

Azerbaijan and Russia March 2004

Three of the BBFU team spent a total of 10 days here ministering to the needs of our Iranian refugee brethren and also a growing ecclesia located in a shanty town on the edge of the Caspian Sea.

It was wonderful to meet again our young married couple B & M, whose story is well known amongst us. Arrested in Turkey, deported to Iran, imprisoned, tortured, given the death sentence, miraculously delivered, they lived on the run in Iran for some time before making it out to Georgia at the time of the revolution there.

They were met there and assisted by our indefatigable sister L, who went out alone, with Angelic help and company, to help them. From there they got to Azerbaijan, where we were able to re-connect them with the UNHCR, who have so far been very positive to them and helpful to us. We were delighted to hear that a representative from UNHCR's Geneva head office gave a very positive statement about Christadelphians. So B & M are still waiting for the long process of checks and investigations to be gone through yet again.

The marks of their torture and huge sufferings are above all psychological. They really need expert counselling. However the pictures we took this time showed them smiling more fully than we've ever seen either of them before. We have some lovely shots which we don't feel able to share by email or the net for security reasons but are happy to share in private meetings anywhere and to anyone who'd like to see them.

It was invaluable being able to make a representation to the UNHCR in Baku in person again. They are impressed with the consistency of the same Western people consistently coming to see them, whether it be in Istanbul, Ankara, Tbilisi, Geneva or Baku. We can only give thanks for the Lord's hand upon the rulers of this world for the care of His people.



Photo: Enjoying a meal together



Photo: Bro N typing his translation



Photo: Bro. B. It seems such a long way from his bath-tub baptism in a Tehran apartment block...



Photo: One of the brethren last week, on the shores of the Caspian Sea

We reported that sister S had major nervous problems and has returned to Iran, where she was imprisoned and kept in a metal cage of less than one square metre for 24 hours. A large 'fine' has been paid and she is currently in hiding.

Br N, Sis. E and Sis A remain in Azerbaijan. Their application to the UNHCR for refugee status has been granted and they are expecting to all be in Canada within the next 3 months God willing. This is of course wonderful news and an answer to so much prayer and effort.

However, it is becoming apparent that the huge nervous stress has taken its toll seriously. These brave young lives will never be the same again. It's clear that they need to be supported emotionally, and that they know in truth that we are their true family who will stick by them to the end; as we've often said, if it were our life for theirs, we believe we would give it. They have given up all - good jobs, a university course about to finish, nice apartments, family... for the excellency of knowing Christ. We can only respect them and do all we humanly can for them.

We wonder about our own faith, matched against their examples. Herzl's words come to mind, when he said in Basle in the 19th century that God's people must yet be "more robbed, tortured, beaten and slain before we are ripe for the ideal". Please God the ecclesia of the latter days may be preserved from this. But perhaps it will have to be.

We shared with them the latest news of other persecuted brethren from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Morocco, showing them the pictures on a laptop. And of course we were able to share the joy of the other Iranians who have now made it through all to America and a happy ecclesial life there. The sense of fellowship between us all is just amazing, and the greatest evidence that we are in the ultimately true way of Christ.



Photo : Sharing news of other brethren through photos on the laptop

It was a true joy to do the Bible readings together. They read at length each day, using the Farsi Bible Companion. We'd been reading Leviticus, and they had lots of thoughtful questions. Like 'Each of the tribes received their specific inheritance. What does that mean for us?'

'Clearly some people needed to have laws to worship God by, David prayed at specific times each day- why don't we have such laws today to discipline us in prayer etc?'. As always we enjoyed a lengthy breaking of bread. Seeing them partake of the bread and wine, symbols as they are of the Lord's sufferings, it made it all so real- that we truly are called through those symbols to share in His life, His joys, His sufferings, His struggles, His victory...



Photo : doing the readings together



Photo : Late night conversations- you'll notice the sisters are in their nightdress, and the time on the clock is 02:00 a.m.

