

Bulgaria ~ Siberia Trip

July 17 - August 11, 2006

Journal of Elder L. Jeff Harris

This is my 26th trip abroad. Those sharing with me in this historic trip are Elders Zack Guess, Herb Hatfield and David Pyles. Elder Zack Guess, is the pastor of Grace Chapel Primitive Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Elder David Pyles pastors Jackson Primitive Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and Elder Herb Hatfield pastors in Aberdeen, Mississippi at Aberdeen Primitive Baptist Church. A few others mentioned in the journal are Maya Chonova, who is a Bulgarian teenager whom I met on my first trip to Bulgaria. She was my translator at that time. Maya has since spent a year in Columbus, MS at a university where she is an exchange student. She has been attending Aberdeen Church. Leah Gregory, who is Bro. Herb's granddaughter, as well as her family have fallen in love with Maya so Leah, her mother, Dawn and younger sister Ellen along with Bro. Herb's wife, Ruth traveled with Bro. Herb and me to Bulgaria for the first part of our trip. They spent their time with Maya, her mother and grandmother and getting to know where Maya grew up and her lifestyle and culture in Bulgaria.

The first part of the trip, Bro. Herb and I were ministering in Bulgaria, then we left for Russia to meet up with Elders Zack Guess and David Pyles on July 25th. Here is an account of the journal I kept while in these countries.

Monday, July 17

Timothy came in late last night from his summer study trip to Guadalajara, Mexico. It was such a joy to have him and Ashley ride with Donna and I to the Atlanta airport. He shared with us several of his experiences, which were all positive, and some of the things he learned. He was particularly impressed with some of the Christian ministers he was blessed to meet there. We enjoyed our drive to Atlanta and even had time for a leisurely lunch together at Appleby's before they dropped me off at the airport to begin my 26th preaching trip across the oceans! I have been blessed above measure to be used in this way, for which I give God the praise.

In my prayers of thanksgiving for support and prayers toward this particular journey, I remembered not only my dear family, but also Wiley & Betty Puckett, Jim and Diana Rogers, Jim Davidson, Adele Fleming, Grannyteen Robinson, Gladys Spencer and Roger Gregory. I thanked God also for the supporting churches involved in this work, which included Fair Haven PBC where I currently pastor, Gadsden PBC, Cincinnati PBC, Albany PBC, and Providence PBC. May God abundantly bless them all who have given so generously, "beyond their power they were willing of themselves" (2 Cor. 8:2-3). Like the Apostle Paul, I pray that God would accept their sacrifice and "supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). I rejoice in this token of God's love toward them, as "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7) and their love for the Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). I mourn at the covetous attitude many of our people have toward the church and

evangelism today. They are “saving” themselves into the poor house! We are living in a day of so many opportunities and yet there is so little interest and support among most Primitive Baptists. There is much criticism, suspicion and open opposition to us, but we much press on, walking in the light we have been given, through which we glorify our Great God. Like Paul, I can truthfully say, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day” (Acts 26:22). Paul never lost his love for his people, the Jews (Rom. 9:3, 10:1) and neither must I for mine. The Old Baptists have been too good to me over these last 40 years, as I joined when I was nine, for me to turn from serving them or to cease to pray for them. It is still, “For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20). I love them, but my chief loyalty is to my King and His command that I must obey, whether or not my people understand it just now or not. I think perhaps that one day they might! I plan to continue “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (28:31) with great confidence in the eventual triumph of the gospel in distant lands as well as our own! Amen.

My flight from Atlanta to Chicago was right on time, but the flight from Chicago to London faced a lot of difficulties. It was good to see the smiling faces of Elder Herb Hatfield and his wife, Sister Ruth and his precious daughter, Dawn and her two sweet daughters (Leah and Ellen), who are all going with us to Bulgaria. They will visit with Maya and her family while Bro. Herb and I travel to several preaching points.

We were delayed two hours before being called to board our 777 aircraft. After we taxied to the runway, they said that they discovered a malfunction in a sensor located in the nose of the plane. They made the needed repair on the runway, which delayed us another hour!

We were all separated from one another in the seat arrangements and met several other interesting people in flight. I could not rest very well in the cramped quarters, but was able to meditate and pray quite a bit on the eight hour flight, which we were told consumed about 4,000 miles across the Atlantic.

Tuesday, July 18

We arrived around 11:30 am, London time, and thankfully retrieved all of our bags safely. We then took an \$8 each bus ride to our Comfort Inn hotel which took about 10 minutes. Everything here is expensive, or so it appears to me. I was given my own room and laid down to rest a little. I didn't awaken until two hours later! Just tired.

While Bro. Herb and his family went sightseeing of London, I stayed at my room to rest and get focused on the teachings we hope to impart to the people of Bulgaria, all of which directs them to Christ Jesus (John 14:6) and his attributes, which are foundational to the five cardinal points of the doctrines of grace.

The BBC News network ran multiple stories about the evacuation process of UK Nationals from Lebanon due to their current conflict with Israel. Hezbollah terrorists have shot a lot of missiles into Israel and Israel is retaliating. People continue to speculate on when WWII will begin, not realizing that the alquiada Terrorist network in our world has already begun such a global war against both peace and hope. Jesus Christ is the only remedy, for it is in Him that we have both.

I enjoyed a fish and fries supper at the hotel and went out for a walk along the busy street that runs in front of the hotel. I saw a lot of people from India and Africa and

heard many languages on the street including India, French, German and Serbian. And that was just 30 minutes! London has really evolved into a global metropolitan city. I couldn't help but wonder what C.H. Spurgeon would have done to reach there various cultures coming into the city God led him to and gave him so many fruitful years of ministry. I sent several e-mails home from the hotel.

I came back to my room for more study and prayer before taking a hot shower and getting to bed by 9:30 pm (local time).

Wednesday, July 19

The Lord blessed me to rest well in the comfort of my room through the night awaking without an alarm clock about 5:00 am. My room had a coffee pot that heated the water in less than five minutes, so I was able to have coffee with my morning reading of John Baines treatise on the original purity of human nature, which was excellent. I couldn't resist taking a second hot shower before I took my luggage downstairs to check out and have breakfast with Bro. Herb's family at 6:30. We are scheduled to take the shuttle back to the airport at 7:00 am.

We decided to get our breakfast at the airport, which was a wise move because Sis. Dawn had a problem with her ticket, which took a while to fix. We got to our gate on time and enjoyed the flight service offered by Lufthansa to Munich, Germany and then on to Sophia, which is the Capital of Bulgaria. We were met in Sophia by the smiling face of Maya, a minister to the Jews named Stan, and two young Christians; Borrás (17 yrs. old) and his father Rosen. We went to a hotel in the center of Sophia and I was impressed by the Greek and Roman influence in the construction of their buildings and streets, etc. This is where we split up. Bro. Herb would stay with Stan to learn more about his ministry to the Jews in Bulgaria. I would go with Borrás and Rosen to go to Southern Bulgaria to labor among the Muslim Turks and gypsies.

Martchaevo was the first village we stayed in. We went to the house of Rosen's first cousin and were met with a very hospitable and kind smile of the matron and her daughter's family who live with her. Her husband passed away at the age of 38 from lung cancer. It seems that so many people smoke cigarettes here that is no wonder they die young. I noticed very quickly the haze of smoke heavy in the air and the loud noise of television upon entering the two story home. WE intended to put our things in our room and go to a restaurant for our supper, but the matron would not hear of that. She quickly made us a good meal and we enjoyed our conversations together.

Thursday, July 20

I enjoyed the meal until I found out the meat was horse or donkey. I enjoyed the "Mediterranean-style" salad and homemade bread. They gave me diet Pepsi to drink because I could not safely drink their water. They also had a lemonade-type drink that was pretty tasty. We went for a long walk through their mountainous village which was very enjoyable, although tiring. The sun did not set until around 10:00 pm. We tried to visit about the things of God, but the noise and smoke and language barrier was a great hindrance amid many interruptions of the telephone. Bro. Borrás is very limited in his English vocabulary, which hindered our efforts to share the gospel. So, we decided it was time to shower and go to bed around midnight. We all three slept pretty soundly in the small bedroom and I was amazed when I looked at my watch and saw that it was

7:30! It was nice and cool and the narrow cot was comfortable to a weary traveler.

