

KYRGYZSTAN, October 2007

Kyrgyzstan may be almost unheard of to many readers. It's a small landlocked former USSR republic in Central Asia, with average salaries of around \$2 / day it's one of the world's poorest countries. Recent reports comment on the endemic corruption here: "Kyrgyzstan... pay starvation salaries to their public servants, who end up charging "extra" the people they are supposed to serve...electricity is rationed in winter time. Villages and towns can go without it for days... Soaring bread prices cause concern and protests ...Bread and wheat are basic staples for the poor, who have already had to cut back on meat and butter"

[from <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=10294&geo=30&size=A>].

Most of our brothers and sisters here are Russians. Russians in Kyrgyzstan are as whites were / are in Zimbabwe- only even worse off. Most of them have left, leaving only the very poor behind. Further, there is growing Moslem extremism here which makes meetings and public witness almost impossible. Reports from other groups report lynchings of Christian converts and threats to cut out the tongue of those who convert to Christianity.

From http://www.persecutionblog.com/2006/08/kyrgyzstan_musl.html we read: "the Muslim mob seized all forms of Christian literature in the buildings, everything was thrown onto the street and set ablaze... Similar events frequently take place throughout Kyrgyzstan.. according to the nation's Bible League director. Muslim intruders make it a practice to warn believers that continued prayer and worship services will result in their homes being torched. There are a number of incidents where militant Muslims have violated the wives of church planters as a consequence of not disbanding and putting an end to their ministries".

From <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370225>: "Even the authorities admit that a significant part of the population of Kyrgyzstan's south rejects secular laws and lives according to Sharia norms". 'Sharia' refers to the radical form of Islam practiced in Iran, whereby converts to Christianity must be executed.

From http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=729 : "The murder of a Protestant in a village in eastern Kyrgyzstan has highlighted the difficulties for ethnic Kyrgyz of Muslim backgrounds in rural areas who convert to Christianity, the widespread social exclusion that allows attacks to go unpunished and the difficulties finding somewhere to bury Christians who die in areas without non-Muslim graveyards".

>From <http://english.mn.ru/english/issue.php?2006-41-8> : "There has been a marked rise in the number of attacks on Christians in Kyrgyzstan, including instances of lynching". And from <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=7364&geo=3&size=A> : "In Kyrgyzstan, anti-Christian violence is on the rise and is assuming proportions of real persecution".

Our recent visit to Kyrgyzstan confirmed the truth of all this. Two sisters bravely continue to hold their breaking of bread meetings in their homes. They're both pensioners, but the pension is only 20US\$ / month- less than 1 \$ / day- so they both still work where they can. However, they need our prayers as they are really quite scared. They feel bad they don't witness more, we comforted them that they are doing likely what we'd all do in the situation. But sister Ludmila cares for an elderly relative, TANYA, who's dying of leukemia, with not enough money to continue chemotherapy [all health care has to be paid for]. Ludmila prepares food for her each day, and has been teaching her the true and only hope. Tanya prays and reads the Bible for so long as she can concentrate each day, and it was a true joy to baptize her [not without some practical difficulties] and rejoice with her in the most certain hope she has. We were able to give some financial assistance to our sisters.

We're investigating the possibility of registering with the Government, but this is a process fraught with problems and demands for bribes, and with no guarantee of any meaningful security to our brothers and sisters.

Our Jewish brother, Jacob, baptized in 2004, has disappeared and was last known to be living in a remote village somewhere in the mountains of South East Kyrgyzstan.

A highlight of our visit was meeting with brother Anvar. Baptized in 2004, he's remained in contact and zealously distributes Bibles and Bible Basics to all kinds of people he meets, quite fearless of consequences.

It was a pleasure to baptize three of his contacts: FAHRID, SASHA and YURI. Fahrid is an ethnic Kyrgyz of Moslem background, so we've covered his face in the photo. Sasha and Yuri are Russians and Afghan veterans. They fought together there and now live in poverty in Kyrgyzstan. The USSR gave them property there, but Kyrgyzstan only allows Kyrgyz passport holders to own property, so they accepted Kyrgyz nationality at the breakup of the USSR. They're now trapped as it were in the country. We spent some time together, Anvar's Bible knowledge and insistence on correct understanding of Bible doctrine makes him a great teacher. Listening to Sasha and Yuri's confession of faith before baptism was very moving. Yuri spoke of men he killed in Afghanistan, some pleading for their lives. He wants the world to know that by rights he should be long dead, but God preserved him and called him, by grace alone; and that God has done for him what he did not do to others. He so wanted to be baptized, and has really grasped the idea of grace, and our unworthiness to receive it.



Photo: Yuri right after baptism:

We were able to tell him that Carelinks have made visits to Kazakhstan, and there have been baptisms in places like Jalalabad and Kandahar, well known to Yuri and Sasha as flashpoints in the 9 year war the Russians fought there. They were utterly amazed that we'd been there, and could even show them photos of those places on the laptop. And they were even more touched to hear of baptisms there, and of how brother Faris was beheaded the very evening on which he was baptized. They vowed to follow the example of their Afghan brother Faris- their former enemy against whom they fought. These brothers truly are brothers, and one feels all our Carelinks labour is worth it just for them to have come to "this grace wherein we stand and [to] rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).



Photo: Brothers in arms

Faithful sisters in Australia continue knitting quilts, and it was a pleasure to present one to brother Anvar. We provided welfare support for winter heating issues, for which they're all very grateful, although they wish us to openly tell you that they were baptized not in hope of any material help but only in hope of God's grace and His coming Kingdom on earth..

Photo: Brother Anvar with his quilt in the lobby of our hotel

Photo: Knitting quilts in Australia

We can only give thanks for the triumph of God's grace again. Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Kyrgyzstan.