

COMPERE

Well, while we're thinking about reading the Bible, let's imagine the scene in a bookshop...

ASSISTANT

Can I help you?

CUSTOMER

Yes, please, I'm looking for a Bible.

ASSISTANT

A Bible, sir? But of course. What kind?

CUSTOMER

Er - brown, I think. Or blue. Black is rather severe, don't you think?

ASSISTANT

No, sir, I didn't mean the binding - the edition. What sort of Bible do you want?

CUSTOMER

Well, you know, the normal one - used in churches. The Holy Bible.

ASSISTANT

Ah, yes, but which version, sir? Do you want the Jerusalem? The NIV? The RSV? Or the KJB - which of course is also known as the AV?

CUSTOMER

Oh, I'm not really sure. It's for my niece - she's getting confirmed.

The ASSISTANT produces various different books as she mentions each version and puts them on the counter, until there is quite a stack of Bibles between them.

ASSISTANT

(holding a book)

The NIV is our most popular seller - the New International Version, although there's an updated edition coming out very soon. I suppose that will be the Double NIV - the New New International Version.

CUSTOMER

It looks nice. But I'm not sure my niece would need an international version. She's being confirmed in Basingstoke.

ASSISTANT

You want a British Bible? Well, there's the NEB - the New English Bible. And the KJB - the King James Bible - also known as the AV, the Authorised Version - that's the classic Bible - what you might call the standard version. The RSV - the Revised Standard Version. The NRSV - the New Revised Standard Version. And of course the RSVP.

CUSTOMER

RSVP? What's that?

ASSISTANT

The Revised Standard Version Plus.

CUSTOMER

Oh. Plus what?

ASSISTANT

Well, plus maps? That's one option...

CUSTOMER

I don't think she'd want maps. She's not planning a trip, as far as I know.

ASSISTANT

Oh, there's not just maps - but a whole range of accessories. Bible with concordance... Bible with apocrypha... Bible with built-in spirit level, to ensure balanced interpretation...

CUSTOMER

Oh. Couldn't I get a basic Bible, and then she can upgrade later on?

ASSISTANT

A basic Bible? Hmm. Let me see. What about the GNB - the Good News Bible...

CUSTOMER

Ooh, yes, I think she'd prefer one with good news in it, if that's possible. There's so much doom and gloom on the news these days!

ASSISTANT

Quite so. Or how about the LB, the Living Bible?

CUSTOMER

(not keen)

Ah, this one's living, is it? Would it want regular feeding?

ASSISTANT

Let's have a look through here. TEV - Today's English Version. YEV - Yesterday's English Version. (That's reduced for quick sale.) KGB, CIA. Oh sorry, no, those are security services, not Bibles... The REV - Revised English Version. (The REV... we call it the 'Rev' cause it's so popular with the clergy.) The VGV - The Very Good Version. HGV and 2CV - what? How did they get in here? These books should be in the Transport section.

CUSTOMER

Such a lot of choices. What do you think would be best for my niece?

ASSISTANT

Well, if you want my advice -

CUSTOMER

Oh, yes please...

ASSISTANT

Get a book token and let her choose for herself.

CUSTOMER

Good idea.

MUSIC PLAYOFF TO MARK END OF PART ONE

Compere clears away stack of books as he announces

COMPERE

Now contrast that with how it might have been, four hundred years ago.

ASSISTANT

Prithee, sire, can I help thee?

CUSTOMER

Aye, forsooth, I would fain purchase a Bible.

ASSISTANT

A Bible, sirrah? Art thou a priest?

CUSTOMER

Nay.

ASSISTANT

Or a monk?

CUSTOMER

Nay.

ASSISTANT

Or a bishop?

CUSTOMER

Thrice nay.

ASSISTANT

Then, sire, might I enquire, what dost thou wanteth with a Bible?

CUSTOMER

I want to read it.

ASSISTANT

(getting out order form)

To read it? Well, 'tis an old saying, ye customer is always right. I can order one from the scribe - it should be ready in about eleven years. Now - letteth me see - thou canst have it with illuminated letters or without. (With illuminations is an extra hundred groats.) In Latin or Greek...

CUSTOMER

Latin, my good woman? Greek? But hast thou not a copy in English?

ASSISTANT

(terrified)

English? Hush, sire, someone might hear thee! Didst thou not knoweth? Folk have been burned at the stake for selling the Bible in English.

CUSTOMER

Aye, verily, but that was last year! Now good King James has authorised a new Bible in English, so all in the kingdom can read it.

ASSISTANT

Thou canst not be serious! Thou art jesting, surely?

CUSTOMER

'Tis no jest. Here's the review from this week's Sunday Times.

ASSISTANT

(reading the clipping)

Marry, sir, this is passing strange. 'A new version of the Holy Bible in English!

Authorised by His Gracious Majesty King

James! And printed by the King's command.'

Very well, I'll order it for thee without delay - hast thou the ISBN?

As they head off stage, she continues questions

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Now, marry, sirrah, what colour would thou likest the binding?

CUSTOMER

Why, madam, black, of course - 'tis the only fitting colour for a Bible to be sure! And canst thou get me one with maps? And a concordance? And the apocrypha? And a Bible reading guide?