



The Bridge Report

SARGON DANIALI

REBUILDING THE ANCIENT RUINS

In prior issues, we have introduced **Sargon Dani-ali** and his ministry to you. For newer readers, he is Assyrian, born and raised in Iran. In 1980, right out of high school, while Khomeini's cultural revolution was raging, Sargon was born again. Due to the pressures and persecution of being a believer in Christ in Iran, upon graduation at the university, he was denied a Diploma in spite of excellent grades, and told he would not be permitted to hold a teaching position in any public school. In 1989, he left Iran and fled to Turkey to start a new life. In Istanbul, he began working among Iranian refugees, later among the thousands of Iraqis who, in 1990, fled the first Gulf War, and the Russians who came after the Iron Curtain fell. The result is that Sargon is today fluent in Assyrian, Persian, Russian, Turkish, and English, and partially fluent in Arabic.



“Then — one day, while I was resting after hard work, I heard a voice tell me to open up the Bible and read. I opened up to Ezekiel 36, and as I began reading, I knew it was a word from the Lord to me concerning my country and other countries in the grip of Islam — v.2: ‘The enemy has said of you, ‘aha!’ The ancient heights have become my possession ...’ vs. 33—35: ‘this is what the Sovereign Lord says, ‘On the day that I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘That land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden, the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited’.

*“As I was reading, the presence of God filled my room. I knelt down and received revelation in my heart that God would be taking back the territories that once belonged to the ancient Christians in the first century A.D., but are now inhabited by Muslims. Those ancient lands which are now under the heavy rule of Islam, from China to Morocco, will be receiving the Gospel again, and I will be partaking in this renewal. **Cont. on p. 2***

A HISTORY OF THE ASSYRIAN PEOPLE



Assyrians are a Semitic people indigenous to Mesopotamia. They are Mediterranean Caucasians, ethnically distinct from today’s Arabs and Jews, although some believe Abraham of the Old Testament might have been Assyrian. The heartland of the ancient Assyria from which so much of the emerging Near East came to be controlled, spans four countries: **Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq**, as far as app. 100 miles south of Kirkuk.

There is archeological evidence that the Assyrian city of **Nineveh** (mentioned in the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament) was located in today’s Northern Iraq and might have been inhabited as far back as 5000 B.C.. By 2500 B.C., two other thriving Assyrian cities, **Ashur** and **Arbel** had been built, from which the fundamentals of our civilization were developed. Due to its rich soil, Arbel was

one of the very earliest permanent agricultural settlements.

The Assyrian Empires enjoyed eighteen hundred years BC of prosperous years while making a profound and lasting impact on the Near East. Before the Assyrian hegemony came to an end, the Assyrians would bring the highest civilization to the then known world. From the Caspian Sea to Cyprus, from Turkey to Egypt, Assyrian imperial expansion would bring nomadic and barbaric communities into the Assyrian sphere and bestow upon them the manifold gifts of civilization.

The Assyrian Empire came to an end in 612 B.C. when the Babylonians joined the Medes and conquered the city of Nineveh, massacred the king, and took possession of the city. The Assyrian people survived the loss of their state, and remained mostly inconspicuous for the next 600 years.

Sargon... Cont. from p. 1

The oldest church in China was established in 86 A.D.; the first official church in Iran was established in 180 A.D.. There is a tomb in my home village that states, “This man died when Jesus was six years old.” Ezekiel prophesied this to Israel and God’s people — likewise I am to prophesize this to the ancient lands.“

Shortly thereafter, a Bridge team visiting Istanbul, met Sargon. We became friends and felt led to send him to minister to the Turkish-speaking ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. During his fifteen years there, he married a wonderful woman, Nadia (graduate of Agape Bible school), has fathered four children, worked among the Afghan refugees, served as Pastor, helped establish a rehab center and a women’s shelter, **Cont. on page 6**



The symbol of the Assyrian Church

The Assyrian Church of the East was established in the first century in Edessa, a small kingdom squeezed between the Roman and Parthian Empires. The believers in Edessa had four Gospels in Aramaic - their native language - and their teaching of those scriptures soon spread throughout the then Persian Empire.

