

# God's Word for Isan

## Isan Bible Translation Project of Northeast Thailand



**Twenty-Plus Million Isan People Are Still Bibleless!**  
*(Without God's Word in Their Own Heart Language)*

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### SPOTLIGHT ON:

## THE ISAN PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST THAILAND and THE ISAN BIBLE TRANSLATION PROJECT

*Over twenty million Isan people still Bibleless!*

- ✓ *Is There a Valid Need?*
- ✓ *What's the Real Story?*
- ✓ *Is the Isan Bible Being Used?*
- ✓ *How Can I Get Involved?*

"God's Word, Accurately Translated Into the Heart Language of Any People, Is Truly Powerful"

*"I am positively convinced the Isan Bible is the key to reaching this major, unreached people group, and a critically strategic way in which one can invest God's resources."*  
 Ron Myers

พระเยซูทรงรักโลกจนได้  
 ประทานพระบุตรองค์เดียว  
 "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son"



### SPOTLIGHT ON THE ISAN PEOPLE of NORTHEAST THAILAND and the MEKONG BIBLE TRANSLATION PROJECT

*being done in their language*

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT THE ISAN PEOPLE, THE REGION, AND THE NEED FOR THE ISAN BIBLE TRANSLATION PROJECT?

*This brochure is dedicated to the Salvation of the Isan People of Northeast Thailand, and to providing you with enlightening information about the people, the region, and the strategic need for the Isan Scriptures, presently being translated into their own heart language:*

#### ✓ The Isan People

The Buddhist nation of Thailand is located in Southeast Asia, within the 10/40 Window of major unreached people groups. Of Anna and the King of Siam fame, it is ruled by a benevolent monarchy, along with a parliamentary democracy since 1932.

The twenty-plus million Isan people of Thailand's Northeastern Region comprise one-third of the nation's total population. Descended from Lao, Mon, and Khmer stock, the Isan people are indelibly steeped in and bound by ancient customs, traditions, superstitions, and beliefs. Typically poor, the rice farming Isan people live on a subsistence level in an archaic agrarian sub-culture, passed down to them from their ancestors.



Isan People in Traditional Dress

The rural-dwelling Isan are a fun-loving albeit hard-working people, toughened by the land they till as well as the socio-economic environment they are forced to endure. The Isan have traditionally been oppressed, routinely ridiculed and taken open advantage of by their politically-astute and class-conscious Thai cousins, and by regional favoritism and ethnic prejudice, all subtly sanctioned by government policy and practice.

Even so, the Isan are emerging from their humble origins into becoming the nation's official labor class. Subsequently, they are becoming more widely accepted as representative democracy slowly develops and matures across Thailand's political landscape.

Largest Major People Group Still Without God's Word In Their Own Tongue!

#### ✓ Their Land

The Kingdom of Thailand, previously called Siam, is a key country in mainland Southeast Asia. It has a land area of approximately 200,000 square miles or about three-quarters the size of Texas and is divided into four main geographical regions: N, NE, E, S. The Northeastern Region, or *Isan*, lies along the border of Laos and Cambodia, separated by the mighty Mekong River. Isan is the largest and most populous region of Thailand and occupies an area of about 64,000 square miles or one-third of the country's total land mass. Isan is divided into nineteen provinces or *jangwats*, out of over seventy nationwide, Thailand's geopolitical system of administration.

Geographically, the Isan region is spread over the vast Korat Plateau, which derives its name from an ancient Khmer kingdom-city of the area. The land is typically acidic rice-paddy country averaging 450 feet above sea-level and interspersed with forested or mountainous regions. Isan has a harsh, sun-baked climate. During monsoon season various locales are either draught- or flood-ridden, causing unpredictable crop yields.



Ancient Khmer Temple Ruins in Isan

#### ✓ Their Heritage

As previously mentioned, the Isan are an ancient people, descended mostly from Lao, Mon, and Khmer origins. According to ancient chronicles their progenitors migrated into the area from the first millennium AD or before, some from as far away as Southern China or beyond.

The Isan region is rich with signs of an ancient religious and cultural heritage. In addition to the myriad of Buddhist shrines and temples that dot the landscape, the Isan region



Revered Taat Panom Buddhist Shrine

contains vestiges of ancient Khmer temple ruins of Hindu Brahman-class influence from the Indianized Angkor civilization of the first millennium. Over thirty ancient Khmer temple ruins can be seen in southern Isan, in the vicinity of the Cambodian border. These were erected when Thailand's Isan region was part of the old Khmer empire, ruled from the Angkor capital in present-day Northern Cambodia.

## ✓ Their Beliefs

Thailand is called the *Land of Smiles*; however, most all of Thai life and culture revolves around Orthodox Buddhism, and dark arts and superstitions. As the nation's state-ordained religion, Buddhism is revered by nearly all Isan people. According to Buddhist teachings there is no Creator-God or Savior. Only by relying upon one's own effort to accomplish religious good works, as set forth in ***Buddha's Eight-fold Middle Path***,



Apprentice Monks

including conquering one's carnal desires, can a person ever hope to acquire enough *merit* to gain "enlightenment," and passage into *Nirvana*. Unlike Heaven, Nirvana is described as a state of oblivion where one's soul essence ceases to exist, thus escaping the endless cycle of reincarnations caused by one's own *karma* or bad deeds.

