



A group of Hmong women and children in rural Laos.



Witnessing God's word at work in the paddy fields of Laos

By Elizabeth Martin



Over the last few months, we asked you to prayerfully consider increasing your *Bible a Month* gift. We've been overwhelmed by so many positive responses; thank you so much for your amazing generosity. Your support is at the very heart of our work and we couldn't do any of it without you.

Look inside this month's edition to read more about how your support is helping change lives in Laos, China and Algeria.



Tom Newbold
Bible a Month Co-ordinator



'What do I do now?' I ask myself. I'm staring at a kilo bag of rice and wondering what to do with it. I am two hours' drive along untarmacked roads, surrounded by paddy fields, deep in the countryside of Laos. The bag of rice I have in my hands is a valuable and costly gift, so I am grateful when my Lao colleague offers to look after it for me.

Along with six other people from our team in Laos, I'm on the way to visit a little village with 35 Christian families. It's harvest time, so most of the men are in the paddy fields. A group of smiling women and children greets us as we arrive at the village.

Their eager hands help unload the boot of our van, filled with boxes of Bibles and Bible stories. The colourful books attract both the children and women, as they enthusiastically start to flick through the pages and admire the pictures. These are in Lao and Hmong, the local heart languages of the area. Since literacy

levels amongst women are low, these books and booklets are a vital source of functional literacy, which in turn increases biblical literacy.

After sharing a delicious feast of fish, chicken and rice with the community, our van staggers up a deeply rutted road onto another church, perched at the top of a hill. A group taking part in our literacy programs is waiting outside to greet us at the end of a long day in school and in the fields. Women and children of all ages are yearning to read God's word for themselves, so the precious resources are shared amongst the surrounding churches in the area to ensure everyone gets a chance to take part in literacy classes. Thanks to your generous support, over 10,600 Scriptures provided spiritual food and joy to village churches in Laos in 2018.

Opportunities like these to serve the Church in Laos are great. There is a deep hunger for faith in this country still

In focus

A glimpse into our history

Since its foundation in 1804, Bible Society has collaborated with countless missionaries all over the world, helping publish invaluable translations, and spreading the Good News across the globe. Over time, a copy of every new translated and published Scripture was sent back to Bible Society's headquarters for collection, and a reference library of archives was gradually established.

In its first year, Bible Society's library contained Scripture in 67 languages. Now, over 200 years later, the library has grown to over 39,000 volumes and stores books of the Bible in more than 2,000 languages. **It is, by far, the most comprehensive printed Bible collection in the world.**

As well as copies of translated Bibles, the archives house a treasure trove of missionary letters, committee minutes, property documents, annual reports and language files outlining linguistic challenges that confronted Bible translators in foreign countries. The collection also includes items which were collected by – or bequeathed to – Bible Society, as well as precious manuscripts used and respected by scholars from all over the world.

Since the mid-1980s, the archives have been housed at the Cambridge University Library.

If you'd like to organise a visit, or are interested in volunteering opportunities at the library, please get in touch:

Call: 01793 418 222

Visit biblesociety.org.uk/cambridgearchives

Email volunteers@biblesociety.org.uk



Our archives house the most comprehensive printed Bible collection in the world.

under a Socialist regime, where public evangelism is frowned upon. Christians in Laos are eager to study the Bible for themselves. The Church is growing, and the Hmong Christians are very active, but teaching resources are scarce. There is a desperate need for training of pastors, especially in the countryside.

So alongside the distribution of Bibles and Bible stories for literacy classes, our team is also working to produce a study Bible in the Lao language. This new resource will bring Bible teaching within the grasp of rural and urban church leaders, equipping them with valuable study tools for understanding the Bible.

In today's age, it is hard to imagine a world where it is difficult to look up a question about the Bible. But in the rural areas of Laos, books and access to the internet are luxuries few can afford. Maps and notes help build understanding of where Jesus grew up. For those living in lush green jungles, pictures will help explain what a desert looks like.

It's thanks to your faithful *Bible a Month* gifts that our team can distribute the



Believers in Laos gathering on a Sunday.

Bible to the Lao people. Thank you so much for your ongoing generosity, which is helping provide God's precious word to believers on the other side of the world.

Thank God for bringing together a young team of keen, devoted Bible translators in Laos. Please pray for God's protection as they seek to make the Bible easy to understand, accessible and embedded in the hearts and lives of Christians all over their country.

Despite the challenges, work in China continues

Just over 40 years ago, the Bible was a banned book in China. From 1966 until 1976, during the Cultural Revolution, any expression of religion was outlawed. Owning a Bible could land you in jail, copies discovered by the Red Guards were confiscated and burned, Churches were closed, Christian worship and meetings were banned. Some pastors and leaders were imprisoned.

But today, the Bible is a bestseller in China, where Christianity is growing faster than almost any other country in the world. There are around 46 million believers in the registered churches, but unofficial estimates say there are closer to 100 million Christians, with more coming to faith every day. Many still don't have a Bible of their own, and demand for Scripture increases every year.

Thanks to your support, we've been able to work with the registered Church in China, with the blessing of the Chinese authorities. Over the last few years, we've been printing millions of copies for the Chinese Church and our printing factory in Nanjing is now the biggest Bible-producer in the world.

