

LIVES CHANGED BY GOD'S WORD

Record

SPRING 2020

85
MILLION
BIBLES
FOR
CHINA

PAGE 18



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

“Your word is a lamp to guide me
and a light for my path.”

📖 PSALM 119:105

📍 China



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Art Director
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CONTACT

American Bible Society Record
ABSRecord@AmericanBible.org




Bible-A-Month™ Partnership
888-227-8262
BAMInfo@AmericanBible.org

Catalog or Bible Requests
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ABOUT THE COVER

A Chinese wife and husband in traditional Miao outfits excitedly pose with their first-ever copy of the Bible in the Big Flowery Miao language. Photo credit: Katri Saarela from Finnish Bible Society

The mission of American Bible Society is to make the Bible available to every person in a language and format each can understand and afford, so all people may experience its life-changing message. American Bible Society is a member of United Bible Societies, a fellowship of Bible Societies throughout the world cooperating to make Scriptures available to people everywhere in their own language.

Published since 1818, American Bible Society's *Record* is the official periodical of American Bible Society and the second-oldest continuous publication in the United States. It is published three times a year and is sent to as many of our supporters as budget allows.

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THE PROMISE OF A NEW SEASON
*A message from Robert Briggs,
American Bible Society Interim President and CEO*

Friends, I am grateful for spring. I thank God for the sweetness in the air after the chill of winter and for the beauty of the cherry trees in full bloom around our office. The newness of spring is a treasured time for me.

Just as God's earth sprouts life in the springtime, so does God's Word sustain and refresh us in our new seasons. Second Timothy 3:16–17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed."

When we apply God's Word to our lives, it equips and qualifies us for every new season. God's Word prepares us for every next stage. The Bible's truths refine us anew.

The guidance of Scripture has been a particular help to me recently. At the end of last year, I entered into a new season at American Bible Society. Our President and CEO, Roy Peterson, announced his retirement after faithfully serving the organization for six years, and I was invited by the board to serve as Interim President and CEO.

Although I've served as part of the Bible Society team for more than 20 years, this new responsibility calls for fresh grace and provision from the Lord. The passionate team here at American Bible Society is freshly inspired to serve you and all who will benefit from our Bible work in this season. We covet your prayers. It's an honor to continue serving loyal partners like you.

This spring, I hope the ancient truths of Scripture are made new to you. I pray that God's Word encourages you this season and for many seasons to come.

Yours in Christ,

Robert L. Briggs

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IN MONGOLIA

*You are sharing a sign language
Bible with deaf brothers and
sisters in Mongolia*

OPENING SPREAD PHOTO: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society

BOTTOM RIGHT PHOTO: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society; TOP RIGHT PHOTO: Katri Saarela, Finnish Bible Society

JESUS SPEAKS SIGN LANGUAGE IN

MONGOLIA

HOW YOU ARE SHARING

A SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE

WITH DEAF BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN MONGOLIA

By Hannah DeMarco

Javzaa clutches her Bible with both hands, weaving through Ulaanbaatar's city traffic on her walk to church. She passes the colorful boxy buildings, the statues of Genghis Khan, her favorite shop to grab a quick order of *buuz* (dumplings). Javzaa was born deaf, so she doesn't hear the cars honking, the restaurants' pots clanging, the kids laughing as they push one another into caked snow.

When she enters the church doors, Javzaa feels the beat of the worship drum pulse through her even though she can't hear it. She hums along to the vibrations. Her pastor begins the sermon, and Javzaa's eyes dart to the sign language translator off to the side. She follows along, watching intently. Her pastor asks everyone to open their Bibles to James.

Javzaa opens her Bible, but she can't find James. She's had her Bible for years, but she can't really use it. It doesn't even really feel like *her* Bible. Its gold edges glow pristine. Crinkly pages stick together. The margins hold no scribbles, no notes.

After church, Javzaa sits slumped in her dining room chair, hovering over her Bible. Hot tears sting her eyes. Like 99 percent of

Deaf Mongolians, Javzaa doesn't read or write Mongolian. "Lord," she prays, "I can't read this. I want to know you. I want to read your Word. Help me read your Word. Help me, Lord."

Javzaa speaks with her body. She pays attention to the way people around her move, what they tell her in a head tilt or crossed arms. She uses her hands, shoulders, and even her eyebrows to tell you her thoughts and emotions. She speaks Mongolian Sign Language.

Right now, not a single sign language Bible in the world exists. More than 466 million deaf people around the world live every day without a Bible in their language. But you are working to change that!

Little did Javzaa know—while sitting at her dining room table—that God was about to connect her to a group of people at Ulaanbaatar's Deaf Church who would work with her to translate the first Mongolian Sign Language Bible.

■ THE FIRST MONGOLIAN SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE

When Javzaa joined the Deaf Church, it felt like home. She found a community of Deaf people just like her! They sing and worship in sign. Their pastor, who is also deaf, recites passages of Scripture with her hands.



Javzaa communicates in Mongolian Sign Language with Shirininkov, a deaf Christian living in the Bulgan Province of rural Mongolia.

“I WANT TO READ YOUR
WORD. HELP ME READ
YOUR WORD. HELP ME,
LORD.” *Javzaa*

Javzaa and others at the Deaf Church asked themselves, “How can we keep experiencing God's Word on other days besides Sunday?” They felt the pain of not being able to connect to Psalms of comfort on troubling nights, of not being able to examine Jesus's teachings

for themselves when making a hard decision. That's when they decided to fix the problem themselves and translate the whole Bible into Mongolian Sign.

Every week, Javzaa meets with the translation team in a small office they transformed into a makeshift studio to film the Bible translation. The team is made up of people with different talents: some fluent in sign and written Mongolian, some fluent in Hebrew and Greek, some (like Javzaa) who perform the sign translation on video. The curtains are drawn, the camera rolls. Javzaa signs God's Word in front of a greenscreen where they can add the written verses so deaf and hearing groups can follow along together.



Mongolian Sign Language is Javzaa's heart language. Here are some words in sign that she holds onto for strength, along with on why she cherishes them.



“Jesus won the victory for us.”

PHOTOS: Doug Notlage, American Bible Society



“God has given us mercy and love by sending us His son Jesus to save us. That's why mercy is so important.”



Shirininkov watches a clip of the Mongolian Sign Language Bible for the first time. His uncle, who isn't a believer yet, follows along with a magnifying glass.

