

BIBLE A MONTH

AUG/SEP 2020
Issue 202

Proclaiming the gospel in the Bible Lands during the pandemic

EYEWITNESS
REPORT

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'I found out that there are families who sleep early because they (now) can't afford to pay the electricity bills – so they save electricity and stay in the dark. There are families who were eating one meal a day only, limited to legumes, as they couldn't afford vegetables, meat or fruit. Some families where people are sick were not able to buy medicine, so they started taking half a pill instead of one pill!'

Issa, part of our Bible Society team in Jerusalem that works with the Palestinian community, was describing his shock at the growing needs of so many people in the Bible Lands. There are many desperate people, but thanks to your regular giving, we are able to provide many families with both physical and spiritual support during the coronavirus pandemic.

People have lost their jobs or can't go out to earn their 'daily bread' and families whose financial situation is

usually stable are suffering. They're being described as the 'new poor'.

Our team was invited by local authorities to join emergency relief efforts in various cities. We provided hygiene kits, face masks, food packages and medicine. But people need more than these bare necessities, so we took this opportunity to reach out to the unreached and to be a light in the midst of darkness.

We gave each family, Christian and non-Christian, a flyer with a short message of hope and encouragement. It said things may come, such as the virus, and change the world very quickly, but God is unchangeable. We can always have hope in God and we can always come to God, and he should be at the top of our list of priorities.

More than 500 families have also received an audio device packed with Scriptures and dramatised Bible

stories. The solar-powered Proclaimer unit with its built-in speaker is hugely popular, especially with those without a computer or little electricity. Demand for these devices has been phenomenal and thanks to your prayerful donations through Bible a Month we plan to distribute thousands more in the future.

This region has a great oral tradition, where people love listening to stories together. Especially during lockdown, whole families gathered around listening to the devices, so just one Proclaimer means many hear God's word. It's also so encouraging that people who never asked for Scriptures are now asking for them.

Issa testified to the difference that your regular support through Bible a Month is making. He said, 'When we knocked on their doors to give the food boxes, they would cry and share with us their feelings of despair. When we intervened it meant a lot for these precious families.'

'We need the Bible now more than ever' are true and powerful words we've heard many times.

Adham, also a member of our team, shared another encouraging sign of how God is at work during this pandemic. 'A main part of our mission

in this project was to hopefully one day see the churches united and working hand in hand ... despite the difficult situation with coronavirus, I can finally testify that I have witnessed an unprecedented movement of unity among the different churches in the Bethlehem area!'

The priority now is to continue to help those affected most by the pandemic. They need psychological help and spiritual guidance – how to deal with fear, how to trust in God, and how to find hope in his promises.

Christians I describe as the salt of the land and a little salt can make a big, positive difference. Please pray for us as we engage with communities in the Bible Lands and try to be the bridge between them, to act as peacemakers.

Please pray for the Bible mission as it continues to make good progress among people in the Bible Lands, and especially those non-Christians who are hearing the word of God for the first time.

The generosity and prayerful encouragement of Bible a Month supporters enables us to be living stones in the land of Jesus, the living stones that tell and retell the story of our Lord and Saviour. Thank you.



Nashat Filmon
*Bible Society leader
based in Jerusalem*



Children gather around a Scripture book at a Sunday School in Ramallah.



This boy was so grateful to receive a gift box in Hebron.

Your flourishing tree of faith bears more fruit

MISSION UPDATE



Photo credit: United Bible Societies

Translator Magdalena Antret, who worked for eight years on the Bible translation, said, 'I feel very happy and emotional about all the work that was done for all our [Achí] people.'

“ Receiving a Bible in their own tongue would not have been possible if it wasn't for the generous and kind giving of Bible a Month supporters

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High on a mountain top in the village of Chimachó in Guatemala, Pastor Francisco de la Cruz, who shepherds a 400-strong congregation, said, 'It is a great blessing and a great joy to have the Bible in our hands [in our own language] because it makes it easier for us to understand God's message.'