Despite tighter regulations in the last year, we're still able to continue our ministry in China, helping millions of Christians, particularly in rural areas, to receive Bibles, many of them for the first time. Thank you so much for your generous donations, which are helping to fuel the growth of the Church in China.

Please pray for our team in these trying times, that they might experience wisdom and patience in their ministries. Pray for more openness to God's word. And thank God for each person in China who receives a copy of the Bible. Please pray that they may read and understand God's word and be nurtured and transformed in their personal exploration of the Bible.



Chinese believers receiving their own copy of the Bible.

Laos

June 2019

After centuries of economic decline, war and communist rule, Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 22% of the population living below the poverty line. Two-thirds of Laos's population is rural and, for a poor farmer, a Bible represents a huge investment requiring many months of saving.

For most Laotian Christians, many of whom come from oppressed minority groups, owning a Bible is a luxury beyond their capacity. Despite these hardships, Christianity is steadily growing in Laos, and with it comes a need for God's word.

Thanks to your generous gifts, our team is able to partner with the Lao Evangelical Church to organise free Scripture distribution, literacy classes and pastoral training in both rural and urban areas, to encourage Christians in Laos in their faith. Because of your support, our team is also working on a study Bible to provide pastors with much-needed resources to equip the Church.



Photo credit United Bible Societies
A congregation worshipping in one of the churches of Laos.

Prayer pointers

- Thank God for the distribution of free scripture to the poorest communities of Laos. Pray that God's word will bring salvation, hope and transformation to their lives.
- Please lift up to God the men, women and children of all ages taking part in the literacy classes. Praise God for their enthusiasm, and pray that they might grow in their hunger to read his word.
- Please pray for continued wisdom amongst the translators and editorial staff working on the Lao Study Bible, who hope to complete work on the New Testament by the end of 2019 and publish it in 2020.
- Thank God for our partnership with the Lao Evangelical Church, which supports Bible distribution throughout the country. Pray this work would help build relationships between churches in Laos.

Algeria

July 2019

Being a Christian in Algeria is tough. Almost everyone in the country – some 98% of the population – is Muslim. Telling people about Jesus is illegal and there are strict limits on the number of Bibles you can import.

Churches have been shut down by police and many Christians face constant harassment from family, relatives and neighbours. Marriages have broken up and people have lost their jobs as a result of being open about their faith.

Despite the government crackdown, Algerian Christians have recently started meeting in tents. Amazingly, local pastors reckon there are at least 120,000 Christians in the country – and they even say numbers are growing. Thanks to your ongoing generosity, our small team in Algeria is working to meet the Church's growing need for Scripture.

For years, and despite the risks, our colleague Ali has overseen this vital ministry in Algeria. But in the next few years, he'll be handing over the reins to his successor, 34-year-old Rezki Ouaked. As he takes on the leadership of Bible ministry in Algeria, Rezki has specifically asked that you pray for him in this important role.



Photo credit Tim Foggin
Our colleague Tim (right), with Rezki on a recent visit to Algeria.

Prayer pointers

- Please pray for the relationship between the government and Bible Society. 'We are trying to work on it, but we aren't getting what we want,' said Rezki.
- Please lift up to God the Church in Algeria. Christians there live with many risks, in an unstable political environment, so pray they will be courageous, faithful and steadfast.
- Please pray for the development of our work with the whole Church and across Algeria, and for Rezki's vision to reach young people and seekers.
- Thank God for Rezki's willingness to take on his new role. Please pray for a balance in his family life and ministry, as he and his wife Naima have just welcomed their first child in May.

Laos

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.'
Romans 15.13 (ESV)

Factfile



Area – 91,429 sq miles, approx. 97% of UK
 Population – 7.2 million, approx. 11% of UK
 Literacy rate – 84.7%
 Languages – Lao (official), French, English, various ethnic languages

Look out for next edition's new look!

Your feedback is really important to us, and we're constantly taking your comments on board to improve what you receive. For this reason, you'll be getting a newly designed prayer letter from August onwards.

- It'll be easier to read. You'll see a larger font, more spacing between the articles and more pictures to illustrate every article. The biggest difference you'll notice is that we'll go from four pages to six pages.
- It will give you a platform to share your thoughts and comments. We will be introducing a new space for you to send in your personal thoughts. There will also be a section at the end of the prayer letter to read other comments from fellow *Bible a Month* supporters.
- It saves money! By switching to different paper and reviewing our printing process, we'll be cutting down production costs. We'll also be using paper licensed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to ensure environmental friendliness and responsible forest management.

You'll still find your eyewitness report at the front and the country profiles to tear off at the back. There'll also be two more articles to enjoy, alongside the new section to read other people's comments.

Algeria

'The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a place of safety in times of trouble.'
Psalm 9:9 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 919,595 sq miles, approx. 10 times as large as UK
 Population – 41.66 million, approx. 64 % of UK
 Literacy rate – 80.2%
 Languages – Arabic (official), French, Berber or Tamazight, other dialects

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter featuring reports from **Ghana** and **Syria**.

Thank you for your support which is bringing the Bible to life at home and around the world.

If you'd like to receive email updates about how your gift is making an impact and ways to get further involved, please provide your email address:

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You can alter your gift at any time. To increase or decrease your regular donation call us on 01793 418222.

If you're paying by direct debit you can fill in the form below and post it to us at Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7DG.

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