

**“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6):
A reflection from my visits to Mucatine (Gaza) and Boane (Maputo)**

By Anastase Nzabilinda

Meeting with church leaders in Mucatine (Gaza Province)

On July 10 and 11, 2008 Richard Akers from Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa (ZEMA) and I left Maputo to Mucatine (Gaza Province) to meet with a group of church leaders in that area. Arriving in Mucatine in the afternoon, we met with a group of 16 church leaders (more than half of them were from Zion churches). The idea of visiting Mucatine came at the beginning of April when I met with a Zion Pastor who was attending Bible training conducted by a mission team from Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church (USA), a church that is actively involved in ministering in that area in partnership with World Relief Mozambique. During the training I met with Amosse Valoi of Mucatine, a leader of about 16 Zion congregations around Massingir District, who expressed a desire to see those leaders attending a formal biblical training, to enable them to preach/teach the Word of God in an effective way. I decided to invite these leaders together with other pastors from other denominations in Mucatine and come with Richard to meet with them.



On our first day, Richard took some time sharing the history of the Zion movement since it started in 1896 in Zion, IL (USA) till the ministry expanded to Africa and then to Mozambique. On the following day we took time to introduce *This We Believe*, a series of biblical lessons that ZEMA missionaries have been using in training Zion pastors. As we were closing, other pastors arrived and they were all asking for more teaching. Both Zionists and non-Zionists pastors expressed their excitement because after learning together they came to realize that

Zionists also belong to the family of God. They asked us to make a plan to continue to come to conduct biblical teachings with them in that village so that they can also be able to teach them in their congregations.

Meeting with church leaders in Boane (Maputo Province)

On the following day (Saturday July, 12), I visited another group of 15 pastors in Boane (about 50 km from Maputo; 9 of them were Zionists). This is one of the Pastors' Networks in the area where about 20 congregations, mostly Zionists, meet to discuss community issues and during this meeting they invited me to do Bible training with them.

As I was driving to Boane to meet with them, I learned from a pastor who was taking me to the meeting place about different practices from many Zion churches, especially in southern Mozambique. This pastor grew up in a Zion church in Maputo, and he used to see his church leaders prophesying to church members

and requiring them to bring chickens and goats to be used for cleansing and sacrifices. Many church members brought chickens to their leaders who killed these chickens, mixed their blood with water and asked people to wash themselves with that mixture of water and blood as a way for cleansing. Others brought goats, slaughtered them, and offered them as sacrifices to take away their sins. They also mixed the ashes with water to be used for cleansing. The challenging part of this practice is the extent to which the pastors profit from the continuation of this sinful practice: on one hand those church members involved in those rituals take the blood from the chickens and the ashes from the burned goats' meat to mix with water and use that water for their purification and cleansing; on the other hand, the church leaders use the chicken and goat meat for consumption, quoting the Bible in those rituals. The pastor was encouraged by my visit to these leaders and believes that teaching them the biblical truth is what is needed at this time.



They had become leaders in wrongdoing instead of spiritual leaders

As I was reflecting on this, I was reminded of the word in Hosea 4: 6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge". When we read this passage (Hos. 4:6-9), we realize that God was concerned for the religious leaders who were keeping God's people from knowing Him ("destroyed from lack of knowledge"). These leaders (or priests) shared the guilt of the people and therefore would not be exempt from punishment. These leaders were supposed to be the spiritual leaders, but they had become leaders in wrongdoing: They *stumble*, referring to their moral shortcoming (cf. 14:1; Isa. 3:8; Jer. 18:15; Mal. 2:8) or their coming downfall (cf. Hos. 5:5; Isa. 8:15; 28:13; 31:3; Jer. 6:21; 8:12; 20:11). These priests and prophets were attached to official sanctuaries and royal courts. Their allegiance was to their human kings, not God (cf. 1 Kings 22:6- 8; Amos 7: 10- 17), and they were characterized by their self- gratification (cf. Isa. 28:7; Jer. 23:11) and greed (Jer. 6:13; Micah 3:11).

The Lord held them responsible for the people's lack on knowledge.

The priests in particular had ignored their duty to communicate the *Law of God* to the nation (cf. Deut. 31:9-13; 33:8- 10; Mal. 2:7). In their greed the priests fed on *the sins of the people* by encouraging them to multiply the hypocritical sacrifices which the Lord hated: "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings"- (Hos. 6:6); "though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning" (Hos. 8:11). The priests' underlying motive in doing this was greed, since they received portions of the offerings which were presented (cf. Lev. 7:7-10, 28- 34; Num. 18:8- 19; Deut. 18:1- 5). The people may have said to one another "It must be OK if the priests do it." The priests were glad when people sinned: "They feed on the sins of my

people and relish their wickedness." (v. 8). Indeed, every time a person brought a sin offering, the priest received a portion of it. The more the people sinned, the more the priests received. Because they couldn't eat all of the offering themselves, they sold some and gave some to their relatives. They in fact profited from the continuation of sin; it gave them power and position in the community. So instead of trying to lead the people out of sin, these church leaders encouraged sin to increase their profits.

The blood of Christ is sufficient to purify us (Heb. 9: 11- 14)

As I was introduced to these church leaders, I had time to read the scripture with them and to encourage them to study God's Word and teach God's people from it. I also had a chance to share with them that Jesus has become a sacrifice for our sins and is ready to forgive us. I highlighted the fact that there is no need to shed the blood of animals because Jesus had shed his blood once and for all. "When Jesus came as a high priest... he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb. 9:11- 14). In fact, while rules and rituals have never cleansed people's hearts, by Jesus' own blood alone (1) we have our consciences cleansed, (2) we are freed from death's sting and can live to serve God, and (3) we are freed from sin's power. Here we are taught that when people sacrificed animals, God considered the people's faith and obedience, cleansed them from sins, and made them ceremonially acceptable according to the Old Testament law. But Christ's sacrifice transforms our lives and hearts and makes us clean on the inside. Thus there is no need to sacrifice animals, for Jesus' blood is sufficient to purify us. In fact, there is no point in returning to the sacrificial system now that Christ had come and has become the final, perfect sacrifice.

We are also reminded how spiritual leadership is a heavy responsibility. This is really a challenge to each of us. Whether you teach Sunday school, or lead a Bible study or hold any church office, don't take your leadership responsibility lightly. We must be leaders who lead others to God.

And let us pray for these groups that they will continue to open their hearts to the Gospel and allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives. He alone can satisfy their hunger of the Word. It is really a privilege to be part of what the Lord is doing in Mozambique.