



GUARDING THE TREASURE

*How God's People
Preserve God's Word*





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God's Word***

Linda Finlayson

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Front cover: William Tyndale gathering together his books and manuscripts as he flees from his enemies.

Back cover: Jo Shetlar Missionary and Translator of the Balangao New Testament standing beside a child as she holds one of the first New Testaments in the Balangao language.



The dates at the beginning of each chapter refer to the time period during which the chapter takes place. They do not refer to the beginning and end of the individual's life.

*** Check the Glossary for unfamiliar words.**



For Sandy





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Boxes from the Sky

July 24, 1982

Jo Shetler brushed aside her dark hair and shaded her eyes against the strong sun as she looked up into the clear sky. The planes had been arriving all day in this remote valley in the Philippines, bringing visitors and food for the celebrations. She spied another small plane as it crested the tops of the mountains and circled to land on the airstrip the Balangao people had built years before. She waved her arms excitedly. Maybe this plane had the boxes.

‘Juami!’

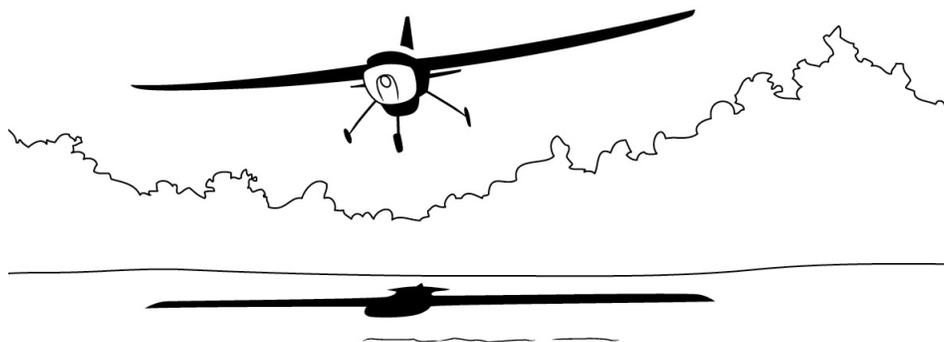
Jo turned when she heard her Balangao name and saw Tekla, dressed in a colourful striped skirt and white blouse, coming toward her. Tekla had become a dear friend over the years that Jo had lived in this tropical valley among Tekla’s people.

‘How many more are coming?’ Tekla asked as the plane began its descent.

‘There’ll be eighty Americans at least,’ Jo replied with a smile. ‘And who knows how many hundreds of Balangaos from all the villages.’



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Tekla's brown face lit up with laughter. 'It will be a wonderful party.' Then she turned aside to direct some lost American visitors to the home they would be staying in.

All around them stood wooden houses on four foot stilts, each with a bamboo ladder reaching from the ground to the front door. Thatched roofs topped the bamboo houses and pens full of chickens and pigs occupied the spaces underneath. The village itself was set in the bottom of the deep valley surrounded by terraced rice fields carved out of the mountain sides.

The small plane came to a stop, and Jo went out toward it. The pilot jumped out, waved at her, and then opened the side doors to let his passengers out.

'Good flight, Bob?' Jo asked as she came up behind him.

'Yep,' he replied, assisting an older gentleman down the few steps. 'And,' he added, 'I brought the boxes!'

'May I see them? Now?' Jo asked impatiently

'Only if you promise not to open them until the dedication begins,' Bob teased.



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He climbed into the back of the plane and handed out several medium sized wooden boxes one at a time to Jo, who carefully set them down on the ground. Both pilot and missionary stood and looked at the ordinary crates, thinking of the extraordinary things they carried inside of them.

‘Congratulations, Jo. This has been a long time coming and you must be very pleased,’ Bob said softly.

Jo just nodded, suddenly feeling a surge of tears rising up in her eyes. After a moment she managed, ‘Let’s take them to my house until it’s time. Oh, I can’t wait to see Ama’s face when he sees them.’ Then to hide the tears she bent down to pick up a crate and led the way for Bob and a few recruits to follow her to her house on stilts.

As the procession wound itself through the crowds of people, one figure came sprinting up to them from the far side of the village. He stopped in front of Jo, breathing hard.

‘Is this them?’ Doming asked.

