



# BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

A publication of **Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries**

Vol. 39 No. 4, 2021

## BIEM's 40th Anniversary!

**E**xactly 40 years ago, Peter Slobodian, a missionary working among Russian and Ukrainian immigrants in Chicago, held a small meeting in his home. There, he led a handful of businessmen and pastors, including son Pastor Sam Slobodian, in discussing an issue that had long been on Peter's heart—evangelizing the Soviet Union.

Although preaching to immigrants in Chicago was fruitful, most Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking people lived in the Soviet Union, an atheistic totalitarian regime dedicated to stamping out Christianity. (Former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had proclaimed Soviet television would exhibit their last Christian by 1980.) Christians living in the USSR endured decades of persecution resulting in imprisonment, exile, and even death. During those dismal years, Christians worldwide prayed for those suffering behind the “Iron Curtain.” However, few in the West contemplated any sort of missionary activity targeting the millions of souls in the Soviet Union. The USSR was considered a “closed” country.

At Peter's meeting, those present discussed the huge short-wave radio audience in Communist countries. A recent article in *Reader's Digest* had stated there were 1 billion short-wave radios in the world, with the majority in “restricted lands”! In other words, most short-wave radios were in communist countries, where they provided the main source of information. Peter proposed renting time on international short-wave radio stations to broadcast into the Soviet Union.

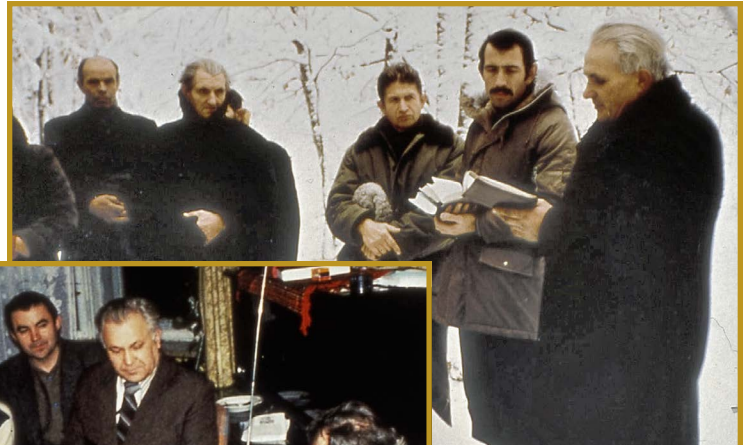
By the time that meeting ended, the men had established a new mission: Baptist International Evangelistic Ministries

*article continues throughout the newsletter*



*The Lord has brought BIEM a long way since its beginnings in the basement of the Slobodian home (inset) in Chicago. Here, our directors stand in front of the beautiful facility God has blessed us with near Indianapolis. This 8,000-square-foot facility contains our offices, a warehouse, and guest quarters for our missionaries when they visit supporting churches in America.*

*During the years of persecution, believers in the USSR listened to foreign broadcasts via shortwave sets like this one.*



*The USSR permitted few churches to exist openly. “Unregistered” (i.e., illegal) churches resorted to holding services in homes, barns, and even in the forest in all kinds of weather.*



(BIEM)—established to broadcast the Truth of God’s Word to millions who had little other chance to hear it.

### Sharing the vision

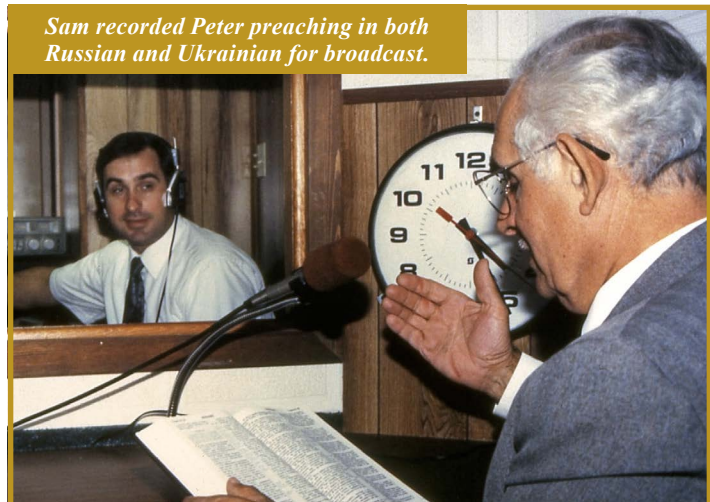
Back then, by targeting Russia as a mission field, BIEM was an exception among mission organizations, which mostly concentrated on the free world. At the time, many pastors and churches viewed with skepticism the idea of evangelizing behind the Iron Curtain. After all, the standard practice was to train and send American missionaries to live on their field of service. This was not possible in the Soviet Union. So, not everyone was quick to embrace novel, unconventional methods, not even for the worthy goal of evangelizing in the USSR.

