

The Bible Society of Egypt Year of the bible 2004 Annual Report

Mega Voice

A shipment of 4000 Mega Voice units, the latest “Gospel gadget” to arrive in Egypt, was sold out within 2 weeks, communicating the Good News to a probable 40,000 individuals!

Just what is this exciting new device? In essence, Mega Voice is a Bible Selection encoded on a microchip. This hand-held digital audio player is rugged, water resistant, and powered by the sun. There are no moving parts to wear out and the message cannot be erased.

Mega Voice was particularly designed as a tool to reach out to non-literate people, who live in a harsh climate. The 2 hour message (the Life of Christ) communicates clearly in the listener’s own language, bringing the Scriptures to life for the 1.5 billion for whom the printed Bible is useless.

When Mega Voice arrived in Egypt, the greatest interest was among those who could not or did not enjoy reading, from young girls to elderly men to literacy classes. Having God's Word accessible in such a simple and easy format was very appealing.

The units will be monitored in hopes of determining how God's Word has affected people’s lives through Mega Voice. Mega Voice is certainly set to play a valuable part in the larger trend towards using electronic media to deliver the Scriptures.

Arabic Bible Website project

With the goal of making God’s Word available and accessible to all, we were at last able to launch our upgraded website. We felt it essential to create a dynamic and attractive website, in order to offer multiple resources for those who want to study the Arabic Bible. The website also provides information about our activities and productions, establishing a greater awareness of the Bible Society of Egypt. Online shopping and donating are made available as well. (The English section is still under construction, as the Arabic section is priority.)

In the first few weeks, after an unpublicized “soft launch” of the site, there were 1800 first time visitors, with 160,000 “hits” (clicks made on the site). With a formal launch and much publicity yet to be made, we look forward to exciting developments to share in the coming days.

Heliopolis Bookshop

During the summer of 2003 the Bible Society of Egypt (BSE) relocated its offices to Heliopolis, a large suburb of Cairo that has more than three million people. In addition to having our administrative offices in that building we have dedicated the ground floor to be a bookshop serving the large Christian population in this area. This fall, we started working on the reconstruction of this bookshop. Please pray that the work will be completed smoothly without any difficulties or delays from City Hall.

Children’s Videos

The Arab world is an oral culture, where important things are often spoken rather than written. With an illiteracy rate of least 50%, the use of audio and visual media is strategic in reaching the people of Egypt with the Good News of the Bible.

Complicating the matter is the difference between spoken Arabic and the classical written Arabic. The Arabic Bible is written in the classical formal Arabic, which is a very different language than that spoken by Egyptians in their homes and daily life. Therefore, even if an Egyptian can read the Bible, he still will hear God speaking to him in what in effect, a “foreign” language.

Children, who have not yet gone to school, and even those in the early years of school, understand little of the classical Arabic. These children are especially in need of Scripture resources in a language and format that they understand and enjoy.

In seeking to provide excellent and attractive Bible based videos for children, the BSE (in cooperation with Sat 7) has translated and dubbed 4 video series for kids. Because we are competing with quality options, we must choose high quality videos which kids are sure to love.

The *Testament* “claymation” series from the U.K. and the *Story Keepers* from Focus on the Family, are both geared to older children, and have been done in classical Arabic. Both have been very popular.

Still Bestseller: Beginner’s Bible

However, when the *Beginners Bible* series was dubbed into colloquial Arabic (the spoken dialect, as opposed to the written classical Arabic), there was a new, delightful response. It was phenomenally successful, and people expressed great appreciation. A special this summer offered the series at almost half price. 12,500 of these videos were sold this year.

This positive response has encouraged the BSE to move ahead in this direction and start earlier with children’s videos. It is important to establish these children in the principles of the word of God *before* they go to school, *before* they are surrounded by the worldly and Islamic influences that they will deal with in school and society.

Pre-School Focus: Kingsley’s Meadows

That is why we are so excited about our newest project, *Kingsley’s Meadows* (originally produced by the ABS). This cast of loveable and hilarious puppet characters brings valuable lessons from the Bible, demonstrating the relevance of God’s Word in everyday situations kids face. Such vital character training, made available in the “heart language” of the Egyptians, is certain to have a positive impact on our society.

The process of getting the *Kingsley’s Meadows* series into colloquial Arabic was no small feat. Beyond the translation of the language, a choir was formed and taught the songs. Studio time and musicians were hired for the recording of the songs, and for the whole process of dubbing.

As with any video, censorship and official permission must be obtained before it can be distributed. In some cases, it takes several years for this to happen! Royalties must be paid, administrative expenses deducted, and finally, a distribution campaign is organized to advertise and market the product.

However, an excellent product in the hands of grateful Egyptians is well worth the effort, knowing that these videos will be played over and over again, in homes, in Sunday schools and Christian nursery schools and special programs. Egyptian children will enjoy the benefits of a positive attachment to God’s truths from early on, and our world will be better for it.

