

## Do You Know the Origin of These Expressions?

From the Bible: Plenty of the words and expressions used today originate from stories in the Bible.

### **Wolf in sheep's clothing, "ramaskrik" (cries from Ramah), and scapegoat are familiar words and expressions, but not everyone knows their background.**

- Many are surprised when they discover how many of the words and expressions we surround ourselves with originate from the Bible, says Rune Arnhoff. He is the founder of the Nordic Bible Museum in Oslo.

The expression "wolf in sheep's clothing" is often used about someone who claims to be something that they are not, and who masks their real intentions behind an innocent appearance.

- The term is originally used in the Bible to describe false prophets and hypocrites, says Arnhoff.

The word "ramaskrik" is often used to describe opposition and discontent. However, the word originates from the stories about the women in Ramah who mourned their lost sons. In the Gospel of Matthew it is written that cries, mourning and weeping could be heard.

- King Herodes had decided that all boys the age of two or younger were to be killed. He was afraid to be challenged after the Wise Men had said that Jesus, the new king, was born, Arnhoff explains.

### **The goat takes the blame**

Advisor at the Language Council of Norway (Språkrådet), Erlend Lønnum, believes that the use of biblical expressions in our everyday language could be explained from the Bible's central role in Norwegian homes.

- The Bible has been one of the most important books in Norwegian homes through centuries. It has helped shape both our oral and written language, Lønnum says.

Though the Bible does not have the same status today, the biblical expressions live on.

- We often use them without understanding their origin, says Lønnum.

The narrative of the scapegoat has been described in both the Old and the New Testament.

- Each year, the Israelites sent a goat into the desert. The people were to leave all their sins with the goat, which then was supposed to carry them with it into the desert, thus making the people free of sin, as collective absolution, says Arnhoff.

The expression "to swallow camels" also comes from the Bible.

- Jesus thought that the Pharisees were too occupied by details, and that they therefore were unable to see things as a whole. According to Jesus, they fussed about trivial things while

accepting plenty of evil as long as they did not lose wealth or power. Today the expression means to accept or join something one does not agree with, he says.

### **Word wall**

On a wall in the Nordic Bible Museum hangs a list of words and expressions from accounts in the Bible.

- It is both entertaining and interesting to read about the history behind the words and expressions we surround ourselves with daily. It gives our language another meaning and dimension, says Arnhoff.

### **More known Norwegian expressions with origins in the Bible:**

- Skille klinten fra hveten (Separate the wheat from the chaff)
- Flytte fjell (Move mountains)
- Som mor, så datter (Like daughter, like mother)
- Ane fred og ingen fare (Saying "peace and safety")
- Veid og funnet for lett (Weighed on the scales and found wanting)
- Gammel og mett av dage (Old and full of years)
- Slag i luften (Beating the air)
- Kjenne sin besøkestid (Know the time of your visitation)
- Hans dager er talte (A man's days are numbered)
- Tale for døve ører (Fall on deaf ears)

### **Contact:**

- Rune Arnhoff, Nordic Bible Museum, tel: 401 05 777.

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