenges and breakthroughs he and his Folopa team encountered during the translation process. Most translators I think start with Mark, but he started with Genesis, which is my favorite book, so it was a treat to see the Folopa encountering Scripture for the first time through those chapters. When they get to my favorite, the story of Joseph, one of the older men says, "We are dying of the deliciousness of these words." As we come alongside these tribesmen who are looking at the Bible for the very first time, we are truly seeing it through new eyes, and we can't help but grow in our love of it.

Alas, this book is no longer in print, but it should be. While I am no linebacker-astronaut-supermodel, I am a designer-copyeditor, and I'd really love to make that happen...and clean up the mess that is this edition. One doesn't expect that the first edition of the Folopa Bible was perfectly polished, but one does expect a bit more of a book published in English in the United States in 2006, especially if it's a second edition and they've had nearly a decade to clean up the first. The third could be tidied up, expanded, illustrated...just made better all 'round. And then (if not before), you should read it!

In the meantime, watch this and this and this.

Kathleen says

This is probably the best book that I've read about the Bible translation process. As my daughter and I discussed what we were reading, we realized the many nuances of our language can make translating to

another language and culture quite difficult. We enjoyed reading about this process from the point of view of the translator.

Sam Brown says

finished this a long time ago but the last time i tried to submit the review it did not work=(amazing book=)

Jersc says

I read this with my son's, ages 13 and 10. The oldest liked it while the younger one thought it was kinda creepy due to the ghost stories. I did have to read a few pages on my own due to mature content, but this story was not only interesting but spiritual and moved me to tears at points. The gospel of Jesus Christ transforms lives and brings hope and light to even the remotest parts of the world.

Tina says

I enjoyed the search to understand and find the right language of this tribe in order to translate the bible for this remote group. It was interesting to see how you find words for something like "create" where you can't really tie to a specific action. Strictly from the aspect of developing the right language this was interesting. From the religious aspect - it never fails to amaze me how many of the bibilcal stories truly are universal and found in almost every culture. If there is inherent right and wrong. If the same stories are shared across language, country, continents and between remote groups that have not had outside contact - don't those stories have to come from something shared between all people?

Rosie Gearhart says

Nice look at the difficulties in translating. Read aloud to 13, 11, and 8 year olds. They loved it.

Jon Gill says

This was one of the most engaging, challenging, and inspiring missionary stories I've read. (Full disclosure: I read it as I was finishing my undergraduate degree in linguistics, so of course that influenced how much I personally connected to a field linguist in action.) Still, the story itself is one that embodies both the vision of Wycliffe Bible Translators, with whom Anderson worked in Papua New Guinea, and also the broader message of Christian missions: God is the God of everyone, He speaks your language, and He wants to make Himself known to you in ways only you can know Him.

Certainly any translator, of the Bible or otherwise, struggles with the fact that no languages are ever truly equivalent, in words or concepts, and so every translation may lose or gain things unintentionally, or even problematically. I've read plenty of other examples in other books where moral concepts, once translated in

words, still have the opposite effect in concept. Anderson indeed encounters such barriers in his field while trying to record the Folopa language and translate Biblical passages and truths. To his credit, he never gives up trying, and relies on relationship and full cultural immersion to go deeper into field, rather than heavy-handed Christianizing.

The "key" the translators have been searching for [SPOILER? - not really] turns out to be the word 'bete', meaning loosely "source," but which unlocks multiple layers of spiritual truths for the Folopa people, and also for the reader. Just as they may have no concept for mercy or forgiveness, we may have no concept of the "sources" of things in our societies. (Aside: Orwell's fascination for how a limited vocabulary can limit concepts is appropriate here, but in a more inverse and hopeful sense!) Once unlocked, the Folopa are able to meet God (the "source" Himself) in ways that Anderson and the western readers can only barely comprehend.

Wycliffe's translation workers have long seen the amazing transformations that happen when tribes learn for the first time that "God speaks MY language!" This is certainly evident in this story, but it shouldn't just be read by prospective Bible-translators and linguists. It should be read by any Christians who think they have a corner on the market of the special revelation of God. When you see how God reveals himself to a people that are not like you, and who will probably not become like you once they "become Christian", you'll be challenged by what it means when we believe God is the God of everyone - it doesn't mean we are the sellers of the great secret, or the curators of the great story, but rather that we are ALL children who bear His image differently, and reflect His glory and love on the earth.

Suzanne says

I absolutely LOVED this book. There was so much put into our hearts to think about, never quite before understanding all that goes into bible translation. This was a wonderful insight to the power of language and culture and we were enthralled. Definitely pre-read if you have a little ones, as we skipped a few parts that I wasn't ready for them to hear...but this is truly an amazing story that I highly recommend.

anca dc says

În limba Folopa, limbă vorbită de un grup de bătăinași din Papua Noua Guinee, cuvântul *beté* înseamnă temeiul unui lucru. Citind această carte, m-a fascinat să văd cum, pe măsură ce Neil Anderson traduce Vorba (Biblia), fiind ajutat la început de câțiva conducători ai tribului iar mai târziu aproape tot tribul este prezent la „Casa Bibliei”, acești oameni își schimbă radical modul de gândire și de trai, trecând efectiv de la o extremă la alta – de la canibalism și tortură la a prețui și păstra viața unui om, de la a-și considera femeile inferioare și fără valoare la a le prețui și a le valorifica (prin înțelegerea adevărului că femeia a fost creată din bărbat), de la a-și urî dușmanii la a-i ierta și a-i iubi (prin înțelegerea exemplului lui Iosif și, mai târziu, prin încrederea și jertfa Bărbatului, adică Hristos), de la teama de spirite și duhuri necurate la teama de Dumnezeu care ucide teama de orice altceva. Am găsit aici povestea online.

