Asia Harvest

Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe! (Joel 3:13)

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Sheep Among Wolves

- The Church in Xinjiang (Part One) -

From the Frontlines

with Paul Hattaway

"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.'" (Revelation 11:15)

There seems to be certain key moments in a person's life when the stark reality of a situation becomes clear; a moment when time seems to stand still and the memory of where we were and what we were doing is seared into our minds. One such moment for me happened last year. I was on a ministry trip to the Middle East, and thanks to the kind generosity of some friends, Joy and our two sons were able to come with me.

While we were in Egypt we had a spare afternoon so we decided to spend a few hours doing what foreigners are expected to do. We rented camels and rode around the Pyramids. We arrived after closing time, however, and were not going to be allowed through a gate to the pyramid area when a Muslim man argued with the guards and allowed us in. It was a kind of surreal experience in more ways than one. Because of the lateness in the day we were the only people at this extraordinary place, and if you have ever ridden a camel you will know that it is quite an experience in itself!

The sun was setting and a cool breeze was blowing in from the Sahara Desert as we made our way back towards the camel stables. It was during the month of Ramadan - when Muslims the world over fast every day until sunset. As we neared the end of our journey we could see the outskirts of the massive sprawling city of Cairo, home to approximately 20 million people. All of a sudden as the sun went down a loud cacophony of noise swarmed all around us. The loudspeakers of thousands of mosques across the city all started in unison, calling Muslims to prayer and announcing that the fasting for the day had come to an end and people could now eat and drink.

In that poignant moment I was struck with an awful awareness of the lostness of

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Cover picture: Devout Muslims praying to Allah on the streets outside a mosque in Kashgar, Xinjiang. Photo courtesy of Frontiers.

the Muslim world, with over a billion people blinded by their religion and self-righteous legalism, heading to hell with little or no knowledge of Jesus, the only hope for their eternal salvation. For some minutes the novelty of looking at the Pyramids vanished and a tremendous burden for the lost Muslim world enveloped me. Oh, how God loves the Muslims! He longs to give them a changed heart, washed in the Blood of His Son. He longs to be a loving shepherd to the millions of families, little Muslim boys and girls, who are trapped in hopeless darkness. The One who said he would leave 99 sheep that are safe to rescue one that is lost so loves the Muslims that He gave his life, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have eternal life!

Since Islamic terrorism sprung to prominence in the West several years ago I sense that many Christians have a kind of hopeless attitude towards Muslims. Many figure they are impossible to reach, while some even view them as evil and not deserving of God's grace.

This, of course, is just the point. None of us deserve God's grace. The only thing you and me deserve is hell.

I want to encourage you not to give up on the Muslim world, because Jesus hasn't! In fact, great things are happening in unexpected ways throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. The gospel is going forward and tens of thousands of Muslims are being exposed to the life of Christ every day. In every single Muslim country the church is growing - not in huge numbers, yet slowly and surely. God is being glorified, and the nations of this world are becoming the nations of the Lord! (Rev. 11:15). There will surely be worshippers from every single tribe, language, nation and people around the throne of the Lamb of God (Rev 5:7-9), including from the thousands of Muslim ethnic groups!

In this issue we present the first part of the little-known story of how a strong and impressive Church emerged in the midst of fanatical Muslims in Xinjiang, the north-west province of China dominated by a dozen Islamic people groups. These testimonies record both the best and worst of human nature, telling of how a beautiful flower was planted and watered by the Lord, only to be crushed by wicked men.

If God was able to reach Muslims in China in the most dire and anti-Christian atmosphere imaginable, then be encouraged! God is able to reach them everywhere, and He is able to reach into your own community, and your own needy heart. The Lord Jesus is still busy winning the lost to His Father, and seeing people's hearts renewed and made pure. This is surely Good News for us all!

CHINA MARTYRS:
Sheep Among Wolves -
The Church in Xinjiang (Part One)



Xinjiang (which means 'new domain' in Chinese) is a huge, remote region in northwest China. It is home to a host of different peoples, including more than 15 million Muslims belonging to ethnic groups such as the Uygur, Kazak, Tajik, Uzbek, Kirgiz and Hui. It may surprise you to know that China, with approximately 25-30 million Muslims, has the ninth highest Islamic population of any country in the world, with about the same number as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia. These days few of Xinjiang's Muslims have ever heard the Gospel, and their spiritual condition is as barren as the huge Taklimakan Desert that dominates the region. There is not even one visible church among the Uygurs or any of the other Muslim groups. This has not always been the case, however. Few people are aware that a marvelous work of God occurred in Xinjiang in the early decades of the 20th century, before it came to an abrupt and violent end in 1933. This is the little-known story of the Church in Xinjiang.

The vast desert expanses of northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is much more historically, culturally, and linguistically akin to nearby Central Asian nations than to China.

