

An American Brother's Journey to Turkey January 2009

There are times when I read the latest Carelink email and just kind of nod and smile. Could people around the world really be that excited about the things of God? We all question things in our hearts and in our minds, no matter what the evidence. In fact I believe most of us are encouraged "to test the spirits to see that they are true", in our Bible study we are told to question everything, to not be afraid of searching for "truth". With that type of a mindset I headed to Turkey to see what type of progress is being made with the brothers and sisters in eastern Turkey. So I ask that you please read this and reflect upon it and pray about our brothers and sisters in these most awful situations and if you have any questions or desire to support to contact us.

When Duncan and I arrived in Turkey we went to the safe house to meet up with a couple of sisters, one from Ukraine and one from Russia. We took them out to eat and headed back to the safe house to wait for brother H, originally from Iran who is hoping to get to Canada this year. As we waited we talked about the Ukraine bible school and shared pictures and videos of our brothers and sisters throughout Russian and Eastern Europe. Then we prayed together and had a simple breaking of bread. Brother H arrived after work and we talked at quite some length before we had to head back to our hotel because of an early flight to another part of Turkey the following day.

Turkey is a relatively liberal Islamic country, many woman do not wear head coverings in the big cities, and most men are without beards, but in all the places we went to you could hear the calls to prayer 5 times a day. Ironically at times, we would begin our prayers, only to hear the Islamic prayer call in the background. The spires of the mosques can be seen at almost any vantage point in any city.

As we arrived at our destination in eastern Turkey, an internal flight, we met up with our brother S. from Iraq who is living in Turkey waiting for the U.N. to clear him and his family for relocation to a western country. Brother S. was a translator for the U.S. army and was able to translate for us when we were in Turkey. Brother S. brought us to the place he was staying to meet his landlord. His landlord agreed to take Brother S. and his family in while they awaited UNHCR help. This man had no reason to do that, no financial gain or anything. He simply took compassion on one of our brothers. Please keep him in your prayers, as brother S. and others talk quite openly about their beliefs to him. After a short visit we met another brother at this house, brother P. Brother P and brother S. would be our sort of tour guides as we went throughout the immigrant area visiting folks.

To convert from Islam is not an easy thing to do. Many times even family members will turn on you. One such case is of a sister who converted to Christianity and her own father has tried to kill her at least twice. She had to move to a smaller city in Turkey just so her relatives would not find her. In hard line Islamic societies, conversion to Christianity is even punishable by death. I bring this up, so that as you read the accounts below, you will see the faith of our brothers P and S and what they have to contend with as they preach the gospel. It is truly a labor of love.

Brother S and brother P have talked to brother S's neighbor about the things of God. They are a young Kurdish couple, M and S, that have fled Iran. We were invited in and all given cups of tea. As we drank our tea, we discussed about the things of the Truth. They had many questions and we asked them many questions as well. We talked about the Kingdom of God, how there is only one God, that Jesus is His son, the importance of baptism, prayer and studying the bible. The joy

and excitement they had in finding a peaceful religion was evident not only in their words, but in their body language. After quite some time in discussion, they demonstrated themselves ready to be baptized, which we did. We now have a new sister and brother in Christ! Please pray for them, that they may be strong in times of great difficulties. All of the people we have met are waiting and hoping for immigration papers to a Western country of some kind or another; some have waited years and years.

When we said our good byes, brother S and P and us headed out. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of what was to be the single most profound spiritual day I have ever encountered in my life. We wandered around the sided streets and back roads to another house of friends of brother P to whom he has preached /Bible Basics/. Since his conversion he has spread the gospel like wildfire. There is only one Christian church in this area of Turkey and they require that you give 10% of all your earnings to the pastor every week. Much like the televangelists in the U.S.A. who say things like, “for only \$29.95 sent in the next ten minutes, you will be healed!” These people are so strapped financially due to the fiscal demands of the Turkish government; Turkey makes it extremely difficult for any refugee that comes in to the country. They cannot work legally; if they do work illegally and are caught then they can be repatriated to Iran and the death sentences that await many of them. Plus they must pay a few hundred US\$ each 6 months for residence permits, and also pay for their childrens' schooling expenses. The truth as we know is, “the free gift of God.” So it was a blessing being able to encourage and teach the true joy that leads to salvation.

At the next house where the friends of our brother P lived and visited at times, were 5 people who have been talking to our brothers- P, M, K, A and F. We talked quite openly with them about our faith and the need for baptism for all those who believe. Each one expressed there joy in what they have been studying and what they have learned through exposition from our brothers. We drank tea and expounded upon the things of God at considerable length and heard their confessions of faith. Our lives were talked about, our struggles, the fear of Islamic persecution. One gal told us that she had baptized herself a few years ago when she first believed in Jesus and read the New Testament, understanding that this is what she must do! But now she had learnt more from /Bible Basics/ she wished to be baptized again. We discussed the difficulties that they faced being refugees in a land that did not want them. Much like the Israelites when Egypt would add extra burdens on them because they despised them. All five were clearly ready to be baptized into Christ, we obliged and encouraged them in their reading of scriptures and praying. Each little group we met, we talked about the importance of daily bible reading and prayer to sustain us during the most difficult times in our lives. Again, we had to say our good byes because our brothers S and P said there was even more people who would like to be baptized .

