

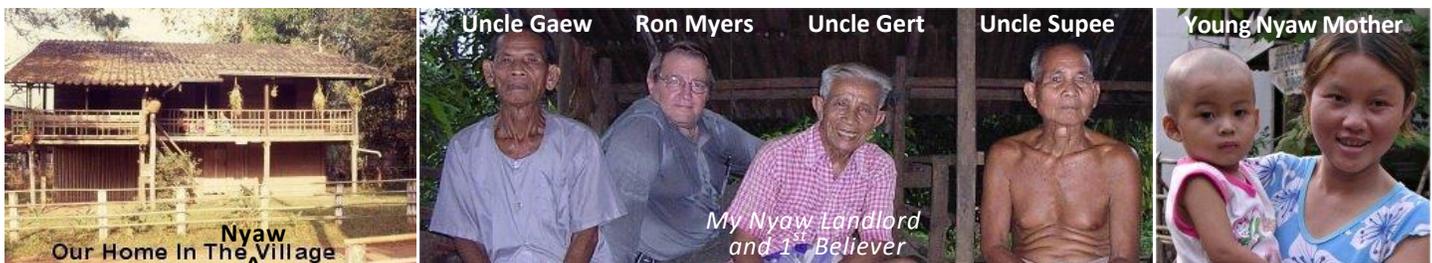
### Reviewing the Past While Looking Forward – A Ministry Panoramic

Greetings in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ,

It's almost unbelievable how, over the years, God has opened new doors of service to expand the scope of our ministry! I thought this an opportune time to provide you with a brief historical overview of our work... to bring you up to date with some little-known particulars as we look forward together toward an exciting future of effectively communicating Christ to the people of Isan, and throughout Thailand. I have kept this communiqué as concise as possible, originally trying to squeeze the formatting down to two pages, but it was too difficult to read comfortably. This should be easier on your eyes—same amount of material.

Cheryl and I entered training for the ministry while in our twenties, just one week after our honeymoon. Upon completing concentrated missions-oriented studies (1969-73), and receiving my ordination, we raised financial support and moved to Thailand with David, our year-old toddler. After a year of further Thai language study in Bangkok, we moved up to Thailand's Northeastern Region in the fall of 1974. There, we befriended the people as we began our pioneer church-planting ministry.

Our initial focus was on the Nyaw people, an unreached village-dwelling ethnic minority of around 150,000 people. After weeks of survey work, riding motorcycles over miles of unimproved roads, we came to the Nyaw village of *NaNai*, located in the *Tah-U-Tane* district of *Nakhon Panom* province. The Village Headman quickly invited us to move in. Thinking we would become a source of income, he became antagonistic when we didn't oblige him. God later reversed the matter when villagers voted in *Mr. Giam* as their new Village Headman, my friend and Nyaw language tutor. I had leased a shady corner lot from Uncle *Gert*, one of the villagers who later received Christ. Lacking electricity, I constructed a very livable 24' x 36' home using only hand tools; Cheryl and I moved in with our two young children on Christmas Eve, 1974. We ministered throughout that difficult-to-reach area until the early 1980s, establishing a yet on-going church.



The Nyaw, like the rest of Isan's minorities, are one of many unreached people groups dwelling in Thailand's vast Northeastern hinterlands. More commonly referred to as the *Isan* Region, the area is interspersed with many rural-dwelling, minority language groups. These people groups are concentrated throughout various locations (*mostly Nakhon Panom and adjacent provinces*). They typically interact among other nearby minority groups, including trading and intermarriage.

Concerning languages, there are two main language family divisions found throughout the Isan region: the *dai-kadai* family of tonal languages, which include: Thai; Isan; Nyaw; Pu-Thai, Puan; Saek, etc. And, the *mon-khmer* family of *non-tonal* languages. These do not rely on tones to define word meaning, but are typically more difficult to pronounce. They include: Cambodian (*Khmer*), Mon, So, Sui (*or Kui*), Bru, Tri, etc. Each people group identifies themselves by their group's name. Their languages differ to varying degrees, yet their cultures, lifestyles, beliefs, challenges and hardships, fears and desires are all very similar as members of a peasant-farmer class. (*Only about 0.01% of Isan dwellers truly know Jesus Christ as their Savior.*)

Presently, few of these people groups have had any Bible translation work done. In fact, apart from our work, the Isan region's populace still lacks the Word of God in the Isan vernacular (*24 million people to-date*). Missionologists tell us the Isan region is the largest major people group still without the Scriptures. Currently, all rural Isanians must rely on Thai Bible versions—a decision on the part of the Thai Bible Society, essentially due to biased socio-cultural views.

