

February 2015 Ukraine

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include Mark 4 and there is an MP3 about this chapter at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/mk4.mp3>

You can see the archives of our MP3 files at <http://aletheiacollege.net/archives.html>

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UKRAINE

You've likely seen the harrowing images from Eastern Ukraine on the media- but the suffering there has to be seen to be believed. Significant numbers of soldiers and civilians are being killed each day, with schools and hospitals being purposefully targeted, and civilians regularly coming under shelling. Heating, electricity and food is in short supply in much of Eastern Ukraine with many there dependent upon food handouts by Russian charities- often outside the now empty and abandoned supermarkets- note the many pensioners in the photo of the food line:



We conducted a **Bible School** and pastoral visit to a brother on a collective farm , resulting in the baptisms of ALEXEI, LUBA and TAMARA. We were graciously looked after on our journeys. But the plight of our brothers and sisters, especially pensioners, is very bad. The Ukrainian Grivna is now relatively worthless , but pensions and many wages have hardly increased- whilst prices have at least quadrupled. Infrastructure is broken down, with the Government bankrupt, economy at a standstill and the roads outside Kiev covered with serious potholes; health care is now extremely expensive. Several at the Bible School have various health issues which they need advice and help with. Others were desperately worried about sons and grandsons who are now at the front; another was terribly upset at having no money to bury a relative. Unless the war finishes soon, there are going to be really major needs for our brethren and sisters in Ukraine, many of whom are pensioners. Many of military age have received callup papers, as the Ukrainian military seeks to raise an army of 200,000 men to take control of the country from the rebels, who have claimed to be raising an army of 100,000 . These are big figures. With the West supporting Ukraine and Russia supporting the rebels, poor Ukraine is caught in the middle of a terrible conflict. The Police are going around to the homes of those called up and taking them away to the barracks if they don't report themselves. And nobody who has been called up can now leave Ukraine. Dear brother M, who is currently serving at the Bible Center, is in this position. His parents were at the Bible School in Kiev, eagerly looking at the photos of him we had on our cameras and laptops. But realizing he can now not return to them. Please, please do pray for this terrible situation and for our brethren who are now in hiding- they are grabbing all men up to the age of 59, and legislation has been passed enabling them to call up women too. With Ukraine now filling up with tanks and all kinds of military technology, the largest scale war in Europe since 1945 is now underway, with East pitted against West with Ukraine in the middle, including over 200 of our bre & sis., many elderly. Amidst all this, we are pleased to report that sister Nana announced her engagement to our new brother Alexei, and we're so pleased that in now the later years of life, and amidst all the turmoil of Ukraine, they have found each other as well as the Truth:



We were able to distribute welfare to those in need.

It was good to see brethren present who were baptized over the last year, and everywhere there is evidence of the great spiritual blessing of the *Russian NEV Bible with commentary*- thank you all so much for enabling it:



Brother David Corbin of the Brooklyn, New York ecclesia describes the **Ukraine Bible School**: On the 28th of January around 4:45 pm, Bro. Duncan, Bro. Nathan Badger And me boarded an Air Baltic plane heading from Riga, Latvia to Kiev, Ukraine. After we cleared customs we thought to get some Ukrainian cook food. Well we soon found out that was not going to happen. Apart from a couple coffee stalls, there was no cook food anywhere in this sprawling airport to be found. We walked with our luggage to the nearby airport hotel and was told that due to no guests, they had closed the only restaurant in the hotel. So we headed back to the airport. On our way back, Bro. Duncan was able to negotiate with a taxi driver a reasonable price, to take us to our destination at a Ministry of Defence sanatorium building in the suburbs of Kiev. We arrived around 9:00 pm, I am still curious how the driver found the location with no visible signs on the secondary roads, minimal lights and rain. But again, God was in control.

After Bro. Duncan checked us in to our rooms, I guess he had enquired of the caretaker about some where to eat. Honestly I had given up on finding anything to eat for the night. My reasoning was that if there was no restaurant around the main airport in Kiev, then surely there wouldn't any in what seems like an abandoned town. But were we in for a surprise about a third of a mile walk down some deserted roads patrolled by an army of stray dogs and the occasional person walking by. There was a restaurant opened after all that served some of the best salads and pizzas. The service was superb although we were the only guests and seemed to shock the staff by giving them some business.

