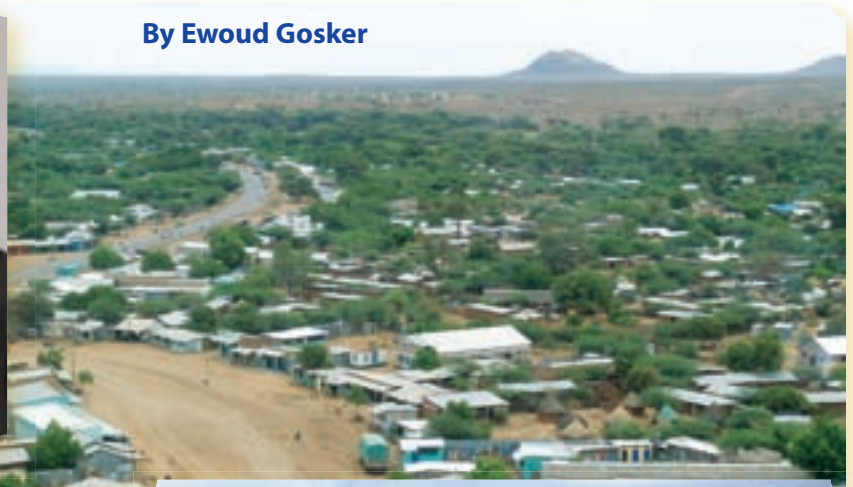




Equipping Africans for Gospel Ministry



By Ewoud Gosker



What a joy to take part in training African nationals in the riches of God’s Word! For five months, men from different remote tribal communities studied together at MERF’s Ministry Center in Lokichoggio, northern Kenya. ‘Loki’ is just over the border from the newly independent nation of South Sudan. Again this year, most came from the fast-growing rural South Sudanese churches which are so very short of trained spiritual leaders.

The men completed a course in Bible History, Reformed Doctrine, and Church History. The South Sudan referendum in January brought political instability which made them start late. Yet, in February they had two teachers together for one period to catch up, followed by five lecturers in a row—each for three weeks.

Before the trip home over vast distances to their



thatched hut communities, Peter van Daalen’s final message was on “salt” and “light.” I have returned home from Loki, but can imagine it: *You have been enriched—do not keep that wealth to yourself but share it, shine your light, spread the Gospel, reach others and you will be even richer than you thought you were.*

Challenge

I was their sixth teacher, from April 28 to May 18, and I loved every moment of it. It was quite a challenge for a retired Dutch high school English and Religious Studies teacher. The challenge, I thought, would be the subjects to be taught—Deuteronomy, Hebrews, Job, 1 Peter, Galatians, and some Church History.



However, the real challenge turned out to be quite different: The students had different backgrounds, came from different regions, ranged in age from 18 to 55, read, spoke and understood English fluently or hardly at all, and filled different positions in their local churches—pastors, elders, evangelists, choir men, or men with no special role. But they all loved God and were very eager to learn.

When I arrived, they had already been at Loki for

Clockwise: Ewoud with his wife Willy; Aerial view of Lokichoggio; Teachers arrive at Loki airport beside these hills which divide Northern Kenya from South Sudan.

some thirteen weeks, which means they attended over 280 lessons of an hour or more. But they listened avidly and lapped it all up as if they were really thirsty. And this thirst for knowledge made “a teacher’s paradise”—there was never a morning or afternoon when students did *not* linger after lessons because they had a question or some words or phrases to be explained.



Great Riches

I myself am a Dutch Christian. My mother, a war widow, took me to church services morning and afternoon every Lord's Day. She sent me to Christian schools, catechism classes, and a Christian teachers' college. The things of God and His Kingdom were fed to me with a porridge spoon. While teaching at Loki I realized how rich I was and how much I could share.

But then these Sudanese men ... partly because of the war, had never attended or completed school; they did not know a thing about Christian education; their knowledge of the Bible was, in many cases, very limited (especially the Old

Testament—only recently translated in some, not all, of their languages). So yes, they thirsted for knowledge.

In addition to 'lectures,' day by day I talked with them of the history of Moses and the people of Israel in the desert and the first years in Canaan. They loved it. We loved it when we learned how God made a covenant with the people very like the Hittite treaties of those days—the majesty of it; God's love and long-suffering in it all. We marveled at the symbolism of the tabernacle as we drew it and understood it. Later we benefited from it so much when looking at Hebrews.

When we saw how God lived among His people (We drew a bird's eye view of the encampment according to Numbers 3), and how He was even 'physically' in their midst when they were on the move, we were very much in awe of God's wisdom and care. We all benefited from these stories from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua.

Seeking the Kingdom

And these men were so serious! Once I gave them an assignment in groups of four or five. Each group had to discuss among themselves and report back to class. They went at it, hammer and tongs. Some sat in a corner of the room, others sat outside, but they talked and talked . . . for more than an hour!

"Come on, men! We want to listen to your presentations. You must come back in now." Okay, okay, slowly but surely they returned to their places, but one group was still missing, sitting just outside the room. So I went there, a bit short-tempered

to be honest, but stopped mid-sentence. They were praying together, asking God to give them proper understanding and the right words in class ... I was so embarrassed, actually ashamed of myself.

Blessed to Preach

We had such a tremendous time together. God blessed us in wondrous ways: The men took turns leading devotions every morning. They would come up with texts and brief comments that *always* proved valuable in our discussions that day.

It was amazing how God led us that way, and this awareness of His interest in us and His care for us made us rich—richer—the richest of men. These men had an unforgettable experience and so did I—and I am sure that they will go back and spread the Word. As one wrote me in a note, "I have now so much to preach about!"

In God's providence, these men may prove of great value in building His Kingdom in a continent awakening from great darkness. I hope there will be many groups like these studying in Lokichoggio for years to come.

Prayer and the support of God's people are vital for MERF's continuing training of national workers.

Top photo: Loki graduating class with Peter and Yoka van Daalen. Bottom photo: On Sundays, Turkana villagers attend the church service on the compound.



For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
—1 Corinthians 2:2