Thus, as people began to come to Christ, we were forced to rely on the Thai Bible. This is problematic for three main reasons. First, even though most rural Isan dwellers are literate to some degree, Thai is not their first language. Second, Thai Bibles are difficult for them to fully understand, since they are translated in formal or a literary writing style, using high, bookish language and syntax form—not the spoken Thai vernacular (*which is easier for Isanians to understand*). Third, and way worse, although the Thai Bible is mostly accurate, the translators have chosen to take undue liberties in certain key locations, which border on license. For example, passages in Paul's epistles that expound on God's grace and the believer's position in Christ are often changed, confusing the reader by making the text appear to require personal effort, or "good works" on the part of the reader.

As I began initial trial-and-error attempts at translating into the Nyaw language, I soon realized that translating into Nyaw, or any other Isan minority language, would be a defeated cause. The reason being, as a rule, minority languages gradually phase out as older generations pass away, and as major languages become more prevalent among new generations. It was around that time that the Lord placed the idea of an Isan Bible translation on my heart. The choice of translating into the Isan language became obvious, being the major language spoken throughout Northeast Thailand. Although Thai is the official national language, Isan remains the trade language of the region, understood and used by almost all Northeasterners—even in private conversations among upper-class city dwellers.

I realized early on, the advantage that computer technology could provide as a translation tool, even before we moved out of the village work and into the provincial capital where I began the Isan translation (*circa 1980-81*). The time was the emergence of the personal computer age. In preparation, I had begun by taking college-level computer programming courses while on furlough in 1979, so as to familiarize myself with this then-new electronic concept.

Upon returning from furlough, I engaged in further preparation towards the Bible translation task ahead. An important part of that was to establish the validity of the Isan language (*a derivative of Laotian*) as being the primary form of communication throughout the whole Northeastern Region. To accomplish this, I traveled to major locations throughout the Isan region in my old VW Bus. In each area, I did research by conducting language tests that I had worked up. My theory proved conclusive, that the Isan language *was* undoubtedly the way to go.

Although Isan was previously an unwritten language, I was able to adapt the Thai writing and spelling system successfully. My spelling adaption method proved very similar to what major Thai universities had been doing. Reading Isan proved to be quite easy to adapt to, many being able to read and write with great speed and clarity using my system. I need to take time here to thank all the native-born Isan believers who have helped in this major endeavor. Reading their own language initially seemed an oddity to them, but they soon caught on and could read up to speed without any difficulty.

When I began the Isan Bible translation project in the early eighties—assisted by Jarat and Prechaa—all we had to work with was an old Thai Olympia portable typewriter, and lots of pencils and paper. After doing exegesis on a section, I would pencil the initial rough draft in the Isan language. Then, after Jarat, Prechaa, and I reviewed the rough draft, I would make changes or additions by erasing or crossing out the old, and adding the new.

After a few discussions and editing sessions, the penciled draft became practically unintelligible to the uninitiated onlooker. Phrases or words were circled with lines drawn here and there, as words and phrases were switched around, added or deleted. After arriving at an accurate and fluent rendering, a hard copy would be typed out, and we would begin the process over again. (*I still rely on this process today because it works well, but I now do it on a computer screen and Thai-enabled Microsoft Word, instead of pencil and paper.*)

After a while, the carriage of the old Thai typewriter took on the appearance of a pigeon roost, what with the dried clumps of whiteout correction fluid. While my faithful Isan assistant was typing something out, he would often stop and chuckle softly to himself. “*What’s wrong?*” I would ask. “*Oh, I just noticed that I skipped a line,*” was his reply. I thought it odd that he found it humorous, which began to try my patience after numerous recurrences. I later came to realize that he was doing his best with what he had to work with, and the chuckle was one of embarrassment more than amusement.

