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Ethiopians Mobilize To Open Road For Baptist Mission

By Robert O'Brien

MEHAL MEDA, Menz, Ethiopia (BP)—Thousands of Ethiopians beat a Southern Baptist bulldozer into action and used crude hand-tools to clear a road into famine-devastated Menz-Gishe in eight days.

"It's a fantastic tribute to them," said missionary veterinarian Jerry Bedsole after a team from the Baptist Mission of Ethiopia arrived to survey needs in the area. "Traveling that road is like going through a couple of Grand Canyons. We decided to forget a bulldozer. It couldn't have improved their work five percent."

Earlier, the missionaries gained permission from the Marxist government to bulldoze the road through 10,000-foot mountains to reach starving people in the area. But between 12,000 and 15,000 Ethiopians already had begun to clear the road.

The Ethiopians' efforts, despite their hardship, took on special meaning to the missionaries as they surveyed the area the people now call "berreha," Amharic for "d sert."

"Berreha" is what the missionaries found in the parched land on the southern perimeter of the northern disaster area where thousands have died. The survey team, there to plan short-term relief and long-range development, traveled all the way to the Gishe part of Menz next to Wollo, a northern area which has received much famine publicity.

The highlanders have some grain but the barren lowlands have absolutely nothing. Mothers, sobbing and pleading for food, hold six-month-old children weighing 10 pounds with arms the size of a man's finger.

"I've lived here a long time and seen a lot," Bedsole said with emotion, "but that's a sight I can hardly bear. That's mild compared to the north. We must move fast to head off here what's happening in the north."

As missionaries Bedsole and Lynn Groce completed their survey, word came that Florida attorney Ed Mason and his wife, Viola, had agreed to return to Ethiopia as volunteers to help coordinate the relief effort. The Masons served two previous one-year terms as volunteers in Ethiopia.

The mission still needs two nurses, a mechanic/handyman/jack-of-all-trades to keep heavy relief vehicles and other machinery in repair, a person qualified to do feasibility studies on water catchment, irrigation and small dams, and a person to help in relief coordination in Menz-Gishe while the Masons work out of Addis Ababa, the country's capital.

Another volunteer, veterinarian John Lawrence of Louisiana, requested an extension to help with overwhelming animal health needs in Menz-Gishe. Texas veterinarian Everett C. Martin Jr. and his wife, Kay, will join the mission soon as Mission Service Corps volunteers to take over courses Lawrence teaches at a veterinary and agricultural school near Addis Ababa.

The survey team found the lowlands strangely barren of cows, oxen and sheep, which have either died in the drought or been sold off before they died. Livestock are crucial in the rural economy, and Ethiopians truly get excited when Bedsole tells them ways to save their animals.

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"We'll try to save the few animals still there," Bedsole said. "If the sheep can get anything at all to eat, I could keep them alive for quite a few months with about five cents worth of medicine each."

Initial plans call for the mission to establish a headquarters in the town of Mehal Meda in Ethiopia's Menz district to coordinate the relief operation throughout the Menz-Gishe area.

The operation will include such short-term relief as feeding centers, health care, grain and dry ration distribution and blankets to protect families against subfreezing nighttime temperatures in the highlands. Long-range development plans include agriculture, water development, community health, irrigation, and animal health and breeding.

Bedsole estimated about half of the 250,000 to 275,000 Menz-Gishe residents will need help in what amounts to a race against time.

If either the "short rains," February through April, or "large rains," June through September, fail again, conditions will become disastrous. But if those life-giving rains come before the mission can stockpile food in the area, many will die. Rain would turn the newly opened road into an impassable quagmire. It still amounts to a rut through hills and gorges.

Despite a logistical nightmare, the 12-person mission hopes to have relief operations under way no later than mid-January. By that time, Bedsole said, grain should be available and newly purchased relief vehicles in the country and ready to roll.

Missionaries expressed sorrow over the bleak Christmas these Ethiopian Orthodox (Coptic) people faced before relief could arrive. But they're looking hopefully to the new year as a time they can do something to help avert absolute devastation.