Four miles east of the village is the town of Cubulco, which is 125 miles along ragged, winding, bumpy roads to the north of Guatemala City. More than a thousand speakers of Achí de Cubulco held a parade to celebrate receiving 4,500 Bibles translated for the first time into their language, which is spoken by more than 51,000 people in the surrounding area. Most of these people are subsistence farmers growing basic grains, and around 60 per cent live on less than a dollar a day.

Receiving a Bible in their own tongue would not have been possible if it wasn't for the generous and kind giving of Bible a Month supporters, who helped

fund this important project. It was a joyful occasion in a beautiful country that remains plagued by poverty, organised crime and corruption.

'This is my first Scripture,' beamed Trinidad López, 39, as she held a copy of the new Bible. 'I have never owned my own Bible until today! Now, I have the full Bible in Achí de Cubulco!'

Cubulco was one of 50 communities worldwide that received its first ever Scripture last year. That's six languages, 4.2 million people, and a lot of celebration and thanksgiving! This year, despite the coronavirus pandemic, Bible mission continues, looking ahead to providing more hope worldwide, sharing with people a better story.

Without the regular donations of people like you, this just wouldn't have been possible. Bible Societies worldwide hope to complete a further 1,000 Scripture translations by 2038, all through your continued support.

Prayer pointers

Praise and thank the Lord that 50 communities worldwide received their first ever Scripture in their own language last year.

Ask God that more and more people will become part of Bible a Month and prayerfully encourage Bible mission to have even greater impact in years and decades to come.

Thank God for the good gifts he gives. Ask him to help us keep putting our trust in him rather than the stuff of this world.

Ask God to guide Bible Societies worldwide as they investigate new ways of continuing Bible mission during the pandemic.

Tell a friend about Bible a Month

We're so grateful for your continued support through Bible a Month. Regular giving and prayers are vital to the success of Bible mission. They enable long-term plans to be drawn up to have maximum impact. After you have read this month's prayer letter, how about showing it to a family member or friend? They can join us at www.biblesociety.co.uk/bam

BIBLE LANDS

The region of the Bible Lands is both volatile and precarious. But amid the troubles it faces, there are rays of hope, brought about by your crucial support of Bible mission. In the West Bank, tens of thousands have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus and many families are now penniless. Your kind giving means that families in desperate need have received not only medication, masks and food parcels, but also free Scriptures. Many of these people are turning to the Scriptures for the first time.

Your continued support has enabled online outreach to blossom during lockdowns. Bible studies and important spiritual messages in audio and video have been produced and widely shared across social media. Nashat Filmon, who leads Bible work among Palestinians, said, 'We believe this is

the ideal time to make the Bible heard and boldly proclaimed, so we will maximise our efforts, to bring hope and encouragement.'

In the old city of Jerusalem, your support ensures that the only Arab Christian bookshop in the area keeps its doors open, while in Jericho this May you provided crucial funds for a training centre for Bible leaders.



Children's Scriptures are laid out ready for distribution in the Bible Lands.

August prayer pointers

Give thanks that people in the Bible Lands are finding hope in God's word.

Pray for an end to aggression, conflict and violence in the region, and for wisdom among leaders.

Lift up our teams in the Bible Lands, who work faithfully, day in, day out, to share the Bible and its message of hope and peace.

Pray for Nashat Filmon, who leads Bible work among Palestinians. Ask that he be granted perseverance and courage

MALI

Mali is one of the most unsafe countries in the world. The coronavirus pandemic has created even more chaos in a country afflicted by poverty, political instability, poor infrastructure and the constant threat of Islamist terrorism.

Protests recently erupted against a curfew introduced to combat the virus and also over a disputed parliamentary election. Islamist extremists exploited the situation to launch deadly attacks.

