

## 'Huge potential' for Talking Bible in Eritrea

By Francois Sieberhagen, United Bible Societies Media Consultant, Southern Africa Regional Service Center

**ASMARA, Eritrea** — “Can this Bible talk in Tigrigna?” was what Kashi Negash Deres wanted Habte Negash, Executive Secretary of the [Bible Society of Eritrea](#), to tell him.

This question came after the Orthodox priest from the village of Shamungus, 20 kms (13 miles) from Asmara, had been introduced to the Talking Bible and spent some time listening to it playing the Scriptures in English. His next reaction was one of joy.

“This will help my people!” he exclaimed.

“Why?” asked Paul Hoekstra, head of Audio Scriptures International, the firm which patented the Talking Bible technology.

“Because it will allow them to hear the Word of God in their own time,” came the response.

During a recent visit to Eritrea, Mr Hoekstra joined me in establishing a research project. The aim of this project is to find out how suitable the Talking Bible is for individual and family Scripture listening within a range of church communities. It is also hoped to determine whether the technology can withstand the harsh conditions in Africa.

The Talking Bible is a light, compact unit made up of a tape recorder packaged in an outer mould which resembles a Bible. It uses a single cassette containing the whole of the New Testament narrated by just one voice. The technology used is so straightforward, according to Mr Hoekstra, that the unit can be repaired by any ordinary village radio repairman if necessary.

With illiteracy at almost 80 per cent and many poor people not having access to printed Scriptures, the Talking Bible could certainly meet a great need.

“Group listening is a foreign concept and will not work in our church environment,” believes Mr Negash. “The Talking Bible will work for family listening and will definitely assist families in engaging with the New Testament.”




Kashi Negash Deres, an Orthodox priest, examines the Talking Bible, a tape recorder packaged in a mould resembling a Bible which uses a single cassette to convey the whole New Testament. Eritrea. Photo: Southern Africa Regional Service Center / Francois Sieberhagen (ERI03DJ-4.JPG)

This view is shared by Mamer Kibreab Garoy, Chairman of the Bible Society Board. "I'm excited about the prospect of reaching people living in rural areas," he says. "The potential is huge."

The most pressing issue now is whether it will be possible to produce the Talking Bible in Tigrigna (Tigrinya), the language of almost two million people in southern and central Eritrea. To do so will require both local and international backing.

"We need help to provide the Talking Bible at a price people can afford," emphasises Mr Negash.

*An earlier article about the potential for using recorded Scriptures in Eritrea can be found in [World Report 372/27](#). (WR 381/14 - 11.03) *

Audio Scriptures International was founded in 1989 with a vision to be:

- A clearing house for audio Scriptures capable of providing recordings of God's Word in many languages for people who have left their homelands.
- A recording ministry providing both permanent and portable studios for recording Scriptures in languages in which audio Scriptures are not yet available.

Further information can be found at:  
[www.audioscripture.com](http://www.audioscripture.com)

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