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Dear Friends,

The Feast of tabernacles this year was not what we expected. My wife Gloria and I originally planned to spend the holy days with our Kachinland brethren. We wanted to participate in the very first ever Feast in northern Burma, (Myanmar.) But this area of the world can sometimes be a dangerous and politically volatile place to be. Circumstances and conditions can change rapidly. If one spends any length of time in this part of the world, one must learn to be flexible.

On August 8, 1988 (8-8-88), there was a pro-democracy uprising in Burma. Many people were killed or jailed. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Gyi, leader of the opposition, was placed under house arrest and has remained there ever since. This year, on September 9, 1999 (9-9-99) a nationwide "strike" was planned by the pro- democracy movement. This caused the military government of Burma to take pre-emptive action to stop their plan. Burma closed its borders and we were unable to obtain visas.

However, just before Trumpets, I received a telephone call from Lazum Brang. He was calling me from the border town of Mae Sot in Thailand and asked me to come there to see him. He had traveled for 4 days from Kachinland by train, vehicle and foot to meet me and also to become acquainted with the Karen members of the Church of God. I left as soon as I could for Mae Sot.

I traveled by bus so I could take along a mountain bicycle purchased for Lazum Brang's evangelistic journeys. We spent a very encouraging Sabbath together with the Karen church members in Mae Sot and discussed Pastor Brang's plans for future evangelistic efforts in Burma, China and India. Pastor Brang had no trouble communicating with the Karen members as he speaks 24 languages including several Karen dialects.

It turned out that Brang could not get back across the border. It was still closed and Burmese soldiers patrolled the area with automatic weapons. So he had to stay in Thailand for Trumpets. We all spent a very interesting Feast of Trumpets together as brethren from 4 different COG fellowships, as well as several SDA's and even a couple of Baptist guests observed the Day with sermons, prayers, songs of praise to God and fellowship. And, of course, feasting! This was an unplanned experiment in COG "ecumenism", and it worked. We all came from various fellowships and had some differences in doctrine. But we came together on God's Holy Day and worshipped in peace and Christian harmony. Maybe this can be an example to others?

When Gloria and I returned to Bangkok, we tried again to get visas for our trip to Burma. But the Embassy was still closed. After Atonement in Chiang Mai, we contacted them again with no success. It was now apparent that the Burma trip was off. So now what were we supposed to

do? Many times we do not see as God sees. We had planned on Burma, but God had other plans for us.

The Karen people are refugees and cannot travel outside the country, and there was no local FOT planned for the 7 or so Karen church families living on the border. Unless someone was willing to organize a Feast for them, they would not have one. But this year they had one. At least on the first and last day, because Gloria and I decided to stay in Thailand and hold a Feast together with them.

If we stand back from the trees, sometimes we can see the forest. The Kachin already had a feast set up as Pastor Brang was returning to take care of them. But, the Karen had no one to help them. God made this our assignment. So, Gloria and I were enthusiastically welcomed back to the border where we gathered with our Karen church brothers and sisters to keep the first day of the Feast.

The Last Great Day didn't work out as planned, either. While we were getting ready on Friday to go to the border again for the last day of the Feast, we received an urgent call from Jack, a church member in Bangkok. He asked if he could come over right away and told us to turn on our TV. The whole city was in an uproar. Dissident Burmese students had taken over the Burmese Embassy and were holding 86 people hostage with AK-47's and grenades! Thai police with sharpshooters, armored cars and barricades closed down the streets in downtown Bangkok where the embassy is located. Every local station was tuned into the drama.

Jack had to come and stay with us for 2 nights because the immigration police were looking for anyone that might be from Burma. We decided to call over to the border to see what the situation was like. Was it wise to go over to Mae Sot under the circumstances? It was decided that it was not a good idea because it would draw police attention to the Karen, some of whom are still connected by family with the Karen national Liberation Army, at war with the military dictatorship in Burma. So we remained in Bangkok on the Last Great Day and spent the day in bible study and in fellowship with Jack at our apartment. Moolah Shi, the elder on the border, decided to go ahead and have a service anyway without us in the home of one of the members.

What a Feast it turned out to be! It certainly turned out differently than we ever expected, but it was for the best. We were happy to have the chance to spend more time with the Karen people. They were able to have at least a partial feast, which meant so much to them. I later received a letter from Lazum Brang. The Kachin had a wonderful FIRST Feast of Tabernacles EVER -- and he wrote, "Many people from far-distant places came to Na Mawn to keep the feast." Gloria and I feel it turned out according to God's will. Through it all, God worked it out so that His people were able to keep the feast.

