Negeri Sembilan in Malay mean “nine states“. In the early history of this state, the Minangkabaus from Sumatra established many cities here and divided the state into nine smaller countries, thus giving rise to its present name.
Negeri Sembilan means “nine states” or “nine districts” literally. It is situated about 50 kilometers south of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. Seremban is the capital of Negeri Sembilan. Rural scenery is the dominant geographical feature of the state as there is not much urbanisation. In the past, the economic focus of the state was mainly confined to the agricultural sector. However, more industrial zones have been set up in recent years, and the state is adopting a balanced approach toward agricultural and industrial development.

With the discovery of tin in the 19th century, trade and commerce began to flourish in the Straits Settlements. But there were factional struggles and unrest in the tin rich districts of Negeri Sembilan like Sungai Ujong, Rembau and Jelebu. This eventually led the British to intervene in the local politics. In 1889, the British persuaded these separately governed states to form a federation, with the “Yam Tuan” as the ruler of the whole of Negeri Sembilan, assisted by a British Resident. In 1896, Negeri Sembilan became a constituent of the Federated Malay States. In 1948, it became a part of the Federation of Malaya which eventually achieved independence in 1957. During the Japanese Occupation from 1941 to 1945, the Japanese committed great atrocities against the Chinese in Jelebu, Kuala Pilah
and Jempol in Negeri Sembilan. More than 1,400 villagers of Titi were massacred in 1941.

Negeri Sembilan is a state deeply rooted in the Minangkabau culture, as reflected in the architecture of the village houses and state buildings. Between the 15th and 16th century, the Minangkabau people crossed the Straits of Malacca to settle in the state. Their traditional architectural style features building roofs shaped like two buffalo horns. The State Mosque and the State Secretariat Building are two notable examples of such architecture. The Minangkabaus are categorised as Malays for political reason, although historians have highlighted their cultural and social differences compared to the Malays of the other states. For example, the Minangkabaus have preserved their social practices called “Adat Perpatih” which originated from their matriarchal tradition. Negeri Sembilan is the only state that still retains this tradition.

Although most of their laws are derived from the Islamic laws, some of their family laws supersede the Islamic laws. For instance, a woman can divorce without her husband’s consent, which is not possible under Islamic law. In addition, the matriarchal system is still followed where family name, property and land inheritance are concerned. This speaks volume of the impact of this culture on women’s rights. Today, the Minangkabaus are mainly found in the Kuala Pilah district. However, more and more of them have opted to
The development of the church in Negeri Sembilan is a record of persistence in ploughing the field and boldness in overcoming obstacles. The mission pioneers came with their God-given vision to embark on the work of seed sowing. In certain districts, mission work has had a history of more than a hundred years, such as St. Mark’s Anglican Church in Seremban, the Methodist churches in Kuala Pilah and Seremban. Yet, Christians remain a minority, numbering a mere 2.7% of the state population. Most of the churches are located in Seremban, the state capital, and its neighbouring towns. According to the 2008 census of NECF (National Evangelical Christian Fellowship), there were about 40 churches of various sizes in Seremban and about 12 churches in Port Dickson. In recent years, regular prayer meetings have been organised through the pastors’ fellowship to build relationship among church leaders as well as enhancing church unity.
The Malaysia Theological Seminary (“STM”) in Seremban has been established since 1979. In year 1998, the campus shifted from Kuala Lumpur to Seremban. Besides nurturing full-time pastors, it also seeks to equip believers and church leaders with theological training.

The local churches faced the challenges of low church attendance and lack of young people to take over the leadership. Many young people have migrated to Kuala Lumpur for job and education opportunities. This has created an outflow of human resources from the state. Nevertheless, the state government has been strengthening its commercial and industrial sectors. Many industrial zones were set up as a result. It has also actively promoted the concept of education city and quite a few universities and colleges have been established in the state. Moreover, the cost of living in Kuala Lumpur has escalated in recent years. Thus, more and more people have opted to reside in Seremban and purchase property there. These factors have contributed to the population growth of Seremban and more employment opportunities have emerged. At the same time, property prices have risen. Students from other states and foreign countries as well as migrant workers have congregated in the densely populated Seremban. These communities serve as the perfect outreach targets for the local churches.
SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO
BUKIT PELANDUK CHURCH

It is impossible not to mention the small town of Bukit Pelanduk when we talk about church growth in Negeri Sembilan. God has manifested His amazing grace in this place.

About an hour’s drive from Seremban, Bukit Pelanduk was an unknown remote town. However, the 1999 outbreak of Nipah Virus shook the whole nation and the plight of the Bukit Pelanduk villagers became the daily focus of press coverage. The pig farmers bore the brunt of the Nipah Virus epidemic. The severity of the epidemic caused hundreds of panic stricken villagers to move away from their homes and farms. At least 95% of the villagers from Bukit Pelanduk were displaced and the local primary school had to close down. Members of the armed forces entered the pig farms to carry out the largest ever pig culling operation in the nation. More than 100 people lost their lives to the Nipah virus. Many families sustained huge business losses; some lost their means of livelihood. The death of their loved ones was the greatest loss of all.

During the crisis, the victims faced numerous problems. Very few medical personnel were willing to risk their lives to come and serve in the disaster area. This greatly compounded the victims’ difficulty. At their most hopeless and helpless moment, many pastors
and believers came to pray for the villagers, bringing them comfort and financial relief. The gospel spread speedily through the love and care the churches provided, and scores of villagers turned to the Lord. The converts began to meet in small groups in their homes. When the churches involved in the disaster relief work prayed together, they felt the need to plant a church in the village. In September 2000, the Whitefields Assembly – the first church of Bukit Pelanduk – was established.

Prior to this, there was no church in Bukit Pelanduk. A good majority of the church members came to know the Lord during the Nipah virus outbreak. Among them was a brother who became a believer in the midst of the painful crisis. He said, “If not for the Lord Jesus Christ, I would not be alive today.” Although he survived the virus attack, he was not freed from its after effect. Whenever his backache occurred, he would sing songs of praise to overcome the pain.

The Nipah virus outbreak did not just bring the main economic activity of Bukit Pelanduk to a halt, it also transformed the village economically. Most of the villagers left their homes to work in other states or commuted by bus to the nearby Nilai Industrial Park for work. They started planting dragon fruit, oil palm and vegetables as well. Some earned a living through fishing. Today, peace and calm is restored. Perhaps, the Nipah virus incident will fade from public
memory with the passage of time. Yet God remembers the village and its people. They have suffered heartbreaks and losses but God has wiped away their tears. The reality of His amazing grace has given them love, faith and hope. The Whitefield Assembly and many other believers are witnesses of the painful historical episode, but more importantly, they are witnesses of the God who showed them mercy in the midst of their suffering.
Prayer for Negeri Sembilan

1. Pray for the state government. Pray that the government officers will uphold the interests of the community, manage the resources in the state properly and be willing to defend religious freedom.

2. Pray for the majority people groups of the state. Ask God to open their spiritual eyes that they may see the truth and light and turning to Christ Jesus.

3. Pray for the local church. Ask God to grant them unity and vision that they may be zealous for Jesus, bringing people to the Lord.

Profile of Negeri Sembilan

Area: about 6,645 square kilometers

Capital: Seremban

Total population: more than 1 million
Malays (55%), Chinese (25%), Indians (15%) and others (5%)

Religions: Islam (58%), Buddhism or Taoism (23%), Hinduism (14%), Christianity & Catholicism (3%), plus others (2%)