But BIEM’s methods were derived from applying simple logic to the Great Commission. God clearly commands us to

go into “all the world.” If we, God’s people, were to obey this command, we could not exclude the one-third of the world under Communism. And since our Lord would never command us to do what we cannot do, there had to be ways to share God’s Word in countries closed to traditional methods. Because radio broadcasts need no permission nor passport to cross national borders, the new mission saw them as a wide-open door for reaching souls.

Praise the Lord, sufficient churches and believers in the U.S. understood this reality and supported BIEM. Soon, BIEM’s Gospel radio programs in Russian and Ukrainian were being broadcast on multiple international radio stations. God greatly blessed those programs, and many were saved. At great risk, new Christians were baptized, formed local churches, and reached out to others. BIEM personnel supplied Bibles and Christian literature that was smuggled, undetected, past Soviet authorities.

government lifted its mail restrictions. Thousands of Russian letters poured into BIEM. Their urgent pleas for God’s Word deeply moved our supporters’ hearts. In response, BIEM added the distribution of Bibles and Gospel literature to its other activities. With the help of God’s people,



Sam recorded Peter preaching in both Russian and Ukrainian for broadcast.

**BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL**  
*Challenger*

*“Reaching the world for Christ since 1981”*  
Dr. Peter Slobodian, Founder

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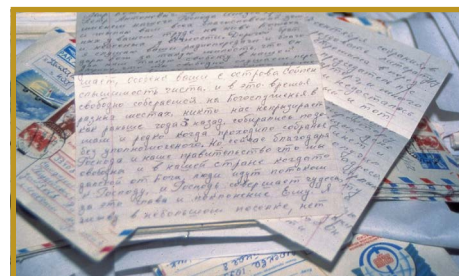
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### Unexpected opportunities

In the late 1980s, *Glasnost* (“openness”) created cracks in the Iron Curtain. A huge crack occurred when the Soviet

we sent Gospel packages throughout the USSR.

In 1991, the disintegration of the Soviet Union into fifteen separate nations brought unprecedented changes. Whoever would have dreamed that, in our lifetime, God’s mighty arm would fling open the door of religious freedom in the land of Lenin? The collapse of Communism and the resulting religious freedom in Russia ushered in new opportunities.



When Soviet mail restrictions lifted, thousands of letters from listeners flooded BIEM.



Mary Slobodian and daughter Debbie, packing literature to mail to listeners.



When the Iron Curtain came down, it created a flurry of activity among Western mission organizations. Everybody wanted to get involved in Russia as quickly as possible. Evangelists held big meetings. Religious TV and radio personalities aired Russian translations

However, BIEM was different from other organizations. Most of them had no contacts in Russia and were starting from zero in terms of relationships. In contrast, years of radio broadcasts and trips into the USSR had given BIEM strong, personal relationships among Russian and Ukrainian

We saw great advantages to this strategy:

- Support of nationals is cost effective because they are already there.
- Nationals already know the language and culture. (Americans need years to master Russian and adapt to the lifestyle.)
- This plan included a role for American missionaries who are called to Russia. Overseeing the efforts of BIEM nationals, they could serve a vital role in teaching, training, pastoring, and mentoring.
- Training nationals assured that the Gospel outreach would continue even if the door closed for American missionaries.



