

August 16, 2008

Kenya Trip Report

Hi Folks,

We hope all is well with you all and that you are being blessed both physically and spiritually at this time.

As I promised I have put together a report of our trip to Kenya. Rick and I have returned home safely but not without many trials and tests. Satan was very active during our time in Africa. The wonderful understanding about that is the bottom line, that he cannot do anything to us unless God permits it.

Our trip to Kenya was uneventful except for some plane delays and the fact that I had one of the most disobedient children I have ever heard sitting a few seats away. The behavior of the child and the adults with her were absolutely disgusting and caused a lot of problems in that section of the plane. Summed up, that translates to no sleep going to UAE. 15 hours of hell in the air. The activities of those in question were completely unnatural and the author was obvious.

Rick and I expected to get a hotel upon our arrival in Nairobi and get some rest before heading out the next day. That did not happen as we had thought.

We were met by Julius, George, and Aaron at the airport and they were anxious to have us visit churches in Nairobi that evening.

We had set up to rent a car from Budget there. The vehicle we requested was not yet available and we were given a small Toyota of sorts to handle all our luggage and added passengers. Budget promised to supply us with another larger vehicle that night which they did.

We left the airport with me driving in Nairobi rush hour traffic. That is on the wrong side of the road and a steering wheel on the wrong side of the car. You Brits out there think that is the right side. I am happy for my time in Australia this year preparing me for that wonderful opportunity. At least there the drivers are somewhat thoughtful.

The first lesson in driving in Nairobi is that a red light means absolutely nothing unless there is a police officer or two present at that intersection or roundabout. The second is if a bigger vehicle is not moving back to their side of the road you had better hit the road shoulder very quickly.

We traveled from the airport through some prosperous areas and entered the slums. Any words I try to use to describe what we drove through would be inadequate to describe the poverty, filth, and squalor we witnessed. It was absolutely heart breaking. After many stops and starts and driving down muddy lanes congested with people of all shapes, sizes, and ages we stopped at a compound of tin and wire.

Here we went in and met many brethren inside. We were able to talk to them for a while. It was getting late but the little children sang for us if I remember correctly. We met some of the local pastors and brethren and some of the teachers who use the area as a makeshift school.

After our visit there we attempted to navigate through the alleys of this slum area back to a secondary road. There are holes big enough to lose a vehicle in all over the “roadways”. That was the case throughout western Kenya on all our travels with few exceptions. They are the worst road conditions I have ever encountered. My many years of off road driving came in very handy. I did drive the entire trip while Rick spent a lot of time in the car talking with those who were with us. We made a very good team effort of it all. Budget did meet up with us and we traded vehicles later that night. Unfortunately for us it was too dark to really inspect the condition of it, which was poor at best. However it was much larger. Unknown to us at the time the spare tire was being held on with two lug nuts from the rear passenger side wheel. How convenient for the mechanic. That later almost led to a tragedy.

We eventually made it to the rental house, which George had set up for us to stay at that night only to find it had been rented to someone else. That was about 9 pm at that point and we set off to find a hotel in the area. We arrived at one in a very poor section of the city and were engaged in negotiating for 3 rooms to accommodate us. By 11 pm we were actually in our room. These would turn out to be a palace compared to what awaited us. The next morning we headed for Western Kenya after we spent time in the nightmare called Nairobi securing some necessary goods for the trip. By noon hour we left the city. It took us about 7 hours to travel to our location we would be staying at for a few days in the Kisii area. The trip was through the Rift Valley and into the highlands of the Lake Victoria Region. It was a trip spent dodging pot holes, which made the paved roads look like Swiss cheese. Some were and are several feet across and deep. Other sections were stone and dirt and for long distances you could hardly see in front of you for the dust and dirt in the air.

We spent several days at this location. It was where George was born and is where his mother and family live. Mosquito nets are a must. There is no electricity or running water in any of these places we were housed in. The exception is the main towns and cities. If I remember correctly we visited 5-6 church groups while there. Most were located on hillsides and at the ends of cattle laneways. Once off the roads we were able to drive for some distances down these cattle paths and then walk the rest of the distance.

The brethren were incredible. They were the most joy filled people I, and I think Rick have ever had the pleasure and honor of meeting. The smiles on their faces were so real and so lasting it was infectious. Many of these folks, (men, women, and children) walked many, many miles to visit with us for a few hours on every day of the week. There were days when we would meet with many different groups in many different areas long distances apart. Too say we were busy in this endeavor is an understatement. There were times when we would provide local transportation for many of the women and children to be transported home. In some cases, that would include 20 miles, which they had walked and were willing to do so again late at night.

