

Visit to Russia ... January 2004

Aim: To visit some bre & sis never visited since their baptisms; to meet and interview Bible Basics contacts; to provide support for brethren in difficulty

One problem in an area the size of the ex-USSR is that so many contacts learn the truth and are baptized, but it is then hard to provide pastoral care. There are many such converts whom the CBM and indeed nobody has ever visited at any time after their baptisms. There is a huge amount of work to be done here! Bible studies are mailed in Russian regularly to all of them, and we give a lot of emphasis to the need for personal Bible reading and breaking of bread. It's always a pleasure to visit those isolated ones who are holding firm to the Faith; their continuance in joyful faith is a huge testimony to the power of the Gospel and the active work of the Father and Son in these dear brethren & sisters' lives.

Bashkortostan

Here there are two very faithful sisters, living in an increasingly Moslem area. Their receipt of large amounts of follow up literature and letters from us provoked the interest of the postwoman, amongst other people, and she too requested Bible Basics. It was a great joy therefore to interview and baptize her and also another Bible Basics contact, in the presence and assisted by our two existing sisters, Larisa and Tamara. So we now have two more zealous sisters in Bashkortostan, NATALYA and VALENTINA. They are already in the habit of daily Bible reading using the Companion and are in regular contact with the existing two sisters. They are really just so happy together as a group. Larisa and Tamara had never been visited since their baptisms, and it was a wonderful encouragement to see them so evidently faithful, continuing in the breaking of bread and prayer. One could share the feelings of John when he wrote that he had no greater joy than to know that his [spiritual] children walk in truth. One great help here has been the large print Russian Bibles which were provided by the Christadelphian Advancement Trust. They have truly enabled so many of our Russian contacts and brethren and sisters in advancing years to read the word.



Photos: Happy new Bashkort sisters



Sis Tamara proudly holding large print Russian Bible

Next came a rather frustrating part of the trip. I travelled around 3000 km to meet a contact, Galina, who was seeking baptism, and also a brother, Aleksej, who is reported to be living in an unheated home and has had to give up one of his children because he can't care for them [his

wife has long since left him]. I failed to meet either of them, and spent a frustrating hour in the fog trying to search for his house amidst a huddle of broken down dwellings on the edge of his town, where he was reputed to be living. Sometimes one does wonder why exactly God would grant us a double disappointment like this. It didn't help that I then got picked up by some suspicious policemen, who wanted to know what a Russian speaking guy with a British passport with Afghan and Pakistani visas was doing wandering around.

I then sought to meet up with our Bro. S, whose problems we have several times mentioned on carelink. He has been falsely accused by the Orthodox church and is facing another arraignment before the local court. He is truly of great faith as he continues preaching at tremendous risk, and against our gentle advice. He recently reported the baptism of a young woman named OKSANA as a result of this work. He is seeking to flee to another area, and my usual way of getting messages to him didn't work, so he didn't turn up at our planned rendez vous as he usually does. He needs our prayers. I later learnt that he is in total hiding as a result of his court summons.

Well through all these disappointments the Lord was preparing me for the next stage, which was a pure joy. I got a late night train from Aleksej and Galina's town to Volgograd, the former Stalingrad. Here lives bro. Viktor, who's never been visited since his baptism about 4 years ago. I found him in very fine spiritual form. His Bible is well marked up and he is breaking bread regularly and has his Bible reading planners neatly in place. We were able to talk about the past week's Bible readings at some depth. It was my great joy to assist our brother in interviewing and baptizing another Bible Basics reader, GALINA. Galina had had no religious background but had been driven to God by her tragic life. She gave a wonderful confession of faith; I believe no brother of whatever persuasion could have possibly refused her baptism. The only issue I had to slightly correct her on was that she had been breaking bread alone before her baptism. Br. Viktor gave a wonderful talk at her baptism, recounting how God miraculously preserved him from death throughout the traumas of the battle of Stalingrad and the famine that followed. It was too bad I couldn't have recorded his speech. It was so very moving. He then played us some songs of rejoicing on his accordion, and I got a brief video clip of him doing this on my camera. I left Volgograd sure that the Gospel has taken root on good ground and will bear further fruit. Incidentally the large print Russian Bible was a major factor in helping Sis Galina learn the Bible's message.



Video: Br. Viktor's song of rejoicing [link to play this is at the bottom of the page]



Photo: Happy Sis Galina and Br. Viktor

The problem of isolation of our many converts weighs heavily upon us. With prayer and hope we placed some major adverts in Volgograd newspapers, with the intention of developing an

ecclesia here. I then returned to Moscow, and met the brethren there. Bro. Igor gave me supplies of the Russian translation of the 'Alcoholism: A Guide For Christian Families' booklet, which I took back to the Baltics to distribute and use in our work here in this area. Whilst in Moscow I was able to place an advert in the largest Russian newspaper, with a circulation of around 3 million. Our aim is to get more brothers and sisters baptized Russia-wide, not only to further spread the Gospel, but because the scatter of our existing converts is so wide and far, that any new convert ought to be within striking distance of an existing one. We want to develop small groups and ecclesias whom can meet regularly. As you all know, we are totally strapped financially just now due to the various political problems we face. The cost of the adverts and especially that of the follow up postage was and will be considerable, God willing. We have gone ahead in faith. We ask for your prayers.

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