When we got back, there were a few members who had already arrived. On Thursday morning, 29th we were up by 8:00 am, so we could have some good Ukrainian breakfast and be ready to share the daily readings together at 9:30 am sharp. I was surprise by how many brethren had trickled in overnight and during the morning despite the war in the east, which in various ways had affected many of them. With Bro. Duncan translating, I heard of many twenty plus hour rides by bus and train to reach the Bible school venue. Most of these brethren traveled alone or in pairs at the most because most of them lives in isolation from each other. It's really inspiring and an exhortation in itself to see what these mainly elderly brethren are willing to go through to share fellowship together for a few days. It puts many brethren living in the west to shame really. The first two and a half hours were spent doing the daily bible readings each day, punctuated by a ten minute break. This was led by Bro. Duncan each day, with the exception of Sunday morning, when I did it because Bro. Duncan and Nathan had left on Saturday afternoon on an eight hour trip one way to baptize a lady in her sixties who had requested baptism. More on that event can be found in Bro. Nathan Badger's report. After the daily readings we had three classes each day. Two by Bro. Nathan and the one by me. After dinner we had another class by brother

Nathan and finish the rest of the daily readings. Each evening we finished around 8:00 pm to 8:30 pm. A full day of spiritual fellowship.



Bro. Nathan classes were mainly about the blessings and struggles of Jacob. Which I thought were very spiritually uplifting . Each day Bro. Duncan's email lights up with many genuine requests for Bibles and Bible Basics, and requests for baptisms from those who have studied in isolation or for more information and help with understanding God's words.

My classes were on 'The four questions God asked Adam & Eve', A study of 1 Thessalonians 1, 'Helpers of the War', 'May we be introduced to God'.

The classes were well received. Bro. Alex helped translate. So language did not manage to keep us apart whom the blood of Christ has united in common faith and hope.

This was also my first experience of fellowship with baptized Jewish sisters, well educated in the law and the prophets and boy do they know their Bible and the Hebrew root words and meaning. For me this was a glimpse of the kingdom. Natural Israel finally embracing their Messiah and the gospel of the kingdom and name of Jesus. It was a pleasure to meet Bro. Maxim's father and mother . We stayed at the apartment in Latvia with Bro. Maxim. He is truly a young brother consumed with the truth. He can't go back to his home because they want to draft him for the war and Latvia has declined his visa. His dilemma is one shared by thousands of Ukrainians. I had to ask why there were so few young men to be found around Kiev. From the airport, customs, stores, on the streets every where, young men are vastly out numbered by young women. At the center I only saw two teenage young men around the facility. Too young for the war. The staff was made up all young Ukrainian women, supervised by one tough no nonsense lady [who made her guests eat their vegetables one way or another lol].

All the military aged young men are either in hiding, have fled the country or are at the warfront in the east. This war is seriously under reported in the west. Please be not discouraged from visiting because of this war as I was at first. Here in the western Ukraine, where the capital is located, it's as quiet as the proverbial church mouse. I haven't encountered any problems. Considering that the last time I saw anyone of African decent was an old lady and man who disembarked in Moscow. The weather was great, even much warmer than in USA. I seriously over packed expecting Siberian like weather conditions. The prices are much cheaper here if you have Western currency because the Ukrainian UAH has lost much of its value. So please make your next vacation here in the Ukraine and help with the spreading of the Gospel.

The next Bible School is scheduled for six months from now. Flights are cheap, no visas are necessary from the US and European end. The brethren here are so happy when they get visits from western brethren. They appreciate that we choose to share fellowship with them rather than the beaches of some tropical area. These brethren are our family also and they spend almost the entire year in isolation from the brotherhood. Those who do the will of God are our REAL FAMILY and Christ family (Matt 25). So these gatherings means everything to them, so let us help with making it an occasion that they can remember with joy and gladness. Nathan and I left for our respective homes from Riga Latvia on Tuesday. The joy and pleasure we shared with our brethren in eastern Europe will not be soon forgotten. Two lessons I learned from my visit is that there is so much that can be done even if you don't speak a word of Russian. The second one is the extreme amount of work involved in running the center in Latvia, answering and contacting request from interested persons and coordinating a brotherhood in isolation.

Thanks Bro. Duncan for all the good you have done and keep doing in the eastern European vineyard. May God bless you and all the helpers of the missionary work here. God's willing yes I will be back. Love in Christ,

Bro. David.

Bro Nate Badger reports on the journey to baptize Tamara:

What do Pizza, Potholes and a Persistence have in common? A trip from Kiev to a collective farm in central Ukraine to baptize Sis. Tamara ?????.

