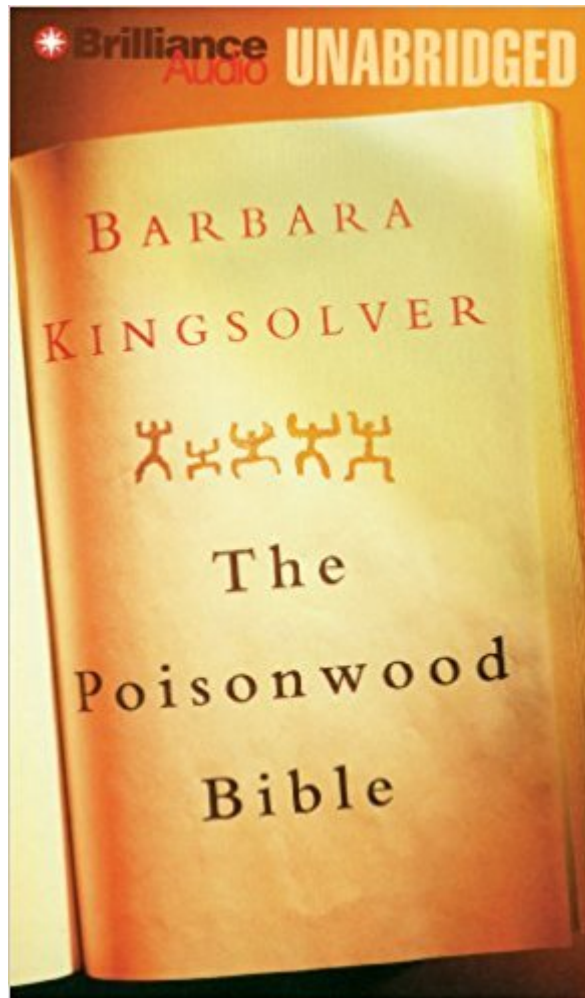




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The Poisonwood Bible



Synopsis

The Poisonwood Bible is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them all they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it "from garden seeds to Scripture" is calamitously transformed on African soil. This tale of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction, over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa, is set against history's most dramatic political parables. The Poisonwood Bible dances between the darkly comic human failings and inspiring poetic justices of our times. In a compelling exploration of religion, conscience, imperialist arrogance, and the many paths to redemption, Barbara Kingsolver has brought forth her most ambitious work ever.

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Customer Reviews

Oprah Book Club® Selection, June 2000: As any reader of *The Mosquito Coast* knows, men who drag their families to far-off climes in pursuit of an Idea seldom come to any good, while those familiar with *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* or *Kalimantan* understand that the minute a missionary sets foot on the fictional stage, all hell is about to break loose. So when Barbara Kingsolver sends missionary Nathan Price along with his wife and four daughters off to Africa in *The Poisonwood Bible*, you can be sure that salvation is the one thing they're not likely to find. The year is 1959 and the place is the Belgian Congo. Nathan, a Baptist preacher, has come to spread the Word in a remote village reachable only by airplane. To say that he and his family are woefully

unprepared would be an understatement: "We came from Bethlehem, Georgia, bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle," says Leah, one of Nathan's daughters. But of course it isn't long before they discover that the tremendous humidity has rendered the mixes unusable, their clothes are unsuitable, and they've arrived in the middle of political upheaval as the Congolese seek to wrest independence from Belgium. In addition to poisonous snakes, dangerous animals, and the hostility of the villagers to Nathan's fiery take-no-prisoners brand of Christianity, there are also rebels in the jungle and the threat of war in the air. Could things get any worse? In fact they can and they do. The first part of *The Poisonwood Bible* revolves around Nathan's intransigent, bullying personality and his effect on both his family and the village they have come to. As political instability grows in the Congo, so does the local witch doctor's animus toward the Prices, and both seem to converge with tragic consequences about halfway through the novel. From that point on, the family is dispersed and the novel follows each member's fortune across a span of more than 30 years. *The Poisonwood Bible* is arguably Barbara Kingsolver's most ambitious work, and it reveals both her great strengths and her weaknesses. As Nathan Price's wife and daughters tell their stories in alternating chapters, Kingsolver does a good job of differentiating the voices. But at times they can grate--teenage Rachel's tendency towards precious malapropisms is particularly annoying (students practice their "French congregations"; Nathan's refusal to take his family home is a "tapestry of justice"). More problematic is Kingsolver's tendency to wear her politics on her sleeve; this is particularly evident in the second half of the novel, in which she uses her characters as mouthpieces to explicate the complicated and tragic history of the Belgian Congo. Despite these weaknesses, Kingsolver's fully realized, three-dimensional characters make *The Poisonwood Bible* compelling, especially in the first half, when Nathan Price is still at the center of the action. And in her treatment of Africa and the Africans she is at her best, exhibiting the acute perception, moral engagement, and lyrical prose that have made her previous novels so successful. --Alix Wilber