Translating and filming a single verse can take longer than a week because some written words from the Bible aren't yet formalized in sign language. And, since sign language is so visual, the team has to agree on things hearing people never even think about. *How high up the mountain did Jesus go during the transfiguration? How do we create a sign for the word "transfiguration"?* The translators huddle around a table, discussing for hours on end. The grueling work gives them life because they know they are doing God's work. They work in anticipation for the day when the whole Bible will be translated into Mongolian Sign.

The translators from the Deaf Church knew they couldn't translate the whole Bible on their own. They didn't have nearly enough funding or expertise in translation. So they asked the Mongolian Union Bible Society to collaborate with them. Because of your generous support, the Mongolian Union Bible Society was able to answer their request! The Bible Society helped the Deaf Church team decide which books to tackle first and how to make sure their translations are accurate—and committed to financially supporting their translation work. In 2019, you helped complete the book of James!



Freedom

"Because of Jesus, we aren't in bondage anymore. We're free."



Peace

"No matter what we go through, we have Jesus. His peace can be with us in the most difficult of times."

PHOTOS: Doug Nottage, American Bible Society

Salvation

"Salvation is eternal life with Jesus. Whoever puts their faith in Christ, they have hope of eternal life in Him. Jesus includes everyone. No one is left out."



■ YOU AND JAVZAA BROUGHT THE BOOK OF JAMES TO DEAF CHRISTIANS

Javzaa recently shared a video Sign Language Bible portion of James with her friends who can't hear. She couldn't wait to tell them about it! So she traveled 11 hours on an overnight train to a small village called Bulgan. Since the Mongolian Sign Language translation is on video, she downloaded the video onto her phone.

Javzaa sat on a bench in her friends' *ger* (semi-permanent tent), flies buzzing overhead, a beam of sunshine peeking through the ceiling flaps. Javzaa's friends crowded around her, glued to the tiny screen in her hands. One of her friends, Shirininkov, nodded along as he watched God's Word unfold before his eyes.

Deaf Mongolians like Shirininkov long to have a full Bible of their own. "With the sign language Bible, I can understand God's Word, and when I learn God's Word, then I can grow in my faith," signs Shirininkov. He can't wait for the day when he can simply tap his phone and watch God's Word anywhere, even in his remote country *ger*.

■ THERE'S MORE TO BE DONE!

You travel with Javzaa every day, whether to the translation studio or a remote village where she shows God's Word to Deaf Christians for the first time. You sit alongside her and her friends as they translate the Bible.

Javzaa signs, "This sign Bible is so very, very important to me and to all Deaf people. Because through that sign Bible, it will minister to us. I'm asking all of you, will you please help us? There are many souls in need. The one help that they need most is the Word of God in sign language."

You can bring the Mongolian Sign Language Bible to life faster than anyone can imagine. With your support, Deaf Mongolians can finally see God's Word. They can watch as Noah embarks on the ark. They can follow along with Paul as he travels to bring the Good News. Finally, they'll be able to see truths from Jesus whenever they need a loving word from their Savior.

"We want Deaf people to be saved. We want them to be able to know God's Word. This is my deepest desire," shares Javzaa. "If you pray for us and help us have this Bible, I can only say thank you. Thank you so very, very much." ■



Share first Bibles with Deaf communities like Javzaa's and more at give.bible/sign

3 BIBLE MINISTRY UPDATES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SNAPSHOTS OF HOW GOD'S WORD IS CHANGING THE WORLD,
THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY



1

CHILDREN'S BIBLES AROUND THE WORLD

God is changing the lives of children around the world through His Word. Here are just a few testimonies from the millions of children who are having their hearts transformed by Scripture thanks to partners like you.

PERU

When Xavier was 4, his dad dropped him off at an orphanage in Peru. He felt sad and lost, like many of the world's 153 million orphans. But the new children's Bible you provided helped Xavier realize he wasn't alone, and he found new happiness in God.



"I WAS SAD, NOT HAPPY,
BUT I RECEIVED MY BIBLE
AND NOW I'M HAPPY."

Xavier, age 8, Peru

1.5M+

children's Bibles were
distributed in 2018!



TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF: Bonnie Lepelaar, Bible Society Vietnam; PERU PHOTO COURTESY OF: Scarlett Parlamachi, Peruvian Bible Society;
BOTTOM PHOTO: Michael Gibeault, American Bible Society



HAITI

"I've never had a Bible. I'm happy to receive this book that tells me about Jesus. It's one of my dreams that come true," says Jinau, a primary school student in Haiti who recently received his first Bible.



NICARAGUA

Thanks to you, 45,472 Nicaraguan children with cancer and their parents received Bibles and Scripture portions over the past two years.

"THIS IS MY FIRST BIBLE I RECEIVED IN MY LIFE!"

Saad, age 16, Bangladesh



UKRAINE

Alex, age 3, and his mother fled Pervomaisk, their home in Eastern Ukraine, with nothing when the area came under Russian siege. Now they live with very little. Thanks to Ukrainian Bible Society, Alex got his first Bible. When asked how he felt about the Bible, he made this gesture.



BANGLADESH

Saad's mother left the family when Saad was 7. Now, at age 16, Saad is an orphan. Fortunately, he found hope in Jesus. Then, thanks to your generosity, he, like hundreds of other parentless children in Bangladesh, received his first Bible. Now Saad reads his Bible every morning and evening, finding belonging in God's Word.



Pray for children around the world to be grounded in God's Word. Ask God to bless the efforts of Bible Societies in reaching the next generation with His message of truth. Share God's Word with future generations at give.bible.

THE BIBLE'S MESSAGE FOR BAHRAIN'S MIGRANTS

Migrant workers from surrounding nations make up nearly 80 percent of Bahrain's workforce. Because of you, they are discovering the hope of Jesus and sharing the Good News with their home countries!

Two arced, mirrored towers spear the sky in a triangular shape: Bahrain's World Trade Center. At night, the sea of ultra-sleek structures and bright city lights bounce off the Persian Gulf—a rainbow of reflections. Not far from modern Manama, however, packed housing units line unlit streets. Here, behind-the-scenes service and domestic workers rest their weary heads.

More than half of Bahrain's population and nearly 80 percent of its workforce are migrant workers. These men and women say goodbye to their homes and families in impoverished villages in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka and arrive in Bahrain ready to work. They send their earnings back home to their families, with the hope of being reunited again one day.