Part way through the 2015 Winter Bible School in Ukraine, we received a call from Bro. Alexei to baptize his grandmother who had been studying Bible Basics with him for several months. With only a couple days left in the Ukraine, it became evident we would need to make some creative plans to reach her. In the end, we hopped in a taxi, spent 1.5hrs fighting through traffic to Borispol airport, and then rented a car for the remaining 8 hrs south-east. With the recent fighting in Ukraine, the country's rural roads have not been maintained and the majority of the trip was tediously slow as we dodged thousands of large potholes in the decaying asphalt. Several times, we considered turning back but we persisted, believing God had sent his angels to guide our journey.

We travelled alongside the Dneper River until we reached Smila where we spotted a brightly lit sign announcing Pizza. After downing two large pizzas we were recharged and on our way again. Funny how there is some normality in a country at war. Late that night we arrived in the general vicinity of the Soviet-style collective farm that Alexei and his grandmother live on. The farm was located in the middle of nowhere. With no streetlights or street signs we were fortunate to have limited access to a mobile WiFi and could vaguely find barren country roads using Google maps. Eventually we found Alexei flashing his flashlight at a crossroads in the middle of farm fields where he led us the remaining miles to their apartment, in the workers' accommodation of a crumbling collective farm.

Bro. Alexei was encouraged to research Christadelphians by Messianic Jews, whose doctrines he disagreed with. He discovered the Bible Basics website and read through the book slowly using his cellphone. He was baptized in August 2014 by Bro. Maxim and has since been teaching the Truth to Tamara, his grandmother. Thankfully, he has now purchased a very old computer (intact with a floppy drive!) where he is able to Skype with other brethren and sisters and join in breaking bread online in Russian. Sis. Tamara welcomed us into their one-room flat and provided us with a bowl of mashed potatoes, beef and sweet-bread. After discussing her convictions, she was baptized in a tub of warm water in their bathroom. We then shared in a breaking of bread and were inspired by talking to Bro. Alexei about his enthusiasm for the Truth and the ecclesia he dreams of developing in that remote place. He is isolated from other Christadelphians in Ukraine and has little means to travel around. He is, therefore, very excited to now have his grandmother to break bread with, and share the Truth.

After 2am it was time to leave. We drove home through Oleksandriya and Kremenchuk, dodging potholes like we were playing a computer game. Then, just as the sun began to rise, one of our front tires collapsed after hours of pounding on the bumpy, unlit roads where huge potholes appeared from nowhere. We managed to change it for a spare and, shortly after, find a 24hr tire repair shop to see if we could salvage the tire. While repairing the tire, we were fortunate to realize that the other front tire was virtually out of air and we had it repaired before completing the final leg of the journey. Around 11am we arrived back at the Bible School.

We were very tired after lasting over 24hrs without sleep. It was humbling to learn from the news that someone had been killed in a crash on that same road within a few hours of our driving on it. At the same time, we were very excited that Sis. Tamara and Bro. Alexei are baptized. God had

blessed our journey and the persistence of us all. Given the current uncertainty in the Ukraine, we don't know if this would be the last chance to baptize our new Brother and Sister. Alexei as a farm worker and with health issues currently has been exempted from military service but that could easily change as the demand for young men becomes more acute.

Bro. Nathan Badger, Cambridge Ecclesia, Ontario, Canada

Bro. Nate is a great changer of punctured wheels... one business booming in Ukraine is 24 hour roadside wheel and tyre repairs; the roads are so deeply potholed and littered with sharp debris . We certainly got our money's worth from the rental car, pictured here just after sunrise:



The great joy of Tamara and her grandson bro Alexei was so great it turned from deep smiles to tears of joy... we felt we had really facilitated him in his preaching and baptizing his grandma in their mould-covered, crumbling bathroom- rather than being the great evangelists ourselves. He was so full of joy as he poured the wine for the breaking of bread and welcomed his grandmother into fellowship:



We don't consider a trip to Ukraine unduly dangerous as long as one doesn't go near the front line nor into the East. We plan to continue with the July Bible School God willing and to afterwards go visiting our brethren and sisters and practically assist them with things like repairing homes against the Winter, and simply encouraging them. This would be a great adventure for younger folks especially- do contact us if you'd like to come.

PRAYER POINTS [and please, do please pray for Ukraine...]:

- For military aged brethren in hiding
- For brother Maxim particularly and his parents and family now separated from him
- For peace in Ukraine
- For the safety of our brethren and sisters
- For the pensioner brethren and sisters in need of health attention
- Thank God we have had the resources to provide material help to those cases of need we came across
- For Alexei and Tamara in their isolation on the collective farm, and that Alexei doesn't get taken to the army

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks