

MIKE COLES



The Bible in Cockney

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The Bible in Cockney



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Well, bits of it anyway...



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to those who have generously donated
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'I hope my book will enable people of all ages to enjoy reading Bible stories in a very down-to-earth way. I also hope it will help God's word reach out to those who wouldn't normally read the Bible at all because they see it as out-of-date or dull.'

Mike Coles

Introduction

Why write this book? In my experience as a teacher in the East End of London, I have often found that pupils haven't a clue what many Bible passages are going on about. The pages are full of strange words and names which mean nothing to them. It has been my aim over the years to bring these Bible passages down to earth, and retelling many famous passages in Cockney rhyming slang has caught people's attention. The biblical language and message suddenly means something. Yes, it may seem quite humorous to read Bible passages in Cockney, but the fact is, people enjoy it! It's funny. It's nice to be able to learn some of the old rhyming slang which is not as common as it once was. But most importantly, people are not only enjoying the stories, they are understanding the message, that this Jesus geezer, God's currant bun, really does love us all. No matter how dodgy we've been, no matter how many times we've done bad things, this Jesus bloke still loves us and will forgive us.

I know people who have told me that they would never dream of picking up a Bible and reading it, but when Bible stories are translated into Cockney, they love the idea and enjoy reading the passages. And that can only be a

good thing. There's now a chance that the real message of the Bible can reach them, and that is my aim.

In this book, I have retold nine well-known Bible stories from the Old Testament and have translated Mark's gospel verse by verse, with references showing parallels in other gospels. (In the Mark's gospel section, the numbers in bold are chapter numbers and the very small numbers are verse numbers.) I have finished the book with a translation of the Lord's Prayer. One of the first questions that many people ask me is, 'Have you done the Lord's Prayer in Cockney?' Because of all this interest, and also because it doesn't actually appear in Mark's gospel, I thought it would be a good way to finish the book.

Cockney

Cockney rhyming slang is wonderful. It is believed to have originated in the underworld of London in the middle of the 19th century. Cockneys didn't want people listening in to their conversations, so they spoke in rhyme to confuse strangers and the police. Some Cockneys I have spoken to say that this is nonsense and that the slang was simply invented for fun, as the police could have easily learned it as quickly as it was being invented! It is a slang in which a word is replaced by another word or a phrase

that rhymes with it. For example, ‘pork pies’ means lies (porkies), or ‘apple and pears’ means stairs. Sometimes the second part of the phrase is not said. So you wouldn’t say, ‘I’m going up the apple and pears’; you would say, ‘I’m going up the apples.’ In this book, I have sometimes put the second word there to help people work out the slang without having to turn to the glossary at the back.

The actual word ‘Cockney’ seems to mean literally ‘cock’s egg’. It refers to a misshapen egg that can sometimes be laid by a young hen. It was originally used to refer to the weak man living in the town, as opposed to the stronger, tougher man who lived and worked in the country. By the 17th century, the term Cockney came to mean a Londoner. Today’s Londoners, especially those who live in the East End, still use the term with much respect and pride.

It is an exciting language, and it is always changing, with new rhymes being added and old ones falling out of use. Nowadays, if you’re popping out for a curry, it’s ‘I’m off for a Ruby’ (Ruby Murray – curry). Some of the vowels are different, usually pronounced much longer. For example, ‘down’ is ‘dahn’, ‘out’ is ‘aht’. Quite often when Cockneys are talking, they drop their h’s and g’s; for example, ‘ow are you?’, or ‘ow’s it goin’?’ I emphasise the point that it’s ‘quite often’. It is not consistent that h’s or g’s are dropped or that vowels are elongated (‘dahn’). You will notice in

the book that h's and g's come and go, and one minute it's 'down', the next it's 'dahn'.

There is no point hiding from the fact that many Cockneys have a reputation of speaking quite 'colourfully'. The Vinnie Jones gangster-type talk springs to mind! The strongest language I have used in this book would be bloomin' or bleedin'. It doesn't need to be any stronger than this. One can still get the feeling that it is totally dahn to earth, and having used these stories in school, there is no reason at all for the language to be any more colourful.

So, with this Cockney background in mind, I hope you have a good ol' read. (Don't get confused with 'read and write' which means 'fight!') There is a Cockney/English glossary at the back of the book, which will explain all the phrases I have used.

