

Ron & Cheryl Myers

GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

August 2015

"MR. AHM-KAH, THE HEALING DOCTOR"

(Weddings, Broken Bones, and the Day an Esteemed Healer Turned from Darkness to Light!)

By Ron Myers

Greetings In the Name of Christ,

HEALTH UPDATE: During my sixth week hip checkup, Dr. Freeman said everything was progressing well and that I would be free to return to Thailand in August. However, he had reconsidered during my twelfth week checkup in late July; remarking that, since the flight to Thailand was so long, he was concerned about the possibility of blood clots developing from sitting such a long period. In fact, he was quite emphatic that he wanted me to wait another two months before traveling. So, it's two more months before I'll be able to return to finish the last eighteen percent of the final review process (*see chart at end*), then publish and distribute the Isan New Testament. God knows all things, including His timeline for completion. I will go by His schedule.

INTRODUCTION: The account of my "chance" meeting with Mr. Ahm-Kah was preceded by a joyous event turned tragic that occurred two weeks earlier. A young couple from different villages was getting married. According to Isan tradition, certain protocols needed to be followed. First, the groom must go ask permission of the father of his bride to be. This also entailed paying a *bride price*... typically an oxen, water buffalo or pig, and an amount of money; the amount being set by the girl's parents, depending on the perceived worth of their daughter.

On the day of this particular wedding, the initial ceremony was held in the bride's village, where we lived and ministered for eight years. The wedding party, including friends and relatives, were then scheduled to travel to the groom's village to continue the celebration. A locally owned six-wheel farm truck was chartered to supply the needed transportation. The entourage climbed up into the back, sitting and standing while holding the side rails. The truck's owner enjoyed the drunken celebration a bit too much and was quite tipsy by the time he was to transport his passengers. Approaching a left-hand bend in the rough gravel road, his reaction time being slowed, he took the turn a little too wide, causing the truck's right front tire to contact the road's gravel berm. The soft berm and shoulder then pulled the truck down off of the road and into a low spot alongside the curve where it rolled over.

All the passengers were unceremoniously thrown out onto the ground where they suffered a variety of cuts, bruises and broken bones. This put a stop to the wedding and was considered an ominous omen, since it interrupted a very auspicious occasion. Many cleansing ceremonies would later be held to cleanse the evil and aright this calamity that had been visited upon the whole village.

Fortunately, the district police happened by in a flatbed truck. The injured were loaded onto the flatbed and hauled to the provincial hospital, some forty kilometers distance—the first twelve kilometers being a bumpy, potholed gravel road. Reaching the hospital, the emergency room nurses cleaned and dressed their many wounds while the doctors set and wrapped their broken bones in casts. An older man later died from his injuries. One young man had a two-inch section of bone ripped from his shin. The doctors skillfully pinned it and put it in traction, to heal while staying in the hospital.

According to local beliefs, broken bones *cannot* heal by themselves, but must be treated by a healing doctor who mouths an incantation while blowing softly across the affected area to transmit the healing power. Consequently, many of the injured came to me to remove their casts. I didn't understand their reasoning, but did not comply. I explained unsuccessfully why casts were necessary for proper bone alignment while healing occurs. I later learned that casts were said to prevent the healing process, since incantations could not penetrate the hard shell to rejoin broken bones. I said our bones are designed by our Maker to heal by themselves. They would reply that, "*You foreigners take meds to affect healing, but we do it our own way: healing doctors.*" I countered by saying that animals' broken bones heal without the aid of healing rituals; however, it was to no avail... like talking to a brick wall.

MEET MR. AHM-KAH: The seriously-injured young man—having suffered a two-inch section being torn from his shinbone during the misfortune—had decided to leave the hospital and return to the village. There, he knew he could enlist the skills of a topnotch healing doctor to heal his wounds. Having removed the full-length cast and pulled out the traction rods, the gaping wound and jagged bones were left fully exposed the dust, heat, and bacteria. Isan villagers believe that ancient folk arts and healers are more effective than doctors, hospitals and modern medicine. (*These two opposing worlds of thought continually clash.*) News of the young man's homecoming soon reached me; so, I decided to go pay him a visit, perchance to share the Gospel.