We left Mrs. Cero's good home after a meal of coffee and "pancakes," which were like Spanish sopapillas with honey; very tasty. It was 10:00 when we left. Our first stop was to get gas in our small station wagon, which cost 60 lava (about \$50). We then, enjoyed our drive to the next village to meet Sergey, a Christian minister among the Turk Muslim people that densely populate Southern Bulgaria. These are not Turkastani gypsies, but actual Turks from Turkey, most of whom are devout Muslims. I felt physically refreshed for the long journey to "Kergely," which is a distance of 400 km. I pray all is well with Bro. Herb and his family in Sophia, whom I will not see until Sunday, Lord willing, in Russe. I enjoyed my reading this morning in Matthew 1-4. Bro. Herb has also had his article on the TULIP doctrines translated into Bulgarian through Maya and printed for distribution on this trip, which is good. I have read the English version and feel it to be sound.

The main turnpike (80) is a smooth four lane way to travel through the mountainous terrain. We didn't have the benefit of an air conditioner so I was thankful for the cooler air to travel in, even though it was still hot. We turned off the main road at Provotovitso (?) and headed due south toward Greece. The rural areas grew lots of sunflowers, tobacco and various grain crops. It is a beautiful countryside. Although we saw tractors and combines in the fields, they still use horse-drawn wagons to haul their produce. WE stopped for fresh peaches and water along the way. We also stopped for 40 minutes in Hoskovo for ice-cream, Pepsi and coffee! Rosen, who is a policeman, has some good friends at the police station that welcomed us into their cafeteria in Hoskovo. It is pretty miserable not having a good translator to interpret their Bulgarian. I saw several gypsies in Hoskovo.

We arrived in Khardzhale at 3:30 pm where we picked up Sergey (Russian Slavokian name) or Gunay (Turkish name), which means, "Rising Sun." We drove another 20 km to Dgebel to Bro. Gunay's "flat" (apartment) to clean up and prepare for my first service among the Turks in southern Bulgaria. I enjoyed our conversation so much, even though his English is very limited indeed. My prayer is that the translation will be accurate and understandable! We drove back to Khardzhale where they have a meetinghouse. Even though I am weary in body, I feel the Spirit energizing me for the message. We stopped for a Bulgarian Chicken sandwich on the way to the service, which was better than I thought it would be!

We arrived right on time for the 6:00 pm. service with about 20 or so Turks who were all previously Muslim. This Christian Church is greatly despised by their Muslim neighbors for sure. This congregation is only five years old and yet they have built a very nice building through American donors. For this reason, they raise an American flag beside the Bulgarian flag each service. Soon Bulgaria will be a member of the European Common Market and use the Euro instead of the Lava system, which will help their lagging economy, or so they claim. The pastor's name is Hoiri. He translated the message for me and did pretty well. I preached on the 4th chapter of 1 John because he used that chapter for the corporate reading during the service. I enjoyed their songs and prayers. The service was a solid two hours long and we visited a lot afterward. The Pastor is a very sweet-spirited man and a talented artist as well. He actually sells his artwork in America to raise funds for his church.

We stopped at a telephone service on the way back to Gunay's apartment and

while I couldn't get through to Donna, I did reach Rebekah, and to my delight, talked to Joshua, my grandson! We came back to the apartment about nine to relax and have a salad/fruit snack, which was good.

I enjoyed some good fellowship, at least the parts that were translated for me. I appreciate Bro. Gunay's hospitality and his zeal for Christ. He is a Turk and has been a Pentecostal Missionary among them for two years. He surprised me though, when he said it may not be a good idea to go to the mountain villages tomorrow, as I had been expecting to do. This time of the year the men are in the fields and it would not be proper to go and speak to just the wives and children. However, he offered to take me to go and "see" the villages using only his tracts, which I declined. He knows there are doctrinal differences between us that could possibly cause problems later and I can understand that. We laid down about midnight, but I awoke at 2 am and decided to write some messages home on cards which I had picked up at the airport. I went back to bed at 4:30 am.

Friday, July 21

The Muslim Priest blew his "Shafer" horn promptly at 5 am to call Muslims to their morning prayer time and Bro. Rosen's loud snores made it impossible to sleep, so I again arose to do my readings and to prepare for the uncharted day ahead. The mosque is built in the center of town. Bulgaria was under Turkish rule for more than five centuries and the Turks forced the nation to become Muslim during that time. However, there has always been a Christian witness here "since the days of Paul the apostle." The main "Christian" Church is the Greek Orthodox Church.

We had breakfast about eight and then walked to the post office and internet server. I have not received a message from home yet, but sure I will. We walked through the square where vendors come each Monday and Friday to sell their wares. We spoke to several Christians on our way. Then we loaded up to go to the mountain villages about 11 am. We ate lunch in a village called Kirnova at 2:00 pm. They have good, healthy food here.

The Turks were very friendly to us and accepted the tracts and Turkish New Testaments from us. I thought it was a great idea to disperse the gospel of John to them and all of them seemed to appreciate it. Of course, the young men were in the fields, but we spoke to many old men about Jesus. It was a joy, even though I was a little nervous. We got to visit or see three or four of their villages and we prayed over each of them. I was really "pumped" by the time we made it back to the city for me to speak in another church. A German Missionary translated for me to this Gypsy (Turk) people. I spoke on the Resurrected Savior. I met a German Mennonite family that touched my heart. They are here for vacation. One of their sweet children even had an English Bible! Amazing... We ate a late supper and went back to the apartment. There, Bro. Gunay and I spoke together about the things of God and the difficult ministry to the Gypsy's that he has been called to. May God bless him.

Saturday, July 22

We were blessed to leave Vokovch at 6:00 am and refueled our vehicle again in Khardzali, where the churches I spoke in were located. It is a bright and Krosivo (beautiful) morning as we begun our long trip to Russe to meet back up with the others.

I asked Bro. Gunay to offer a word of prayer for us before leaving. I sense in him a great desire to serve the Master. He has been married for three years and has a son which is only 20 days old! His wife is Maya's good friend in Russe. We will see them tonight, God willing. I thank the Lord for bringing me to this place and I will not soon forget these experiences.

My morning readings of a short account of the life and labors of Adoniram Judson (by Erroll Huise) were both edifying and humbling. What a dedicated servant he was! I like his covenantal pledge recorded in 1819.

1. Be diligent in secret prayer, morning and evening
2. Never spend a moment in mere idleness
3. Restrain natural appetites within the bounds of temperance and purity, "Keep thyself pure."
4. Suppress every emotion of anger and ill-will.
5. Undertake nothing from motives of ambition, or love of fame.
6. Never do that which, at the moment, appears displeasing to God.
7. Seek opportunities of making some sacrifice for the good of others, especially of believers, provided the sacrifice is not inconsistent with some duty.
8. Endeavor to rejoice in every loss and suffering incurred for Christ's sake, and the gospel's.

He reaffirmed the importance of a deep knowledge of Hebrew & Greek in the translation of the scripture into other languages. I must return to my study of the languages. We must also encourage our churches at home to;

1. Increase prayer meetings for evangelistic concerns.
2. Increase ministry support for evangelism.
3. Begin a writing ministry to encourage evangelists.

The brethren wanted me to see the Castle Palace at Turnovo, which is the oldest castle in Bulgaria. I didn't realize that I had already seen this place when I came three years ago. Their restoration work has continued and it is more and more just a tourist trap at present. It is interesting though, in the development of this country. We didn't stay at the fortress for along time and then made our way back to Russe, where we enjoyed a meal in Bro. Rogen's apartment. I enjoyed meeting Rogen's good wife and daughter. The Bulgarian people are very hospitable and seem to have a high regard for ministers. They can make a simple meal very meaningful and a work of art. May the Lord bless them and make me to live in such a way that they would not regret the honor they have bestowed upon me.

