

Blog 2018

December 15, 2018

Christmas Holidays 2018

The Study of the Bible

Thanksgiving in America has come and gone and the winter holiday season now turns towards the coming of Christmas. Christmas of course is primarily about God sending his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of the world as John 3:16 so beautifully states. It is the beginning event – in real time, so to speak – of the implementation of God’s plan of salvation which he purposed before the creation of the world. Though the main redemptive events have already now taken place via the sacrificial death, then resurrection and ascension of Christ, God is continuing to work out this plan in the world today. This focuses on his actually giving the gift of eternal life – that is, the life of the age to come – first, through the giving of the firstfruits of the Spirit to those who believe in Christ; and then, the final fulfillment which will come with the second coming of Christ and the final establishment of God’s kingdom (I Cor. 15:20-28). For those interested, my book, “God’s Plan of Salvation”, gives some of the details of this plan of God and can be read on-line by clicking in the right hand column on this web-site. Better yet, I will also be glad to send a hard copy to anyone interested. For some it might be a nice present and for many others it could be a nice review. Anyway, that is my Christmas present to our readers along with the authors and books I recommend below. One of the key group of verses which summarizes God’s plan of salvation - as well as my book - is from Paul’s Letter to Titus and certainly fits nicely in this Christmas season. It is one of my favorite short sections of Scripture in the Bible:

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom [which] he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7).

Learning about salvation from my youth through those who taught me the Scriptures is something I am particularly thankful for and it provided me with a deep biblical background for the rest of my life. The apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the same in his Letter of II Timothy:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:14-17 NIV).

Like many people, the first adults that I learned the Scriptures from were my parents and also my childhood pastors and Sunday school teachers in the church that I attended. I will always be thankful to them, especially in that just by reading the Bible and memorizing certain portions of it the Scriptures came alive for me in a way that I’ve never doubted their truth since that time. This inspired me to continue to read and study the Bible. Eventually, however, as with all subjects I needed the help of other teachers, authors, and especially, of true Bible scholars to better understand both the depth and the details of all that the Bible had to offer. For me growing up in the institutional church gave me a background in biblical studies that I will always be thankful for even though I am most comfortable now in the house church forum. What matters most, of course, is simply that a person learns God’s word, grows together with God’s family, and helps bring others into the family of faith. No forum is perfect and we all have to find the best situation for ourselves and others according to our own situations and circumstances in life. For many, some combination of the two is probably what is best. No matter where we fellowship, attend church, or go to Bible studies our quest should be the same: to learn God’s word as accurately as possible so that we can faithfully live according to it and also share it

with others. To do this we must first and foremost take responsibility for reading and studying the Bible ourselves. However, we must of necessity also depend upon qualified and dedicated Bible scholars who have provided us with Bible translations and other study works to learn from. Fortunately, there is a fairly large number of these scholars who have come to be recognized as the leaders in their biblical fields and from whom individual Christians and groups of people from all churches, denominations, and Bible study groups can learn. I will list some of the most important of these below – almost all of whom are primarily New Testament Scholars - along with a few of their most important works that I would recommend to others. Anyone who is especially interested in any of their works and cannot find them or afford them, let me know and I'll do my best to help you get them. These scholars are men whose dedication to understanding and sharing the truth of God's word has helped millions of people over much of the last century or so. Their ability to do this is based on their decades of study of history, biblical languages and cultures, and the themes, subject matter, and details of the Bible itself. In addition, these are men whose honesty, integrity, and zeal for the truth is evident in all that they say, do and write. In short, they are all dedicated Christians and it is their dedication to God that has motivated their work. Their publications are numerous, wide-ranging, and in-depth; and yet, they are also accessible to the generally well educated seeker of truth who is willing to put forth the effort to understand them. I list them in the relative order to which I believe that their scholarship has benefitted my own life and also to acknowledge my gratitude to them. I first became acquainted with the works of a few of these scholars as a teenager and gradually became acquainted with the works of the others thereafter as I continued to study the Bible in depth. Since it's easy enough to Google them to find out more historical background about them as well as a list of their works, I'll just make some brief personal remarks about each of them. So here is my "Top Ten" followed by "Honorable Mentions":

