

Dear Brothers and Sisters at Harvest Baptist,

The last time we wrote we mentioned that there was going to be a church wedding here. I mentioned that we were under a great deal of pressure to perform a traditional animistic ceremony as well as providing abundant rice wine for the wedding guests. One of our church leaders tried to handle this before the wedding. The man who is insisting on doing things the "old" way is the head of the traditional cultural law in our area. Pretty much every tribal village on this part of the island has a man in this position. We thought this was handled before the wedding, but we were wrong.

Another factor really complicated things for us. There is another church group in our area. This is the church that was started by Akim when we did not go through with his ordination. As far as we can tell, there are almost no believers in this church. This church group was started in our province years ago by an evangelical group. Unfortunately, now many of their pastors in the churches near here don't know the Lord. This group had a wedding in our village four days before ours. Their church also has regulations forbidding the animistic ceremony and also forbids any drinking. But in spite of this, the family of the girl who got married did the animistic ceremony and also provided abundant alcohol. Of course the thinking then was, that since they did this, we should do it also.

Our wedding four days later was very nice, and the reception and meal were also very nice. Then a few days later we received a very nasty and threatening letter from the local head of traditional law. He said that we did not honor him or the memory of their ancestors by not doing what he had wanted us to do. Honor is a big deal here. He demanded that a number of our folks go down to his village so he could lead a court case and fine them. The day of the court case, there were many local leaders including our local congressman who attended. They all said that this man had no right to insist that we follow animistic law, and that we should not be fined. That meeting lasted three hours. During that meeting, no food was served and they didn't even serve any coffee. This was a major breach of etiquette in this culture and was not a coincidence. No final decision was made at that time. But the head of traditional law said that he would come here this last Sunday to give his final decision.

The night before that Sunday afternoon meeting, we all talked together as a group about what their response would be. I asked that no matter what they decided to do, that they would be of one heart and mind. I also suggested that they appoint a calm, levelheaded person to do the talking for them. They had the meeting on Sunday. The folks handled themselves very well. The meeting lasted for another two hours. Apparently it took two hours for them to be told that they would not be fined. Our folks were very clear that fine or no fine, they would not be performing the animistic ceremony, or providing strong drink at any future weddings in our church. I was proud of them throughout this whole thing. It was very stressful for them, and also for me. But I believe the Lord was honored through their actions and decisions.

In an ironic twist, Akim's daughter is getting married. She is marrying a fellow from another village who is with the same church group as our church. He has approached our men and asked them if they would handle everything that needs to be done in our village. I was very surprised to hear that he would ask that. Neither he nor his family have attended our church for the last two years. It turns out that he has had some major problems with the leadership of the church he brought in here and is not on speaking terms with them. We talked about this request. Our guys thought it was pretty funny. I suggested that they be as polite as possible when they turn down Akim's request. At the very least, it would not be very respectful to this other church group for our guys to be taking care of someone who is a member of their church. We do appreciate your prayers with us about this whole situation.

Bella and I continue to get the Sekadau Bible ready to be sent to the printers. Our target was the beginning of July. We missed that target, but I expected us to. Bella is far more detail oriented than I am. She said it would take months for us to adequately go through the Bible to get it ready. But having a deadline caused both of us to work night and day to get it ready. Even though we will be a few weeks late, we are well within the time frame I was hoping for. I have a very long list of things I still have to check. Unfortunately the translation program that we use does not allow Bella and I to be working on the same books of the Bible at the same time. What is left to be done requires each of us to have permission for the entire project. Bella is working right now going through a list of all the words that occur in the translation. This means I can't work on the translation right now. That is why I have time to write this letter today. Tomorrow, I will take over and begin going through the list of things that have to be done. Again we want to thank you for your prayers for us as we do this.

Thank you very much for the \$100 that you sent to us in May and June. Please do keep praying for us and for the believers here in Sekadau. I am very aware that our time here is limited. It influences everything I do, and everything I teach. When we left Gerai years ago, the plan was for us to continue to make trips in there and teach. Even knowing we would return, it was very hard to leave. At this point we have no plan to come back in here once we leave. That makes it very hard to think of leaving.

Yours in Christ,

Paul and Bella

Please pray for us.

1. To be able to finish getting the translation ready for printing.
2. That we will be able to do what we need to do before we leave next year.
3. For continued health to be able to serve the Lord here.

The two pictures are of; Bella going through the Bible with native language speakers. There were more people in the room, but they were spread all over, and I couldn't get them in the picture. The second picture is from years ago. It is the animistic ceremony our folks don't want to do. Some of the food on the trays is for the people involved in the ceremony. Some of it is for offerings for the spirits.

