



# ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

ABTS Newsletter

August 2015

### Stories from the Field

**ABTS graduates: Where are they now? How is the Lord using them to impact the Arab Church? Recently we sat down with several ABTS graduates to learn about their current ministries. We share their stories so that you can rejoice with us in the work of the Lord. Join us in prayer for these and all ABTS graduates who are now serving throughout the Middle East and North Africa.**

**Daoud\* graduated from ABTS in 2013 with a Master of Divinity. He now pastors a Baptist church and teaches at two small seminaries in Khartoum, Sudan. His wife, Djamilia, is also an ABTS graduate and together they have three children.**

Daoud's vision is to see the Cush people return to God, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 11:11, as the Biblical Kingdom of Cush was located in what is modern-day Sudan. He shared with us, *"I am encouraging all the people around me to be effective witnesses for the Good News, to share their faith, and start home groups in which they study the Bible so that the Church will be truly missional and fulfill the Great Commission."*

According to Daoud, his discipleship courses at ABTS were very important for his current ministry, as what he learned at ABTS helped him to disciple people and guide them to disciple others. The Kingdom Ethics course was also very beneficial to him. He noted, *"I encourage people at my seminary to refer to me by my first name – to*

*encourage an equal relationship. At ABTS, I saw relationships between faculty, staff, and students modeled with Kingdom values, which goes against our culture."*

At the two small Sudanese seminaries, Daoud teaches Bible courses including: Pastoral Letters, Old Testament, New Testament, and Ethics of the Bible, as well as a course called Islam and Christianity in Sudan. This course covers the history of Christianity, the origins of Islam, and how to enable reconciliation between Islam and Christianity and build bridges in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Daoud joined us at ABTS for this year's Middle East Consultation (MEC), held in June, which discussed discipleship of Christ-followers from a variety of backgrounds and in a variety of contexts. Daoud plans to share what he learned with his church and students,

especially about Biblical and social identity, tribal cohesion, the topic of identity in the Pauline letters, and of the various ways and approaches for witnessing in a Sudanese context. *(cont. on page 2)*



Sudan

### Thank You Elie Haddad for Your Decade of Service at ABTS!

In June, our staff and faculty gathered to celebrate ABTS president Elie Haddad's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary at ABTS. First serving as a provost, he became president in 2008. On behalf of the staff, faculty, students, alumni, and friends of ABTS, we would like to thank President Elie Haddad for his decade of service to ABTS and to the Arab Church.

Continue reading this article and see more photos on our website [www.abtslebanon.org](http://www.abtslebanon.org).



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The theme was very applicable to his home ministry, as he noted: *"In Sudan we have an Islamic government with a plethora of identities and ethnicities: Arabs, ethnic Ethiopians, Darfurians, various tribes like the Nubians and their sub tribes, and the Zagawa. This conference has been very beneficial to me. In the morning sessions we have been talking about when holding on to your identity is sinful and not sinful. In our church in Sudan we have 45 members, a number that includes Nubians, ethnic Egyptians, ethnic Ethiopians, South Sudanese, and Sudanese. As a pastor of this small but diverse community, it's important to understand identity. Our prayer as a church council is that the church accepts and embraces all Sudanese ethnicities."*

Daoud asks for prayer as they face three main challenges in ministry in Sudan. The first challenge is working in a Muslim-majority country with an Islamic government, which has tried to reduce the role of the Church in Sudan in many ways. The second challenge is finding and providing financial resources for the Church. Please pray that the Lord will provide for all their needs. Third, many more equipped men and women are needed to lead the Church in Sudan. Please pray that the Lord will raise up servant leaders for His Kingdom work in Sudan.

**Taha\* and his wife Farah\* graduated from ABTS in 2010 with a Bachelor in Theology and a Diploma in Theology respectively. Today they lead a growing ministry evangelizing, discipling, and equipping leaders for the Algerian Church and have hearts to serve where there are no churches in Algeria.**

Taha and Farah told us, *"Everything we learned at ABTS has been useful for our current ministry."* When they felt the call to disciple, the courses they took at ABTS, such as missiology, became especially relevant.

When they returned to Algeria after studying at ABTS, they spent three years ministering to university students. After they had discipled another believer to carry out this ministry among the university students, they moved on to serve in other places. Currently, their vision is for church planting in five other cities where there is no church presence. They trust the Holy Spirit to lead them to which



Algeria

people they should be serving; they serve both ethnic Arabs and Amazigh (Berbers).

