

**meco** | australia

MAGAZINE - ISSUE 1, 2021



**Light in  
Darkness**

Partners in mission with Middle East Christians



Rev Richard Coombs

# Light in Darkness

**D**espite daily threats of war, violence and persecution, believers in the Middle East are being sustained by God, prayer, fellowship and the scriptures.

And ... it's not just the printed Bibles we have access to. Think of the great variety of Bible apps and resources we have available electronically for computers, tablets and phones.

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MECO is an interdenominational, evangelical, Protestant mission agency founded in 1860.

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The Bible Society in the Middle East reports that in the midst of war and suffering, they are discovering an unprecedented demand for Scriptures – from both Christians relying on God more than ever, and Muslims looking for an alternative to the extreme expression of Islam they see around them.

Bibles are being distributed - alongside everyday necessities like food parcels, toiletries, and mattresses – to families who find themselves living in refugee camps.

With no education, few playful distractions and a fear of the unknown, daily life for a child in the refugee camps is a far cry from what it should be. That's why MECO Australia has joined with LSESD and the Bible Society to provide picture Bibles, colouring books, comic books and other materials that brighten many a day for children.

We have also helped publish and provide Bible-based trauma counselling for children in Lebanon and Syria who have witnessed the horrors of war and persecution and have had to flee their homes and villages.

How privileged we are in Australia to have choices of a large number of different versions, very attractively presented and with a variety of styles to suit our eyesight and other preferences.

It was William Tyndale who translated the scriptures into English, who wrote to the Pope on one occasion – *'I will cause a boy who drives a plow to know more of the scriptures than the Pope.'* He desired to get the scriptures into the language and hands of all common people.

The Apostle John writes in John 1:5 *'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.'* While I understand John is talking in the first place of the coming of Jesus, it also stands true that where the scriptures gain entrance into a nation's soul, a person's heart and life, there the darkness of sin and guilt and shame can be replaced by the 'light' of God's word.

In this issue of our magazine, you will read of the endeavours of one of our workers, Sandy, endeavouring to get the first Kurdish Study Bible translated and published. He has been a driving force to get this completed.

Would you be able to help with costs of getting this published for the eternal sake of the Kurdish people? See our 'Kurdish Bible Translation' project on page 6.

Our bank has advised us of a change to our account details. Please note our new details:

BSB: 704 922  
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# Confessions of a Middle East Bible Smuggler

**John\* arrived at the airport late in the evening. There was only one more hurdle to get through before he was safely with his contacts, secret Christians who were following Jesus in this Middle Eastern country we can't name.**

He had to make it through the border.

He went to the customs line at about 9:30 pm. His hope was the customs officers wouldn't ask to see inside John's suitcase; he hoped they would just wave him through.

That's not what happened.

A customs official asked John to open his suitcase. "I opened the suitcase," John recalls. "The man opened several of my special 'presents' and asked me who these presents were for or where I wanted to sell them. I told him that I personally wanted to give these presents to thank the people for being welcome in the country."

The "presents" were, of course, Bibles. John is a Bible smuggler. And he'd just been caught trying to bring God's Word into a place where it wasn't welcome.

John volunteered to bring God's Word to secret believers desperate for Bibles. Brother Andrew (Open Doors) used to pray that "seeing eyes would be blinded" as he snuck Bibles through unfriendly borders. John probably prayed something similar to that. But God doesn't always answer prayers in the same way.

The customs officers confiscated all 50 Bibles that John had tried to sneak in his suitcase and John was taken to a police station where he was held and interrogated through the night. "I was questioned by customs officers and local policemen," John says. "Continuously there was someone questioning me, without a break. Some were in uniform, others not. They asked me about my material, who it was for or to whom I wanted to sell it. I repeated that these were presents." The guards knew there were too many Bibles to be simple gifts.

John wasn't sure what would happen to him. He asked one of the officials if he could go to his hotel. The official told John that he would instead be put on the first airplane back to his country - he was to be deported.

But the official continued. "The man said that I was different from the others," John says. "I started to talk with him. After a while, he told me his father was seriously ill."

John didn't hesitate; he asked if he could pray for the officer's father.

"He agreed and I prayed for the man," John says. "After that, I told him my testimony and explained how important Jesus is to me. I took a small New Testament from my pocket. At the end of the book, a 'plan of Salvation' was printed."

John read all this for the man. And incredibly, the official who was overseeing John's arrest came to see the truth of Jesus.

"He accepted Jesus as his Saviour," John says. "I had tears in my eyes."

The officer then offered to help John. "He said that he would help me to solve my problem," John remembers. "He asked me if I was only in the cell because of the books. I said 'yes.' He then asked if I wanted the books back. The man asked me to follow him to get the Bibles. The situation was solved, and I could put the books back in my suitcase. At about 8:00 am he took me to my airplane."