What they face, however, is unlike anything they expected. Confronted with unpaid wages and harsh working conditions, many migrant workers are used, abused, and exploited—with no one to come to their defense. They live in crowded buildings known as labor camps—men in one, women in another—that are divided into rooms where 10 to 12 people sleep, sometimes on bug-infested floors. Discouraged and lonely, with what seems like no way out, migrant workers become depressed and often suicidal.

■ YOUR GIFT SAVES

Because of your love, however, God's Word is reaching thousands of vulnerable migrant workers in labor camps and churches across Bahrain. They're discovering that God is their defense. He hears their cries. He uplifts their weary souls.

■ YOUR GIFT MULTIPLIES

Anu moved to Bahrain from India with the hope of making some money and returning to his family in two years' time. Now, six years later, he lives in a labor camp and works long days as a house painter. He can't read or write. But when he listened to the audio Bible you sent in Telugu, his heart language, he came to accept Jesus as his personal Savior! He couldn't contain his excitement and shared his new faith with his friend, Paran, a Hindu. Paran also became a believer and started telling others in their labor camp about Jesus. The number of believers in the camp has continued to grow! Now, the group meets weekly to sing, pray, and talk about Scripture—using the Bibles you provided. Paran says, "In Hinduism, there is no peace, there is no happiness. But here [in the Bible], I got it—from God. The relationship from God is here."

■ YOUR GIFT SATISFIES

Because of your gift of God's Word, migrant workers are finding the blessing of new life in Christ. Although they live in difficult settings, they now have the love of Jesus to share with one another—and with their families back home in the days to come. Thank you for giving the gift of eternal life and hope through the message of the Bible.



BECAUSE OF YOUR
LOVE, GOD'S WORD IS
REACHING THOUSANDS
OF VULNERABLE,
ABUSED MIGRANT
WORKERS.

YOUR GIFT MATTERS IN THE ARABIAN GULF

3,000
Audio Scriptures given
to illiterate Telugu
speakers like Anu

60
languages served
by Bible Society
in the Gulf

34,500
free Bibles and
Scripture Portions
distributed in 2019





God's Word for Our Military

60,000,000+
Bibles

have gone to American
Service Members,
Veterans, and their families
through American Bible
Society's Armed Services
Ministry™ to date

~550,000
U.S. Service
Members

currently receive Scripture
engagement materials
each year thanks to you

~900 chaplains

nationwide are helping
Service Members engage
with God's Word through
Armed Services Ministry™



FINDING FAITH AT FORT JACKSON

Thanks to your support, a Veteran named Pastor Vargas gives 1,000 Soldiers a Bible of their own each year. Pastor Vargas has served on the Fort Jackson base in South Carolina for more than 23 years, and he partners with American Bible Society's Armed Services Ministry. Half of the Army goes through Basic Combat Training at Fort Jackson, where Soldiers have the opportunity to learn about God through weekly services Pastor Vargas leads in both English and Spanish.

Pastor Vargas is grateful for your support, which allows him to provide Bibles to these brave Service Members from all faiths and backgrounds. These Bibles challenge the Soldiers to ready themselves with faith in Jesus the way they ready themselves physically. Pastor Vargas says, "These soldiers have a hunger for Jesus. They want more and more. They are looking for answers. They need to understand that God is here for you in the good times and the bad times—in every time, in every moment." *Thank you for giving chaplains and Military ministry leaders like Pastor Vargas the Bibles they need to keep our troops spiritually equipped!*

**"THESE SOLDIERS HAVE A
HUNGER FOR JESUS. THEY
WANT MORE AND MORE."**

Pastor Vargas

FAITH
AND
LIBERTY
DISCOVERY
CENTER

Discover our history. Imagine our future.

In America's past, the Bible shaped the values of our nation's founders, inspiring them to build a country that looked to God for hope and guidance.

In America's present, biblical literacy and understanding have almost disappeared. Is it any wonder that biblical values are also in retreat?

In America's future, YOU can share the Bible's incomparable influence with hundreds of thousands of students, children, and other Americans in need of God's truth.

The Faith and Liberty Discovery Center is opening in Philadelphia in fall 2020. At this immersive Bible experience, people from across the country will discover how the Bible is just as relevant today as it was at the time of our founding.

Become a Charter Member of the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center!

fldc.americanbible.org

A photograph of an elderly man with a joyful expression, wearing a blue button-down shirt, sitting and reading an open Bible. He is positioned in front of a large, dark log that has a small fire burning in a notch. Three large, dark, round pots with metal handles are hanging from above, framing the man. The background is a soft-focus view of a village with traditional buildings under a warm, golden sunset sky. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

