



Pakistani women taking part in a literacy class.



Photo credit: United Bible Societies

Helping Pakistani women to read the Bible

By Tim Foggin



You may think of the Middle East as a difficult region for gospel work. But thanks to your support, Bible mission is made possible in places like Pakistan, Iraq and Turkey. Have a look inside this month's edition to read how your gifts are changing lives today.



In last newsletter, we mentioned some of the ways in which your support is having a tremendous impact here at home, and further afield. To find out more about ways to grow your impact, why not have a look inside this month's edition?

Tom Newbold

Tom Newbold
Bible a Month Co-ordinator

It's hard to believe just how low down some women are considered in Pakistan's hierarchical, caste-based society. 'Almost at the level of animals', someone said to me.

Can you imagine pulling your daughter out of school, so she can help around the home and be ready to marry when she reaches her teens? As a father, the tragedy of the situation hit me hard. Here in England, you would never thwart your child's prospects in such a way.

This is the entrenched view in Pakistan, an Islamic republic where 97% of people are Muslim and where Christians account for less than 2% of the population. So when I last visited the country, I was thrilled to visit our literacy project which aims to teach young Muslim women to read using the Bible.

Three out of five women in Pakistan are illiterate, but thanks to your ongoing generosity through *Bible a Month*, 7,000

women and girls learn to read and write every year, and each receives a Bible. They attend classes for two hours a day, five days a week, for six months. While I was there, I had the privilege of joining a graduation ceremony for 200 women.

I arrived into a chaotic atmosphere and was given guest of honour treatment! I participated in the Bible distribution ceremony, shook hands with the women, and posed for photos. The books they receive are called TAZI Bibles. TAZI stands for 'Taurat, Anbiya, Zabur, Injil', the Torah, Prophets, Psalms and Gospel. The pages read from right to left, and it's written in a way that resonates with the cultural context of the Middle East.

What struck me was that, even though all the women were Muslims, they knew a fair amount about the Bible when I asked them about its various stories. They learn to read from Scripture as their tutors help them unpack God's word. Remarkably, women of all ages take part in the classes.

In focus

Mary Jones World opens again for the summer season

In 1800, 15 year-old Mary Jones walked 26 miles from Llanfihangel-y-Pennant to Bala in North Wales to purchase a Bible from Revd Thomas Charles. Mary had saved for six years and Revd Charles was so moved by her determination to own a Bible that he helped establish Bible Society four years later.

Now, over two hundred years on, Mary Jones' legacy stands as a powerful reminder that many still live in the hope of receiving their own Bible today. Today, her moving story is told in *Mary Jones World*, our visitor and education centre on the edge of Lake Bala.

Since its official opening ceremony in 2014, the Centre has welcomed thousands of visitors and students. Through interactive displays, exhibits and activities, it gives the public the opportunity to follow Mary's journey and learn about the impact of the Bible, not only on Wales, but on the rest of the world.

The Centre will be opening its doors again for another summer season on 1st April. With a picnic area, café, children's playground and plenty of parking space, it provides a great day out for children and adults alike.

To find out more about opening times, ticket prices and volunteer opportunities, visit bydmaryjonesworld.org.uk or call us on 0808 1784 909.



Mary Jones World on the edge of lake Bala.

I even met one lady who'd attended the literacy classes with her grand-daughter.

Thanks to your generous support, our team in Pakistan our team is able to give tremendous hope to these women. Despite the poverty, hardship and lack of respect, the women learn that God loves them. When they feel down, they can draw upon that steadfast truth, leaning on the Bibles they carry home to give them courage amidst the challenges.

And the impact doesn't stop there. Women are at the very heart of Pakistani home life, so when a woman is moved by God's word, it radiates to her family and beyond. It reminds me of the verse in Isaiah: 'then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon.' (Isaiah 58.10 GNB).

Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries of the world in which to be a Christian. Although many Christians happily coexist alongside their Muslim neighbours, the threat of Islamic extremism is growing. My Pakistani colleagues live in fear every day. There's



Learning to read and write together.

an armed guard on the front door of Bible Society's bookshop and office in Lahore, the second largest city in Pakistan. I don't think any other Bible Society in the world has that. Yet the courage and determination of my colleagues is astounding.

It's vital that we pray for our team in Pakistan. The window of opportunity is open. Now's the time to share the word of God with a society that deeply needs it. Thank you for your faithful, regular gifts which help to make this life-transforming work possible.

Rebuilding hope in Northern Iraq

Armed police still stand outside the churches of Qaraqosh, Iraq's largest Christian city. After the ISIS invasions of 2014, Iraqi Christian numbers dwindled from over a million, to a mere 250,000 people in the whole of the country. Thousands of houses and churches were burned to the ground, and many Christians fled to the neighbouring countries of Jordan and Lebanon.

But since 2017, thousands of inhabitants have returned home, and rebuilding work in the city of Qaraqosh has already allowed three Christian schools to reopen.

Thanks to your support, refugees are encouraged to take part in Bible-based trauma-healing, in order to talk through their experiences and rebuild their trust in the Lord. By equipping committed Iraqi Christians to become trainers in their communities, our team are able to run local trauma-healing groups and mobilise churches to reach out to traumatised people across the country.

