

**King James Bible Study Correspondence Course**

*An Outreach of Highway Evangelistic Ministries*  
5311 Windridge lane ~ Lockhart, Florida 32810 ~ USA

**Women Heroes of the Faith**  
**Lesson 5**

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**Isobel Kuhn**  
**Missionary to the Lisu people in China**

It was the middle of a cold December night in the early 1920's when Isobel Miller, a twenty year old from Vancouver, Canada, was slowly making her way down the dark hall of her parents' home. She was on her way to the bathroom to drink from the bottle marked "poison" in order to end her life. She had reached a low point after finding out that her fiancé had been unfaithful to her. This knowledge had left Isobel heartbroken and feeling as though no one would ever love her.

As her hand reached out and gripped the bathroom doorknob, she heard a groan from her father who was sleeping in his room nearby. The sound of her father startled her into a grim reality – If she took her life, her dear, loving father would be devastated, thinking she had gone to hell. Isobel didn't really believe in hell, but she knew her father did and that he would think she was suffering there for all eternity. She loved her father too much to cause him such agony, so she turned and quietly went back to her room, her life having been saved by the sound of her father.

The despair Isobel was feeling was heightened by the fact that her belief in God had been undermined through the teaching of her college professors and the opinions of fellow students. She had discovered that there was a prevailing idea among the "educated" that only unenlightened people believed in God and the Bible. Even though she had been brought up in a Christian home and had attended church her whole life, hearing these things over and over had brought Isobel to the point where she questioned God's existence, the truth of the Bible, and whether there was a heaven or a hell. Isobel ran these things over and over in her mind, but every time she would think of a reason to believe, one of her professors would say something that would again bring about uncertainty in her. She said in later years that she did not think she had become an atheist, but rather an agnostic, not knowing if there really was a God. Now, in the depths of despair, she did not have the hope and comfort offered by God to all who believe. The anguish she felt was great indeed.

Having returned to her bedroom, she sat on her bed in hopelessness. She did not want to live but could not die. In this state of mind she suddenly cried out to God saying, "God, if there be a God, if You will prove to me that You are, and if You will give me peace, I will give You my whole life. I will do anything You ask me to do, go where You send me, obey You all my days."

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With this prayer, that she wasn't even sure would be heard, Isobel climbed into her bed and fell asleep. She slept more soundly that night than she had in a long time and awoke with her mind at peace. She remembered her prayer; and, though she was still doubtful, she wondered at the peace she felt. This was just the beginning of many ways God would prove Himself and His love for her. Eventually Isobel would come to a full and complete trust in the true and living God, and she would keep her promise to obey His call in her life.

As is often the case, the Lord had a number of good Christian folks He would use to encourage, guide, and pray for Isobel. Some of them she had known as a child, others she would meet along the way, and still others she would never actually meet. Some were old, some were young. Some were well known missionaries, others were unknown prayer warriors. Some gave of their wisdom; some gave of their money; some gave of their time, holding her before the Lord in prayer.

One of these special people was Mrs. Whipple, an elderly woman Isobel's father knew from Seattle. After Isobel was saved, Mrs. Whipple was someone she was able to really talk to, who truly helped her get her life on track for the Lord. Perhaps the most important thing Mrs. Whipple ever did for Isobel was invite her to The First Bible Conference. This was an annual Bible conference held at a camp site in Washington State. Isobel agreed to go and loved it so much that she attended again the following year.

At this Bible conference, she met many people who would become very dear to her throughout the rest of her life, and one man in particular who would change the whole course of her life. This man was James O. Fraser, missionary to the Lisu people of China. He was the main speaker at the conference the second year Isobel attended. He told about a remote tribe of people in the mountains of China who, like everyone else in the world, needed to be told of Jesus and His free gift of salvation. Isobel was greatly moved when she heard the story of the mountain dwelling Lisu people.

At the close of the conference, Mr. Fraser said he needed young men who would be willing to go as missionaries to help with the work in Lisuland. Isobel prayed, "Lord, I would be willing to go. Only I am not a man." She left the conference that year unable to forget about the Lisu people.

Mr. Fraser needed willing men, and there was a willing man that God made sure to bring into Isobel's life. His name was John Kuhn. He was a student at Moody Bible Institute and worked in the cafeteria as a dishwasher. Through various, seemingly miraculous means, God had brought Isobel to this college as well to prepare her for missionary service.