After a shower and short rest, we went over to Maya's "flat." It was so good to see her godly mother (Tanya) and grandmother once again. We visited a few minutes, then made our way to Maya's church for our first service in Russe this trip. It was a youth meeting and everyone was attentive and nice. One precious old brother prayed powerfully. Bro. Herb did Part 1 of his presentation on the O.T. tabernacle, complete with transparencies! It was very interesting. I followed him with a short summation of how the tabernacle foreshadowed many of the characteristics of Christ, using John 14:6, and Psalm 63:4, as my benchmarks. The people seemed to enjoy themselves

and I believe God was glorified.

Following the service and fellowship afterward, we went back to Maya's flat for a late supper and more fellowship. We enjoyed "catching up" on events occurring while we were apart and was allowed to use the computer to learn the news from home, as well as the meal. We did not leave until 11:30 pm and got to our bedrooms around 12:30. I am privileged to stay in Bro. Rosen's simple, but clean, home. They were so tired, everyone went straight to bed! I had the opportunity to check my email and send a few short messages before disconnection from the server ended it. I was thankful to hear that Elder Jerry Hunt, Sr.'s colon surgery appeared to be successful and the cancer did not spread. Praise God!

Sunday, July 23

This morning my first thoughts and prayers are for my family and for the services today at Fair Haven. May God be pleased to bless them with His presence and power as well as us in our scheduled three services here in Russe today. My prayers are also inclusive of Providence, Albany, South Hampton, Las Vegas, Cincinnati, Fellowship, Big Spring, Heritage, and Gadsden churches this Lord's Day. I read Colossians again this morning and want to let Christ have all the preeminence today in my life and teaching. May it ever be. Amen.

We began our day with prayer. I was moved by the hospitality of this poor family to set before me the very best that they had in their possession to give. Their humble home is reflective of my Master's image. I feel to know the attitude of Abraham's servant who exclaimed to God, "I being in the way, the Lord hath led me to the house of my Master's brethren." Rogen, his wife, and both teenage children could not have treated me better! Following a good breakfast, I made an attempt to email home. We do not have easy access to an international phone, so the internet is the next best thing.

We then went to meet at Maya's church where I was given the whole preaching hour. Bro. Herb went to the only Baptist Church in Northern Bulgaria this morning. I cannot explain how it rejoiced my heart to see dear Leah, Maya, Tonya and her godly mother enter the building with smiles as big as Texas! The house was packed with people in every nook and cranny. I only saw eyeballs as I began to preach. Maya did an absolutely excellent job translating the one hour message I tried to bring. The Spirit attended the effort and people visibly rejoiced in the beauty of Christ! Amen. Mission accomplished! Following the service, we regrouped with Bro. Herb at a very nice restaurant in an old Turkish fort refurbished into a winery and beautiful restaurant. All 14 of us could sit at the same table! Bro. Herb had preached at the Baptist church and brought the very capable pastor and his family with him. Little Ellen, Bro. Herb's granddaughter had some stomach trouble that prevented her and her mother (Sis. Dawn) from coming to services this morning, so it was good to see them both able to come to lunch with the rest of us. It was very enjoyable indeed. Bro. Herb asked me to do a devotion for the group. I took 2 Kings 4 for our reading and then led in prayer. It was delightful to hear the Baptist preacher's experience of grace and call to ministry. He seems to be a serious student of the scripture and believer in the doctrines of grace.

We hurried to a 3:00 pm service at another Pentecostal type church that I was expecting to be a youth gathering, but it was a special church service for us. It was hot and Bro. Herb told me to take the time, which I did. They were very receptive to my

message, but evidently I must have said something that upset the old pastor. He said *"I like to let Baptist ministers come to my pulpit because they bring nine stones and leave with eight. The ninth stone is left here for a blessing to our church. The walls of this church are built strong by those who oppose us. I was ordained by God to preach while our country was under Communist rule. I have been shot twice, placed in prison 80 times, beaten, stoned and left to die more times than I can count, but still God raised me up in power. 2000 people have received healing here and dozens of churches began by ministers ordained here. So bring your stones and we will continue to build! I have been invited many times to come to the USA, but that would be a mistake if I went because all the Baptists and Methodists would receive the Holy Ghost and that would put an end to their denomination!"* I took exception to his sentiment, but considered deeply the things he and other Christians have endured through recent years. He then prayed over us and thanked us for coming. Quite an experience.

We left in a hurry to make it back to Maya's church for a 6 pm service. Again, the house was packed. Four Mormon missionaries were present. Bro. Herb asked them who they represented and they said, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints of America. To this introduction he replied, "I am Pastor Herb Hatfield and I represent the Church of Jesus Christ of latter day saints in Aberdeen Mississippi called Primitive Baptists!" Bro. Herb did a good job in his second part study of the Old Testament tabernacle and I followed with a few remarks on the cross and Christ as our Lamb, closing with the song, "Lamb of God" by Twila Paris. God just blessed every part of the service and Bro. Plumin thanked us for coming and welcomed us back any time we could come. God is good!

We then went back to Maya's flat where we enjoyed pizza and fellowship. We also had a chance to do some email. We then were asked to sing some of our hymns in English for them, which we gladly did. We sang *Amazing Grace, God moves in a Mysterious Way, and Be Thou My Vision*. Also, *What Wondrous Love is This*. It was a very emotional time of reflection and thanksgiving. Bro. Herb's family sings so sweetly. It was an honor to be with them in Bulgaria. They asked me to offer prayer in conclusion and we thanked them for their hospitality and kindness toward us.

I left the Hatfields and Maya's family and went back to Bro. Rogen's humble home getting to bed about 12:30 am. It has been an interesting day indeed!

Monday, July 24

I awakened promptly at 6:30 am without an alarm clock. I went in to the living room to check my email while the ladies prepared a breakfast meal. I was thankful to have several messages from home.

Following breakfast at 8 am, we went to meet the others at Maya's house. Mrs. Tonya took our passport to the police station to be stamped so we would not have any difficulty getting through customs tomorrow. It was sweet of her to do this even though Rogen is a policeman and wanted to take care of it for us. She insisted! Bro. Plumin was there also and volunteered to take us to see the ruins of an ancient fort and castle that is looked upon with as much respect by the Bulgarians as Masada is by the Jews. Masada was the palace fort built by King Herod the Great where Jews made their last stand against the armies of Rome, while this place, Cherven Fortress was the last stand against the invading armies of the Ottoman Turks, which began a rule of over 500

years! It was very interesting indeed. We also saw an ancient monastery build in the side of a cliff near Russe before going to lunch at a restaurant overlooking the Danube River. There, they presented us with gifts of remembrance. It was a sweet time.

We hurried off to the bus station where we were met by Julian the translator, which Bro. Herb hired. I wish I could buy him for what he is worth and sell him for what he thinks he is worth! (He was indeed helpful to us though and allowed for us to speak in two different places, for which I am thankful.) We made the five hour bus trip just fine and took a taxi to our hostel. We made quick calls home and then went to supper, as Bro. Herb had found a good place near the hostel. It was very good and he had enough Lava left to buy it for us. I have found him to be a generous soul and a pleasure to travel with. He had a very interesting experience on the dark street between the restaurant and our hostel, but I must leave that story for him to tell! The miles of walking, riding, moving our luggage, etc. took its toll and after showering we melted into our comfortable beds about 11:30. God is good!

Tuesday, July 25

The Lord blessed us with a good night's rest last night and we were up by 6:30. We walked a short distance to a McDonald's restaurant for coffee and a ham & cheese sandwich. We then returned to the hostel to finish packing and bid farewell to four American missionaries that were there on their way to Romania for a few weeks. They were from Lynchburg, Virginia and very friendly to us. It was just awesome to hear of their work and ministry in this part of the world since the fall of Communism 15 years ago. They said we were the third American team they've met in Bulgaria, which I thought was interesting.