God was with John, all the time.

"From the time my suitcase was opened until I entered the airplane again, I thanked the Lord," he says. "I had peace - the peace of God that transcends all understanding. I saw the hand of God in all that happened. It went different than I had planned. He decided to change everything for this one soul. I was just a spectator. Thanks to my Father, thank You Jesus."





**“He accepted  
Jesus as his  
Saviour,”**

Another group of travellers was more successful in delivering Bibles and other books.

“We travelled with half our suitcase full of Arab Bibles,” one member of a small group of Europeans says. “We had a good trip to the country. The airplane landed with an hour delay, but we arrived at the address where we would stay.

“The next day, we called our contact person. Soon, he picked us up and we headed with our valuable ‘presents’ to his church. We had an hour together before handing over the Bibles and so we spent some time in prayer with M. It was a moving and very rich time together.”

Later, they participated in a church service.

“It was moving to be part of a church service with about 80 believers, all coming from a Muslim background,” the Bible smuggler says. “There were also some children present.”

The literature is more than welcome in the Middle East. A church leader in one of these places echoes this. “We are grateful for the Christian literature we regularly receive,” he says. “A few years ago, our church suffered a lot from lack of literature, and especially gospels for new converts. We now have enough. Thank you that you help us.”

*\*Throughout, names have been changed in order to protect identities. Thanks to Open Doors.*

# Man shall not live by bread alone...

(The Sorani Kurdish Study Bible New Testament project)



A Kurdish social media group post showing a typical Kurdish oven for 'nan baladi' with John 6:51:

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

**T**he first complete Bible in Sorani Kurdish was launched in Erbil in Kurdistan in 2017 and published electronically on You Version at the same time. Work was then focussed on a Study Bible and an audio Bible. The audio Bible was released in September 2020 and since then the text and audio recording have been used many times over by those creating social media posts, film clips and much more.

Sorani speaking Kurds number around 10 million. There is now a worldwide diaspora that stretches beyond their Middle Eastern heartland in the Zagros mountains. They are a society with strong family loyalties, and it has been a joy to see individuals and then families come to know the greatness and goodness of their Heavenly Father through the grace of Jesus.

The Spirit has put a growing love in the hearts of these believers to encourage one another and under lock down this has been going on through WhatsApp and other social media. One WhatsApp group has around 30 members and each day, throughout the day, they are sending each other questions and comments on Scriptures they are reading, along with prayer requests and songs of praise in Kurdish.

Recently there was a long exchange on the nature of holiness, and the work of sanctification among the believers. So often such discussion has been a reminder of how believers need others who can help unpack the truth in Kurdish and how they are still relatively few such believers with a strong grasp of Bible truths. **The Sorani Kurdish Study Bible** aims to serve exactly such scattered believers both in the homeland and in the Diaspora.



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The project to translate the *Life Application Study Bible* first began in 2004, but was discontinued until the text itself could be fully completed. In 2017, the project was restarted with the New Testament Study Bible Notes but was again paused while more work was done on revising the text for the audio Bible.

In September 2020, the translation was completed, but revision work was needed. The Biblica senior management, in November 2020, decided that with limited resources available, the project could not be completed. However, the translation team offered to complete the project as volunteers, and Biblica senior leadership kindly agreed to this plan.

Currently the revision work has reached 1 Timothy 4, and when complete, it is planned to publish the text both electronically for distribution to the Kurdish diaspora, and hopefully on paper for readers in Kurdistan.

Some gifts have been received that have enabled the translators to be partially paid for their work, and yet the completion of the project will require other funds.

**MECO Australia** would like to contribute to this project and **AUD \$12,500** is still needed.

If you would like to contribute to the translation and publication of this strategic project, send your gifts to our office or through the website online.



The Kurdish national bird, the 'Keu', or red-legged partridge, with Psalm 62:1-2

*"Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken."*



# Receptive Soil

**The soil in the Middle East is about as rough as you can imagine; it's hard for vegetation to take root in the rocky, desert terrain. War and unrest have a death grip on this region and terrorism is an everyday reality.**

But the seeds of the gospel are taking root in the most unlikely places. Men and women are hearing God's Word and their lives are being transformed!

**A Personal Testimony: Raza\***  
- 'Jesus came to my refugee camp ...'

I never thought we would end up living in a refugee camp ...

Unrest caused us to be displaced from our home. All we had was an 8x13 wooden box wrapped with a tarp and covered with a tin roof. Every day was the same routine until a group of people showed up and started telling children's stories about a man named Jesus.

Together with some other adults, I would sit in the back of the room and listen. Being raised Muslim, I had not heard these stories before. Jesus was so interesting; His words were so compelling! I had to know more.