The city of Yarkant (known as Shache in Chinese) has a population of around 700,000 people today, 95% of whom are Muslims. Located in western Xinjiang, Yarkant has also been a hotbed of fanatical Islamists for centuries. The first Christian to experience the wrath of Yarkant's Muslims was Portuguese Catholic priest Benedict de Goës, who reached Yarkant in November 1603 after an exhausting 13-month trek from the Indian city of Agra. Goës was soon hauled before the local religious leaders, who tried to force him to denounce Christianity and embrace Islam. Goës gave a firm and clear rebuttal. The Yarkant leaders "could not understand how an intelligent man could

profess any religion but their own. Elsewhere Goës was treated less civilly, several times barely escaping with his life from the swords of fanatics determined to make him invoke the name of Mohammed."[1]

On one occasion Benedict de Goës was affronted by a furious Muslim who burst into the house where he was staying. The man placed "his sword against his breast, and threatened to plunge it in, if he did not instantly render homage to the prophet Mohammed. The courageous missionary calmly looked at him, gently put aside the sword, and said, 'Go, I know not who Mohammed is.'"[2]

One of the greatest mission figures of the 19th century is a name few Christians in the English-speaking world are familiar with. Nils Fredrik Höijer travelled through Russia, the Middle East, and Central Asia in the 1870s and 1880s, preaching the gospel in spite of tremendous opposition and difficulties.[3] Through Höijer's tremendous courage and persistence the Swedish Missionary Society was founded in 1878. Dozens of pioneer missionaries were sent out over the following decades.

Wherever the Swedes went they seemed to encounter great success. In 1892 they established a work at the strategic city of Kashgar in western Xinjiang. For the first two years the mission had just one worker—Mehmed Shukri, the son of a Muslim *mullah* (religious teacher) from Erzerum, Turkey. Shukri, who changed his name to Aveteranian after his conversion to Christ, proved to be a highly effective evangelist. In 1894 four Swedish missionaries joined him, and a mission base was established. Just one year later they started



Nils Frederik Höijer — the great Swedish missionary pioneer.

a satellite work at Yarkant, about 140 miles (227 km) southeast of Kashgar. From the very beginning the Swedish mission faced great opposition. Local Muslims "were infuriated that there was a Christian presence in their sacred territory, and they refused to allow the missionaries to rent any residence. For an extended period they had to live in a garden area, and even then several riots occurred. Finally, the Muslims, together with the Chinese authorities, incited a riot at Easter in 1899."[4]

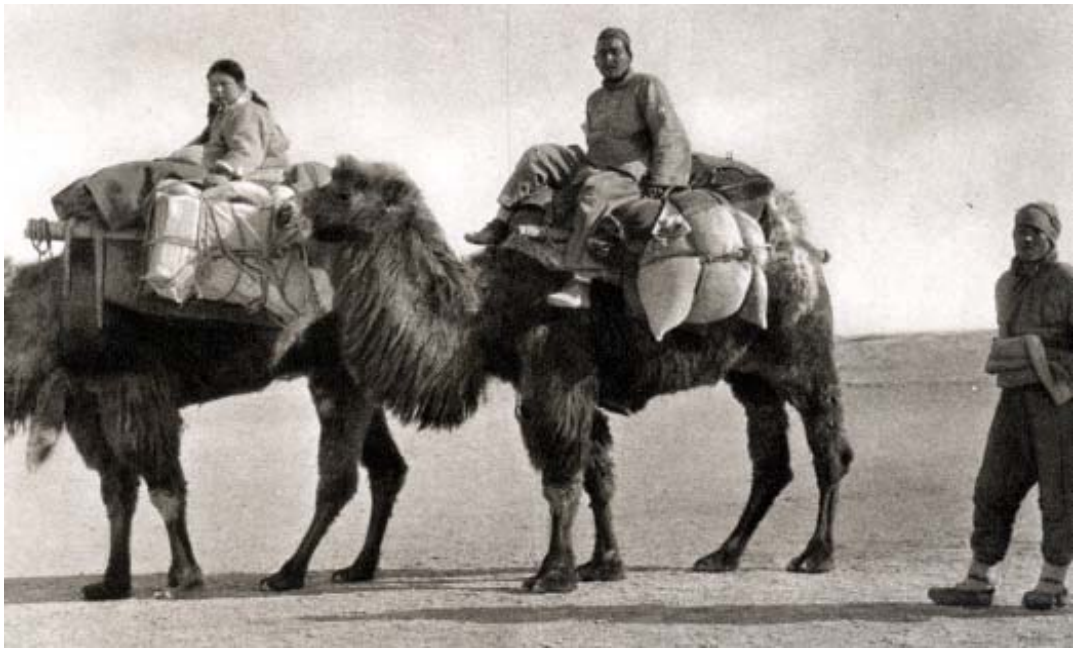
The Swedes overcame incessant opposition, and succeeded where no other Protestant mission had done before.