1 OF 85 MILLION BIBLES FOR CHINA

AT AGE 60,
MIAO BELIEVER LEI ZHANG
RECEIVED HIS FIRST BIBLE

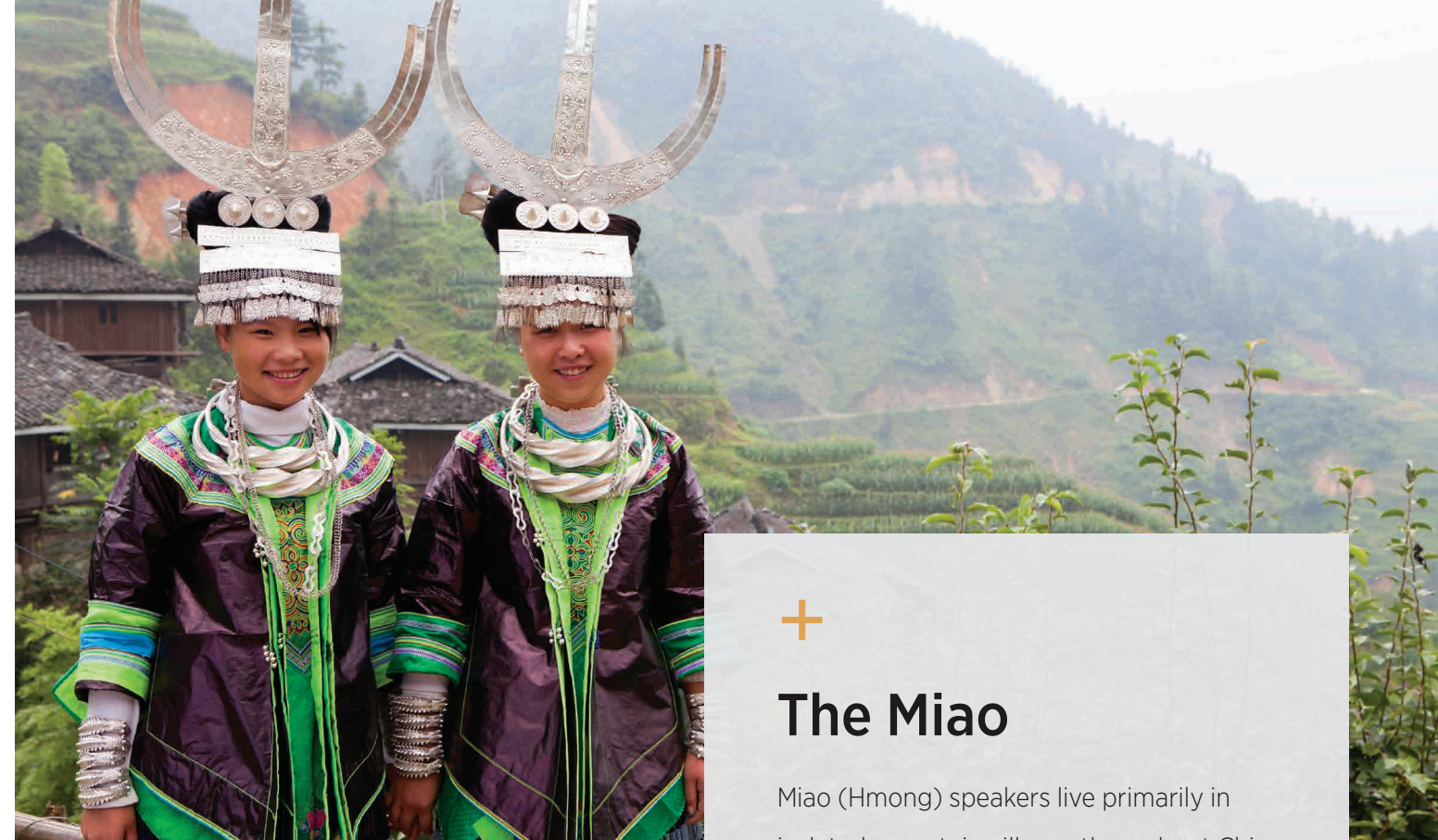
By Laura Chan

ou are sitting under a brisk summer sky on a carved wooden stool. Next to you is a modest clay house with a thatched roof. At your feet, the ground rolls away down the hill and into tiered rice paddies and rivers. Bundles of sticks are piled to your right and left—the hope of heat for the fall and winter to come. Across from you sits a man in his 60s, wearing a worn blue jacket and carefully cradling a beige-covered book in his farm-calloused hands. His fingers, bruised from labor, pet the pages gently as he searches for something in the text. He grins and the wrinkles around his eyes go to their familiar places. And startling the calm majesty of the morning, he begins to read his favorite words from this book, “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”

The man you’ve just met is Lei Zhang*, and you can’t fully fathom what a miracle it is for him to be sitting there reading that book, his Bible, to you. Lei is holding that new Bible so gently because he knows what a gift it is. You see, for the past 30 years of his Christian life, Lei has longed for God’s Word in his language. Up until now, he’s only had pieces of Scripture, only dreamt of what the whole story could be. Then, when he turned 60 years old, you stepped in and provided that Bible for Lei—the first in his life.

■ LEI’S 30-YEAR WAIT

Everything in Lei’s early life worked against the moment you just experienced. For the first 30 years of his life, religion was banned in China. There were no church buildings. Pastors and Christian communities operated in whispers, threatened with imprisonment or worse if they



Lei Zhang is from a minority ethnic group in China known as the Miao. Miao people like Lei often live in remote regions, which limit their access to Scripture and Christian teaching.

dared to share their faith. No one evangelized in the streets; no one hosted worship nights; no one carried around a Bible. There seemed to be no way for Lei to ever hear about Jesus.

Complicating matters was Lei’s remote location. He was born in a small Miao farming village on the side of a mountain to a family with very little. “Our lives have always been modest,” Lei says. Growing up, Lei didn’t even have shoes to make the 31-mile trek to the nearest town, so instead of attending school, he stayed home to help farm corn and beans.

For nearly 30 years, Lei wondered if there was more to life than farming. He came of age, got married, and took over the family farm. Every morning he woke up to light a fire in his home’s open oven, thankful for what he had, yet feeling unsettled in his soul.



The Miao

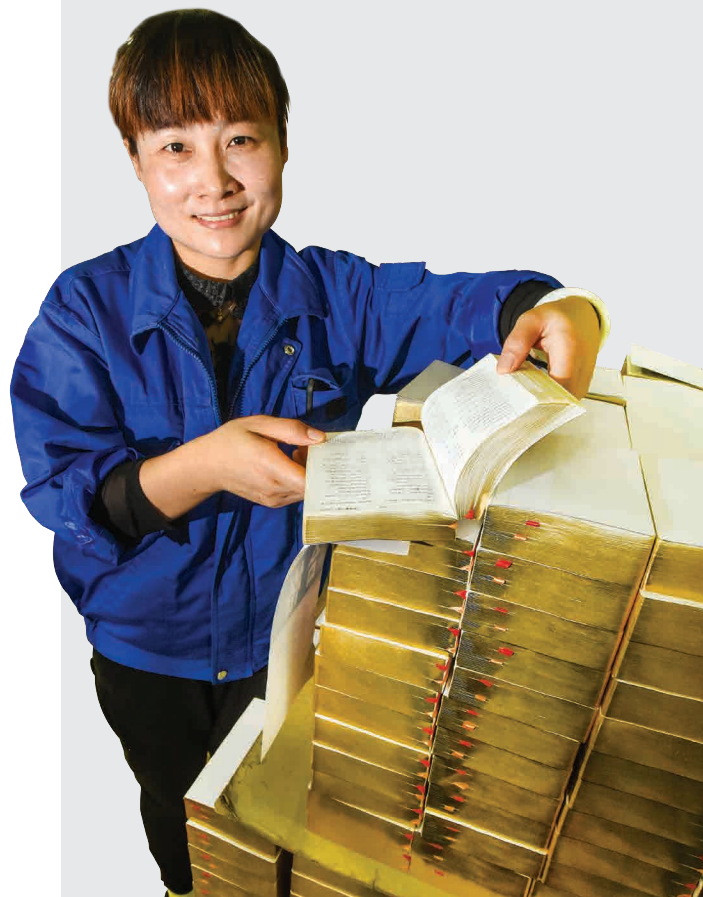
Miao (Hmong) speakers live primarily in isolated mountain villages throughout China and Southeast Asia. More than 1.7 million Miao speakers live in China alone, according to Ethnologue. They are traditionally farmers and family oriented, divided into patrilineal clans. Although Miao religious views are varied, the group traditionally follows animism or shamanism—believing spirits inhabit all things. Now that the Miao have the Bible in their language, however, God is bringing them closer to Him.





More than 85 million Bibles

have been distributed to China's churches in the past 33 years, thanks to generous partners like you. Those Bibles were all printed in China at Amity Printing Company, a governmentally authorized press started through Bible Society partnerships in 1987. Amity has printed Bibles for more than 140 countries and territories to date, bringing its Bible printing total to more than 200 million!



■ LEI'S INTRODUCTION TO FAITH

One day, strange visitors came to Lei's village. They walked from house to house, inviting people to events to hear about someone named Jesus. Lei couldn't shake the invitation. Reflecting, he says, "I was thirsty for the truth."

At one of these events, Lei was introduced to the Way, the Truth, the Life he'd been missing. After nearly a lifetime of religious silence during the Cultural Revolution, the glorious Good News of Jesus was finally explained to Lei in ways he understood. At age 30, he became a follower of Jesus. He found the Living Water for which he'd been thirsting.

Suddenly Lei's life was reoriented. As a farmer, he was accustomed to the physical rhythm of planting, waiting, harvesting. As a believer, his life took on a new spiritual significance. When he lost crops to frost and disease, he had a Provider God to trust. When he had surprise bumper crops and good weather, he had a Provider God to thank. He immersed himself in learning everything he could about this God who had given him life and new life.

Lei was eager to read God's Word—this manual for living that the missionaries had talked about. But because he hadn't been able to go to school as a boy, Lei had never learned to read. Through his local church, he started taking literacy courses. Lei learned to read and was eager to dive into God's Word, but that still wasn't a possibility for many reasons.

No one in Lei's circle of believers could read the Bible—because no one had one. First, Bibles are hard to come by in rural areas. Second, during China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religious Scriptures were confiscated and destroyed. In the aftermath, Christians faced a severe Bible shortage.

PHOTO: Clare Kendall, British and Foreign Bible Society



Lei Zhang and his wife, Miao Christians in China, speak with Bible Society partners outside their home. Now in their 60s, Lei and his wife recently received their first Bible in their Miao language.

Amity Printing Company, a governmentally authorized Bible press started through Bible Society partnerships just after the Cultural Revolution in the '80s, started printing Bibles in Chinese at an incredible rate, but it wasn't close to enough for everyone in the country who wanted one.

Further complicating these issues was the fact that Lei lived in a remote area and spoke Miao, not Mandarin. A Miao speaker trying to read the Bible in Mandarin is like an English speaker trying to read the Bible in Latin—the script is familiar but incomprehensible.

Fortunately for Lei, although the Miao Christians around him lacked the Bible in their language, they *did* have some handwritten Bible passages and Christian hymns. These scraps of Scripture had been hidden during the Cultural

Revolution, kept safe to preserve the faith. The group shared these precious words, each carefully copying them into their own journals. Lei is grateful for these Scripture snippets, because, as he says, "Through these we came to know God."

Still, these pieces of the story weren't enough; he longed to read *all* of God's Word to him.

■ LEI'S FIRST BIBLE

Over the past 30 years, Lei has grown a lot in his faith. He's learned to trust God alongside his wife, in sickness and in health. He's grieved bad crops with God and sung praises to God when He provided in abundance. And he's faithfully prayed with his Miao community—*God, bring us Your Word.*

PHOTO: Katri Saarela, Finnish Bible Society



Other Chinese minority groups like the Miao have been waiting decades for God’s Word in their languages. Will you be the one to bring Bibles to them?

“I AM SO HAPPY AND GRATEFUL FOR THIS BOOK.” *Lei Zhang*

Over the past 30 years, Lei spent many late nights asking God to reveal Himself. He’d wrestled with decisions, wishing he could turn to God’s Word for wisdom.

In 2018—thanks to partners like you—a miracle happened. Bibles in Miao were distributed in Lei’s community.

At age 60, Lei received his first Bible. Holding his answer to prayer in his hands, Lei choked back emotion. “This is spiritual food for me,” he said grinning.

All the practice Lei put into reading is paying off. “Now that I have my own Bible, I’m really going to read it,” he says. And he does. He reads it aloud every day, soaking in the words he’d missed for so long.

Now, Lei and his wife have a place to turn for guidance and comfort. They—like the other Christians in their community who finally received Bibles—are thankful for the translators and financial partners who made it all possible. “I am so happy and grateful for this Book,” says Lei, shaking his head. “I am so happy.”

PRAY FOR LEI

You are sitting under a brisk summer sky on a carved wooden stool. A man named Lei Zhang is sitting across from you bowing his head, asking you to pray for the spiritual and physical health of his household.

You pray for Lei and his wife: *God, we thank You for the blessing of Your Word that points us to ultimate truth. Thank You for opening the doors so the Zhang family could receive a Bible in their language. Please draw them closer to You. Help them be a blessing to other Miao believers as well as to those who do not yet know You. Amen.* ■

*Name changed



Only 15 of over 200 minority language people groups in China have the New Testament or a full Bible in their language. Bring God’s Word to waiting Christians in China at give.bible/china

PHOTO: Getty Images



PARTNER PROFILE

Elsie Sokol honors God and her family with her legacy of faithful support for Bible ministry

- NAME: Elsie Sokol (1925–2018)
LOCATION: Born and grew up in New Jersey, retired to Florida, residing in heaven
VOCATION: President and CEO of Freehold Trust Company and Central Jersey Bank and Trust
HOBBIES: Golf, etiquette, Bible reading
FAVORITE CHARITIES: American Bible Society, Doctors Without Borders, Smile Train

God’s Word from Generation to Generation

by Laura Chan

Elsie Sokol was an impressive woman. Always prim and proper, she exuded charm and acumen. She lived the American dream: starting as a bookkeeper at the Freehold Trust Company and working her way up to the position of President and CEO of Freehold Trust Company and its later expansion as Central Jersey Bank and Trust. She taught herself golf and learned to excel at it. Her style was as sharp as her mind.

To only know Elsie in this way, however, would be to miss the heart that drove her. Elsie was born into a Ukrainian American family that loved the Lord above all else. In turn, Elsie considered God and family her most important pursuits. She was faithful to give to her church and multiple charities and to live out the Good News of Jesus wherever she went. She saw the Bible as the key to success and looked to it for truth and guidance, just as she’d seen her parents do. “Our family’s values very much came straight out of the Bible,” says Elsie’s nephew, Peter Sokol.

