

# Y U C A T A N

Merida • Hocaba • Tabi

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Photos by Geraldine Wilkins*

Mexico, part 4



*Pastor Demetrio Canche moved to Hocaba to teach God's Word.*



*In Hocaba, some believers walk hours for weekly Bible studies held in a stick hut.*

Deep in the jungles of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, a 19-year-old Mayan considered the death practices of his ancestors. He found the rituals dark and fascinating. His small village was near the ancient Mayan remains of Chichen-Itzá, where human sacrifices were made to the rain god, Chac. For nearly 2,000 years, his people have also worshiped Kukulcan, an early Mayan priest idolized as a serpent.

*Believers from Calvary Chapel Merida fellowship with believers from the Hocaba fellowship, a mission church planted by CC Merida.*



*After receiving toothbrushes, Mayan children in the village of Tabi listen to Bible stories.*

The young man contemplated his own suicide. In his village, bread was scarce and survival was a struggle. Taking his own life might connect him to something supernatural and powerful. Many others his age had done so. But today a group of Christians was coming to the small village of Tabi to share about eternal life in Jesus Christ. He had seen crucifixes in old crumbling churches nearby, but these people spoke of knowing God as closely as a friend.

The group under the open-air, palm roof was mostly teenagers, all from the large city of Merida, two hours away. He had never been to Merida, but he had heard of its electric lights and running water. He listened more closely to what they were saying: Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ would wash away one's sins. Jesus was the Son of God; the Mayan gods were false gods. Suicide and death were not God's way; a new life in Christ was God's way. The Mayan people could leave their old traditions behind and be free from the fear of angry gods and the oppression of death.

The young man's blood boiled. Fists clenched, he threatened to hit one of the young men. Angrily, he yelled at them and stalked away. That night, his anger simmered. But something else rose to the surface—a new desire to know a God who loved him, a yearning for freedom from death. Could Jesus Christ offer him an abundant life now and an eternal life in the hereafter? Could he leave his traditions?



*Mayan believer Buenaventura, far left, rolls dough for pastries while Pastor Sam Medina of CC Merida shares news. Upper right, Felipe Matehuala plays with one of the children. CC Merida started the bakery to provide bread for the Tabi villagers and to share Christ's love.*

The next afternoon, the Christians returned. He wondered if they would welcome him after his outburst. He approached, humbly apologizing. He asked them, "How can Jesus help me leave my traditions behind?" A young man explained how the cross paid for the sins of all men, offering freedom from sin and death to all who would believe. His words pierced the young Mayan's heart. Bowing heads with the Mexican believer, the Mayan youth prayed to accept Christ. He attended the

weekly Bible meetings in the village, growing in the faith and spiritual freedom he had found with God through Christ.

### **The Light of the Word**

Far away from the U.S. border, southern Mexico has long been stricken with poverty and fearful superstitions. Many Mexican people fear God with no assurance of eternal salvation, while indigenous people worship earth spirits and their ancestors.

But Mexican believers at Calvary Chapel Merida are taking the hope of the Gospel to the city of nearly 1 million people.

Located in the northwestern Yucatan peninsula, CC Merida has grown rapidly since it was planted by Pastor Sam Medina in 1999. Of the nearly 200 adults who attend CC Merida, nearly 60 of them regularly go on evangelistic outreaches to outlying areas. One outreach in the southern part of Merida has resulted in several drug addicts



*Missionaries share the Gospel through puppets.*



*Felipe snuggles a Mayan baby.*



*Pastor Sam encourages the village women through God's Word. Most of the adults in Tabi cannot read.*



CC believers from the U.S. and Mexico built CC Merida.



CC Merida's teenagers play games together before Bible study. Teens also lead worship.



Pastor Sam, left, and Felipe, right, stopped to visit a Tabi man. After hearing he was ill, they laid hands on him and prayed.

“It is better for a man from their own village and culture to share the Gospel with them.”

Pastor Sam Medina



CC Merida has a large children's ministry and houses a Christian school.

and prostitutes accepting Christ and being set free from their old lifestyles.

Sam, also called Santiago, first visited Merida on a vacation in 1995. Living in the U.S. since he was a teenager, Sam had accepted Christ under Pastor Raul Ries' ministry and later attended Calvary Chapel Downey, CA. After visiting Merida, Sam could not stop thinking about the great need there for Bible teaching. He started studying the Bible and enrolled at nearby Biola University. Seven years ago, he and his wife, Millie, moved to the city of Merida and began reaching out through their vocation—teaching. “Some of our first converts were professors,” Pastor Sam recalled.

