TALES OF PERSIA
Tales of Persia

Missionary Stories from Islamic Iran

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Dedicated to my grandchildren and to their grandmother,
who served Christ with me in Iran.
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INTRODUCTION: WHY I WENT AS A MISSIONARY TO IRAN

I am an American. I was born in Kentucky, and when I was a boy I lived in Virginia. But I spent many years of my life far from my native land. For forty-three years I was a missionary to Persia, now known by its ancient name, Iran, a country some eight thousand miles east of Virginia. How did this happen, and how am I now able to write for you a book of stories about people in Iran? Let me tell you.

In the Valley of Virginia, about ten miles from the town of Lexington, there is a Presbyterian church named Bethesda. My grandfather and, after him, my father were for many years pastors of that country church. I lived in the manse, the home of

1. Iran is pronounced Er-rahn.
the pastor, with my parents and my brother, Francis, and our little dog, Trigg. We loved the beautiful mountains called Jump and Hogback, which we could see when we played in the yard. We loved our home, where our mother taught us our lessons (we never went to school) and read stories to us. We loved Tales of a Grandfather by Sir Walter Scott, which told us about our Scottish heroes. We loved to take care of the garden and the chickens and the horse and the cow and the pigs. And we loved our church, where we worshiped God, and where in Sunday school we recited the many Bible verses and the catechism that we had learned by heart.

We also belonged to a missionary society for the young people and the children of the church that my mother started, called the Kemper Band. It was named for a missionary friend of my mother’s, Miss Kemper, who was serving Christ in Brazil. All the members of the Kemper Band gave two cents each week to help Miss Kemper in her missionary work. To earn this money, we used to sell eggs and do chores, for we didn’t have much money in those days. We read books about missionaries, and sometimes missionaries came to visit us and speak in our church. Once Miss Kemper herself came. A great missionary from the Congo (Zaire) in Africa named Dr. William Morrison once visited us and told us stories about Africa. How we loved his stories!

When I was still a little boy, I did an important thing: I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. I loved Jesus because he first loved me, and I wanted to serve him. I thought the best way to serve him would be to become a minister like my father and both of my grandfathers. But where should I serve Christ as a minister? When I heard from the missionaries that there were many
people in the world who had never heard of Jesus Christ and his love, I began to wonder whether God might not want me to go to some other country to tell the people the good news that Jesus had come to save them from their sins and to make them children of God. I was willing to do this if God wanted me to, so I waited for him to tell me what to do.

After I had been graduated from college, I went to a big missionary meeting for students in Kansas City, and there I saw many missionaries and heard their addresses. They reminded us that Jesus had commanded his followers to go into all the world and to tell people about him, that they might believe on him. But now, after nineteen hundred years, there were millions of people in many lands who had never seen a Bible or heard the story of Jesus and his love for all the people of the world. And these missionaries asked us students if we should obey Christ and go to a land where most of the people did not know him, and there help to make him known. It seemed to me that this was God’s message to me, and after this meeting I decided that, if God permitted me, I would become a missionary in some foreign land. I would try to go, and I thought God would stop me if he did not want me to go abroad. But God did not stop me, so I became a foreign missionary. But when I was in Kansas City, I wasn’t yet ready to become a missionary. First, I had to study in a theological seminary to learn more about the Bible and Christian teaching, so that I could teach other people the truth about Jesus Christ.

One of the great missionaries whom I saw in Kansas City and whom I got to know well when I was studying in seminary was Dr. Samuel Zwemer. He had gone to Arabia to tell the people there about Christ. He told us that most of the peo-
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People of Arabia were Muslims; that is, they were followers of Muhammad, a man who had lived in Arabia about six hundred years after the time of Christ and who had claimed that he was a prophet sent by God. He wanted all the people of the world to believe on him. After his death, his followers conquered many lands with the sword and converted many people to this new religion, which was called Islam. Dr. Zwemer also told us that there were very few missionaries working in Muslim countries, and very few Muslims had ever become Christians. When I heard this, I thought, “Surely some of us students in the seminary should go to the Muslims and tell them of Christ’s love for them! Why shouldn’t I go?” So I decided to become a missionary to Muslims.