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this risky but resoundingly successful novel, Kingsolver leaves the Southwest, the setting of most of her work (*The Bean Trees*; *Animal Dreams*) and follows an evangelical Baptist minister's family to the Congo in the late 1950s, entwining their fate with that of the country during three turbulent decades. Nathan Price's determination to convert the natives of the Congo to Christianity is, we gradually discover, both foolhardy and dangerous, unsanctioned by the church administration and doomed from the start by Nathan's self-righteousness. Fanatic and sanctimonious, Nathan is a domestic monster, too, a physically and emotionally abusive, misogynistic husband and father. He

refuses to understand how his obsession with river baptism affronts the traditions of the villagers of Kalinga, and his stubborn concept of religious rectitude brings misery and destruction to all. Cleverly, Kingsolver never brings us inside Nathan's head but instead unfolds the tragic story of the Price family through the alternating points of view of Orleanna Price and her four daughters. Cast with her young children into primitive conditions but trained to be obedient to her husband, Orleanna is powerless to mitigate their situation. Meanwhile, each of the four Price daughters reveals herself through first-person narration, and their rich and clearly differentiated self-portraits are small triumphs. Rachel, the eldest, is a self-absorbed teenager who will never outgrow her selfish view of the world or her tendency to commit hilarious malapropisms. Twins Leah and Adah are gifted intellectually but are physically and emotionally separated by Adah's birth injury, which has rendered her hemiplegic. Leah adores her father; Adah, who does not speak, is a shrewd observer of his monumental ego. The musings of five-year-old Ruth May reflect a child's humorous misunderstanding of the exotic world to which she has been transported. By revealing the story through the female victims of Reverend Price's hubris, Kingsolver also charts their maturation as they confront or evade moral and existential issues and, at great cost, accrue wisdom in the crucible of an alien land. It is through their eyes that we come to experience the life of the villagers in an isolated community and the particular ways in which American and African cultures collide. As the girls become acquainted with the villagers, especially the young teacher Anatole, they begin to understand the political situation in the Congo: the brutality of Belgian rule, the nascent nationalism briefly fulfilled in the election of the short-lived Patrice Lumumba government, and the secret involvement of the Eisenhower administration in Lumumba's assassination and the installation of the villainous dictator Mobutu. In the end, Kingsolver delivers a compelling family saga, a sobering picture of the horrors of fanatic fundamentalism and an insightful view of an exploited country crushed by the heel of colonialism and then ruthlessly manipulated by a bastion of democracy. The book is also a marvelous mix of trenchant character portrayal, unflagging narrative thrust and authoritative background detail. The disastrous outcome of the forceful imposition of Christian theology on indigenous natural faith gives the novel its pervasive irony; but humor is pervasive, too, artfully integrated into the children's misapprehensions of their world; and suspense rises inexorably as the Price family's peril and that of the newly independent country of Zaire intersect. Kingsolver moves into new moral terrain in this powerful, convincing and emotionally resonant novel. Agent, Frances Goldin; BOMC selection; major ad/promo; author tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is the most fascinating book that I have read in many months. At times I felt as though I was living in the jungle too. The contrasts between the years of living there and the lives thereafter were in perfect harmony with the characters.