One of the survivors, Father Pathros* recalled the moment he was forced to leave his home, 'On the night of 6th August, I left everything I had: my clothes, my library, my car...' But his face lit up as he described God's grace throughout the trials: 'God gave me the chance to experience what it will eventually be like to leave this life without any belongings.'

He concluded: 'What happened to us was like the Babylonian exile. If I was asked to go through the experience of displacement all over again, I would say yes. We lived in a grace which was beyond imagination.'

Thank you for your support, which has enabled people like Father Pathros to find comfort in God's word through our trauma healing projects in Iraq. Please pray for Iraqi Christians, that they might find hope in the Bible. And thank God for our teams in Iraq and Lebanon, who are faithfully working to bring back the certainty of Jesus's love and protection to the Iraqi people.

*Names have been changed to protect those involved



Iraqi Christians holding a service in their burned down church.

Pakistan

April 2019

The Christian community in Pakistan is tiny – less than 2% of the 207 million-strong population – and in this Islamic republic, Bible ministry is fraught with difficulties. Even though it's tough, our team are committed to sharing God's word as widely as possible.

Your support is funding four key projects, and making a difference to thousands of lives:

- 1) 7,000 women and girls are being taught to read each year using Bible stories
- 2) 30,000 young people take part in Bible competitions and a sports festival each year, where they learn to read the Bible and listen to Bible talks before every sports match
- 3) A team of eight volunteer Christian doctors go out to rural villages to offer free healthcare alongside Bible teaching, seeing up to 400 people a day
- 4) An annual Christian TV drama is filmed and screened on national TV, providing the core gospel message to an audience of around half a million Pakistanis

Thank you for your ongoing generosity, which is helping transform lives across Pakistan.



Pakistani children reading an Urdu Bible.

Prayer pointers

- Give thanks for the 200 women who completed our literacy program recently. Pray the Bibles they received will give them comfort, hope and courage in their difficult lives.
- Pray for the medical teams who are visiting villages and slums this year. Pray for safety, good organisation, and opportunities to talk about why they give their time in service of others.
- Please pray for Bible Society's annual sports competition in Pakistan, that inter-faith friendships will grow and that young people will be touched by God's word.
- Please lift up to God our colleagues in Pakistan, who live daily with risk and fear. Give thanks for their faithfulness and ask for God's protection over them and their families.

Turkey

May 2019

Throughout the 20th Century, massacres, severe persecution and waves of emigration to Greece nearly wiped out the entire Church in Turkey. Christians now form a tiny minority, numbering less than 0.1% of an overwhelmingly Muslim population of more than 81 million.

In spite of these challenges, our team is able to run a Bible shop on one of the main streets in Istanbul, where people come in to enquire about the Christian faith.

Thanks to your support, the Bible Society in Turkey also attends annual secular book fairs across the country. With over one million visitors, these fairs provide a safe public environment where Muslims can browse through Scripture and ask questions.

While the ministry is slow and challenging, our team in Turkey remain trusting in the Lord. One of our colleagues explained, 'Sometimes we meet people who first came to our Bible store or book stand 15 years ago. We never saw them again, but they kept reading the Bible. If they hadn't come back years later, we might have never known that their lives had been utterly transformed.'



The skyline of Istanbul, Turkey's capital city.

Prayer pointers

- Most Turks are misinformed about the Bible and often have strong prejudices about the Christian faith. Pray that God would soften the hearts of those who visit the Bible shop and book fairs, that they might encounter God for themselves.
- Praise God for the perseverance of our small team in Turkey as they continue to witness powerfully to the work of God amidst a difficult nation.
- Family pressure and societal intimidation keep many Turks from coming to Christ, while forcing others to remain secret believers. Please pray for strength and boldness for those who turn to Christianity after receiving God's word.
- Please pray for renewed church growth in the face of continued spiritual, legal and cultural opposition in the country.

Pakistan

'Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8.12 (ESV)

Factfile



Area – 494,670 sq miles, approx. 3.27 as large as UK

Population – 207,862,518 million, approx. 3.17 as large as UK

Literacy rate – 57.9%

Languages – Punjabi, Sindhi, Urdu, English, other languages

Your Stories

Thank you for your powerful responses to the *Pass it on* campaign over the last year! We hope you've been as encouraged as we have by the powerful accounts of God's work in your lives.

Mrs CP Wilson

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29.11 (ESV)

'I chose the following verse because the Lord drew it to my attention soon after my husband died. We'd served the Lord as a couple in many different ways and his death meant that this all stopped. But the Lord used this Scripture to remind me that he still had a plan for my life and would give me hope for the future. I've since seen him put that plan into action in so many ways. He brought me into contact with other widows who I could befriend and share my faith with. He called me to several mission trips to Romania. And I've had the immense joy and privilege of seeing several friends and neighbours come to know the Lord as Saviour. All this I know is only possible through His grace and by His Holy Spirit working through me. To God be the glory!'

Turkey

'You answered me when I called to you, with your strength you strengthened me.'

Psalms 138.3 (GNB)

Factfile



Area – 486,882 sq miles, approx. 3.22 as large as UK

Population – 81,257,239 million, approx. 1.24 as large as UK

Literacy rate – 95.6%

Languages – Turkish (official), Kurdish, other minority languages

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

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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