Jo smiled down at her twenty-year-old adopted brother. Like many of his people, he was only five feet tall. Jo handed him her box. He held it with care, his eyes shining.

‘But you can’t open it yet,’ she said. ‘Not till the ceremony. And not until Ama sees them first.’

Doming nodded and gave her a look of understanding. Ama was Doming’s father and Jo’s adopted father. By rights he should see the contents first.

It was late afternoon when everyone had finally arrived. All the baggage the Americans had brought was stowed in their hosts’ houses. The canopies of quilts and palm branches had been set up to shade the seats cut out of the hillside. The aroma of cooking pork filled the air, promising a wonderful feast after the dedication ceremony.



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Jo stood looking out over the hundreds of faces, white and brown, as they settled themselves on the seats under the canopies. She listened to their excited chatter in both Balangao and English, and waved or nodded as many looked her way. How she loved the people that God had allowed her to serve for the past twenty years. People like Tekla who had refused to sacrifice to the spirits long before she had heard about Jesus, knowing that she needed to worship the true God. Or little old Forsan, the spirit medium, who, until her conversion, everyone used to call when they needed to appease the evil spirits. Or Andrea, who had been amazed that Jesus could command the evil spirits to leave and they would go. If Jesus was powerful enough to free her, then he was the one she wanted to follow. And dear Ama, Jo's adopted father. Jo gave him a special smile as he made his way toward her through the crowds. Ama had taken her under his wing when she first arrived. He told her she needed someone to look after her since she was a woman and his people were head hunters. Jo was sure he was wrong, but quickly realised he was right. People wouldn't listen to her, but they would listen to her 'father.' He told her the customs of his people, helped her with the language and even insisted she join his family, her family, for dinner each day. Ama didn't understand the gospel though, and it took many years before he was convinced it was safe to reject the spirit worship of his people to serve God. Now he was an evangelist to the other villages in the area.

Ama stood beside Jo, coming up to just past her shoulder. Dressed in a short sleeved white shirt and dark trousers, Ama held up his arms to quiet the crowd. As the chatter slowly ceased a number of other Balangao grouped themselves around Jo and Ama. These were all the people who had helped Jo with the translation work. Ama had a programme organised and he stepped up to the microphone to begin.

Custom demanded that all visitors must be introduced, and their host families too. Then, after a number of speeches and songs,



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it finally came time to open the boxes piled nearby. Jo opened the first one, reached in and pulled out a black bound book. Everyone grew silent, so that the only sounds were the humid winds rustling the palm branches and the songbirds of the forests calling and chiming their music. Turning to Ama, she held it out to him, the first copy of the New Testament in his own language. Jo couldn't stop grinning as Ama took it carefully with both hands and held up for all to see.

'This is what we've been waiting for!' he called out, tears leaking out of his eyes. 'And now we will celebrate! Balangao style!'

The crowd erupted into cheering and clapping, and some starting to sing and play gongs. Laughing and crying, Jo reached into the box again and gave out a book to each one who had helped with the translation work over the years. Each accepted his or her copy with care, opening the pages and reading with wonder the stories of Jesus in their own language.

That was just the beginning of a celebration that lasted for two days. Each village that came to the celebration had prepared its own special presentation. Some had written songs to commemorate the coming of God's Word to their valley, others told stories about how they had come to believe and the struggles they had against the spirit world. Jo listened in wonder to those stories. These people had more struggles than she had realised and she praised God for his saving grace and strength among the Balangao people.

* * *

Have you ever thrown a party when you received a Bible as a gift or gone to purchase one at the store? Probably not. While we value God's Word very much, we have so many Bibles all around us that we don't get as excited as the Balangao people did. They were seeing their Bibles for the first time. We, on the other hand, can



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buy Bibles at any bookstore. We can choose ones with different coloured covers; decide if we want one with pictures or notes, or neither. We can buy inexpensive soft cover ones or very expensive leather ones. Many different versions are available, all in English. The King James Version uses older English words and phrases, like reading a Shakespeare play. There are modern versions, like the New International Version, that read more like the books we get from the library. We can also download the Bible onto our mobile phones or iPad. With so many choices why would we get excited just to get a new Bible?