That was Uncle Prechaa, a stalwart Isan believer with an evangelist’s heart, whom I had the distinct pleasure of knowing and working with. Prechaa later moved back to Mukdahan province where he started a small church in his home, selling fresh goods in the local open-air market to sustain his family. I once visited and stayed with them, where I spoke to the new group that Sunday morning.



Shortly after that, and after months of prayer, the Lord provided amply and generously through His people to be able to purchase a really good computer, one perfectly suited for our needs that I saw first at an office show in Bangkok. Computer technology has proven to be a godsend. For one thing, computer technology completely eliminated the above typewriter and paper scenario, and has saved me years of time and toil... and headaches.

Although Thai script—with its upper and lower diacritics, and no spaces between words—was initially problematic, it meant the ability to compile and store the whole Isan New Testament, along with Old Testament portions, as well as language and culture research, Bible lexicons, dictionaries, teaching materials, and even writing correspondence. A keyboard, a screen, a storage device, and a printer sure beats pounding away on a typewriter, with a bottle of whiteout correction fluid, surrounded by stacks of open Bibles, lexicons, and commentaries. Word processor search/replace routines are instant, saving hours of work. I can only look with awe and admiration upon those who translated, reviewed, edited, compiled, formatted and printed Bibles mostly in adverse conditions without the aid of modern computer technology. My hat certainly goes off to them.

My hat also goes off to all my Isan assistants who gave of themselves over the years, taxing their minds daily as we tried various approaches, seeking to arrive at the very best rendering for each word, verse and section as we worked our way through to the completion of the Isan New Testament. These include: Evangelist Prechaa; Pastor Jarat; Mr. Pradung; Pastor Somkit; Evangelist Paetong; and Pastor Pitak. These and other men, along with their wives, did extensive proofreading and offered valuable input. As seen by their titles (*Pastor/Evangelist*), most of these men entered the ministry with their wives, after having helped me with the Isan translation. I took every opportunity to ground and instruct them in the truths of God’s Word while we worked together, even going on Saturday village evangelism trips, where people accepted Christ and were baptized. Their lives, families, and ministries are my reward. These men also learned to operate computers and touch type in Thai.

Computers can have problems too. I have come to the experiential conclusion that, although they are fantastic time-saving devices, computers can be a real pain when not working properly. These last few weeks I’ve been in the process of changing desktop computers, as I had experienced problems with my old computer’s operating system, which I could not easily correct—thus the tardy newsletter. That being said, I’ll still take my computer over a typewriter or pencil and paper every time. (*I also use Carbonite-online backup storage for the Isan New Testament, just in case...*)

Concerning completion of the Isan translation, as I wrote in previous newsletters; with the skilled help of these dedicated Isan believers, I was able to finish the whole Isan New Testament in December, 2012. What a sense of accomplishment! Yet, we have more work to do before we can go to press. Pastor Pitak and I, along with other Isan volunteers, are presently conducting a final review... proofreading, editing, and smoothing out various places where needed, to increase accuracy and readability. *Please pray with us for wisdom, that the Isan New Testament review process will be completed, both as accurately and speedily as possible, so we may proceed to printing and distribution—placed into the waiting hands of the Isan people.* God has already begun to bring in generous amounts of printing funds through His people, for which we are thankful.

For the record, my goal for the Isan translation is: <sup>1</sup>)to accurately reflect the best, most complete Greek manuscripts available (*namely in the Byzantine/TR camp*), <sup>2</sup>)maintaining a formal or faithful translation style, <sup>3</sup>)while doing thorough and multiple procedural checks, <sup>4</sup>)to produce a translation as fluent and accurate as possible in the Isan language—given the challenge of differences in languages, cultures, and communication styles.



What does the phrase “**God’s Word for Isan**” mean? First, and of prime importance, it means translating the New Testament into the Isan language. Yet, more than that, as a Church planter, I am mainly engaged in evangelizing and teaching **God’s Word** in a cross-cultural, localized setting, to establish new churches among previously-unreached rural-dwelling **Isan** people. The major challenge I have faced over the years is that of communicating God’s message in a way that successfully overrides the false theories held by all Thai people about the Gospel message; namely who Jesus Christ really is. They sincerely believe that Jesus came to start a new religious system to teach Westerners to be good, just like Buddha came to teach Easterners to be good. A large part of this problem stems from their total lack of knowledge of Creation and their Creator (*Jesus Christ*). Paradoxically, they all adore *Nature*, yet are blithely unaware of its divine origins.