Top Ten (with a few selected works):

1. Oscar Cullmann – In the Presbyterian church community that I grew up in, the names of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, and Cullmann were all well-known amongst those who were interested in biblical and theological matters. Though the first three of these were the most famous, the eminent Swiss theologian Oscar Cullman, who taught Biblical Studies at various universities in the 1930s-1970s mostly in Europe, was much more important than the others in promoting an accurate understanding of the New Testament against the background of its Jewish heritage. This helped build a trend in biblical studies called "salvation history" that has continued ever since and has greatly enriched our understanding of the Bible, especially the New Testament. Cullmann's works including *Christ in Time*, *The Christology of the New Testament*, and *The Immortality of the Soul or the Resurrection of the Dead: The New Testament Witness* were all groundbreaking studies that presented NT truths in a way that came right up to the edge of orthodox acceptability of these subjects in the times in which he lived. All of his works also provided foundations or inspiration for the other authors below who followed him in their own studies, writing and teaching, and several of them openly acknowledge his influence. His works were also extremely meaningful to me near the beginning of my own in-depth studies of the Bible and I treasure his works to this day. Cullmann also represents the spirit of this web-site in that he was a very important and leading figure in the post WWII ecumenical movement seeking to unite Christians beyond denominational labels on the basis of the central truths of the Bible.
2. F.F. Bruce – This renowned Scottish scholar has long been my favorite biblical scholar to read and study. Elected as a member of the prestigious and secular British Academy later in his career, Bruce at one time served as both the President of the Society for Old Testament Studies and the Society for New Testament Studies, such was his recognized biblical expertise by his peers. He was often called the Dean of Evangelical scholars in the 20th century and there is no one whose work in biblical studies can rival the breadth, depth and solidity of that of Bruce. A recent biography of him makes clear the mind boggling immensity, quality and influence of his work in biblical studies that have affected for good almost anyone who studies the Bible today, whether they know it or not. I recommend everything he

wrote including his many commentaries on individual NT books of the Bible as well as his specialized studies on the historical formation and reliability of the Bible. A couple of my favorite books that are accessible to most believers are his superb little commentary on Romans in the Tyndale Series as well as his book about the formation of the Bible itself called *The Books and the Parchments* which I'm afraid is now out of print, though probably can be found.

3. G.E. Ladd – Ladd is most recognized for his outstanding and ground breaking work on the subject of the Kingdom of God. His little book *The Gospel of the Kingdom* is the best short, but fairly comprehensive, work I know of on this subject and I recommend also his much broader work *A Theology of the New Testament*. In addition, his commentary on the Book of Revelation is perhaps still the best short, accessible, and trustworthy commentary on this last - often mysterious - book of the Bible. Ladd tells you what he knows pretty much for sure, the most probable options for what he is not sure of, and importantly, what he is sure no one knows for sure – e.g. who or what the number 666 stands for or means, etc.

4. Gordon Fee – I first learned of Fee through his book which he co-authored with Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* some thirty years ago. I still highly recommend this as one of the best “how to” read the Bible books available and it has now expanded into other related “how to” Bible books, all of them good. Another equally good shorter book is *Gospel and Spirit*. Coming from an Assemblies of God background, Fee is most often recognized as one of the leading experts on the subject of the Holy Spirit. His massive book *God's Empowering Presence* is surely one of the best books ever written on the subject of the Holy Spirit, though one has to learn to ignore his anachronistic Trinitarian comments. His commentary on I Corinthians set a new standard in commentary writing and remains one of the best commentaries ever written. Fee is also one of the translators of the last two editions of the TNIV and NIV translations of the Bible which is certainly to the NIV's benefit.