We are very blessed indeed in our country to have God's Word so easily available to us. But it hasn't always been that way, nor is the Bible available in every place in the world. Like the Balangao people in the Philippines, people long ago did not have many copies of God's Word, or even copies of it in their own language. What Jo Shetler did for the Balangao people, many people in history have done for us. Let's find out who they were and how we got our Bible.





Meet the Writers

The Bible is not actually one book. Rather, it is like a library, a collection of sixty-six books all put together. God inspired many people to write these books at different times in history and then the early church councils put them all together. What sort of people did God ask to write down his message for his people? A slave turned prince, military commanders, an exiled politician, Jewish kings, priests, prophets, a farmer, a fisherman, a doctor, a scholar turned missionary, a former tax collector, and Jesus' own half-brother. These people wrote what God inspired them to write. And they used the gifts that God gave them to write in different styles. Some wrote about the historical events of Israel. Some wrote in poetry and verse. Some wrote biographies of people who loved God. Some told of visions, both wonderful and terrible, that God had given them. Some wrote about how Jesus, God's son, came to earth, lived and died for us and came back to life again! Some wrote letters, giving God's instructions and encouragement to believers.

Let's meet a few of these people and see how God used them in writing his Word ...



Guarding the Treasure

Moses **(Around the thirteenth century B.C.¹)**

Moses was born a Jewish slave in Egypt at a very dangerous time. Pharaoh, fearful that his slave population was growing too large, had decreed that all baby boys were to be thrown into the River Nile. Moses' parents disobeyed that command and kept him hidden for three months. But, as with all babies, it was difficult to keep the little one quiet. So eventually his parents did obey Pharaoh's decree, but not exactly as Pharaoh meant. Moses' mother made a waterproof basket and placed him inside and set the little boat floating on the river. She chose the right place to do it; just where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe each morning. When the princess saw little Moses she knew immediately that he was the child of Jewish slaves, but her heart was soft and she decided to adopt him to protect him from death. And so it was that Moses went from being a slave to becoming a prince.

Years later when Moses was grown and living in the palace, he decided to go and see what was happening to his people, the Jewish slaves. He found that they were badly mistreated by cruel overseers. In anger, Moses killed one of the overseers who was beating a slave. Then he hid the body in the sand dunes. But others had seen the crime and reported it to Pharaoh, who became angry with Moses. So Moses ran away, as far as he could go, to the land of Midian. There he became a shepherd, quietly minding his sheep away from all the difficulties in Egypt. But God had a job for Moses to do and called to him from a burning bush. God wanted Moses to go back to Egypt and lead the Jewish people out of that place and into a new

¹ B.C. means **B**efore **C**hrist was born.



Meet the Writers

country. Reluctantly, Moses obeyed. It was not an easy task. Pharaoh saw no reason to let his slave population go. At least not until God sent ten nasty plagues on the land. After the Egyptians had suffered a great deal, Pharaoh finally let Moses lead the Jewish people out.

But Moses' job was not finished. God told Moses to meet him on Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the rest of the laws he wanted his people to obey. The laws included how God should be worshipped and how the people must behave toward each other. For this reason, Moses has been known as the Law Giver by Jewish people right up until today. How easy Moses' life would have been after that if only God's people had just obeyed what God had commanded. But like all of us, they would forget, or choose to forget, and do what they felt like instead of obeying God. As a result, the people were not allowed to go directly to the Promised Land. Instead, they spent forty years living in the wilderness with Moses as their leader. When at last the people were allowed to go to Canaan, God told Moses that he was only allowed to see the Promised Land from a mountain top before he died.

God had Moses write down the history of the Jewish people from the beginning of Creation to the time just before they entered Canaan. These are the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books were originally written down on scrolls. Copies were made through the years and kept in the temple and synagogues to be read out to the people when they came to worship God. These books are called the Torah.



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David **(Around 1000 B.C.²)**

David was born into a family of boys in the town of Bethlehem, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. Jesse owned a great many sheep and David was given the job of looking after them. David enjoyed being out in the pastureland where, as the sheep grazed peacefully, he could play his lyre and compose songs. But it wasn't always peaceful. He had to keep a close eye on the flock, who, not being very bright, could wander off and be injured or eaten by bears or lions. In fact, David had to kill those wild animals when they came too close to the sheep. He was practiced with a sling shot and could aim accurately enough to hit an animal in just the right spot to kill it.