Am tradus următorul verset. "Vă spun vouă, prietenii Mei: să nu vă temeți de cei ce ucid trupul, și după aceea nu mai pot face nimic" (Luca 12:4).

Ajunghind aici unul dintre bătrâni, cel care asculta Vorba, a rostit: "Nu avem de ce să ne temem". Toți ceilalți și-au întors privirile spre el, însă n-a mai scos nici un cuvânt, iar noi am continuat: "Am să vă arătăm"

de cine s? v? teme?i. Teme?i-v? de Acela care, dup? ce a ucis, are puterea s? arunce în gheen?; da, v? spun, de El s? v? teme?i" (Luca 12:5).

Acela?i b?trîn ?i-a ridicat din nou privirea din locul în care ?edea pe podea. "Ne e team? de Dumnezeu", a spus el, punîndu-?i mîna la gît cu binecunoscutul gest al b??tina?ilor Folopa care dau glas celor mai adînci ?i înfrico??toare adev?ruri. "Iar teama de Dumnezeu ucide teama de orice altceva. Aici", a încheiat el, "se afl? un mare beté".

(...)

?edeam, într-o zi, pe veranda casei b?rba?ilor. Cîteva dintre vechile c?petenii r?zboinice î?i istoriseau întîmpl?ri de odinioar?. Împreun? cu mine se afla un prieten ?i coleg care venise în vizit? de la Ukarumpa. Acesta s-a gîndit s? le pun? o întrebare extrem de provocatoare.

"Nu v-a?i dorit niciodat? s? se întoarc? vremurile de demult astfel încît lucrurile s? fie iar??i precum au fost?"

I-au r?spuns, mai întîi, cu o t?cere nedumerit?. Omul ?sta avea chef de glume? Într-un tîrziu, au izbucnit: "Nu! N-am vrea s? se întoarc? niciodat?! Au fost vremuri îngrozitoare. Tr?iam mereu cu frica-n sîn. N-aveam pace. Ucideam ?i eram, la rîndul nostru, uci?i. Aia nu era??.

Acum îl cunoa?tem pe Dumnezeu, adev?ratul beté al tuturor lucrurilor. De ce ar trebui s? ne întoarcem la mai pu?in?"

Mark Adams says

As a person who has studied Biblical languages and has thought about being a Bible translator overseas, this book really resonated with me. It is about Anderson's experiences in New Guinea, trying to find the right words so that the Bible could be put into the language of the people of Papua in a way that they could understand. What's amazing is to be able to see the hand of God at work in all sorts of ways during his surprising adventures. I have reread this book more than any book I've ever owned, and every time I have come away thinking, "I've got to read it again soon." This book is a tremendous testimony to the awesomeness of God. I cannot recommend it highly enough. One friend who borrowed it read it three times, and was so inspired that he ended up going to New Guinea on a mission trip.

Mel says

An amazing account of linguistic missionaries and their experience while living in Fukutao with the Folopa people.

Their beliefs in evil spirits, appeasing spirits would be chuckled off as superstition in the civilized world, but was very real to them. The Shaman controlled a lot of what they did and caused a great deal of unrest. Their demand of retribution for accidents, whether intentional or by accident can be childish.

This isn't normally a subject I find interesting, but this book was interesting. The culture of the Folopa is interesting. The changes that took place during the time the missionaries lived there and the elders were asked if they'd want to go back to their old lifestyle.

It was an emphatic no.

Romy says

This story is a bit different from the other missionary stories that I've read recently in that the village that was the focus had already come to faith in Christ. Neil Anderson entered this village with the sole purpose of translating the entire Bible into their native, "heart" language. Sounds like that would make it easier, huh? Well, consider that he moved into the jungle of Papua New Guinea with his wife and two young children, having no knowledge of their language. So, not only does he have the responsibility of building a home in the jungle for his family, he also must learn the language, which by the way is only a spoken tongue. This "project" takes years. Neil takes us on a very easy to read ride through the years of learning the Folopa language, creating an alphabet and written language, learning their culture, and translating God's Word. He shares with us some of the most profound discoveries that the Folopa people learned about how God's Word revealed the truth about some of their own legends and cultural stories. I truly enjoyed reading these accounts and was blessed to be learning more about about God's Word right along with them.

Rebecca says

An interesting look at bible translation. The difficulties faces in learning the language and culture and then figuring out how to put the gospel message into terms they will understand.

Julie says

Wow! What a great, fascinating, funny book on a subject that sounds so scholarly and boring. I loved it. If you have a love of words and language, you will be fascinated too. There were a few times i felt a little teary. A family goes to a little tribe in Papua , New Guinea and with much help from the people there, begin to translate the Bible into their language. I had never thought before about how difficult this job can be when you are trying to get across a concept in a culture that has no word or similar concept in their tradition. It was utterly entertaining and captivating. Or, in the Falopa's words, 'delicious'!