The persecution of the Christians, launched in the first Century by Nero, Emperor of Rome, quickly spread throughout the whole Roman Empire and scattered the young church. As thousands of Christians were martyred, a stream of believers fled and sought refuge in Persia (today's Iran) where they were warmly welcomed by the Assyrian believers there. They fanned out along the Silk Road and brought their faith with them which they readily shared with others. Churches began to grow throughout Asia, and the Gospel prospered.

The Assyrian church was represented at the Church Council in Nicaea in 325 A.D. where the basic doctrines of the Christian faith (the deity of Christ, the Trinity, etc.) were agreed upon by the church leaders.

A century later, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., a serious dispute arose among its leaders. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria could not agree on two Biblical doctrines; firstly, the nature of Christ (Nestorius claimed Jesus had two separate natures within Himself, whereas Cyril maintained that Jesus was interchangeably perfect God and perfect man within a triune Godhead (a doctrine to which our present evangelical church adheres); secondly, the use of the term "Mother of God" in reference to the virgin Mary, instead of "Mother of Jesus".

The outcome of the Council, rife with power struggles and political expediency, resulted in Nestorius being branded as a heretic by Cyril and removed as Patriarch by the Council. His teaching was banned from the church. He fled to Egypt where he resided till his death. This marked the beginning of the estrangement which led to the split between the West Catholic church, seated in Rome with the Pope as head, and the East Orthodox church, less centralized in structure, that spread throughout the Eastern empires.

The Assyrian church did not partake in this conflict. They continued to adhere to the doctrines stated in the Nicaea Statement of Faith, while rejecting Nestorius' teaching. Nevertheless, the church maintained a good relationship with Nestorius after his expulsion. In an effort to marginalize the Assyrian church, the Roman church leaders began interchangeably to call it the Nestorian church, with the result that the powerful Assyrian church history has largely been ignored in the West.

The Western church has largely been unaware of one of the largest and most expansive missionary efforts ever done! It was simply because it was effectuated by the believers of the East church and obscured by the church conflict at the time, thus never reached the consciousness of the church historians in the West: **During the first millennium, the Assyrian church brought the Christian faith to the Middle East and the entire Asian continent!**

It is a significant fact for us from the West, who are concerned about reaching the 10-40 Window for Christ, to know that many of the nations who are presently dominated by the five major world religions, have a Christian heritage reaching back almost two millennia! We have been erroneously taught that, apart from a few brave pioneer missionaries in the 18th and 19th century in the likes of Taylor and Carey, these nations have been void of the Light of the Gospel.

To give justice to this amazing missionary effort, I have chosen (with permission) to quote excerpts from www.nestorian.org:

"The headquarters of the church was at a strategic place on both banks of the River Tigris, the center of travel between Europe and Asia. By the middle of the sixth century, the church had spread into Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Ceylon, China, and Mongolia.

This church had great missionaries. They expanded rapidly into Asia



Assyrian church in the city of Ankawa, Iraq

which was widely covered by their impact. They had no funds to support their mission stations financially; there were no mission boards to direct their activities like Western missionaries of later days who followed the colonial Empires.

*It is time to hear from our long-forgotten past the thrilling story of our missionary enterprise during the early centuries of the Christian era. These Christians did not have great material means, nor were they able to engage in planning great missionary strategies computerized and perfected in world conferences, to win the world in our time. They carried the torch of the Gospel all across the vast Asian continent at the cost of great personal suffering and often martyrdom, for untold numbers of laymen and clergy alike were led by the Holy Spirit to push the frontiers of the Kingdom of God far and wide. **They went to preach, teach, and cure. At the end of the eleventh century, this church was the single largest Christian denomination at that time.***

Assyrian missionaries were working from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Ocean,

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First... Cont. from p. 4 from the Black Sea to Siberia, from the Arabian Sea to the Indian Ocean. Asia Minor, Cyprus, Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, India, China, Japan, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Turkistan — all had missions where the Gospel was taught by zealous workers of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Church historian John Stewart writes:

‘Whole peoples with their rulers had become Christians and it seems certain that there were few places in all Asia that were not reached at some time or another ‘

The missionaries included bishops, priests, monks, and deacons. It is said about these men — the messengers of the King of kings — that they were as gentle as lambs and unassuming, but courageous and fearless with the hearts of lions. They sacrificed life and health in unknown lands and did their work among the heathen with faith and trust in God.