Karen Language Booklets

Legacy Institute wants to announce the completion of the first ever booklet on the annual Holy days written in the Karen language and script. The Karen brethren are quite excited about it because, not only can it be used to explain these days to their Karen families, friends and neighbors, but, it even helps the brethren themselves to learn more about the plan of God.

What is really special about this booklet is that the Karen brethren did everything themselves. Thaw Thi Ko translated the material from English; Jack typeset it into Karen script on the computer and Davidson Lebey has done the proofreading. All we did was facilitate and

provide funds for making copies. The Karen will distribute the booklets themselves. They are black and white booklets, which fit letter-size envelopes, and will be sent by the lowest postal rate.

The booklet will also be translated into Kachin and Burmese. Later, maybe Thai as well. I have asked the Karen to tell me what booklets or information should be translated next. They know their people and they will know better than me what is needed. This is all very exciting and shows what “ordinary” church members can do if they are empowered and encouraged to exercise faith and use their God-given talents to further the Gospel.

Festival Tragedy

During this Feast season we lost one of our Karen children. 15 year old Olivia, niece of Thaw Thi Ko and Ester, was anointed for fainting spells. At first the family thought it was just temporary dizziness or weakness of some kind. But the problem got worse each day until she could no longer walk, talk or feed herself. When Gloria and I heard the news about her deteriorating situation, we told them to get her to the hospital right away. Going to the hospital for the Karen is quite different than what we experience. It is not just down the road. It took over 24 hours to get her there. First, they had to find a vehicle to take her and then the journey was over 8 hours long to Chiang Mai, the closest hospital that had the facilities and staff to handle this sort of situation.

She was finally admitted and given medication. The doctors changed the medicine several times and did every test they could think of to try to find out what it was. They never did diagnose the disease. But, it was some sort of virus that destroyed the left side of her brain. She finally went into a coma and never woke up. Olivia was the youngest child in the family and the only daughter. Her father was in a refugee camp somewhere along the border and never did make it to see his daughter before she died.

Cards or email notes to the family can be sent via the Legacy Institute address. Olivia's mother's name is Margaret. She is the sister of Ester, Elizabeth and Juliana.

Lazum Brang's Plan for a Bible School

Pastor Brang wants to begin construction of a teak and bamboo classroom building in his village right away after the monsoon rains end. He plans to build a modest building to use as classrooms to teach bible courses to interested young Kachin people. The building will also double as a meeting hall for services.

There are now over 20 young Kachin people who want him to teach them the "bible truth". Several have already graduated from Bible College in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachinland, but desire to learn the true doctrines of the bible. They want to be useful to God and someday hope to be sent out to help Pastor Brang teach the bible truth to others.

Lazum Brang feels this part of the world is ripe for God's harvest. He has received many letters from individuals as well as groups of people in China, Assam and different parts of Burma inviting him to come to their area and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. So, he has been praying to the Lord of the Harvest to supply workers.

Starting a small bible school to teach young people is an important step in preparing harvesters to help teach those God may be calling in the remote mountain borderlands of Kachinland and surrounding countries.

FOT in Thailand

Once again, we want to find out what the level of interest for attending a Feast of Tabernacles site in Thailand in the fall of 2000. Please respond by letter or e-mail if you are seriously interested in attending an 8-day festival in exotic Thailand. If there is enough interest, we will formally let everyone know the itinerary and costs. The more people we have signing up, the less it costs for each individual because of price breaks on air tickets and accommodations. Please let us know of your interest as soon as possible.

P.S. Emergency Hospitalization

I am writing this post-script from Bangkok. I had to take Jack to the emergency room of a nearby hospital because of intense pain in his side. It turned out to be a very swollen and infected appendix. They operated on him right away. The doctor said we had gotten there just in time. Jack has now been released, and although he is very sore, he is recovering well. The problem is the hospital bill. With the operation, it came to over \$1,100.00. Jack tried to get aid from the UN, but they have no program for refugees that are not yet officially recognized by the UNHCR. So, I am asking for donations to cover his hospital bill.

For those of you who can help, please send your donation to Legacy Institute at our Dallas PO Box number. We appreciate your help. I know Jack certainly does.

That is all for now. I am back in Thailand. Gloria will be coming over in a couple of weeks. We thank all of you for the support, both physically and spiritually, that you have shown for this humble work in Asia. Support comes from individuals and various fellowships in different parts of the world. We may be separated by distance, nationality, race and be from different church fellowships, but we are united in our efforts by the common bond of the Holy Spirit. We appreciate your kindness and generosity.

May God continue to bless you all.
In Christian service,

Leon Sexton

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