

RUSSIA AND CHECHNAYA September 2003

Chechnaya and Southern Russia

There is generally not a high incidence of persecution in Russia, but in some local areas there is without doubt a conscious attempt by the Orthodox church to persecute our members. This is especially so in parts of southern Russia bordering on the troubled Caucasian republics, where there is guerrilla warfare between Moslem rebels and the Russian security forces. Readers of carelink will recall the story of Bro. S, whose zealous preaching resulted in him being singled out by the secret police, his mother murdered and him being blamed for it, his imprisonment and subsequent release after our intervention. We have been reporting through carelinks of his continued zealous preaching and his subsequent re-arrest under the false allegation that he had disrupted a Russian Orthodox service. He has to appear in court soon and is seeking to lay low and flee the area. Funds have been provided for him to relocate. The tragedy is that his sister-wife, sis. L, has just given birth to a baby- she worked, but was told by her employer to either get an abortion or leave. She refused to get an abortion and therefore has no work nor financial support from her employer nor the state. Amazingly, they continue preaching. Sis. L is herself a refugee from Grozny, Chechnaya, where her family home lies in ruins. Bro. S has bravely been preaching in Chechnaya, and we are pleased to announce the baptism of NIKOLAJ from Chechnaya. He is on the run himself now, and has many amazing stories of God's deliverance. For example, he says he was rounded up along with 8 others and taken away to be executed, but when it came to his turn they stripped him naked and told him to walk home. There are other contacts there but due to the very hard nature of communication and transport there I missed an appointment with another woman who has read Bible Basics and seeks baptism. Br. S. is tireless in his preaching efforts, despite it being so much wiser, humanly, for him to say nothing and lay low- just as many of us as may think it is at times in our lives. But he is convinced that he is called in order to preach; and he is determined to remain faithful to the promise he made to God whilst in prison to found an ecclesia in his area. He is doing quite well- several have been baptized this year. However there is no doubt that he is a marked man. One of his recent contacts, Bro. VLADIMIR, recently had his house burnt down. We are arranging funds to be sent to help him in this. There were several desiring interview and baptism, but because of lack of time and missed connections- transport in the area is really very unreliable- I didn't have the time required to do this properly, and so I left it that Br. S. would complete the work and inform us of how it went.

Bro. S and Sis L look terribly thin and scared. I discussed with them the possibility of a time of tribulation for the saints in the last days, and from their perspective it surely seems to have begun. They are deeply spiritual people, faithfully reading by the Bible Companion and somewhat reminiscent of our brave Iranian brethren in their total devotion to spreading the word under persecution. They are terribly frightened about Br. S's court case with the Russian Orthodox church-



here is a photo of our brother with the final summons to court

We really must pray for them. I assured them that we would. We have sent funds to them to relocate but in order to be legally registered in another area of Russia they need to be owners of land- it's not so easy to just relocate in Russia without 'propiska', legal registration. They really need yet more funds I think by all means we must continue to fund them in this, as despite their dream of establishing an ecclesia where they are, it just seems to me that the risk is too great for them to stay.

Irbit

I left them, so wishing, as with all these dear persecuted ones, that I could just permanently live with them until the Lord comes. I travelled around 3000 km from there by bus, plane and chartered car to Irbit, where a very zealous elderly couple [Nadia & Anatoly] live who are refugees from Kazakhstan. Despite great poverty they preach to many people, and there are many students of Bible Basics in this rather broken down town in the Urals. It was a pleasure to interview and baptize VIKTOR, son of an East German pastor who was deported to Siberia from East Germany by Stalin in the 1950s, and also DENIS, who has been studying with us for some years, who travelled in to meet me from Tyurinsk. Bro. Anatoly wasn't at home as he had gone back to his birthplace to try to get his birth certificate; this is in Belgorod, Southern Russia, about 2,200 km away. Nadia was very broken down because she had just received a telegram saying that he had been taken ill and was in hospital but he had no money for the bills and the return rail ticket. I gave her the funds and she will send them down to him. Again I assured her of your prayers.