At age 92, Elsie’s earthly life came to an end, but her passion for sharing God’s Word lives on. That’s because Elsie planned ahead to continue honoring God after she’d passed on to be with Him by naming American Bible Society in her Will. Elsie chose to pay homage to her ancestors by ensuring that generations to come also have access to the life-changing message of God’s Word. Her legacy is as powerful as her Christian heritage.

PHOTO COURTESY OF: Peter Sokol and Lois Wessel



TOP: Elsie and her family in 1927. From left to right: brother Peter, father Jacob holding Elsie, mother Annastazia, brother Jerry.

TOP RIGHT: Ukrainian Baptist family members pose outside the church that the Sokol family helped build in New Jersey. Elsie's father, Jacob, is fourth from the left on the bottom row with Elsie's mother, Annastazia, directly over his left shoulder. Elsie is four rows down from the top on the right.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Elsie (far left), age 4, works with her mother (middle) and her brother Jerry (right) on the family's trip back to Ukraine to share God's Word.



■ SHARING GOD'S WORD IN UKRAINE

Elsie's biblical worldview was directly tied to the strong faith of her family. Growing up, she was surrounded by God's Word. Elsie's niece Lois Wessel says, "There must have been 20 Bibles in that house, so that was a very big influence in all of their lives."

Jacob Sokol, Elsie's father, would read to the family from the Good Book every day, filling the house with the whispers of Scripture. Jacob was also a natural evangelist, passionate about building the church and sharing the Bible.

A desire to share the Good News is what drove the family back to Galicia, now a part of present-day Ukraine, when Elsie was four years old. Jacob and his wife, Annastazia, were excited to share the Bible through the local Evangelical Baptist Church. They involved

the entire family in sharing about the God of Scripture. Unfortunately, the family's time as missionaries was short-lived. The family received threats of kidnappings or worse if they didn't cease their work with the church. When murmurs of World War II threatened to tear apart the relative stability of what is now Western Ukraine, the Sokols decided to move back to the States. Still, this formative time gave Elsie firsthand experience sharing the life-changing message of God's Word—something that became a lifelong pursuit for her.

■ A GODLY HOME IN AMERICA

Back home in the States, Elsie learned the joys of American baseball and hot dogs, as well as Ukrainian hard work and *varenikes* (pierogies). She also learned that one thing transcended culture: the Bible. As she grew up and saw earthly success, Elsie never lost her footing; she stayed grounded in God's Word. Peter says,

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: Peter Sokol and Lois Wessel

"I think Elsie saw the Bible as the formula for success. To be successful in this life, you had to gear yourself to be successful in eternity."

Elsie learned about true success from her father and mother. Jacob and Annastazia invested in her—showing her what it meant to serve God as they read (and cried) over Scripture. Peter says, "Every evening following dinner, they would study the Bible together. And that was the environment that Elsie lived in."

As Elsie got older, her faith matured. Eventually, as her parents aged, the responsibility of care shifted to Elsie, and she made sure Jacob and Annastazia were well supported—physically and spiritually. She would spend hours with her father in the garden, reading from the Bible. Even when she had pressing work commitments, she'd always make sure her Pop, as she called him, was well fed with food and Scripture. "Elsie was a model for honoring family," says Peter.

■ HONORING THE PAST GENERATION, HONORING THE FUTURE

For Elsie, giving back to a Christian organization was a way of honoring the parents and God she so adored. Lois says, "Giving to American Bible Society was a way for Elsie to honor her parents, my grandmom and grandpop."

Through her generosity, Elsie honored not only her immediate family but also her extended family of Christian brothers and sisters around the world. Through her support, Elsie sent Bibles to orphans in Ukraine, to hurting hearts in Rwanda, and to waiting believers in China. Through her Will, she continues to bolster this important Bible ministry. We remember her now as an example of a strong businesswoman who faithfully lived and faithfully gave to see God's Kingdom come. On behalf of future generations, thank you, Elsie! 📖

PHOTO: Getty Images



Interested in leaving American Bible Society in your Will like Elsie? Request your free Will Information Guide by returning the card in the back of this magazine.



Elsie's Ukrainian Heritage

Elsie's beloved father, Jacob Sokol, was in the Austro-Hungarian Army. While on leave in the United States in 1914, Jacob learned that war had broken out in Austria-Hungary. Soon, that skirmish escalated into World War I, and sea travel was blocked. There were no ships to carry Jacob back home.

Over those years away from Ukraine, Jacob became accustomed to life in America. He met his wife Annastazia (also Ukrainian), got married, and started his family in New Jersey. One of the reasons Elsie had such a heart for global ministry was this connection to her homeland across the ocean. She wanted everyone—here in the U.S. and abroad—to know the saving power of Jesus.

2020 Daily Bible Reading Guide

One of the best ways to grow in your relationship with God is to read His Word each day. Use this guide to read through the Bible this year, asking God to illuminate His truths to you and to help you live for Him.

January

- 1 Rom 1:1-17
- 2 Rom 1:18-32
- 3 Rom 2:1-16
- 4 Matt 1:1-17
- 5 Matt 1:18-25

Epiphany

- 6 Matt 2:1-23
- 7 Matt 3:1-17
- 8 Matt 8:1-17
- 9 Matt 8:18-34
- 10 Matt 9:1-17
- 11 Matt 9:18-38
- 12 Matt 10:1-15
- 13 Matt 10:16-31
- 14 Matt 10:32-42
- 15 Matt 11:1-19
- 16 Matt 11:20-30
- 17 Matt 16:1-12

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Begins

- 18 Matt 16: 13-28

Ecumenical Sunday

- 19 Matt 17:1-27
- 20 Matt 20:1-19
- 21 Matt 20:20-34
- 22 Acts 3:1-26
- 23 Acts 4:1-22
- 24 Acts 4:23-37
- 25 Acts 5:1-16
- 26 Acts 5:17-42
- 27 Acts 6:1-15
- 28 Acts 7:1-22
- 29 Acts 7:23-43
- 30 Acts 7:44—8:3
- 31 Acts 8:4-25