But to what land should I go? Muslims live in many countries, and one seventh of the people of the world follow the religion of Islam. Someone suggested to me that I think of going to Persia, the country now known by its old name, Iran. So I read reports on what missionaries were doing in Persia. I learned that Presbyterian missionaries from America had been living and working in that land since 1835, and Episcopal missionaries from England, since 1869. They had hospitals and schools in a number of cities, and some little churches had been established.

I also learned that a new mission station, or center, had been established in the city of Meshed in eastern Iran, the only place in a vast region one thousand miles across where the message of Christ was being given and the love of Christ was being shown to people. (If you look at the map in this book, you will see that this region includes part of Iran, all of Afghanistan, and all of Turkestan.) I felt that God wanted me to go to that greatly
Introduction: Why I Went as a Missionary to Iran

neglected part of the world, so I asked the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church to send me to Meshed. How happy I was when, in 1919, I set out from New York on a ship called the *Black Arrow* with eight other missionaries and a little one-year-old missionary boy named Jack—all bound for Iran!

When I reached Teheran, the capital of Iran, I began to learn the beautiful Persian language—for, of course, I could not tell the good news of Christ to the people until I could speak their language and understand what they said to me. After seven months I went on eastward to Meshed, traveling the 560 miles in a wagon drawn by four horses. There were no trains and very few cars in that part of Iran at that time, and there were no good roads. In Meshed, I joined six other missionaries who were treating many sick people in the mission hospital and telling the message of Christ to all who would listen. I was present when the first little group of Muslim men was baptized and became Christians.

I had a Muslim teacher who helped me learn the Persian language well. He also told me a great deal about the religion and customs of the Muslims. In chapter 1, I will tell you a little of what he and others told me, and I will also tell you a little of what I later learned from the books I read about the beliefs of the Muslims of Iran.²

*Bible reading:* Matthew 28:18–20

You remember that I promised to tell you about the religion of the Muslims and about their prophet Muhammad. It is a most interesting story. Muhammad was born in A.D. 570, in the city of Mecca in Arabia. Most of the people of Arabia at that time worshiped idols, and there was a famous idol temple in Mecca. They knew that there was a great God, whom they called Allah, but few of the Arabians worshiped him. When Muhammad was a young man, he met some Jews and Christians who did not worship idols but were worshipers of the unseen God. Then, when he was forty years of age, he thought he saw an angel who told him that Allah had appointed him to be a prophet and that he must tell the people to worship only Allah, not idols. So Muhammad began to
preach. He told the Arabs that one day Allah would raise all the dead people to life. He would take all who had worshiped him and done good deeds to heaven, and he would send those who did not worship him to hell.

A few people believed in Muhammad, but most of the people of Mecca would not listen to him. However, he continued to preach for thirteen years in Mecca. Finally, there was so much opposition to him and his preaching against the idols that Muhammad and his followers left Mecca in A.D. 622. They went to Medina, another city in Arabia, about two hundred miles north of Mecca. There the people received Muhammad and made him their chief, and many believed him to be the prophet of Allah. Before long he began to fight with his enemies in Mecca, and he defeated them. At last he was able to capture their city. When he entered Mecca without a battle, he threw out the idols from the idol temple and made it the center of the religion of Islam.