After one bible study Rick and I decided everyone else would need to wait on our journey home while we drove many brethren to their locations. It was on one of these return trips that I had a thought put into my mind to look at the rear tire. I stopped and checked it out. The tire that had the 2 lug nuts removed to hold the bald, treadless, spare tire on had worked loose. It was about 3 turns of 2 lug nuts from coming off. The roads were so bad that I did not notice it as wobbling or such. I tightened up the remaining lug nuts with the wrench knowing full well they may not hold well because most were stripped.

We continued with our taxis service and I continually checked the tire with the lug wrench.

Let me tell you all at this point that both Rick and I greatly appreciated your prayers for us. They were felt in some very powerful ways.

After the first day in this region it became very evident that I needed to change the topic I had intended to teach about for a more, timely subject. I had been asked to speak about the plan of salvation from start to finish. As you all know this is a very big and lengthy subject. The first day I had covered it from the oldest account of history in scripture from John the first chapter to our part in the plan. I did not get to finish that and based on questions being asked I knew a much simpler and focused subject line was in order. From that day forward I spoke about the family of God and our part in it. We covered the positions in that family already filled, (Father and Son) and the fact that the Father was calling a bride to His son. This scriptural theme was understood by all. We stressed many points in it. One was the Father has household rules. They are called the 10 commandments. We showed from scripture where they were practiced by Christ and the apostles and why we are to do the same. We also focused on our job description at this time to qualify to be the bride. We clearly showed this was a qualifying process and was not about just the gift of salvation, which in fact will be offered to all at one time or another during the timeline of the plan. The women received this message with zeal. Many of the men did and some did not. I do believe what was taught in Kenya this trip, will go a long way to allowing women to be viewed as equals of men in the eyes of Christ with each having their own biblically defined roles. This point will need to be repeated often due to the cultural norms of Western Kenya.

One other theme we instructed about was the simple fact that we are all to be able to give a defense for the hope which lies in us. We were able to show the brethren how to do this from the scriptures. We will be following up on this with the tools they will need to do so, such as interlinear bibles and concordances, so they will be able to see more accurate translations of the Hebrew and Greek languages. This is necessary for many reasons but a chief one is the fact that some of their bible translations into their own languages are horrible. In some cases whole scriptures are deleted and some altered so boldly that they say exactly the opposite of what it should.

It was in this area of Kenya that my passport came up missing. This turned out to be a real ordeal. The disappearance took place at the location we were staying in. I had left it behind so not to lose it on our journeys during the day. After talking to the US Consulate I decided I needed to travel back to Nairobi to the embassy to secure a replacement for I would not be allowed to leave the country without it. This meant changing the schedule and enduring the trip both ways back to Nairobi. We had to stop and have a police report made out in Gucha. During the trip back the tire that had been loose blew out completely. Once again another ordeal, but Rick and I managed to get the spare off and the blown out tire off as well. Unfortunately I had to break off 2 lug studs while doing so for they were completely stripped. Now we were driving on the bald spare tire with 4 lugs attached. Once arriving at the embassy 8 hours after we had left I had to wait for them to open again. They are only open 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon. I went and got more passport pictures taken while we waited while Rick and Julius and George and Aaron waited for Budget to switch out the vehicle for a better one. Budget had actually

wanted to charge us for the switch. As it was they had already told me I had to purchase my own lug nuts for the ones missing on the tire back in Kisii.

I was astonished that once I got back to the Embassy that the guards walked me to the front of the line. I was the first into the consulate personnel and within a half an hour I had everything processed. Unfortunately I was not able to pick it up until Thursday morning with this being Tuesday afternoon. This was somewhat of a miracle in itself for they had told me by phone it would be at the least 10 days to get a replacement for it. Linda had been very busy the previous day e-mailing a lot of Government types for assistance. She was able to get Louise Slaughters office involved. She is one of the ranking Democrats on the finance committee in Washington and is a representative for our district of NY. They were very helpful in nudging the Nairobi Consulate General. We decided we needed to get back to the brethren and our schedule. We had also decided to drop our trip to visit in Tanzania for I needed a passport to do so.

