

Guatemala, February-March 2012
Travelogue and Reflections
By Bob Young

Our arrival in Guatemala is without incident and on time. Luggage retrieval, immigration, and customs go like clockwork. Now we only have to call brother Adán, our contact, to verify his location and arrange taxi transport to meet him.

The public phones are right where Adán said they would be, but they are not working. We eventually use a phone in a car rental office (with appropriate tip, of course). After we think all is set, we find out there are two places with the same name, so we still do not know exactly where we are to go. No problem, we will figure it out on the fly. The taxi driver wants more than the agreed to \$10, at least \$2 more for the luggage. Agreed. I am grateful that the taxi driver has a cell phone and we are eventually able to make the connection with Adán. (I pay the taxi driver \$15, with gratitude).

The most expensive part of the transportation is behind us: \$15 for a 15-minute taxi ride, but the three hour bus trip costs only \$9 (for all three of us, and our four pieces of luggage). Jan is not sure about the luggage riding on top unsecured, but it is no problem. (I think our luggage eventually got used to it.)

Nothing is scheduled on Thursday evening—a welcome relief after almost 15 hours of travel. Good also because we have to catch the bus to our Friday study at 6:30 a.m. the next morning. Buy some purified water, and we are ready to slow down and turn in pretty early. Once the sun goes down, it is cool at 7000 feet; they tell us that February is the coldest month of the year in this place.

Friday is devoted to traveling to Santa Clara to visit with the small church in that location, about a hour and a half ride, probably not that far, but the road is terrible, and something around 25 kmh is the maximum speed. In Santa Clara, after a nice breakfast at a local restaurant, we meet Gaspar, Nicolas and Rosa and study for a couple of hours before lunch at Gaspar's house. Lunch is soup, traditional with lots of relatively large pieces of vegetables. The Santa Clara church does not have a local minister, so Adán is the primary ministry contact. The return to trip to Sololá in the afternoon seems shorter.

After a brief rest, it is time for Friday night Bible study at Sololá; there are 15-20 present, our first experience with the local church in Sololá. The church meets on Sunday, and also on Wednesday evenings and Friday evenings.

On Saturday: we have a trip to Xela (Quetzaltenango) planned; the bus leaves at 5:45 a.m. and is already packed when we board. I end up spending the entire 2 ½ + hour trip standing—probably got my \$3 worth, but barely! In Sacajal, we visit in the home of brother Guillermo Poz and eat breakfast. By mid-morning we are in Xela, where 6 brothers want to meet with me, a cordial meeting but lots of questions, obviously for the purpose of checking out the newcomer and outsider. After the fellowship is established, I am invited to join a meeting of 13 brothers who are finalizing plans for the annual retreat of all of the churches in Guatemala.

We share a wonderful lunch together and enjoy an afternoon seminar before the return trip to Sololá (this time with a seat available, but the bus is still quite crowded). We get back to Sololá

about 6:15 p.m., just in time for Jan to go to the hotel to rest and for Adán and me to go to a regular Saturday night meeting with one of the leading men in Sololá, one who will probably eventually serve as one of the first elders. The home Bible study touches various topics but is ultimately about leadership development.

The Sunday afternoon meeting time in Sololá gives Jan and me an unusually long Sunday morning and early afternoon. Jan and I talk about how the first century experience might have been similar. After the worship assembly, we go to Adán and Miriam's house by moto-taxi, high on a hill, overlooking Lake Atitlan which is some 3-4 miles distant. The high overview provides a beautiful view of the lake, and the evening of light breads and coffee is delightful.

The schedule for Monday through Wednesday is for a leadership seminar each day in Chichicastenango, about an hour's bus trip each way. Each morning, we travel to Los Encuentros and then change buses for the rest of the journey. Each day, Adán opts for a busito for the last half of the trip, explaining that it is much smoother (and costs the same 70c US). The 12-passenger van never has more than 26 riders aboard (by actual count). Good thing the Guatemalans are small! The seminar in Chichi is attended by about 25 church leaders each day, representing 15-20 congregations. The all day seminar is tiring, but rewarding, with good questions, good comments and discussion, and a high level of interest. The Wednesday evening Bible study in Sololá is an opportunity for more leader training, but the 1 ½ hour study makes an exhaustive day—about 9 hours of instruction and teaching.

