

Eastern European Bible School, January 2004

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From 22-29 December there took place the Winter Bible School in a picturesque corner of Sverdlovsk Oblast. Siberia met us with wonderful weather. I had never imagined that the colours in Siberia would be so beautiful. The snow seemed unusually white here and it almost reflected in the sun. The temperature sunk throughout the week but we were so happy together. I have noticed that all Bible Schools are blessed with fine weather. A bus was arranged to take us from the railway station direct to the rest complex where we had our school. The rooms were very clean and we all fitted in, we were initially 54 people from 6 countries [although more joined us later]. We were disappointed that two of our scheduled speakers didn't come, maybe they were frightened by stories of the Siberian Winter. But for those of us who came, no kind of low temperature could damage the warmth which we shared as we realized again that truly we are God's chosen people who had gathered together.

The Bible School was an unusually great success. We were helped by our speakers, Steve Street, Igor Podgaisky, Sasha Solovyov, Marcus Heaster, Dima Krasavin. As always, the highlight of our studies was the reading of the chapters from the Bible Companion each morning, which were led by our brother Duncan. Many questions arose from what we read, there were many comments made, to the extent that nobody in the audience was indifferent to the discussions. I think we all like this session the most because it is conducted solely in Russian language.

The majority of the talks were given by our dear brother Marcus Heaster. He had with him a model of the tabernacle, and he also dressed up Brother Zhennya in the clothes of the High Priest. So we were really able to get a better imagination of how it was for the brothers and sisters in the wilderness as they travelled towards the Kingdom of God, with every detail of the tabernacle having such great significance. Marcus made it very real for us. He gave us each some incense which was like the incense used in the tabernacle, and I can still remember the smell of it which he put on each of our hands and faces.

Marcus spoke about another theme also, about the parables of Jesus, all of which he illustrated so that we could remember them- the camel passing through the eye of the needle, and some candle lamps he brought along to illustrate the parable of the wise and foolish girls. I still remember the lesson from this, that we are the light of the world.

The word of God which we learnt at the Bible School is like the oil in our lamps. We must keep feeding ourselves on that word not just at Bible Schools.

This is the way we can take the light to the world, by having the word within us, and then we will find ourselves taking the knowledge of the word of God to other people too. This is the only way our ecclesias will grow, if we are showing the light of God's love to the people around us and not just keeping to ourselves our theories and knowledge.

The highlight was the baptisms of brothers Anatoly and Valerij, and sister Olga. Bro. Sasha brought along some tapes of songs and hymns which were played. We gave them presents for their baptism, and then we did the breaking of bread. We in fact spent the whole evening together in joy.

Most evenings we had a less formal time together. One evening I told everyone about my reflections upon the book of Esther. I think peoples' reactions were mixed, I felt like Balaam's ass speaking the word of God, anyway, everyone paid much attention. On some evenings DUncan showed us slides of our persecuted brothers and sisters. We also looked back at pictures of our Bible Schools over 10 years. This made our day of parting very hard, we cried and exchanged addresses.

Looking back there was something special about this Bible School. There were many difficulties for many of us to get to this Bible School, especially financially, because of recent problems. But this is why there was 100% attendance of everyone at all lectures, and why there was such a wonderful spirit amongst us. It was only by the faith, hope and love which come from God Himself that this wonderful week could happen. I want to thank the brothers and sisters who translated the talks for us, without them we would have had no contact with our visitors. But especially I want to thank brothers Marcus and Duncan for their great work for us all for the Lord's sake.

I know for sure that this Bible School was a taster of the Kingdom of God which is to come, and it strengthened me to hold on until the coming of the Lord.