We left the hostel about nine to go to the airport, which is small, but pretty efficient. We did not know what to expect, but Bro. Stan, the missionary to the Jews, met us there and made sure we had no difficulty getting checked in on the right plane. He has a servant's heart, and I believe is doing a great work here. He holds very similar doctrinal positions with us and is associated with an organization that is 150 years old – *Witness to Israel* – and seems very happy with his labors. He suffers from colitis and is only 34 years old.

We descended from customs to gate # 5 to go to Moscow. A bus took us to our plane on the runway. We are looking forward to seeing Bro. Zack Guess and Bro. David Pyles in Moscow. We will then make the long flight to Irkutsk, Siberia to meet up with our contact there, whose name and address is:

Sergey Mochalov
Servastopal Street, 249-17
Irkutsk, Siberia 664048, Russia

The end of the earth? No, but I am told you can see it from there! The 747 evangelists fly again!

Our two and a half hour flight from Sofia, which is 1200 miles, was right on schedule. I was relieved that the plane was a Boeing 747 built in the good old US of A! It took us another 2 ½ hours to get through customs and bussed to the domestic airport, which was only about five miles away. We went through another check point in the very, very crowded terminal, which is small compared to ours. We exchanged some money for Rubles and ate a good snack, wondering where Zack and David were. Our

flight to Irkutsk was delayed five hours due to bad weather conditions. This was actually a blessing in disguise because Zack & David's flight was late and they did not realize that they had to meet us at the domestic airport. They wandered around the lower level of the airport a couple of hours looking for us. Finally, David called Herb on his cell phone and made the adjustments necessary to find us, or allow us to find them! We were so thankful to God for His favorable providence to bring us together for this good work so many miles from home! God is good.....all the time.

After several more delays, Bro. Zack & David were finally able to check their bags on a confirmed flight to Irkutsk. They handled the delays well, but it was wearing on them for sure! We were given vouchers for supper in the airport restaurant, which was good and then made our way to the gate to await boarding. After a seven hour delay, we finally took off from Moscow at 1:45 am and tried to rest in the cramped conditions on a 4 ½ hour flight to Irkutsk, Siberia, which was nearly impossible.

We were met in Irkutsk by pastors Sergey and Vladimir and Bro. Sergey's son. They took us to an old Seminary school building, where we fellowshiped and enjoyed a short rest, leaving at 6 pm to drive nine hours to Ulan-ude to minister for a few days. Bro. Igor received us into his humble home about 3:00 am and had a good snack of meat, fruit, and Coke waiting for us. We visited with one another until 4:30 am and laid down for rest on some floor mats pondering Bro. Igor's good testimony.

Wednesday, July 26

We arose at 10:30 am thanking the Lord for the six hours of rest. We enjoyed breakfast and Biblical discussions until leaving out for our first service in Siberia. We drove 30 kilometers to Ulan-ude. We greatly enjoyed our discussions of John 6, 10, 11, Romans 10 and finding these brethren sound in their understanding of regeneration (without means).

We met together with about 15 men, women and children here where Bro. Igor's labors as pastor are being blessed. They sang Russian hymns, prayed, and gave us an opportunity to speak. I went first and took as my text, James 1:17-18 on the *Power of the Word*. 1) Written, 2) Preached, and 3) Living. David Pyles spoke from Jeremiah on the *Nature of the Effectual Call, Love, and Eternal security*. The people stood and sang *Amazing Grace*. Several more people crowded into the small meeting house and I was pleased to see so many children. Bro. Zack then exhorted them to trust in this God who will never forsake us. He re-accounted the death of his 12th child, teaching that God will sanctify our deepest trials to our own good and his glory. Bro. Herb followed with a short exhortation to stand fast in faith and to read his pamphlet on the doctrines of grace that we believe. Then, Pastor Igor exhorted the church toward following our shepherd Jesus Christ (John 10). Bro. Sergey led all the singing from their hymnals. He has an operatic voice and sings well. Bro. Igor shared some of his experiences in coming to Christ. One little boy shared a poem about Christ as the narrow way, then another believer exhorted the church toward deeds of service. We then had prayer for the sick and the provision of a permanent building. We even went by a small building that is available for purchase for \$2000. A matter of prayer. We then ate lunch back in Bro. Igor's home about 4 pm.

We went to the scheduled 6:00 pm service here in Ulan-ude. We had a total congregation of about 25 including us. We sang some familiar hymns in Russian,

including *I Need Thee Every Hour* and *There Will Be Showers of Blessings*. After prayer, Bro. David was asked to speak first. He shared a little about himself and then spoke from John 2:23-25, on *The Nature of True Belief in Christ* as the Son of God. Bro. Vladimir again translated for us. David was followed by Bro. Herb who spoke from Matthew 3:16 on *The Importance of Scriptural Baptism*. Bro. Zack then brought a good message on *The Doctrine of Salvation* taken from Romans 5:12, Eph.1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, and I followed with a message on *Primitive Christianity*. All the messages were well received and blessed. The brethren sang a song between the messages, which made for a good intermission each time. They served a snack afterward and concluded around 9:30 pm. We were able to buy a telephone card in order to call home, which we all did. We visited all through the night and went to bed between 2:30 and 3 am. Bro. David and I tried to sleep on a pallet on the kitchen floor, but this endeavor was quite unfruitful!

As I lay upon the hard, cold floor with mosquitos dive bombing around my face, I thought about the young man long ago that thought he wanted to become a monk. He joined a monastery that only permitted you to speak one sentence per year. At the end of the first year the senior monk asked him to speak, so he said, "Bed hard." At the end of the second year he was again asked to speak and he said, "Food bad." Time went on and at the end of the third year he was again brought to the senior monk to speak his sentence, and said, "I quit." To this statement, the senior monk replied, "I am not surprised, all you have done since you've been here is complain!" I am not complaining, just complaining! ;) I wonder how the loss of restful sleep is going to affect my ability to preach clearly. May God show mercy upon us and keep us from a complaining spirit.

Here there is no internet service available to us, so we must wait until we get back to Irkutsk to do our email.

Thursday, July 27 Ulan-ude, Siberia

Friday, July 28

I was only able to rest a couple of hours. Bro. David got up and went to the living room to lay across the love seat there. He looks like an over-grown pretzel covering the piece of small furniture completely. Bro. Zack and Herb were on the fold out bed of the couch and our three Russian brethren slept on their floor pallets in the next small room. My neck was stiff and sore. It was only 5 am, but I went ahead and showered, dressed and made some coffee.

The brethren began to move around about 8 am and prepare to leave out for Irkutsk again. We ate a very tasty and expensive meal at a Mongolian Restaurant, but it took so long to get our food! We were there two hours. We then stopped to see a huge brass sculptor of the head of Lenin, ruler of Communist Russia. I was sickened by the sight as I remembered his cruelty and murderous persecution of Christians and Jews during his seven year regime. I was comforted by the fact that we had prayer together in Lenin square. We parted with Bro. Igor, as he did not go back to Irkutsk with us.

We made the long, bumpy trip back to Irkutsk without any problems. A good supper was at a restaurant overlooking the famous Baikal Lake, which is the largest fresh water lake in the world. We were very tired after the ten hour drive, but still tried to

call home. We couldn't make a connection. Went to bed about 1 am very tired, but very thankful....just for a bed!!! ; (

Saturday, July 29

Schedule of Services:

- | | | | |
|----|-------------|-------------|--|
| 1. | Ulan-ude | pastored by | Igor Butakov |
| 2. | Irkutsk | pastored by | Mochalov Sergey |
| | | pastored by | Michaylov Gennedy |
| 3. | Angarsk | pastored by | Litarvin Sergey - Baptist Bible Church |
| 4. | Suirsk | pastored by | Kopytko Alexes |
| 5. | Sayansk | pastored by | Sergey Gekkel |
| 6. | Mizneudinsk | pastored by | Mossoev Veel |
| 7. | Jangel | pastored by | S. Hepelevsky Tenya |
| 8. | Tulun | pastored by | Paramonov Kolya |

I awoke refreshed this morning around 8 am local time and realized we had no programs to fill today. We cleaned up and organized our things and waited for Bro. Sergey. We ate a light breakfast and enjoyed a sweet devotional prayer service among ourselves. Bro. Sergey came for us at 2:30 pm to go to his house for a meal. We met his dear wife, three daughters and 2 sons. We were also able to call home and work our email while there. I am thankful for that and the sweet fellowship we enjoyed there.

