

# WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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# Dawn Over the Yemen and Hadramaut

JOSEPH J. COOKSEY

## *Some History*

AS modern investigation proceeds, it is becoming clearer that Christian influences have moulded that which may be considered worthy and strong in Islam to a degree not formerly appreciated. South Arabia has a definite contribution to make to our knowledge of the whole subject. Up to the year of Mohammed's birth in A.D. 570, and yet later, there was a Christian Church in South Arabia which was well taught and virile. The Jacobite Christians who founded it were persecuted fugitives from the Eastern Church in Persia, where the strong hand of Sapor II (A.D. 339-379) was outstretched for its destruction. These enthusiastic missionaries won many of the Arabian tribes, founded churches with bishops' sees at Sanaa, Nejran (Yemen), Dhufar (Hadramaut) and Baith Katraye (facing the Bahrain Islands). At Hira and Cufa on the Iraq border also there were bishops presiding over groups of important churches.

Persecution revealed the quality of the faith of the Arabian Churches when Yusef a Jew was ruler of Yemen with authority over the Hadramaut. His uncomplimentary surnames were Musruq (Stolen) and Dhu Nowâs (Lord of the Pit), expressing his habit of casting into a pit of fire those who resisted his proselytizing zeal. He was descended from an important family of Jews who came with a number of others following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. The tribes of Kenanah, Al Hareth, Ebn Kaaba and Kendah were joined to them by embracing Judaism.

The persecuted Christians appealed to Kaleb, the Christian king of Abyssinia, who sent a first expedition which defeated Dhu Nowâs, imposed peace and returned to Abyssinia, leaving a garrison of two hundred and eighty soldiers in Dhufar. By a stratagem the force was destroyed in one night and burnt alive in the church at Dhufar. This

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act synchronized with the second and more terrible persecution in A.D. 523 in which over four thousand Arab Christians were martyred rather than accept Judaism. A second Abyssinian force was despatched, which routed and slew Dhu Nowâs. The army remained seven months and departed, taking fifty hostages of the leading families. King Kaleb left as Viceroy, Abraha Ebn Al Sabah, a decided Christian who built at Sanaa a magnificent church, designed to draw the Arabs there on pilgrimage, instead of to Mecca. He succeeded so well that the Koreish, noting the diminishing pilgrimage, sent Nofail of the tribe of Kenanah, who, entering the church by night, defiled the altar and walls. Abraha, rightly incensed, set out with an expedition from Sanaa and marched on Mecca to destroy the Kaaba. The road followed by the army was that which, though dilapidated, still runs slightly to the east of Mecca, onward to the Gulf of Akaba. Abraha was defeated; he never entered Mecca, and the elephants in his army, on which he greatly counted, proved useless.

The preceding events, which have been lightly sketched, are the necessary and logical steps leading up to this battle which was one of the most momentous in the world's history. From a military point of view it was a small affair, but it deflected the whole course of Arabian history, and, in the indirect aid it afforded to the rise of Islam, contributed to change the face of a large part of the world. The pagan forces in north and central Arabia now assumed a militant attitude to the Christian Yemen and Hadramaut, and, among the southern tribes humiliated by defeat, Christianity began to decline. In that fateful year, A.D. 570, Mohammed was born. The Abyssinian power lasted a further twenty-seven years, when the Persians, who had patronized Dhu Nowâs in opposition to Byzantium which had patronized King Kaleb of Abyssinia, invaded the weakened country and defeated the Abyssinians. The conquest weighted the impact of the forces of paganism from central and northern Arabia, and thirteen years later Mohammed made his public appearance in Mecca as the Prophet of Islam.

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### *Martyrs of the Cross*

Christianity was, however, too well founded to die out quickly. It remained virile even after Mohammed was dead. Nejran was the last Christian stronghold until the caliphate of Omar (A.D. 634-644) when the Nejranites, refusing Islam at his hands, migrated to the Christian centres of Hira and Cufa in Iraq. They were Arabs, well understanding the nature of Islam, but they rejected it. They firmly believed in the Deity of Christ and His redemptive work on Calvary.

A few years ago there was discovered a valuable ancient manuscript in the Syriac language used by the Jacobites and Nestorians who founded the Arabian Church. It was entitled the *Book of the Himyarites*, and recorded some of the names and dying testimonies of those who were martyred by Dhu Nowâs. A few selections will reveal the Scriptural quality of their faith.

#### *'In the City of Nejran'*

'And they brought to him a cross and threw it on the ground before him. And this incarnate Satan Masruq said to the blessed ones, "Listen to my words and deny Jesus Christ the Son of Mary because He was of mankind and a mortal as all men, and spit upon this cross and be Jews with us and ye shall live. But if ye will not obey my words, by Adonai God, I will let you suffer torment by fire." And they answered, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, God, He who became man for us by His manifestation in the flesh and in His grace . . . and rose as God, and by His passion and death saved us from the second death that is reserved for you, that ye may die for ever by it, together with Satan your father. So, then, now that thou hast seen our belief do all that thou wishest and do not delay us from our way to our Lord."

'And they brought before Masruq the woman Habsa whose ancestor, the teacher Hayan, was of those who brought the Christian faith to Nejran. And he gave orders and they threw before him a cross, and brought and placed near him a bowl in which was blood just as he had done to those who had suffered martyrdom before her. Then he said to her, "Deny Christ and spit on this cross and take with thy finger from this blood and say as we that Christ was a mortal as everyone else, and be thou a Jew as we are and thou shalt live." And Habsa answered him

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saying, "O, thou crucifier who hast hung on the cross thy Lord, thou who hast undertaken to destroy as thou thinkest all the race of Christians in our land, I will not say that Christ was a man, but I worship Him and praise Him because of all the benefits He has shown me. And I believe that He is God, Maker of all creatures and I take refuge in His Cross."