“This is virgin territory for the Gospel and Bible teaching,” he added. “The people in Merida read a lot, so we can reach them

through the Bible.” Many accept Christ after a few months of Bible teaching. Speaking of how the church has grown, Sam said, “To be a part of this is a privilege. Even with money, you couldn't do all of this. It's all the work of God.”

Hundreds have accepted Christ, including entire families, inner-city drug addicts, and Mayan villagers. Believers are growing in the Word and eager to share it with others.

### Bringing Christ to the Maya

CC Merida has a strong missions and church-planting emphasis. They have mission churches in the poor villages of Hocoba, where they are working to provide drinking water for the village, and in Tabi, where they have started a bakery. CC Merida also has missionaries in the southern Yucatan

region and Cancun; Monterrey in eastern Mexico; and Jaltipan, Veracruz.

“My vision for Tabi, which has about 800 people, is that everyone would accept Jesus Christ,” Sam said. “And we could establish a center to train missionaries—Mexican or American, anyone—and send them out to reach the Mayan people.” There are an estimated 6 million Mayan people scattered throughout the Yucatan and other parts of Central America.

When CC Merida believers first came to Tabi and presented the Jesus film in Mayan, more than 100 people prayed to accept Christ. That's when a small core of believers formed and weekly discipleship began. On Sundays, CC Merida believers bring food and teach the Bible to children and adults. “Every Sunday, we have 50 to 60

children,” Sam said. “We are training up the next generation.”

One little girl, Seydy, said with a shy smile, “I used to be sad before, but now I am happy because Jesus loves me.” Along with the spiritual bread of the Word, the people of Tabi now have sweet bread and pastries from the small bakery started by the church. The people in Tabi live in stick or concrete huts, and many had only one or two meals a day. “We wanted to show them that God is good and that He loves them,” said Pastor Sam.

Already respected as a leader in his Tabi village, Buenaventura (whose name means “good venture”) accepted Christ while visiting Merida and now oversees the bakery. He has brought other village men to church and helps with the village outreach-

es. “I am praying that God will raise him up to be the pastor here,” Sam said. “It is better for a man from their own village and culture to share the Gospel with them. The people here have seen his testimony. It has been very powerful.”

### Spiritual Strongholds

Along with American missionaries, Mexican believers at CC Merida are sharing Christ with the area's teenagers. “There is a lot of suicide among the youth—Mayan self-sacrifices, old strongholds,” said Millie Medina, who also ministers to women.

In Merida, dead religion and new cults are causing spiritual confusion. “A lot of the people have been hurt by legalistic religion,” Millie said. “A church here called ‘The Perfect’ has a lot of hypocrisy.”

Christian cults, whose teachings about Jesus contradict the Bible, have also been at work in Merida.

“There is a lot of sorcery here—a new wave of Buddhism called ‘Mahikari,’” Millie said. She added, “We pray. It's the Word that changes people. Once they embrace the Word, they know the truth and walk with the Lord.”

CC Merida also has a Christian school for children and an extension campus of the Calvary Chapel Bible College.

### Horizon in Merida

Nearby, another fellowship has sprung up to reach the people in Merida. Pastor Miguel and Alicia Lechuga have been working with American missionaries, John



*World famous, the Mayan ruins of Chichen-Itzá were once the site of human sacrifices. Mayan people still worship ancient gods. While suicide is prevalent among Mayan youth today, local believers say many are turning to Christ.*



*Wearing bright Yucatan garb, a woman sells embroidered goods at Chichen-Itzá.*

and Dora Ancira, for the past five years at CC Horizonte Merida, Yucatan, affiliated with both Calvary Chapel and Horizon Christian Fellowship.

“We’re a new congregation—about 30 of us still meeting at my house,” said Assistant Pastor John. “About 85 percent of our fellowship are brand new believers who have come to Christ through us witnessing in the community.”

“People here are very humble, loving, trusting, very open. They gladly receive the Gospel; they love to hear about Jesus,” he said. “The big problem here is ... getting them to make a big change, a conversion from [traditional religion] to a relationship with Christ. There is so much [dead] religion that doesn’t have anything to do with the Bible, and deep-rooted superstition, white magic.”

Aside from witnessing in Merida, believers are also planning outreaches to Mayan villages along the eastern coast of the Yucatan peninsula. “We are doing all we can here



*Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula*

while the doors are open,” John said. “We are enjoying the freedom we have to share the Gospel now while people are receptive and want to hear about the Good News.”



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