

Chapter 9

Brazil

— By David Wilson —

My first visit to Brazil was in April 1985 through three invitations: a Christian and Missionary Alliance

(C&MA) church in Porto Alegre, a Southern Baptist missionary in Belo Horizonte named Wade, and Word of Life in São Paulo. In downtown Porto Alegre, large crowds gathered in the central plaza as the gospel was preached. Even as the rain fell, they stood and responded. The missionary who organized the seminar said, “This was one of the greatest days of my life.” In Belo Horizonte, Wade, whom I had known years before in the US, wrote four months later, “We’ve preached to over 12,000 using the sketchboard since being trained. We’ve had over 850 decisions.” In São Paulo, the director of Word of Life Brazil (Harold) asked me to train EMME, a musical and evangelistic branch of Word of Life led by Steve. Our first open-air meetings, with Harold translating for me into Portuguese, drew large crowds, and the response was overwhelming. Steve decided to use our method for



OPEN-AIR FILM MEETING WITH MISSIONARY WADE AKINS



SEMINARS WITH WORD OF LIFE



FIRST MEETINGS IN BRAZIL 1984, SÃO PAULO WITH WORD OF LIFE - DAVID WILSON WITH STEVE PETERSON



DAVID WILSON PREACHING IN RIO DE JANEIRO

evangelism on their EMME tours of churches in different cities by going into the plazas for evangelism. God had truly led me to Brazil! It was harvest time.

I began returning to Brazil each year. Crowds of up to 2,000 gathered in the central squares and open fields to

see The Jesus Film and listen to the preaching as Wade translated for me. Large trucks were even provided by the mayors as stages. Open-air outreaches in downtown Belo Horizonte saw hundreds responding, with local Baptist churches providing counselors.

At Word of Life, on the first day of our seminar, we went on the streets where no traffic was allowed in São Paulo. The students watched and counseled. About 1,000 attended the meetings, with almost 100 being counseled for salvation. Two days later, the trained students conducted the entire day's outreach, and we saw God bring similar results. Again, in Belo Horizonte with Wade during three days of preaching in the main plaza, we saw over

1,000 indicating their desire to know Christ as Savior. During one meeting, a demon-possessed man came in front of us, yelling and threatening. The crowd reeled back from him. I continued to preach about the cross, "which is the power of God unto salvation." When he saw that



BRUNO COSTA PREACHING IN SÃO PAULO



PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

he could not prevail against God's Word, he suddenly ran away. Then, the crowd pressed in even more eager to hear the gospel. In a remote village the year before, we had conducted an open-air meeting with a missionary where there was no evangelical witness. He now reported that there was a house church with about 30 people. One man (55), who was remarkably converted, died just two weeks after our meeting. This was a vivid reminder that millions like him need to hear the gospel before it's too late.

In 1990, José and Eduardo, both WOL students with EMME, joined OAC to become our first pioneer evangelists. They had completed three years at WOL Bible College. The Lord provided funds for the first OAC van equipped for film showings. José moved to Petropolis, near Rio De Janeiro, and Eduardo stayed in São Paulo. Later, God provided a second van. Downtown São Paulo and Rio were harvest fields with unlimited opportunities to preach to crowds of people hungry to hear the good news of salvation. Many were Catholics who had no idea of how to be "born again," nor any assurance of eternal life. OAC (Campanhas ao Ar Livre) was registered with the government, with Harold and Steve as the first members of the board.



AMERICAN MISSION TEAM IN RIO

I took José and Eduardo, and Juan and Felipe (my pioneer evangelists for Paraguay), to work a few days with Wade so they could see church planting in action by using our method of evangelism. In the town of Lagoa Da Prata, the police blocked the crossroads with barricades for us. Wade drove around and announced The Jesus Film, and we waited to see what would happen. A crowd began building in front of the van and reached 2500. After the film and the preaching of an illustrated message in blacklight, many responded. A few days later, over 700 showed up to see the second half of The Jesus Film near where the new church was being built by an American team. On Sunday morning, 250 showed up for the first worship service!

In 1994, a youth pastor (Mike) made contact with me. He had brought a team to Atlantic City in 1978 to work with us on the beach and boardwalk. I suggested that he now consider bringing a team to Brazil to work with OAC. This resulted in our first overseas mission team during the spring break. We flew down to São Paulo and stayed with Word of Life (WOL). Crowds up to 800 came to open-air meetings, and over 1,800 in school assemblies. Many prayed to trust Christ as Savior. This was the beginning of many annual open-air teams of high school students coming to Brazil with Mike and later to Paraguay and Ecuador. Adults were added to these teams, which led to some supporting our evangelists. Mike wrote after the first two trips: "I can honestly say that our times in Brazil with OAC were by far the best trips we have ever taken students on. As a result of the two trips to Brazil, we have several students who are planning to go into full-time Christian work. Experiences and life changes from these trips have been deep and permanent."