As I ascended the rickety old stairs to the porch, the stench of putrefying flesh accosted my senses. "*Don't say anything,*" the young man blurted out as he sat there amongst flies buzzing around his exposed wound; not wanting to hear any "nonsense" as to why he should have stayed in the hospital and under doctor's care. My attention was immediately drawn to an elderly, nondescript gentleman whom I did not know. It became evident that this was the healing doctor the family had hired to restore their son's leg. The "doctor" was sitting in front of the young man; blowing gently across the young fellow's hopelessly mangled shin while mouthing an incantation to perform a healing. I observed quietly for a while; then began to introduce the Gospel, using colorful posters I had brought along. These depicted various aspects of Biblical truths in story form, contained on the posters. As I pointed out these truths, some locals sitting on the porch turned their attention to me. Others glanced briefly, and then returned to their respective conversations.

I spoke a bit more; then stopped and asked, "*Who here wants to have their sins forgiven, receive the gift of eternal life and go to heaven?*" I was surprised to see the healing doctor abruptly stop treating his patient, and turned to me saying, "*I want to go! How can I do that?*" Making his way across the porch towards me, he plopped down directly in front of the posters I was holding; *ooing* and *aahing* as I pointed out the underlying meaning of each scene.

Before long, the injured young man reminded the healing doctor why he was there. I gave him the directions and he later came to visit at my home, at the opposite end of the village. It was then that he told me his name: *Ahm-Kah*. Mr. Ahm-Kah's interest in the Gospel had not waned in the least, asking me to explain more. I told him of the eternal God, maker of all creation, who came and took on human form, lived a perfect, sinless life, and gave Himself as a sacrifice to pay the redemption price for our sins by His blood. And, He will deliver us from sin and eternal death and from a life of darkness to light if we will but repent and believe. God had obviously prepared Mr. Ahm-Kah's heart; because he accepted Christ on my front porch at that juncture.

Before Mr. Ahm-Kah left for home that afternoon, I told him of a group of believers that met together each Sunday morning in a nearby village, and that he could learn more about his newfound faith there. Agreeing to attend, he smiled and bade me farewell as he walked towards the main road, in front of our village. There, he could catch a ride to his village on one of the local pickup trucks that came by each half-hour.

These locally-owned small Japanese pickups were outfitted to provide public transportation; having a pipe-framed roof with roof-rack, and a bench seat mounted along each side over the fender wells. I used to ride these local truck-taxis on weekly forty-kilometer trips into the Provincial capital of Nakhon Panom, where I bought fresh food and supplies there at the large open market. (Note the red dot under "Nakhon Panom" on the map.) This was before I was able to purchase a used Honda CL-350 motorcycle. The weekly roundtrips were gruelingly-long and tiring; and the bike was a real time saver. However, it proved to be a tradeoff; since it took me away from meeting and talking with the villagers while toughing it out in the tediously slow and dusty truck-taxis.

When each Sunday rolled around, I would peddle my old Chinese-made bicycle the six kilometers to the next village, *Pone Boke*, where a small church had formed and is still presently active. (Using a rickety old bicycle helped put me in good stead with the villagers, who were mostly very poor.) Soon after the meeting got started, Mr. Ahm-Kah came, just as he had promised—a good sign as to his sincerity and new faith. We stopped, greeted him, and welcomed him into the fold. Mr. Ahm-Kah came quite dependably and it was a blessing to watch him grow in Grace and the knowledge of the Lord.

One thing I was concerned about, though, was Mr. Ahm-Kah's former dark-arts profession as a healing doctor. As I recall, he told me he didn't call on the spirits anymore, but prayed and asked God to perform the healings. In any event, I thought this was certainly a step in the right direction as his faith progressed. He also earned a meager living by selling small bundles of medicinal herbs, leaves and roots he gathered from the surrounding forests.

Eventually, I lost contact with Mr. Ahm-Kah, other missionaries having assumed my village responsibilities after I transitioned from the village evangelism and church-planting work. I later learned that he had his ups and downs, as we all do, but was attending church on a frequent basis. This was after I had moved into the Provincial city of Nakhon Panom to expand my ministry responsibilities, including beginning the Isan New Testament translation project, which is now finished (pending an in-depth final review) and fast approaching the time when we can publish and distribute it among the Isan masses. (It would be done by now, apart from the advanced Osteoarthritis in my left hip, which had gotten so bad that I couldn't continue on without first having a total joint replacement.)

Incidentally, Thailand's total population is over sixty-seven million according to Buddhist year 2557 census figures (A.D. 2014). Thailand's Isan or Northeastern Region comprises approximately twenty-five million, or roughly one-third of the country's total, both in population and landmass! The Isan Region is also Thailand's largest rice producing region, producing sixty-percent of Thailand's total annual rice yield.