Children’s Coloring CD

With more and more children in Egypt spending time on the computer, the BSE felt it vital to provide healthy and beneficial alternatives to the software available in the general market. This year, the BSE was very proud to offer its own production, a CD with animated Bible Stories, coloring activities, and puzzles. Children are very keen on this product and more than half of the CD's sold in 2004 were from the children's selection.

Jesus Film

Shortly after "The Passion of the Christ" movie was released in Egypt, the Bible Society of Egypt began a *Jesus Film* campaign (in cooperation with the Jesus Film Project). The film and a free New Testament were packaged together and advertised widely at a very subsidized price (less than \$1 US). After distributing 1.5 million copies of this film in the past 12 years, we were not at all prepared for the incredible response we received!

BSE staff was overwhelmed with the calls requesting information concerning this video! On the first day, after TV ads and a front-page newspaper ad had been placed, there were over 200 calls, and within 2 weeks, there were over 500 home deliveries made, and over 1,700 pkgs. sold from the bookshops in Cairo alone. Over 80% of the deliveries were to people with no church background, many of whom have expressed thanks to the BSE for supplying further information on the life of Christ. Most had seen "The Passion" movie, and were curious to know more.

Through the home delivery service and our bookshops, we have been able to make contact with people from all walks of life, from the common and the needy, to high-ranking ministers and embassy staff, all who want the *Jesus Film*.

Numerous home deliveries were made to the remote areas of Cairo, some taking 1 and 1/2 to 2 hours to reach! ONE such trip included a ride on the subway, a ride in a microbus, and another ride in another microbus, followed by a 20-minute walk down a very long street with a confusing numbering system! Many cell-phone calls were needed along the way! This is the price paid for "free" home delivery!!!

One lady came to the bookshop six times over the course of 2 days, each time she met or remembered a friend or family member to whom she wanted to present the film and NT. Several such customers described the Bible as illuminating, and conveyed appreciation to the BSE for providing the Scriptures.

One man came, wanting to know more about the Bible. Yet he was hesitant to enter such a bookshop. As he stood outside, the salesman brought him a Bible to look at. After some time, he asked for another, and then another, as he compared the texts and layouts. In the end, after much deliberation, and without entering the shop, he purchased a Bible and went on his way!

Advertising

Because we are limited to selling Bible Society products from explicitly Christian outlets, the only way to reach the general public with news of our products is through advertisements in the media. Without these ads, many people would never hear about our products. Just one ad on national TV or in a newspaper attracts hundreds of people to our bookshops. Our free home delivery service also depends on constant advertising of the home delivery phone number.

We thank God for the unprecedented freedom we have to advertise and want to use it to the utmost. The impact of these advertisements is multi-fold:

- § informs the public about new Scripture products
- § Helps in raising the profile of the Bible Society
- § Gives unparalleled visibility to Christians in the media

In addition to the billboards, TV, and newspaper ads that we have been using, we continue to seek out new avenues and creative ways to inform the public about the Scriptures, such as the underground subway system televised commercials and the placing of ads in the menus of inter-city buses.

This is a time of unparalleled visibility through the media. The Egyptian church is very grateful to the Bible Society of Egypt for providing that which the church is unable to, namely, publicly promoting the Bible.

Making Bibles Affordable

Making Bibles available in Egypt, at prices people can afford, is becoming increasingly difficult. As Bibles are printed abroad, the currency exchange difference means that it now costs twice as much as it did to produce the same Bible in 1999. This is a dilemma, as selling prices cannot be increased beyond what people can reasonably pay, and yet, there are limited resources to subsidize the Bibles.

To partially overcome this problem we began to produce a “missionary edition” of the Bible, which is a smaller size that can be used for evangelization, youth, small groups, discipleship, etc. We were able to produce this Bible at a very economical cost, while subsidizing the regular size “pew Bible” for those who use it in their own Bible study and for their Churches.

In segmenting Bible readers into two distinctive groups and trying to meet the needs of each group separately, both groups are able to obtain Bibles that meet their respective needs, at reasonable prices. The result has been a **tremendous** increase in our overall Bible distribution.

He Lived Among Us

The Bible Society of Egypt has long been focused on meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. Over the years, dramatized cassettes have provided God’s Word in the heart language of the Egyptians, giving non-readers direct access to God’s message. Even literate people benefit from having the Scriptures in their everyday language.

Over 4 million different Scriptures cassettes have been distributed across Egypt in the last 5 years, many produced in cooperation with IBS and SIL. The response has been remarkable, and people continually ask for more. Because the target audience is poor, often illiterate, additional subsidy is needed to make these cassettes affordable.

Our focus this year is a professional dramatization of the life and teachings of Jesus, “*He Lived among Us*,” done with IBS. A special offer made this cassette, packaged with a free New Testament, available for .35 US cents! Over 120,000 of these cassettes have been distributed this year, as an excellent means of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout Egypt.