They are progressing well with translation work, and have now completed a Farsi translation of "Scriptural Guidelines for Christian Living".

There are several people in Iran desiring baptism and we ask for your prayers and financial support to enable us to meet with them as it will involve them coming out of Iran and meeting us in a neutral area so that the interviews and baptisms can be safely performed. Around US\$1500 is required to get these people to come to another country and be interviewed for baptism.

We also spent some time with the local Azeri ecclesia, who mainly live in a very run down and dirty shanty town on the edge of an oilfield.

They are preaching actively and we were pleased to assist them with the baptism of OLEG as well as meeting a number of Bible Basics contacts there. Young adopted Sister Sasha continues to grow and develop well in the Truth and also at school.

Brother A has had to have both his legs amputated, despite our having given extensive funds for medication to try to avoid this. He is now in a small village near the Iranian border and we understand he is actively witnessing there. His condition is indeed miserable and we stand by him in prayer.

On the return journey from Baku, we made a 1500 km. round trip to a remote village in Belgorodskaya Oblast in Russia to visit the beloved Yurev family. They continue witnessing to all and sundry- the whole village knows of their faith, and many Bible Basics have been distributed by them. It was a pleasure to assist them in the interview and baptism of GENNADY, husband of Sis. Svetlana; ROMAN, husband of Sis. Oksana; and MAXIM, son of Sis. Svetlana. There's nothing quite like seeing the truth take hold upon a family. They are breaking bread weekly very faithfully and reading according to the Companion, and are very proud to be the biggest church apart from the Orthodox in their village!

Finally, in an attempt to encourage those baptized to have a summary record of the things they confessed faith in at their baptized, we have produced a certificate which they and those interviewing and witnessing are to sign and they keep as a record.

It's reproduced below.

It's only a summary of course.

PLEASE do continue your prayers for all these wonderful things the Lord is working with His people.

I was interviewed and baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ

on _____ by: _____ witnessed

by: _____ The following is a summary of what I confessed and believe from my study of the Bible:

There is one God- not a trinity

Jesus Christ is the Son of God but not God Himself, and He did not physically exist before His birth

Jesus Christ had our human nature and temptations and was tempted just as we are, but He never sinned

I therefore and hereby take Him to me as my example, Lord and Saviour.

I understand that He is my representative. By going under the water I share in His death, and die to sin, and by coming up out of the water of baptism, I unite myself with His resurrection and am committed to trying to live a life like His.

I recognize that my real problem is my own temptations and sin, and I undertake to fight against them, always asking myself 'What would Jesus do?'

I realize that the devil or satan refers to this 'adversary' to my salvation- not to a literal dragon or monster.

I believe that when I die, I will remain unconscious in the grave, until the Lord Jesus returns to resurrect me and judge me.

I do not have an 'immortal soul'. By His grace I look forward to being accepted in that day into His Kingdom which I believe will be literally established here on earth.

I believe in the Holy Spirit as the power of God, not as a literal person.

I realize that death is the wages for sin, although 'hell' means only the grave and not a place of torture or literal fire.

I believe salvation is by grace and not by works. God's plan of salvation for me is revealed in the Bible, which is infallibly inspired by God and which I am committed to continuing studying daily.

I realize that there are many false doctrines circulating in the world under the name of Christianity and I will seek to keep separate from these and to meet with other true believers for fellowship and the breaking of bread.

I understand that I must seek to live a life in conformity to God's expressed will in His word. I recognize that marriage should be treated as a permanent bond in which God seeks to join two people together as one flesh for life, and I will not break apart what God has joined together, neither in my life nor in that of others.

I realize that sex outside of marriage and homosexuality are wrong.

I give my life now to the Lord Jesus Christ, to learning of Him and following Him, always from now on asking myself 'What would Jesus do?' in all situations and feelings I am confronted with in life.