For successful evangelism, these long-held erroneous beliefs must be addressed first and foremost, since they contradict the core Biblical theme in Ephesians 2:8-9; that we are saved by God’s unmerited favor alone (*Grace*), and not by our own self-effort (*Religious Works*). Therein lays the crux of the matter. Typical short-cut Gospel presentations are easily deflected by their oft-repeated mottos, God’s truth bouncing benignly off the brick wall of their false beliefs. Therefore, it takes a special method of communication to penetrate an Isan (or Thai) person’s heart and mind with God’s truth, to successfully address and correct their long-held misconceptions.

It is said that “*A person convinced against his will is of the same mind still.*” Even though missionaries may continually stress that Jesus Christ and Biblical Christianity is not a “religion,” that doesn’t change their minds or persuade the normal, uninterested, non-seeking Thai Buddhist one little bit. In fact, no amount of evangelistic persuasion can pierce their spiritual armor concerning what they perceive as being an inferior religious system compared to their beloved Buddhism! In light of this ever-present impasse, I found it necessary to develop alternate evangelistic and teaching materials, relevant to the communication challenges and spiritual needs faced while seeking to reach these self-satisfied Buddhist people whom God loves. Compare Paul’s Gospel presentation to the educated heathen on Mars Hill—he started by introducing Creation! (Acts 17:24...)

With Paul’s example in mind, I was able to develop a major breakthrough presentation that effectually addresses this matter. Called “*Considering Creation*,” this little booklet is written in conversational Thai with the help of a Thai friend, Pastor Teerakorn. Done in non-confrontational style, it begins by dialoging about Nature, which they adore, inviting them to consider the reality of an *Intelligent Designer*. It then transitions into Creation, explains redemption’s story, and ends in a clear Gospel invitation. Thai Christians value it and Thai Buddhists enjoy reading it, often passing it on to their friends! We have now printed 40,000 copies of this popular conversation starter.

Our teaching materials have also proven uniquely invaluable in grounding believers in Salvation through Grace alone. Emphasizing our unchangeable position *in Christ*, rooted securely in God’s Love, these materials meet a real need among poorly taught Thai Christians.

Recent development: A Chinese Christian brother in Malaysia contacted me, volunteering his expertise to convert the completed Isan New Testament into a popular Bible software program format, called “e-Sword.” (*See example below.*)

Once converted into the e-Sword format, the Isan module can easily be converted into another Bible program format called “the Word.” I use both of these powerful programs to help insure accuracy, both in choosing correct wording, and to make sure Greek verb grammatical forms (*Tense-Voice-Mood*) are accurately reflected in the Isan scriptures.



We will also be recording the Isan New Testament in audio CD format when it is done. I did this with Isan Genesis 1-12, then had it mass-produced at a professional shop in Bangkok. I will likely do the same with the Isan New Testament, once the recording work is completed.

There are many other things I could add here, like how God miraculously watched over and protected us from various dangers over the years... including being captured by Laotian Communist soldiers, or the other churches we strengthened or established, or the disciples that were made, or my soon return trip to Thailand, and our upcoming Isan leadership conference, *et al*.

Concerning my on-going Sciatica disability, God knows that I have pursued about every medical avenue available, to correct the situation. So far, none have worked. Yet, I haven’t given up hope. With that in mind, The Lord recently assured me through His Word that: “*My Grace Is Sufficient for Your Every Situation and My Power Shows Forth in All Its Perfection through Your Weaknesses.*” (2 Corinthians 12:9 – *Myers Personal Version*)

One thing Cheryl and I want to say is, on behalf of the 24 million Isan people, “**Thank You** to each of you who stand in the gap with faithful prayer, while undergirding this vital, ongoing work through your generosity.” (*Mission address below.*)

God’s Richest Blessings,  
*Ron Myers*  
 Ron (& Cheryl) Myers  
 Missionaries to Thailand  
[www.IsanBible.org](http://www.IsanBible.org)