We loaded up with Sergey and three of his children to go see Lake Bakal and to have our supper there. We really enjoyed the meal and time with that dear family. We got back to our room about 11 pm and I tried in vain to call home. I studied a little before getting to bed around 12:30 am

Today, in 1966, I was baptized by my own father into the Primitive Baptist Church. Who would have thought then, 40 years later that I would be writing a journal as an evangelist in Siberia! Let us not despise the day of small things, when we serve such a great God Who has given us such a great message! It is also my second son, Timothy's 22nd birthday. May God bless him in his path of ministry in the gospel. I am looking forward to one day traveling these dusty roads with him by my side, Lord willing!

Sunday, July 30

I had a terrible night trying to sleep. My neck would hurt every time I moved—dozed off about daylight. We split up today. Bro. Herb and I preached together at the Irkutsk meeting house, where we stayed the night. We then were driven to Angarsk and enjoyed a good service. Both churches were about 50-60 members strong and were conducted in a godly manner. I preached from Genesis 24:27, while Herb preached from 2 Thess 2:13. In the second service, which began at noon and lasted until two, I preached from 2 Cor. 8:9 and Herb spoke from Jeremiah 6:16.

Bro. Zack was taken to another congregation and we all met back together again for lunch at Bro. Vlatimir's church outside Irkutsk. We discussed many topics concerning practice and church order. It was very enjoyable and everyone seemed to enjoy both the meal and the fellowship. We did not get back to our room until midnight.

We enjoyed rich discussions on God's word and I changed cots to the bunk

above Bro. David, which was much better. I asked Bro. David if he would mind me sleeping right above him and he replied that he didn't mind at all.....as long as did not wet the bed! I thought of the folks back home and tried to pray for the services there tomorrow with Timothy and Bro. Matt.

Evening meditations on Galatians 6:14 included verses from Gadsby's Hymnal #564 that Bro. Herb brought on the trip.

Dear Lord, forbid that we should boast,
Save in the cross of Christ,
Here may we confidently trust,
And solemnly rejoice.

A triune God is here displayed
In all His glorious hue;
Here sinners may approach and live,
Behold and love Him, too.

Monday, July 31

The Lord blessed me with my first full night's sleep since we came to Irkutsk, for which I am very thankful.

After breakfast we made some calls home and rejoiced that all is well there. I was glad to hear that Fair Haven's services were blessed in many ways. I believe God is going to use Fair Haven Church for many wonderful things in the future. We are scheduled to leave Irkutsk at 3 pm to begin our long journey north to visit brethren there. We re-packed our things and were ready to go before noon.

Bro. Sergey did not come for us until 4:00 pm because he had some work done for the van suspension, thankfully. We drove north only a few hours to a city called Suirsk, which has a small Baptist Church pastored by Kopytko Alexes. Bro. David preached from Isaiah 54 on the *Barren Woman* and I preached from Matt. 26 on *The Lord's Supper*. They were both well received. There were about 40 people present. It was an enjoyable service lasting from 8 - 10 pm

We then had a wonderful supper in the Christian home of Sis. Natasha. Her youngest daughter, has a wonderful gift of playing the piano and singing. I received one of her CD's. We fellowshiped all night and stayed in their home along with grandmother Palina who is 80 years old. They had many questions and Bro. Vladimir translated for us. After we went to bed around 1:30 am, Bro. Vladimir continued to answer their questions and share with them more about Primitive Baptist faith and practice until 3:00 pm. I rejoiced to listen to both the passion and excitement in their voices, even though I could not understand a thing they were saying.

Tuesday, August 1

Xpxctoc Bockpec "Christ is risen" (in Russian).
We did not sleep long, even though we were all comfortable in their clean and hospitable apartment. IT was truly a blessing to be among them. They prepared a delicious breakfast for us and sang more of their songs for us. The highlight for me was hearing the testimony of the 80 year old grandmother, who has been a devout Christian for 30 years and blind (glaucoma) for the last 9 years. It was a sweet testimony and she

sang a beautiful Russian hymn for us, *Thinking of Jesus Day and Night*. Her name is Palina and she has seen much persecution against Christians in her lifetime. We spoke long and hard about the things of God until Bro. Sergey came to pick us up at 11 am. He stayed the night with Pastor Alexey. Sister Natasha and her two daughters prepared us a wonderful lunch, after which we went to the river where the best ferry is located, to talk about the things of God and more of the things related to our church and fellowship. We talked about baptism mainly. We then went back to Natasha's at 4:30 pm and had supper and rest before going back to the house church for our 6 pm service.

Bro. Zack used as a subject, *Three Things to Do in Times of Trouble* Job 23:8-12. Bro. David and I were given the opportunity to say our farewell to the congregation and pray for them. The people stand while both singing and praying. They are so warm, kind and spiritual. I will never forget them. Bro. Herb preached from Psalm 117 on the subject of *Let us Praise the Lord*, Psalm 147:1. Bro. David had to leave after this service to go back to Irkutsk in order to fly back to the USA tomorrow. It was very tempting to change my ticket and go back with him, but I feel led of the Lord to continue on in this important work. We'll miss Bro. David, but will pray for his safe passage back home.

Wednesday, August 2

The Lord blessed Bro. Sergey and Bro. Vlatimir to conduct us safely to Sayansk arriving about midnight. My back and neck were so tight, so I asked to take a hot shower quickly, rather than visit until the morning. God is so good to His servants! I felt so much better after the shower and two aspirins. I felt strange standing in my pajamas while everyone else was fully dressed and ready to eat a midnight snack with tea before going to bed. We had a good time of laughter and relaxation around the small kitchen table. The two new ministers we have now met are 'Little' Sergey and Alexander. Bro. Herb and Zack got the two beds, I got the couch, and the other three ministers had floor pallets. There was not a morning program, so we were delighted to finally get to a cyber café which is the first we have seen here!

Our discussions with Siberian Christians revolved more around the use of musical instruments and head coverings for women in the church. Both are used by these brethren and they wanted to know where Primitive Baptists stood on these issues.

Called home while the Russian brethren ate their breakfast at noon and found out that little Abigail, my granddaughter's front teeth removal went well and she was cute as she could be! Around the 4th of July she fell and hit them so that she broke the roots and they died. I also learned that my youngest brother, Jimmy, may have had a light heart attack. He is only 36 years old! I pray God will deliver them all, according to his wise and holy counsel.

Our morning devotions revolved around the comfort of Psalm 27:5. God's promises are real and we need not fear.

It was good for all of us to hear the news from home. It always helps during these long trips to now something of our home folks condition, good or bad. Our attitudes are greatly improved!

We went to the "Bizarre," which means "market" and bought food for our afternoon meal, as well as tonight's fresh fruits and vegetables along with read and

eggs. I get the distinct impression that these people do not eat well all the time because of limited resources.

Sis Ira and her youngest child accompanied us to the “house of prayer” apartment where we were scheduled to have a service this evening. It was very crowded even though there were only about 20 or so people present. Their singing was beautiful indeed. They sang three hymns before I preached to them from 1 Samuel 2:1-10 on *Our Joy in God’s Sovereignty*. They sang two songs and Bro. Zack preached on *God’s Sovereignty in Creation, Providence and Salvation*. We each took about an hour and enjoyed very good liberty before the attentive congregation. Bro. Vlatimir improves his translation efforts each day, or else we improve in our ability to work with him!

