

Mr. Kiam;

My Language Tutor, My Friend, and My BurdenBy Ron Myers (God's Word For Isan: www.IsanBible.org)

After completing our final year in Thai language school in Bangkok, in mid-1974, Cheryl and I, along with our two toddlers, David and Angela, hired an old truck and moved our meager belongings some 500 miles up to the furthest area of Thailand's impoverished and densely-populated Northeastern region—also called the Isan region.

There, as young career missionaries, we would begin the next phase of our ministry, i.e., more language and culture learning, befriending people, fitting in, helping out, evangelizing, teaching, and eventually planting new churches. As missionaries to the unreached tribes, our desire and primary goal at that juncture was to establish a work among the village-dwelling Nyaw people, in their own language, and within their own primitive village surroundings. This, we did, by God's Grace.

To begin, we needed to conduct extensive surveys to locate these Nyaw villages, which another missionary and I did, riding hundreds of kilometers each day on a pair of 100 cc trail motorcycles for weeks on end. We traveled over mostly unimproved roads, both during hot and dusty days, as well as rainy days and muddy conditions. Meanwhile, our wives and children were living in nice, comfortable Thai-style homes that we had rented in the adjoining provincial city of Sakon Nakhon, where we would return, usually early each evening.

Through the survey process, we were able to locate a friendly medium-sized Nyaw village located beside a not-too-bad dirt road, ten kilometers from the local district town of *Tah-U-Tehn*, which was on a paved main road, situated alongside the Mekong River. This was the 200-home village of Ban-Nah-Nai (meaning "Inner Field Village"). When I say "friendly," I mean that the village headman was quite positive about inviting us into the village, claiming that if he gave the word, all the villagers there would "enter our religion." We sometimes thought of him as the little *Bantam Rooster*, because of his smallish stature and comedic boastful crowings.

Later on, we were startled to discover that the village headman was only positive towards us initially, because he was hoping to gain personally from our presence. He turned out to be very corrupt. As soon as he realized this would not be the case, he turned on us behind our backs, trying in every way he could to get us to leave. These ways included spreading a huge campaign among the villagers—who didn't pay much attention, since they liked us and knew his tendencies.

The man also reported us to the district Government Official, claiming we were CIA or KGB spies, and Communists. The Official, knowing of our presence there, saw through his slanderous accusations and sent him back home. Meanwhile, we committed the situation to God's care. Soon, the village elders appointed a four-man petition committee. They went throughout the village in teams, getting the required amount of signatures to remove the troublesome village headman from office—which eventually happened.

One of the men on the petition committee was Mr. Kiam, my close friend and Nyaw language tutor. When the corrupt headman was finally removed from office, the villagers elected a new headman. In a miraculous turn of events, they chose my close friend, Mr. Kiam. Kiam was a carpenter by trade, so our first meeting was when I enlisted his help to finish a few details on our village home. Our friendship grew from then on.

This is a prime example of how the Lord often allows Satan to overplay his hand in his attempts to delay or prevent us from preaching the Gospel. In this case, seeing churches planted among the Nyaw people and their neighboring Isan villages. Later, the former headman's own son even came to faith, confessing Christ as we sat conversing one day on my porch—another testimony of God's power over the forces of darkness.



The bittersweet part of all this was when Mr. Kiam informed me after a language lesson that, "I really don't understand very well yet, but I know the message you bring is very important." Further proving his interest, Kiam (as new headman) later called a village-wide meeting of all the men. There, he invited me to present the Gospel. Although they listened, they didn't really understand much. My ability in the Nyaw language was still somewhat weak, and I hadn't yet developed the icebreaker creation-evangelism method, that bridges their typical misconceptions and gets to the real Gospel.

I continued to work with and pray for Kiam. A few years later, I left the village ministry to begin the Isan Bible translation project. Yet, I returned to visit village friends at times. On one occasion, I walked up to Kiam's house, as I usually did, and called out, "Friend! Friend! Are you there?" All was quiet—no friendly welcome in return. A moment later, Kiam's neighbor called out to me from across the road saying, "Ron, you're too late! Your friend died last month for no apparent reason!" My heart sank. Even now, I often ponder, had Kiam ever truly understood the Gospel? ...enough, that is, to receive Christ before passing unexpectedly?



My only consolation is, our merciful, all-knowing Lord certainly knew Kiam's heart, and his sincere interest in seeking to understand and even promote the Gospel. Yet my heart grows heavy even now, years later, as I write about my old friend. My hope is that he had come to a more complete understanding later on, and had opened his life to receive Christ for himself before he passed into eternity.

In closing, thank you for your participation in helping get God's life-giving Word to the People of Thailand's Isan Region and beyond. I will return in mid-November to finish translating the Book of Matthew. Next on the list is all Old Testament verses that speak of God's power and majesty in Creation—perfect for those who are ignorant of God.

By God's Grace & For His Glory,

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Food For Thought: How important is preparedness? That is, how important is it that each of us develops a clearly-understandable, scripturally-accurate, and well thought-out Gospel presentation? It's because: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Meaning: Hearing and receiving the Gospel Message—the Wonderful Works of God. (Romans 10:17, Psalms 40:5; 107)