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A Mountain Country and Mountain Men

The country of Nepal is about the size of Georgia. The latter has a population of about 6.5 million, while Nepal has 23.5 million. In fact Nepal has a population larger than that of Australia. About ninety percent of Nepal is covered with mountains. Many of these are above 20,000 feet. Mount Everest, which is the tallest, is 29,0028 feet. A comparison for those of us who live in the eastern part of the U.S is New Found Gap, in the Smokies above Gatlinburg, which is 5,000 feet.

With the exception of the cities, in Nepal there are few people who have what Americans hold as comforts and/or necessities. This was brought home to me again when I interviewed one of the new preaching students in the Himalaya Bible Institute (HBI) in Nayarangarh, a small city, which lies about 100 miles southwest of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

This young brother's name is Lal Bahadur Ghale. The first two parts of his name mean "Red Brave" The latter part is the name of his tribal group. It is surely coincidental that he has a name similar to that used by the American "red Indians," although the Nepalese are oriental in appearance as the "red" men in the US are. Lal Bahadur lives in a village called, Linjo. He and his family are also part of a very large group of Himalayan people called "Tamang." There are ninety houses in this little town of approximately 1000, and it is situated on a mountaintop that is about 7,500 feet (2,250 meters) high. Although Nepal is in the tropical zone, Lal Bahadur says the snow sometimes gets three feet deep during the cold season. The village is located three days walk from the nearest town. There are no buses that go to the village, it has no cars, no one has a bicycle and no one has an ox cart, although some do have oxen for plowing. There are no roads and there is no electricity or running water except what runs out of the side of the mountain. Incidentally one of the springs is a hot water spring, it is sometimes used for bathing, but not for drinking.

Our young brother, who is 22, is married. His wife is 18 and her name is Yo-Maya. They were married four months ago. He stands just a little over five feet and she perhaps a little less. Knowing that marriages are almost always arranged in this part of the world I asked him how long he had known his wife before they married. He replied that they had always known each other for they had grown up in the same village. When I asked how the marriage was arranged, he said I wrote her a love letter and she said "yes." I took that to mean the letter had been a proposal of marriage. He had written that letter in 1999 about twelve months before the marriage took place. In this connection, I asked, did you consult your father about your marriage? He indicated he had asked his father's permission, but said that his father, while being a member of the church, was not too strong in faith. Thus Lal Bahadur said that he had depended more on the advise of an older brother in the church, Ae Ghale. He is no relation, but has been a faithful Christian for many years and he enrolled in HBI last March. A local gospel preacher married the couple.

Lal Bahadur and Yo-Maya live in a joint family household with his parents. There are nine in the one house, which is made of fieldstone and plastered together with clay. It has a wooden roof. I asked if the roof leaked when it rained. He said it did not leak much if the rain was not too hard. There are two floors. The ground floor is one big room where all the family lives, eats and sleeps. In the middle of this room there is a pit for a fire for cooking and keeping warm. At night all the family members sleep curled up around the fire on mats woven from thin reeds and they cover themselves with hand woven blankets. There is no furniture in the house. Sometimes they will make a bench out of the same wood, which is used for the roof, but it is set up outside the house, never inside. Light for the house consists of burning a piece of bamboo near the fire pit. They do not have oil lamps - kerosene - or otherwise. The second floor is what we would call a loft and it is used to store corn, wheat, millet and other non-perishable foods like potatoes. The family owns eight to ten cows and oxen.

Their main food is called dhindo (din-dough). It is usually corn, which is ground to the consistency of grits and boiled with a small amount of water. It is served in such a way that members of the family can pinch off a small portion, dip it into a curry (vegetable stew) and eat. Sometimes the dhindo is molded into a small cake then roasted. I would say that gets pretty close to being corn bread. Other grains such as wheat or millet are sometimes used, but corn meal is the staple. The curries are made from beans, peas, potatoes, greens, tomatoes, onions, okra and other vegetables with chilies. The corn and other grains are ground in the local gristmill, which is water powered. Since the money is very limited in the mountain country much exchange

takes place through barter. The rate of pay at the mill is one half kilo (kilogram-slightly over a quart) for the grinding of four kilos of grain.

