

# International Teaching Ministry of Douglas Jacoby



## **International Bible Teaching Ministry Update 2011 Issue 2 -- Middle East Update: Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates**

**"Challenging men and women of faith to think"**

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4 February 2011

Dear Friends,

I've just flown back from Cairo, the last stop on a Middle East tour. Before I share with your details of this amazing trip, let me thank those who made the fruitful tour possible through funding and prayers. The international Bible teaching ministry could not do this without your support.

### **Middle East Tour**

My 13th visit to the Middle East in 14 years, this was probably the most memorable. The itinerary was United Arab Emirates-Bahrain-Kuwait-Lebanon-Egypt (more specifically, the cities Dubai-Manama-Kuwait City-Beirut-Cairo). Please refer to map below.

#### *Dubai (United Arab Emirates)*

Delta's 14-hour non-stop flight from Atlanta makes Dubai an excellent entry point for any trip to the Middle East. Here, as in many states in the Arab world, one is struck by the differences from western society -- some good, some not so good. For example, pornography is illegal. Laws are so strict that last year an engaged British couple appealed a jail sentence after being caught kissing in a restaurant. And yet many men (with the permission of the Qur'an) have four wives. The exquisite Arab cuisine is hard to top, though good luck trying to buy a ham sandwich.

As I returned to Dubai, I was struck at how much the church had grown since I last spoke there (July 2009). It seemed to me the membership had doubled! The church has 150 members, and from 18 nations. The teaching ministry gave away 100 books to the disciples, who were excited to receive material on Bible questions, Islam, parenting, evangelism, etc. There were over 200 adults in attendance at my three-part presentation, including dozens of seekers. We met and took communion on Friday, effectively "Sunday" in this part of the world, as Sunday is a regular work day. Although it has no full-time leaders, the Dubai church is full of faith. Thank you for your hospitality, Jacob and all the churches of the Emirates! Be sure to visit any time you are in the Gulf area.

A real treat for me was the visit of a dear brother from Kabul. Gary Knutson, currently HOPE director in Afghanistan, invited me (along with Douglas Arthur) to learn about the Bible and 7 weeks later baptized me (1977). He made the short flight from Kabul, attended the classes, and we shared a couple of meals together. We should always be grateful for the persons who reached out to us. As in my case, many of them took a chance on a stranger.

### *Bahrain*

At the airport in Dubai, waiting to go through immigration, I allowed a family to go before me. First came the children, then four women clad in black from head-to-toe, their husband (singular) following. The Islamic world! Bahrain is just 1 hour from Dubai. Both are near to Iran (just across the Gulf). As the sun was setting, multiple muezzins called the faithful to prayer. I met my friends, gave them the books (every church received free books and CDs), and we enjoyed an Indian meal. (There are many South Asians in the Gulf.)

The church here is small, yet still members were outnumbered by guests more than two to one. First I shared missions news from around the world (half an hour), and after a break, the lesson. I adapted my sermon the previous week in Auburn (on Mark 12, the Greatest Commandment), and made it even more evangelistic, to speak to the Hindus, Buddhists, and other visitors. Some guests were family members, others work colleagues. One of them, a physics teacher and atheist, was deeply moved by the word of God. He stood up and said, "I have no idea why I came tonight -- but I'm so glad I did." People are open, and I pray there will be a small harvest from this initiative. Pictures were up at Facebook within hours! Thank you for your giving spirit, Brian and all the church in Bahrain!

### *Kuwait*

After my breakfast of bread, olives, goat cheese, celery, vine leaves, and coffee, I took the flight on Jazeera airlines from Bahrain to Kuwait. Monitors featured pre-flight Islamic prayers. Looking out the window, I saw the vast sands of Iraq, staggered at the cultural and spiritual chasm between followers of Christ and most persons living in the Arabian peninsula. On the lighter side, I chuckled as I watched the Canadian program *Just for Laughs*, one of the few things I can watch that forces me to smile.

On landing, I was met by a Muslim from Sri Lanka, and escorted through immigration and customs. My bags were x-rayed for contraband (such as guns, alcohol, and pork), and then I met Pradeep, a strong and energetic Indian who, like the other non-staff preachers in Bahrain and Dubai, works a demanding job. Such men are to be commended for their service. Everybody was pumped, and we had a great meeting, again with many guests. I would like to extend special thanks to Matt Anjilivelil, who arranged most of my trip to the Middle East, and formerly served as the preacher in Kuwait. He is much loved.

### *Iraq*

Still in Kuwait, I stop and look across the water. On the other side of the Persian Gulf is Iran, some 200 km away. 100 km Behind me lies Iraq. I learn later than all the church members in Baghdad have been evacuated to nearby countries, because in recent months Sunni Muslim death squads have been going house-to-house and executing Christians. (Jesus did say "Flee" [Matthew 10:23].) Why is there so much hatred?

### *Lebanon*

At the airport, before flying out to Beirut, noon prayers blast away on the PA system. In a few hours I am back in Beirut, where I spoke two years ago (and 25 members saw an attendance of around 400. They were outnumbered 15:1!). I am met by my friend Moufid, an incredible people-person and great preacher. The church, like last time, has been heavily promoting our first evening meeting (by flyers, posters, TV and radio). All of Lebanon was in a state of anxiety, as the Sunnis rioted after the recent elections, which put in office a candidate with too-friendly connections

with Hezbollah.

I was interviewed by Arabic SAT 7 television before the meeting, and the crew stayed to film the event. The presentation went well (that night and next), yet as roads were blocked and the demonstrations began, cell phones were ringing and the crowd became anxious, not sure they'd be able to get home. Read more about my visit in an [interview](#) with preacher Moufid Tohme. In the meantime, I heard about demonstrations beginning in Egypt. I was also accompanied through the night by the rumbling of thunderstorms.



### *Egypt*

Cairo is a massive city -- at 20 million, Africa's largest. I'd been able to speak once to the church in 2008, when I was leading the Biblical Study Tour in Egypt, but this visit allowed me to have three days with my friends. Like many Bible-centered congregations, our sister churches in Cairo and Alexandria are under constant surveillance and scrutiny by the pro-Muslim government. This is one reason I wanted to return to Lebanon and Egypt; our brothers and sisters should not feel alone, but rather supported, respected, and loved. I had a meal with Suleiman, the preacher and a brother I met 20 years ago in Sweden. Suleiman has recently been interrogated several times by the police, and is unsure how secure his position is. He has a wonderful family, and though our fellowship was great, we wondered how the street demonstrations might affect attendance at the evening meeting.

The series I was presenting was *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* Everyone was grateful for such an appropriate topic, given the rigors of life in the Middle East, the state of the economy, and the political and religious tensions. Our first evening went off smoothly. But our second meeting was slated for Friday, the designated *day of rage*. Some members could not make the journey to church, given the physical obstacles, but still a good number turned up. We'd moved the meeting to the morning, to finish before Friday prayers, when the Muslims would be returning to the streets. After lunch with friends, I headed back to the hotel for a workout in the gym, and began packing. A group of protesters marched past; as riot police were blocking the street on one end, they proceeded in the opposite direction. It was eerie to realize that fingers of the protest wave, which had started in the center of Cairo, were shooting out rapidly throughout this vast city.

Then I received a (land line) call to the effect that I'd better get to the airport a.s.a.p. or be stuck in the city. My flight was booked for Friday evening anyway. It took a while to find a taxi willing to take me to the airport. Our circuitous route took us past large and vociferous groups of demonstrators, riot police, army vehicles, and soldiers. We were striving to reach the airport before the curfew was in effect. It was not obvious to me that we'd make it in time, but we did.

The flight had been cancelled. The chaos level brought an anxious smile to the faces of many of my fellow travelers. Without internet connections and mobile phone use -- shut down by the restrictive Egyptian government, most of us were as handicapped as the airline and airport staff. People were amazingly self-controlled. A CNN notice said Delta was suspending its Egypt route. (But what about us?) Eventually our flight was rescheduled for the next morning (wishful thinking, as it turned out).

There were thousands of passengers, and only dozens of seats, so after walking around as long as I could stay awake, and attempting unsuccessfully to catch any flight out of Egypt, I managed to sleep an hour or so on the floor of Terminal 1. After a day at the airport, we finally took off. In the seat next to me was an Egyptian economist, and it was fascinating hearing her perspective on what was going on. As we headed to Atlanta, the man sitting behind me identified himself as a senior producer for CNN International, and we had an electronic interview. By Saturday midnight I was home, and walking into church at North River the next day surprised a few people! ("Hey, how'd you make it out of Cairo?") But what surprised *me* was a call I received that morning from Cairo. One of the preachers was checking to make sure that *I'd* made it home safely. (*Me?* I was thinking, "I ought to be baptized by you!") Such a big heart. Of course I assured him everything was fine; I only wanted to know how *they* were doing.

#### *A continuous adventure*

After President Mubarak turned the internet back on, I contacted Suleiman, and received this message in return: "Life in the Middle East is a continuous adventure and I like it. Remember you have a home in Egypt as long as I am here." What a heart!

For a recent update from Cairo, click [here](#).

#### *Prayer needs*

Please keep the Middle East in your prayers. These are the needs, as I see things:

- *Overcoming fear.* In the tense atmosphere, with widespread rioting, disrupted services, escaped convicts robbing homes, and the ever-present anti-Christian bias, even a strong believer can feel anxiety.
- *Peace.* Ask the Lord for things to calm down, that peace may prevail and the climate to improve for the spread of the gospel.
- *Education.* There's a great need for further training, and we are always seeking help with AIM scholarships, books, and funding for leaders to attend international conferences.
- *Revolution.* Disciples of Christ place no hope in the power of political revolution, but we do long for spiritual revolution. We look forward to the day when the Islamic world will crack wide open. One piece of encouraging news I received was that in one of the capital cities in the Arab world, a half dozen *Muslims* are expected to be baptized this month. Conversion is a tremendous sacrifice. and often dangerous in this part of the world. May these brave men and women keep their courage.

I will return to the Middle East once or twice more in 2011, but there is no doubt that my thoughts will return there every day.

#### **To Central America**

That's all for now. This week I'm recording podcasts, speaking a few times at North River, and

catching up. Next week I head to Los Angeles, for a Teachers & Evangelists meeting, and then the following week to Central America (Honduras and Nicaragua). The next newsletter will probably be in April. Keep us in your prayers.

Yours in Him,

*Douglas Jacoby*

International Bible Teaching Ministry

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