

had stopped and the seal was sufficiently rested, it slipped back into the water, gliding away to rejoin its mate.

As I reflected on President McKay's compassion, his love of beauty, and his sensitivity to all living things, I was reminded of the scripture that "I, God, created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind; and I, God, saw that all things which I had created were good." (Moses 2:21.)

On that memorable day, in its jewel-like setting, I learned a lesson from a prophet of God: man does have dominion over "all the earth" (see Moses 2:26); let us exercise that dominion in kindness and love. □

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The Dedicated Daniel Choc

By Kirt Harmon

I have known a modern-day Nephi: Daniel Choc, a Cakchiquel Indian of Guatemala. When I first met him, Daniel was serving as a missionary in the Guatemala Guatemala City mission, the first Cakchiquel missionary, as far as I could learn. He served only thirty miles from his home, the small city of Patzicia where his father was a farmer and president of the branch. The distance from home was small, but for Daniel and his family the financial sacrifice for his mission was great. His father earns approximately \$200 each year, but as Daniel approached the age of nineteen and his call to serve a mission for the Lord he loved, the family prayerfully

committed \$90 for the two-year period—approximately one-fourth of the family's income.

Having taken that step, Daniel then began to conquer other challenges such as collars and ties and shoes, and foods other than beans, tortillas, and rice. But he adjusted to his new environment rapidly, for his only interest was in teaching and blessing his people, and in helping the missionaries to learn the difficult Mayan dialect.

Elder Choc was a gifted teacher, and he worked with an urgency that amazed me. He taught with power, love, faith, and testimony, always leaving his contacts happy and satisfied. He made the gospel easy to understand. I never saw him angry or upset, even in the midst of opposition. He loved his people, and they loved him.

Before my mission came to an end early in 1976, I was destined to meet Elder Choc one last time. In this experience I would learn what faith in the Lord really means, what life is all about. I would gain an even deeper insight into the devotion of this amazing native elder to his people.

On the morning of 4 February 1976, in the Central Guatemala highlands, one of the most devastating natural disasters ever to hit Central America occurred: a killer earthquake, responsible for more than 24,000 deaths.

That morning, immediately following the quake, my companion and I were assigned to secure information concerning the welfare of our elders and Church members in the central highlands area in order to make a preliminary report to Salt Lake City. We stopped in several small towns, and finally encountered Elder Choc and his companion making their way to Daniel's home. They had worked all morning helping the wounded and taking care of the dead, and then, having done all they could in their assigned area of labor, they started for Patzicia. My

companion and I went with them.

When we came upon what used to be Daniel's home, we saw his father, looking lost, uncertain, and afraid, stumbling through the rubble. Daniel rushed over and embraced him. After a moment of silence, they both broke into tears as Daniel's father whispered that his wife, then carrying their unborn eighth child, and two young sons had been crushed to death by the heavy adobe walls of their home when the quake began.

President Choc was deeply hurt, and the stress was almost more than he could bear. But after a long time of weeping, Daniel composed himself, looked into his father's eyes, and said: "Can you remember the sacrifices we made for almost twenty years to go to the temple of God, and how special it was to know that we had been sealed for time and all eternity? We will all be together again. I know it! Father, the Lord has blessed you. You are his servant in this part of his vineyard. Take this bruised and broken people by the hand and comfort them. Organize them and lead them in prayer, will you?"

And then, as Nephi of old had turned to Lehi in the desert to encourage him as a leader, Elder Choc said, "Help us, father, to exercise our faith."

(President Choc *did* organize the members of his branch and began the massive task of salvaging and rebuilding. He was a pillar of strength from that day on to all those associated with him.)

After doing what he could for his family and friends, Daniel's first words to me were, "Come on, let's go. We've got a lot to do if we are going to report back to Salt Lake by tonight."

Somewhat shocked by his remark, I explained to him that we could get to the remainder of the cities by ourselves and that he was needed at home.

"My father can take over now," he said. "My calling is to



Daniel and his father tearfully embraced and mourned the loss of family members killed in the earthquake.

help the Saints and elders elsewhere. Can I please go?" After such a plea, we consented.

The day was going by quickly and we still had three cities to get to—two of them inaccessible by road because of quake damage. So we decided to split up. Elder Choc and I drew the assignment of going to Comalapa. He was so anxious to reach the city that he suggested we run all the way—all eleven miles!

I was sure he was joking. After all, we had to go through a deep canyon that was sure to be dangerously steep because of quake-caused landslides. I was willing to walk *around* the canyon, but Daniel, already familiar with the terrain, insisted that we would never make it unless we ran *through* it. He reminded me that with the Lord's help, we could do it. He asked me if I would pray for physical strength and endurance, and plead with the Lord for a special blessing on the canyon because there were many in Comalapa

who needed help but were trapped there because of the dangerous condition of the canyon. Humbled, I did so.

And we ran every step of those eleven miles! As we did so, he rehearsed with me the words of the Savior to the people of ancient America. Daniel said he had pondered them deeply in his heart and was anxious to know more.

When we got to the canyon, we found it calm and quiet, and it stayed that way the rest of the day. After helping and securing the information we needed in Comalapa, we made our way back to Patzicia, and I left Elder Choc there with his father and surviving family.

I never saw him again. But I pondered continually the greatness of this young Cakchiquel Indian. He affected my life in such a drastic way that I have never been the same since. My vision of the gospel has been amplified a hundredfold since my association with Daniel. Truly, "he did keep the commandments

of God, and did walk in the ways of his father." (Hel. 3:37.)

On 30 March 1976, nearly six weeks after the quake, while working with sixty other missionaries to clear away rubble in the devastated town of Patzun, Daniel was killed as an adobe wall was collapsed by one of the earthquake's many after-shocks.

His death was hard to accept. But as a fellow missionary, Elder Julio Salazar, said at his funeral: "I could picture Elder Choc as a great leader in Patzicia. For this reason, I could not accept his death. As I pondered why he died, I realized that it was probably *because* of his great preparation that the Lord called him to aid with the work in the spirit world, especially among the thousands of Cakchiquel people who were taken during the earthquake." □

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