



November 2022

One of the major religions of the world, originating in India 2,500 years ago, is Buddhism. The religion has millions of followers around the world but is most common in parts of Asia. Recently, I was training a group of translators from 10 different Southeast Asian countries and many of these translators are from countries with populations that are predominantly Buddhist.

In 30 years of supporting Bible translation projects, I never would have imagined what I learned these past few weeks.



In this workshop, I met and trained two who had lived in a Buddhist monastery. They both entered the monastery at the age of 12. One of them (I will call him Drew) shared that his parents sent him to live and attend school in the monastery because they wanted to show their devotion. They wanted Drew to be in the monastery for one year and then, at the end of that year, return home to be with the family. With a smile, he told me that instead of staying for one year, he stayed for 26 years. He became a monk and also a teacher in their school. He had gained influence and position. After decades of commitment to the monastic life, he left. Ironically his parents, who wanted Drew to leave the monastery after one year, were disappointed when he left 26 years later. They wanted him to continue. As he shared about his life it was intriguing to learn more about monastic life and the language into which he was translating the Bible.

The language stirred my interest.



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He shared that when young men join a monastery they begin to learn a language called Pali. Drew learned Pali and, eventually, he became a teacher of Pali in their school system. What surprised me and still fascinates me is that nobody speaks Pali, at least not as their first language. Pali is a religious language that is primarily read and passed on from monks to pupils. Most languages thrive or at least survive because mothers and those in the home teach their young children the language they speak. (Mother-tongue language) Pali is completely outside the family circle. It survives and thrives because the religious writings are in the Pali language. I was told that there may be as many as ½ a million monks who know and use Pali.

Translating the Bible into Pali reminds me of what is written in Isaiah.

The Lord declares:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways,

As the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it

without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,

so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty,

but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (NIV)



The Bible is for everyone—going out into languages, accomplishing His purpose.

Thank you for your partnership in Bible translation.

Brian Renes