

## September 2011 Svetlana, Vitaly, Abedi

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 and there's an MP3 about these chapters at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/2cor34.mp3>

### RIGA BIBLE CENTER

God continues to draw a very wide range of people to the Riga Bible Centre and thereby to an understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and baptism into Him. This week we baptized SVETLANA, a young woman who sleeps next to sister Tatyana in the same night shelter. She was really jubilant at being baptized; here she is with sister Tatyana after her baptism:



Brother Vitaly was first attracted to us because of our rejection of the existence of a personal Satan. Here's his testimony:

"I am an Afghanistan veteran and I saw many awful things there, which changed my life. I thought I was unusually affected, until I learnt from the internet that almost all of us who served in the Red Army in Afghanistan have been traumatized in the same way. One thing I have learnt is that God preserved my life for a reason. The company I was attached to had 96 men in it when we left for Afghanistan in 1987 and only 7 of us survived. I have shrapnel marks on my stomach, and there was one moment I wish to tell you about. It was as we were basically retreating from Afghanistan, we were almost back in the USSR, near the Tajikistan border. We were captured by young Afghan men, they were high on drugs and armed with I think American automatic rifles. Two of them held each of us whilst a very high [on drugs] guy shot our men one by one from an automatic rifle. The cylinder kept binding but he kept on anyway. When he came to me, the bullets hit the men holding me. The other Afghans started shouting at each other and ran away. I and 3 other Soviets ran out of the house they were holding us in and escaped. Somehow a bullet somehow flew out of the cartridge or from somewhere in that madness and it actually landed harmlessly on my chest and fell down inside my shirt. I have kept it to this day. Whatever jacket I have worn since 1987, I have kept this bullet sown into it, it is my one and only personal thing, my physical reminder that God is with me and wanted me for Himself:

Photo: Bro Vitaly in the kitchen of the Riga Bible Center with the bullet, and sharing it with Duncan:



In passing, I shake my head and wonder at the hand of God, that in those days the Americans were supporting the people who later became Taliban etc just because they were then fighting us as Soviets, and now they are fighting them I have looked at that bullet a few times each week since 1988. I have looked on the internet now to find what kind it is. It is surely not Soviet made, not fitting a Kalashnikov, AK47 etc. So, I think it was an American made one. You can put this on the internet and see if someone can solve that question for me. Not that it matters. As I faced my death, I suddenly realized I needed God. I had been raised as an atheist, I actually thought I was fighting for a good cause, fighting for the principles of Communism against the wickedness of Islam. But in that moment I so dearly wished I had some hope, some understanding of God. I

made no promises to find God if He saved me, nothing like that, because, well, I did not. It was just a wish I had in that moment. I returned to civilian life as the USSR was breaking up in the 1990s. Like many Afghan veterans I struggled to make sense of life, that what we had fought for was breaking up around us. I became angry. I to my shame became involved with satanism. I became a priest of satanism. I had "666" tatoosed on my neck to show I was satan's slave, under his yoke. I therefore insisted to wear a T-shirt when I was baptized to cover these shameful things. I have tried to erase the tatoos but I've only managed to fade them. I am ashamed of them, but I asked Duncan to photograph them just to show others, that change is possible. I now reject totally all those things. When I realized I was wasting my time with satanism, I went to a Pentecostal church. I immediately saw that "speaking in tongues" was an act, and their claims to cast out demons from me seemed strange to me because it was a kind of acceptance demons exist, and I had learnt through my total rejection of satanism, and my reflections on the Afghan war, that sin comes from within, not from demons or a satan being, all that doesn't exist at all. So I was disappointed with churches. But I didn't give up hope I would find the truth about God.



I worked with a man who went to Riga Bible Center. He was telling me how different it was there to other churches. I asked if there were any other Afghan vets who went there. He said he didn't know but there was a man there who had gone to Afghanistan and baptized people. Then he told me that they didn't believe in satan at all. That it was sin within. I immediately was alert at that point. I went there and met Duncan and was so interested to hear of baptisms in Afghanistan, and to learn there was no satan. I also learnt that baptism meant to become a slave of Christ, to put our heads under the yoke. In fact Duncan was talking about this the first time I attended. Nobody knew I had "666" tatoosed on my neck and that I was so ashamed of having it there, I wear high collars to always hide it even in Summer. I saw I was being called to put my head under the yoke of Christ. So I studied more, about the wonderful kingdom to come on earth, with no more war and no more sin and badness, Jesus being of our nature and not any trinity, how he destroyed the power of death itself, and all sin, if we are baptized into Him. And then the day my baptism was arranged for, I had to work. Maybe I did the wrong thing- I went to work. Work is so hard to come by, if you don't turn up you are fired, there is so much unemployment here. I felt very bad about it. God has led me a very long way to this understanding. But the time I waited until the next opportunity for baptism was good for me. I came to it absolutely committed. It is the greatest moment of my life. I cannot find words, they are not sufficient, to express this. Praise God".

Our "younger people's group" were present at the baptisms and were all fired up by the testimonies:



Here's a special appeal from Cindy, who is herself due to give birth soon:

"Some of the brothers would really appreciate it if we could organise an electric hairclipper for them to be able to use to cut each other's hair. They obviously can't afford to go to the

hairdresser, but would still like to look a bit more neat and tidy. If anyone has an electric hairclipper they aren't using, please get in touch with us - it would be greatly appreciated. Thanks!"

**Bro. ABEDI**

Readers may recall that a few years ago Carelinks appealed for help with the terrible plight of African refugee brother Abedi and his family, who went through awful sufferings and then suffered yet more in a very bad refugee camp; with your help he was able to emigrate to Guyana and associate with the ecclesia there. That wasn't the end of their problems, however, because the red tape in Guyana was major, as it was so unusual for the country to be faced with the case of an African seeking to immigrate on the basis of persecution. We're grateful to all the efforts of bro Clive Solomon and sister Sonia over a long period, and Sonia writes: "Brother Abedi and his family have finally been granted Guyanese citizenship. I'm sure that Carelinks readers who remember them would be happy to hear that". The efforts for Abedi and his family were truly a united effort from brethren and sisters in the UK, France, Africa, America, Canada and of course Guyana. We give thanks that finally it has worked out well.

**With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks**