

The Mozambique Evangel - Update

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By Charles Woodrow

Dear Friends,

We give thanks to those whose prayers have brought down the blessings we have experienced here in Nampula during the past two weeks. Everyone associated with planning the FIEL (faithful) Pastors' Conferences here in Nampula felt that our seventh annual conference was even better than those of previous years.

At the outset both Karl Peterson in South Africa and I here in Nampula felt that we were encountering more than the usual obstacles and setbacks. From my end, we had invited an exceptional speaker from Brazil, a creation scientist, and had scheduled special meetings for him the week before the conference so that all the churches and students in the vicinity could benefit. However, a seemingly endless series of difficulties prevented those meetings from getting the publicity and careful preparations they merited. We rented a 1000 seat theater, but were prevented from putting up our advertising posters around town until only two hours before the first presentation. Other delays kept us from getting publicity to the churches in time for them to promote the meetings from their pulpits. We had only 60 people at the first presentation, 100 at the second and third, and 150 at the final talk. The presentations were outstanding and many participants glowingly raved about them, an unusual response from Mozambicans who don't normally exhibit so much enthusiasm or motivation. However, it looked as if the evil one had won the first round in so severely limiting what could have been a powerful influence for the gospel in Nampula.

While those meetings were being hamstrung, I kept encountering setbacks in trying to prepare for the conference as well, which was to follow hard on the heels of the city-wide Creationism meetings. We sent out our request for prayer, and by God's grace things got turned around in the final two arduous days before the participants arrived. We had 225 pastors, church workers, and wives register from 44 denominations all over the country, making this our best-attended conference yet. Adatao Lorengo, our creation-scientist, continued to bat 1.000 with four more outstanding presentations that impressed us all with the glory of God in creation as confirmed by what science is finding out as it catches up with what Bible-believing Christians have known all along. Adatao effectively showed how atheistic scientists who espouse spontaneous, natural creation and evolution are finding the evidence mounting more and more against them, not that any are persuaded by that to re-think their presuppositions even though many now acknowledge how untenable their position is scientifically. The pastors were most appreciative, and many asked that we have lectures on science and the Bible at every conference. I was delighted with their response. I thought Adatao's voice was much needed in Mozambique where the atheistic interpretation of scientific data has until now reined unchallenged in every city and village for lack of an educated Christian response.

Karl Peterson planned an excellent program, the best yet, and received much praise from the pastors for his work. The theme was Power in the Pulpit and the messages centered on the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures and the efficacy of Bible-based, Spirit-enabled preaching. Adatao's presentations were graphic demonstrations of the former two points, but our main speaker was Conrad Mbewe from Zambia who really delivered the goods for us. His eight messages were great examples of the very points he was making. We thank God for an African pastor of his caliber who can be such an encouragement to our men. We have more than a few attending our meetings these days who could reasonably

aspire to similar heights, and we are glad for the opportunity to influence them. Karl also organized four workshops where the pastors grappled with 15 different scenarios he presented, all classic problems that characterize Evangelical churches here, with Conrad giving a Biblical correction for each after the men had time to seek Scriptural solutions amongst themselves. Karl's scenarios and Conrad's responses (along with some of the astute comments from our own pastors) were truly inspired. The subsequent evaluations turned in by the pastors confirmed that this was an exceptionally helpful conference.

We thank God for a further, long sought-after breakthrough realized at this year's meetings. We have finally uncovered a gifted translator/preacher in one of our own pastors who has come from over 1000 kms away to attend the conference for each of the past four years. He translated all of Conrad's 11 sessions indefatigably, almost without missing a beat, and from his own passion for the word was able to not merely translate, but enter into the heart of the messages as well. He has assured us that he and his wife will be returning to the conference as long as we continue hosting it. An added encouragement to me was his comment that he is involved in teaching the materials he gets at our conferences to the regional pastors in his own denomination. The item he singled out as especially helpful was the handbook on systematic theology that all of our conference participants receive each year. He did not know it, but the handbook was assembled by me, and I was pleased to hear that he not only studied it, but is reproducing, distributing, and teaching it to many others.

Right on the heels of the FIEL Conference was my FIEL Seminar, an intensive six day crash course in systematic theology that lasts over 12 hours per day with only brief interruptions for meals. We have fifteen lectures and handouts, fifteen homework papers, fourteen discussion sessions, and fourteen tests. During the 60+ hours of study we look at over 500 Bible texts. Thirteen men and one woman signed up for the seminar. As usual, the course was over the heads of a few participants, but as usual, there were exceptional students who profited much. Their test scores and their own declarations corroborated this assessment, and that is what continues to make the FIEL seminar the high point of my ministry in Mozambique. One young pastor who attended from over 1000 kms away scored a perfect mark on 12 of fourteen tests, missing only one and a half out of 278 questions. For years he had been trying to attend the FIEL Conference and this was his first year to succeed. His only exposure to Reformed theology had been through the FIEL books and the FIEL magazine, which is what had whetted his appetite for attending both the conference and seminar. As his performance clearly showed, he readily understood and embraced the material being taught.

