

# TBM offers shelter to those whose world has been shaken

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ANTAKYA, Turkey—A heart breaks as naturally as it loves. And traversing Antakya, Turkey, it crumbles like the buildings.



In Antakya, Turkey, a February earthquake left 300,000 people homeless in less than two minutes. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

This once bustling city of 400,000 people now looks post-apocalyptic. Any structures not reduced to rubble by a February earthquake are leaning, cracked or both. More than 300,000 people became homeless in less than two minutes, with many of them leaving the city.

Six Texas Baptist Men volunteers came to this devastated landscape to put together simple shelters for families who had lost their homes to the earthquake.

The metal buildings provide safe places for families to live the next several years, empowering them to move out of cracked structures or flimsy tents.

These Quonset-hut-style, half-cylindrical shelters are being built in a place that feels like a scene out of a movie. Electricity is hard to come by, and water is even harder. Don't even ask about sewage management.

Residents—often including children—scavenge through the rubble for scrap metal they can sell or reuse. Small emergency tents dot the city, giving a small source of protection for families. Long lines of people form daily for food and water distributions, as well as government support checks.

## **Begin with a basic need—provide shelter**

In such a desperate situation, it's hard to know where to begin offering relief and recovery. A TBM team started with the basics.



TBM volunteers Chris Roberts (left) and Robert Watson (right) work in Atkakya, Turkey. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

“Historically, Christians were first called Christians here in Antioch,” said Team Leader Robert Watson from First Baptist Church in Tyler. “They were called that because they were ‘little Christs.’ They were living out the

teachings of Jesus. That's what we want to do here."

TBM volunteers, working alongside an in-country partner, fought supply-chain issues and used the trial-and-error method to devise a custom template for housing in this situation. The team outlined a system whereby the shelters, measuring 3 meters by 9 meters, can be crafted and installed faster by future volunteers.

TBM has provided funds for 20 homes in the city. That can't meet the need of everyone here. No one team or one organization could. But the TBM team sought to do what it could.



TBM volunteer Michael Gilbert work on a shelter for a family displaced by the earthquake that rocked Turkey in February. (TBM Photo/ John Hall)

"We're trying to make an impact in individual homes and families," said TBM team member Mike Gillert from First Baptist Church in Athens. "Hopefully it will make a difference for families, and they will know God loves them."

The Turks certainly appreciated the team's work. They pitched in to help where they could. They cleaned the lots for the houses and worked

alongside the Texans where possible. Even children excitedly stepped in to hold tools and drive in stakes.

Using hand gestures and Google Translate, team members were able to communicate and connect with those they served. In many cases, the Turks wanted to know everything they could about these Texans who traveled around the globe to help them.

After building the homes, the teams gave some of the families water filters and boxes of food. Conversations led to opportunities to encourage people and pray with them.

“They’re just as interested in us as we are in them,” team member Chris Roberts from First Baptist Church in Tyler said. “They want to know where we’re from, why we’re doing this.”

The team was particularly affected by serving a woman in a wheelchair. After the earthquake, she was unable to return to her upstairs apartment and was living in a makeshift area in a cracked living room.

As soon as the team arrived, she rolled out to greet those who were helping her. She visited with most of the team and expressed her appreciation. She even wanted a photo with the team to remember them.

**‘Building these homes for Jesus and his children’**



TBM volunteer Joe Fuller works atop a newly constructed shelter the team built in Antakya, Turkey. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

At another home, 8-year-old Amen joined the crew to build his home in the rain. Seeing his excitement and energy spurred them along.

“That’s our job,” said team member Joe Fuller from The Heights Baptist Church in Richardson. “Jesus told us what we do for the least of these we do for him. As far as I’m concerned, we’re building these homes for Jesus and his children.”

Hugs and tears flowed upon the completion of each home. Families often offered coffee, tea and even small sweets from their small supplies.

“They’re thrilled,” Roberts said. “They’re overwhelmed. I’m honored to be able to help give them a place to rest their head, where they can get out of the weather.”



TBM volunteer R.L. Barnard and a newfound friend are pictured in front of a shelter the Texas team built in Turkey. (TBM Photo / John Hall)

The experience transformed the team as well as the Turks. Instead of seeing Turkey simply in terms of political and religious stances, they met the Turks themselves and found it easy to identify things in common. Children want to play. Parents want to provide for them. They want what's best for their families and their community.

"These are folks just like you and me who need help," Roberts said. "I'm glad to see the human side of it. They're just folks like us. We can help them."

Hoisting Amen on his shoulders, team member R.L. Barnard from First Baptist Church in Duncanville couldn't help but smile as the child waved a Turkey flag.

The road to recovery is long. But for the families these Texans served, it

has started.

“I have a real soft spot for these people,” Barnard said. “And I always will.”