



Hooloot (pictured) turned to the Bible for help when her husband was kidnapped by ISIS.



## Refugees holding onto God's word

By Susan Wingrave

I wonder what makes you excited about 2017? Perhaps you'll be celebrating something big this year, maybe a wedding or a significant birthday?



One thing I'm celebrating this year is the 40th anniversary of Bible a Month! 2017 marks 40 years of amazing support that's enabled us to bring God's word to millions!

Whether you've been part of Bible a Month for 40 years, or for 40 days, we are so grateful for your support. I hope you enjoy this first newsletter of 2017 and know that your gift is changing lives.

**John Ranford**  
Bible a Month  
Co-ordinator

In 2016 I made two trips to Austria to witness Bible work there. It was an icy  $-4^{\circ}\text{C}$  on my first visit in January, but by the time I returned in September it was a scorching  $28^{\circ}\text{C}$ . What a difference, and yet the biggest change between the two visits was the way that people's lives had transformed.

I first met Hooloot in January, when the leader of a local Syrian Orthodox Church took me to visit her. We shared a meal and talked about how the Bible she'd received from Bible Society helped her during a distressing period in her life.

Hooloot is one of many refugees who have arrived in Austria from Syria in the last couple of years. Refugees are not new to Austria; the German-speaking country first welcomed refugees in 1956 when The Lager on the outskirts of Vienna started receiving people escaping the Hungarian Uprising.

The number of people arriving since 2015 however has been unprecedented, and has been equally accompanied by an unprecedented surge in demand for Bibles.

The Austrian Bible Society is small but coping. The Director, Dr Jutta Henner, told me that in 2014 there were 20,000 people seeking asylum. By 2015 there were 100,000! They receive requests from ministers, missionaries, police and prison chaplains asking for Bibles for refugees.

Each person's story is different and each has had a profound effect on me, but it is probably Hooloot's that I remember most vividly. When I visited her, she told me through a translator how a few years ago her husband was kidnapped by ISIS.

She described how reading the Bible helped her in those dark days. My own daughter is in her teens and I cannot imagine trying to be a parent whilst your

# In focus

## Every child in every primary school

Open the Book has a vision to bring the Bible to life for every child in every primary school, and is now active in over 2,000 schools.

Teams of volunteers from local churches across the country use drama, mime, props, costume – and the children – to present Bible stories in lively and informative ways in assemblies and collective worship.

Back in the 1990s, Dave Todd, a youth worker in Bedford launched Open the Book in just six weeks. Dave and a small team around him wrote handbooks, trained volunteers and got schools signed up.

The news about Open the Book spread quickly, and the team grew and expanded throughout the British Isles.

By 2013, Open the Book had grown to a massive 8,600 volunteers, and then merged with Bible Society. Since then it has multiplied to over 14,200 volunteers going into over 2,500 schools. In 2017 another year's worth of Bible stories based on Christian Values will be launched.

Please pray that this work continues to grow and that more children across the UK will have the opportunity to hear Bible stories through the storytelling of generous volunteers from local churches.



Children & volunteer storytellers at St Mary's Cheltenham retelling the story of Noah's Ark.

husband is going through such torment. And yet through all that, Hooloot held on to her faith.

After the kidnapping, Hooloot paid the ransom. But following her husband's return home, he fled the country and once again, Hooloot was on her own with her children. Once again she turned to the Bible for support.

Eighteen months after his arrival in Austria, Hooloot's husband was granted asylum and the family were finally reunited. Hooloot told me how scary it had been but that the Bible had supported her.

She requested a Bible from Bible Society because she knew it was important to forgive people and not let it affect the rest of her life. Reading about how Jesus forgave people was an important part in that process.

When I returned to Austria in September, I was delighted to see Hooloot after church. Since our first meeting she continues to read her Bible, attend church and she has been attending German lessons. She has passed the qualification she needs to get a job



Susan with Hooloot during her return visit to Austria in September.

and has been offered employment as a teaching assistant. I am certain that she never envisioned working in a German-speaking school, but throughout she has held fast to her faith and her Bible.

Again and again I heard from people how they longed to have their own Bible either because they already knew it well and relied upon it, or because it had been banned in their home country and they were desperate to read it themselves.

The verse that comes to my mind is Romans 12.21 – 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (ESV). Refugees in Austria are showing us that the Bible offers a real alternative to extremism and I count it a privilege to be part of distributing God's word.

## Child of Bethlehem

Bible stories are being brought to life in Bible Lands for children and young people through the Child of Bethlehem project. Running since 2000, Child of Bethlehem is designed to share the real meaning of Christmas by retelling Bible stories in creative ways in the places they originally took place.

Jericho, Jerusalem and even Gaza hosted Child of Bethlehem during the 2016 Christmas period. Different activities that brought the Bible to life included special drama plays and Christmas worship songs. Scripture distribution and a powerful Bible message are always an essential component for the thousands attending these activities.

The key theme for 2016 was 'refugees'. Children were given a special colouring book featuring Biblical stories about refugees, and concluding with the story of Jesus, a refugee himself in Egypt.

One of the children (Tony), who participated in the Bible camp comes from a Christian family that is not engaged with church and has never been taught anything from the Bible. It was a shock for Tony to hear stories from the Bible, as he had never had a Bible and didn't understand what it meant to be a Christian.

The story of Joseph particularly touched his heart, so much that he returned home and shared with his parents that God can take care of him, even in the hardest of circumstances. This testimony touched his mother's heart.

