



6 October 2020

News from the Rowbory Family

In brief

- No firm date for departure yet, but it's coming closer
- David's busy working remotely with the Ashɛ translator
- We need more translators on the team
- We thank God for Covid calm in Nigeria while the West is in turmoil

Getting back to Nigeria

Good news from us is that flights to Nigeria eventually opened up for a select few airlines and we have heard of people successfully making it in, and being allowed to quarantine in their own homes for a week. That is all encouraging. While we love being around friends and family in Glasgow, we're slightly envious of our friends who have already made it back.

All the same there are several complexities to manage in terms of finding flights given limited supply and great demand, and getting Covid tests before we go. As I wrote this, despite warnings about how long it might take, renewed passports arrived for Elizabeth, Abigail and Helen. We still have some vaccinations to arrange, and our personnel folk in Jos don't want us rushing in right away. But just as the renewed lockdowns (as expected) strike the UK, we have some real hope of escaping back to Nigeria and being able to carry on with work there.

There will certainly be some extra expenses for Covid tests and administrative hurdles to navigate, but we were pleased to hear that under 12s don't need to pay for the expensive private tests. That saves us £400.

A year later than we had planned we have gone over the plans and given the go-ahead for an extension to our house in Nigeria to give us a little more space for homeschooling, hospitality and growing girls. We're

We celebrated Rebekah's & Julie's birthdays last week, despite coronavirus. Many other plans have been foiled, though.



thankful to God for friends who gave generously towards that project.

Making Luke clear and compelling

Meanwhile most of my time has been spent trying to work with translator Arams over patchy video links from his home in Kachia, revising Luke's gospel. I'm pleased to report we are making decent progress and have managed to tidy up really quite a lot. Three weeks ago he travelled to our office in Jos and had much better internet access which was a great relief and was also given good technical support from colleagues in the office for which we're all grateful. This week he's back in Jos again and we are continuing to get everything in order, while doing some translation software training on the job.

Ashɛ events

Two exciting events are coming up for us: in November the project are planning a community event to raise the profile of the language development and Bible translation efforts, and before that in late October Arams' daughter Tabitha is getting married. We had been invited to the wedding a year ago and fully expected to be there to share their joy but that's now looking impossible, which is very sad.

So please pray for Arams as he has so much to prepare. We will continue working to revise Luke's gospel and hopefully re-record it and prepare other materials which we hope will encourage and enthuse people. Every time we re-read the improved translation Arams seems delighted about how much clearer and better it sounds, so I'm encouraged. But there's a lot we still could do.

I'm disappointed that over the last 6 months the other translator Moses has been uncontactable and so busy with church responsibilities that he is now needing to step back from the project. He had been very helpful and was learning quickly, so we feel the loss keenly and pray that God would provide 1 or 2 suitable extra translators who will be able to commit some years to the translation efforts.

Teaching remotely: TCNN

At the same time I'm needing to get to grips with remotely teaching a cohort of students I haven't met how to wrangle their computers to do linguistic fieldwork and build dictionaries on under-studied Nigerian languages. It's the course I've taught most of the last 9 years at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. It's challenging when in-person, and actually I've long thought that a self-paced course with instructional

videos, written instructions and little tests and challenges to submit would be better than too much group teaching, but it's taking a while to come together and it's going to be hard for many of the students to get going with it, especially the less computer-savvy ones.

Covid calm in Nigeria

We thank God for his kindness in sparing Nigeria from too severe a coronavirus spike. They seem to be handling the coronavirus reasonably well with strict controls on people coming into Nigeria, with tracking and tracing of people suffering symptoms in the country, and encouraging some distancing and mask-wearing in towns. In the majority of the villages where no-one has seen any signs of coronavirus in real life it apparently seems a rather unreal threat, and certainly less pressing than issues of security, banditry, economic struggles and lack of reliable electricity.

That said, we gather that Western colleagues caught between 2 worlds have faced many stresses. As our home church pastor reminded us in the last few weeks, the gospel message is more one of hope and salvation than health and safety for just the here and now, but it's hard when our home cultures have become so obsessed and transfixed with deadly risks and gloomy projections.

We need to make sure we're talking and thinking more of Christ than of Covid, more of keeping each other safe in Jesus than just inside. This is all tricky as so much of this crisis and the responses are deeply polarising. For that reason Julie and colleagues in Nigeria had to abandon attempts to organise a 'retreat'; it sadly would have been more divisive than uniting. Whatever we think about the risks and the public health responses, I think we in the English-speaking world ought to be profoundly humbled if not humiliated, but we are not too downcast because we should never have been proclaiming how great Western culture, healthcare, political systems and ways of life are anyway. We don't want to be trying to replicate Western church culture in Africa. We help translate the Bible so that people might know the Lord, and we rejoice that in many places where that message has been preached people are trusting God and his kingdom is productive. Jesus' message to his disciples is really important for us to keep our bearings:

Luke 20:5-11

- 5 Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6 "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."
- 7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"
- 8 He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. 9 When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.... 27 At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

So we have been warned. We need not be deceived, or paralysed with fear. God is working out his own purposes and we know he loves us, if we are trusting his Son. That means it really is the best thing to do to invest our passing time and unreliable treasures in helping people hear God's message clearly.

Spinning plates

Please pray for us as we try to work out our plans for the next few weeks, prepare everything that we need to, and then pack up our house to let it out while we are away. There's still some work we need to do on it (flooring loft for storage, painting, bathroom work), the girls are still at school, and we still have some final health and admin things to sort out. The girls are generally keen to get back to Nigeria even as their parents are mildly intimidated by all that needs to happen before we go.

Please pray for David to teach his students well and to encourage the Ashe translation team. Pray for our Nigerian brothers and sisters facing economic and security challenges partly related to the global Covid chaos; pices for many imported items have multiplied.

Thank you for your partnership.

May the Lord bless you and keep you close to him,
David, Julie, Rebekah, Elizabeth, Abigail and Helen