Temporary Outlets

Making God’s word available in crowded public places, through non-traditional outlets, has had a significant impact in reaching people who would otherwise not have access to Bible products. The majority of our sales at these temporary outlets and bookstalls are in the form of videos and cassettes

BSE staff manned booths at 21 of the Christian festivals that are held every year in honor of a variety of saints. Such work is exhausting, and often entails camping out for days, making do with crowded, less-than-adequate facilities, in order to make God’s Word available. The attendance at these festive occasions varies from 50 thousand to two million visitors. Poor and illiterate people particularly attend. These large gatherings are a good opportunity to offer Scripture products, which are always sold at a high discount so that people can afford to buy them. Colloquial cassettes are sold for only .15 US cents!

This year the BSE was again represented at a wide variety of exhibitions and fairs, and was able to rent a stall in a busy Cairo mall and to place outlets in popular vacation spots and on the Desert Highway. Because these stalls are very expensive we try to rent them for the busiest months of the year.

A staff member who was at the Rest Stop outlet on the Desert Highway was especially encouraged by a customer who stopped specifically to find the latest episode in the *Beginner's Bible* series. He asked detailed questions, wondering which stories were on which videos, and finally, called his wife on his cell phone to ask her which episodes were missing from their collection. The salesman admired his knowledge and appreciation of the series and asked him what church he attended. The man replied that they had no church background!

Cairo International Book Fair 2004

Due to unusually cold and rainy weather, and a shorter running time because of a large Muslim feast, Bookfair attendance was very low. Salesmen were discouraged, but found that they had much more time to talk to new customers and help them in choosing the right Scripture products. An independent display area on the Bookfair grounds outside the pavilions was rented, and this new location had by far the best sales.

Though sales at the Bookfair grounds were half what they were last year, we were pleasantly surprised that our sales team was able to catch up during the last two weeks of February. We always continue our "Bookfair sale" through the end of February, to give a chance for people who did not get to the Bookfair to obtain this year's new Scripture products. More than 10,000 transactions were entered during the month of February, and the total Bookfair season sales all over Egypt were only 8% less than last year! This is remarkable considering that many publishers were only able to sell 20 to 30% of what they sold last year.

Truth on Display

The presence of a Bible Outlet, on busy streets of inexpensive summer vacation areas, has proved to be one of our most successful methods of evangelistic outreach, providing an excellent opportunity to reach both locals and vacationers with the Word of God. Each year, tens of thousands of people come through these popular summer spots. Most of the people who frequent these streets are totally un-churched and have never come across a Christian bookshop in their lives.

To adapt with the vacationers' schedule, summer working hours are from 5pm to 5am! A TV screen is strategically placed to project a video for all who pass by to see. Each day there is a regular crowd of viewers outside the outlet. Whenever the children from neighboring shops and homes notice that the cartoons are on, they call out to each other and gather around for the next episode of Bible Stories! The Jesus Film, and the crucifixion scene, is generally shown repeatedly, as this catches the attention of the people like nothing else.

One man, deeply affected by what he saw, entered the bookshop to ask if this was the true story about Jesus. He then purchased the video for himself that he might see the whole story. Another man, a vacationer from a neighboring country, came into the shop for prayer... he had been there a year earlier, having purchased the Scriptures after seeing the video clip.

People who pass by are impacted by the video and drawn out from the prevailing atmosphere. In response, many will buy a small book or video, or at least, come away with the strong message they have received of Jesus' sacrifice. Such outlets provide opportunities, not only to distribute more of our products, but also to expose those who pass by, to the truths of God's Word.

Bible World

Looking forward to 2005, our biggest challenge will be to complete the Heliopolis Book shop and then to go about raising funds for our dream project, Bible World. The first floor of our new Bible House has been reserved for this contemporary and creative Bible Experience, where school-aged children will learn that Christianity is not a Western import!

From a Scriptorium in Alexandria, 270 BC, to Guttenberg's Press, to time travel in a Space capsule and exciting Computer games, Egyptian children will understand how the Bible came to be, what it is, and why we should trust it. Bible World will increase confidence in the veracity and authenticity of God's Word to a whole generation of young people who are daily being challenged by their context about the reliability of the Bible.

We are envisioning significant mindset changes for Egyptian children through the Bible World project. We want to inspire a passion to have God's Word in one's own heart language, believing that this new generation will further encourage the development of a more understandable translation of the Bible, for themselves and for the whole Arab world.

Challenge Grant!

We have just received the exciting news of an anonymous group that would like to participate in this endeavor through a one-time matching grant. Please pray with us, that many individuals and groups will respond to this opportunity to double their contributions as they add their support to the Bible World project. All funds raised for the Bible World from December 2004 through May 2005 will be matched by this group. Please contact us for further information.

Thank You...

We sincerely appreciate your prayer and support of the Bible Society of Egypt. This truly has been a rewarding Year of the Bible. As we work together, believing that our labor is not in vain, let us pray together, according to the promise of Isaiah 55:11: So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:11 (NKJV)