On Thursday we return to Chichi for a visit to the famous Chichi market, and also to visit the Health Talents clinic at Lemoa. On the return trip to Sololá, I finally experience the advantage of looking older and tired—the bus attendant asks others to make a place for Jan and for me. Thursday evening we eat an early dinner—seafood at a nice little restaurant in Sololá. Friday is filled with a visit to the Sololá market and a trip to Panajachel to see Lake Atitlan up close. The bus trip from Sololá to Panajachel is short, only about 8 kilometers, with a drop of 2000 feet in altitude. The return trip is much longer (at least by point of time), as we go 8 kilometers up steep hills with switchbacks to gain back the 2000 feet. Friday night is our last meeting with the Sololá church, bittersweet, with lots of hugs and hopes expressed for future visits.

On Saturday about noon we are fortunate to catch a direct bus from Sololá to Antigua. Once we are in Antigua, lugging the luggage (apparently, that's why they call it luggage) from the bus drop to the taxis is tedious; and the taxi driver's inability to follow instructions (on purpose?) leads to a much longer ride and a charge of Q.50 (\$7) for what was really only a 4-block ride. Such is life!

On Sunday we walk to the Antigua church and are warmly received. I already have an invitation to teach the Bible study on Thursday night, so we are glad to visit the church and meet the brothers and sisters. It is our first visit to the Antigua church for a Sunday assembly. During the week, Jan attends Spanish class in the mornings. I spend most of Tuesday meeting with Esteban and Faustina, answering questions, thinking about the future of the Lord's work in Antigua, and praying about God's direction and will. I also use the week to work on various

studies and preparations for upcoming mission trips. It is a blessing to have a wireless Internet connection in the home where we are staying.

We spend exactly one week in Antigua. Saturday evening, Roberto and Martha Alvarez drive to Antigua to pick us up for the one-hour drive to Guatemala City, but they have a dual purpose, because it is also an opportunity to stop by the home of Hilario and Teresita Tercero in Milpas Altas to share a time of prayer. Teresita has had several health problems, and we pray with the family, enjoying also the presence of Marvin, Hugo and Edy, and the opportunity to renew friendships and to visit.

On Sunday I preach twice in the new congregation in the Centro Historico in downtown Guatemala City. The congregation just began in late January, so this is only the 7th week of meeting. There are 56 present on Sunday morning, then 87 present on Sunday evening. They have purchased an old historical building and the renovation is still in progress, with everything being done according to government specifications. We share a lunch together to help furnish the classrooms.

Our last day in Guatemala is devoted to a seminar with the students at BICA (Bible Institute of Central America). I teach on the theme of servant leadership, and also emphasize the importance of evangelistic follow-up in the work of developing leaders. A special treat of this day is time spent with Daniel and Nahum, Baxter students who are doing their 4th year Missionary Apprentice Program in Guatemala City.

At least some of the Mayans are preparing for 2013

Chichicastenango is an area where the influence of the Mayan culture is obvious. The churches in the area are heavily influenced by the Mayans, and many of the leaders and members are of Mayan heritage and Quiche speakers. On the bulletin board in Chichi, I was encouraged to see that the schedule of upcoming events included activities for 2013. At least some of the Mayans believe that nothing is going to happen (regarding the predicted end of the world in December 2012, based on the end of the Mayan calendar).

The Importance of individual Bible studies

On this trip, I spent much more time in studies with families and potential leaders, in individual studies and conversations. These individual studies are very encouraging and have much potential for leadership and teacher development. I want to do more of this on future trips.

Seminars provide lots of teaching hours and help the churches more quickly

The best use of teaching time is in seminars with preachers and church leaders, because the things I present are then taken to the various local congregations for study and sharing. Consider the impact of three seminar days in Chichi, with 6 hours of seminar each day—18

teaching hours x 25 present = 450 student/hours of instruction. There were between 15 and 20 congregations represented.

At the seminar in the Bible training institute, one day with 6 hours of instruction x 45 present = 270 student/hours of instruction.

Developing and modeling an approach for effective Bible study

Our approach is not only to share specific Bible information and various classes or lessons, but also to demonstrate and model an approach to Scripture, a way to study and understand God's Word, especially to think about what the text meant in the original historical context given the intent of the original author. This takes time, but is essential. I am amazed at the knowledge of world history which many of the Guatemalan ministers and leaders have, and how quickly and adeptly they learn and use the process.