Bro. Sergey is a young, zealous, 32 year old brother. He came to Sayansk three years ago as a Baptist Missionary to recover a scattered Baptist community in this region. He was paid \$100 (2700 Rubles) per month to support himself and family by the Arminian Baptist Union. He began to be uncomfortable with their denominational decision to ordain women as pastors as well as doctrinal problems contrary to the doctrines of grace. In January of this year, the Union stopped his support. The only job he could find was as a taxi driver.

We enjoyed our late night discussion and watermelon and tea. We did not get to bed until around two am.

Thursday, August 3,

I enjoyed my hot shower and rested well until we arose at 7:30 and ate breakfast about an hour later. WE then loaded up the old van and headed for Mizneuvdnsk over a lot of rough roads, but beautiful countryside. Siberia has a lot of open space and trees that remind me of Aspen only smaller. There are also pine and spruce with a lot of open fields. They grow a lot of grain here: oats, rye and wheat. Siberia is the “bread basket” of Russia! I got to sit in the front seat for the first time since we have been here and enjoyed the view and leg room! ;)

We arrived safely in Mizneuvdinsk (established in 1648) after only five hours of driving over their rough roads. Bro. Herb has some stomach trouble that I suffered from on Monday.

We entered the city and waited for the pastor, M. Veel, to come and guide us to the Prayer House. He was a young reddish-blond fellow with a big smile on his face. He leaned into the van and welcomed us, but also asked us to remember that this was a military town and it would not be wise to speak our English loudly or draw attention to ourselves in any way. It is not that we are illegally here, but we do not want to tempt some poor MP to try to bribe some payment or bribe from us.

We followed Bro. Veel to his “flat” where his godly wife prepared us another feast! It was really tasty and we enjoyed the experience. Their two small children were afraid of us and very shy. I think the daughter is four and the boy is two. Very shy!

We were impressed with the area designated as his study. He has many good books. He had an illustrated map on his wall of “Bunyan’s Dream” (Pilgrim’s Progress) which I had never seen before, but I recognized several of his books written by A.W. Pink, John McArthur, C.H. Spurgeon and the Puritans. We spoke a lot about our churches back home and the history of our church in America and the churches in the Philippines, India and Africa. It was decided that we should have two services tomorrow

rather than one tonight and one tomorrow night, due to the labors of the people. So, we just visited with Bro. Veel. After supper, he led us across town to another apartment where we are to stay the night. A young 21 year old brother, who assists Bro. Veel, whose name is Alexander, kindly offered his mother's house to us. His mother and grandmother agreed to stay in another place so we could all stay in their flat. We appreciated this kindness. Since they do not have hot water, they took us to a local bath house to shower and shave. Bro. Veel is a watchman in the bath house, so we did not have to pay the 50¢ for our shower.

We enjoyed the experience and got back to the flat around 10:30 pm. We visited over a hot cup of tea until 12:30 am, discussing WWII from the viewpoint of Russian people, reflecting on the Battle of the Bulge, Midway and Stalingrad. These victories led to the overthrow of Hitler's Germany.

I had another battle to wage, which I lost; the Battle of Mosquitoes! The hall light was left on so we would have no difficulty finding the bathroom and this attracted a host of flying, stinging hellions. It was a bloody fight indeed, but it finally got cold enough for them to leave.

We had prayer and went on to bed. Once again I slept on the couch in the living room rejoicing in God's sure mercies and great promises.

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through.
God has not promised sun without rain,
Peace without sorrow, joy without pain.
But God has promised strength as our day,
Rest when we labor, light on the way.
Grace for our trials, help from above,
Unfailing kindness, undying love.
Though we have mingled sunshine and rain,
Clouds decked with rainbows, joy mixed with pain.
Let us still trust His mercies right on,
And sing His praises, all the day long.

Friday, August 4

Following breakfast at eight, we left for a meeting in the village of Shumsky. We all numbered 15 for the sweet service in the farm house. Our service began at ten. After several songs and prayers, I spoke on the subject of *Building on the Right Foundation* using Matthew 7:24-29 as my text. Bro. Herb spoke on *The Faithfulness of Christ as our High Priest* using Hebrews 4:14-16. Bro. Zack used Hebrews 6:10 and presented a message on *God Won't Forget*. Bro. Vlatimir did a good job translating for us. They sang one familiar song with them that we know—*When the Roll is Called Up Yonder*. After the preaching service, we had open discussion with the gathered church in which they wanted more information on our form of worship and the way we conducted our meetings, Bible Studies, etc.

We went by to see the oldest member of the church who is a 98 year old widow. She has been a Christian through the Balshoveck Revolution, two world wars and great persecution from a Communist Regime. She did not want to get out into the rain today, but she is quite an example of faithfulness. When the Christian leaders of her village

were assassinated in 1930, she took in seven of their children to raise to adulthood. She has quite a testimony. Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and all their power could not remove the faith and love in the soul of this petite, little Russian Baptist! May her tribe increase!

We came back to Alexander's flat to rest and eat our lunch. Bro. Herb shared his spam and crackers to go along with the vegetable soup, cheese, bread and fresh vegetables they served us along with hot tea. Everything was good and satisfying. It does my heart good to hear my Russian brethren laugh and carry on with one another like they do! It reminds me of several brethren back home that I can do so with. Bro. Sergey is quite jovial and very animated in his expressions.

We learned today that Bro. David made it safely back to Mississippi, for which we gave thanks to our Lord. I was able to purchase a phone card that would give us local access to the internet using Bro. Alexander's computer, so Bro. Zack and I were able to check our messages and send a mini-report back home. God has been so good to us in every way—even in providing communication back home. Blessed be the name of the Lord for all His benefits toward us!

We left for our evening service at 5:45 pm, not having to drive very far this time. We are in Nizneusinsk, which means "Under the River." Our service began promptly at six pm. After two hymns and prayer while standing, I was asked to speak first on the subject of the identifying marks of the Church that Jesus built using the text Matthew 16:18, Acts 1:8, 2:45. I stood about 35 minutes. It was well received. Bro. Herb followed and preached from 1 Corinthians 11 on the significance of the women wearing a head covering in today's generation. I did not fully agree with his application, but it is the Russian Baptist practice, culturally, so it is fine with me for them to use them, but I believe it is a matter of conscience not law. He spoke for well over an hour. Bro. Zack followed him and took only a short time to speak from one verse in which he commended them all to the grace of the Lord. We three Americans then sang *What Wondrous Love is This*, which was enjoyed by our Russian brethren. It sounded pretty good if I do say so myself! ;) We concluded in prayer about 8:30, then had open discussion with the congregation until around ten pm. Bro. Veel showed us some property they are trying to purchase for their new House of Prayer. We were all tired when we returned to our apartment at 11:30. Had supper and a good prayer meeting with Bro. Veel. To bed at 1:30 am.

Saturday, August 5

The Lord blessed all of us with a good night's rest. Bro. Herb brought his trusty mosquito spray and it was very effective. We awakened at seven and re-packed everything to drive north 650 km. We had breakfast and even had the opportunity to check our email before leaving out around ten am.

The scenery was at times breathtaking and I sat in the front seat until we ate lunch around three pm. The further north we went the fewer vehicles we saw. The few trucks we saw were hauling logs. Nearly every house we saw was a log house. It all looks just like Alaska or Montana territories. It was really beautiful. There were a lot of mosquitos for sure, but there were also fields of wild flowers and berry bushes in abundance! They warned of grizzly bears and timber wolves also, but we did not see any, nor do we want to! Nobody at home would believe the condition of the main roads

in Siberia, but after 13 long hours, we made it to Yangell and went straight to the large apartment of Bro. Zhenya, who has three older children and three younger ones still at home.

We ate a small portion of their meal and headed for bed, around midnight, thanking the Lord for His favorable providence toward us. He has been so very good to us over these many miles and trust He will continue for those that lay ahead. Slovadebagu “Glory to God!”

