



A quarterly newsletter
of Zena Wengel
Ministry

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Message from the founder

Brother Alemu Chekole has submitted a well presented life testimony which is rather long. But as we believe that it is exemplary and has an important teaching value. We felt that it would be unwise to cut it short. So the editorial board has decided to leave out other items and publish the whole life testimony of Brother Alemu Chekole in this issue.



LIFE TESTIMONY



I'm Alemu Checole. I was born on June 19, 1942 in a remote village, deep in the mountain recesses of northern Ethiopia, not far from the famous, rock-hewn churches of Lalibela.

When I was eight years old, I lost my sight from some type of eye infection. Since there were no medical facilities in the area, I could not get any medical attention right away. I suffered for almost a year; the infection went from bad to worse; the pain became horribly excruciating until finally the eye balls got perforated and I became totally blind.

Thanks to the resolute determination and incredible foresight of my father, I was brought to Addis Ababa for further treatment and examination. The eye doctor checked my eyes and said that there was no hope of regaining my sight.

Fortunately with God's providence, my father heard a rumor that Emperor Haile Selassie I was dedicating a school for the blind within the next few months. He took me to an Orthodox Church where his majesty was commemorating a certain saint's day. There the king gave orders to one of his court officials to take care of me ▶

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Snatched Out of
Darkness...

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Brother Alemu Chekole

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the next day. Accordingly, my father took me to the imperial palace where the court official took me in and facilitated my stay in the palace for about two or three months until the inauguration of the school on July 23, 1952. I was therefore one of the privileged boys to be admitted on the first day of the opening of the school. The school was jointly run by the Mennonite Mission and the Haile Selassie Welfare Foundation. The Mennonites were responsible for providing excellent academic and vocational training while the foundation met the physical needs of the students.

In retrospect, I look upon my blindness as a special way of God to bring me out of that hopeless situation where I could have remained a beggar by the roadside in that remote village, or at best, become a teacher in the Orthodox Church. But with the grace and providence of God, I came to Addis Ababa and received the best possible education available in the country at the time.

On May 5, 1958, the most important encounter occurred in my life when I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. Of course, there have been ups and downs in my faith journey, but haven't drifted away from my Lord any time. Church leadership has been a rewarding experience for me over the past forty years serving as an elder at the local, regional and national levels teaching and preaching, and sitting on various church committees and boards.

1966 is another momentous year because it is the year when I started teaching at the Bible Academy, a Mennonite Mission high school located in Adama City. At first, I was scared to death because I wasn't sure I had the gift of teaching. Very soon, however, I came to realize that I had the skills necessary and the favor of my students. I taught English, History, Bible courses and music. Working at the Bible Academy gave me a rich experience in my teaching career. I continued serving there until it was nationalized by the Derg Regime in 1982.

Despite my blindness, I have traveled extensively across the globe to participate in different seminars, symposiums and conferences. In my travels I have had the opportunity to meet many people with whom I have made lasting friendships. On April 10, 1977, one of the happiest moments in my life took place, that is, the matrimonial bond with my beloved spouse, Abebech Wache. God has blessed us with six lovely children, three daughters and three sons. ►

Life testimony ... [continued from page 1]

During our courtship period, my wife had to face serious challenges. Some people came up to her and said, "Have you counted the cost of marrying this blind man? Can you really bear the cross of dragging him around throughout your life?" Some even warned her against the possibility of giving birth to blind children if she decided to go ahead and get wedded to this visually impaired person. At such times, I tried to allay her fears by assuring her that some of these allegations were ill-founded and unscientific. And sure enough, all of our children have turned out to be healthy, beautiful and handsome children. Praise God!

Indeed a disability can be a gift. I have chosen for it to be so in my life. Certainly, there are numerous inconveniences just as there are many challenges for everyone. But these inconveniences do not define my life nor do they undermine my individual human value.

Many of you, I suppose, know Helen Keller, that world famous woman who became blind, deaf and dumb at the age of one year and seven months. She could not see, she could not speak, she could not hear. And yet her life became a tremendous triumph about the power of God in her life. Someone came to Helen Keller in her later years. The person

asked her saying, "Miss Keller, do you think that physical blindness is the greatest handicap that a person can have?" After she thought for a while, her answer to that question was, "No. The greatest handicap that a person can have is to have sight, but not vision."

God has blessed me in many ways and made me a blessing to others. So.....

"I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me. And let us exalt His name together." ■

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