

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is a brief update about my recent visit to Pakistan. Many of you have sent gifts to help the believers in Pakistan through Lord's Work Trust, and some have sent them directly. The saints have really appreciated this. I apologise if you have yet to have a personal acknowledgement. I hope to get up to date with this over the next few days. I felt a prayer update was more important, as I know many of you have been praying.

We will be sending out our annual Prayer Update in the next few weeks, so this will keep you up to date with what has been going on in Pakistan in the meantime - I am sure you are not sitting waiting with bated breath!!

I trust that you have a happy time over the Christmas period,

Yours through Grace,

Stephen (& Carole)

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The report referred to:

Pakistan visit November 2022 - Stephen G Baker

I arrived in Lahore on the 22nd of November and was met by three brothers from Arifwala - Sohail, Nadeem and Nicodemus. They left Arifwala at 3 am that morning, so they would arrive in Lahore at 7.30 am to meet me. It was wonderful to see them again. We started our journey back to Arifwala after being stopping at the army checkpoint to verify my ID, Visa and plans while in the country. This information was immediately sent to the police in Sahiwal (a Regional Centre for the police), where we were expected to check in on our way to Arifwala. The journey took four and a half hours. Our meetings with the regional police (Sahiwal) and the local police (Arifwala) went smoothly with no hiccups despite taking quite a long time. I had an interesting conversation with the senior officer from the Special Branch (the structure is similar to the UK). He was fascinated that I was in the country to teach the Bible. He asked me if this was a passion or I was being paid to do this.

Later that day, we had our first meeting with the group of young men in Arifwala, many of whom preach the gospel and are interested in learning more about the scriptures. It was wonderful to see that the group had grown since I was in the country three years ago, and many of those I had met last time were still going on for the Lord.

Each morning we had an hour of Bible teaching with elders, young men and believers, who travelled over an hour to be there. We studied 1st Peter and focused mainly on chapter one and chapter five. These were encouraging times in light of their appetite for God's word and the believers' concern to ensure that they were understanding scripture

correctly. There were usually lots of questions and further discussion at the end of each session.

In the afternoons, we travelled to different locations where marquees had been set up so the believers could gather. The numbers varied from place to place. There were 400 plus at the largest meeting, some meetings were around 60, and the average was around 100. Hundreds of souls have been saved in the last four years, and there are now over 20 assemblies in this area. Teaching large numbers of new believers is challenging (I mean for the local brethren who do the teaching) at the best of times, but when assemblies are also just newly established, there are additional issues, such as identifying elders and seeking to guide the assembly to meet according to the truth of the New Testament. It seems to me to be very like the days of the early church as described in Acts 11:19-30 and 14.

Later in the week, we travelled to Faisalabad. Two new assemblies there commenced when a couple of men relocated from Arifwala two years ago and started preaching the gospel. This was a very encouraging visit, with many believers gathering to hear the teaching of the word of God.

Over the period I was in Pakistan, the days were packed with visiting, preaching and teaching in many locations, but it was refreshing and encouraging to see the interest in the things of God.

Sadly, the persecution that the early church experienced is also quite normal in this part of the world. A couple of Muslim men were saved during the time I was in Pakistan. Since I came home, they have been beaten up, and their carts (which they used to sell in the market) have been set on fire. As I write, one of these men is in hospital undergoing surgery, and his wife and children are in hiding until they can be moved to a safe location. This has become normal in Pakistan, especially for Muslims, as their lives are threatened from the moment they get saved. A young man was murdered earlier this year because he refused to deny the Lord Jesus and acknowledge the other religion of the country as being the only true faith. His mother lives in the same village where the recent persecution is taking place and is facing renewed threats to her life, so she will also be moved to a safe location this week. Please pray for these dear saints as they suffer for their loyalty to the Lord Jesus.

It was interesting and encouraging to visit the villages where flooding had wrecked the houses of believers. Funding from believers in 'the West' has enabled these believers to rebuild their homes (usually one-room structures); where it has not been possible to rebuild, tents have been purchased to house families. Winter arrives in Pakistan very rapidly. It was 31 degrees when I was in the country just over a week ago. The temperatures are now in the low 20s during the day, dropping to 9/10 degrees at night. In the summer, the temperatures soar to the high 40s and sometimes 50s which means that the current temperatures are hard for the locals to handle.

At the time of the flooding medical camps were set up to relieve the higher incidence of dengue and other diseases that come with flooding and the increase of mosquitoes in the area. Some families lost their carts, stalls and means of creating income, and so many of these items have been replaced to help them start their businesses again. Blankets and warm clothing are now being purchased to try and protect believers as the cold weather intensifies.

This visit has left me with the following impressions:

- 1.** People are excited to hear the word of God being taught,
- 2.** Young men and elders are keen to learn from the scriptures and to put into practice what they learn,
- 3.** More men are now praying in the meetings, and elders are taking an active part in leading and guiding the Lord's people,

- 4.** The singing is quite different to ours, but the saints enjoy times of singing and rejoice in their salvation,
- 5.** There has been a massive increase in the numbers of believers and assemblies,
- 6.** There is an ongoing need for good literature and for sound bible teaching,
- 7.** The people are warm and friendly,
- 8.** There is a great understanding of the power of prayer, and the saints bring every situation before the Lord in prayer,
- 9.** There is a need for more order in assembly gatherings, but the elders and leaders are aware of this and seek to teach the Lord's people.

Please continue to bring these dear saints before the Lord in prayer. They really value your fellowship, and knowing that you are praying for them gives them great strength.