this book has all of the things i love in a book - characters with purpose, a fantastic setting and stunning language. it had its flaws, but ultimately, *The Poisonwood Bible* was an excellent read and i'm looking forward to more from Kingsolver. Nathan Price is a fierce Baptist minister who brings his wife and four daughters to the small village of Kilanga in the Congo during the late 1950's. his intentions to bring salvation are mighty, but he seems to be trying to over-fulfill his obligations by force-feeding his beliefs to the natives, nearly as much as his family seems to be trying to force their southern Georgia lives to fit into a Congolese way of life. "So determined he is to win or force or drag them over to the Way of the Cross." as the political situation in the country becomes dangerous, the family is urged to leave, but Nathan stubbornly refuses and, despite being cut off from their monthly stipend which leaves them penniless, he persists. the family dynamic becomes obviously brittle and for the second half of the book we follow the various lives of each member for the next several decades. the story is told from the perspective of the mother, Orleanna, and each of the daughters, the eldest Rachel, the twins Leah and Adah, and the youngest Ruth May. each is distinctly different in their voice and this was probably the most accomplished component of the novel. of the daughters, Leah was by far the most entertaining to me. she was quick witted and intelligent, and as a child, fiercely and honorably loyal to her father, despite his misgivings. but, i loved the sections that were devoted to Orleanna! she was the most competent at displaying the emotions and choices in her life and this invoked an unbelievable sadness in me. her narratives read in a way that made me so sympathetic to her situation. "I had washed up there on the riptide of my husband's confidence and the undertow of my children's needs. That's my excuse, yet none of them really needed me all that much." the Congo was depicted as a harsh and majestic place, much as i imagine that it is, even today. although i haven't read any other fiction set in Africa, this has definitely sparked an interest in me to read more. the landscape, as depicted by Kingsolver, was cruel and heartless - malaria killed nearly half of the children in the village - but it was also lush and thriving with the passion of the people and their cultures. really, if this book had been set anywhere else, i don't know that it would have been as powerful as it was. in the end, though, it was the language that made me absolutely love this book. there were so many amazing lines that just made me stop, take a deep breath and read them again. i went highlighter happy (thankfully it was on my kindle) and had hundreds of quotes by the time i was finished. if you are a fan of beautiful

language, you will most likely love this book. although the story was a little slow at times, and although the first half was stronger than the second, in my opinion, i would recommend to anyone who loves a patient, yet intense, read.

I had noticed this book before but cast it aside thinking it was another book about the good work missionaries do in the underdeveloped world. How wrong I was. The Poisonwood Bible contains a strong message about all the negatives that can happen with missionary activity. The book tells the story of Nathan Price and his family and what happened when they went to spread the word in the Congo. Things went wrong from the start when arrogant Pastor Nathan (wrong person for the job and his church tried to tell him so) arrived with a basket of seeds from plants native to North America. The Congolese apparently are so primitive they didn't know how to grow their own food. The plants failed in the Congo and Nathan began a difficult learning experience. The brilliance of the book comes from how it operates on so many levels. The story is told through the eyes of his wife and four daughters and each sees a different reality. It is set against a background of massive injustice inflicted on the Congo by the west (Belgium and USA in the case). The culpability of President Eisenhower I found particularly disturbing. Unfortunately similar stories can be told of elsewhere with other western countries equally guilty. I would strongly recommend Mr Pip by Lloyd Jones about New Guinea. An amazing book I enjoyed it immensely and read it very quickly despite its not inconsiderable length.

Considering I have never read a Kingsolver book in my life, this book really signed me up to read another one of her works. Upon reading this, I felt for every single one of the characters (besides Rachel and Nathan). Though, this book really takes a lot to get through the first few chapters. The story is a missionary family long to the Congo in order to spread the word of God in 1959. what's fascinating about the book is that the perspectives are so vastly different which is really shown through the writing style. And also, the characters realization of the world they are in, such as, the world issues occurring in the rural area and the girls' opinions changing about the God they had been following for part of their lives. In the book, it excludes the father's perspective and only takes the mother and her 4 children into account. Rachel, Leah, Adah, and Ruth May (in order of age). In each of them, there is something to love or hate, which makes it harder to keep reading in fear that something terrible to happen to them (since that's how books usually go.) and for them, Africa had a impact of them whether they liked it or not.

I have read this book more than once and recommended it to friends. In the beginning it is a little confusing, but hang in there. This is a book where the characters became real people to me and I found myself thinking about them after I had finished the book. This book weaves together family relationships, religion, culture and history.

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