In 1995, the First Baptist Church of Stuart, Florida, (where we attended) sent a team of 26 people with me to Brazil and built a church for Wade in one week! We (OAC) were in charge of the evangelism. After three days of announcing our film meeting in the main plaza, approximately 3,000 attended, the largest crowd I had ever preached to. Several hundred came forward to be counseled for salvation. Later, an open-air meeting in front of a church drew 700. Assemblies in schools were held, and principals began calling principals recommending our



GOING TO INDIAN TRIBES IN THE AMAZON

program, resulting in over 10,000 being reached! At the dedication of the new church, with the mortar still wet, there were more people outside than inside! On another OAC outreach, we drove 1200 miles north, where the roads were bad, and there had been no rain in nine months. Pastor Gilberto hosted us. He had been on staff with OAC Brazil but had left due to a lack of support. He had faithfully pioneered a church by going to the streets and schools, using what he had learned with OAC. Now 300 attended his church (80 percent from the streets and schools), and he had nine house churches in the surrounding villages. As we announced the film meeting, the local priest heard and went on the radio telling people not to go. But God was at work and drew an even larger crowd who stood for two hours watching the film and drama, and listening to the preaching. Many prayed to receive Christ. On Sunday, there was standing room only in Gilberto's church due to the outreaches.

Eduardo resigned from OAC; being Jewish, he longed to reach his own people. Today, he serves as a pastor in Nazareth (Israel). Bruno and Camila were trained by José in Petropolis and served as voluntary workers. Camila joined OAC in 2000, and Bruno in 2002, and they were married in 2004. After José resigned, they moved to Campinas. OAC Brazil changed its name to "Worldwide Proclamation" (Proclamando Ao Mundo in Brazil) in 2006. Campinas, one hour from São Paulo, became its base. The ministry developed rapidly. Although the schools were more closed to Christian programs in



INDIANS HEAR THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION

Campinas than in Petropolis, they kept knocking on doors. Soon, schools opened wide to them to speak on drugs, show Christian films, and preach the gospel to thousands of students. The plaza required a permit, but this was granted many times for the crowds to hear the Word of God. American teams continued to come, and their drama teams attracted large crowds. These teams would also go with Bruno to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where many would be reached in plaza meetings.

The Lord put on Bruno's heart to help missionaries who were reaching Indian tribes in Brazil. I went with Bruno to different tribes with a missionary, sometimes sleeping in their Indian huts. Hammocks were strung up near or over an open fire because the nights were cold. At daybreak, the whole village would go to the river to bathe. We went later on our own. One Indian chief said, "I used to kill outsiders." Now he welcomes missionaries, having come to know their motives and having seen their good examples. The Indians were very humble, hospitable, and kind, even preparing food for us. We had to drink from the river, which later resulted in us being infected with rare parasites. The many mosquitoes seemed to like my Deet repellent. But, at night under a black velvet sky filled with bright stars, every thought of hardship faded away as we gazed upon the glorious scene of these people totally absorbed in every word of The Jesus Film and our illustrated gospel messages. Beneath their cultural veneer, they were just the same as we were. They had the same needs and needed the same God. There was a void in their lives that only Christ could fill. It seems they were the first generation among these tribes to hear the gospel. After we left the 18 tribes, the missionary called and said the Indians were talking among themselves and saying, "If this team stays here for more days, all the Parecis (tribes) will trust in Jesus."

Tiago (pronounced Chi-ago) met Bruno at Bible college and, after graduation, expressed a desire to join OAC. Bruno trained him, accepted him on staff, and suggested that he could open a branch in the northeast area of Brazil. Tiago had already been on a mission trip to the northern town of Petrolina and had received a great burden to reach the little surrounding towns where few, if any, evangelical churches existed. So in 2016, Tiago left everything and went, by faith, with his wife and little son to Petrolina. They had nothing, not even a vehicle. Bruno and I visited him later that same year, and we went out together to one of the towns. We slept in a small evangelical church and, during the day, went out with a couple of pastors to evangelize. The high school opened up to us on the condition that we spoke on biblical values first before giving the gospel. All the students seemed very open and receptive to the gospel and even applauded the message. People in the neighborhood readily invited us into their homes to share about Christ, and some came to our film meeting at night. There was a great spiritual hunger, and hearts were wide open to the Word of God. Tiago, however, needed a truck and film equipment to do the ministry. After I arrived back in the States, a Christian couple asked if OAC had any needs. I immediately mentioned Tiago. They sent the money for the truck. Soon, other gifts covered all of his film equipment. Now, rejoicing in God's provision, Tiago is reaching Petrolina and surrounding remote towns with the good news of salvation. God has confirmed the opening up of a new OAC branch in the far northeast territory of Brazil.

The Brazilian evangelical churches needed a vision for missions, so God used Bruno in his home church to head up an annual mission conference. Already they have sent a mission team to work with OAC Kenya and Bolivia and are helping support the evangelists in both countries. Other churches have used Bruno to help them have mission conferences. OAC Brazil has now sent Robson and Cris to Bolivia, where they are establishing a new national branch of OAC. Camila's father, a pastor in Petropolis, is leading a mission team there every year and providing a good portion of their monthly support.