Today, Tony's mother is reading the Bible with her children every night, and has started to attend church on a regular basis. This is just one of many stories of amazing impact that the Child of Bethlehem project is having in Bible Lands.

There are three Bible Societies active in Bible Lands; Arab-Israeli, Israeli, and Palestinian. All three Bible Societies work closely together, and we support each on the basis of need and close consultation between them.



Children watching a special drama play as part of the Child of Bethlehem project.

# Austria

February 2017

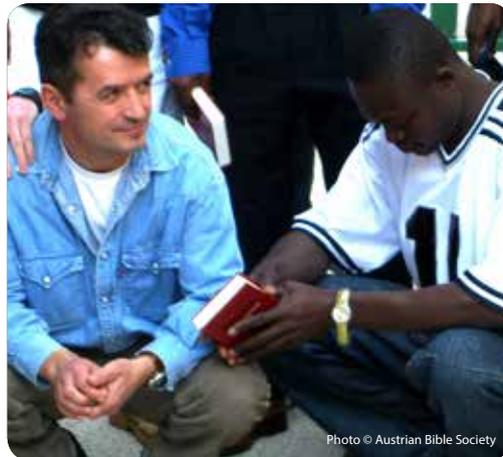
Austria has the highest rate of refugees per capita of any country in the European Union. For many refugees, the Bible might be the only thing they'll receive and read in their home language.

Refugees receiving Bibles may be Christians who are finding comfort and reassurance in God's word, or they could be non-Christians hearing about God's love and plan for them for the very first time.

One Austrian minister described the touching experience of giving out Farsi Bibles to Iranian refugees that came to his church.

'You should have seen the eyes of these young men and women. I have never before seen such gratitude. They have been hugging me and I had to write dedications in the Bibles. Now, for the first time in their lives, they can read the Good News of Jesus Christ without fear of persecution.'

The Bibles you give through your support are enabling refugees to experience this joy as they flee conflict and persecution in their own countries – thank you so much.



Refugees with a Bible near the Traiskirchen refugee camp. Photo © Austrian Bible Society

## Prayer pointers

- Pray for peace in Syria and Afghanistan, and for all countries all over the world where civilians are being displaced by war and conflict.
- Thank God for the hard work of the Austrian Bible Society. Pray they will be sustained and strengthened.
- Pray for children who have had long periods of instability while their families have been separated.
- Pray for Hooloot and her family, as they use the Bible to enable them to move on from what they have been through and build new lives in Austria.

# Malawi

March 2017

More than half of Malawi's population are children. This makes our work with children and young people a top priority.

We're distributing Bibles to Sunday schools in Malawi's city-based churches, aiming to reach 10,000 children. The Bibles will be in either English or Chichewa, the two main languages spoken in Malawi.

In Malawian churches there are often few teaching materials to engage children with, making children's Bible distribution a top priority. For children who receive a Bible, often in hapless life situations, it can be a source of hope and joy.

'Malawi is going through turbulent economic times, and people can hardly think of buying a Bible, let alone a children's Bible. Yet we know that children's Bibles are very effective,' said Youth and Children officer Wongani Mhango.

We're working hard to distribute as many children's Bibles as we can to Malawian churches over the next couple of years. Thank you for your continuing support that is helping to make this possible.



Children receiving their new Chichewa Bibles at Michiru Sunday School. Photo © Mary Frank

## Prayer pointers

- Give thanks for the work being done with children and young people; the future of the country of Malawi.
- Pray that church leaders in Malawi will consider and prioritise the needs of children.
- Pray that Sunday Schools in Malawi would be encouraged and motivated as they are better-resourced.
- Pray that children who receive a children's Bible would experience the hope and joy that can be found in God's word.

# Austria

*'The Lord defends the rights of orphans and widows. He cares for foreigners and gives them food and clothing.'*

Deuteronomy 10.18 (CEV)

## Factfile



Area – 83,871 sq km, approx. 34% of UK

Population – 8.7 million, approx. 14% of UK

Literacy rate – 98%

Languages – German (official), Turkish, Serbian, Croatian

# Club Corner

## 40 years: your stories

2017 marks the 40th anniversary of *Bible a Month*, and we want to celebrate it with you! We've been digging through the archives for old memorabilia and great anecdotes from the last 40 years, but we really want to hear your stories too.



Have you been supporting *Bible a Month* for several decades (or maybe even the full 40 years)?! Do have stories of volunteering or fundraising for Bible Society? What inspired you to start giving and makes you continue? We want to hear from you.

Email us to tell us how long you've been supporting *Bible a Month* at [bamc@biblesociety.org.uk](mailto:bamc@biblesociety.org.uk) or write to *Bible a Month, Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, SN5 7DG*.

Look out for memories, articles, images and a special edition of the *Bible a Month* newsletter this year to celebrate over 22,000 of you who are part of *Bible a Month*. Giving God's word to somebody can be one of the most powerful, life-changing things you can do – thank you.

# Malawi

*"When you welcome even a child because of me, you welcome me. And when you welcome me, you welcome the one who sent me."*

Mark 9.37 (CEV)

## Factfile



Area – 118,484 sq km, approx. 49% of UK

Population – 18.6 million, approx. 29% of UK

Literacy rate – 65.8%

Languages – English (official), Chichewa, other local languages

Look out for your next *Bible a Month* prayer letter which will feature reports from **China** and **Lebanon**.

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

Remember that if your circumstances change 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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