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82-143

Fire Guts Jerusalem Church, Begin Deplores Suspected Arson By Elizabeth Smith and Bill Webb

JERUSALEM (BP)—A fire, which authorities suspect was started by an arsonist, swept through West Jerusalem Baptist Church about midnight Oct. 7 leaving three walls standing but gutting the chapel's interior.

Baptist House, a two-story stone structure adjacent to the church, received limited fire damage, minor smoke and water damage and broken windows. The center houses a bookstore and classrooms where the church holds Sunday School. It also functions as a meeting place for Baptists in the city.

No figures were available on the dollar loss in the fire.

The fire and the possibility of arson drew sympathetic response from virtually all levels of government in Israel, including Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who was quoted on radio in Israel as deploring the fire.

"If it was arson and if it was committed by Jews it was a crime that must be investigated and dealt with," Begin said.

Yosef Burg, Israel's minister of the interior, police and religious affairs, came by Baptist House the morning after the fire and told reporters, "This act shows a greater spiritual problem than a physical problem. You can always rebuild a building but it is very difficult to renew confidence between people."

Jerusalem's mayor Teddy Kollek, who was in Europe, called Robert Lindsey, a Southern Baptist representative and pastor of the church, to express his concern about the fire. A municipal deputy came to the scene and affirmed the city's support of a building permit when the church decides to rebuild.

City crews immediately restored telephone and electrical service and Baptist House was filled the day following the fire with Baptist crews from as far away as Haifa and Tur'an in Galilee that helped clean up and repair the damage.

People from throughout the Jewish community where the church is located came to express their regrets, many of them quietly giving checks to assist in rebuilding the 49-year-old wood and stucco structure.

One neighborhood youngster faithfully carried jugs of drinking water to the work crews. Another neighbor pledged to help in the construction when the church begins to rebuild.

The church's pastoral council which meets every Friday morning to pray did that in spite of the fire, praying for forgiveness for whoever was responsible, thanking God no one was injured and asking for guidance for the future of the church.

The group expressed concern that the suspected arson not be misinterpreted as the attitude of the Jewish people as a whole and thus become a source of anti-semitism.

The congregation planned to meet for worship Saturday, Oct. 9 as scheduled but outdoors in the courtyard on the property. Some 350 worshippers had been attending each week. Sunday School was planned as usual in Baptist House. Services normally are held on Saturdays in Israel because this is the day when employees are off work.

Vandalism is nothing new at the church and at Baptist House. A few years ago Baptist House was damaged by fire bombing and a few windows are broken each year.

In the past the city has paid for repairs in accordance with a policy regarding damage done during "interethnic" violence.

Baptist representatives aren't sure to what extent the city might help in rebuilding if the fire is determined to be the work of an arsonist.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board holds title to the property. The board, which owns property in most of the 96 countries where it has work, acts as its own insurer and does not carry fire insurance on overseas structures.

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Louisiana Train Explosions
Can't Derail Missions Trip

By Oscar Hoffmeyer

Baptist Press
10/8/82

LIVINGSTON, La. (BP)—Exploding railroad tank cars canceled a revival at Doyle Baptist Church in Livingston but did not stop the church's mission trip to Wyoming.

All 2,500 residents of the community, 20 miles north of Baton Rouge, were evacuated Sept. 18 when 43 cars of the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad derailed, including 35 cars that carried combustible cargo such as styrene and vinyl chloride.

Five Baptist churches are located in the general vicinity of the accident. Two, approximately two blocks away, Doyle and Bethel churches, sustained damage. No damage was reported to First Baptist Church Livingston, Red Oak and Satsuma.

The train derailed about 5:15 a.m. and sent a fireball 300 feet in diameter swirling into the air. Additional explosions shook the community for more than a week as the fire continued uncontrolled.

Mayor Allen Hunt, a member of First Baptist Church, said "It is a miracle no one was killed or seriously injured." He said numerous buildings were damaged including "possibly windows blown out in a couple of Baptist churches."

The railroad company provided lodging in nearby motels and food for the displaced persons.

Hunt said the Louisiana Baptist disaster van was not needed because there were enough facilities in the area.

Charles Bigner, pastor of Doyle Baptist, had left home that Tuesday morning to help a family with the parole of their son. He did not know of the accident until he returned that afternoon, anticipating continuing the revival at his church.

During an interview an hour before the Doyle group left for Wyoming, Bigner's wife Ernie Mae, recalled the trauma of the event eight days earlier.

