



1. A HARD, DRY LAND

In 1811, a young man named Henry Martyn arrived in Tehran, Persia with a very special gift for the Shah, the Muslim king of the land. It was the New Testament, translated into the Persian language for the first time ever.

But the Shah refused to see Henry Martyn. He wanted nothing to do with that book from a different religion.

Henry sadly went on his way, leaving the translation in another city. Shortly after this he died, only thirty-one years old.

Another man took the translation and printed many copies of it to sell or give away.

Another man translated the Old Testament into the Persian language.

A few missionaries came in those early years to the eight million people of Persia (which is now called Iran). But, at first, not many of those missionaries tried to reach the Muslim people for Christ. Those Muslims





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seemed so ... uninterested. So set in their ways. So hard-hearted.

Instead, most of the missionaries worked with the Assyrians and Armenians who lived in Persia—those groups of people had believed the Bible for centuries. Many of them became stronger in their faith, and they followed the examples of the missionaries.

And a few more missionaries came from the West. Only few Muslims came to Christ.

Persia ... Iran ... it was a hard, dry land.

The people were dying of thirst, needing the Living Water.

Over the next two hundred years, the Living Water sprinkled ... and then poured ... and finally began to gush over the hard, dry land of Iran.

Now there are eighty million people in Iran. And more and more of them every day are wanting to drink of the Living Water of Christ.

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2. KURDS AND THE WAY (ܣܘܪܝܝܬܝܢ)

Here it is,” said Justin Perkins. “Right off the printing press.” He held up a large sheet of paper, printed all over with a strange print. “The first Scriptures in our new written Syriac language.”

The year was 1841. Justin Perkins, one of the first Western missionaries to Persia, had been translating the New Testament into modern Syriac for six years. Before long, the entire New Testament was printed.

Missionaries from among the Assyrian people of Persia began to leave Urmia to take the good news of Jesus Christ to other parts of the country. One of these was Pastor Yohannan. In 1879, he left for the town of Senneh, where the wild horseback-riding Kurds lived. The Kurds prided themselves on being very strict Muslims. They were willing to quickly kill any of their own if any of them turned away from the true faith and became infidels.

But, of course, no one ever did.





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A sixteen-year-old Kurd named Saeed arrived at Pastor Yohannan's door in Senneh. He was going to teach Pastor Yohannan Persian, and Pastor Yohannan would teach him Syriac.

"I'll not greet those men with a *salaam* of peace," Saeed muttered to himself. "They're obviously infidels, unbelievers. Anyone who is not a Muslim will never receive the *salaam* of peace from me."

"Good morning," he said, when the door opened.

"You may give us the *salaam* of peace," said Pastor Yohannan's friend. "After all, we're People of the Book."¹

People of the Book? Saeed glanced at the two of them sharply. *Then they know our holy Koran!* He knew that the Koran said that the Christian Bible was also a holy Book, and that the People of the Book—the Christians—were to be respected. But no Muslim did, really. It was unthinkable, because Christians didn't honor the Prophet Mohammed and the Koran. Saeed glanced down, unsure what to say.

The men were having their morning prayers. Before this time, Saeed had heard only Muslim prayers and superstitious Catholic prayers. How differently these men prayed! They bowed down on their knees and

1. "People of the Book" is an expression used in the Koran. Muslims who study the Koran know that the People of the Book are the Jews and Christians.



prayed as if they were praying to a real person, for forgiveness for sins, for their friends—and for their enemies! What good Muslim would do that?

Saeed looked at the Persian New Testament. “I’ve seen one of those,” he said. “It didn’t make any sense to me at all.” He looked at Pastor Yohannan, who just smiled at him. *Some of those Christians have been my language students, he thought. Their lives don’t match what they say they believe. You won’t be any different.*

Months passed as the young teacher and the old student continued to meet together. More and more, Saeed found himself questioning, wondering, doubting.

He studied the prophecies of the Old Testament with Pastor Yohannan and saw that they pointed not to Mohammed, the bloody warrior, but to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

And he watched the life of Pastor Yohannan, the Christian.