One day, a group of Bible translators came to our camp. When I told them about the stories I had heard of Jesus and how I wanted to know

more, they told me I could help translate the Bible - all the stories about Jesus - into my own language. While they were talking with me, my wife came into the room. She listened for a long time and then said that she wanted to help, too. She had also heard the stories and was hungry to know more.

We are both so intrigued with this man named Jesus! Now I am looking to recruit more men and women to help us get the stories of Jesus into our language. We have been waiting to know all of His words for us.

*\*Name changed and country not listed for security reasons. Thanks to WBT.*

## Mathai's Story

**When 46-year-old Mathai found out he was next in line to be beheaded by a local ISIS gang, who were on the rampage against Christian men in his Syrian hometown, he knew he had to flee.**

He made sure his wife and three children were safe, and then set off on a long and perilous journey across the

border to Lebanon, Turkey and by boat to Greece. From there he trekked through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Hungary before finally arriving in Austria. 'Sometimes I was afraid', Mathai recalls. 'But mostly just so tired, so tired, so exhausted'.

It was in Austria that Mathai found help from Christian brothers and sisters, who gave him a safe place to stay and

helped him lodge an asylum application. What's more, our Bible Society gave him what is now his prize possession - a large-print Arabic Bible.

'This Bible tells me I'm not alone, it reminds me that every human is loved by God and has a value', Mathai says. 'Whenever I think of my wife and children I'm very afraid, but when I turn to the Bible I see light.'



# Student Testimonies from Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut

For many years MECO Australia has prayerfully and financially supported the training of leaders at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. We have provided finances for scholarships and funds for their Student Common Room. We were also pleased to support Perry and Karen Shaw in their years of service there until they retired in 2019.

## Yemen

I was the religious leader of my town despite my young age. I had descended from a prominent non-Christian religious family, and I was quite committed to my faith. Then, in 2015, I was at a training conference in Jordan when the Yemeni war erupted, so I had to stay there for almost a year.

In 2016, my spiritual thirst was no longer bearable. I asked a Christian friend to teach me to pray the Christian way, so she directed me to the Bible. In 2017, I was born of the Spirit after a three-week Bible study.

After I returned, I joined the Church in Yemen and began to serve God as an evangelist, a preacher and a teacher, but as the pressures increased, I had to leave for another Arab country where I now pastor a group of refugees, and I continue to serve my Yemeni people online.

I desire for the message of the gospel to reach every Yemeni house through mobilizing church groups in Yemen and through online outreach. I also aim to build bridges through starting an online radio station tailored for the Yemeni community.

Studying theology will help me deliver sound Christian doctrine and the message of the untainted gospel to the Yemeni community, a people group that has so many questions regarding the Christian faith. There is a need for Yemeni theologians, so I aim to pursue my graduate studies in theology to advance the gospel in Yemen and the Middle East.

## Algeria

In 2005, I had many problems at work and at home, and I had lost all hope. Then, as I flipped through the satellite channels looking for an answer, to no avail, I got tired of television altogether. My attention turned to the TV screen again, for I saw a Christian TV channel. The next show was a dubbed version of a well-known preacher, and when she offered an invitation to accept the Lord, I simply did.

I was born to a poor, humble family, so all I wanted was to earn money in all ways attainable. Sadly, the more I tried, the more I failed.

The Certificate in Ministry program has been a great blessing to my life and ministry, especially in the fields of teaching and preaching. I wish to grow more in my ministry, hence why I applied for a Bachelor of Theology.

In 2011, I became the leader of a Bible school in Tizi Ouzou. Classes were first held at a church building, but in 2013, we found another building in Tizirt. In 2015, we started a church there too, and I became its pastor. The lives of many are changing through our ministry. People come to us out of sheer curiosity, and then they stay.

## Lebanon

I accepted Christ nine years ago at a worship meeting after having looked for faith for so long. Perhaps this quest for God started because I had battled with a pervasive sense of hollowness throughout my teenage years. My quest led me to take up Islam, but that didn't last long, for God sent someone to share the gospel with me. After accepting Christ, my life changed drastically.

Today, my husband Anthony and I serve at the ministry center of an evangelical church in the North of Lebanon. My ministry is that of evangelism, preaching and teaching. It also includes distributing food vouchers and hygiene kits to refugee families as well as giving them access to free medication and free educational courses.

My vision is to shepherd believers and prepare them to shepherd others through discipleship and encourage them to study theology.

## Student Testimonies from Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut

### Iraq

As a Catholic, I had studied the catechism and had gone to church since I was a child. Then, at 15, I became a nun. The longing to see Jesus - to feel His presence - was always there. Although I was in a convent, I had failed to experience God personally. As a teenager, I thought it quite tedious to recite prayers all the time.