Sunday, August

Awakened at 7:30 am a bit sore, but anticipating a full day of service to our awesome God. Us three Americans were dressed and ready for breakfast by 8:30. Bro. Zhenya’s wife prepared pancakes and fruit for us and then went to take care of her family who were still asleep. They have a different time clock in their brain than we do and it is tough sometimes to align with them. They like to stay up late at night and we like to rise early. We had a good season of prayer together in our room and visited with the others while they ate.

We left out just before eleven to go to service because their House of Prayer is just around the corner from where Bro. Zhenya’s flat is. This is a very small village, but their building is the nicest building we have seen this far. The buildings and grounds are well kept. The congregation numbered about 30 and there were about four men, the rest were women and children. Bro. Zack spoke to them on the subject of *The Love of God* citing Ephesians 3 and Romans 8. I followed and talked to them about *The Thessalonians Model of the Church* using Acts 17:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 1. Bro. Herb closed the preaching part of the service with a short message from 2 Thessalonians 1 on *The Patience of the Saints*. We felt the spirit among them.

The wind began to blow and it cooled down very fast. We could only imagine what a wind like this would mean to these people were it -50°F. We then returned to the pastor’s home for a meal about 1:30 pm. Following the meal, the whole church came to the house to hear teaching and ask questions. It was profitable, but very tiring for some strange reason. I have never had more difficulty with the time zone adjustment than this trip! I spoke to them from Romans 8 and then we fielded their questions for the next 3 ½ - 4 hours. We discussed everything from marriage between believers and unbelievers, to Communion and music in the church. It was enjoyable if only we could have understood them better and they us! We took another late supper at 11:30 pm and went to bed an hour later—very tired! Prayed for Fair Haven, whose services are going on at this very hour in Georgia, USA.

Monday, August 7

Pastor Zhenya’s home and church
“God Bless You!” Bog Buagoslovi Vas!

Awakened at 7:30 am sharp and took my shower and dressed for church services scheduled to begin at eleven. We ate about 8:30. Enjoyed prayer time and fellowship together.

The service began at the House of Prayer promptly at 11 am, but only had about 10 members to preach to. They asked Bro. Herb to speak first and he took Romans 8:29-30 and tried to speak on the subject of *God’s Children Going to Heaven* referring

to the booklet he wrote on salvation. Bro. Zack spoke for about 30 minutes on *Regeneration: Immediate* taking his scriptural references from John 3:8, 5:25, 2 Cor. 4:6. They sang songs in a minor key at times and it was really beautiful. Bro. Sergey's baritone voice adds a lot. They had a piano present, but did not use it while we were there. The rest of the congregation came in while Bro. Zack was speaking, but the brethren had to work and couldn't come which was understandable. God blessed us with a good service and the people seemed very receptive to each message given. We enjoyed these people so much and they seemed to enjoy us as well. Following services, which lasted until about 1:30 pm, we went back to the flat of Pastor Zhenya. Everyone was able to take a short nap while the sisters prepared their meal for us, which was also needed. We visited until taking our lunch at 3:30 pm. It was amazing to us to sit hour after hour and answer question after question from these godly people who have touched our hearts in such a wonderful way! All the storms these folks have endured, all the poverty all the sorrow and yet, here they are worshiping the God of our fathers in spirit and truth! How can that be? Only through God's sovereign power and grace! They believe the same doctrines as we do, but have a mandated hair covering, use musical instruments in their worship and do not believe in the literal observation of feet washing.

The people started going home about 8:30 pm. Sisters Lena and Luda prepared us a good meal, after which we continued to talk on the things of God. One drunken man came to repentance and another woman asked for specific prayer regarding salvation. Many good discussions on scripture took place. Sundown is about 10:40 pm and sunrise at 5 am. These people have a way of getting into your heart.

Jangel (Daniel) Shepelevski is the 32 year old pastor of the church which is yet higher in the mountains, about 1,000 km north of where we are here. Bro. David paid his way to drive here. His mouth is full of gold teeth and he is also pretty argumentative! ☹️ He has never been ordained and probably should not be, at least until he has had time to study under a sound minister.

We had prayer about midnight and tried to get some rest because it will be a hard day of travel tomorrow with an evening service scheduled at Tulun about 450 km away!

Tuesday, August 8

It was 5:30 am when I awakened this morning because we were heading out to Tulun at seven. It took us about nine hours to get there, stopping only for gas and lunch. The sisters at Tulun had a good meal waiting for us at 5 pm. The services began at six. WE had about 25 believers present and Bro. Herb went first taking Romans 8:29-30 for his text. I followed and spoke on *The Unfinished Work of the Church* using Acts 20:24. Bro. Zack closed out with a message on God's sovereignty in regeneration citing, John 3:5,7 and Daniel 4::35, etc. Our messages seemed well received. Bro. Vlatimir was tired, but still did a great job staying up with our English speaking sermons. It was difficult though.

Pastor Nicolay has three precious children and a devoted wife. He seems very zealous, but is not very deep in the scripture, or I should say, not as deep in them as Sergey and Vladimir. We had another meal after the services and several hours of discussion as usual. Instead of spending the night in Tulun at the church, it was

decided that we should drive on to Irkutsk, there being the possibility of a storm tomorrow and there would be little traffic after midnight. We left the church at 11:30 pm.

Wednesday, August 9

God blessed us to arrive safely at the church compound at 4:30 am. I rode shotgun beside Bro. Sergey who drove us every kilometer this whole trip. I admire his tenacity and zeal. He is a natural leader and I treasure his friendship and fellowship. I feel the same closeness for Vlatimir, who is so intelligent and sincere in his walk with the Lord. He begins each day with one hour of prayer and Bible reading. My favorite image of him will be as I witnessed him kneeling on the floor in the light of some window quietly praying and reading, while wiping tears from his cheeks in communion with his Savior. What a precious sight and an enduring lesson! These men of God make me want to be a better Christian.

My body clock is all messed up and I awoke at eight and just could not get back to sleep! I quietly walked past Bro. Herb and Bro. Zack, who were simply too exhausted to get up! I made my way to the shower room having to borrow Bro. Herb's shaver because I must have left mine somewhere along that bumpy road behind us. Bro. Herb is so experienced in this kind of work, that he has everything anybody would need and cheerfully shares his things with us. He enjoys giving everything he has to someone else. Bro. Herb had cereal and milk and coffee waiting for me when I got out of the shower. We had prayer together and re-packed our things one more time. Thankfully, each time we reload, it gets lighter and easier to carry!

I went to the chapel and enjoyed my prayer time and Bible reading this morning for one hour. I felt the presence of my Master as He spoke to me through His word. I enjoyed the quietness and solitude of this House of Prayer and really was reluctant to leave! The Lord has wrought a great and enduring work here and I believe He has called us to be a helper of their joy.

I cannot help but think about two little boys I met in Yangel that I had a distinct impression of the Spirit that they were both going to be preachers of the gospel one day! Hallelujah! The first is about eight years old and his name is Alexander Trashcova and the other is only seven and his name is Timothy Shepelevski. One other, Vasa Shepelevski may also be called. He is ten. I hope I can help them in some way with their religious training. God will manifest His will in His own good time. They have good parents that are trying to teach them. I plan to study their language before I return next year, God willing.

Bro. Sergey came and picked us up at two pm and took us to his home for the use of his computer. There is such a limitation on internet access here, at least in the places we have gone. This has been our biggest complaint, as we felt the lack of communication can give rise to undue concern by our loved ones back home. Bro. Sergey's precious wife prepared us a lunch with black tea, which was delicious. Bro. Herb and Bro. Zack went with him to purchase tires and shock absorbers for the van while I pecked away on 18 messages that awaited my response. I completed my task and was picked up at the flat at 5 pm, rejoining the others. I down-loaded the precious photo of Jefferson, Joanna and Eliana holding up a sign that said, "We love you, Poppy." I wish I would have had that one at the beginning of this trip!