David's life began to change when the prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem and told him and his family that God had chosen David to be Israel's next king. At first it appeared that the message made no difference whatsoever. David went back to taking care of sheep, practising his fighting skills with the sling and shepherd's staff, and composing poems and songs about God and his creation. But shortly after that David ended up facing and defeating the giant Philistine, Goliath. David was then welcomed into King Saul's palace, became a close friend of Jonathan, Saul's son, and married Michal, Saul's daughter. But Saul was jealous of David because God had chosen David to be the next king, and because the Israelites loved David. So Saul tried to kill David.

David went into hiding, but he was not alone. Over time many young men came to join his army, but they didn't fight against Saul. David knew it was wrong to kill someone God had anointed. Only in God's time would David become king. Until then they had to

² B.C. dates go backward from the birth of Jesus Christ (the opposite of how we count today, because we are counting forward from his birth).



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wait patiently. During that time David had a chance to meet many of the people he would one day rule over. David became king when Saul and all his sons were killed in a battle with the Philistines.

David ruled over Israel for forty years. He had many difficulties to deal with: invading armies, rebels in his own army, and problems with his own sons. But he eventually established a peaceful kingdom. God called David ‘a man after my own heart.’ That meant that David loved God and tried to live as God had commanded. But even David had his failings and there were times when God had to punish David for sinning. And even though he was a king, David was humble and asked God to forgive him. Out of all of this, came the poems or Psalms that David wrote. The Psalms cover all the things that happen in life: praising God for his mighty works, asking God for help during troubled times, confessing sin and asking forgiveness, rejoicing in God’s goodness and care. David experienced all these things and used his gift of song-writing to worship God. These Psalms were included in the Old Testament books, used in worship in the synagogues and the temple and have had a central place in the worship of the church.

Jeremiah **(Around 626-585 B.C.)**

Jeremiah was born in the town of Anathoth, not far from Jerusalem. His father, Hilkiah, was a priest. King Josiah was ruling in Judah at that time, and wanted to serve God. He had issued orders to repair the temple that had been neglected, and told the people to turn away from idol worship. But the people were stubborn and some refused to turn back to God and worship him. So when Jeremiah was just a young man, God called him to be a prophet, someone who would deliver God’s message to the people. God had plenty to say to those stubborn people.



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Jeremiah's life was not an easy one. The messages God gave him to preach were not pleasant. Jeremiah was to tell the people that God was angry with them, so angry that he was going to allow an invasion and eventually the people would be captured and taken away to foreign lands. But, God also said that he loved them, and later he would allow them to return and rebuild their land. You can imagine that Jeremiah was not very popular with the people or the kings who came after Josiah. Jeremiah's life was threatened more than once. He suffered beatings, was thrown down a well and put in prison. All of this happened because he faithfully gave God's message. Not only that, but other men, calling themselves prophets too, preached false messages to the people. They said Jeremiah was lying and they were speaking God's truth. There were times that Jeremiah felt very discouraged, but he didn't give up. He did as God told him to, and wrote down the messages in the book named after him in the Bible.

Jeremiah is just one of the many prophets God called to preach warnings and messages of love to his people. Seventeen books in the Old Testament are books written by God's prophets. These books were not just for the Israelites back then, but are meant to be read by Jews and Christians as messages from God that we need to hear today.

Luke **(Around A.D.³ 60)**

Luke was a Gentile, born somewhere outside of Israel. There are no exact dates, but he must have been born sometime around the same time that Jesus was born. Although we know little of Luke's background, we do know that he was well educated. He

³ A.D. refers to the time after Christ's birth. The letters A.D. are a short form for the Latin words Anno Domini, which mean 'Year of our Lord.'



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was trained to be a doctor, and was also a writer and historian. At some point in his adult life he became a Christian and met the Apostle Paul. They became good friends and Luke accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys around the Roman Empire. Luke even went with Paul to Rome when Paul was arrested and tried by the emperor. Luke endured much of what Paul did: persecutions and beatings by those who didn't want to hear the gospel, joy when some were converted and new churches begun, tiredness, hunger, shipwrecks and even prison.

