

The Gospel Among The Bedouin



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FOREWARD

In my recent stay in Germany, I was given a copy of a report about missionary work among bedouin tribesmen, mainly in the 1930s. This report was written by Friedrich Heinrici in 1958, in response to many requests and has recently been re-issued by his daughter and son-in-law, Esther and Martin Spangenberg, well-known to those of us who served in Lebanon with the (then) Lebanon Evangelical Mission (and before that, known as the British Syrian Mission).

Friedrich Heinrici (or Uncle Fritz, as he was often called) went to Palestine in 1913 with the German Carmel Mission, where he engaged in work among the Arabs. In 1932, he and his Arab colleagues found themselves with an opening to visit some bedouin tribesmen. The ensuing story I found quite fascinating and I think will be of interest not only to those of us who knew of Sheikh Rahal but also to anyone interested in evangelism among the Muslim bedouin. So I made an English version of the whole report, with the exception of one or two short sections.

Barbara Wilson

INTRODUCTION

Unforgettable to me are all those years in which I visited the expanses of the Syrian desert with our Arab evangelists, Pulus and Ibrahim, to proclaim the Gospel in the tents of Kedar. One has to have lived for a time in the black tents of the bedouin, eaten with them and drunk Arabic coffee, smelt the air of the encampment, and got to know the hearts of the rough sons of the desert, in order to properly understand the life of these descendants of Ishmael. My heart burns for these people. We want to ask God also for Ishmael, that He will show mercy to this race.

Who are the bedouin? Where do they come from? Where and how do they live? The word “*bedouin*” is synonymous with “*desert-dweller*”. They spin threads out of goatshair which, woven together in primitive fashion in the open air, provide the material for their tents. These tents joined together form the black “*tents of Kedar*” (Psalm 120:5). There it says:

*“Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech,
that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!”*

These are the bedouin tents. And in verse 6, we read:

*“My soul hath long dwelt with him that
hateth peace.”*

These are the bedouin. They live a free, unrestricted life. They are usually gathered together in family groups or clans of 20-30 tent units. Separate tents adjoin such a group. The oldest grandfather is usually the Chief. Many such clans form a tribe and the chief of a tribe is called an Emir. A bedouin clan usually has 150-250 sheep and goats. Since very little grass grows in the desert, they are compelled to move the camp frequently and so one encampment is often two to three hours distant by camel from the next one. If the goats' milk cannot be taken to a town, yoghurt is made from the fresh milk. The milk is dripped through a cloth, then dried in the fierce sun. In lean times, diluted with water, this makes a good thirst-quenching drink. Butter is made, transported to the towns in large jars and sold there.

But the milk products were not enough for proper nutrition, so the bedouin moved near the villages. Woe to the farmer who didn't leave enough wheat and maize for them to glean! He had to reckon with the fact that the next year the bedouin would be the first to reap the crop, instead of the last and he himself must be satisfied with the gleanings. This is accepted custom and the farmer must take it into consideration. The gleanings give the bedouin their principal nutrition. It was like this in the area near Homs, around the River Orontes - maybe in other areas it was different.

In spite of these advantages of agriculture, the farmer was for the bedouin a second-class person. He contemptuously called the townsman “*Paleface*”. The bedouin is convinced that he is the true seed of Abraham through Ishmael, Hagar's son. Abraham was a bedouin, and he also will only be, and remain, a desert-dweller. In Homs, we met 200 bedouin living in stone houses at the edge of the town. They felt like prisoners. They had lost all their sheep and goats through disease and so the men had sought work in the town so they would not go hungry. A bedouin woman pointed to her tent in the corner of the room and said, “*Do you think that I'm going to stay within these stone walls? As soon as I have four goats, I shall go*

into the desert.” The desert is the bedouin’s natural environment. Here he feels free and doesn’t need to work. The women and children do the work. The man loves to ride his camel and go on raids. His eyes shine when he chases through the desert on a racing camel - no horse can keep up with him. He especially enjoys it when it is a question of a *“bride-raid.”*

The wedding is very simple. The young couple each stand on a stone, raise their hand towards heaven, and declare, *“I swear before God that you are my wife (husband) from this day.”* With that, they are married.