❧ Part 1 ❧

Stories from the Old Testament

1

Would you Adam-and-Eve it... it's the story of Adam and Eve!

Genesis 2—3

The word Adam means geezer, or Man to be exact. We can read how this geezer was made in the rookery of Genesis chapter 2, verse 7, an' in chapters 2 and 3 we can see how God gives 'im responsibilities, and how 'e then messes things up (this is usually called The Fall). Some people think this story actually happened; others think it's just a story that teaches us about ourselves and our relationship with God. Adam represents all the geezers, and Eve all the ladies. It's a clever little story this. We see how people turn against God – they rebel against 'im. They refuse to give God the glory. But good ol' God doesn't let them go. God is always working on saving us... our salvation. Have a read...

The garden of Eden

Now, when God had made everything, the whole universe and that, he realised that there were no plants anywhere, and no little seeds had grown, 'cos 'e hadn't sent any Andy along, and there was no one around to look after the land, but there was a little bit of fisherman's coming up from under the surface which kept the ground watered.

One day, God took a bit of dirt from the ground, and 'e made the shape of some geezer out of it. He then breathed into the fireman's hose of this geezer, and would you Adam-and-Eve it, the dirt geezer started to live; God had obviously breathed fork into 'im!

God then planted a nice little garden in Eden, in the East, and it was 'ere that 'e put the geezer he'd made out of dirt. There were some bloomin' lovely trees in the garden, producing all sorts of smashing fruit. Right in the middle of this garden was the tree that gives fork and the tree that makes people know what's good and what's bad. A little stream of fisherman's flowed in Eden and it watered the garden.

Now, God put the geezer he'd made in the garden of Eden an' told 'im to look after it, help all the plants grow, protect it and all that. God said to 'im, 'You can eat all the

fruit you want, from any tree, except the tree that tells people what's good and what's bad. Now you ain't to eat the fruit from this tree, 'cos if you do, you're gonna die; you'll be brown bread the same day!

God then went on to say, 'Now, it ain't good for the geezer to live on 'is Tod. I'm gonna make 'im a Mile End to help 'im.' So God took some of the dirt that 'e liked to make things out of, an' 'e made all the animals and little Richards. God then brought them all to the geezer to see what names 'e would give them. The geezer gave them all a name, and that's how the animals got their names. So, the geezer did a good job there, naming all the animals and Richards. But after all that, none of them was a suitable Mile to help him.

God then made the geezer 'ave a real deep kip, and while 'e was 'aving a kip, God took out one of the geezer's ribs and then closed up the little hole in 'is side. He then made a woman out of this rib and 'e brought 'er to 'im. The geezer then said, 'Cor blimey! She's the same sort of person as me. She was made from a stick-and-stone taken from me, and from my flesh. She'll be called "Woman" 'cos she was taken from a man, innit?' That's why a geezer leaves his dad and finger, and joins with 'is trouble, and they become one. The geezer and the woman were both starkers, but they didn't care; they weren't embarrassed.

Adam and Eve make a bloomin' big mistake

Now, out of all the animals God made, the snake was the most dodgy, really sly and crafty. One day, the snake went up to the woman and asked her, 'Is it true that God's told you not to eat any fruit from 'is garden?'

'We can eat any fruit we want,' said the woman, 'but we ain't to touch any fruit from the big tree in the middle of the garden. God said that if we eat or even touch this fruit, we'll end up brown bread!'

The snake replied, 'What a load of bleedin' nonsense. You won't end up brown bread. God ain't gonna kill you, sweetheart. 'E's just worried that if you eat the fruit, you're gonna end up like 'im, and you'll know what's good and bad; you'll know everything!'

Now the woman started to have a real good butcher's at the tree. She noticed how delicious the fruit looked, and she started thinking how brilliant it would be to know everything and become as smart as God. And so, would you Adam-and-Eve it, she took some of the fruit, and ate it. Then, she gave some to 'er husband, and 'e ate it. 'Cos they had eaten the fruit, they suddenly understood things, and the first thing they noticed was that they were

both starkers! So they found some fig leaves and made some these-and-those out of them.

