



# BIBLE A MONTH

JUN/JUL 2021  
Issue 207

## From grief to belief and a Bible ministry in Laos

EYEWITNESS REPORT

“ I wanted to cry, to laugh. The Holy Spirit was touching me and I got baptised. ”

*Vatsana Mahaphone, 71, is at the forefront of Bible work in Laos. Your kind giving through Bible a Month supports her vital and challenging ministry in a communist country that is one of the poorest in East Asia. Vatsana wants to thank you for your amazing support and tell you her story. (For security reasons we are not using Vatsana's real name and have blurred faces in the images.)*

I have a very clear memory of the moment when I first encountered the one true God through the Bible. It happened in 2004 when I was suffering great personal loss. At the time I was a practising Buddhist and took my faith very seriously, but it did not bring me the comfort or hope I needed when I faced the pain of seeing one of my five children die.

**I had gone to the United States to get treatment for my daughter who had cancer. When she passed away,**

**a relative took me to a church. As I listened to the preaching, I felt that everything around me was touching my heart and I couldn't stop crying. It was the Holy Spirit's presence within me. From that moment on, I knew that there was a God – and that he was real.**

When I returned home to Laos, I attended church and had the same experience. I wanted to cry, to laugh. The Holy Spirit was touching me and I got baptised.

A short time later, I found myself crying again, unable to stop the tears. This time I was at my desk at the Bible Society office in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. I became emotional as I translated the story of the crucifixion for a children's Bible.

You see, just six months after I became a Christian I started working for Lao Partnership as a secretary. I

also started translating Scriptures for children from English into Lao.

I've personally experienced the importance of having a clear translation of the Bible because when I first became a Christian I had to read the old version of the Lao Bible that uses outdated language and is also missing verses. The Revised Lao Bible, which was published by Bible Society in 2013, has helped the Church to grow in Laos. It also helped me to develop a deep passion for Scripture. The story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16.19–31) is one of my favourite Bible stories.

When I was asked by my church in Laos to attend a workshop in 2015 I had no idea that I was being nominated to be a translator. I felt that my English wasn't good enough! But with encouragement, training and practice I improved and my confidence grew. Now I am one of two translators working on the new Lao Study Bible, which is based on the Good News Study Bible in English.

**There are very few study materials in the Lao language to help people**

**study the Bible for themselves and for pastors and church leaders to prepare their sermons and lessons. This project, supported by your kind giving through Bible a Month, will make a big difference. When I translate, I get so involved in my work that if I prepare a hot drink it turns cold before I remember to take a sip! I love my job and I thank God for using me in this way.**

I'm also studying for a master's degree in theology and working as an associate pastor at my church, focusing mainly on women's ministry. At the church, I pray and share the hope of the Bible with many desperate people – poverty-stricken widows, abandoned wives and women whose lives have been blighted by the drug addiction of husbands and sons.

Thank you for your prayerful support of Bible work through Bible a Month. Please pray for the publishing and distribution of the Study New Testament and for God to grant us wisdom and good health as we continue work on the Study Old Testament.

**Vatsana Mahaphone**  
*(not her real name) is an associate pastor and Bible translator in Laos.*



Vatsana started by translating Scriptures for children but now, helped by your Bible a Month donations, she is working on a Lao Study Bible.



Vatsana reads from the Revised Lao Bible to a family in an impoverished area of Vientiane. Most of the family recently became Christians.

# Translators brave hurricanes in Guatemala

MISSION UPDATE



Bible translator Carlos Rene Pop in his new 'office' atop a mountain in Guatemala.

“

‘All this effort is worth it because we will soon deliver the word of God in our language.’

”

Imagine having to climb to the top of a mountain to get a strong enough internet signal to do your work.

That’s what the team working on the Revised Q’eqchi’ Bible in Guatemala has had to do in order to work with the Global Translation Advisor to check their translation - a task usually done in person.

**‘We’ve faced many challenges as a team, including having to work with the consultant in a virtual way,’ said translator Dario Bá Xuc.**

A pair of hurricanes hit the area where the translators are based in 2020. It caused internet connection problems at a time when the team needed it most, with the pandemic pushing everything online. The second of the hurricanes was the worst, causing landslides that killed around 150 people and left many more homeless.

**‘We thank God that the translators are safe and have not lost their belongings and that, despite the**

**adversities of the weather and the pandemic, the translation continues,’ said translation coordinator Mario Xuruc.**

The Maya people who speak Q’eqchi’ number 1.4 million and they are proud of their cultural heritage despite also speaking Spanish. The new translation, supported by your kind giving through Bible a Month, was requested by their churches. It will strengthen the Christian identity of the community.

In the last quarter of 2020, Bible Society initially published Galatians in Q’eqchi’ and thousands of copies were distributed.

‘This has been a difficult year, but the translation team is more committed than ever to finishing the translation so that God’s word can bring hope and encouragement,’ said Mario.

Thanks to your regular giving through Bible a Month that day will come.

• Envelope image: A girl holds a Bible Society Scripture booklet in Guatemala. Photo credit: José García.

## Prayer pointers

Thank the Lord that the translation team has so far successfully adapted to and overcome the difficulties of working online. Ask God to give them great strength and wisdom as they strive to reach their goals.

Ask God to be with the Q’eqchi’ people affected by the landslides as they rebuild their lives.