It was good to meet Sis. Tanya again, baptized at the Moscow Bible School. She is totally blossoming with the Truth and giving Bible Basics to all she meets.

Talitsa

I journeyed on through the Urals to Talitsa, where there is an active ecclesia led by our inimitable brother 'Big Sasha'. He and sis Lidija are so totally devoted to the Lord's work it is wonderful to see. The ecclesia meets twice / week, on Wednesdays for the daily Bible readings and on Sundays for the breaking of bread. They get a lot of opposition from the other groups in the town. It was a pleasure to baptize SERGEJ, husband of Sis. Vera, who has been reading Bible Basics for some years and finally has decided for the Lord. Vera was just so delighted at her husband's baptism.



Vera & Sergej

There is a great partnership between 'Big Sasha' and young brother Evgenij. Evgenij preaches to all the customers where he works and directs them to Sasha who gives them classes. These two have spread Bible Basics all over the place. I had an interesting experience in the railway station- in Russia, one must show their passport in order to buy long distance rail tickets, as the tickets have your name printed on them. So I presented my passport to the woman behind the counter in the station, she made out my ticket, noticed my name and then grinned- and pulled out a copy of Bible Basics, asking if I was the author! Sasha had given her a copy and she reads it at work...

Some distance from Talitsa lives LUDMILA, an educated, thoughtful woman who had come to the Moscow Bible School in August but was not ready for baptism then. After a lot of discussion with her about various 'difficult passages' it was a pleasure to baptize her.

One thing especially noticeable in these small ecclesias is the faith and spiritual devotion of the older sisters. Often ill and with tiny pensions, they devote themselves to prayer and what Bible reading they can manage given poor eyesight. They are extremely well informed of the situation with our Iranian brethren and assure them of their constant prayers. Sasha's dear, one eyed mum is one such "salt of the earth" sister whom we can all surely confidently look forward to serving with in the ages of eternity:



Sis. Lidija

I am pleased to report that Br. Evgenij's army service problems seem to have subsided for the moment, thanks to your prayerful support and to a loving Father.

Omsk Obl.

I had a warm send off from the ecclesia in Talitsa and laden with gifts of carrots, jam, fruit etc. I took the night train another 800 km into Siberia, getting off at Omsk and travelling further by chartered car to the village of Azovo, some way out in the steppe beyond Omsk, in what used to be called the German autonomous region. Here there is a small ecclesia which it is just a pure spiritual joy to be present at. Comprised mainly of Germans who either descended from the German soldiers who surrendered in WW2 to the Russians and weren't executed, or from Germans from the former East Germany sent there by Stalin, these elderly sisters are simply totally devoted to the word. Every Bible Basics we send out there is passed around the community, and the ecclesia faithfully meet each Sunday for the breaking of bread. It was a joy to interview and baptize VLADIMIR & OLGA, EMIL, EVDOKIJA and IDA.

Sis. Ida is our most elderly sister in Russia. A German Jewess, she fled from Germany and after an eventful few decades, ended up in the German autonomous region in Siberia. And now, she has found the Hope of Israel and been baptized. She is very much alert and perceptive. The prophets foretold that God will gather His Israel in the last days "one by one" and it is an honour to be part of this.



Sis. Ida.

This little group are really a great example of where your support plus local zeal have been blessed by the Lord of the harvest. Every dollar spent sending preaching material and literature out to such groups, plus the cost of visiting them and providing pastoral support, is really producing a great harvest to His glory.



Azovo ecclesia

I asked them to run the breaking of bread as they usually did when I was not present. Br. Aleksej leads the group in the Bible readings from the Bible Companion- some of the sisters say they read the chapters two or three times / day as they have nothing much else to do in the village- and then he reads the exhortation for the week which is sent out to them. On this occasion, Sis. Frida had written a poem about the garden of Gethsemane which she read out to us. Please remember them in your prayers and be inspired by their faithfulness. Sis. Berta thanks those who enabled her cataract operation, she says that it is her great joy now to be able to read Scripture again clearly.

Photo:



Sis Frida reading her poem

Photos: DH, 09/03

D.H.