

Middle East Gets First Church for Deaf

War. It was the loudest noise 5-year-old Tobutu* had ever heard.

And then he never heard anything else again.

When the explosions of civil war came to Tobutu's African town, they claimed his father, mother, brothers and sisters—and his hearing. He cried himself to sleep for months in a refugee camp in Sudan, alone and unable to communicate with anyone.

He learned to steal to eat and, over time, to feed his drug addiction. He eventually moved to the Middle East and along the way learned sign language.

But it would be nearly three decades before Tobutu learned the sign that would change his life—"Jesus." Soon after, he learned the sign "baptism" and wanted to show the world his new life in Jesus Christ.

Tobutu and 21 other deaf people were recently baptized in the sea and came together to form the first known deaf church in Northern Africa and the Middle East.

"There was no fire from heaven, no battle with a giant, no plagues and no opening of the sea like with the miracles that happened in biblical times in the same area," said Doc Douglas*, who is familiar with work among the deaf people of Northern Africa and the Middle East. "Yet God displayed His miraculous power there once again."

Deaf believers exist in other countries in the region but have not formed communities of faith yet, Douglas said.

"We are hoping to train deaf from several countries next year

so they can plant churches in their own countries,” he said. Deaf people are usually shut out from a lot of information, so learning new things, even about Christianity, is usually of interest. I have found a lot of responsiveness.”

Many deaf people have yet to see the name of Jesus signed, he said.

“There are places where there may be (hearing) churches, but the deaf have no idea who the ‘dead man on a cross’ really is,” Douglas said. “There are places where the majority of the deaf live in deep spiritual darkness. The area of Northern Africa and the Middle East, where a plethora of Bible stories took place, remains one of the most spiritually dark places on the globe.”

These deaf are the unreached and mostly unengaged, he said. They are waiting on a message—and a messenger.

“There are many places where the deaf continue to live without a witness for Christ,” Douglas said.

When the message of Jesus Christ finally does reach them, many accept without fear, he said.

“Persecution and suffering may be in the immediate future for these folks, but to see the look on their faces as they came baptized out of the sea, a person would be hard pressed to see any fear or expectation of repercussions,” Douglas said. “They know that no matter how close the hand of Satan may be, Christ’s hand is always closest.”

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**Names have been changed.*

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