5. J.D.G. Dunn – The breadth of his New Testament scholarship is very wide and deep and most of the topics he touches on are included to some extent in his excellent presentation *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*. He is most widely known for being one of the leading exponents of the so-called New Perspective on Paul. His best book about Paul, however, is simply his broader *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* which I highly recommend and which includes most of what is valuable from his work on the New Perspective on Paul as well as other aspects of Paul's theology. However, in my view his greatest contribution is in the realm of Christology where his book *Christology in the Making* and his articles in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, etc. are ground breaking and highly persuasive. Dunn, though usually solid in his exegesis, tends to be the most daring and, consciously or not, the most iconoclastic of the authors here listed. This makes him always interesting but also in need of being confirmed by the work of others as well.

6. Joseph A. Fitzmyer – along with Bruce, Joseph Fitzmyer – a late Roman Catholic Jesuit Priest – is the most eminent of the scholars here listed in terms of his actual expertise in biblical languages, history, and exegesis. Most of his work is quite technical and written for other scholars, students or pastors, especially fellow Roman Catholics. However, some of his works are accessible to educated student of the Bible including his single volume commentary on Romans in the *Anchor Bible* series which is one of the great commentaries ever written. It is loaded with insight and contains a brief but highly insightful and accurate presentation of Paul's theology at the beginning that is worth the price of the book itself many times over. And, ironically, one will find no greater biblical defense of justification by faith than in this great and learned man's commentary. Amazingly, he continued to write into his 90s until his recent death.

7. G.B. Caird – the master of New Testament language, which can be accessed via his famous but fairly technical work *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*. Caird was both an Old and New Testament scholar having taught both in major universities. This gives him, like Bruce, a great depth of understanding that goes beyond the ordinary NT scholar. He also wrote an outstanding New Testament theology as well as a particularly unique and insightful work called *Paul's Letters from Prison* which I

treasure. Lastly, a particular claim to fame is that he was the doctoral supervisor for NT Wright who has gone on to be the most well-known NT scholar of our recent times.

8. N.T. Wright – following on and expanding on the work of his doctoral supervisor G.B. Caird, N.T. Wright has gone on to become by far the most prolific and well-known NT scholar of our times. Having studied first Greco-Roman Classics and then NT studies in his academic work he has a broad background in ancient Greco-Roman and Near-east history, languages and cultures. Coupled with a life time of biblical studies beginning in childhood and carried over into university studies and teaching at Oxford university and now at St. Andrews university he has an almost unparalleled background to work from. However, one has to add into this his practical pastoral experience which enabled him to eventually rise to become the Bishop of Durham (England) in the Anglican Church. In my view, Wright's greatest strengths are as a historian of the New Testament times and early church period as well as his understanding of the practice of properly understanding and teaching history itself. But he is mostly recognized as an insightful, somewhat controversial, and innovative exegete of the New Testament. He has written a huge number of ground breaking scholarly NT works which are for the educated public and fellow scholars; however, he has also written many practical and helpful devotional works for the common man. Today he also gives on-line courses on many biblical books and topics in addition to his professorship at St. Andrews in Scotland. Though his greatest contributions to biblical scholarship are his in-depth multi-volume series on the New Testament, I would recommend listening to one of his on-line presentations or reading one of his simpler books first and then determining whether to go on further with him after that. Though at times too wordy, pedantic, and even infuriating in his interpretations, Wright is always interesting, knowledgeable, stimulating, and certainly, never, ever dull for those who are interested in the truth of the Bible. Start slowly with him and increase your intake as you like.

9. Richard Bauckham – his expertise is especially in biblical eschatology as well as in-depth work on the historical reliability of the Gospels. His article on “Eschatology” in the New Bible Dictionary is the best brief overview of the subject of eschatology that I've ever read. He also has outstanding commentaries on Jude and the Book of Revelation which are amongst the best ever written and are very accessible to the educated student of the Bible. For the most part, having Bauckham and Ladd's commentaries on Revelation are sufficient for almost all but the specialized NT scholar.

10. Douglass Moo – Moo's expertise in biblical studies is such that he was named chair of the NIV translation committee. He has also written many commentaries and works on NT studies and I include him here because his commentary on Romans in the New International Commentary on the NT series is probably the best commentary on Romans to have if you only have the chance to have one. It is thorough and does an excellent job both in the text and in the footnotes of giving all of the reasonable positions on most of the issues in studying Romans. Nevertheless, he also tells you what he himself thinks very clearly while acknowledging the other possible explanations by other experts.