Pray for the churches in the region whose pastoral work helps people who are struggling due to the pandemic and flooding caused by the hurricanes.

Pray for Bible Society staff so they can continue developing projects that will see God’s word available in all Mayan languages.

# THANKS FOR THE RIDE! IT'S BIKE FOR BIBLES 2021



The wheels are in motion for the annual Bike for Bibles where folk go that extra mile and have some fun while raising funds.

Last year, when the wheels stopped spinning the result was more Bibles for children in Malawi, Scripture-based trauma healing for victims of violence in Mozambique and the training of Sunday school teachers in Syria, among many other great projects.

It's free to sign up for the September event and riders of all ages and abilities can take part. How about making it a fun family event, or cycle with brothers and sisters from your church!

You ride 50, 100 or 300 miles, but the timeframe is up to you. You could channel your inner

Captain Tom and ride 50 miles over the course of the month, or if you fancy yourself as the next Chris Hoy, blaze through 300 miles before breakfast!

We've designed special jerseys and T-shirts, medals and water bottles.

We ask that every adult cyclist aims to raise at least £250. That could fund a Bible translator for eight days or provide 15 practical aid packages to refugee families, containing food, clothing and a Bible.

We are full of thanks already for your incredible generosity through Bible a Month, but if you are interested in a fun day out for a good cause then all the information you need is here: [biblesociety.org.uk/bikeforbibles](https://biblesociety.org.uk/bikeforbibles)

## 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

I am blessed with lots of Bibles and so many people haven't got even one. Every one of God's children should have the opportunity to have God speak to them directly through his word, so I want to use the money God has given me to let another person have God speak to them directly through his word.

### Joanne

After reading BAM April-May issue I was so encouraged to see all the incredible work being done in Egypt.

### Brian

I was greatly touched by the accounts in the latest newsletter and therefore spiritually motivated to increase my monthly donations accordingly.

### Malani

I pray that many children will be blessed by the Bibles and Scripture story booklets [in the Middle East] and that they will meet Jesus and want to follow him.

We love to hear from you. Email us your thoughts at [bam@biblesociety.org.uk](mailto: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](https://biblesociety.org.uk/bam)

# LAOS

When Laos became communist in 1975, Bible ministry in Laos was halted by the authorities, but despite limitations on religious freedom, our Bible work continued thanks to your regular support and we co-operate closely with many churches.

The vast majority of the population is Buddhist but Christianity has experienced significant growth during the last ten years. Now four per cent of the population is believed to be Christian. Church planting is on the rise, and with that comes a strong need for pastoral training and in-depth study of the Bible.

The Revised Laos Bible was launched by Bible Society in 2013. It has had a huge impact, helping Christianity to blossom.

The new Laos Study Bible is expected

to directly impact on about 20,000 believers at first and then grow from there. It is vital because there are very few study Bible materials in the Lao language and many people do not understand any other language. Thanks to your continued support, the growing Church will have a valuable resource which will help them grow in their understanding and study of God's word.



Your kind giving helps Vatsana Mahaphone as she works on a Lao Study Bible translation.

## June prayer pointers

Pray for the continued health and strength of the translators and typesetters of the new Lao Study Bible. Ask that God will grant them wisdom as they go about their work.

Pray for the promotion of the Laos Study Bible to the local churches. Ask that leaders will embrace it and that Christians will be enriched spiritually by studying the Scriptures in greater depth.

Praise God that Christianity is blossoming in Laos, and ask that it will continue to prosper and that eventually the gospel may be shared without any restrictions.

# MALI

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world with less than three per cent of the population Christian. Terrorist groups are rife but their atrocities are causing people to look to Christianity, and the Church is expanding. And with your support, our team of 16 in Mali are running projects that change people's lives.

Our team, led by Jacques Dembele, have a heart for Bible training and equipping, to help believers be salt and light in their communities.

Your gifts go to a number of key projects. First, you help to equip church leaders. Christian leaders of all denominations will be trained on major biblical themes through seminars and retreats, and they'll be provided with resources to help them reach out to Muslim neighbours.

You also help families engage with the

Bible, by providing study guides for parents and children to use together, and putting a strong emphasis on children's ministry.

Finally, your support means illiterate people can understand and engage with the Bible. Two-thirds of adults in Mali cannot read or write, so we run a Bible storytelling programme to bring God's word to life through song and music.



These marginalised Malian women enjoy Bible studies and are trained in the production of small food packages to help them reintegrate into society.

## July prayer pointers

Give thanks for our dedicated and faithful team, which includes ten Bible translators. Pray for energy, protection and wisdom.

Pray for a confident Malian Church to be living out the gospel, serving as a witness and prophetic voice in the nation. Pray for the development of strong, Bible-literate leaders who can share God's word with passion and inspiration.

Ask God to bless the storytelling programme, so that many illiterate adults would find life and meaning in the Bible.

# LAOS



## FACTFILE



### Area

91,429 square miles, the same size as the UK



### Population

7.6 million



### Languages

Lao (official), English, French, regional languages



### Literacy rate

84.7%

'This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.'

Joshua 1.8 (ESV)

# MALI



## FACTFILE



### Area

478,840 square miles, five times bigger than the UK



### Population

20.1 million



### Languages

French (official), Bambara, many regional languages



### Literacy rate

35.5%

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.'

1 Peter 2.9 (ESV)