Back home at Fair Haven, Sis. Wanda Tyson's father passed away at the age of

92. I was strengthened by the emails I read and thank God for those prayer warriors at home that are really to be given credit for any success we might enjoy here.

Just before our seven pm service, we were informed that our translator's husband, who is an unbeliever, would not allow his wife, who was a baptized believer, to translate for American Baptists. It was a great shock and disappointment to all of us. Bro. Herb is with Bro. Vlatimir at his church tonight, so Bro. Zack and I sat still and observed their service. It was good for us to hear Bro. Sergey preach to his people. We couldn't understand a word of it! I had to fight depression and discouragement. There was so much on my heart that I wanted to say to these poor people that I could not, not even good-bye. I had on my mind the Apostolic benediction in 2 Cor. 13:11-14.

God is on His throne and there is a reason we were silenced and Sergey was able to feed both the sheep and the lambs. After all, that is what matters most of all!

Bro. Sergey gave a report on our journey north and then led several songs. I asked him to read 2 Cor. 13:11-14 from us to them. After this reading, he then went into a Bible study on the effectual call of Christ using Matthew 9:9 as a starting point. He was asking questions of the congregation and there was a lot of response from both brothers and sisters. You could tell everyone was enjoying it and the interacting was great. I copied down a sign beside the pulpit from Romans 10:3.

Bro. Zack said it right, "Observing their service was like watching a silent movie!" ☹️ We got back upstairs to our room by ten, made sure everything was ready to go in the morning. Vladimir brought Herb back to the compound about 11:30 pm. We gave him our gifts and bid him farewell.

Thursday, August 10

Bro. Vladimir brought one of his twin 16 year old sons and an impressive young man with him. We visited with them a little while and then Herb had to re-pack his things. He is leaving them two suitcases full of food and other items he brought in case we needed them which we did not. I have never seen anybody bring as much stuff as Bro. Herb and Bro. Zack. It is a joyful experience to be able to give these poor people something useful to them and as a prayer-remembrance toward us. They have asked us for nothing but fellowship and are very reluctant to take our gifts. My, what a difference that is from many places we have gone! They are truly "krasivo" (beautiful) people and I will never forget them. Their faces are engraved in my heart for all time. They are not perfect, but neither are we, or at least the last time I checked. But they are a warm, generous, attentive and sober-minded people who know first-hand the cost of persecution and rejection, first through a Communist government, then by a pagan culture and then by Armenian Baptists. They are a faithful, godly people whom God is blessing to not only survive, but actually to grow in both knowledge and numbers. I am completely satisfied that the Lord is doing a great work among them and I plan to recommend to the few PB churches that have a Biblical vision toward evangelism that they support and pray for our brothers and sisters of like-faith in the cold regions of Siberia.

We got to bed at 12:30 am and I slept off and on until we arose at five. We got our luggage down stairs and enjoyed a good cup of coffee and bowl of cereal before Sergey and his good son, Dina came to pick us up promptly at six am. We hurried to the airport and made it in about 20 minutes. It was at that point that Bro. Herb realized

that he left his digital camera at the room along with his 500+ snapshots which were stored on the camera. Bro. Sergey left us to check in and rushed back to the room to retrieve the camera. We were relieved to see him return with the camera case in hand. We bid him and Dina farewell and went through customs to get to the gate. Flight 705 to Moscow was right on schedule and we lifted off at exactly 8:00 am. The aircraft was an older model 737 and we were immediately confronted by the reality that the air-conditioning did not work! Uggh... The plane was packed full of overheated people?! The funny thing is that it did not bother us at all because of the direction the plan was pointed! WE just sweat and smiled through the whole five hour flight, sensing somehow that the lights of home would soon be shining for us. Alleluia.

My mind continued to replay several themes that seemed to dominate this whole trip. I think it all goes back to the reality and expression of God's boundless love for His elect. As the hymn writer said, "What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul." There are not enough words in any language to adequately describe the depth of love that Christ has for the Father and for "His people" (Matt. 1:21). It was love, not nails that bound him to the cross.

We arrived safely at the small international airport in Moscow at nine am local time. We boarded our transfer bus with all of our luggage in hand and were carried the four miles across the pasture to terminal two. We had time to get a really good meal (Bro. Zack bought for us), send some emails back home, and buy some post cards, which are hard to find. This finished up our remaining rubles (Russian money). We then made our way to gate #14 for flight 3181 to Frankfurt. The relief of getting through customs and being on schedule caused our lack of sleep to kick in and we became weary and a bit silly. We were captivated by anyone speaking English! Our flight left Moscow right on schedule and we enjoyed the comfort and service of the Lufthansa airline. The 3 ½ hour flight was restful and we had no trouble retrieving our luggage and getting through customs when we arrived. We walked right out of the terminal over a bridge way to the beautiful Sheraton hotel and went straight to our rooms. This is the first room I have not shared with someone else since beginning my trip (except for London). Thank the Lord for this arrangement! Hot shower, news, bed...

Friday, August 11

There is much discussion about the arrest of 21 terrorists in England who plotted to use liquid explosives to bomb three American airlines: United, Continental and American as they would be on their way to American cities. From the news that we received, the UK police discovered the plot before it could be carried out, thank the Lord. This plot heightened airport security world-wide. I am glad I believe in a sovereign God Who rules absolutely over the whole universe and I trust Him explicitly in all my goings. The evil men arrested were linked to alquiada terrorists and were of Pakistani heritage and Muslim extremists. We are all in God's hands and that is good enough for me!

Security concerns were very intense at the Frankfurt airport, so we decided to get there as early as we could. I woke up at 4:15 am without an alarm and walked back to the airport with Bro. Herb and Bro. Zack even though their flight on United to Chicago left 2 ½ hours earlier than my direct flight to Atlanta on Lufthansa. I stayed with them until they got checked in and we parted company. I did not have any trouble checking

in and we passing through customs and three security check points. I was thankful to be among the first passengers to get to gate A-60. Bro. Herb gave me 50 euro dollars, so I was able to buy a good breakfast and some neat postcards. He also paid for my room at the Sheraton hotel, which was totally unexpected! I am indeed thankful for his generosity toward me and my ministry.

As I sat at my gate, I purchased a USA Today newspaper and watched TV reports on terrorism, the suicidal bombings in Iraq, and the fearful escalation of the war between Israel and the Hezbolah of Lebanon. All of these sights and sounds of war remind me of the malice of Satan and the consequences of hatred in our sin-cursed world! The only remedy is found in the person and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ!

We were informed that our flight should disembark from Frankfurt on schedule and I am thankful for God's favorable providence toward us.

I met a very kind and super-intelligent German school teacher who actually helps establish schools of learning in India as a skilled volunteer. We compared notes on our experiences with the Dalit people and she helped me understand how grants are received to build facilities there. Interesting... She speaks French, English, Latin, Spanish, and Portugese along with her mother tongue of German. This proved to be a great encouragement for me in my linguistic pursuits. They served us a good meal, after which I was able to study and pray some. Sleep eluded me.

The service on Lufthansa was good and even though there were many children around me, they were all well-behaved and quiet. I was able to rest, but not sleep. I read and studied and in my mind I rehearsed the whole trip behind me. God blessed it so much in every way. I can only remember one message that I did not feel the presence of the Spirit and met only one minister that I did not feel was sound or called of God. That is an amazing thing to my mind. God is surely doing a work among the Russian and Bulgarian people. I lament over the fact that such a powerful moving of God is largely absent in most of our churches at home. As the pilot called out that we were approaching Atlanta, I am filled with anticipation and joy to see my faithful wife and loving family again. It has been 26 days since last I saw them. My mind went back to the terrible days of WWII when many better men than I am had to leave their families for as long as four years! My, how very difficult that must have been! The Lord has been pleased to bring me back to where I started this long journey. Sloivaboga (Glory to God). But, my home is not in Georgia or even Texas. My home is in heaven and I am but a day and a preaching trip closer to going there. Our days are truly so few, may they be more devoted to Him and His kingdom. Amen!