Honorable Mention (with one recommended work):

11. I.H. Marshall: The Pastoral Epistles (International Critical Commentary)
12. C.K. Barrett: The Letter of Paul to the Romans (Black's New Testament Commentaries)
13. Bruce M. Metzger: The New Testament: its Background, Growth and Content
14. Craig Keener: Paul, Women and Wives
15. Ben Witherington III: Jesus, Paul and the End of the World
16. E. Earle Ellis: Pauline Theology
17. Robert Banks: Paul's Idea of Community
18. Richard Hays: The Moral Vision of the New Testament
19. R.E. Brown: The Gospel of John (Anchor Bible Commentary)
20. G.R. Beasley-Murray: The Gospel of Life

These authors and their works are certainly not for everybody but I list them in gratitude and in recognition to what they've meant to my life and the lives of others in the last half century or so of biblical studies.

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25th Anniversaries

It's been a good while since we've written anything for our blog and we hope that you - our friends and fellow-believers in Christ who read and use our web-site - are all doing well. Though we try to blog at least four times a year, we also believe there is a wealth of information for spiritual growth already available through the web-site articles, links, etc. and we hope that the website is a continuing benefit to God's people even when we're not able to blog. Nevertheless, the year 2018 is a special anniversary year for those of us associated with The Unity of the Spirit. In fact, there are several interconnected 25th anniversaries that center around 2018 for us. Perhaps, the foundational and unifying 25th anniversary, which greatly affected the others, is the starting of the Bible fellowship twenty five years ago that eventually developed into Cary Christian Fellowship. Cary Christian Fellowship has been, ever since, our local "church" or "ekklesia" in the fullness of its New Testament sense. Three couples - Dorota and I, David and Pam Hahn, and David and Mary Seed, all of whom had for many years been Christian friends and involved in various Christian ministries and fellowships—decided to start a new weekly Bible fellowship, which we then began to build over the course of time into a "fellowship of fellowships", mostly centered in our homes as in the New Testament times. Each of the above mentioned couples - as well as others - have through the years hosted and helped lead these fellowships on a weekly and/or monthly basis. The result has been a wonderful, loving, growing group of believers of all age ranges. Scot Hahn, the son of David and Pam, has almost from the very beginning been a vital leader in Cary Christian Fellowship and since our incorporation into a legal "church" he has been our lead pastor, even ordained under the laws of North Carolina. However, what is most important about this fellowship is that every participant is considered a vital part of it and all continue to play a vital role as members in particular of the body of Christ within our local fellowships. When I read the word "church" in the NT I think of Cary Christian Fellowship or else our sister fellowship in Poland as examples of a true first century church in the twenty first century today. Of course, I know that there are many, many others. With the huge variety of churches that exist today throughout the world I pray that all Christian believers can find a similar type of fellowship within their own local church or by starting a fellowship of their own. No guiding human authority is required to authorize this. Instead, it only requires 2 or 3 who regularly gather in Christ's name (Matt. 18:20). Only God knows where and how it can develop from there. Faithfulness to the fundamental truths of God's Word is the key and over time this fellowship or "church" - in the biblical sense - can become one of God's "pillars and foundations of the truth" (I Tim. 3:14-15) scattered throughout the world, even if only as 2 or 3 gathered in Christ's name. My prayer is that every local church can have the blessing that has been ours as participants in Cary Christian Fellowship for the past 25 years.

It was also twenty-five years ago that I first wrote, with the help of several others, my compact book God's Plan of Salvation which was our first publishing effort. This followed immediately upon completion of a tape class on the Bible entitled "God's Living Word" that is available on our web-site both in its first and second editions. That class deals with understanding the Bible as a whole with a focus on the continuity of the New Testament message in the light of Old. Following on that, I specifically wrote God's Plan of Salvation because after much searching I could not find another work that I considered adequate for what I envisioned: a thoroughly Bible-based book presenting the subject of God's plan of salvation in a way that was clear, accurate, focused, and yet, with layers of depth for

further study. God's Plan of Salvation was, and continues to be, meant to be a book for those seeking to receive God's gift of salvation as well as for those who desire to understand this vital subject in a more comprehensive and in-depth way. You can read the first edition of that book by clicking the link in the margin on the right side of this blog. A few years later, in 2000, we updated the book with a very mild revision (mostly in the end-notes) and that 2nd edition is still available free of charge by contacting us directly. This book continues to be a blessing to many people who read and study it either individually or in some form of group study. I recommend it to anyone who might be interested in this, the most important subject of all, God's plan of salvation.

