

# Lessons from Chile

**By Samuel L. Blumenfeld**

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, an accident occurred in the San Jose copper and gold mine in the town of Copiapo in northern Chile. 750,000 tons of rock collapsed, blocking the mine shaft and trapping 33 miners in their emergency refuge area more than 2,000 feet below ground. Since there was no way the men could communicate with the surface, the relatives of the miners did not know if they were dead or alive. But unbeknownst to those above ground, the miners were indeed alive.

For the next seventeen days the miners were unable to communicate their predicament until rescuers above were able to bore a hole the size of a grapefruit through which they were able not only to communicate with the trapped miners but also to send down a miniature video camera so that everyone above ground could see and talk to the men below. When they were asked what they needed most, their leader, Luis Urzua, said, “tooth paste and Bibles.” But they were also sent glucose, rehydration tablets, oxygen, medicines, camp bed parts, and messages.

But why Bibles? Because from the very beginning, the miners knew that only through a strong faith in God could they maintain an equally strong will to survive. For seventeen days the 33 men shared what little food and water they had. They had to suppress their hunger and thirst if they were to survive. Fortunately, they had a leader who knew that if they were to survive, it would be because of God’s doing. However, once they could communicate with the surface, they could receive food, water, and communications from their loved ones.

During their time underground the miners split into three groups, each with its own leader. They worked in shifts as they did before the collapse. Meals were delivered by the supply bore holes in plastic packages. Prayers were an important part of the daily routine.

But how could the men be brought to the surface safely? A new shaft would have to be drilled down to the miners through which they could be brought out one by one in a cage-like tube or capsule designed by Americans who had come to Chile to assist in the rescue operation. And it would take weeks to complete the new shaft. Indeed, it wasn’t until October 13<sup>th</sup> that several rescuers were able to descend into the mine and begin bringing the 33 men to the surface.

The ride to the top was by no means smooth. The new shaft had been drilled through 2,050 feet of solid rock which made the ride bumpy and noisy. Nevertheless, the system worked smoothly and each miner was successfully brought to the top without any hitches. The entire operation took 22 hours. It took an additional two and a half hours to bring the six rescuers to the surface. In all, the men had been trapped in the mine for 69 days.

On emerging at the surface, one miner characterized their ordeal as a struggle between God and the devil, and that God won. To the secularists, the rescue was a technological miracle. To the miners it was a spiritual miracle, for, as one miner said, “we give thanks to God that we were able to resist eating it right away,” referring to the one can of sardines they had to share among the 33 for 17 days.

But as one atheist stated in a commentary, if God were real and compassionate, he would not have permitted the mine to collapse. Atheists seem to believe that if God wanted them to believe in him, he would make himself known by preventing all evil, accidents, poverty, and tragedies from ever happening. They expect the true God to maintain an eternal Garden of Eden, where human beings could live without any problems or suffering. They believe that the true God would create a super welfare state, with no wars, no conflicts, nothing but endless pleasure, as if the world were a large cruise ship going nowhere.

Unfortunately, most atheists have not read the Bible, and so they are unaware what actually took place in the Garden of Eden due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Once they ate that fruit, they had to take responsibility for their lives. They would have to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves. And that is why life has been full of struggle, suffering, hard work, and conflict since that very beginning. But life is also full of love, pleasure, creativity, and learning if one adheres to Biblical principles.

The most important lesson to be learned from Chile is that when a nation rejects God and begins to rely entirely on its own secular resources, it will fail. Interestingly enough, the President of Chile, Sebastian Pinero, was at the site of the mine from day-one, and welcomed aid from any country willing to provide it. Unlike Obama who rejected aid from other countries when the BP oil well exploded, the Chilean president was grateful for the aid given by the world. Pinero, a Harvard trained economist, is a wealthy, free-market oriented businessman who was elected President in March. He will serve one term of four years, according to the Chilean constitution.

Health Minister Jaime Manalich said it had come as a shock that the miners, despite their ordeal, were in such good condition and that many of them were in a position to be discharged from the hospital in only 24 hours.

“Even when we recognize the efforts on the part of the medical team we were completely surprised and we call this a miracle, because any effort we could have made doesn’t explain the health condition that these people have today.”

So miracles do happen, especially among those who believe in them. The miners knew that nothing short of a miracle would save them. They prayed twice daily for their salvation and their rescue, and their prayers were answered.