The life of the bedouin is very simple. Twice a day, they eat burghul and maize bread, and drink water. *“Burghul”* is wheat, boiled at harvest-time, dried in the sun and crushed. Like cooked rice, it provides a tasty and nourishing food. The bedouin eats with his hands and claims that his food is tastier thus than when eaten with European implements. At night, they sleep on straw mats on the ground.

For eight years, I spent several weeks each summer among the bedouin with my Arab evangelist, Ibrahim. It was a wonderful time, to be allowed to be among the bedouin as God’s messenger. Brother Ibrahim Doany was my teacher in everything and my protector and life-saver in many dangers. May the Lord repay him for his loyal service!

IN THE BEDOUIN ENCAMPMENT BETWEEN SAFED AND TIBERIAS

With my Arab evangelist, Pulus Doany, the brother of our missionary, Ibrahim, I was once for 30 days in the villages of Galilee. We shared the life of these simple people, sleeping on the ground on thin mattresses. Since we brought the joyful message of Jesus, we were welcomed both by Muslims and by the Arabs who belonged to the various church groups.

After 30 days of this ministry, we came to Safed, the city on the hill (Matthew 5:14b). There we had a very good Turkish bath. The next day we decided to ride to Tiberias on mules. On the way, we came upon a bedouin encampment.

In the chief’s tent sat 20-25 men round a large bowl of rice, on which lay a lump of mutton. They were eating the dry rice with their hands; the meat was torn into pieces by the chief and served to the individual participants. As we entered the tent, we called out the usual greeting, *“Salaam aleikum!”* (God’s peace be upon you.) The answer should be, *“U ileikum issalaam!”* (And peace upon you.)

The chief stood and greeted us with the words, *“May your day be happy!”* As this was not the appropriate answer, we knew that we had come to fanatical Muslims. We would need to be careful. The chief stepped nearer and asked, *“Why do you take the greeting of believers on your lips? You are unbelievers and have no right to it.”* I said that we had a perfect right to this greeting, for it was a greeting used by Abraham and also by the Lord Jesus, both of whom lived before Mohammed.

"No, you have no right", was his answer. Then he pointed to me and said to the Arab evangelist, *"Why do you bring this Jew into the land?"* I assured him that I was a German.

"Perhaps you are a German Jew! Know that we have the right and the duty to kill you," and he felt for his revolver.

I went towards him, seized his hand and said, *"Wait a moment! Today is the Jewish Sabbath. You know that the Jews may not make such a long journey on the Sabbath."*

He was puzzled. *"Are you really a German?"* As I answered in the affirmative, he said, *"And yet you come to us? Don't you know what we did to the retreating German soldiers after the war in 1918?"*

Now I knew about this from an eye-witness. The majority of the small group of German soldiers who had to cover the retreat were horribly murdered by bedouin. I said, *"We have nothing to do with war. We bring you a royal message."*

"Tell us the royal message," he replied.

Now Brother Pulus, my competent and gifted evangelist, sat down. I thought he would bring them the Gospel, but he preached to them about the Last Judgment, beginning, *"At the end of the days, God will open His books."* "Yes," rejoined the men, *"God will do that, and then you unbelievers will see where you stand."*

Pulus didn't let himself be disconcerted. He began talking about the Last Judgment in the following way: *"In the book is the name of a powerful bedouin chief. He is called Abdallah Ibn Elahseen. Much good is reported about him: He has helped the poor and he excels many in humility and nobility. But he has killed several people in raids and so he goes away into everlasting perdition!"*

He described a second and a third in similar manner. The men turned to each other saying, *"He means us - he's speaking about us!"*

I tugged at Pulus' robe and said in German, *"You'd better stop. You see, we'll be shot."*

But he continued for a while with similar comments. The men's eyes grew ever darker. All had laid their hands on their revolvers, waiting for the chief's command. When their excitement reached a high pitch - Pulus was holding them with his eyes - he suddenly changed his approach with the question, *"Does God will our destruction? - No, He provides a way of salvation."*

"Then why don't you speak about this way? Why do you torture us with treats of judgment?"

"I had to first make clear to you what you are. You are, without exception, murderers! If there is anyone among you who has not killed, let him raise his hand!" No hand was raised.