With a revised schedule we headed for Narok. It is a bustling town located in the Masai lowlands. It is a dusty, dirty place in winter. I can only imagine what it is like in summer. For you farmers out there we were there during the wheat harvest. The main mill is located in Narok. There were lots of trucks lining the road to deliver their produce as well as lots of combines on the roads traveling from field to field. We saw hundreds of thousands of acres of wheat during our journey. On the way from Nairobi we came upon a wreck on the sides of the Rift Valley decent. We were about 150 yards away from it. People came out of the woodwork to look. Many climbed up the hillside along the road to watch. There were many young men running around selling bottles of beer to the spectators as well as offering their wares to all those in vehicles in the lineups caused by the accident.

We found a "hotel" in Narok to spend the rest of the night. It was filthy at best. There was a shower in my room, which was located with the toilet under it with many unnamed substances all over the walls. Quite an engineering feat I would say.

The next morning we traveled a few miles to meet up with the local brethren. There are about 25 Masai families who live in this location. We spent time going through their homes with Steve a local young man who assists in the care of the church there. This is one of the locations we have been able to put up a building for their use. Steve has actually killed a lion with his spear when 2 of them were attacking their cattle. He is a very articulate young man. The life here is very difficult by our standards. The women and children make a 4 hour journey each day to draw water from the river. It is a long trip with a lot of difficulties in the way. We emptied out the vehicle and filled it with every container they had and drove to the river and returned with them filled. The women were so happy they that unbeknown to us they killed a goat and cooked a meal for us. At the same time we had made the trip to town and purchased corn meal, salt, sugar, tea, and powdered milk for all 25 families. It is amazing how much food one can buy for a reasonable dollar amount. We were able to distribute it before we left. We also had an impromptu bible study on the family of God here as well. The meal was very good. There is usually a lot of rice, a corn bread or wheat bread mix with beans, maize, and some greens at most special meals. The men had the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep down to the river to be watered and thus we did not meet many of them.

I am looking into the possibility of sinking a well here for the families to use. I hope I can make the right connections. It all depends on the depth to the aquifer and the ability to

drill there. A hand pump could be provided which can pump down to depths of 300 plus feet that I am familiar with.

Our journey continued later that day to the Chebole Church area and the groups in Nyamira and Bomet. While there we got to meet many brethren from different backgrounds. On Thursday we needed to stop at the home of one of the founding pastors in the region. It was a sad occasion for his wife of 40 plus years had just died of meningitis.

We had to stop at a location to get phone cards for some of the phones. While there a whole school yard of children emptied out and surrounded our vehicle when they saw “white” folks in it. They were all hooting and hollering with joy when we started making an effort to shake all their hands and acknowledge them individually. Things like that happened throughout our trip. They were so curious about touching our white skin it was something to behold. I will tell you it seemed that Rick and I were the only white folks in all of Western Kenya. I can only remember seeing one other white person outside of the national park during our travels outside of Nairobi.

On Friday we traveled to Julius’s region of Transmara. We stayed at his home there, which consists of several traditional mud buildings as well as several rudimentary structures as well. It is here where the Shankoe Church meets in a building on his property at the top of the hill. Getting to his location can be very difficult when raining. This is the area of the Maasai Mission Churches. What is interesting is the number of organizations, which use that name in Kenya. We also inspected a recently constructed building and one under construction which will be used for the church functions as well as for their feast site.

During our stay here we were having the studies translated into Masai rather than Swahili. The Sabbath was spent there at this building teaching and fellowshiping with many brethren.

The dancing and singing is something to see. It is a very big part of their day. Rick and I were presented gifts here from the women. They also gave some gifts to bring to our wives. We were made Masai elders here in a special ceremony and received all the traditional clothing of one. Rick is still looking for the spear!

I had started feeling ill that morning with an upset stomach and headache. I did not eat anything substantial for several days in the effort to pass it from my system. By Sunday afternoon the symptoms had passed.

We had changed our plans on departure based on a number of developments. One was the fact Rick’s mom had fallen and broke her hip back home. Other issues precipitated it as well.

We spent Sunday visiting and conducting studies with other Masai Churches. Julius had decided we would visit the Masa Mara Game Reserve on Monday instead of Tuesday. That is quite a place. Many animals had migrated to the area from the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. We saw hundreds of thousands of wildebeasts, thousands of zebra’s, herds of water buffalo, giraffes, baboons, mongooses, elephants, ostriches, vultures, secretary birds, hippo’s, crocodiles, lions, spring bucks, Thompson gazelle, elands, and much more. It is an amazing place to visit.

