

Russian Bible School December 2003

This was without doubt a special Bible School; there was a sense amongst all present that the spirit of Christ was truly amongst us as we gathered in a forest-surrounded Sanatorium in Sverdlovsk Oblast in Western Siberia. The School was unique in that this was the first time that financial constraints had resulted in us asking the Russian brethren and sisters to pay their own fares to attend the School as far as they could. There were many sacrifices made- one sister gave her jewellery to a pawnbroker in order to raise the funds for her fares [we were able to repay her]. Young 15 year old Natasha travelled alone for 3 days on the trains in order to be with us.



Photo: Sis Natasha

We met the costs of food and accommodation as usual. We felt it was an amazing achievement that over 60 brethren and sisters from throughout Russia, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and England gathered together for this unique week of study and fellowship. Distances separating our Eastern European brethren are significant; they have to travel days to these gatherings, and rail fares have tripled in recent times. We warmly invite any Western brothers and sisters who are interested to come and join us at future Schools. The studies were well received.

Brethren Steve and Marcus from England joined with Brethren Igor, Sasha and Dmitry in leading studies on various themes. Marcus and Steve had struggled across Europe by train, taxi and plane with a large scale model of the tabernacle and also replicas of the High Priest's garments, which were the basis of Br. Marcus's studies. Seeing this was quite bulky to transport around, we have left the tabernacle model in Riga and any CBM or other mission workers are most welcome to use it in their work.



Photo: The tabernacle model erected at the Siberian Bible School



Photo: Bro. Zhenya dressed up as the High Priest to illustrate the studies

Each day started with a 90 minute lively discussion on the daily Bible readings from the Companion. The president always had to curtail discussion. The level of knowledge by these converts is exceptional. Some of the old sisters spend their lives continually reading and re-reading both their Bibles and all the literature which we have been able to send them. The readings were from Job, Zechariah and Revelation- not the easiest books to understand. We were convinced that the Truth is firmly established in this land and is here to stay until the Lord

comes to gather all His people. One very noticeable characteristic of these brethren and sisters is their constant taking of notes and marking of their Bibles. There is a thirst for the things of God which it is a pleasure to respond to.



Photos: Note taking at Bible School

Photo: Young people at the Bible School

Sister Ludmila, formerly of Kazakhstan but now of Kazan, Russia, was present in force. It seems true of her as of Moses that her natural strength has not abated one bit. Having brought nearly 300 people to the truth, she continued to share her dynamism with all at the Bible School, commenting in depth on just about everything from the interpretation of Zechariah to the problems of the book of Job.

The evening sessions were largely taken up with slides of our suffering brethren from Iran and other Islamic areas. It was a pure delight to notice how the local brethren continually mentioned them in the prayers offered throughout the School. Truly we are a world-wide family, and when one member suffers, truly we all do. Reviewing the tremendous sufferings of our brethren resulted in many of our Russian-speaking members gaining a wider perspective on their own difficulties. Marcus also showed pictures related to the background of brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts, and also slides related to how Western brethren had dealt with the matter of conscientious objection. We saw pictures of British brethren working on the land in WW1, and of Canadian brethren working with lumber as their alternative service during WW2. There are several young Russian brethren undergoing serious difficulties with their army service at this time and we were able to talk at depth with them, counselling and encouraging as best we could.

We were delighted to see the young people continuing to form friendships; the Bible Schools are their only chance to meet with each other. We teach strongly that believers should only marry other believers, and therefore these are their only opportunity to meet with each other. We have every reason to believe by all accounts that they are all reading their Bibles daily according to the Companion and faithfully continuing in the breaking of bread.

The three candidates for baptism who attended were all thoroughly interviewed and it was a delight to baptize OLGA [from a remote village in Kirov Oblast], ANATOLY from Kazakhstan, and VALERIJ from a small town in Komi Respublika, near the Arctic Circle. Valerij had completed the Bible Basics course and travelled many days at his own expense to be baptized. He arrived at the Bible School, never having met any of us before, leaning on his walking stick, announcing that he had come to be baptized. He is very outgoing and soon fitted in amongst us, with fervent comments and questions on the daily Bible readings. He commented how warm it was in Siberia- it was about -10 centigrade, whereas it was -45 where he came from! We marvel that the Gospel is now truly spreading to the furthest corners of the earth. May this herald the Lord's early return.



Photo: Bro. Valerij from the far north, so relieved to have found us and be amongst us

We are aware that many brethren and sisters generously responded to our appeal for funds to enable this Bible School to happen, and we want to thank them each one both from our hearts and also from the hearts of all the Russian speaking brethren and sisters who attended. We are sure that because of your extraordinary generosity, the especial blessing of the Father was with us. For this we simply give Him our sincere thanks.