Dozens of Muslims gave their lives to Jesus Christ. Trouble was never far away for the missionaries. One missionary and his converts were beaten and dragged through the streets of Yarkant. The Swedes remained at their post, and gradually won over many of the local people with their godly lives and sacrificial service. By 1926 more than 28,000 people had received treatment at the various Christian medical centres established throughout the region. The missionaries provided food during famines, clothed the poor, ran orphanages, and established ten schools. The Bible was translated into Uygur, and the missionaries printed and distributed copious amounts of Christian literature, boldly handing some of it to *mullahs* and other Islamic clerics. One report says that "During the years between 1919 and 1939 the adult communicant members of the Christian church of the country grew to number over 200, almost every one a convert from Islam; and if their children be included the Christian community had about 500 members."[5]

In April 1933 an armed Muslim faction from Khotan took control of Kashgar, Yarkant, and the other towns south of the Taklimakan Desert. Hundreds of Chinese were massacred in the assault, while their wives and daughters were captured and used as sex-slaves or forcibly married off to the deviant attackers, who gained control over most of Xinjiang and proclaimed the Turkish-Islamic Republic



Christians outside the church at Kashgar in the early 1930s. All of the believers were converts from Islam, and most were slaughtered by Muslims in 1933. There has been no visible church among the Muslims in Xinjiang to this day.



Chinese evangelists crossing the Taklimakan Desert in the 1940s.

of Eastern Turkestan. One of their first objectives was to get rid of the Christians at Kashgar, Yarkant, and the other places the gospel had taken hold.[6]

On April 27th the Khotan leader, Abdullah Khan, ordered the Swedish missionary Nyström to appear before him. Nyström was in charge of the mission's medical dispensary, which had helped thousands of people in Yarkant and surrounding districts. Nyström went to see Abdullah with his colleagues Arell and Hermansson. After being forced to wait a long time at the governor's mansion,

"The Emir himself came into the room, holding a handkerchief to his nose (to filter the air contaminated by Christian breath). He began to ask such questions as 'You intended no doubt to use these poisons [medicine] to harm me and my followers?' Then he yelled, 'It is my duty, according to our law, to put you to death because by your preaching you have destroyed the faith of some of us! Out with you—bind them."[7]

After Nyström was bound, the cowardly Abdullah Khan personally struck the defenseless missionary. A group of soldiers armed with rifles, swords, and clubs, told the three missionaries to prepare for instant death. Abdullah Khan raised his sword and was about to start the slaughter when an aide sprang forward and begged for the missionaries' lives. They narrowly escaped, and were soon expelled from Xinjiang and returned to Sweden via Russia. Three other missionaries were allowed to remain in Xinjiang for a short time, before they were expelled across the Karokoram Pass into Pakistan.

After dealing with the missionaries, the cruel tyrant focused his energies on the local Christians, demonstrating a particular hatred toward all those who had converted from a Muslim background. The male

Christians were beaten and thrown into prison at Yarkant and Kashgar. Some were beheaded, while others perished from the terrible tortures. The female Christians (including girls as young as 11) were forced to become wives of Muslim men. One of the girls later said, "We were called unbelievers, dogs, birds of ill-omen, scum, swine, a shame to our people and accursed. They said, 'You must realize that this is being done to save you from damnation. Now say that you will leave your rebellious ways and come back to the faith which was yours in the cradle and which you should never have left.'"[8]

None of the Christian girls denounced their faith. **At least 100 Christian men** suffered martyrdom for their stand for Jesus Christ. Numbered among those who paid the ultimate price for their faith were:

Hassan Akhond, who was 20-years-old. A Muslim who was later released from prison and told how Hassan's soothing voice had often calmed the nerves of the prisoners at night as he sang hymns to Jesus. One night they heard him "faintly singing, 'Loved with Everlasting Love,' in Uygur. The next two nights [Hassan's] chain dragged, but after that was silence and they concluded he had died of starvation."[9]

Almost all of the Christians imprisoned at Kashgar died or were put to death. The martyrs included **Khelil Akhond**, **Liu Losi** the principal of the Chinese school, and many others. The Christians were herded into groups and then crammed into small, unventilated cells not large enough for each man to even sit down, "so that they all spent day and night on end on a half-standing, half-crouching position. The few who survived said they got aches and swelling in their knees and then in the upper part of the calves of the legs and in the thighs. Later mortification usually set in and death followed. These unheated cells were bitterly cold, especially for prisoners who had not been allowed to take with them more clothes than those they stood up in when arrested. A number had been sent to prison only half clad. Some of them were put to unmentionable tortures. Consequently, apart from those who were executed, someone died almost every night, and sometimes four or five corpses were taken out of the cells in the morning. After several years' imprisonment, when all the leading Christians were dead, the half dozen survivors were admonished with threats and released."[10]

The Church had suffered a horrific blow in Xinjiang. After the persecutions of the 1930s the few surviving ex-Muslim Christians faced the horrors of World War II, followed by more than half a century of Communist rule. To the present day there has never been such a wide-scale turning of Muslims to Christ in Xinjiang as there was when the Swedish Missionary Society was ministering there.