"Charles left around 4:20 a.m. I read a short while then decided I had better go back to sleep. About 5:10 I heard the train coming, coming pretty fast. Then I heard a loud thudding type noise and thought 'Did the train derail?' I got up and went to our back bedroom window that faces the track and all I could see were just flames boiling up, limbs falling and trees on fire. Our son, Scott, was in a bedroom across the hall. I hollered for him to get up and call a neighbor across the street that we were coming over.

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"We decided to leave because the tanks might explode again. We drove to Ponchatoula where our daughter lives. This all happened in about 15 minutes. I told Charles later this was the most frightened I had ever been. You think of a lot of things, I guess, at a time like that, but I remember thinking, 'Lord if this is it take us quickly.'"

Bigner returned from DeQuincy about 2:30 p.m. "We had never turned the radio on all day and when we left Interstate 12 for the Livingston exit an officer stopped us," he said. "I saw smoke but I thought it was one of the companies burning off bad oil. We started to pass his car when he asked me where I lived and I said 'right at the side of Doyle Baptist Church.'"

"He said 'Oh, my God.'"

"Bignor was in the back seat and jumped up to get the door opened. But the policeman said, 'You're not going to Livingston or if you do they'll put you in jail.'"

He then told Bigner what had happened, no one was injured and everyone had been evacuated. Bigner later located his wife and son in Ponchatoula.

Bigner spent the next several days visiting with his church members and helping where he could. On Oct. 3 the Livingston Baptist churches met at the Walker Baptist Church for services. "We met at 3:00 p.m. so we didn't interfere with their program," Bigner said.

Referring to the Wyoming trip Bigner said, "I am going to preach a revival in addition to helping complete the church at Thermopolis, west of Casper.

"The thing is, all of our clothes and other items and my Bible and sermons are still at the house. We can't get to them. Maybe the Lord will give me some new sermons, the old ones probably should be burned anyway," he said with a laugh.

Seven families will help restore the church's roof that was destroyed by hail and do some painting.

The pastor of Roundtop Baptist Church in Thermopolis is Jim Sermons, retired bivocational pastor, formerly from Shreveport, La. "Work was difficult there until Sermons started his ministry," Bigner said. "Now they have 50 or 60 in Sunday School and a membership of about 80, including oil field workers."

Some of the groups also plan on hunting deer and antelope in addition to work on the church. They will return after Oct. 17.

One of the Doyle church members who couldn't make the mission trip was Winson Hoover, Livingston councilman responsible for utilities. Hoover, who had never been on a mission trip, gave his hunting permit to those who are going.

During an interview at the command post about a mile east of Livingston, he recalled the derailment. "I was already up and had gone to the driveway to get my paper. I returned to the den and was reading when I heard a roar and thought it was thunder. Then I heard the derailment and the hissing of flames. We got our son and daughter and their children who live next door, got in two cars and left."

Hoover and his children's homes are within about six and 900 feet of railroad, he said.

Hunt said they helped the pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church, James Sasser, get a passport and other necessities from his home the day after the explosion so he could make a mission trip he had planned to Norway.

Hunt said the Bethel church sustained window damage in the old building but the "new building looks good as far as we could see from the air."

He noted that a class-action lawsuit had been filed in Livingston parish for those who had experienced damage including churches.

Summer Camp Scene
Of Terror In Romania

By John Rutledge

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Summer Bible camp—the words conjure no image more menacing than an occasional shaving cream fight to Baptists in the United States.

But when officials in Romania saw that Romanian Baptists had completed a two-story cabin for the children at their annual Bible camp, the militia was called in to break up the camp, the children sent home and the cabin razed.

Hal Brooks, pastor of North Richland Hills Baptist Church, Fort Worth, received word of the incident recently from the camp director, Paul Negrut. Brooks attended the ordination service for Negrut in January at the Baptist church in Oradea, Romania.

The government had attempted to stop the ordination because they feared Negrut, a psychologist, would have too much influence for Christ among the students. The latest incident is part of an ongoing struggle between Baptists and the Communist government in Romania.

The Baptists, Brooks said, had not been building the camp or conducting the camp secretly. "They didn't sneak around. They've been as open as possible with the authorities."

The local Romanian officials had allowed the camp to be conducted for many years. But the new building—designed to replace the tents the children had been housed in previously—was apparently too much for them.

The fourth- and fifth- grade children who arrived at the camp in July were delighted with the building which was built by volunteers and included running water and its own electrical generator. The camp, set in the Carpathian Mountains, was supposed to last two weeks and include Bible teaching, singing, nature walks and sports.

But a few days into the camp, as the children gathered for morning classes, a group of local uniformed militiamen entered the cabin. They showered the instructors with humiliating insults and ordered the children to pack.

"They are teaching you lies and myths," the colonel shouted. "Hurry and get out of here at once. Your meeting is illegal. We have orders to demolish the cabin."

Negrut explained to the frightened children they should obey but he received permission from the soldiers to conduct a noon picnic before they left.

When children and teachers had gathered to eat they all stood to pray. By the time Negrut had finished praying, according to the report, many of the militiamen were visibly moved. Negrut invited them to eat with the children.

Instead of a refusal the men expressed regret at what they were doing explaining they were simply carrying out orders.

Another busload of children was stopped on the way to the camp and diverted to to a nearby school house. When the expelled campers arrived all the children's names were taken with records of the incident placed in their school records. They were threatened with expulsion from school and told their parents would be fined or possibly fired from their jobs. Then they were sent home.

The government had problems destroying the camp. First a group of local townspeople were told to destroy the cabin. They refused. Next a group of gypsies were brought in. But they told authorities, "we're too afraid of the God of these people to meddle in their affairs." Finally a group from a distant region of the country were brought in and they eventually tore it down. The church at Oradea was fined the equivalent of \$1,000 for demolition charges and one of the camp teachers was fired from her job.

Three of the sponsoring pastors remain under investigation for "antigovernment activities with the school children."

Brooks, who said he'd been to the campsite during his trip to Romania, explained that Romania's status as a favored nation in trade with the United States is reviewed annually, and that human rights violations are considered in the discussions. He suggested that senators and congressmen be made aware of how Baptists feel about the incident.

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'Nova Scotia Connection'
Leads Old Seaman To Church

By Opal Carleton

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10/8/82

EL VERANO, Calif. (BP)—Until last April Al Karnes rebuffed everyone who talked to him about becoming a Christian.

But when Arch Martin, pastor of Craig Avenue Baptist Church in El Verano, was asked by a "kind, meek little lady" to talk with Karnes his instant reply was "certainly I'll go."

Martin was told about Karnes' treatment of others who had tried to talk to him about Christianity and was warned "Be careful. You don't know what you're getting into. Karnes is rough with anyone who tries to talk about Christianity."

That week "with some reservations" Martin drove into the old seaman's yard but when the pastor continued to talk to Mrs. Karnes, Karnes demanded, "Turn around and talk to me!"

"Do you know Harry Williams?" Karnes asked. Martin had known Williams, director of evangelism in the California state convention, during seminary days.

"He used to sit there in that chair across the room and tell me I was going to Hell. I'd tell him I'd meet him there," Karnes boasted.

Karnes next asked where Martin was from. When Martin told him he wouldn't have heard of it, he replied he was an old seafaring man and had been around the world several times.

"I asked him if he knew where Nova Scotia was," Martin explained. "His face brightened when I told him I'd lived 110 miles from Halifax. Immediately our friendship became closer. He asked about the Halifax explosion that demolished the city and the surrounding towns. I told him my father had helped dig the dead from the debris."

Karnes said he'd been on a ship that had docked in Halifax and was to have stayed there three days. Instead they received orders to pull anchor and sail. They were just outside the harbor when the waters divided from the explosion.

Martin seized the opportunity and said, "Mr. Karnes, at your age and considering the experiences you've had, have you ever asked yourself, 'If this were the end for me where would I spend eternity?'"

Karnes looked at Martin with a strange expression and replied, "The other morning at breakfast I settled that, and my Bible tells me that I shouldn't be ashamed to repeat it before men. If Mamma will come with me I'll join your church Sunday morning!"

Mrs. Karnes was standing in the next room. In a loud voice and with evident happiness, she said, "I'll go with you! This is the happiest day of my life."

Karnes immediately turned to Martin and asked if he'd see Harry Williams. "I'll see him next Monday morning," Martin assured him. With eagerness he asked, "Will you be sure to take him a message from me and tell him what happened?"

"Karnes has only missed one service since April 18," Martin said. "He showed me a Bible in big print Williams had sent him along with a lovely letter of which he was very proud."

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(Adapted from The California Southern Baptist, newsjournal of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California)