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Correspondence- Jean Teague - December 1978

Jean Teague

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BAPTIST HOSPITAL

GAZA

DECEMBER, 1978

MERRY CHRISTMAS!! It's a bit hard for me to think that the Christmas season is almost upon us here in Gaza. From November until spring, it's harvest time in the Strip's orange and lemon groves; already the fruit is turning golden! Too, the huge poinsettia "trees" are already clothed in scarlet "blossoms" -- definitely something more than N.C.'s potted ones! How glorious they are here!

We have rejoiced over the coming together of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, in their joint effort for peace between their two countries. Much remains to be done -- but what is done now, and in further efforts later -- will have an effect on the Palestinian people with whom I'm working here in Gaza. I know that you join all of us here in praying that the Lord will lead and direct in every effort for peace in this land of Christ's Birth -- a Birth we prepare, even now, to celebrate!

The Gaza Strip -- in a sense -- is a vast refugee camp, containing 270,000 Palestinian refugees of 1948 and their descendants (or 70% of the total population of approximately 420,000 people). Gaza, perched on the edge of the Negev Desert, is the same land the ancient Israelites fought for under Samson and other judges; it's the territory that was intended for the Tribe of Judah when the early nomadic Jews burst out of the wilderness into the Land of Canaan (Joshua 15:47).

Just off the main square here in Gaza Town is the traditional site of Samson's Tomb. Here, also, is an ancient orthodox church, St. Parpherius, built in the 4th century. Driving through the Strip, one passes many picturesque mosques (56 of the total 75 are in regular use for Friday prayers). Approximately 99% of the Strip's population is Moslem!

Whizzing along the main road from Gaza to Jerusalem -- or from Gaza to El 'Arish -- one passes many camels loaded with grass, heavily-laden donkeys "decorated" with red tassels or milk goats tended by small boys. The "world" moves on, but life here goes on in many ways just as it did 2000 years ago!!!

Except for the early morning abundance of seven-passenger Mercedes Benz taxis that one sees transporting travelers and/or workers to Israel, there is very little European or American influence evident in day-to-day activities on the busy streets of Gaza Town. Donkey or horse-drawn carts and wagons continue to do "big business" as transporters of goods of every description.

As you know, I came to Gaza to teach English in the School of Health Sciences -- a position I am now filling. In our first-year nursing class, we have 33 students -- 21 boys, 12 girls. Of this number, 4 are from believer families, 1 from a Christian (Greek Orthodox) family, and the other 28 from Moslem families. In our 2nd and 3rd year classes, we have a total of 25 students -- all Moslem! I'm having opportunities to share the good news of Jesus, and I rejoice in this! But, I request your prayers for all of us who witness to Moslems. It's difficult to explain clearly to a Moslem who believes in the goodness of Jesus as a Prophet that He's more than a Prophet!!

In addition to teaching in the school, I'm also serving this year as Dean of Students. My major responsibility in this position is to serve as school counselor -- doing what I've enjoyed doing in the States for many years! You will be interested to know, too, that I'm studying Arabic again -- only 1 class per week, but I'm progressing!! My students help me, too!

Most of our Baptist work here in Gaza has been done with/for the refugees. Recently, though, an opportunity opened for me to be of help to some of the professional segment of the population. The Gaza Lawyers' Association asked me to teach a course in English for them. I began the three-month course in mid-October, teaching it in our library in Gaza Town. At a "coffee" they had for me last week, they asked me to teach another one when the present one (grammar and conversation) is completed! This one will deal with explanations, in English, of the law terminology used primarily during the British Mandate period here in Gaza. Pray for me as I begin now preparing for this; I don't know very much about this sort of thing!!! My dictionary and I have become "bosom buddies" already! If you have helps or suggestions, send them along. L. T. Hamrick of Shelby has already been a big help by sending materials for use in my present course -- and some I'll carry into course II. One of the students said the other day, "If you continue this law study, you'll go back to America a learned advocate." Be prepared, lawyer friends!!!

By the way, at the recent coffee hour, someone had put on my "tea plate," two pieces of cake, two bananas, one apple, four cookies!! With these things, I drank a cup of hot tea! Just before I left an hour later, after "social conversation" with my students, I drank -- according to the best Arab tradition -- a small cup of Turkish coffee. But more important than food and drink was the "speech," presented in English (and with laborious effort). Abu Dagga said in his conclusion, "We want Mrs. Teague to know us so well that when she goes back to America, she can tell the people there that she has brothers and sisters in Gaza." I already feel that way about them (3 women, 16 men), but how I wish they were brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray for them and me, will you?

If I could talk with you in person, I'd tell you so much in detail about my nursing students, for whom I am (at their instigation) "second mother" -- about Sa'da, whose Moslem husband divorced her because in 5 years of marriage she gave him no child; about Nowal, whose husband divorced her because she wasn't beautiful enough (she's a lovely girl!), and kept three year daughter for himself; about so many of "my children" who are hungry for love, attention, understanding!!! One of the girls said the other day, "Mrs. Teague, everyone in our class loves you! I don't know why." I've thought about that, and I've concluded that if what she says is true, I know why! I love them! And I've always found it true that when I've given love to others, they've given love in return. Haven't you found that true, too? Who was it said, "The whole world's crying for a little bit of love"? -- words to that effect!!!

Saying goodbye to my friends in Amman, Jordan, was very difficult, as I knew it would be. My year and a half there provided me with tremendous, life-changing experiences and personal encounters. I shall always feel an indebtedness to the people and the circumstances which contributed to my ultimate growth as an individual.

Being in Gaza, though, is enjoyable, rewarding, and fulfilling, too. Everyday I have at least one encounter with a student that blesses me "real good." Yesterday, a student said to me, "Mrs. Teague, why don't you come to our Bible Study tonight?" I answered, "I'd love to, Mohammed, but I have another meeting tonight." Pray for those here who lead Bible Study for interested Moslem students, that the seed sown will bear fruit!!

Thank you for helping us through your gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, to minister here through our hospital, our nursing school, and our library. Truly, without the "extras" that offering provides, our work here would of necessity be less complete.

I am also enjoying worshipping in our little church here on the hospital compound. Each Sunday, services in Arabic and English are held. And we have a "bus" ministry for those who live too far away to walk to worship! Your gifts have helped to make this kind of ministry possible!! Again, thank you!

In Christian Love,

Jean M. Teague