About a year after finishing God's Plan of Salvation we also began our biblical newsletter The Unity of the Spirit. This was meant to focus in a more in-depth way around the primary subject matter of God's Plan of Salvation as well as to deal with a wide variety of biblical subjects and related topics. For the first several years we published The Unity of the Spirit four times a year in print edition. A few years afterwards we also started a concurrent web-site by the same title that was originally devised and organized by our brother in Christ, Adam Kleczkowski. Then, eventually, a few years ago we opted to go with just the web-site. I'll admit that I miss publishing the print edition of the newsletter; however, it was a lot of work and it seemed that the age of the internet had taken over so that the huge amount of time and effort put into the print edition was no longer really worth it. Nevertheless, we are now in the 25th year of producing The Unity of the Spirit in one form or another and we hope that it can continue to be a blessing to all who use it. Most all of the past editions can be read via the Archives link in the margin above and the most important articles can be accessed via the Articles link also above. I believe that all of the articles are very biblically and accurately presented. They normally are meant to comfort and strengthen God's people through a clear presentation of fundamental biblical truths. At other times, however, they compare, confront, or challenge received truths or traditions that need to be better understood in their proper biblical light. In all cases these articles are honest and diligent attempts to properly present the truth of God's Word in the light of its original intent and meaning. May they continue to be a blessing to those who are seeking to live for the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Last but not least is another very special 25th anniversary which is very near and dear to our hearts. That is the 25th anniversary of the Polish Bible Conference which will be taking place this summer in the beautiful countryside just outside Krakow, Poland. This conference has from its beginning been organized primarily by our sister Bible fellowship in Krakow, Poland – a Bible fellowship which several of us began together in Krakow in the summer/fall 1982. Through the years many others became involved in the Bible fellowship and, as many of its members dispersed to various parts of the world, we've stayed in touch and continued to support each other. Throughout this time the fellowship in Krakow has continued to be a vital fellowship - or biblical "church of the living God" - where God's word and God's love continues to be a great blessing to all who participate. In 1994 we decided together to begin having a yearly summer Bible conference for all those who could attend. My heartfelt thanks to all who have continued to help lead the Krakow fellowship through the years as well as to organize this wonderful summer Bible conference. Dorota and I have personally been able to participate in well over half of them and some of the most meaningful experiences and memories of my life come from them. The names of all of those who have been involved are way too many to list; however, some Polish families – Druszkiewicz's, Razny's, Pelleszowie's - have participated or been involved in organizing all, or almost all, of them. Others have participated faithfully from abroad as they were able – Kleczkowski's, Jeszenski's, LaMattina's, etc. In fact, many others have also come participated from other countries and certainly knowing that we are a part of God's family spread throughout the world and throughout the ages is a comfort and strength for all believers at all times (I Pet. 5:6-11). This year our dear friends and brother and sister in Christ, David and Pam Hahn, will be representing the believers of Cary Christian Fellowship. They will have the opportunity to experience the warmth of Polish Christian hospitality at its best as well as to share the love for God with those who

are there. May God's blessings be upon them and upon all who will participate this summer – from Poland or abroad – as children in God's family!

Happy Anniversaries to all!

Eph. 1:3-14!

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God is Faithful

By David Hahn

“World travelers” is a phrase that was recently used to describe my wife Pam and me, and this phrase could not be further from the truth. World travelers we are not, but we did finally venture across the “Big Pond” to visit and fellowship with our wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ in the country of Poland. “Why Poland?” you ask (and I got that question a lot before we left). Let me explain.