In the next issue we will look at the individual testimonies of several bold Xinjiang Christians who laid down their lives for Jesus in Xinjiang.

This article is included in Paul Hattaway's upcoming book, China's Christian Martyrs, which will contain more than 500 inspirational testimonies of those who died for Jesus Christ in China.

Asian Worker's Fund -
Helping the Gospel in Xinjiang



A Tajik woman from the border area between Xinjiang and Pakistan.

Among the many Asian evangelists and church planters we are blessed to be able to support financially through the Asian Worker's Fund are a whole team of more than ten Chinese and Uygur Christians who are reaching out to most of the Muslim groups living in Xinjiang. Facing tremendous opposition, these brave believers have forged ahead for several years, seeing ever-increasing numbers of Muslims come to faith in Jesus Christ. If you would like to give to the Asian worker's fund please consider filling out the yellow response form enclosed with this newsletter.

Please pray the Xinjiang team would be empowered to reach many Muslims for Jesus.

Pray thousands of Muslims in Xinjiang would soon hear and believe the Gospel.

Ask God to glorify His Name throughout every community in Xinjiang.

Notes

[1] Vincent Cronin, *The Wise Man from the West*, 246.
[2] Abbe Huc, *Christianity in China, Tartary, and Thibet*, 195.
[3] An excellent English-language book about Höijer's life and ministry is Ann-Charlotte Fritzon, *Passion for the Impossible–the Life of the Pioneer Nils Fredrik Höijer.*
[4] Ralph Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China*, 169.
[5] R. O. Wingate, *The Steep Ascent: The Story of the Christian Church in Turkestan*, 10.
[6] See Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949.*
[7] Wingate, *The Steep Ascent,* 16.
[8] Wingate, *The Steep Ascent,* 19.
[9] Wingate, *The Steep Ascent,* 24.
[10] Wingate, *The Steep Ascent,* 24-25.

God Wonderfully Intervenes!

Here at Asia Harvest it has always been our desire to act as a link between the Church in Asia and believers around the world. We marvel at the way many people we have yet to meet in person have been moved by the Holy Spirit to pray and participate in the work. One such couple are Earl and Judy, who live in Tennessee. They have been specifically praying for and supporting the Asian Worker's Fund team working in Tirap in the remote northeast India state of Arunachal Pradesh. Recently Earl emailed us, saying: *"An odd thing happened to my wife, around the Resurrection season. As she got up to do a prayer vigil in the middle of the night, TIRAP came intensely into her mind. So she prayed for the workers and the work there. It was brought to her attention for a couple of days afterwards, but not quite so intensely. Do you have any word of what might have been happening there?"*

We immediately contacted the team leader of the work in Tirap and were told: ***"This is really true because a Hindu gang tried to kill one of our team members! They smashed his motor car, but the Lord intervened and the gang leader did not kill him. About two weeks later the gang leader returned and ask for forgiveness and decided to follow Jesus! He even paid him so he could repair his vehicle. The entire family of the gang leader came to Jesus and our workers have baptized them. Please let Earl and Judy know that their prayers have really worked!"***

After hearing this news, Earl and Judy excitedly wrote, *"It is unbelievably encouraging to our hearts! And, it came at just the time we badly needed it, too. We rejoiced for hours and the oppression that had been hounding us was put to flight, I can assure you! The hearty report caused us to increase the tempo of our prayers for those dear front-line missionaries. They are surely doing the work we have never done. May The Lord bless them... and you, too, Asia Harvest, for how would we have known who or what to pray for, if not for your labor of love in His Camp? We are encouraging our local brethren to PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. The spiritual battles are needing to be fought so as to give these front-line missionaries prayer support. If we cannot go, we can still join with them in this manner."*

CHINA CHILDREN'S PROJECT

Current Total: 1,508 Sunday School Teachers Trained and Equipped.

Thank you for the generous response to this strategic project to reach China's children for Christ. Each teacher, on average, is expected to teach 100 children and establish them in the Word of God. Teachers attending the training have their travel costs covered, and a set of materials given to them for free. These materials include a children's Bible, teacher's manual, 18 teaching books with visual aids, 15 hours of VCD (video cassette disc) teaching, and six CDs of 'Children's Heavenly Songs'. **The total cost of $47 per set** includes printing and production, and training expenses.