Blended with a vigorous mixture of Ancestor Worship, Animism (*taboos, shamanism and appeasement of malicious spirits*), Brahmanism (*trust in omens, amulets, incantations, and auspicious days*), and other forms of superstitious folklore, the whole package forms a powerful underlying socio-cultural identification that is not readily open to outside input or change. **It forms a tough shell of resistance that is impervious to normal evangelistic methodology.**

## ✓ Their Present Condition

**The Gospel first entered Thailand almost 200 years ago** through Baptist missionary pioneers Adoniram and Ann Judson. Many decades later, the first Bible-believing missionary to enter Thailand's remote Isan region was in the 1930s. **Yet, today, only about .1% to .01% of Thailand's Buddhist populace are considered to be truly born-again Christians.** That's approximately one believer to every one-thousand people (1:1,000). **The number of believers in the Isan region is even more scarce—as few as one to every ten-thousand (1:10,000), being more deeply steeped in ancient beliefs and customs, and much more resistant to change.**

Their lack of receptivity is due to the blinding stranglehold of their culture and superstitious traditions, including Buddhism. Those who have heard the Name Jesus Christ, have a fixed mindset that He is the equivalent of their Lord Buddha, or the *Guru* who founded the "foreigner's religion." Compounded by the lack of the Scriptures in their own heart language, very few of Isan's millions are truly born-again, not being able to comprehend the Gospel of God's Grace.

**This Situation Is Changing As They Read The Isan Bible!**

## ✓ Their Deliverance? God's Word in Their Language!

"Having experienced it first-hand, we are persuaded only one thing can truly reverse this trend and break the Satanic chains of spiritual darkness that bind the Isan people so completely. That is, God's eternal Word, translated into their own heart language, taught and preached using culturally-relevant evangelism techniques, empowered by the Holy Spirit." *Ron Myers*

God graciously used and blessed veteran missionaries Ron and Cheryl Myers' church-planting ministry among Thailand's Isan people. They realized the need for the Isan Bible in the early 1980s. Benefited by years of training, dedication and first-hand experience, they are uniquely qualified, strategically positioned, and wholly dedicated to the task of finishing the Isan Bible translation.

### Facts, Goals, Projections, Obstacles:

♦ **Fact:** To date, all Old Testament portions related to creation-evangelism and chronological teaching have been translated and nearly two-thirds of the New Testament, using Wycliffe's checking methods.

♦ **Goals and Projections:** **Projected completion date is 2006.** Upon completion, the goal is to print the Isan Scriptures in an easily readable dual column edition, alongside the Thai version. This is the best format for acceptance and popularity. We envision a printing of 30,000, along with audio narratives in CD format, as well as Thai and Laotian editions.

♦ **Obstacles:** **The greatest single obstacle is the lack of adequate support-funds** to complete the task, as well as immediate funds needed to print and distribute books presently out of print.

♦ **Fact:** **An increasing number of missionaries and mission organizations** working among the Isan and Lao people are enthusiastic about the Isan translation's potential and are beginning to use it as books become available.

♦ **Fact:** **Wycliffe Bible Translators** has acknowledged the Isan translation's importance, and has asked formal permission to use it as a source text for their translation teams working on various languages in Vietnam, Laos Cambodia, and Thailand

♦ **Fact:** **A growing number of Isan and Laotian believers** are reading the Isan translation because it speaks so clearly to their hearts, unlike the Thai or Lao Bibles.

### Isan and Lao believers speak out:

✓ **"I began to read and I couldn't put it down. It captivated my mind and my understanding. Every word and phrase spoke deeply to me. Even the passages that are difficult to understand in the Thai Bible are now crystal clear."**

✓ **"This is exactly what we need for our parents, relatives and elders to clearly understand the Gospel message."**

✓ **"Wow, in times past we never had a Bible like this one. Where did this come from and why so good now? The understanding is very clear."**

✓ **"I read the book you gave me (John's Gospel in Isan). It is really special. It went deep down into my heart. I want to know more. I want to believe now."**

✓ **"We like this Bible because it is so understandable, written in our normal, everyday language."**

## ✓ How Can I Be Involved?

✓ **Invite us to your speaking engagements and mission conferences.** (Write for brochures, details, references and résumés.)

✓ **Sponsor the Isan Bible Translation Project.** This remains one of the greatest needs. **Your partnership with the various costs associated with translation** (checking, printing, and distribution), will help expedite the Isan scriptures into the hands of the Isan people. Visit our website, call, write, or e-mail us for further information. (*address on back*)

✓ **Pray daily for the people of Isan, and for Thailand, that God, in His mercy, would grant them open hearts and receptive minds** to understand and truly receive the Christ of the Gospel.

✓ **Pray daily for the missionaries and their families involved in the Bible Translation Project and interrelated ministries, that God would:** <sup>(1)</sup>grant health, protection and safety from all harm; <sup>(2)</sup>speed their progress in completing the task; <sup>(3)</sup>give wisdom and eternal fruit for their labors; <sup>(4)</sup>provide for their personal and ministry needs.

