

Baltic Bible School, Brothers Viktor, Charles etc June 2010

Isaiah 60 is one of our Bible readings this Sunday according to the Bible Companion, and there's an MP3 on this chapter at <http://aletheiacollege.net/audio/is60.mp3>

Br Steve & Sis Sue Gretton were recently in Latvia for a week and here's their account below of the Bible School and various issues encountered. Brother Steve gave five excellent talks on "Forgiveness" and they are downloadable as MP3 files from <http://hristadelfiane.org/audio/sg1.mp3> ; <http://hristadelfiane.org/audio/sg2.mp3> ; <http://hristadelfiane.org/audio/sg3.mp3> ; <http://hristadelfiane.org/audio/sg4.mp3> ; <http://hristadelfiane.org/audio/sg5.mp3>

Coincidence or the invisible hand of God?

In Acts 16, Paul is constrained by God in various ways to move through Asia Minor towards Macedonia. We don't know precisely how the Holy Spirit worked in forbidding Paul to preach in one place and not allowing them to go in another. We cannot even be sure what is meant by a vision coming to Paul, but Paul and Silas' conclusion is undoubted – the Lord was directing them.

How easy it is to pass off circumstances as coincidences, unless we are willing to see God at work – and so it was during our week in Latvia!

Within hours of arrival we witnessed the baptism of DAINIS a serious and studious young man who was often spotted during the Bible weekend with his head in the scriptures, discussing the Bible, assisting in the kitchen or mending the temperamental oven! Clearly he doesn't intend to be just a passenger in the ecclesia.

We had hoped to visit Br Charles -a refugee from Nigeria - fleeing the most awful Moslem persecution in which 100 of his church including his mother, sister and fiancée were massacred. But he had just been taken to court for his case to be heard. However without papers his case was hopeless.

Later we went to visit Charles and he recounted his tragic story. We wept and prayed with him.

And so for a quiet day of secular sightseeing in Old Town Riga and meet at a cafe for a snack. Vlad had arranged to meet us all there. He wanted to share his Bible Studies with us (he had taught himself Hebrew and Greek during the Soviet period from Bibles his family had hidden) and wanted to discuss connections he was discovering between the curses in Revelation 7-9 and Genesis 3. He desperately needs an eye operation for his cataracts. Surely we can help here. Every time he gets to the head of the waiting list for his operation, he gets missed because there is not enough money to deal with the corrupt system here. Here is a Bible student with an enormous gift and enthusiasm for Bible study. He spends all his time in the library studying. Our brother has a huge folio of notes on the Scriptures, a result of over 30 years careful Bible study. He brought them along to the Bible School to discuss some points in more

detail! You can see them in the photo below:



And so, by chance, (???) Br Mikhayel comes in to use the toilet with RITA. They both used to attend the synagogue. It has taken Rita a long time to gradually come to accept that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. She agreed to come to the Bible School and said she was now ready for baptism! What an opportunity. And how was it that we just happened to be there at that time.

And so to visit Viktor – one of the brothers being taught the necessary skills to be an ecclesial elder. Although only in his early fifties, he has had a stroke. We were in for an awful shock. He was in a filthy ward and was almost completely paralysed and was already developing bed sores. He could only move one arm and leg. Although mentally alert and responsive, his speech was indecipherable, and the ward was hopelessly understaffed (one doctor and a nurse and 4 orderlies to cover 2 wards round the clock)

One of them came to turn him (Coincidence that Cindy qualified as a doctor last year and knew what was needed? Later she was there and diagnosed epilepsy which the hospital had not spotted.) A surly attendant came and roughly turned him – but only if we paid him first! But what do you expect if they are only paid peanuts. As our brother has no relatives and no work, he was just being left there. They didn't even bother feeding or shaving him, and were intending, they said, to "throw him out" to a "pansionat", where he likely would be put with 6 or 7 similar men in a small room and be left in that paralyzed position, unable to get up or feed himself, until he died [which would likely be of bedsores inflammation, says Cindy]. But he could be in that position for years. It would be a fate worse than death; all because he had nobody to pay for care and therapy at this crucial post-stroke stage.

Cindy tried to show Viktor how to do some simple exercises with his remaining strength. We were to see him again later and all we could do for now was to hold his hand and smile encouragement and pray with him.

And so to the North of Latvia where there is a barn converted into a lovely home for a family and a Bible centre ideal for teaching, eating and sleeping. About 60 came and we counted 9 nationalities there, including Br Dan Joseph from Australia who organized the catering. We spent the first day getting things ready for a study on the theme of 'The challenge of forgiving' a major problem for people over here who have suffered so much. There were studies based on Joseph and his brothers, some true stories of Christian forgiveness, a look at why forgiving others is good for ourselves, a study on grace and our response and finally a case study of the life of David and Saul in the context of forgiveness.

Many were taking notes – some of them copious – discussing the subject and comparing scriptures. Two sisters came up to the whiteboard afterwards to complete their notes:



And then ARMANDS approached us. He has been learning the gospel for months but the talks on forgiving had struck a chord and had brought him emphatically to the decision to seek baptism. He told us that all the events of his life seem to have been pushing him to this moment. A tough life under Communism, subsequently a cheating business partner, a wife who left him because he would not take revenge, taking his children with her.



Photo: Armands and Steve after the baptism

And we had the privilege of being in the right place at the right time with the right message. He had only just caught the bus here and had had to stand for 4 hours on the journey. And now he gave his confession of faith and was baptised.

AIVARS also decided that now was the time to be baptised. He has had a hard life and the gospel has been like a beam of light for him – a real hope in a world had side-lined him. So he too put on the saving name of Jesus. In addition, RITA the Jewess was baptized. Carelinks had appealed a few months earlier for your special prayers that she would accept the Gospel; we were the first and only Christian church she had visited after quitting the synagogue. He she is



just before her long awaited and much prayed over baptism:

A sister staying for the weekend had an unexpected visit from her brother. They had had a serious rift some years ago and the relationship had been strained. After he had left, she told us that she had at last been able to forgive him and that they were now reconciled again. Another undesigned meeting. Refugee brother Robert, originally from West Africa, is living at the housing project where the Bible School is held. What a "coincidence" that our newly released brother Charles, also from West Africa, was able to attend. They were obviously and visibly a great encouragement to each other in this strange land so different from their native Africa. These two African brothers were often to be seen in delighted conversation with local brothers and sisters, somehow reaching through the language barrier:



Photo: Breaking bread at the Bible School

After dropping us off at the airport, they turned to the task with dedication and as I write this report I keep receiving emails on the progress. They have negotiated a special electric bed and proper treatment for the bed sores. Physiotherapy has started and Viktor is beginning to respond. He now has a cassette player and recordings of Bible Schools to listen to. He can

hold and read his Bible a bit. The ecclesia are being mobilised to come and visit him. Plans are afoot to get speech therapy and the work will continue to rehabilitation.

File photo of Brother Viktor [far right] from a previous Carelink. Our brother now lies paralyzed, unable to move or feed himself



And what about the babes and sucklings? Baby Evija has been assisting the work! Her presence in the hospital during the tense negotiations turned out to be a good ice-breaker. Even hardened staff love an innocent baby.

Is this the tip of an health iceberg in the ecclesia that may get bigger? I expect so. Are there others to whom we will have to extend this sort of service? Inevitably. Can we cope? Have we bitten off more than we can chew? It can feel like this, until we turn to Jesus and hear what he says:

“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what you will and it shall be done unto you.”

And so, Lord Jesus, we ask for your help and commit this work to you that our Father and yours may be glorified.

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