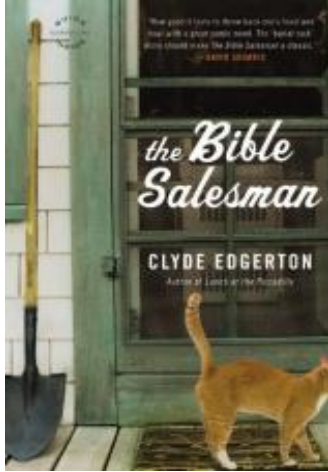


The Bible Salesman

by Clyde Edgerton



About the Book

Preston Clearwater has been a criminal since stealing two chain saws and 1600 pairs of aviator sunglasses from the Army during the Second World War. Back on the road in post-war North Carolina, a member of a car-theft ring, he picks up hitch-hiking Henry Dampier, an innocent nineteen-year-old Bible salesman. Clearwater immediately recognizes Henry as just the associate he needs --- one who will believe Clearwater is working as an F.B.I. spy; one who will drive the cars Clearwater steals as Clearwater follows along in another car at a safe distance. Henry joyfully sees a chance to lead a dual life as Bible salesman and a G-man.

During his hilarious and scary adventures we learn of Henry's fundamentalist youth, an upbringing that doesn't prepare him for his new life. As he falls in love and questions his religious training, Henry begins to see he's being used --- that the fun and games are over, that he is on his own in a way he never imagined.

Discussion Guide

1. Although he initially views Henry as a gullible boy, Preston eventually realizes that he is not as clueless as he thought. How do you see Henry? Did your opinion change as you read? Why and in what ways?
2. Henry sells free Bibles he receives from Bible societies across the country, which he has requested under less-than-honest pretenses. Discuss how Henry reconciles his actions with his morality. Does he feel that his actions are acceptable? Do you?
3. From the moment Henry and Preston meet, Henry's innocence contrasts with the older man's manipulateness. Discuss the relationship between these men. How does Henry's naïveté ultimately allow him to upset Preston's plans for him? In what ways are the two men similar?

4. Henry's family is charitable (sending blankets to Yancy), but their church is sometimes harsh (warning the child Henry about being a blasphemer). How does Henry's Uncle Jack help him navigate these contradictions?
5. How do the elderly, especially women, contribute to the comic scenes in **The Bible Salesman**? Does their unworldliness add to their being funny? Are they similar to Henry in this respect?
6. The Biblical characters of Abraham, his wife Sarah, and his mistress Hagar intrigue and puzzle Henry. Does his knowing their story make it easier for him to accept his attraction to Marleen Green?
7. Henry's childhood is revealed over the course of **The Bible Salesman**, as are the numerous forces that shaped his Christianity --- Aunt Dorie, the Bible salesman instructor, and Henry's church, just to name a few. To what extent does each influence how he approaches his faith? How do his beliefs change over the course of the novel?
8. Henry's beloved Uncle Jack is ejected from a surfside club as "white trash." Clearwater feels justified in burglarizing a plantation house owned by rich northerners in Florida. Does class conflict lead to the doctor's death in Drain, Georgia? Or is Clearwater's character the sole culprit?
9. In what ways does Henry mature from a child to an adult over the course of the novel? How is he still like a boy? What characters and events influence his growth? Do you think it is possible to maintain a positive outlook such as his in the face of the trials of adulthood?
10. Henry and Preston's journey through the South is the focus of the novel, but they travel in other ways as well. How does movement, in both the physical and psychological sense, cause the characters to change? Do you think Henry would be the same man at the end of the novel had he not partnered with Preston?
11. Family reunions play a big part in Henry's past. How does the extended family unify the disparate personalities and bloodlines in **The Bible Salesman**? Does it assuage the fact that Henry's parents are absent and that his sister's son looks nothing like his brother-in-law?
12. Did **The Bible Salesman** inspire you to compare parts of the Hebrew Bible to the King James Version and the Chicago Bible? If so, what differences in interpretations of the text did you find interesting?

Author Bio

Clyde Edgerton is the author of seven bestsellers, including **Raney**, **Walking Across Egypt**, and **Where Trouble Sleeps**. Five of his novels have been New York Times Notable Books. A musician and songwriter, he lives with his wife, Kristina, and their children in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he is a professor of creative writing at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

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