Suddenly one of them called out, *"We only kill if someone defends himself. Whoever lets himself be robbed will not be killed."*

“Well,” rejoined Pulus, “you are murderers, and deserve the judgment of God and I also.”

“You as well? Have you also killed?”

“No, I haven’t killed anyone. But, we human beings are all sold under sin. There is no one who is righteous, not one. Yet there is a way of salvation. Do you want to hear about it?”

“We want to hear!”

Now brother Pulus described the love of God in sending Jesus. The Lamb of God as sin-bearer stood before their eyes. His poetical way of speaking came now to its full development, especially helped by his eloquent, flowery Arabic speech. The men’s eyes widened, they loosened their hold on their revolvers, they gazed at the speaker. When he had portrayed Christ before their eyes for about half an hour, he wanted to stop. But the men called out, *“Please go on talking, for we’ve never heard anything like this before.”* He talked on for a while, then closed with a short prayer.

The chief came nearer, gave each of us his hand and said to Pulus, *“Thank you for this royal message. This news has moved me deeply. You have spoken so eloquently. Just say in simple words if these things are really true. Did Jesus really go to the cross for Muslims also and has He died also for our heavy sins? Please give us a clear explanation!”*

Saying this, he turned to his men, *“Men, I am deeply moved. What about you?”*

“You see the tears running down our cheeks,” was the reply.

Then the chief asked, *“Is it really true that all people, including the greatest sinners, can be saved and receive everlasting life?”*

“Yes, this is the truth for all people and for the biggest sinners, even for the worst criminals.”

“And how long have you known this message?”

Pulus answered, *“As a child, I learned the Bible stories in the English Mission School in Rafidia, near Nablus. Later I came to experience the Lord Jesus as my Savior in the American Evangelical school in Jerusalem. That was many years ago.”*

“And you came so late to us? Couldn’t you have come earlier? Please come often with this good news of the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We sat with them several more hours and answered their many questions. And we had to join them in their festive meal. Then they helped us onto our mules, and called out, *“Please come again soon.”*

Later we were able to go to them every summer for a few weeks throughout eight years, to bring them the glorious Gospel of the salvation of all men from sin and guilt through our Lord Jesus Christ.

VISITING BEDOUIN IN PRISON

In 1917, the English Foreign Minister, Arthur Balfour, promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine. After that, Jewish immigration increased. The simple Arabs received them gladly and it seemed to promise a friendly living together. Educated Muslims, however, perceived a threat to their homeland. Accordingly, articles appeared in the Arabic newspapers: *"The Jews are taking your land and bread!"* Such headings could be read in Arabic newspapers. The simple folk, however, continued to welcome the newcomers: *The Jews are our cousins. We shall get on well together."*

A German Jew with a fine, educated daughter said to me at that time, *"I wouldn't mind giving my daughter to an Arab in marriage."* The daughter, however, thought differently, and disappointed the father.

By 1927 came the well-known unrest and struggles between Arabs and Jews, which continued until 1939 and claimed many victims on both sides.

That we continued our journeys in the mission car is inconceivable to me today. The Arabs knew us. I only had to stretch my hand out of the car and we were allowed to go anywhere unhindered. But then our hour struck and made us more careful. It was on the way to Jerusalem. My son-in-law, missionary Spangenberg, was driving the car. Frau Glunkler, the architect, her son and daughter and I were the passengers. Shortly before Nablus, a lorry overtook us. The driver, an Arab, moved to the side, as though he wanted to let us pass. Hardly had we caught up with him when he turned left and we plunged up the embankment. Our vehicle turned upside down with the wheels in the air. I got a few scratches; the others were unhurt, but thrown into confusion in the car. The lorry rushed on. As the windows were smashed, it was difficult to get out. I shouted after the lorry as loudly as I could. The driver came back, and when he recognized me, said, *"I'm sorry, I thought you were Jews."* That experience was characteristic of the situation at that time.

As many bedouin had committed offenses against the Jews, they were brought to Akko (Acre) to the big regional jail. Here we held a service for the prisoners each Sunday. We had permission from the English in Jerusalem and so we had entry to all the cells. The police unlocked the cells and groups of prisoners accepted our friendly invitation to the service. We were able to use a large cell and the attendance varied from 100 to 150 and often more. The jail nearly always had 800 to 1,000 prisoners. They were almost all Muslims, there being only a few Christians among them.