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Like John Kuhn, she worked in the school cafeteria to help pay for her tuition.

One day as she waited for the hot food she was to serve, her eyes met the eyes of the dishwasher. They both quickly looked away, but they both felt the same strange sensation that they had just seen someone special. It would be three more months before they would be introduced to each other; soon afterward they discovered their mutual burden for the lost people in China.

After completing their Bible education, John and Isobel applied for the China Inland Mission and were both accepted. John, having graduated a semester ahead of Isobel, set sail for China before her. But when her time came to go, the China Inland Mission was no longer able to send missionaries to China because of political uprisings in the country. Isobel had to stay behind until things calmed down.

The Lord used this time to prepare her for life as a missionary. She was asked to be the superintendent of the Vancouver Girls Corner Club. This was a group of Christian business girls who had formed an evangelistic ministry to reach lost ladies in Vancouver. They held weekly meetings where they invited unsaved friends and acquaintances. Though the position of superintendent did not pay much, it was a perfect fit for Isobel. Years later she wrote that through it God had made her conscious of the needs of others and had taught her how to pour herself into their lives. These were lessons that would serve to be valuable to her when the door to China reopened two years later. John and Isobel were finally married in their beloved China on November 4, 1929.

For twenty three years John and Isobel were missionaries to the Lisu people in southern China, until they ultimately had to flee the country in 1952, during the communist takeover. From there they went to Thailand where there were more Lisu people as well as other unreached tribal groups. As with most missionaries, the Kuhns faced many challenging difficulties. They had to master an incredibly complex language with differing dialects. They had to live in the filthy conditions of lice ridden people - people who had no concept of cleanliness, manners, or privacy. They had to surrender basic comforts and possessions in order to reside in the mountains of Lisuland.

Because their service to the Lord spanned both World War II and the communist takeover, they faced many harrowing circumstances and often found themselves separated from each other and their two children, Kathryn and Daniel. However, they were faithful and diligent in spite of it all and successfully established churches, the Rainy Season Bible School, and the Girls' Bible School. They were witnesses to everyone with whom they came into contact; and prayer was their greatest

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means of accomplishing things for God. They put Him first in all areas of their lives. It was a genuine love for the people and for God that motivated them to endure the hardships and pursue the duties of their calling. John and Isobel's work among the Lisu was significant, leaving a lasting legacy.

In the year 1954, the couple received some disheartening news – Isobel had cancer. Her ministry among the people she loved so very much had to end as she needed to return to the United States for treatment. On March 20, 1957, she succumbed to the disease and was taken home to heaven. Why God would take away someone who was so busy for Him may be hard to understand, but the Bible says in Isaiah 55:8-9, "...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Truly God is wiser than man. He can see the bigger picture and works accordingly.

During the two years Isobel battled cancer, she found she had much time on her hands. She used that time to pray for her beloved Lisu people, but she also discovered something else and had this to say about it, "...I was sent a new lesson or an old lesson in a new form. I had to refuse to allow my imagination to play with my future. The future, I believe, is ordered of God, and no man can guess it. For me to let myself imagine how or when the end would come was not only unprofitable, it was definitely harmful, so I had to bring my thoughts into captivity that they might not dishonor Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5). The best way to do this, I found, was to engage in some interesting work. While still confined to bed I tried prayer and reading. As I became stronger I set about writing a book – I drew up a daily schedule that would come within the limits of what strength I had, and tried to keep it faithfully. This I enjoyed and I can say truthfully that on this platform of a dread disease there have been many months of very real happiness."

Artistic in nature Isobel had always had a love for beautiful literature, so it came natural for her to put words on paper in an interesting and eloquent manner. She ended up writing several books, and over the years those books have impacted the hearts of many people.

In her book *By Searching*, Isobel takes the reader along with her on her journey of seeking God and finding out the truth not only of His existence, but also of His goodness. She likens her doubts and agnostic ideals to dwelling in the "misty flats" a place where one drifts helplessly and hopelessly. She wrote that the question, "*Canst thou by searching find out God?*" (Job 11:7a) finally pierced through the mist, and she discovered that "by searching" for God, one could indeed find his or her way out of the "misty flats" and onto a firm foundation, Jesus Christ. She included one example

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after another of how godly people interceded for her and helped her throughout her time of searching.