Since I had no mentor, I grew lukewarm, and I left the convent at 21. I got married in 2004 and had a child. Then in 2015, we took asylum in Lebanon. My friends would invite me to churches who help refugees, but I would downright refuse.

Then, I visited Resurrection Church Beirut out of curiosity. I kept attending afterwards. The church took me in and helped restore my relationship with God. In August 2016, I got baptized.

One day, I was in the downstairs chapel praying, and I felt an inner outpouring of the Spirit that brought me to tears. For the next year, I would inwardly speak to God, as the traditional prayers were recited - as a daughter would speak to a father or a young woman to her betrothed.

Today, I serve as a leader in the church's refugee relief ministry. I serve six home groups, and I tend the persecuted believers at our church. In the future, I wish to start an orphanage for female orphans. I want to study theology in preparation for that ministry.

*This is a sample of testimonies from students at ABTS. At a time of significant disruption, ABTS welcomes the largest intake of new students in ABTS history! Please continue to pray for them and for their students as this academic year progresses.*

# Australian Workers



We are aware that the Conavirus is having a very great impact on all countries around the world. Our workers overseas are in 'lock-down' in the respective places where they are. At the time of printing they are all well and keeping themselves occupied with learning language and encouraging others in their teams and schools. We continue to pray God's peace and protection upon them.

**Darren** is continuing to teach at the College of the Constant Lighthouse. He is also discipling some young men. Because of the Covid pandemic Darren stayed in Lebanon and had ministry among the Syrian refugee families. After the Beirut blast he helped those who were affected.

**Rebecca** has been unable to get home due to the Covid pandemic which has made travel very difficult. She has spent time learning Arabic and also helping families affected by the refugee crisis and the recent blast in Beirut. She is also having a ministry to mothers of students at the school.

**Ivy** returned to Taipei because of the need to have medical treatment for a return of her cancer. We are thankful that this has been successful. She is wanting to return to Jordan but is waiting for vaccine availability and also ministry opportunities.

**Vicki** worked with Middle East Concern (MEC) and based in Luton, UK. She has returned to Melbourne to be closer to her mother. She is continuing to speak to governments and interested people on the plight of persecuted Christians in the Middle East where she has opportunity. She would value your prayers for God's guidance of her for future ministry.

**Perry and Karen** continue their association with MECO Australia as Associate Members. Perry is fulfilling writing commitments and doing a lot of his consultancy work with overseas theological colleges by remote communications. Karen is having ministry in the local community with some opportunities for speaking and also pastoral care. They value your continued prayers for them.

**Noel and Ros Uebergang** (Perth) continue to have opportunities for ministry in West Australia among people from the Middle East. Folk can help with their support by forwarding gifts to our office.

**John and Magda Ackad** (Sydney) are available for speaking at churches and other groups and can be contacted on (02) 9822 2303 or 0404 058 569. Folk can help with their support by forwarding gifts to our office.

## PLEASE NOTE:

Due to Victorian Government stage 4 restrictions in place due to Coronavirus, the office is not open and there will be a delay in responding to donations and phone messages.

## Donations and Support

*We have a variety of ways in which our work and ministries can be supported.*



**On-line** – donors can use

Visa and Mastercard

[www.meco.org.au](http://www.meco.org.au)

Donations by Credit Card can also be made direct to the office by calling 03 9898 0077

**NEW Bank Details**



**Internet** – direct transfer to our account

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**Legacies** – Legacies are a significant way for Christians to continue support of taking the gospel to the people of the Middle East. You can have an "ongoing support" of MECO and its ministries by remembering MECO in your will.

# Beirut Relief Fund



On August 4, 2020, a massive explosion in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, shook a nation already in political, economic and pandemic turmoil.

**Beirut Relief Fund** enables you to donate in order to provide support for those affected by this tragedy.

Finances received will be channelled through our partners and local churches who are on the ground responding to those in need.

Go to our website – [www.meco.org.au](http://www.meco.org.au)  
– to donate online

Deposit gifts through  
BSB: 704 922  
Account: 100018534  
Reference: Beirut Relief Fund

**'Let us be God's light and hope to  
our Lebanese brothers and sisters.'**

- **Prayer Points** – monthly Prayer Points for the Middle East are distributed by email and print. We would be delighted to add your name to our list – please forward an email to: [office@meco.org.au](mailto:office@meco.org.au) requesting the Prayer Points and specify how you would like to receive them (email or print).
- **Prayer for the Persecuted Church** through our partnership with Middle East Concern (MEC) we get regular up-dated prayer requests for people in the Middle East who are in difficulty with the authorities. If you wish to be part of this prayer ministry, please request to be placed on the mailing list – [office@meco.org.au](mailto:office@meco.org.au)