The woman in our class, Leonor, was also an exceptional, bright, and spiritually mature Christian. She scored a 97% on her tests, which normally would have made her the run-away valedictorian, except that we had an even more outstanding pastor participating this year. Leonor is a 36 year old Sunday school teacher who comes to the conferences from 200 kms away. She is quite attractive but has never married. She has had plenty of suiters, but is waiting for a godly man who can be the kind of spiritual leader a woman of her stature needs. Gustavo, one of the two African preachers in our own congregation, is 35 years old and single for the same reason - neither he nor I had yet encountered a solid female Mozambican believer who would be a suitable helpmeet, thus he has remained celibate well beyond marrying age, an amazing phenomenon in African culture. I made sure to get the two introduced to each other and thought my prayers for Gustavo had finally been answered, but was disappointed when Gustavo said he could not court a woman older than himself. As far as I am concerned, if Gustavo goes to his grave a bachelor, it is now his own fault! The Lord has provided, if he could only see it. I give thanks to God for this

fine woman because she is proof of what God can do here in Mozambique and encourages us to keep praying and working and to not give up hope. She has faithfully attended the FIEL conferences for years, scheduling her annual work vacation around the conference dates. Her evaluation of the seminar was gratifying, saying that from her personal Bible reading she had "notions" that what she learned at the seminar was true, but had never heard it taught in church. Now she had concrete proof from Scripture that what she had only suspected before was indeed correct. As the conference is explicitly for pastors and church leaders only, accompanied by their wives when possible, I am not sure how this unmarried woman has successfully crashed our meetings for several years, but am happy to accept that she is a God-appointed "Gibeonite exception" chosen to be a special example of His grace!

I close with a few quotes lifted from the evaluations our participants supplied at the end of the conference:

"I have long desired to participate in a conference of this nature, so unforgettable, so important in the grace of God. The program was exceptionally rich and I am deeply grateful."

"The messages were marvelous and carefully presented."

"I was completely encouraged by the ministry in which Christian workers are involved. The messages were, as always, very interesting. I believe that we must change the manner of preaching in our churches."

"As touching the messages, I was instructed in a manner so moving I must carry this teaching to the rest of my brothers in the church."

"Above everything else, I want to give thanks to Editora FIEL for the marvelous way they have blessed my life."

"In conclusion, I want to thank God and the leaders of this ministry for their vision in promoting these conferences, for they have greatly helped the pastors and leaders of the churches in Mozambique."

Karl mentioned to me at the outset of the meeting that Editora FIEL had supplied \$7,000 for the annual conference and the year's book distribution program (45 pastors who each receive a free book every month for 36 months). Karl put an additional \$6,700 of his personal funds into the conference. My share for the conference, seminar, and pre-conference city-wide meetings was a further \$6990.00. Beyond that, Grace Missions purchased twenty-five thousand dollars-worth of books (including freight) which FIEL provided us for only \$10,000 and which we sell at the conference and in our bookstore at half that cost. As in the previous six years, Richard Denham, founder of Editora FIEL, Karl Peterson, and I rejoice to sink our personal finances as well as our ministry funds into the Annual FIEL Pastors' Conference because like many of our participants, we believe it is vital to the churches in Mozambique. Please join us in this ministry, as additional funds would enable us to expand it's influence even further. The meeting hall we use was packed nearly to capacity this year. For ten thousand dollars, we could build a covered pavilion that would accommodate 350 church leaders for our preaching sessions. This year we could accommodate only 60 participants on the conference grounds, having to put a further 24 out-of-town leaders in downtown boarding houses. For five thousand dollars we could put up tent sites and an ablution block that would accommodate many more of these men on the conference grounds we rent for these occasions. Even though the books we supply are

sold at a fraction of their normal cost in Brazil, they are still out of reach of most of our men. Additional book subsidies would get this fine literature into the hands of many more pastors.

We are thankful to be part of a ministry that is fairly bursting at the seams! Please help us to lengthen our tent cords and strengthen our stakes, so that many more in Mozambique may be blessed with the rich legacy left us by the Reformation fathers!

By His grace:
Charles Woodrow