Luke wrote two books in the New Testament: the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. The gospel is the story of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, and then Luke continues the story of the early Christians and Paul's missionary journeys in Acts. It was like writing books one and two in a series for the early Christians to read and learn about Jesus and the early church. He wrote in what we call a narrative or story telling fashion. Luke said that he wanted to 'write an orderly account'⁴ because he knew these events were important and true. And indeed they are. God inspired Luke to record all these events so that we would have a clear historical account of what happened during Jesus' time on earth and the beginning of the early church.

Paul **(Around A.D. 60)**

Paul was born around the time of Christ in the city of Tarsus. He was Jewish, but his family also had Roman citizenship. Paul was a bright young man and he did so well at the synagogue school that his family sent him to Jerusalem to be trained as a scholar with Gamaliel, a respected member of the Sanhedrin.

⁴ See Luke 1:1-4



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Paul was a committed follower of God. He wanted to live a life that pleased God and was distressed when others refused to obey God's law. Paul, along with many of the Jewish leaders, didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, or that he had come back from the dead. So when the early church began after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul was concerned that Christians were not following God. He thought they were out to change God's law as laid down in





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the Scriptures (what we now call the Old Testament). So he received permission from the Jewish leaders to arrest the Christians and put them in prison. But Jesus himself intervened. He appeared to Paul in a vision and told Paul to stop persecuting Christians and become one of them. Jesus changed Paul's heart so that he understood that Jesus really is the Son of God. Paul became the first Christian missionary. He travelled to as many parts of the Roman Empire as he could, preaching the gospel and establishing churches. Paul endured a lot of hardship, even while he had the joy of seeing so many come to Christ. He experienced beatings, stoning, riots and prison. But he never gave up, telling people that 'I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'⁵

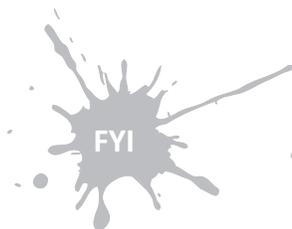
Paul wrote letters to the churches and some individuals, teaching them about God and telling them how they should live to please God. He warned them against false teachers and encouraged them to remember their ultimate goal was to become more like Christ. The early Christians gathered Paul's letters together so that they could be read whenever Christians met for worship. Eventually they became part of the New Testament.

These are five of the many writers of the books of the Bible. God used many more people, inspiring them with messages he wanted his people to hear. Together all these books make up the Bible we have today. But how did all these books, written by so many different writers over a long period of time get together in the one book we now call our Bible?

⁵ Philippians 3:8a.



Guarding the Treasure



How to Make a Book in Ancient Times:

The first 'books' were written on surfaces that people had to hand: flat stone, large wooden tablets and tablets made of clay.

To write on those surfaces people used a variety of tools. Stone tablets required a chisel and hammer and a very precise effort to chip out the letters one by one. You think you have something to complain about when you're asked to write neatly on paper, just imagine if you had to chisel your work out instead.

Wooden tablets were a little more user friendly. In ancient Egypt the scribe's tools included fine brushes, pens and ink which he carried around in a wooden box. Black ink was made from charcoal or soot, but he could also make a variety of coloured inks by crushing minerals and mixing them with water to produce red, green and blue. The brushes and pens were made from papyrus reeds, which wore out quickly so he needed a large supply.

Clay tablets were the most popular of the three. They were easily made from the clay soil, a common and inexpensive item. While the clay was still soft, the writer would use a stylus, made of wood or bone, to jab the clay repeatedly to form the outline of the letters. A bit slow, you might think, but he had to be fairly quick especially if he lived in the hot climates of the Near East because the clay did dry out. When the writing was complete, the clay tablet was then baked to harden it, making it a long lasting 'book.'

Not surprisingly all these items were large, heavy and not easily stored. You would have difficulty lugging around a large stone, which had to be a decent size to have anything of substance written on it. So this medium was generally used for



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official signs and announcements, something that was put in a public place for all to see. The wooden tablets were sometimes stored in what we call book form today: several tablets on top of one another and bound together by threading pieces of leather through holes in each wooden piece. But the form did restrict the size. Again, wooden tablets were hardly pocket-sized and difficult to read in bed. Clay tablets were long-lasting, but had the same drawback as the stone: large and heavy. Official documents recorded on clay were usually stored on shelves or in labelled wooden boxes, making them easier for the official or librarian to find in large collections.