Later on in the evening, they heard God taking a little ball in the garden, and so they hid from 'im behind some trees. God then called out, 'Where are you, folks?'

The geezer answered, 'I heard you taking a ball in the garden. I was scared and so I hid from you, 'cos I had no bloomin' these-and-those on!'

'Hang on a minute,' said God. 'Who told you that you were starkers? You ain't been eating the fruit I told you not to eat, 'ave you?'

The geezer answered, 'Well, actually, it was that woman you put in the garden with me. She gave me the fruit, and all I did was just eat it.'

So God turned to the woman and said, 'Oi! Why did you do this, young lady?'

She replied, 'It weren't me, God. It was that dodgy snake. It tricked me into eating the delicious fruit, innit?'

God is not 'appy

God then said to the snake, 'You nasty little animal. You're in big trouble now. No other animal, just you. From this moment onwards, you're gonna have to crawl around on your Aunty, and you're gonna eat dirt and dust for as long as you live. You and the woman are gonna hate each other. Her saucepan lids and their descendants, and your saucepan lids and their descendants are always gonna be enemies. All her descendants are gonna crush your loaf, and you're gonna bite her descendant's heel.' (Many Christians explain this bit by saying that Jesus, the currant of Mary, is the descendant who will crush the snake's – or the devil's – loaf. Jesus is the one who has victory over evil and death. The bit about the heel means that because we all sin – do dodgy stuff against God – we have to 'limp' along the frog of life trying to reach our final goal.)

God then said to the woman, 'I'm gonna make it quite troublesome when you've got a bun in the oven (pregnant), and when you're pushing out the little saucepan during birth, it's gonna hurt. Now that sin 'as come into the world, there are gonna be all sorts of things that ain't all that nice. Now, despite what I've said about being pregnant, and the pain that you'll go through when the little ol' saucepan is popping out, you're still gonna fancy

your husband, and want to sleep with 'im, and you're gonna have to obey 'im!' (This is also because sin is now in the world!)

God said to the geezer, 'You listened to your trouble and ate the fruit which I told you not to eat. Now, 'cos you did this, you're gonna have to work bloomin' hard to grow your own food. There's gonna be loads of weeds and thorns that you're gonna have to deal with. You'll have to eat wild plants. If you wanna grow anything out of the dirt, then you'll have to work bloomin' 'ard. You'll 'ave to carry on working hard until you return to the dirt that I made you from. You're made from dirt, and you're gonna become dirt again, innit?'

Adam gave 'is trouble a name – Eve – 'cos she was the finger of all human beings. God actually made some these-and-those out of animal skins for Adam and 'is trouble, and 'e gave the these-and-those to 'em.

Adam and Eve are booted out of the garden

God then said, 'This geezer Adam has become like me. He now knows what's good and bad. Whatever happens, 'e must never be allowed to take any of the fruit from the tree of fork, otherwise he'll live forever.' So God told Adam to leave the garden of Eden. Adam was made to look after the soil and to grow 'is own food. At the east side of the garden, God put some big, mighty, heavenly creatures an' a big flaming sword which turned in all directions. As you've guessed, this was to make sure that no one could get into the garden, and ever touch the tree that gives fork!

And so, that's the story. People turned against God. Yes, God did punish Adam and Eve, but 'e didn't destroy them. God was already working on a nice little plan to save all people.

Would you Adam and Eve it?

Read how Jesus feeds 5,000 geezers with just five loaves of Uncle Fred and two Lillian Gish. Or how Noah built a bloomin' massive nanny. Then there's always the story of David and that massive geezer Goliath, or the time when Simon's finger-and-thumb-in-law was Tom-and-Dick in Uncle Ned and Jesus healed her... A very down-to-earth 'translation' that brings scripture out of the pulpit and back onto the streets.

'It certainly is a good laugh while imparting the essential message of the Bible.'

Reverend Stan in *The Badge*, the London cab drivers' newspaper

Now working as a funeral celebrant in Essex, **Mike Coles** was for many years head of religious education at Sir John Cass Church of England Secondary School in Stepney, East London. He hated RE when he was at school, and vowed that he would never make the children suffer as he had to! When he moved to the East End, he immediately fell in love with Cockney rhyming slang and started to use it in his lessons. The children loved it, he decided to write down some of his stories and – well, here they are.

