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A Trip to Remember



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SUPPORT PLEDGED



JAPAN, SOUTHEAST ASIA

As I got on the older rickety bus at the border of Laos and Thailand, I had the slight feeling come over me that the upcoming ride through the mountains was not going to be the same as a trip in Thailand. In this area of Laos, they are about 20 years behind Thailand. I never realized that this country was so mountainous and the roads so bumpy. My long legs were jammed into the seat in front of me and my head started to ache after a couple of hours. Well, 17 hours later, we arrived at our destination in the city of Xianhong. It was a trip to remember. I had a perfectly fine motel room and good food, but there is little coffee in this country where tea seems to be king. And, outside my motel window was a big Walmart sign. This city was very busy with lots of motorcycles.

I went to this country north of Thailand for a celebration. People joined in singing about how the God of the universe has been merciful and faithful to the Akha over the last 10 years.

I travelled with 32 other Akha men and women. We had a great time on the bus, singing and joking together. In the particular area we visited, the Akha numbers about two hundred fifty thousand. The other significant group is the Thai-Lue. There are very few Christians in this area of the world. They do not have a Bible written in their own mother tongue, although some of the Akha are working on this, so that this communication barrier can be overcome. They do have a Chinese Bible. In this area of the world, there are ethnic minorities of many backgrounds. I hope to be able to inform you soon that an Akha Bible, appropriate for this area of the world, will be available soon.

The Akha first migrated to Myanmar (Burma) and then on to Thailand. Most of those in Thailand began to arrive in significant numbers around 1960 and now have grown to about 100,000. Now, the Akha in Thailand are awakening to their responsibility and possibility of being a moving force back toward the countries that they have come from. (Matthew 28) This really is amazing. It is a God movement.

What was my strongest impression on this trip? There has been significant struggle and strong opposition to the message of hope in Jesus in this place. As soon as one gathering of people began to sing and study they were often crushed by local leaders. Then the believers scattered and went elsewhere, not to be found again. Apparently, in this country, laws have been changed that say other "religions" are allowed, but many local leaders are not aware of this.

In one unnamed village, a couple accepted Christ about 20 years ago. Then they began to visit a gathering of other like-minded individuals about 15 km away, sometimes even on foot. One year later, there was a revival, and many children in the village began to sing praise songs and a number of believers were baptized. Not long after that, persecution came from village elders, parents, or spouses and in combination with that, their faith was weak. Many stopped coming to the fellowship. But this initial couple kept coming to the gathering. They saw God perform signs and bring about healings. Then in recent years, another wave of persecution came. The total number in the fellowship, 60 people, went down to a smaller number. But, the Gospel flame was never put out. This is a village where there are shamans and animistic practices going on, but the Living One is working there.

In conclusion, through bumpy roads and long check points, I found familiar people in a nearby land. It is different there in some ways, and there are many struggles to know the One that we sing about and promises eternal life. With much confidence, we can go forward because although at times there seems to be darkness, the light of God triumphs.