

Bouaflé, Ivory Coast, March 16-17, 2020. Trainers : David Vaughn and Ian Flanders

We got off to a wonderful start in the first 2 days of training. Among the approximately 50 conference participants we had about 20 students training for the ministry in the Hebron Bible Institute where the training was being held, plus about 20 pastors from churches in the town of Bouaflé where we were. Most of these pastors were from independent churches and have had very, very little theological or pastoral training. Pastor TOH, our host, and the director of Hebron Bible Institute, was very happy to see them all come in answer to his invitation. And, finally, we had 10 pastors come down from neighboring Burkina Faso. These last 10 had made a demanding 12-hour bus trip to be with us for the training. We felt so badly, especially for them, that the training was interrupted, after they had made such a long and arduous trip on the African roads.

In the two days of training that we were able to do, we taught the men almost half of the material we had intended to teach on the three courses: *Bible Overview (1)*, *What is a Christian?*, and *How to Read the Bible (1)*. Ian Flanders taught the first two courses and I (David Vaughn) taught the last course.



The men were extremely responsive. In the course on *How to Read the Bible*, I spent about half of the time teaching them and half of the time having them work in small groups using the principles taught. After each workshop, men would come up to the front and report on the results of their work on different biblical texts and then constructive criticism was given by the instructor, if

needed. Both I and the participants immensely enjoyed this mixture of teaching, workshop, reporting back in front of the whole group, and final critique by the instructor. It enabled Ian and I to clearly see how much the men were understanding and where we needed to give more explanation. The men were amazed at times to see how they had misunderstood biblical passages, and to discover the reasons for which they had been badly interpreting biblical texts. Passages for the workshops were mostly those in the material previously prepared for trainers, but in some cases changes were made and passages were chosen with both with an eye on the interpretation principles they needed to develop and the doctrinal errors common to the African Church. There was a great discussion time when the men came back from the workshops to report on their understanding of certain biblical passages. Also, some exhortation on my part concerning certain doctrines such as the "Prosperity Gospel" which has infected to much of the African Church.

Ian's teaching on *Bible Overview* dealt with Genesis 1 to 3 and the great events and doctrines of Creation and Fall. This generated lots of questions on many very basic issues. For example, there was much discussion on what it means for man to be created according to the image of God. In the African context this notion of man as created in God's image raised questions that Westerners would not even think of. Though the 2 courses Ian taught lent themselves to less workshop opportunity, he was able to include a good bit of practical discussion in small groups with reporting back to the larger group and then discussion and correction by instructor. At the end of one session there was an impromptu question and answer period which was very interesting and fruitful.

As mentioned above, we interrupted our 5-day training to hurriedly travel back after completing only 2 days. Due to Corona Virus and countries suddenly restricting travel, Ian and I made a quick decision with Pastor Hien Toh of the Hebron Bible Institute in Bouaflé, Ivory Coast, that the training would be interrupted, and we would leave right away. We hoped that when we got to Abidjan and its airport, several hours away, that we could get places on a flight. We had been told that Air France had cancelled 80% of its flights. We are thankful to the Lord for a series of providential events that enabled us to get on a flight at 2am Wednesday morning and make it through this narrow window of time given by the President to get back into France, and then on to England for Ian. Coming through the Paris airport was the first time in my life that I have gone through passport control without having to wait in line – not a single person in front of me.

Wednesday at 11am I was still in the Paris airport after the long flight from Abidjan overnight. While waiting for my Paris-Marseille flight, I received a short email from Pastor Toh saying “*I hope that you have made it home with no problem. I am still hearing people talk about the impact of the teaching. It is really a shame [that the training had to be interrupted] but that is independent of our own will. I greet your wife.*”



We do not doubt the wisdom of the decision to come back but are very heartsore over having to interrupt the training in this way. Pastor Toh was a wonderful host. We were quite impressed with his organizational skills, his leadership abilities and his understanding and empathy with us in this very exceptional situation. The Hebron Bible Institute which he directs is quite respected by all the various evangelical churches (and pastors) in the area and is evidently having a good impact from what we learned. It seems that the Lord has led us to quite a strategic place to give PTI training and we are looking forward to the next 4 years, Lord willing, of continued collaboration.

David Vaughn