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Not Your Ordinary Home

By Stefanie Morris



Miriam and Zumbek Molong, a recent student at the Home for Bible Translators. Zumbek Molong is a pastor and Bible translator from Papua New Guinea. His efforts to translate the Old Testament into his mother tongue, Nabak, will allow 20,000 people to read the word of God in their own language.

A simple prayer, offered in faith, would change Miriam's life and lead her and her husband, Halvor, to establish the *Home for Bible Translators*.

Miriam Ronning grew up in a family that put a high priority on the Word of God. Her Christian father immigrated to Palestine, then part of the British Mandate, in 1947 because he foresaw the establishment of the State of Israel. Although a Finnish citizen, Miriam was educated in Israel, in Hebrew-speaking schools. For much of her adult life, Miriam taught Hebrew to Bible scholars and translators in a small classroom in Jerusalem at the Institute of Holy Land Studies.

“Let’s go have ice cream,” an American student urged her class at the end of a particularly long day.

Miriam looked up from her papers. She glimpsed sorrow and suffering in the eyes of two Ugandan translators. Maybe they were wondering whether their families in Northern Uganda even had enough food to eat. She could tell that the African translators felt out of place among the young Americans with their Western mentality.

“I looked at their care-worn faces and prayed, ‘God let there be a special home for Bible translators in Jerusalem.’”

Such a home away from home would minister to their daily needs and help them concentrate on their studies. She prayed for courses designed specifically for Bible translators. The courses at the Institute were not created with translators in mind. She longed to immerse them in the Hebrew language so thoroughly that they would gain a deeper understanding of the Biblical message.

At the time, Miriam and Halvor both taught at the Institute of Holy Land Studies and were busy raising four children. Several years passed by, life was full and the dream faded, but God didn’t forget.

In the summer of 1993, a neighbor called one evening. She told Miriam about a new apartment her husband was constructing in the nearby village of Mevasseret. She suggested the the Ronnings rent it

Miriam answered her friend “We have no need of an apartment and have never even thought of renting one.”

A few days later, she called to ask again, and Miriam gave the same answer. When her

friend called the third time, Miriam mentioned her dream of establishing a home for Bible translators from all over the world.

“But if such a home were to be established, it would require a caretaker and a cook and others with practical skills,” Miriam said, “and Halvor and I are not talented in these areas.”

Four months later in early December 1993, a couple from Finland came to visit. The husband and wife had previously volunteered in a kibbutz, an Israeli communal village.

The husband turned to Miriam and said, “My wife and I would like to volunteer somewhere starting a month from now. We could do something practical such as caring for a home. Would you please look for a place for us in your village, Motza, or in the nearby village of Mevasseret?”

Miriam stared at them in amazement. Her friend’s apartment was in Mevasseret. “It was as if the Lord was reminding me, ‘Do you remember the dream you had of a home for Bible translators?’”

Miriam invited the couple to sit down and told them about the prayer she said so long ago. Four months had passed since her neighbor’s last call.

“Surely, the apartment is rented,” Miriam thought, but it wan’t!

The very next morning Miriam and the couple went to look at it. They were amazed. It was a perfect apartment for student living, and in addition it was beautifully constructed with a skylight over a small internal garden. It had four bedrooms, each one with its own shower and lavatory. There was a modern kitchen and a large open living area, a corner of which could serve as a library.

“Deep in my heart I knew that this was the place we had envisioned!”

In January 1994, they signed the rental contract.

God's answer to Miriam's prayer had just begun; a second miracle would provide a university-accredited program for Old Testament translators. A Californian friend of theirs had developed a course for American pastors through the desk for Special Programs at the Hebrew University.

"Maybe we could approach that same desk," Miriam thought. "Maybe they would be interested in developing a program for Bible translators."

Miriam and Halvor spoke with the person responsible for Special Programs. He told the Ronnings he couldn't approve their request. The decision would have to be made by a higher official, the Provost of the Overseas School. They tried to hide their disappointment as they asked for the Provost's name. Discouragement turned quickly to joy.

"What? He is our friend from student days. We had no idea that he is working here," Halvor and Miriam said.

When they met with the Provost, he immediately liked the idea of a six-month study program designed specifically for Old Testament translators. He smoothed the procedures for its acceptance by the Hebrew University. Within just a few months, the Rothberg Overseas School established a fully-accredited program at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The first students arrived from French-speaking West Africa in 1995. The first course was offered in French, because of the great lack of study opportunities for Bible translators in French-speaking Africa. The language of instruction still alternates between French and English.

Ten years have passed and the Home for Bible Translators and Scholars in Jerusalem, Inc. (HBT) has hosted 79 Bible students from 29 countries representing 48 languages. The

student body is a picture of the heavenly kingdom, with translators from such varied locations as Chad, Mongolia, Papa New Guinea, Europe and the United States.

Through the power of God, these translators, and their teams, will make it possible for over 35 million people to read the Old Testament in their language. This is just a start. HBT works for the day when all people will have the Old Testament in their native tongue.

There is a long way to go. Ninety percent of the over 6,000 languages in the world do not have the Old Testament. The vast majority of people groups cannot read the story of creation. They cannot find comfort in the Psalms or wisdom in Proverbs. They simply do not have the Old Testament scriptures that Jesus so frequently quoted.

This knowledge spurs Miriam on. “Everybody deserves a complete Bible in their own language.”

Miriam Ronning is a Finnish citizen and has been a permanent resident of Israel since 1949. She has graduate degrees from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in Scientific Translation (Hebrew-English), Clinical Psychology, and the World of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Miriam has taught Biblical Hebrew and Bible translation in academic settings in Jerusalem for many years. She has translated Old Testament books from Hebrew into her native Finnish (Genesis, Ruth, Joel, Obadiah, Habbakuk, Zechariah and Isaiah). For more information on HBT, go to its website at www.bibletranslators.org.