While the situation is improving, Isan remains Thailand's poorest region. As such, Isanians still find themselves a neglected people, living under longstanding unfair socio-cultural, economic and political policies. The Isan village dwellers have also long been characterized by Thai society as backward and intellectually incapable. These attitudes are slowly improving as their worth is becoming more-recognized by their class-conscious Thai cousins.

Thankfully, God doesn't view them as such, but as a people for whom the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price of their redemption by His blood, and rising again for their justification. The average number of *bona fide* Christians in Thailand is as few as 0.1% (one in a thousand). Notwithstanding, the number among the Isan people is much fewer than the national average... as sparse .01% (one in ten-thousand or less)!

On the brighter side, although evangelism and church-planting efforts in Isan have been relatively sparse when compared to other regions of Thailand; as of late, the Isan region has received a more-concentrated effort, not only by missionaries, but also by a few of the larger Thai churches in Bangkok, motivated by God's Love for the unreached Isan masses; who are hopelessly lost apart from Christ.

Why the meager response to the Gospel? Although Isan people have access to Thai Bibles, Thai is their second language, and because Thai Bibles are written in a high, literary style—as opposed to common or spoken style—they do not communicate well to the average village-dwelling Isan person.

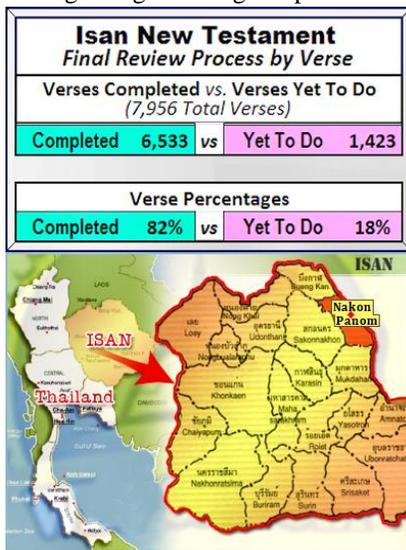
I believe this is a major reason for their failure to respond to the Gospel message, i.e., not having God's Word in their own native language of Isan; that is, until now. God's Word clearly states that: "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) That means the hearer's own heart language, not just a second language. In Acts 2:8 we read where the Jewish beholders remarked, "how [is it that we hear] every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" while hearing the Gospel being proclaimed.

In the preceding paragraph you'll notice I wrote, "that is, until now." When I first started to teach God's Word to village-dwelling Isan believers and non-believers, I soon realized a sizable communication disconnect existed. Not that they couldn't comprehend rudimentary Thai on a purely surface level; however, more complicated, literary or "high" Thai did not enter into where they live, i.e., their very hearts and souls.

At that time, the Lord impressed me about translating the Isan New Testament; not a small task considering all that was involved. I had the training and skill, I knew the language and culture well; and, most importantly, I possessed a distinct God-given vision and personal drive for the task. This drive and vision empowered me through the years, helping me to press on to completion through times of heavy spiritual opposition.

At 12:10 PM on Friday, December 14, 2012, my faithful assistant Pastor Pitak and I finished translating the last remaining verse, signifying the completion of the Isan New Testament!! It was a triumphant moment that we celebrated by enjoying lunch in a nice Thai restaurant that overlooked the Mighty Mekong River and the picturesque Laotian mountains along the far shores. We had carefully checked every verse as we progressed, considered all input, and had it all proofread by our Isan translation checking team.

We're now practically finished reviewing everything for grammatical and content accuracy, and are closing in on a printing date. (Note chart and map.) Your personal interest, prayers and sacrificial partnership over the years have been crucial. We are sincerely appreciative on behalf of the Isan masses, who will soon enjoy being spiritually enriched and refreshed as they read God's Word in their own heart language. You have played a huge roll in seeing this all come together... Thank You!



By God's Grace and for His Glory,

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Cheryl's Mom, Nell, who lives in Florida, was taken to the hospital Sunday evening the 23rd, because she seemed confused. Cheryl's sister thought she might be having another stroke or a recurring brain hemorrhage. They took her to the local hospital, which transferred her to the Regional Med Center. After a CT scan, the doctors there concluded that she had not had a stroke and that the former hemorrhaging in her brain was diminishing in size. There was a mix-up in her meds; two places had given her injections of the same drug, PROCRI, which caused it. Nell is doing well now, and the confusion is fading. The doctors want her to go to rehab nearby where her daughter (Cheryl's sister) lives. **Please pray for Nell's full recovery, and for no more mix-ups!**