

IN THE PRESENCE OF ANGELS

When I was set apart as a missionary, my stake president gave me a promise that at times I would feel the presence of angels and they would protect me.

By Samuel Gould

In 2003 I was called to serve a mission in the Ivory Coast, in western Africa. As I researched, I found that the country seemed to be involved in constant civil war, but I was comforted to learn there was a ceasefire in place. Further comfort came when I was set apart. The stake president gave me a promise that while I was serving, I would at times feel the presence of angels and they would protect me. I was also promised that if I was obedient, I would return home safely.

In the first months of my mission, the mission president counseled us to be prepared. In our apartment in the capital city of Abidjan, we kept a three-day supply of food and water, and at meetings we received training on what to do if conflict broke out.

Still, we were nervous when rebels broke the ceasefire on November 4, 2004. Our mission leaders gave us a 6:00 p.m. curfew. During our last teaching appointment the next day, we heard a sudden explosion. Immediately we ended with a prayer, left the family

a chapter from the Book of Mormon to read, and rushed home. The other companionship in our apartment arrived shortly after us. The assistants phoned and told us not to leave our apartments under any circumstances—not for church or even food. We learned that some French peacekeepers had been killed in air strikes, so France had attacked the military airport, crippling the small Ivorian air force. In reaction, massive riots had broken out across the capital.

Tens of thousands of protesters swarmed the streets, wielding machetes, looting French shops, and breaking into homes where they suspected the French lived. From our window, we could see the violence unfolding. We knew we were in danger because of our white skin.

On Sunday afternoon, November 7, amid the sounds of screaming, gunshots, and explosions, we held a sacrament meeting in our apartment with only four participants. After blessing and passing the bread and water from our three-day food supply, each of us shared a scripture and bore testimony.

I read Doctrine and Covenants 84:88: “And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left, and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up.” As I read, I reflected on the blessing my stake president had given me, and I knew I would be safe.

We were shut in our apartment for a week. Ward leaders and members visited us and brought us food. One member even took messages from us and e-mailed our families, letting them know we were safe for now. These members’ help was amazing! Meanwhile, our families and Church members around the world were praying for our safety. As my family prayed, they felt a calm assurance that I would be OK.

On Friday, November 12, our evacuation began. Ivorian Church members led us through the streets of Abidjan, and though we heard reports of other refugees being harmed, we made it safely through the barricades to the British ambassador’s home. Then British forces evacuated us from the country, and my family’s prayers were



answered when they saw two other elders and me on the news being evacuated. In the dark of the night, members took other non-African missionaries to the mission home. From there the Italian air force transported them to Ghana, where we were reunited.

Despite dozens of attacks on foreigners throughout the country, none of the missionaries were harmed during the riots, and no missionary apartments were broken into. Because we listened to the mission president's counsel, we were safe at home when the riots broke out and we had supplies necessary for our survival. And even more comforting than military protection was knowing we had the Lord's protection.

When we were being evacuated, I found out that on Sunday afternoon after our sacrament meeting, a group of protesters had been preparing to attack our apartment. One of our neighbors shouted, "They aren't French!" but they would not leave. Finally, another neighbor cried, "They're missionaries!" and the rioters dispersed. I again remembered the words, "My Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you," and I realized that I was living the promise from my stake president's blessing. I had seen prophecy fulfilled. ■

Note: Conditions in the Ivory Coast have improved since 2004. Nonnative missionaries are now serving there again.