The missionaries traveled on foot; they had sandals on their feet, a staff in their hands, and carried a basket on their backs, and in the basket were the Holy Writ and the Cross. They took the road over deep rivers and high mountains thousands of miles. On their way they met many heathen ethnic groups and preached

to them the Gospel of Christ. The heathens who worshipped idols were told about the Savior who took their sins upon Himself and saved them. They sowed the good seed in the field, worked zealously and won many souls among them.

The work of the mission became a blessing to the nations, as the missionaries influenced greatly those among whom they worked. They went to the palaces of the kings and to the cottages of the poor. Kings and princes heard the words about the love of Christ; they believed, and their subjects followed their princes. With their own hands, they destroyed the temples of their idols; those that they had formerly worshipped and from whom they hoped to get help and comfort. Great gifts were given to the missionaries, and they distributed everything given them in the best way to serve the spreading of the words of Christ, and many souls were won”.

In the 11th century, the Muslim Kalif Alhakim, charged through the Middle East and parts of Asia, burned 30,000 churches and missions and massacred untold number of believers. In 1380, Tamerlane, a cruel warlord from Central Asia whose ambition was to re-conquer and re-establish Genghis Kahn’s Mongol Empire, invaded most of the territories won for the Gospel with his barbaric horsemen hordes. A mixture of Adolph Hitler and Saddam Hussein, Tamerlane killed, burned and looted his way through Asia and the Middle East. A small remnant of believers took refuge in the mountains of Iraq and Iran, where there are still active Assyrian churches today. **The light of the Gospel dimmed, and the Dark Ages set in.**



In June 2006, I spent several days with Sargon Daniali and his family while visiting Almaty, Kazakhstan. He began to share a vision for his life that we had spoken of earlier, that by then was more in focus: tracing the ancient Assyrian Church of the East in predominantly Muslim countries, then re-establishing beachheads on those ruins for the Gospel by sending out well-equipped missionaries, trained in Central Asia, to those places. With others, he was in the planning stage of establishing a Bible training school in Almaty for Silk Road missionaries .

When I visited Sargon and his family again this last June, the new mission school was in session with 15 students — men and women mature in faith and dedicated to the Lord and His work. I was impressed and humbled!

Presently, Sargon is visiting the United States, sharing his mission vision among the Assyrians living here, of which there is a population of 300—350,000, and app. 50 churches. *“You know the story of Elijah — God told him there were 7000 people in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1. King 19:18). I believe that the Lord will give me 7000 Assyrian partners who will assist in making this mission effort become a reality,” Sargon says.*

Please mark your memo **Kazakhstan Workers 1B** for financial gifts toward Sargon; **Silk Road Project** for gifts toward his mission. Please pray for him and his family!

Sargon... Cont. from p. 2 assisted in improving the life of handicapped orphans in a state run orphanage, and shared the Gospel with many Muslims. All of these things are good and have provided invaluable experience, and furthered the Kingdom of God; however, I have sensed that his involvement in these projects was not his ultimate call in life.

In the last three years, Sargon’s vision has been revitalized. In 2006, leaders from an inter-denominational group of churches — Methodist, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal — established, and are helping finance, a two year missionary training school in Almaty. Sargon was asked to join as Director and part time teacher. His goal is to equip and send out 100 missionaries along the Silk Road. Sargon’s vision is to go and find the ancient ruins of the Christian communities in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey, India, China, etc. where the prayers of the old saints and the blood of the martyrs are crying from the ground; then commission the missionaries to those places, bringing a fresh revival of the Gospel! The Muslim governments have laws that protect the ancient churches, as they are regarded part of their national heritage. By coming under the covering of these churches, the missionaries will have a freedom to live and work there as Christians, a privilege denied believers from the West who openly share their faith.

As the doors are closing on missionaries from the West, the doors are opening wide toward for the Eastern believers to again conquer the lands for Christ! Let us stand and proclaim with them, *“Lift up your heads, o you gates, lift them up you ancient doors, that the King of Glory many come in!”* (Psalm 24:9).



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