“How can this be?” Saeed muttered to himself, gripping his hair. “That Christian man is always kind and patient. He’s always truthful, always! He knows his Scriptures very well and explains them with clear thinking. His whole life reflects all that he teaches! He never speaks badly of my people or my religion,



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though we speak badly of his people and his religion all the time! Why is this unbeliever so good, and we, the faithful ones, are not?"

In agony of soul, one day Saeed asked Pastor Yohannan plainly, "What do Christians think of our greatest prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him?"

For a moment, Pastor Yohannan was silent. He looked down.

"Really! I really do want to know!" Saeed insisted. "I won't harm you!"

Pastor Yohannan looked at Saeed with gentle eyes. "Jesus said that after Him would come false prophets. If you look honestly at Mohammed's life and character ... We believe he's not a worthy example or a worthy prophet to represent the Holy God."

Pastor Yohannan's voice was so tender, so kind and loving, that in spite of the sting of his words, at first Saeed could not respond.

Finally he said, "Maybe you're mistaken."

Then passages from the Koran came to his mind, about Mohammed's violence and selfishness. *Not a worthy example. Not a worthy prophet. Maybe the pastor is right. Maybe you, Saeed, maybe you're wrong.*

Saeed left quickly and went home. "No!" he shouted to himself. "I dare not question my holy religion! I'll devote myself fully to it!" He sent the





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Bible back to Pastor Yohannan and refused to come for studies.

Then he began to fast for the month of Ramadan. During the day, when everyone else was fasting and sleeping, he fasted and read the Koran. During the night, when everyone else was eating a big feast, he ate almost nothing. *Surely I'll find relief from these nagging thoughts!* But the doubts only became worse.

What if the pastor is right? What if you're wrong? What if Mohammed was only an imposter?

"No! No!" he screamed. "Satan has got my heart! I'm going to hell!"

In the middle of the night, Saeed jumped out of bed like a crazy man, ran to the fireplace, and pulled out two small red-hot charcoals. He put one on each leg and gritted his teeth and clenched his fists as he watched them burn. "That one is to remind me never to talk to another Christian!" he grunted through his clenched teeth. "And that one is to remind me that I will always and forever belong to holy Islam. Oh," he groaned. "How can an accursed Christian live a life holier than mine?"

In a few days, the pain in his legs passed. But the pain in his soul lingered on.

Maybe the Christian is right. Maybe you're wrong.

By day, Saeed taught his students the Koran. By night he prayed in the mosque. But the more he taught, the





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more he realized that the Koran was full of errors and bad teachings. The more he prayed, the more desperate he felt.

One night, walking home after prayers at the mosque, Saeed tripped over a stone and fell in the dirty street. Right there, in the dirt, he began to cry like a child. “O God,” he called. “You said that You lead the lost. I’m lost. Show me the plain way. Show me the right way. I promise I’ll follow it. If You don’t—if I don’t—I’ll go completely crazy.” He rested his head on his knees and sobbed.

In a moment, Saeed felt lifted up. In a moment, he knew exactly what he should do.





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Early the next morning, he again knocked on the pastor's door. "Salaam, my friend," he said. "May I have the Bible again?"

"Saeed!" said Pastor Yohannan. "I'm so glad to see you! I've been praying for you. I know that God loves you."

Now Saeed studied the Bible, compared with the Koran, with an open heart, desperate to know the truth, to know the right way.

There came a day when he said, "Lord Jesus, I give you my whole heart and soul." Now his tears were no longer tears of grief and confusion and fear, but of an overwhelming sense of love and peace and joy. The Living Water had brought relief to his thirsty soul.

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When Saeed's relatives found out he had become a Christian, they wanted to kill him. He escaped to another city, where he studied medicine and became a doctor, giving many people the good news of Jesus Christ.

His brother finally found him in that city, determined to either force him to repent, or to kill him. But Saeed's brother was so impressed with his changed life and the good news of the gospel that he too became an ardent follower of Jesus Christ, taking the good news to many.

See Thinking Further for Chapter 2 on page 135.

