

MIRACLE BEHIND THE BERLIN WALL

BY MICHAEL FURCHERT

Editor's Note: Nov. 9, 2009, marks the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the symbolic end of the Cold War Era. Before the construction of the wall, Billy Graham preached twice in Berlin, in 1954 and 1960. In 1982 he preached in East Berlin and several other East German cities. During these visits he met many believers who faithfully served Jesus Christ even under the Communist regime. The following article shows how, in the months prior to the fall of the wall, God worked through one Christian family to demonstrate His power to officials in the atheistic state of East Germany.

PICTURED: Michael Furchert, visiting a remnant of the Berlin Wall

With God all things are possible!” my mother replied to the East German border guard. He stared at us in disbelief. Before him stood an East German family of seven with valid passports. The oldest child was 17, the youngest 4. The guard had never seen his Communist government make such an exception. This was the Cold War—a time when many were killed trying to escape over the Berlin Wall into freedom. Now he looked at this pastor’s family with visas to cross through the wall into West Berlin to celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of the pastor’s wife’s parents. The guard was perplexed.

“There is no God!” he responded defiantly to my mother’s comment. “Someone in high places must have shown favor to you.”

My father smiled. “Someone above! This is what my wife just said.”

For three decades our family had been separated by the Berlin Wall, a 12-foot-tall concrete barrier fortified with barbed wire, electric fences and armed soldiers on high security towers. It was a world-known symbol of imprisonment and injustice.

For years we had petitioned to visit our family on the other side. The petitions were rejected. Why would the government make an exception for us? My father had been fired from City Hall because he would not join the Socialist Party and end his church membership. Now he was a pastor proclaiming the Gospel. My siblings and I refused to join the Young Communist Pioneers at school and to pledge allegiance to our socialist fatherland. Despite disadvantages and sacrifices, we had taken a stand for our faith and had refused to conform. Should the government show favor to those who opposed them?

My grandparents’ only wish for their diamond wedding anniversary was to celebrate with their family. East German officials told us that it was impossible and that this time they would not even read our applications. Yet we continued to petition with persistence and faith. On both sides of the Berlin Wall, our separated family members prayed fervently, believing that God could make the impossible possible.

Then one day the phone rang. Our family was called to the police station, where a nervous officer paced back and forth. “I do not know who has made this decision,” he finally said. “Your petition has been approved.” He handed us seven passports and left the room.

That night we gathered around our kitchen table, our

hearts filled with joy as we opened our daily devotion book. For this day it read: “God, You have many silent ways in which You make possible what seems impossible to men. Yesterday it was not visible yet, today not much, but tomorrow it will stand before us in all its glory and we will recognize how You have accomplished what none of us could have achieved.” The next morning we could leave. Our daily devotion book read from Psalm 31:8. “You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet on a spacious place,” (NIV).

We crossed to the West, and together with our relatives we celebrated our grandparents’ 60 years of marriage. God, who was stronger than any dictatorial regime, had fulfilled our greatest wish. Faith had triumphed.

Our 10-day visas passed quickly. We could have stayed in freedom, but my father had given his

word to the Communist officials that we would return, and he would not abandon his church, the place where God had called us to serve.

The large iron gate of the Berlin Wall closed behind us. Back under dictatorship we stood, in East Berlin, a city shrouded in grey. Yet we were grateful and our hearts rejoiced. We had witnessed the power of prayer. We knew that God was real and He was faithful. With Him we could overcome obstacles that seemed insurmountable, and we could experience His favor in the midst of adversity.

That evening my father received a phone call: “Family Furchert, are you back?” My father assured the anonymous caller that we had returned. “Thank God,” the man said and hung up. Years later we learned about the Communist official who approved our visas. He had never entered a church, but when his mother had died, my father preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Communists at her funeral. It made an impact on this man. When the petition had come across his desk, he approved it and said to his superiors, “I vouch for this man and his family. This pastor will not abandon his church. If he says he will return, he will return.”

Half a year later, on Nov. 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came down. We were free and our family was reunited.

Communist East Germany didn’t last, but our faith in God has remained. We look back with gratefulness. We look forward with hope. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. 📖 ©2009 MICHAEL FURCHERT

SCRIPTURE QUOTATION TAKEN FROM THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.