February

- 1 Lev 19:1-18
- 2 Deut 5:1-22
- 3 Deut 6:1-25
- 4 John 3:1-21
- 5 John 3:22-36
- 6 John 4:1-26
- 7 John 4:27-42
- 8 John 4:43-54
- 9 Luke 10:25-37
- 10 Luke 17:11-19
- 11 Psalm 81
- 12 Psalm 86

- 13 Psalm 90
- 14 Psalm 108
- 15 Psalm 136
- 16 1 Cor 13:1-13
- 17 Col 1:1-23
- 18 Col 1:24—2:5
- 19 Col 2:6—3:4
- 20 Col 3:5—4:1
- 21 Col 4:2-18
- 22 Jude 1-25
- 23 Psalm 17
- 24 Psalm 33
- 25 Psalm 36

Ash Wednesday

- 26 Matt 6:1-18
- 27 Psalm 50
- 28 Psalm 51
- 29 Psalm 57

March

First Sunday in Lent

- 1 Matt 4:1-25

Great Monday (Orthodox)

- 2 Psalm 91
- 3 Psalm 3
- 4 Psalm 4
- 5 Psalm 5

World Day of Prayer

- 6 Psalm 11
- 7 Psalm 22

Second Sunday in Lent

- 8 Psalm 25
- 9 Psalm 26
- 10 Psalm 27
- 11 Psalm 28
- 12 Psalm 30
- 13 Psalm 31
- 14 Psalm 32

Third Sunday in Lent

- 15 Psalm 46
- 16 Psalm 48
- 17 Psalm 69
- 18 Psalm 71
- 19 Psalm 75
- 20 Psalm 77
- 21 Psalm 84

Fourth Sunday in Lent

- 22 2 Chr 1:1-17
- 23 2 Chr 5:2-14

- 24 2 Chr 6:1-11
- 25 2 Chr 6:12-31
- 26 2 Chr 6:32-42
- 27 2 Chr 7:1-10
- 28 2 Chr 7:11-22

Fifth Sunday in Lent

- 29 Ezra 8:15-36
- 30 Neh 9:1-25
- 31 Neh 9:26-38

April

- 1 Isa 40:1-31
- 2 Isa 51:1-23
- 3 Isa 52:1-12
- 4 Isa 52:13—53:12

Palm/Passion Sunday (Western Churches)

- 5 Matt 21:1-22
- 6 Matt 21:23-46
- 7 Matt 26:1-35
- 8 Matt 26:36-75

Maundy Thursday

- 9 Matt 27:1-26

Good Friday

- 10 Matt 27:27-56
- 11 Matt 27:57-66

Easter Sunday (Western Churches)

- 12 Matt 28:1-20
- 13 1 Cor 15:1-11
- 14 1 Cor 15:12-34
- 15 1 Cor 15:35-58
- 16 John 20:19-31
- 17 John 21:1-14
- 18 John 21:15-25

Pascha (Orthodox Easter)

- 19 Heb 1:1-14
- 20 Heb 2:1-18
- 21 Heb 3:1-19
- 22 Heb 4:1-13
- 23 Heb 4:14—5:10
- 24 Heb 5:11—6:12
- 25 Heb 6:13-20
- 26 Rom 3:19-31
- 27 Rom 4:1-25
- 28 Rom 5:1-21
- 29 Rom 6:1-23
- 30 Rom 15:1-13

May

- 1 Heb 7:1-14
- 2 Heb 7:15-28
- 3 Heb 8:1-13
- 4 Heb 9:1-22
- 5 Heb 9:23—10:18
- 6 Heb 10:19-39

National Day of Prayer

- 7 Heb 11:1-22
- 8 Heb 11:23-40
- 9 Heb 12:1-11
- 10 Heb 12:12-29
- 11 Heb 13:1-25
- 12 1 Cor 9:1-27
- 13 1 Cor 10:1-13
- 14 1 Cor 10:14—11:1
- 15 1 Cor 16:1-24
- 16 2 Cor 1:1-11
- 17 2 Cor 2:5-17
- 18 2 Cor 3:1-18
- 19 2 Cor 4:1-15
- 20 2 Cor 4:16—5:10

Ascension Day (Western Churches)

- 21 Acts 1:1-26
- 22 Psalm 47
- 23 2 Cor 5:11-21
- 24 2 Cor 6:1—7:1
- 25 2 Cor 7:2-16
- 26 2 Cor 8:1-15
- 27 2 Cor 8:16-24

Pentacost (Eastern Churches)

- 28 Acts 2:1-21
- 29 2 Cor 10:1-18
- 30 Acts 1:1-11
- 31 2 Cor 12:1-10

June

- 1 Acts 2:22-47
- 2 Joel 1:1-20
- 3 Joel 2:1-17
- 4 Joel 2:18-32
- 5 Joel 3:1-21
- 6 Acts 8:26-40
- 7 Acts 18:1-17
- 8 Acts 18:18-28
- 9 Acts 19:1-20
- 10 Acts 19:21-41

- 11 Acts 20:1-16
- 12 Rom 8:1-17
- 13 Rom 8:18-30
- 14 Rom 12:1-21
- 15 Rom 13:1-14
- 16 Rom 14:1-23
- 17 1 Cor 12:1-11
- 18 1 Cor 12:12-31
- 19 1 Cor 14:1-25
- 20 1 Cor 14:26-40
- 21 Ezek 1:1—2:1
- 22 Ezek 2:2-10
- 23 Ezek 3:1-27
- 24 Ezek 10:1-22
- 25 Ezek 36:1-15
- 26 Ezek 36:16-38
- 27 Ezek 37:1-14
- 28 Ezek 37:15-28
- 29 Ezek 39:21-29
- 30 Ezek 43:1-12

July

- 1 Gen 12:1-20
- 2 Gen 13:1-18
- 3 Gen 14:1-24
- 4 Gen 15:1-21
- 5 Gen 16:1-16
- 6 Gen 17:1-27
- 7 Gen 18:1-15
- 8 Gen 18:16-33
- 9 Gen 21:1-21
- 10 Gen 21:22-34
- 11 Gen 22:1-19
- 12 Exod 1:1-22
- 13 Exod 2:1-25
- 14 Exod 3:1-22
- 15 Exod 4:1-17
- 16 Exod 4:18-31
- 17 Exod 6:2-13
- 18 Esth 2:1-23
- 19 Esth 3:1-15
- 20 Esth 4:1-17
- 21 Esth 5:1-14
- 22 Esth 6:1-13
- 23 Esth 6:14—7:10
- 24 Esth 8:1-17
- 25 Esth 9:1-19
- 26 Esth 9:20-32
- 27 Isa 35:1-10
- 28 Isa 42:1-17
- 29 Jer 31:1-22
- 30 Jer 31:23-40
- 31 Jer 33:1-26