Jacques Dembele, who leads our work in Mali, said, 'There is a real disaster in Mali. With the poverty of the population, no one observes the distancing measures; prices of masks and hand sanitiser have quadrupled and products cannot be found. It's really worrying, but we count on divine protection.'

Thanks to your support, the team in Mali are continuing to distribute Bibles

through churches as best they can, and Scripture translators now work at home. Your gifts have helped pay staff during this critical time to keep Bible mission alive and ensure projects on hold can restart as soon as restrictions are lifted.

Thanks to your kind support, a key project in Mali – supporting women who are victims of violence – continues. And a family Bible reading scheme, Project Jerome, will be back up and running soon.



This grain store was completely destroyed by raiders targeting and killing Christians in the south of Mali at the turn of the year.

September prayer pointers

Ask for God's protection for Jacques Dembele, who leads our work in Mali, and the rest of the team.

Give thanks that our Bible translators can safely work at home; pray for good progress in their work.

Pray that the violence and extremism that grips much of Mali will abate and that peace will reign.

Pray for the speedy resumption of vital Bible work as soon as the coronavirus restrictions are lifted, to meet the great spiritual need in the country.

BIBLE LANDS



FACTFILE



Area

10,871 square miles, about nine times smaller than the UK



Population

13.5 million



Languages

Hebrew, Arabic, English



Literacy rates

97.5%

Cumulative stats for Israel, West Bank, Gaza Strip (The Bible Society of England and Wales works alongside the Bible Society in Israel, the Arab-Israeli Bible Society, and the Palestinian Bible Society)

'Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.'

1 Peter 3.9 (ESV)

MALI



FACTFILE



Area

478,841 square miles, about five times larger than the UK



Population

19.5 million



Languages

French (official), Bambara, many indigenous languages



Literacy rates

35.5%

'For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.'

Psalms 27.5 (ESV)

EXPERIENCE THE BIG STORY WITH FREE BIBLE SUNDAY RESOURCES

It's Bible Sunday on 25 October 2020. On this day we'd like to invite you to join with us in celebrating the great and precious gift of God's word! To help you or your small group or church do this, we've compiled an inspirational pack of free biblical resources.

A sermon written by Dr Andrew Ollerton will draw from the Book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament, and more specifically chapter eight where Ezra steps up and reads the law of Moses to the people.

For Sunday schools and youth groups there is a small mountain of fun and intriguing material that will encourage children to engage with Scripture. It also focuses on the same passage of Scripture as the sermon, meaning both adults and young people and children will all be on the same page!

For primary aged children it includes a starter game, a super story written from the point of view of Ezra's grandchild, a memory verse and activities to learn it, a craft, colouring page and much more! For the youth group there will be more background and discussion questions.

A pack of inspirational stories of people that have been helped through Bible a Month and other Bible mission work, prayers and a short video showing the work you prayerfully support by being a part of Bible a Month, round out your Bible Sunday package.

These resources will be made available online to easily download in September. To receive the package all you need to do is go to www.biblesociety.org.uk/biblesunday2020 and enter your email address.

YOUR STORIES & COMMENTS

You are part of a community of 23,000 people, committed to seeing God's word change lives around the world. Here's a snapshot of what some of you have to say!

Christine

The thoughts expressed (in June–July BAM) that God is with us through this virus give us hope and help us to persevere. It is a reminder that he never leaves us or forsakes us.

Debbie

I just really encourage people to support Bible a Month because it means we can spread the gospel without going out to the other countries ourselves.

Mavis

I use the prayer pointers, one every single day, and when I have been through them all, I start again and repeat.

Derek

It is always humbling to hear of the impact of God's word around the globe and how precious the Bible is. Bible a Month is a wonderful outpouring of God's kingdom.

We love to hear from you. Email us your thoughts at bam@biblesociety.org.uk or use the comments form attached. You can also find an online version of the prayer letter at biblesociety.org.uk/bam