

KAZAKJSTAN & KYRGYZSTAN, AUGUST 2004

Kyrgyzstan is a small, poor, Moslem, landlocked country in Central Asia, formerly part of the USSR, where we've been quietly preaching for the past 11 years. We have three excellent sisters there, whom we were able to visit and break bread with- they rarely see a visitor. They're strong in faith, reading and praying daily. Two of them are teachers, and earn about \$10 / month- if they're paid. They do as many other jobs as they can. The economy and infrastructure really is terribly broken down, aggravated by a civil war in the mountains in the West of the country. We gave some welfare but would so wish we could give them a fishing rod rather than a fish as it were. They entertained us most generously.



Photo: Breaking bread with the sisters

We met up with our contact JACOB, who has been studying with us for some time. He lives in a remote mountain town in a small wedge of Kyrgyz territory wedged between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It's amazing that a Jew could be living in that Moslem area, but it's amazing how God calls. We baptized him and helped with him welfare towards being able to get his documents in order so that he can get better employment.

Then there was ALEKSANDR, in the dusty town of Talas; and then another four near Bishkek: ALEKSANDR, DMITRY, ANVAR and BAKHRAM. The latter two are our first pure Kyrgyz converts. It was an especial joy to realize that the true Gospel is going into all the earth in these last days- we can realistically believe that indeed there will be men and women from all nations, tongues and ethnic groupings in the great company that will sing the Lord's praises on His return.



Photo: Baptizing our first native Kyrgyz brother in a dirty trough near Bishkek

We also came in contact with a businesswoman who works with female prisoners in a women's prison. They take their children with them if they have nobody to leave them with, and live in awful conditions, especially for the children. Babies and young children frequently die in there, and our contact told us that some women had even eaten one that had died. We feel compelled to offer a very small amount of help to them. We visited a group of contacts in the men's prison, where Cindy was a big hit, playing backgammon with them on their carefully home made board. Many of the men were drivers who'd been involved in fatal crashes and had been sent to prison automatically as they couldn't pay a bribe to get out of it. It's a case of hot summers and very cold winters, and the accommodation is really woefully inadequate. Our contacts are allowed to use a room for their Bible studies, which they have repaired as best they can- the whole prison is simply falling down. Very little maintenance has been done to anything in Kyrgyzstan since the Russians pulled out. They have read and re-read Bible Basics and hold meetings to

discuss it twice / week. The prison have given them a special room where they can conduct their 'ecclesial meetings' as they call them. We feel there is much genuine interest from these men and will do all we can to support them in their studies of the word. They have nothing to do all day, and presented us with wooden carvings they'd made and painted, using various ingenious methods. Getting permission to enter the prison and spend time with the men was the result of some marvellous operations of providence, for which we thank God. We bought them several large Bibles for their use and were allowed to leave these with them.



Photo: One of our brothers painting a carved jewellery box with a toothbrush



Photo: Bibles, pencils, jewellery box

From Bishkek we travelled through the steppe for 24 hours [in an awful train with even worse travel companions] to Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan, where we'd been expecting to baptize a long time contact. It turned out that he wasn't ready; we went on another 7 hours across the semi-desert to Shymkent, where again, the same thing happened- a long time contact, previously twice visited by our teams, who appeared ready for baptism, we found wasn't. Travelling long and difficult journeys tempts one to simply accept people for baptism but we've learnt that the Truth will only grow and prosper on a firm foundation.

From there it was a local flight to a place near the Chinese border, where we met up with REGINA and baptized her in a cold mountain stream- even though it was hot weather, the stream was really melt water from the permanently snow capped mountains



Photo: Cindy baptizing Regina in the cold stream

On the left in the above photo is Sis Vika and her baby. We had appealed on carelink for some baby clothes to be sent to her as they are so desperately poor. Thanks to a kind brother and sister, these were sent, and they're in daily use. We gave help as we could.



Photo: Sis Vika with the box of baby clothes

Our last stop was Shchuchinsk, 2 hours flight to the north. There are around 40 brethren and sisters baptized in this town. We had an extended session of prayer, asking everyone to put forward their prayer requests first, followed by Bible readings, a study on the crucifixion, and a very comforting breaking of bread. The truth is clearly very well established here. The warmth of the fellowship, our sense of the depth of convictions and understanding, was all a great encouragement that many years of such travelling have not been in vain, and truly out there in Central Asia there is a people being prepared to rise up and meet the Lord on His return.

We left them, exhausted but so, so joyful, to arrive in Moscow and learn that we had flown within a hundred km. of the airline crashes that had happened a few hours earlier. We thanked God yet again for His Providence.