Asked what Southern Baptists and others could do to help, Bedsole said, "We need the concern, resources, manpower and prayers of our people--especially the prayers. Only God can control this situation.

"Pray for this nation," he requested. "Pray we can get the food in on schedule. Pray for the lives of the people and their livestock. Pray for the short rains. Pray the people can then get crops in the ground in time for the large rains and that those large rains will come.

"Pray we'll have the strength and ability to make a difference here."

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'God's Sharpshooter' Sets
Sights On Winning Believers

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)--The Brazilian sports press calls him "God's Sharpshooter."

They're talking about Baltasar, one of Brazil's best soccer players, and his God-given ability to score goals. But now Baltasar is setting his sights on making Christians as well as goals.

The soccer star was led to faith in Christ by a Southern Baptist missionary and he, in turn, has now guided several of his fellow professional soccer players to the Lord.

Ivan is the latest new believer influenced by Baltasar. The two soccer standouts faced each other in a crucial game recently. After Baltasar scored the winning goal, he and several other Christian players saw their friend Ivan baptized at Rio's Fourth Baptist Church.

Soccer, known as football in Brazil and many other countries, reigns supreme in the Brazilian sports world and its players are treated like kings. That's why missionaries "rejoice at the possibilities, the influence these young men have. They are giving such a good testimony," says Southern Baptist missionary Edgar Hallock.

The young players meet once a week for prayer and discipleship training with Brazilian Baptist minister Ezeikel Batista.

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Japan Baptists Apologize
For Koreans' Suffering

SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--Japanese Baptists have formally apologized to Korean Baptists for the "unbearable sufferings" inflicted on Koreans during Japan's 36-year rule over the Korean peninsula.

A three-man Japanese delegation headed by Sumio Kaneko, executive secretary of the Japan Baptist Convention, presented the letter of apology at a meeting of the Korea Baptist Convention in Seoul. It was adopted earlier in 1984 during Japanese Baptists' annual convention session.

"As is clearly stated in the letter, Japan has inflicted upon Koreans unbearable sufferings.... The letter was our confession of sin," wrote Kaneko in the November issue of *The Baptist*, journal of Japanese Baptists.

Kaneko said Korean Baptists accepted the apology "graciously" and welcomed the Japanese delegation's visit "as the beginning of genuine fellowship and cooperation between the two countries." He reported the letter also was presented to the ecumenical Korea Council of Churches.

Japan annexed then-unified Korea in 1910. Over the next 36 years Japanese colonial rulers brutally suppressed civic freedoms, exploited the Korean economy for Japanese business interests and eventually tried to stamp out Korean culture. Many Koreans were forced to speak only Japanese, take Japanese family names and deny their own religions to adopt Japan's Shinto faith. The period ended with Japan's World War II defeat in 1945.

International attention refocused on the Japanese colonial era when a 1982 edition of Japanese school textbooks downplayed colonial and war atrocities. News of the textbooks aroused public outrage in North and South Korea and China. Last September, during a state visit to Japan by South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan, Japanese Emperor Hirohito indirectly apologized for his nation's behavior in Korea for the first time, calling the colonial years "regrettable" and "unfortunate."

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Bible Way's First 20 Years
Explosive But Unharnessed

By Robert O'Brien

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KABWE, Zambia (BP)--Startling achievements and unfilled potential characterize the 20 years since the Bible Way Correspondence School began on a small scale in Zambia.

Bible Way, an idea born at a meeting in the Elephant's Head Hotel in Kabwe in 1963, has burst into 38 countries since the Baptist Mission of Zambia enrolled the first student in late 1964.

Worldwide statistics aren't completely documented but, in 20 African countries alone, Bible Way has enrolled at least 331,000 students and recorded nearly 42,000 professions of faith.

Along the way it has penetrated homes, schools, prisons, businesses, agricultural and trade fairs, churches and many other areas in countries where it operates. That's led to the planting of many churches, development of many church leaders and the opportunity to influence thousands of lives as Africans from the bush to the cities study Bible Way curriculum and work toward diplomas in at least 11 languages.

But this powerful, unharnessed phenomenon also has missed many opportunities to fulfill the Bible Way goals of evangelism, church planting, Christian development and enhancement of Baptists.

Rebecca Reagan Phifer, Southern Baptist missionary adviser to Malawi's Bible Way Correspondence School, touched on some of the difficulties common in Third World countries.

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"I'm afraid our (Malawi's) really weak spot is follow-up," she said at a recent conference in Kenya where missionaries and Africans explored the problem. "We simply don't have a good program for that. We do have a list of all the churches and a contact person for each area, but we haven't found an effective way to contact those who make a profession of faith.

"Our churches are scattered," she continued. "Some are too far for people to attend on foot, and very few of our students or church leaders have transportation. How do we direct these people to a local church?"

Conferees discussed ways to increase enrollment, but missionary Dena Brent asked a penetrating question.

"A thorny issue of enrollment is this--do we want to get as many students as we can possibly get?" asked Mrs. Brent, Bible Way director in Kenya. "From a purely financial point of view, how many students can we afford to enroll? We're given a set budget by our mission, and we have so few personnel."

That brought to mind a dilemma in one mission in Asia where missionaries, eager to spread Bible Way, advertised it on the radio. They got 42,000 replies and couldn't even begin to handle them.

So, the problem revolves around budget limitations, logistics complicated by Third World problems and personnel shortage.

Ironically, personnel shortages played a major part in launching Bible Way. Lacking manpower to cover Zambia, missionaries Zeb and Evelyn Moss, Tom and Mary Small, Dutton and Marilyn Bonnell, Ted and Verna Savage and Douglas and Katherine Kendall turned to Bible Way and the nation's postal service for help.

"We wanted another way to reach people in Zambia, but we knew we'd never have enough missionaries to cover all that area and reach all those people," recalled Zeb Moss, now media consultant for Africa based in Kenya. Moss consults with Bible Way personnel across the continent as part of his current role.

Many missionaries and Africans reflect Moss' view that the time has come to harness Bible Way's power potential so it can achieve even more in its second 20 years than it did in its first 20.

A task force, which grew out of the Bible Way conference in Kenya, has worked on strategy to accomplish that goal.

African Baptist and missionary planners want to find better ways to keep tabs on all Bible Way converts. They want to learn how to help them grow further in their faith, how to tie them more effectively into baptism and existing churches, and how to plant many more churches as a result of their conversion.

Besides that, they want to find ways to start Bible Way on mission fields which don't have it and to use it as a tool for penetrating countries which currently have no Southern Baptist missionaries.

Next September, a follow-up conference in Kenya will bring together Bible Way personnel and church planters in Africa to explore ways to blend Bible Way students into strategies for evangelism and church growth. The findings should have worldwide implications.

No matter what the future holds, Bible Way already has played an unusual role in more ways than one. Perhaps the most unusual occurred in Uganda during the infamous era of former dictator Idi Amin.

Southern Baptist missionaries Jim and Linda Rice credit Bible Way with a key role in keeping Baptist work alive during Amin's ban on the churches. During the ban, Bible Way had the status of an educational institution, not a church. It enrolled nearly 1,000 people and recorded 100 professions of faith. But more significantly, it helped keep Ugandan pastors, who used it as a continuing training tool, from losing contact with their people and the skeleton mission from losing contact with the pastors and churches.

"We couldn't visit them because they weren't supposed to meet, and a foreigner's presence would have caused suspicion," Mrs. Rice said. "But we could continue the correspondence that accompanied the lessons."

Bible Way proved once again then, as it has on many other occasions, what mission leaders mean when they call its formation a stroke of genius. That's especially true in Third World countries where people eagerly seek education and reading materials.

"If anything can be mobilized to reach our Bold Mission Thrust goals to proclaim Jesus to the world in this century, it's Bible Way," declared Kenya missionary Ralph Harrell, who edits international curriculum.

"The scope of Bible Way is as broad as your imagination," added Davis Saunders, the Foreign Mission Board's director for Eastern and Southern Africa. "Bible Way has no limits to its scope."

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(Adapted from material prepared for the February-March 1985 issue of the Commission magazine)
