

Real Life Stories
Teenager Mary Jones Took a Walk and Paved The Way

IT WAS DARK when Mary and her mother were walking home from the meeting. As they carefully kept to the path in the darkness, Mary recalled the preacher's words from Psalm 119:105; "*God's Word is a lamp to my feet and a light unto my path.*" How Mary wished she had a Bible of her own so that she could learn more of God's Word! Mary Jones was born December 16, 1784 in the Welsh village of Llanfihangel Pennant, at the foot of Wales' famous Cedar Idris. Her father had been a weaver, but he died when Mary was four. Mary and her mother were poor but they got on as best they could.

When Mary was about eight, a school was established about an hour's walk from Llanfihangel. Mary took the two-hour round trip walk each day and progressed well in reading. She wished she had a Bible to read, but her mother told her it was too expensive. A neighbor did have a Bible, and every Saturday afternoon Mary went to read Mrs. Evans' Bible for several hours. She read through book after book.

One day as Mary was doing her chores, washing her family's clothes in the river, she got the idea that she could earn some money by washing for other people to save enough money for a Bible of her own. When Mrs. Evans heard of Mary's plan, she gave Mary some chickens to raise. When the chicks became hens, Mary could earn money by selling the eggs. Mary soon found other ways for earning money too -- looking after children, weeding gardens and knitting socks.

After six years of careful saving, Mary finally had enough money to buy a Bible, but there was none to be bought in her village. Rev. Thomas Charles sold them in Bala, but that was over twenty-five miles away! In the summer of 1800, when not yet sixteen, Mary set out alone with the money she had earned on the long walk to Bala. She even took off her shoes and carried them so they wouldn't wear out. Although a long and difficult walk, it really didn't hurt that much as Mary was so full of anticipation.

When she finally arrived and found Rev. Charles, he told her he only had one Bible left and it had already been promised to someone else. Mary could not hold back the tears. After working and saving for six years, then walking over twenty-five miles, Mary could not help but be extremely disappointed. All her work seemed wasted! But when Rev. Charles heard Mary had worked six years to buy a Bible, he made her take his last one. The other person could wait a little longer.

Rev. Charles was tremendously moved by Mary's efforts to obtain a Bible. Many people in Wales and throughout Britain were coming to Christ; and Bibles should be more readily available for these new converts. In December 1802, Rev. Charles was in London and laid before a committee of the Religious Tract Society the desperate need for Bibles in the Welsh language. Rev. Charles told the committee about Mary Jones and all she had to do in order to get a Bible of her own. Though the committee appreciated the need for Bible distribution, neither the Religious Tract Society nor the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge felt they could meet the demand. Rev. Joseph Hughes suggested that, "a society might be formed for the purpose -- and if for Wales, why not for the Kingdom; why not for the whole world?"

Fifteen months later, March 7, 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed, "for the wider distribution of the Scriptures, without note or comment." The Clapham Sect, a group of influential evangelicals, including William Wilberforce, were important in establishing the BFBS. The BFBS was concerned with distributing Bibles throughout the whole world, and within a few months the Gospel of John was issued in the Mohawk language. The Society was solely concerned with people having access to the Scriptures.

Auxiliary local groups arose throughout Britain to raise funds and distribute Bibles in their localities. Similar Bible Societies were formed in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia, France, Greece and the USA. The Bible Societies worked closely with the growing missionary endeavors to bring the Bible in other languages. All of the great missionaries, including William Carey in India, Robert Morris in China, Henry Martyn in India, and Adoniram Judson in Burma, relied on the Bible Societies for support. By 1907 the BFBS had distributed 203,931,768 Bibles, Testaments, and portions of Scripture throughout the world. This worldwide movement of Bible translation affected men and women of many nationalities and church traditions, but in its inception, it grew out of local needs, such as those of little Mary Jones.

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Mary died at the age of 80 (16 December 1784 – 28 December 1864). In the town of Llanfihangel, a monument has been erected with the following inscription in English and Welsh:

In memory of MARY JONES, who in the year 1800, at the age of 16 walked from here to Bala, to procure from the Rev. Thomas Charles, B.A., a copy of the Welsh Bible. This incident was the occasion of the formation of The British and Foreign Bible Society. Erected by the Sunday Schools of Meridneth.

.Gleaned from Christian History Institute