✓ **Adopt the Isan people and the translation as a special project.** **Commit** to finding out more. **Visit** the Isan area of Thailand. **Meet** Isan people on a short-term mission trip. **Go** teach ESL English.



## ✓ What Do We Stand For?

### Vision and Purpose Statement:

♦ Motivated by the *vision* of God's all-encompassing love for all people, and in fulfillment of the Great Commission, we are dedicated to the *purpose* of making a lasting difference throughout Northeastern Thailand and beyond by taking God's eternal life-giving Word to the twenty-plus million Isan people living there. It is being translated into their own heart language following the Byzantine/TR Greek text form (KJV), employing sound translation principles. This, integrated with a Biblically and culturally-relevant evangelism, teaching, preaching, and church-planting ministry.

♦ **WHY? Over twenty million Isan people are still Bible-less (without God's Word in their own language)!** God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; the entrance of God's words giveth light and understanding to the simple; so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. 2 Pet 3:9b, Ps 119:130, Rom 10:17

### We Believe and Teach:

♦ Being Baptistic and conservative in faith, doctrine and practice, we believe and teach that: the Holy Scriptures are God-breathed (*inspired*) and are thus living, eternal, inerrant and relevant in their entirety; that they are meant to be understood in keeping with a literal and historical method of interpretation, comparing scripture with scripture in the light of normal and logical meaning, according to grammatical, contextual and prophetic considerations (*not superimposing allegorical, symbolic or pet meanings*)

♦ that according to Scripture, there is only One True Living God, existing from eternity past as the Triune Father, Son (*Preincarnate Christ*) and Holy Spirit; that being Divine in nature, God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present; righteous, holy and just; faithful, trustworthy and true; tender, compassionate and merciful; full of loving-kindness, goodness and grace for all

♦ that everything, everywhere, was created in its entirety by God, the Intelligent Designer's speaking it into existence, all within the first six 24-hour days, fully devoid of any so-called *big-bang* or evolutionary theory or process

♦ that Satan, the fallen Archangel Lucifer, is the enemy of God, the author of sin, the deceiver, destroyer, and the personification of evil; although limited in the scope of his power, he holds sway over the system of this world and its occupants, enslaved in their sin

♦ that Adam and Eve were created specifically by God, in His image, for the express purpose of blessed fellowship with Him; that Eve was first tempted by Satan to doubt God's goodness and promises; that they both fell from God's good graces by an act of willful disobedience; that they became separated from God, lost and banished from His presence, and experienced spiritual and physical death as a result of their sin

♦ that subsequently, all are born into Adam's fallen race and are lost in sin by natural birth and by willful choice, and are fallen short of the requirements of God's Holy Law; thus all are lost in sin and devoid of any ability to save or redeem themselves to a right standing before a holy God

♦ that Scriptures describe the extent of mankind's lost and rebellious condition; that no matter what station in life, all sin will be judged; that the scope of God's plan of redemption is all-encompassing, in that He does not desire that anyone should perish in their sin, but that all people everywhere should repent and receive Him as their Creator-God, Savior and Lord

♦ that as pre-existent Divine Son of God, the virgin-born advent of Jesus Christ into the Jewish race as promised Messianic Savior was prophesied in Scripture and fulfilled; that as Son of Man, Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life and after meeting all the requirements of God's Divine Law for us, He shed His own Blood on Calvary's Cross, sacrificially dying in our stead as substitutionary payment for the sins of all peoples throughout the world

♦ that after three days, as promised, Jesus was resurrected bodily from the dead for our justification, gloriously vanquishing our enemy Satan and establishing victory and power over sin, death and the grave; that He is presently seated at the Father's right hand as our Living Lord, Savior, Advocate, High Priest and coming King; that His pre-tribulation, pre-millennial return for His own Bride is eminent, which is His Body, comprised of all born-again believers, purchased and redeemed by His Blood

♦ that God is no respecter of persons and graciously offers salvation as a free gift of His loving-kindness, intended for all people everywhere and gained through personal faith in the Person, Name and Work of Jesus Christ alone on their behalf, gained totally apart from any form of human striving

♦ that according to the Scriptures, all who repent and accept Jesus Christ as Personal Savior are immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit, forgiven of all sin, reconciled, declared righteous, and receive everlasting life; are born-again into God's family of redeemed Saints, i.e., the Church, and can never again be lost; are destined to spend a blissful eternity in glorified resurrected bodies in God's presence; that while still here, are responsible to glorify God by walking in obedience, living in newness of life, and bearing spiritual fruit

♦ that conversely, all who *do not* receive God's free offer of forgiveness and salvation by grace through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ on their behalf will stand guilty before Him, responsible for their own sin, condemning themselves to undergo God's scrutiny and judgment; and to be cast bodily into the Lake of Fire reserved for Satan and his angels, to anguish throughout eternity in a state of conscious torment in payment price for their own sin, separated forever from God and all that is good

♦ **WHY? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,** that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." — John 3:16-18, 36