One day, we found in one cell 20-25 bedouin who had been guilty of killing Jews. To our invitation to come to the service, they explained, *"No - we don't need you! Jews and Christians in this land must die."*

On the following Sunday, I stood outside the grating and read out Psalm 1 in Arabic. The men crowded round the grating and listened. When I had finished, my Arab colleague, Brother Ibrahim, gave an address.

"Those were good words", said one. *"Next Sunday you can come to us. We won't join with the others."*

The next Sunday, the cell was opened for us and we entered at our own risk. The officials remained outside and locked us in. Now we were in the middle of these murderers. But we preached the message of the Savior from the deepest sins. We had before us a quiet, listening congregation of criminals. Brother Ibrahim understood how to lead them to the fountain of life. When the time was up and we prepared to go, one of those bearded bedouin said, *"If you had brought this message to our tents, we wouldn't have killed the Jews and we wouldn't be here!"*

In one cell, there were 15 bedouin in red suits with chains on their hands and feet. Red is the sign that they are under sentence of death. They were not allowed to come to our service, but an entry into their cell was arranged for us. Here also the door was shut behind us and we were left alone. We sat down on the floor with them. They sat in front of us apathetically. They knew they were for the gallows, so they were indifferent to everything. But Brother Ibrahim understood how to draw them out of their apathy. He brought them the Gospel in such a lively manner that soon the sunken heads were raised. A message for murderers - cancellation of all guilt - was that credible? Eternal life, heavenly glory for all?

"Also for us murderers?" asked one.

"For all who believe in Jesus. Eternal life for all people who want to believe."

"But our guilt, I have killed three."

"And I four."

"And I ," another broke into tears. *"Is it true? Could we really have eternal life? Everything can be forgiven us?"*

After several Sundays, they asked for a primer. They wanted to learn to read. We brought 150 primers into the prison. Whoever could already read became the teacher. When they had learned this art, they asked for Bibles.

One day, a crate containing 100 Arabic Bibles arrived from Beirut. Only after some time did I learn that a German expatriate had ordered these Bibles for prisoners. I thank him today for this valuable mission service. Through the reading of the Bible, Muslims have come to faith.

After some weeks - the period of remand lasted a long time - a bedouin asked, *"We have read, 'Go into the world'. Shouldn't you also have come to us?"*

"Yes, we should have come to you. The message is for all people."

"Why didn't you come? Why did you hold back this good news from us? If this good news had been preached in our tents, we would not have killed the Jews, and we would not be sitting in prison. Won't you be guilty when we are hanged?"

This reproach moved us deeply. We asked God for a way to the bedouin in the region of the Orontes near Baalbek and Homs and around Damascus. We could have gone to them but didn't know if we would have come back alive. Besides, we already had a full timetable. The bedouin are rough fellows. Travelers are gladly welcomed but not missionaries, who

must talk about the truth. *“Kill the unbelievers, wherever you find them,”* is a clear command of Islam, even if today they are more careful. So we laid this matter before God and asked for a guide to lead us.

In the prison, we found six cells for the worst criminals. They were not allowed to come to us but we had permission to enter every single cell. Here also we were shut in. The officials stood outside the grating and were supposed to protect us. We had a long talk with one man who had killed ten Jews and after he had heard the Gospel, guilt weighed heavily in him.

“Will the ten Jews whom I have killed live again if I believe?”

“No.”

“Then my faith would be no good to me. Your message may be good for Christians but for us Muslims it is worthless. However, please come and see me, although I can’t believe. No one may visit me, the hardened criminal; only you are allowed to come. For two packets of cigarettes, I killed ten innocent Jews! If only I would undo that dead!”

Like this, sighing, he would speak to me. Later he asked me for a New Testament.