Over 40 years ago, one of my dearest friends and a brother in Christ was inspired to travel to Eastern Europe to study and to spread the Good News. This was at the time when Eastern Europe was under communist rule (behind the “iron curtain”) and spreading the Good News was highly frowned upon, to put it lightly. I had known and worked alongside Richie Temple for a couple of years and had seen his quiet conviction and desire to love people by sharing God's Word, in word and deed, and I knew God would be faithful to bless his desire to travel and share. My wife and I supported him in whatever way we could, but mostly through prayer.

God honored his faith and desire to share the Word and put some wonderful people in his path who listened and believed, and have stayed faithful to God and his Word. They have continued to grow and prosper in every way to build a wonderfully sweet fellowship in the Krakow area.

Our first encounter with one of the Polish believers was back in 1985. Richie asked Pam and me to host Irena Bryg, at that time a freshman student of English at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She was such an exuberant delight, ready to learn and grow in the greatness of God's Word and love, and fearless in all that she encountered. She stayed with us for about a month, and we tried to give her a good dose of the American culture. She was such an appreciative adventurer and we knew that someday the hospitality we were able to show her would be returned. God is faithful!

In 1994, Richie and his beautiful wife Dorota (whom he met in Poland while teaching English to Polish professionals), along with the believers there, started an annual Bible Conference, a weekend getaway to fellowship together with each other and with God. Pam and I would hear about them from Richie and Dorota and would say that we too would participate one day (God willing). Then we started receiving calendars with pictures of all the Polish believers in various activities while at the Conference. This truly piqued our interest and desire to, one day, be a part of this event.

In 1998, another family from the Polish fellowship visited us. This was the Druszkiewicz family, Leszek, Olga, Eryk and Jakub. A wonderful family that has been very instrumental in the growth of the Polish fellowship. Getting to know them, learning of their faithfulness to God, seeing their growth, hearing about the growth of other Polish believers, and then receiving calendars with pictures of all the Polish believers each year, inspired us to want to be a part of this wonderful fellowship in more than just by way of spirit.

So we started saving our “airline miles” and believing that God would show us the right time to go. Our trip of a lifetime was realized this past June and into July. We had never been out of the country, so we were challenged to take the leap and expect big things from our Heavenly Father. We flew to Krakow by way of Toronto and Munich. After eighteen hours of traveling, we were met at the airport by that 20-year-old girl who had stayed with us some thirty-three years before. She is now married to a wonderful man Krzysztof Razny, and has two grown sons, David and Daniel, both of whom are young men of God. Daniel's classmate from the university that he attends in Scotland was with Irena, a wonderful young Englishman by the name of Josh Betts. Josh shared at the conference how he had been set free by the truth of God's Word which he heard from Daniel. God is faithful to produce when

we speak the truth of the Gospel!

We spent the first three nights at the home of Irena's Mom, Maria, a beautiful and wonderful hostess, who allowed us to use her flat to become accustomed to the time change and difference in culture. We did some sightseeing with the help of Irena, Daniel, Josh, and a delightful, loving believer from Scotland, Gosia Kleczkowska (the daughter of Adam and Marta, some of the original Polish believers). We all shared some great time at the Salt Mines in Wieliczka and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which was a true journey back in time!

On Friday afternoon we were picked up by Irena and Krzysztof, and off we went to the Conference. Our prayers and believing were about to be realized. God is faithful! The calendars became alive as all the beautiful people we had seen and prayed for for years came to life. What a truly wonderful realization of God's grace and love. We spent the next five days and four nights together, sharing, praying, singing, eating and playing with our wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ from Poland and a few other countries! It was truly an Ephesians 3:20 experience. Our expectations were far exceeded because of the love, compassion and excitement of the believers we were with. We heard some wonderful sharings from God's Word, were able to share ourselves, but most of all got to know the faithful family of believers who have stood together for the past 25 years, and grown in love, faith, commitment and number. God is faithful, and we are thankful that we were able to experience and enjoy this faithfulness by way of our travels in the beautiful country of Poland. Thanks to all who participated in the Polish Bible Conference and thanks for making our visit a dream come true. And thanks to our wonderful, loving and faithful God!