Isobel's book entitled *In the Arena*, chronicles the ministry she and John shared among the Lisu in China. In this book she describes the Lisu people and their beautiful, mountainous homeland. She also introduces the reader to various "platforms" within her missionary service where the Lord taught her significant lessons about trusting Him alone in all matters. On each platform, her faith grew as she discovered that lasting joy and peace come from waiting on God for His timing and direction. She describes her last platform as "the platform of a dread disease," revealing it as simply a "springboard for heaven."

*Ascent to the Tribes* is the book that takes the reader along with the Kuhn's as they transferred their ministry to northern Thailand after fleeing China. This new work brought the light of the gospel to people who had known only the darkness, superstition, and bondage of their false beliefs.

In yet another book, *Whom God Has Joined*, Isobel candidly wrote about her marriage, sharing various stories that demonstrate that two people, who have chosen to put God first in everything, can have a lasting, happy, and meaningful life together. Willingness to be patient, to wait on God, and to cheerfully submit to her husband were just a handful of the lessons shared in this enjoyable book.

Isobel wrote many other books in addition to the aforementioned: books about individuals from among the Lisu people and books about other dedicated missionaries who served with the China Inland Mission. As her strength began to fail, her writing had to come to an end. She was left with only strength enough to pray for the ministry; soon this too was more than she could accomplish. John wrote, "Isobel slipped away from us in a series of surrenders." She had to surrender her missionary work with the Lisu, her book writing, her work of prayer, and finally her family as she entered into the presence of her Saviour.

The reason Isobel's books have had such an impact on people is not because of the exciting stories or because of her engaging style of writing, though these both exist. It is because Isobel shared the lessons God taught her throughout her life. She wrote honestly and humbly of her failures, her fears, and the times when selfishness or pride hindered her. She wrote of strong and godly men and women who helped her, and about what she gleaned from their wisdom and guidance. (Proverbs 27:17) She wrote about the struggles she had and the way God showed her how to overcome them and to continue on for Him. Her approach was never to exalt herself or her and John's missionary work, but rather to present herself as a broken,

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marred vessel that God molded and made into a vessel fit for His service. (Jeremiah 18:4).

Isobel has been in heaven now for over sixty years, but her words still live on in her books. People are to this day being blessed and encouraged through them.

On the last page of *By Searching*, Isobel implored her readers with these words, "And now, as reader and author part, I can find no better words to use than these same, 'Let us go on.' (Philippians 3:14) Go on searching and exploring the greatness and the dearness of our God. He has no favorites. He has said, '*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*' (Jeremiah 29:13). Notice that last phrase, for it is the only condition. There must be inner honesty and undivided loyalty – that is the only stipulation...'*he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*' (Hebrews 11:6b.)"

### Notes

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**Women Heroes of the Faith**  
**Lesson 5 - Isobel Kuhn**

Names \_\_\_\_\_

1. What drove Isobel & John from ministering to the Lisu people?
2. What stopped Isobel from killing herself?
3. Where did John and Isobel meet?
4. What important lesson can we learn from the instructions at Bible Colleges?
5. Who did God use to change the thinking of Isobel's life by creating the interest in going to China for the Lisu people?
6. What did Isobel say to God when she was requesting that He prove Himself to her?
7. How many of us have said the same thing but never kept our word after He did prove Himself to us?
8. Why did Isobel have to stop her primary ministering to the Lisu people?
9. What are some of the lessons we can learn from Isobel's life?
10. After Isobel was diagnosed with her life threatening disease, did she just give up; what did she do from that point on?

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11. Explain how 2 Corinthians 10:5 applies to Isobel's life? And yours also?
12. Explain how Jeremiah 18:4 applies to Isobel's' life? And yours also?
13. Explain how Hebrews 11:6 applies to Isobel's life? And to yours also?
14. Why would Isobel, her husband and children endure such hardship for people they never knew?

Note to the reader:      You are saved, what is your purpose, in the heart of God?

**True/False**

- Once Isobel was diagnosed with cancer, she just gave up and died.
- During her ministry Isobel was subjected to filthy conditions and lice.
- God held Isobel back from going to China to teach her lessons that would help her in her ministry.
- People that did not even know Isobel, prayed for her during and before her ministry.



Scripture memorization, write out these verses on the back on this page:  
Hebrews 11:6; Philippians 4:14; Jeremiah 18:4 (Must be in KJV)

Any questions?