August

- 1 Isa 43:1-21
- 2 Isa 49:8-26
- 3 Isa 54:1-17
- 4 Isa 55:1-13
- 5 Lam 3:1-24

- 6 Lam 3:25-57
- 7 Hos 1:1—2:1
- 8 Hos 2:2-23
- 9 Hos 3:1—4:10
- 10 Hos 5:4-15
- 11 Hos 6:1—7:2
- 12 Hos 7:3-16
- 13 Hos 9:17—10:15
- 14 Hos 11:1-11
- 15 Hos 14:1-9
- 16 Jonah 1:1-17
- 17 Jonah 2:1-10
- 18 Jonah 3:1-10
- 19 Jonah 4:1-11
- 20 Zeph 1:1-18
- 21 Zeph 2:1-15
- 22 Zeph 3:1-20
- 23 Hag 1:1-15
- 24 Hag 2:1-23
- 25 Zech 1:1-17
- 26 Zech 1:18—2:13
- 27 Zech 8:1-23
- 28 Zech 9:9-17
- 29 Zech 10:1-12
- 30 John 8:1-11
- 31 Phlm 1-25

September

- 1 Matt 5:1-20
- 2 Matt 5:21-48
- 3 Matt 6:19-34
- 4 Matt 7:1-14
- 5 Matt 7:15-29
- 6 Matt 12:1-21
- 7 Matt 12:22-32
- 8 Matt 12:33-50
- 9 Matt 13:1-17
- 10 Matt 13:18-33
- 11 Matt 13:34-58
- 12 Matt 18:1-14
- 13 Matt 18:15-35
- 14 Matt 19:1-15
- 15 Matt 19:16-30
- 16 Matt 22:1-22
- 17 Matt 22:23-46
- 18 Matt 25:1-13
- 19 Matt 25:14-30
- 20 Matt 25:31-46
- 21 Prov 1:1-33
- 22 Prov 3:1-35
- 23 Prov 4:1-27
- 24 Prov 8:1-36
- 25 Prov 9:1-18
- 26 Prov 10:1-32
- 27 Prov 14:1-35
- 28 Prov 15:1-33
- 29 Prov 16:1-33
- 30 Prov 17:1-28

October

- 1 Hab 1:1-17
- 2 Hab 2:1-20
- 3 Hab 3:1-19

World Communion Sunday

- 4 1 Cor 11:17-34
- 5 Isa 1:1-20
- 6 Isa 1:21—2:5
- 7 Isa 3:1-15
- 8 Isa 4:2—5:7
- 9 Isa 6:1-13
- 10 Isa 11:1-16
- 11 Isa 32:1-20
- 12 Isa 33:1-24
- 13 Isa 34:1-17
- 14 Isa 50:1-11
- 15 Isa 57:1-21
- 16 Isa 58:1-14
- 17 Isa 59:1-21
- 18 Jer 1:1-19
- 19 Jer 2:1-25
- 20 Jer 3:6-25
- 21 Jer 4:1-18
- 22 Jer 5:1-19
- 23 Jer 5:20-31
- 24 Jer 7:1-15
- 25 Jer 10:1-16
- 26 Jer 29:1-23
- 27 Jer 30:1-24
- 28 Nah 1:1-15
- 29 Nah 2:1-13
- 30 Nah 3:1-19
- 31 Ezek 34:1-31

November

- 1 Psalm 92
- 2 Psalm 93
- 3 Psalm 94
- 4 Psalm 95
- 5 Psalm 96
- 6 Psalm 97
- 7 Psalm 98
- 8 1 Chr 13:1-14
- 9 1 Chr 14:1-17
- 10 1 Chr 15:1-24
- 11 1 Chr 15:25—16:7
- 12 1 Chr 16:8-43
- 13 1 Chr 17:1-15
- 14 1 Chr 17:16-27
- 15 Psalm 121
- 16 Psalm 122
- 17 Psalm 124
- 18 Psalm 125
- 19 Psalm 126
- 20 Psalm 127
- 21 Psalm 128
- 22 Ezra 7:1-10
- 23 Ezra 7:11-28
- 24 Neh 8:1-18
- 25 Neh 12:27-47

Thanksgiving Day

- 26 Psalm 138
- 27 Psalm 139
- 28 Psalm 135

First Sunday of Advent

- 29 Psalm 24
- 30 Psalm 144

December

- 1 Mark 13:1-23
- 2 Mark 13:24-37
- 3 Dan 7:1-14
- 4 Dan 7:15-28
- 5 Dan 12:1-13

Second Sunday of Advent

- 6 Rev 1:1-20
- 7 Rev 2:1-29
- 8 Rev 3:1-22
- 9 Rev 4:1-11
- 10 Rev 5:1-14
- 11 Rev 7:1-17
- 12 Rev 19:1-10

Third Sunday of Advent

- 13 Rev 19:11-21
- 14 Mal 1:1-14
- 15 Mal 2:1-17
- 16 Mal 3:1-18
- 17 Mal 4:1-6
- 18 Isa 7:1-25
- 19 Isa 8:1-20

Fourth Sunday of Advent

- 20 Isa 8:21—9:7
- 21 Luke 1:1-25
- 22 Luke 1:26-56
- 23 Luke 1:57-80
- 24 Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Day

- 25 John 1:1-18
- 26 Luke 2:21-52
- 27 John 1:19-34
- 28 Phil 1:1-30
- 29 Phil 2:1-30
- 30 Phil 3:1-21
- 31 Phil 4:1-23



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in memory of
Larry and Jean Elliott
given by Richard Small

in memory of my husband
Harold L. Felte
given by Joleita J. Felte

in memory of my husband
Olan Forker
given by Kathleen Forker

in memory of my mother
Ethel Mae Geller
given by Dennis Geller

in memory of my wife
June Handwerker
given by Bob Handwerker

in memory of my husband
Elroy Kelle
given by Eloise F. Kelle

in memory of my father
Henry P. Leonard Jr.
given by Lisa Pritchard

in memory of
Anne Ruth Lansing
given by Zoraida A. Portillo

in memory of my father
Norlan Nelson
given by Susan Nelson

in memory of our daughter
Karla Rae Peter
given by Dean and Marlene Plooster

in memory of
Lester J. Reed
given by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Warner

in memory of my husband
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in memory of my mother
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