Again as we wandered through side streets and back alleys lto the next place, being led by our brothers walking arm in arm (which is an Iranian custom), I was amazed at the pure joy these people had as they came to Christ. I reflected on my own life, would I have the courage to convert to Christianity if I knew what lay ahead? Would I be so open about my faith, knowing the consequences that may lie ahead if I was found out? My mind was racing at the time we made it to the next house.

We made it to the house and brother P tossed a rock at a top floor window. It took him a couple times before we heard a voice tell us to come up. Brother P made a joke about how modern their technology was! As we reached the top floor and went in, we met a family of a mother and father and two kids. We sat down on the sofa and drank tea and ate apples and oranges together. We

talked openly about the scriptures and were asked all types of questions. The father at the house asked us a most pointed question, “how do I share what I know and believe about Christianity, knowing what the consequences of my conversion can do to me?” We talked about the change we go through as we believe in Christ and try to follow his commandments. We discussed how the greatest witness we could be towards anyone is how we change our lives to reflect Christ and live by his principles. Most times it is not our words which convert people, it is who we are and how we act that people will ask us why we do the things we do. The discussion lasted quite some time. We prayed together, and as we prayed, the mother was on her knees with her hands folded with her two kids doing the same. They wanted to be baptized so they can be with Christ in the kingdom. We baptized them [M & F] and encouraged them to be strong in the word and prayer.

At this point we left and headed over to brother P's house. At this time it was nearing dark. We followed our brothers throughout the little side streets wondering about our experience. We were happy to be used as a tool to by our God to help so many on the road to the kingdom. What lay in store for us at our brother's house will forever be etched into my consciousness.

Upon our arrival we could see that there were 3 guests at their house mingling with both brother P and brother S's families. Two of them were perusing brother P's artwork and paintings and signing a contract to have him do more work for their art gallery located about two hours away from where we were. The other guest sat off to the side glancing at us from time to time. We talked to the art gallery dealers for about 20 minutes before they left. I talked about the artists in my family and that I have always had an affinity for art ever since I was a child. Funny being on the other side of the world and getting a business card from an art dealer! Brother P's art is amazing!

After the art dealer's left we talked to brother P's other guest about the things of God at quite length. He had come to us to be baptized. He was so excited about the things of God! He wanted so badly to follow Christ in all aspects of his life. Again as we expounded upon the scriptures we could see the “pure joy” talked about in the scriptures. The hope in his eyes, the excitement in his voice, an amazing witness to what the gospel is all about. This fellow too wanted to be baptized. This is when I truly felt the presence of God. After we baptized our new brother A, he burst into tears of joy. Just imagine being in an Islamic country and a grown man, only a couple of years older than yourself, hugging you while he sobs great tears of joy after he is baptized. He was so thankful and so happy.

After the baptism, we stayed a while with our new brother and our brother art and s's family. We talked about the joy of the kingdom and played with all of the little kids. A meal was prepared and we all ate together, reflecting upon the things that God is doing throughout the world. He is calling out a people for His name, and to be able to help in such a small way is beyond describing. The families of brother S and brother P have become best friends- the children are about the same age, and the wives get on well together. So they spend a lot of the days together. It's wonderful to see this kind of fellowship in Christ, and the true friendship which comes from knowing the Truth and sharing the risky life in Christ together. We provided welfare funds, which would enable the children to go to school. They were thrilled with our presence, their lives are very boring and limited otherwise.

As I sat on the bed in the hotel, I reflected upon all these things, trying not to forget any of the details. The people I met, the smiles, the tears, the joy and the pain that we all shared made me consciously aware of the fact that we are living in incredible epoch of time. The return of Christ

could be any day. There is so much more that can and should be done. How do we help our new brothers and sisters? How do we encourage their walk in Christ? They speak two languages, Sorani and Farsi. Biblical literature is limited to Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs and the New Testament in Sorani, and they are quite hard to come by. Farsi seems to be widely available in both the old and new testaments. There is a need for materials in both languages. How do we help them grow in the word in such a repressive governmental system? What can we do? The issues affecting our brothers and sisters are immeasurable. If you have any ideas please write or email us to let us know.

I took a trip to the other side of the world with no expectations. Instead I was given an opportunity to live my faith. To help others come to Christ. I saw the faith of others in trying circumstances. I have brothers who are so alive and excited about the things of the truth that they are not afraid to bring it up to others, even if it puts them in harms way. Please consider any help and support you can give. Come over and see for yourself what is going on throughout the world. I pray that God will keep this journey on the forefront of my mind, to help me be more open about spreading my faith back in my homeland.

Peace in Israel's Messiah

Brother Charlie Klennert (Tacoma Ecclesia, U.S.A.)