One of their biggest challenges is that people are quick to believe and place their faith in the Lord, but they are hesitant to be discipled. Taha explained that *"they will say 'yes' to faith in the morning, but go back to drugs or sin in the evening."* Additionally, he told us that persecution for those who become followers of Jesus has become *"so typical we don't even talk about it anymore. We praise God for persecution because that's how we identify a true believer."*

Taha recalls becoming a believer after having a dream that he was in a pit of snakes. *"A hand came down, took me from the pit, and told me, 'I am Jesus.' That is when I came to faith. I was persecuting the believers at this time. But they treated me with love and that touched me a lot."* He was persecuted for 5 years after he became a believer and had to flee for a time.

Taha asks for prayer for their discipleship ministry. He hears of thousands of people coming to Christ as the result of several different churches, evangelism ministries, and media ministries, as well as through dreams and visions. Taha's heart is to follow up with all of these people, to be a friend and talk to them about their new faith. Algeria is such a geographically large country that follow up is done through correspondence instead of face-to-face. Explaining the need, Taha shared that he recently *"went to a distant region in Algeria where an older man lived and needed discipleship. He owned a taxi company and had accepted the Lord three years earlier, but he still knew nothing about Jesus. He had come to faith through one of the Arab Christian TV channels."*

Farah, Taha's wife, has an incredible gift of engaging with her neighbors, entering their homes, and speaking with them about Jesus. She is also a person of peace in her community.

Taha and Farah ask for prayers as they seek to understand how they can reach all the new believers who require personal follow up. Pray that their follow up will be more than just a discussion, but will lead to practical implementations of faith in the lives of the new believers.

*(Next story on page 3)*

**The Middle East Bible Outreach (MEBO)** is a 501(c)(3) corporation based in Marietta, GA, that coordinates efforts among our US friends and partners to generate awareness and much needed financial gifts and prayers to support the work of ABTS.

**ABTS Mission:** *To serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord by offering specialized learning resources and equipping faithful men and women for effective service.*

**Maroun\*, a 2009 ABTS graduate, serves in Lebanon. Maroun was a businessman when God used the death of one of his believing friends to call him into ministry.** He was challenged to live his life in ministry as his friend had done. He began using his business to share the Gospel and the love of God with others. In 2007 he sold his business and started ministry full-time. Maroun studied at ABTS for 2 years and graduated with a Diploma in Theology.

*"Today, especially with the Syrian crisis, God is blessing our ministry,"* Maroun shared with us. *"We host weekly clubs for women and teens in three different age groups as well as a group for men,"* he added. They begin their club meetings with Arabic sweets and show the JESUS film on a video projector. Maroun's ministry follows up with those who are interested in studying more via other video series. During these follow-up visits, people are encouraged to accept Christ in their hearts and start the discipleship program. Each week the ministry averages 300 women and around 50 men in their groups. They are also currently discipling 40 people. Maroun is excited to have new believers serving on his team as well.

His ministry also hosts several projects for children, youth, and women, by offering medical services, sponsoring relief work, compassionate care ministry, hygiene sessions, and special programs in schools.

One of their ministry goals is to begin house groups among refugees. At the same time, they have a desire to reach their fellow Lebanese nationals who are traditionally difficult to reach. Because of the war in Syria, the situation near their ministry center has been especially unstable.

Maroun admits that he didn't think he would use all that he was learning while he was at ABTS, but now he does! *"I learned how to follow up with groups and prepare projects. 'The Value of Christian Leadership' with Elie Haddad is a course I remember well, as I am always leading and facing challenges. I also use what I learned in my apologetics course with Dr. Douglas Ley. When I am serving with the traditional denominations of Lebanon, I am reminded of my 'History of the Church' course with Dr. Hikmat. I know God led me to ABTS, because to serve I need to have a background of history and theology."* Maroun added, *"My understanding of theology was further formed at ABTS in classes with Dr. Perry Shaw. In my Christian community, we did not have a clear understanding of theological topics like the trinity, for example. You cannot just trust what someone says. ABTS helped me to form my understanding of theology, and now I am better equipped to explain my faith*