On our return home we were able to visit the office in Kilgoris. Here they offer many services to the town and surrounding area’s to make copies, send and receive e-mails, and other such things.

Sunday night I had started having very itchy feet. By Monday afternoon my feet had swelled and had turned black and blue with an incredible itch associated with it. We all prayed about it that evening. I decided to sleep in the vehicle because of the discomfort and possibility something was in the room I had been occupying, which was affecting me. We had already planned on departing for Nairobi the next morning to pick up my Passport, drop off George and Aaron and spend a night in a good hotel before leaving Wednesday afternoon for home. I awoke at 1 am with some pretty intense itching all over my body. Very large welts started covering my legs, arms, and waist areas. At 2 am I woke up everyone who was to be going and told them I needed to leave at that time for a hospital in Nairobi. We were on the road by 2:30. The roads are very difficult by daylight and at night with rain they are brutal. I was able to drive the distance in less than 5.5 hours. We were early enough to make it to the embassy for the morning session. There were at least 50 people ahead of me but by the mercy of God I was once again directed to the very front of the line and was first to be assisted inside. I had my temporary Passport within minutes and was given information as to which hospitals and doctors would best suit an American in Nairobi.

I decided to go to a University Hospital not far from the Embassy. It turned out to be a good decision. Once inside and consulted (and don't forget paid) I was led to emergency care. The people here were incredible as to service, and concern, and professionalism. Tests were conducted and many questions answered. I was given shots intravenously to help as quickly as possible. The tests came back positive for a bacterial blood poisoning. To this day no one knows the source. It could have been an insect bite or any number of causes. It was very serious. My trachea was already starting to swell and thus close. My chest was very tight. Within hours of the shots the welts which were a reaction to the poisoning started to fade and the itching ceased. Amazing what massive doses of cortisone and anti-histamines will do for you temporarily.

I filled a prescription for some super anti-biotic and several other things I do not like to take. We then headed out for a hotel downtown which Linda and Matt were able to book for us. Here we said goodbye to George and Aaron. George was off to another part of town and Aaron was set to take the 5-hour bus ride north to Meru, which is north of the equator.

Rick and I had the pleasure of taking a real bath and eat a meal cooked over a stove. He slept for about 8 hours and I for about 9. By 8 am the symptoms of the welts and itching were back full force. We returned to the hospital, which actually made the doctor very happy for I was able to give him a stool sample, which I could not the day before. I underwent another series of intravenous shots. The tests came back negative for any parasites or malaria. That was good news. The doctor wanted me to cancel the plane for several days to stay in the area for observation. As you can imagine I declined. Rick and I still had to check out of the hotel, drop off the vehicle, and make it to the airport for our 4 pm departure. It was now 12 pm at the hospital. It all worked out but was very hectic to say the least. We were able to also book flights from Dubai to NYC on the same plane, which was not the case up to that time since we had to change our plans. A word of advice to all who travel overseas! Always by the trip insurance!

After some very long flights we made it to JFK airport in NYC. We were told we were not booked on the early flight out but a later one. That was not easy to deal with but we ended up taking different flights due to some confusion at the terminal. I got home at

12:30 pm and Rick made it here by 6:30. He decided to head back for Michigan that night and made it home the next morning.

What a trip. We accomplished a tremendous amount of work while there. We met some incredible brethren full of zeal. Their hospitality was immeasurable.

There is a lot of follow up work to do and I have been in touch with Gerald as to much of it. There are projects worthy of our assistance and there are some, which are not. There are brethren worthy of our assistance and frankly there are some people who are not. All this could only be ascertained by going there and living as they live. I am sure I have left a lot out and I am sure I will remember a lot I could have reported on but I do think this is enough of a report for now. It is good to be home and witness and enjoy the incredible blessings we have been given here. I missed my wife and children immensely. To have been accompanied by a man of Rick's conversion and depth of understanding and friendly demeanor is truly a blessing. He made quite an impression on many during the trip. They even publicly commented on his ability to make you feel comfortable so as to talk about any subject. That is a gift and it was used well representing the scattered brethren of God from around the world. Thanks for your constant prayers for a successful trip. Satan threw a lot at us, much of which I have not even articulated in this letter. He is our adversary and our constant accuser. He lives to bring division but he cannot overcome the love of God. I look forward to the day he will be turned to ashes.

Brian