*The original Board stands beside the first container of Bibles, Christian literature, aid, and other supplies we shipped. We're still shipping containers!*

of their programs. Christian publishers produced their books in Russian (not all of them quality translations). Humanitarian organizations funded aid projects in Russia. Mission agencies dispatched hundreds of missionaries to Russia.

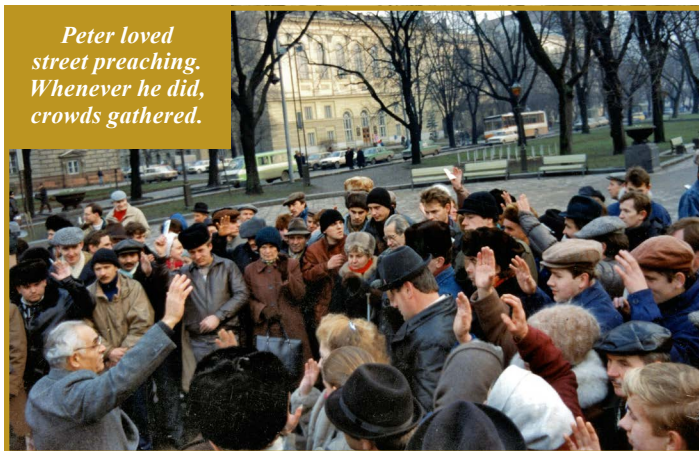
For BIEM, too, the new opportunities raised questions: What would be the most fruitful way to share Christ in the new Russia? Which missionary projects should we pursue? Should the ministry move to Russia?

young men are on fire to preach the Gospel. What we lack are sickles for the harvest." The imagery was clear and powerful. A pool of dedicated and proven workers already existed. More than anything, they needed to be equipped for the work of the ministry. Together, we all agreed this was God's clear answer to our prayers—the most effective approach for evangelizing and planting churches in the former USSR was through training, equipping, and supporting nationals.

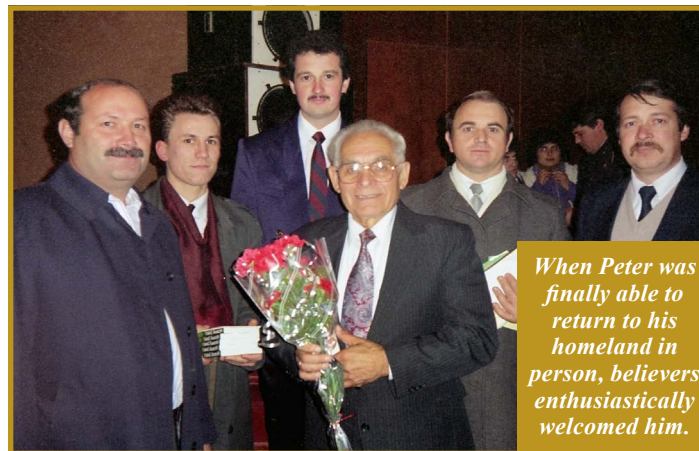
Indeed, within a short number of years, Russia began expelling western missionaries or simply would not renew their visas. Nearly all those American missionaries are gone, but our national coworkers have citizenship; they can't be deported. Pastor Pavel Rumachik and others have stated, "While there were many huge Christian organizations that flooded Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed but are now gone, BIEM—despite being much smaller in size—has accomplished more."

### Church planting

Thanks to a track record from years of radio broadcasts—plus friendships developed while traveling in Soviet



*Peter loved street preaching. Whenever he did, crowds gathered.*



*When Peter was finally able to return to his homeland in person, believers enthusiastically welcomed him.*



*Having no church buildings, congregations advertised Christian meetings in schools, theaters, and movie cinemas. Peter shared God's Word everywhere.*



*Sam Slobodian, with our first group of church planters in the Moscow area.*



*Near Moscow, Podolsk and Tuchkovo were the first areas where BIEM constructed church buildings.*



times—BIEM enjoyed strong ties with Russian and Ukrainian churches in many regions. In Moscow, Russia's large capital, BIEM developed particularly strong relationships with Baptist leaders, well known for their courage and steadfastness in the face of intense persecution. These ties produced an outstanding group of young men called to preach. They became BIEM's first church-planting national missionaries.

