
GREETINGS FROM BEVERLEY

Jerusalem

July 2005

In my last letter I referred to winds of change blowing across the Middle East. Since I have worked so long among the Lebanese I have been following the developments in Lebanon with great interest. The dramatic changes have been covered extensively in the media, but I want to include a brief summary in this letter. Syrian troops deployed since 1976 were withdrawn, finalized with a farewell ceremony at the end of April. Syrian troops entered Lebanon as a peacekeeping force early in the civil war, became embroiled in the war and in the end stayed to maintain security, but stayed much longer than specified in the Taif Accord that ended the war. The history of this period is complex with many influences both internal and external. Regarding Syria's role there are opposing views, but regardless, the withdrawal of Syrian forces marked a new chapter in Lebanon's history and made way for the election of a new government free of Syrian influence for the first time in 29 years.

The parliamentary elections in Lebanon were held from May 29 to June 19, one Sunday for each of the four electoral districts in the country. This division was according to the electoral law of 2000 that many claimed to be unfair, but to change the law would have taken an act of parliament. It was decided better not to delay the elections, but to work within the existing law, although some chose to boycott the elections. People can vote for independent candidates, but usually vote for a party leader with a list of candidates to represent each constituency within the electoral district. To ensure their place in parliament alliances were made including some unlikely alliances. Results of the

voting gave three blocs of power with the anti Syrian alliance in the majority (72 of 128 seats in parliament) and with a distinct sectarian division.

A unique and controversial feature of the Lebanese government is its sectarian nature that allocates a fixed number of seats to each of the 17 religious sects that make up Lebanese society. In the parliament there are 64 seats for the various Christian sects and 64 seats for the various Muslim sects. The president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of the house of parliament must be a Shiite Muslim. The members of parliament elect from among themselves the president, prime minister and speaker accordingly. Prior to the war the Christians held the balance of power, but the Taif Accord evened the number of seats between Christian and Muslim sects and shared power between the president, prime minister and speaker.

From the new parliament the prime minister will form a new government, but there remain sectarian divisions and norms from the years prior to the war. Lebanese politics is still influenced primarily by a number of powerful ruling families and there has always been a greater allegiance to one's clan and ethnic religious community over nation. Although during the "Cedar Revolution" the Lebanese demonstrated unprecedented national unity, the long-term commitment to work together toward real reform and change is another matter. Acts of violence are still a threat. I read little about issues prior to the elections but now the new government must deal with numerous problems.

May 23 was the fifth anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon that forced thousands of her Lebanese allies to flee to Israel. The day was marked by a memorial ceremony in honour of the hundreds of South Lebanese Army soldiers who lost their lives over the years of war. The past five years have been difficult, but most are making the best of their situation. Having lost their homes, housing remains a major concern. Permanent residence or citizenship is granted, but few really feel at home, unable to belong to either the dominant Jewish or minority Arab communities. Building a new life as a refugee in a new country is never easy, but making that transition in Israel is very hard, especially for the Lebanese community given their unique circumstances. The Lebanese have a strong sense of family and although some family members are together, most are separated from extended family. Many children do not know their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Were they in another country they could at least visit, but being separated by a closed border they cannot. It is especially painful when loved ones are seriously ill or die. Just being able to visit would mean so much. What the political changes in Lebanon will mean for these displaced Lebanese is not yet known. Amnesty could be granted, but even so, returning would be problematic for many. Their future is still full of uncertainty.

No matter what the circumstances may be, the Lord loves each one of us and uses us to show His love to others. God's concern for the poor, the needy, and the stranger is very clear in the Bible. The dental clinic continues to be very busy and has treated hundreds of Lebanese and others referred to us in need of help. I am also very pleased that the Lebanese dentist and assistant who worked with me for so many

years in south Lebanon have continued to run the dental clinic I had to leave behind. Many of the people we treat at the Arazim Dental Clinic were also treated at the Marjayoun Dental Clinic, thanks to the enabling and faithfulness of the Lord.

I continue to visit many families in need of encouragement, friendship and help and there are often opportunities to discuss matters of faith. One family I visit often has a most difficult situation. Pray that the Lord would work out His best solution and that they would find a new life in Him.

Please pray for the Lebanese people; for Lebanon's new government; for the staff and ministry of the Arazim Dental Clinic; for the church to be a light in the midst of change and turmoil in the Middle East.

Pray also for wisdom and guidance for me as I continue to serve. Thanks for sharing in my ministry through your prayer and support. May the Lord richly bless you! I'll be in Toronto Sept. 12 – Oct. 13 and look forward to seeing family and friends. (Telephone: 416-225-2060.)

In His love,



Beverley Timgren

Each gift is important. Please send donations designated to **Lebanon Fund** c/o Beverley Timgren, payable to:

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