

“We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5)

“You also joining in helping us through your prayers” (2 Cor. 1:11)

West African Mission Update

January 2006

Steve & Patricia Phillips

A Tale of Two Cities: It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Skirting the wide mouth of the Sierra Leone River about 5 km southeast of Freetown, lies Wellington town. Just some minutes trek up a rugged stony hill puts one in the village of Jollah Terrace, the home of Emmanuel Freeman.

For 12 years he had dutifully served as an assistant pastor under a self-styled Pentecostal apostle, content with his comfortable role in that system. All that while, the Bible had remained a closed book to him. He rarely, if ever, studied the Word, while coasting along satisfied to imbibe the shallowness and errors of his religion.

About midway through 2005, he made a horrifying discovery: His “apostle” had been embezzling large amounts of money by duping foreign donors to his “ministry.” At the same time it came to light that this man had been frequenting the beer parlors, visiting ladies in the night, and keeping more than one as regular consorts.

The community began to talk; so did brother Emmanuel. When he confronted this so-called man of God, things did not go well for our brother. A slander campaign was mounted against him, accusing him of rebelling against the “apostle” and attempting to destroy the ministry by an Absalom-like stealing away of the hearts of the congregation.

By early October, Emmanuel was forced to resign. On the very day of his resignation, in deep discouragement and perplexity, he checked his e-mail before heading home. There he found a message from the Scriptures sent to him by brother Peters. Brother Peters, who lives with us, had begun sending out periodic exhortations to a variety of people, one of whom was Emmanuel, though they had never met. Through that one message we came to know this dear brother.

Not knowing what he should do after his dismissal from the church, Emmanuel had begun to pray with his wife, his brother, and one other in his home for guidance.

Peters invited him to come and see us in Regent. We taught him the Word. Soon he was coming twice weekly for Bible study. He invited us to his home to teach the some 20 people who now had joined them for their Thursday prayer time.

The things that he had learned from the Word he taught others in his neighborhood. Two weeks ago, 41 people from that fellowship joined us here at our home for worship and teaching. Patti was able to teach the women as well during that gathering.

Emmanuel began a Monday Bible study in a nearby village. Now he is coming to meet with us four times weekly along with several other of the brethren from his place for three hours of study in the word of God. His wife, Elizabeth, has also been coming to meet with Patti from time to time for encouragement and counsel in the Word.

He and those with him have distributed hundreds of tracts, the Purity tract being gladly received by the Muslims who predominate in their village. Saturday we plan to begin a regular weekly Bible study in their area to encourage and strengthen these upcoming brethren. It is the best of times.

Meanwhile here in our village of Regent, the proud home of the oldest stone church building in West Africa, almost the reverse is occurring.

On December 9, this Anglican congregation held its annual "Carnival" at the community center. What was sponsored, promoted, and attended by the Canterbury of West Africa [for so they call themselves] was an abomination.

From six in the evening until seven in the morning, the filthy music of the world openly describing and urging fornication, foolishness, and sin was blared at full volume to be heard by every resident of the village. Inside was a nightclub atmosphere, complete with disco dancing and beer drinking. Drinking among them with the rest were the Vicar and elders of the church.

I was grieved and indignant that the name of Christ would be associated with such an event. I wrote a personal letter to the Vicar expressing my disgust at the whole affair as well as citing several Scripture passages about the solemn responsibility of serving the Lord with sincerity, purity, and truth.

Rather than responding to me about the concerns raised, the Vicar chose to read the letter to the whole congregation. A riot nearly erupted. Two different groups were barely restrained from storming our house to "deal" with me.

News spread like wildfire through the village of about 2,500. The bishop in Freetown was brought into the matter as was our landlord.

Our landlord happens to be the Grand Patron of the church, a lawyer of international reputation who resides in the UK and was home for the holidays. He also happens to be the Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge both in Sierra Leone and in Argentina. Some who claim to be in the know assert that since the death of Mubutu, he has assumed the position of Grand Master of all of Africa in that occult lodge.

We have been told by the chief of the village [one of the church elders] that they are prevailing upon our landlord to drive us out of Regent. Our one-year tenancy expires at the end of January. We have been informed by one very close to the landlord that he is going to demand a 100% increase in our rent for this next year – in effect, a veiled eviction notice.

Tension is high in Regent and I am regularly slandered openly by irate residents and our children have been rudely spoken to and even threatened. A cross-section of the congregation will be helpful to better understand the context of this situation.

Months before this event, I visited one of their leaders in his home to preach the gospel to him. He is a smoker, drunkard, and an adulterer.

As a matter of routine when a family member passes away, the church members offer sacrifices to the dead. Many members are involved in secret cult societies, offering ritual sacrifices. Many of those in prominent positions in the church meet after the Sunday service in the beer parlor before heading to the Masonic Temple in Freetown.

On New Year's Sunday after church, the entire congregation proceeded to the cemetery in order to honor and commune with the departed spirits of the dead. When the traditional masked devils came out parading in the streets during this holiday season, the vast number of devotees following them were church members.

With such an orientation, such a reaction to my letter can be better understood. We are now faced with the decision as to where to go.

Do we locate somewhere in Freetown or do we head for the Provinces to pursue the gospel work in that needy environment? We are praying that the Lord will make His way plain and provide all that is needful at this juncture.

We are not anxious nor disturbed by all that has come upon us, but we do solicit your prayers that we might conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the Lord in all respects.

**With love to all,
Steve and Patti Phillips**

West African Book Project

Christian books with solid biblical teaching are extremely rare and hard to come by in West Africa. Many of the best works are out of print.

We are therefore requesting of you brethren, that if you have copies that you would be willing to sell or donate to contribute to the building up of the disciples here, we would be most interested.

Commentaries, expository, and devotional works by the following authors in particular are what we are hoping to obtain.

- • C.A. Coates
- • H.A. Ironside
- • H.C.G. Moule
- • A.B. Simpson
- • William Erdman
- • Samuel Ridout
- • J.G. Bellet
- • F.W. Grant
- • F.B. Meyer
- • G. Campbell Morgan
- • and W.E. Vine.

If you would like to participate, you may contact Bob Haines, who will coordinate all arrangements. His address is:

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