After that, most of the people of Arabia quickly submitted to Muhammad, and he became their political and their religious ruler. His followers were called Muslims, because in the Arabic language the word muslim means "one who submits," and they had submitted to Muhammad and to Allah, who they believed had sent Muhammad. After the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, the Muslim armies soon conquered most of the nearby countries. Later this religion spread westward to Spain, eastward to India, and southward to Africa.
Now let me tell you what the Muslims believe. They believe that God, whom they call Allah, is the one true God who made all things and who has all knowledge and power. He made man to obey and serve him; and when people disobeyed, he sent prophets to tell them what to do and what not to do. Muslims think that there were many prophets, perhaps 124,000 of them, but they do not know the names of most of them. They say that there were five very great prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. They believe that Muhammad is the last and the greatest of God’s prophets. They think that God gave books to each of the great prophets, as well as to some other prophets. They call the book that they say was given to Jesus Injil. They believe that God sent messages in the Arabic language to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad told the people these messages, which were written down by those who heard them. Later they were collected in a book called the Koran. Muslims believe that the Koran is the very Word of God and that it should be read in the Arabic language.

What do Muslims know about Jesus Christ? The Koran says that Jesus was a very great prophet, born of the Virgin Mary, but that he was not the Son of God. It also says that Jesus performed wonderful miracles, that he healed the sick people and even raised the dead to life. But it says that he did not die on the cross, for God performed a miracle to save Jesus from death. They say that God changed one of Jesus’ enemies to look like Jesus and that this man was crucified in place of Jesus. Then, they say, God took Jesus to heaven, where he is now. They believe that Jesus is alive and that he
will come to earth again and will punish all who do not accept Muhammad. So you see that though Muslims think highly of our Savior Jesus Christ, they do not really know him. They do not know that he is the Son of God and that he loved us so much that he died on the cross to save us from sin and that he rose from the grave alive. They wrongly think that Muhammad took the place of Jesus. They say that people no longer need Jesus and his teachings—all must now submit to Muhammad and the Koran.

Muslims believe that there will be a day of resurrection, when God will raise all the dead people to life, judge them, and send some of them to heaven and some to hell. If people want to get to heaven, they must do certain things. First, they must say the creed of Islam, which is “There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger.” Then they must worship Allah every day. To do this, they must put some water on their hands and feet, stand facing the city of Mecca, and recite some Arabic sentences. As they do this, they must bow, kneel, touch their foreheads to the ground, rise again, and repeat this ritual several times. This must be done early in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Many Muslims perform these acts of worship five times each day.

Muslims must also keep the fast of Ramadan. From the time when they first see the new moon in the Muslim month of Ramadan to the next new moon, about twenty-nine days, they are not permitted to eat any food or taste any drink from daylight in the morning till after sunset at night. But all during the night they are allowed to eat and drink. It is hard for working people to keep the fast, especially in hot weather. Muslims also must give money to poor people. Some give pennies to beg-
gars, and others sometimes give large sums for hospitals or schools.

Once in his life, every Muslim who has the money should make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who do this gain the title of Hajji. Many people in Iran who can’t go all the way to Mecca make pilgrimages to Meshed or other cities in which the tombs of descendants of Muhammad are located. Since the followers of the religion of Islam do not have a savior, they hope that by making pilgrimages and doing the other things I have told you about they may please God and get him to forgive their sins and take them to heaven when they die. But they are never sure whether they will go to heaven or to hell when they die.

Many of the Muslim people in Iran were very kind to me. I love them, and I long for them to know and love the Savior Jesus Christ, who died to save them. While I was in Iran, I was happy to know devoted Christians who had been Muslims. The stories of some of these Christians have been told in Ten Muslims Meet Christ. But in this little book I want to tell my grandchildren and other children who love Jesus, some stories about other people in Iran and about interesting experiences I had there. In several stories the names I give to my Iranian friends are not their real names.

Remember that I first went to Iran many years ago, and the conditions in that country as described in some of my stories were then very different from what they are now. Today fine highways have been built, and one can travel all over Iran by bus, train, or plane. Iran has become one of the great oil-

producing countries of the world. In the big cities there are supermarkets and huge apartment buildings. The government has established schools and colleges and hospitals and factories, and many people own cars and radios and televisions. In material things, Iran has made amazing progress since I arrived in that land in 1919. But, sad to say, most of the people do not yet know the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

_Bible reading: Romans 10:1–4_