

UPDATE - BIBLE DISTRIBUTION

Thank you for your prayers for Bibles. As the Japan Mission continues to make the Scriptures available in China and many parts of the Far East, a great need in the Middle East has caught our attention. Syria is a nation where more than half of the population has been forced to flee the country. Millions are now living in inhumane conditions in overflowing refugee camps.



The Japan Mission has recently been involved in a project to provide Bibles to Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. We have received reports that many Syrian children and their mothers have come to know Christ.

One minister in Jordan shared how God opened a wide door for the Gospel in the Middle East. Just 10 years ago this situation would have been unthinkable.

One day, a Muslim woman dressed in a burka came through the doors of his church in Amman. This was most unusual. A Muslim woman simply does not enter a Christian church, especially by herself. She was quick to say: "Please don't look at the way I am dressed."

She then proceeded to tell how she had seen a man in a dream. He was dressed in white and had told her specifically to go to that street and that particular building where she was going to receive help. She and her family were refugees from Syria.

This incident was the beginning of an outreach effort from that church to Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Today, around 800 families with about 5,000 members receive help every month. As the church has shown the love of Christ in action, the refugees have opened up their hearts and many have received Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The refugees have fled from war and incredible atrocities, and faced life-threatening danger in their attempt to find safety. They have not only left their families, their homeland and all that was near and dear to them, but they have to a large extent also left their religion. Many are open to the Good News.

Pray for these people as this project gives light, life and eternal hope to thousands of people living in hopelessness and darkness.



March / April 2016

CREDITORS ON THE DOORSTEP - Part I

Keiko was born in 1934 in the famous city of Kyoto. Her earliest memories included difficult times during World War II, when her family stayed in one room and covered the light with a black cloth at night so that the light would not shine through the windows. She was scared of the dark and when the war ended in 1945, she was delighted to be able to turn the lights on without any restrictions!

Keiko attended a Christian middle school called Doshisha, which was established by a Christian missionary and educator in 1875. Keiko remembers the words of a minister who visited the school. She listened with interest as he shared his faith in Jesus, and for the first time she thought there might be a true and living God who loved her and had a plan for her life.



Keiko Hirabayashi

Keiko was a senior in High School, when she became attracted to her language teacher. As time passed, the two developed a relationship and after she finished 4 years of university in 1957 she married Hajime Hirabayashi.

Years before, when Hajime was still in High School, a friend told him about Jesus and invited him to church. Hajime gave his heart to the Lord while he was a university student, but had wandered away from the church and its teachings by the time he had met Keiko. He started to question the existence of God and became an advocate for social change. They both felt that social change was the answer to a happy life and the problems in society.

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When the eldest of her three children entered elementary school, Keiko felt the urge to do something new. It was just then that she received an advertisement to learn English at a church in her neighborhood. This ad immediately caught her attention, because she remembered how she enjoyed studying English at school, and it stated: **Children Welcome!**

Keiko attended the English classes and ladies meetings with her two children, who were two and three years old. She was familiar with the Bible since she had attended a Christian school, but it was all intellectual knowledge. The more she heard the messages, the more she came to understand the truths of the Bible. She came face-to-face with the reality that she was a sinner.

"I regarded myself as a good person because I had never committed a crime, but when I came across Mark 7:20-23, I was deeply convicted and realized that I had fallen short of God's glory. I asked for forgiveness and accepted Jesus as my personal Savior."

Shortly after Keiko had given her heart to the Lord, she was faced with a daunting trial. Without her knowledge, her husband Hajime agreed to be a guarantor of a loan for a former student. The student ran a book store that was on the verge of bankruptcy and then he disappeared. Hajime was forced to borrow money from a loan shark in order to assume the loan. The interest on the money that he borrowed accrued into a very large amount, so he borrowed more money from another loan shark in

order to pay the interest. They were saddled with a mammoth debt in no time!

Hajime did not tell Keiko about this situation until one of the loan sharks came to their home and threatened to evict them. When he confessed, she was so stunned that she did not even get angry with him.

Soon after, they saw a headline in the newspaper about a family that committed suicide because of a three million yen loan. Her husband's loan was over ten million yen! She later confided that such an option had sometimes crossed their minds as an honorable way out of this desperate situation. It was at these times that she clung to the verse in 1 Cor. 10:13: **No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.**

With three children in elementary school, Keiko started to teach English to kids in the neighborhood to help bring in some income. They sold their home, but were glad to be able to continue to live in it. Their situation was very bleak as they borrowed money from their friends and relatives to make ends meet. For many months, the interest payments alone exceeded their monthly income.

"We would receive dreadful calls from the loan sharks," Keiko recalled. "My husband's hands would tremble when he answered the phone. When I received a call, my heart would beat

rapidly in fear. I recited the words of Matthew 10:28 out loud, **Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.** This helped me to have the peace I needed to answer the phone. I discovered for the first time how Bible verses were a true strength for Christians.

"We experienced many miracles during these difficult years. Sometimes we only had one dish of **tofu** (bean curd) for dinner, but we never went without food. Our needs were abundantly met through the help of Christian and non-Christian friends.

I was convinced that the words in the Bible were true and praised God with my children from the bottom of my heart. Romans 8:32 says, **He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,**

how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Keiko is now 81 years old and lives happily with Hajime, who turns 90 this year. "I have experienced severe trials in my life," shared Keiko, "but if I hadn't had such adversity, I would not have known Jesus Christ so deeply."

She continues to attend the same church where she found the Lord and now plays a vital role in Japan Mission's English Evangelism Program, which is being held in that church. **Pray** for her as she teaches the Bible and shares her faith with many of the English students.

Read the next issue to learn how the entire family dedicated their hearts to the Lord and were miraculously delivered from the horrendous debt that they incurred. □

JAPANORAMA - SUICIDE IN JAPAN

Last year over 25,000 people took their own lives. That amounts to about 70 people per day. Experts say that isolation is the number one precursor to depression and suicide. The insurance system in Japan is not so strict when it comes to paying out for suicide; so when all else fails, some feel they can just kill themselves and the insurance will pay out. There is sometimes an intolerable pressure on the elderly that the most loving thing they can do is take their own lives and thereby provide for their family. Some experts think Japan's suicide rate is actually much higher than reported. A lot of lone deaths of elderly people are never fully investigated.

The fastest growing suicide demographic is young men. It is now the single biggest killer of men in Japan aged 20 - 44. Evidence suggests that these young people are killing themselves because they have lost hope and are incapable of seeking help. While many older people still enjoy job security and generous benefits, nearly 40% of young people in Japan are unable to find stable jobs.

Pray that the Lord would lead us to those whose hearts He has prepared as we seek to reach those who have lost hope.