'And they brought before him Ruhm, daughter of Azma, a distinguished and rich lady of Nejran. And Masruq commanded his servants to say to her, "Deny Christ and be a Jew and save thy life and remain in thy former honour." And Ruhm answered, "As to your saying that I should deny Christ, God forbid, for He is God, Son of God, Creator of the worlds. And Masruq may bring upon me all the torments he wishes and I will with joy endure them for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ my Lord and my God."

'Masruq, now baffled, sent to Nejran his trusty lieutenant, the wicked Dhu-Yazan. And he gave orders and they brought before him the believing freeborn women, one hundred and seventy-seven in number and they brought with them many children. But these believing women not only did not deny, but with the help of Christ, God, who was with them, each of them despised him . . . and confessed that Christ is God. And Dhu-Yazan sent word to the impious Masruq and said, "Among the women that we have brought together I have not found even a single one that denies Christ, but they insist shamelessly even more than their husbands, saying that Christ is God, Creator, Son of the Merciful, and they abjure thee and all who agree with thee."

'These crucifiers said to a man in Nejran, "Art thou a Christian?" He answered them, "If I am worthy I am a Christian." And they said to him, "If thou art a Christian stretch thy hand up." And he immediately stretched up his right hand, and a man swiftly drew his sword and smote him and cut it off. Again they said to him, "If thou art a Christian stretch up the other." And immediately with joy he stretched up the left one also, and then that crucifier smote and cut off that as well. Again they asked him and said to him, "Art thou still a Christian?" and he said to them, "In life and in death I am a Christian, and praise be to God our Lord Jesus Christ who has deemed me worthy of this." When they heard this those foes of righteousness became angry and smote his feet also from behind him and cut them both off.'

### *Mohammed's Attitude*

The fearless denunciation of the persecutor in the face of

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torture and death is typically Arab, and gives a sure touch of authenticity to the confessions. A crowd of questions arise seeking solutions. It is obviously incredible that the faith of the Yemen, so scripturally sure and notably missionary, was unknown in Mecca, joined as they were by a well-used caravan trading route. Abraha's attempt to deflect the Meccan pilgrimage and his military expedition against Mecca to destroy the sacred Kaaba made an enormously hostile impression upon its people. Mohammed's celebration of the deliverance in the chapter of the Koran entitled 'The Elephant' is there attributed to a divine miracle. God and His angels fought against Abraha. Did Mohammed in consequence regard as anathema all that could come out of the Yemen, including the Christian faith of Abyssinian or Nestorian Arab? During his lifetime it was commonly believed that he was instructed by Nestorian monks; even their names of Boheira (the 'little sea,'—of knowledge) and Salman the Persian were currently cited. Nestorian doctrine concerning the Deity of Christ and His sacrifice for sin, whether in Hira or the Yemen, was such as was expressed by the martyrs. Why then did Mohammed regard as authentic Christian doctrine the aberrations of heretical sects in the Eastern Church which were propagated in north Arabia, and which he rightly rejected and denounced in the Koran? Did he not also have a knowledge of pure doctrine whereby to make a choice between truth and error? Did he know, and did he definitely reject the implications of the Cross, both from the side of God and that of man? Was the Cross too personal for him? These, and other questions of real importance and interest, are definitely raised by a study of the Nestorian Church of South Arabia.

### *Coming Changes*

Changes, both social and religious, are slowly operating in the Yemen and Hadramaut. Italy is seeking influence in the former. The Imam Yahya is aged and already changes are discussed to take place when he dies. Modern progress is modifying the almost theocratic rule of the

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Moslem Seiyids which has prevailed for several centuries. Neither country is wide open for missionary work, but it may be regarded as open to a few wise men who are also Christian doctors. When the World Dominion Press Survey is issued it will define the possibilities.

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### At Work in Iran

The main burden of missionary work in Southern Iran is borne by the Church Missionary Society, which has stations at Isfahan, the famous old capital of Iran ; at Yezd, the desert town ; at Kerman, the well-known carpet weaving centre ; and at Shiraz, the city of the poets Hafez and Sa'adi and capital of the Province of Fars, from which the words Persia and Parsee are derived.

At Isfahan, the Society has hospitals for men and women ; a fine college (boys educated there hold good posts in all parts of the land) ; an Industrial Mission known as the Garden of Arts (some of the products of which were exhibited at the famous Exhibition of Persian Art held recently in London), and a school for girls, which, though in actual fact must be reckoned a national school, may yet be regarded as a missionary school, as both the headmistress and her chief assistant are full time missionaries of the Society.

At Yezd, the Society has two hospitals, and here again there is a national school for girls, the headmistress of which is a missionary.

At Kerman there are two hospitals, a welfare centre, which until recently was the only training centre for midwives in the country, and two fine schools for boys and girls, both under the direct control of the Society.

At Shiraz, the youngest of the four stations, the Society has a splendid hospital for both men and women, and the leading school for girls is a national school conducted by a full-time missionary of the Society.

At both Isfahan and Kerman the church is within the hospital compound, but at Yezd a fine church and hall, together with a vicarage, have been built in a separate compound. At Shiraz as yet no church has been built, but preparations are almost complete and shortly building will begin. A vicarage, caretaker's house, guest-house for village Christians, and two workrooms have already been built. A good garden has been laid out, and courts for badminton and deck-tennis have been made for the use of the young people of the Church. Looms have been set up in the workrooms and some fatherless children connected with the Church are being taught to weave and to read and write. There are also two promising out-stations, with no resident missionary, one connected with Kerman and the other with Shiraz, and at the latter a small church is now being built.