Our church-planting efforts began in Moscow, Russia's huge capital. Our young missionaries evangelized everywhere they could. They established churches in schools, theaters, homes, and in cultural centers still under the shadow of Lenin.

As the number of BIEM church planters grew, they targeted St. Petersburg and other cities of Russia and Ukraine. Soon, God opened more doors for BIEM in neighboring nations.

Yes, God blessed BIEM's efforts in the Soviet era. But when He provided the freedom to do more, the ministry greatly accelerated: Bible schools, Christian camps for youth, unparalleled opportunities to evangelize and plant churches, open distribution of Scriptures and Christian literature, humanitarian-aid shipments, Christian drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers... The list goes on. It was harvest time for the Lord's work. With the Lord's help, BIEM's workers have planted over 121 churches. Of those, 67 are in Eastern Europe, and 54 are in nearby restricted

Muslim lands. We are now in our 56th church-building program.

### **Muslim lands**

With so much for BIEM to do in Russia and Eastern Europe, why did we extend our vision to Muslim lands? This dramatic move did not start with our Board of Directors. Neither did our missionaries suggest it. The spark that initiated this historic venture did not seem profound when it happened. It occurred in Moscow, during a simple fellowship time with several of our church planters and national pastors.

Due to a recent terrorist attack, the discussion turned to the subject of terrorism by Muslims. It was occurring on Russian soil more often than reported by our media in the West. Everyone was concerned.

At one point, Peter Rumachik—a much-respected pastor who had suffered 18+ years in the Soviet prison system—made a startling comment: "Brothers, if we don't reach those Muslims for Christ, they will come over here and kill us all!" Pastor Peter had also served as Vice-President of the unregistered Baptist Union, consisting of thousands of underground churches. When he spoke, we listened. His comment changed the tenor of our discussion. Soon, that time of fellowship and food turned into a prayer meeting. With God touching our hearts, we sank to our knees and prayed for the



*Russian pastor Peter Rumachik became a friend of BIEM to the end of his life.*



*Peter, meeting with the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches of Ukraine.*

souls of Muslims. We didn't realize BIEM had just turned a corner.

In the following months, something unusual began to happen at BIEM. Over and over, God led into our circle of ministry believers from Muslim lands. Some had vast experience in working among Muslims and wanted to do more. Others had no experience but were deeply burdened for Muslim souls. Many were from Russia's Muslim neighbors to the south, in the 10/40 window. Such individuals showed up at our schools in Moscow and Kyiv. Others contacted our offices with letters or emails. One couple had much experience plus contacts in Central Asia (which resulted in a team of national church planters who lived and ministered in Muslim lands.) After months of this repeating trend, we realized God was responding to that moment when brother Peter led us in prayers for the light of the Gospel to illumine Muslims.

By the time BIEM held its 25th anniversary conference in Yalta, our team included a good number of converted Muslims who were reaching souls and planting churches in their Muslim homelands. It was such a blessing to see our Russian and Ukrainian church planters bonding with their Muslim counterparts. Pastor Peter especially relished the opportunity to swap stories and share blessings with these people who were undergoing the same type of persecution the Russians and Ukrainians had endured for so long. As we look back, we're amazed that all this began with a few pastors kneeling in fervent prayer.

### Detecting God's hand...

As the new outreach to Muslims began, we did not at first see all the reasons why it took such a firm hold among our Russians and Ukrainians. However, in time we recognized interesting factors that would explain what God was doing at BIEM:

1. Many Muslim nations to the south were formerly part of the USSR. As Soviet republics, they had retained their Muslim faith and culture but were required to speak Russian as their official language. Having a shared language greatly facilitated training and communication between

Central Asians and our Russian and Ukrainian workers.

2. There were also geographic and economic considerations. Because the economies of Central Asian nations were struggling, hundreds of thousands traveled to Russia for jobs. This migration made it simple for national church planters in those restricted lands to travel to Moscow for training. The brethren in Moscow also launched outreaches among these visitors.
3. Americans have become less and less popular in the world, especially in Muslim lands. However, Russians and Ukrainians laboring in Muslim



*In 2001, Peter Slobodian posed with some of BIEM's church planters and missionaries who attended the 20th anniversary conference.*

*BIEM's 25th anniversary conference in Yalta, Ukraine. By this point, former Muslims were joining our ranks.*





lands do not face this barrier. They are far more acceptable to the Muslim population and do not attract the kind of attention that Americans draw.

