



Celebrating Bob Hartman and the 25th Anniversary of The Lion Storyteller Bible

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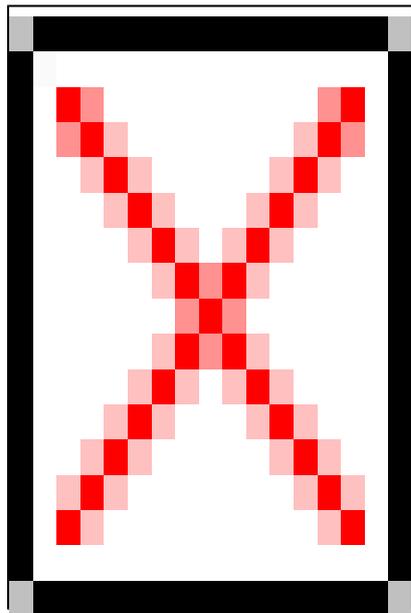
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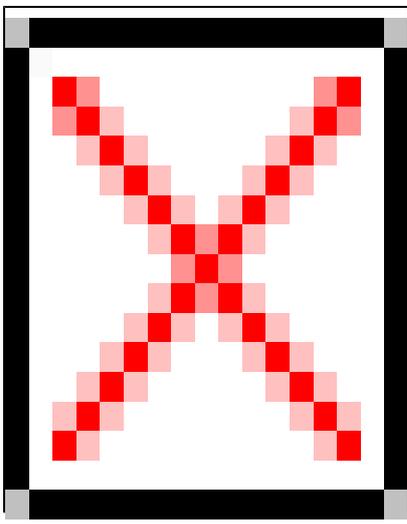
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25 years of the **Lion Storyteller Bible**

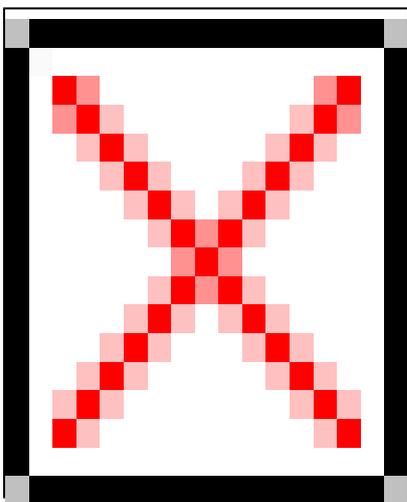


When first published twenty-five years ago, **The Lion Storyteller Bible** with its lively retelling of the stories that make up both the Old and the New Testament and cheerful illustration was both accessible and exciting. All those years on, it is still popular, and as part of the celebration for the 25th anniversary, publishers Lion Children's Books are reissuing it with additional stories. Not only that, there will be a new **Lion Storyteller Family Bible**. Behind both these publications is Bob Hartman. What was the inspiration and where did the idea for presenting these stories in this lively way come from? **Ferelith Hordon** spoke to Bob to find out.



Though Bob has lived in the UK for 40 Years, he was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His background was that of a church going family and he made his commitment to Jesus when he was a teenager. After being ordained a pastor he was invited over to England to a little church in Leicestershire and has been here ever since. He has always been a storyteller, frequently using Lion materials. This led him to contact Lion Hudson the publisher, and the **Lion Storyteller Bible** was born. However for some time he had been thinking that it would be good to have a new resource for parents to share with their children. He explains: "The stories from the **Storyteller Bible** were already there and I thought that if we could expand them from one spread to two and pull out the faces of the different characters from the story and let those characters ask the questions of parents and children together, that might be a fun way to do it." It is certainly that.

Like many churches he has experienced a change in the way the week works when now children are often engaged in sport or other activities on a Sunday. Does he feel it important that the Christian stories should be told? Can they only be used within a Christian background? "It helps to be raised in a Christian family?" he says, "It does not mean that children will necessarily take that path, but if they get exposed to Bible stories at an early age in a positive way it does make a difference". Certainly the **Storyteller Bible** is a Christian resource and Bob was very much looking to support and help Christian parents to pass on and explain their faith. He became aware that many parents did not feel they knew enough or were not confident in approaching the questions that might be raised. As a result the design of the **Storyteller Family Bible** aims to address this. The activity suggestions, such a feature of the other **Storyteller Bibles** which can be found at the back of the book, have become attractive panels at the end of each story asking questions, suggesting ideas ? encouraging engagement from both the adult and the child. "We really wanted to provide something that was easy to use, attractive and bright".



Is he happy to use within a Christian context stories from other cultures that often reflect the values that can be seen in the Bible? Indeed he is and there has been both **The Lion Storyteller Bedtime Book** and **The Lion Storyteller Book of Animal Stories** that do just this. There is now a plan to create an anthology of world stories reflecting values to stand beside the stories from the Bible. However, he wants to make it clear that there is a difference between these and many

other stories. As he says: 'Sometimes if we are not careful we can turn these stories into fables like those of Aesop, we have to make clear the realities of these stories'. He emphasises that both the Old and the New Testaments reflect history and are about real people with recognisable attitudes facing real situations. He gives an example: 'I tell the story of Jonah because I want people to understand it. The point of the story is not that Jonah was disobedient but that he hated the people of Nineveh.' It is reflecting on this that is important and interesting and drawing out these aspects is very much integral to his approach: 'They make the stories more open ended They give parents and children the opportunity to consider the ramifications of the story'.

Though Bob has an evangelical background, the stories have appeal right across the denominational divides and looking at the **Storyteller Bibles** it is clear that they can be used in a much wider context. He has never felt that they should be exclusive - indeed, through the organisation **Open the Book** he has taken his storytelling programme into schools of all types including Muslim schools just adapting his storytelling techniques to be sensitive to that tradition. They now reach over 3,000 schools around the country. 'There is an assumption that people know these stories and they are old hat' he says, but in fact he has discovered people do not know them and if they are well told children welcome them.

They are of course woven not just into faith but also into our culture and knowing them cannot but widen appreciation and understanding. Bob Harman's storytelling is an ideal introduction.

The Lion Storyteller Family Bible by Bob Hartman with illustrations by Krisztina Kallai Nagy is published by Lion Children's Books, 978-0745978420, £12.99 hbk.

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