*to others."*

Even though ministry is difficult where Maroun serves, he is encouraged often when he sees the Lord at work. One of his favorite God stories was when he wanted to engage a particular Muslim community immersed in armed clashes and violence near their ministry center. *"I had dreams about different people, which weighed heavily on my mind. I felt the people praying for their needs,"* Maroun explained. He wanted to talk to people in the area, understand fully their needs, and distribute food to those in want. Many of his friends advised against this ministry, saying it was too dangerous and that he should avoid this area. Many believed that the Muslims were becoming more extreme. If he was trying to help a different group, he says it would have been okay, but everyone advised against giving aid to these specific people. Maroun continued searching through many closed doors for a way to reach out, until one person, a Muslim religious leader, agreed to allow him to send aid. This leader would not allow them to visit the area in fear that Maroun would try to share his faith. Maroun's church had decided to send aid boxes with a note saying "we love you, from the evangelical church." But this religious leader insisted that they remove all evangelical materials including their letter from the boxes before they sent the aid.



Lebanon

Maroun's church was afraid that if they sent the aid without a note from the church another group might take credit for the gift. Maroun talked with the leader more, and after much prayer decided to send the boxes with just a letter of love from God for the families. The leader did not agree to this at first, but *"praise God, a few days later, the group sent a truck to pick up the aid boxes from in front of our center. What a testimony this was to the community! They saw our ministry publically helping Muslims,"* Maroun recalled with a smile. Although Maroun no longer saw the religious leader, he received confirmation that the boxes were given to those in need.

But the story didn't end there. Five years later, Maroun was managing a ministry booth at a book fair. The same Muslim religious leader with whom he had negotiated the humanitarian aid happened to be visiting the book fair, and ended up at Maroun's booth. After five years, they were able to reconnect and the leader shared in front of a large group of people, including his followers, how Maroun's church had cared for and helped his people, when the world had abandoned them.

*(Next and final story on page 4)*

**Youssef\* from Morocco graduated from ABTS in 2000 with a Bachelor of Theology. Rana, his wife, also studied at ABTS for one year. Today they lead an extensive media ministry based in Spain that is reaching all of North Africa and the Middle East, broadcasting in multiple Arabic dialects.** He has been involved in this ministry for 12 years and is thankful for the support of several churches and ministries abroad. This ministry format is special to Youssef, as he himself came to know Christ through a media ministry broadcast in his home country.

Their media ministry doesn't broadcast sermons, but rather shares discussions from different Arab countries about secular societal issues with spiritual foundations. Youssef gave us an example of *"the Biblical story of building a house on the sand or on the rock. From this subject we talk to people about how they can build their lives, their relationships, their interactions with other people, and whether they build their societies on sand or on rock."* He continued, *"We also use the same analogy when discussing marital and parent-child relationships."*

Youssef shared that in order to speak with people in a Biblical way and about Biblical topics, you need a good theological foundation. *"ABTS gave us this theological foundation,"* Youssef explained, *"Through those three years*



Morocco

*here we learned how to speak. We do not use what we have learned just for the radio programs. We also engage in follow-up ministry, discipleship, and the training of other believers. For our kind of ministry, you need this solid Biblical background to keep the ministry on the right path."*

Youssef praises God for the people he has seen come to Christ through their ministry. Once, a Moroccan man was listening to their programs and took down their contact information. Youssef recalled, *"This man didn't contact us right away. It wasn't until he went on vacation to France that he called us. He had many questions so we talked over the phone with him. After three phone calls, he gave his life to Jesus Christ. Once he returned from his vacation he was hungry for a hard copy of the Bible."* Many people contact their ministry after listening to their programs or reading articles on their website. *"After they contact us they start a relationship with us, and then can come to know Christ. For those who have come to Christ but don't know any Christians they can speak with, we have the tools to connect them to a local church,"* Youssef explained.

\* All names changed.

## Support our Mission. Please Consider Donating.

*Your scholarship donations in the past have helped equip the leaders that you read about. We are very grateful for your partnership with us. Please consider coming alongside other future leaders whom God is preparing for His mission field*

*In addition to your regular support to ABTS, please consider giving towards one of these important and urgent projects. Every contribution makes a difference and will be utilized to move our projects forward.*

- \$11,000 for waterproofing of our conference center. Project due September 2015.
- \$9,000 for 18 laptops with software for first year students, to use during their studies and in their ministries upon graduation. Project due early October 2015.
- \$10,000 for the annual maintenance of student housing. Project due mid-September 2015.

*US contributions are tax-deductible. For more information, contact Partnerships Manager Wissam al-Saliby [walsaliby@abtslebanon.org](mailto:walsaliby@abtslebanon.org).*