- By the time these developments occurred, BIEM had a strong network of nationals and national churches in both Russia and Ukraine. If God’s plan was to use Russian and Ukrainian believers to reach, prepare, and launch national church planters in Muslim lands, BIEM was strategically placed to play an important role. God’s working was evident.

### The bottom line

Individuals and churches that formed BIEM’s base of financial and prayer support enthusiastically embraced the expansion into Muslim lands. Although BIEM is more active than ever in Eastern Europe and Russia, it has been exciting to see God empowering the outreach to Muslims. Today, BIEM is working with dedicated and brave nationals in several Muslim countries. Their work is not easy. Some of these brave servants have faced arrests, beatings, and threats so severe that while others would quit and flee, these choice servants continue to worship and evangelize in creative ways. As they do, God continues to bless with a steady harvest of souls.

In retrospect, these 40 years have passed quickly. Yet, during this time, God has opened locked doors and used BIEM to reach souls that others considered unreachable. But we haven’t accomplished these feats alone. You, dear friends, provide enormous input into this work through your prayers and financial gifts. Thank you for standing with us. Join us in praising God for His wonderful love, which reaches out to all nations. To Him be the glory!

*“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)* ■

### To President of the BIEM mission Sam Slobodian and the directors of BIEM

Peace to you, dear brothers in Christ at BIEM! I sincerely congratulate you on a remarkable date—the 40th anniversary since the founding of the BIEM mission. Let me express my heartfelt gratitude for more than 30 years of your mission working alongside Kyiv’s independent Baptist church “Temple of Salvation” and with the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches of Ukraine. In the years leading up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, we knew about your mission through its Christian radio broadcasting. When Peter and Sam Slobodian personally visited our church in 1982, we were suffering persecution for faith in God.

I’d like to say the BIEM mission is a gift from God for our churches. Thanks to the solid spiritual and financial aid of your mission throughout these years, many new churches have been started, many evangelistic children’s camps have been held, thousands of Bibles and New Testaments have been given out in evangelism, and the Kyiv Theological Seminary was established on the campus of our Temple of Salvation church. I don’t



*Nikolai Velichko was the longtime pastor of Ukraine’s largest independent Baptist church and leader of the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches of Ukraine.*

know of any other organization that has done more than BIEM in the work of planting new churches in the history of our Brotherhood. May the Lord bless the continuing ministry of BIEM for the expansion of God’s work on earth!

With brotherly love and Christian greetings,

*Nikolai Velichko  
Pastor Emeritus,  
Temple of Salvation Church*

### From Pastor Pavel Rumachik in Russia

Dear Sam Slobodian and directors and coworkers of the BIEM mission:

I sincerely congratulate you on the 40th anniversary of your ministry in God’s harvest. I recall our first meeting, when Peter and Sam Slobodian flew to Moscow. They offered us help and cooperation in the work of starting new churches.

Looking back, we can firmly declare that God has blessed our joint labors. Through our joint labors, many serious projects have been accomplished. A large portion of the churches in our association were established thanks to the support of BIEM. And when we built church buildings, BIEM provided support in the construction of nearly every project.

At the time of perestroika, many big, famous missions starting working across the vastness of our country. Today, hardly any of them have remained in Russia. The BIEM ministry may not be huge, but its contribution is enormous. As for the number of church-building projects in which the mission has participated, in my opinion, there is no equal in our country.



*Pastor Pavel Rumachik is a leader of the Association of Brotherly Churches, a group of independent Baptist Churches in the Moscow area. He’s the son of Peter Rumachik, a past leader who was imprisoned for 18 years for his faith.*

May the Lord bless the future ministry of BIEM and all its workers. May God reward all who have sacrificed financially for it. May the ministry be rich and fruitful until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’s coming.

With respect and gratitude,

*Pavel Rumachik  
Pastor of Truth Baptist Church*