There are four churches of Christ scattered in different areas of the town or village of Linjo. The other three congregations are small, but in the place where Lal Bahadur and Yo-Maya worship there are about 200 members. The church has built its own building of fieldstone with a sheet metal roof. Back in August 1999, some militant Buddhists came to the area and knocked down this building along with three others belonging to churches of Christ. The brothers have since rebuilt. Lal Bahadur said often many of the male members of the congregation are not present on Sunday, because they must go to distant parts of the mountain country to find grass for their cattle and sheep. They may stay gone for weeks. He said when they do this the brothers will have worship together on the Lord's Day. When I asked how do they provide themselves with the communion juice I learned that they take raisins and boil them in a metal pot. The brother who told me this said they bake their own communion bread on a leaf (it is unleavened and is commonly used in this part of the world and is called chapatti).

In order for you to comprehend the isolation of these mountain families (about one third of the population of Nepal lives in the Himalayan Mountains), I will tell you how long it takes Lal Bahadur to reach home when he leaves the school at the end of the month. He leaves Nayarangarh by at least eight in the evening by bus in order to make the five hour-100-mile trip to Kathmandu before seven the next morning. Leaving Kathmandu at that time the bus arrives about two in the afternoon in the town of Sebrun Bensi.

After staying overnight in order to get an early start the next morning our young brother must walk three days to reach his home in Linjo. In route at night he stops at a wayside food stall, which the local people call a "hotel." Here the hiker is able to buy his supper of corn meal mush and curry for a 20 rupees (28 cents). There is no charge for sleeping anywhere he can find a place to lay down. His breakfast also cost 20 rupees. In all it takes him about five days to get home and of course five days on his return trip to the school. This is why our students in Nepal spend one month in school and one month at home.

In order for you to appreciate the skills of Lal Bahadur Ghale I should explain a little about our requirements for a brother to be accepted into the Himalaya Bible Institute. They must have been Christians for at least two years, they must be prepared for a Bible entrance exam and they must spend five days in a class learning the Bible and memorizing scripture. When they request an application form they receive a small booklet telling them some of the things they must know in order to pass the entrance exam. This year's exam consisted of the following questions. **PART I:** (1) Who was Jesus' mother? (2) Who was her husband? (3) Where was Jesus born? (4) How old was Jesus when we read of His trip to Jerusalem? (5) In what river was Jesus baptized? (6) Who baptized Jesus? (7) Who tempted Jesus in the wilderness? (8) What did Jesus promise to build? (9) How did Jesus die? (10) After Jesus' death how many days later did He rise from the dead? (11) How many books in the Bible? (12) How many books in the Old Testament? (13) How many books in the New Testament? (14) Who was the first man? (15) Who was the oldest man who ever lived? (16) Name one of Adam's sons. (17) How many sons did Noah have? (18) Who was Abraham's son by Sarah? **PART II:** (1) List the twelve tribes of Israel. (2) Name the Ten Commandments. (3) Name the ten plagues. (4) List the twelve apostles. (5) Name the four ways Jesus grew. **PART III:** Write all the names of the books of the Bible in your own language.

Of the 53 who came for the first day of school February 27, eight were sent back because their applications and supporting papers were not in order. Of the 45 who sat for the above test 35 passed, but it turned out that eight of these had only been Christians for 14 months, so we told them to apply next year. Of the remaining 27, who sat for the five days of selection class with daily quizzes, three memory verses each day and a final exam over all 200 questions in the basis course we call Introduction to Faith seventeen passed. Lal Bahadur, the little man from Linjo scored 99 on the entrance exam, 99 on the daily grades and memory work, and 98 on the final exam. He and his 16 classmates are scheduled to join the regular school program in April and be taught the Pentateuch by Ernest Burnette. Brother Garry Jones of Clinton, TN is here with me in Nepal now (March 10th) teaching Preparation and Delivery of Sermons to the 26 second year students. This means we now have 43 in the school. Our heartfelt thanksgiving of joy goes up to Heaven for these men whose feet, God willing, will be beautiful on these mountains. Also beloved our hearts rejoice for your participation in this work of faith and labor of love. I must leave Nepal on Monday (March 12th) for India. Please pray for all to come to hear the word of truth and for me.

In Christian love, Jim E. Waldron

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