Weeks went by. Then one Sunday he stood at the grating, raised his arms with the heavy chains, and called out, *“Friend, I have received light! I can now believe that Jesus Christ has atoned for my onerous sins on the cross of Golgotha. This enlightenment came to me this morning.”*

When he stood before the gallows, he asked for a moment of quiet. The English commandant nodded, also the two Muslim officers. Then he folded his hands and said, *“Lord Jesus, I thank you that you sent these men to me with the Gospel. Forgive me my great sins and receive me into your Kingdom.”* Then his sentence was carried out. After that, the two Muslim officers came by turns to the services. They asked for Bibles. When we came, they were holding the Bibles under their arms, and had a host of questions. They also are in God’s hand. In those troubled times between the two world wars, we spoke to a large number of men in red suits. Many, before going to the gallows, shook hands, saying, *We don’t want to know anything more about the Muslim heaven* (it is similar to the old German Valhalla - another earthly life, living off the fat of the land). *“We want to be with you, in the presence of Jesus.”* Six of them publicly confessed Jesus before their death. Because of this experience, we know that *“The Gospel to the Muslims!”* is the watchword of the moment.

But the reproach of these bedouin - *“Won’t you be guilty when we are hanged?”* - left us no rest. We prayed God to send us a guide. At our stations, it was earnestly prayed for. After some months, suddenly one evening there stood before me a bedouin chief. In his girdle he had a revolver and ammunition and over his shoulder a rifle. He looked like a robber chief and asked briskly, *“Are you Heinrici?”* When I told him I was, he said, *“The Lord Jesus sends me to you - you must instruct me!”*

Now we had already experienced several disappointments with Muslims and we needed to be extremely careful. To what extent we had to reckon with betrayal and dubious motives, a few examples will show.

One day, a man came weeping. He must become a Christian, for he needed the forgiveness of sins. He had heard us preach in the prison in Akko and it was clear to him that Christian teaching contained the truth. After an hour's conversation, the reason for his request came out, *"I have two Muslim wives, but now I love a Christian girl, so I need to be baptized. She doesn't need to know that I have two wives."* (Mohammed gave permission for every Muslim to have four wives; for him, the prophet, God had allowed 11 wives and two concubines.) With that, the case was settled!

Later came another one who absolutely must become a Christian. After a long discussion, he said, *"I see that you want to know my secret motive. I want to be a Christian so that I can drink alcohol."* A remarkable reason! Such cases were easy to settle. But we also got involved in other situations. We will mention one such case.

We had rented a room to the east of Haifa. Brother Iskander, my second Arab evangelist, used to hold a Bible study there every Wednesday afternoon. Several Muslims appeared to be enthusiastic listeners. One day, a Muslim came in and sat down on one of the front seats. As Iskander was preaching about the only way of salvation from sin and guilt in Jesus Christ, he stood up and gave Iskander a resounding blow on the ear, so that the weak brother staggered and fell. With help from the men, Iskander stood up and said, *"The Lord Jesus said, 'If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'" (Matthew 5:39)* The attacker prepared for the second blow, but some men jumped in between and held him back. Then he fell at Iskander's feet and said, *"Forgive me - I wanted to test you!"*

Another day, he came to me in the evening at our headquarters in West Haifa. He wanted to know how to find the verse about hitting the cheek. When he had read it, he asked for instruction. He insisted that he must be an evangelist. Brother Iskander instructed him faithfully. When he pressed for baptism after some weeks, I asked for a postponement.

I contacted a former pupil from the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem, who later studied music in Vienna and Berlin and asked him to make enquiries to the east of Haifa and find out why this man wanted to become a Christian. After three days he said, *"Beware! This man is receiving money from influential Muslims. He is to get us to baptize him so that they can write against us in the newspapers."*

When after several days the man came to me to talk about his baptism. I confronted him with the facts of the case and explained, *"You can deceive us men, but God is not deceived."* At first, he was frightened but then he promised to refuse all payments. He knew, he said, that only in Jesus Christ could one have the forgiveness of sins. He wanted to preach this good news, he wanted to be an evangelist. After some weeks, my friend came and reported that the man was still taking payments.

One day, the Muslim stood once more in front of me. I said. *"My friend, if you don't give up this way, the hand of God will strike you."* He turned and left but soon came back and screamed the Muslim witness in my ear, *"There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet!"* Then he went on to shout. *"But Jesus Christ is the Savior from sin and guilt!"* He was mentally disturbed. The hand of God had stricken him. Soon after that, he died in a state of mental derangement. This made a deep impression on the Muslims. When later I went to the Mayor of Haifa, Hassan Bek, and he saw me in the doorway, he rose from his seat, came towards me with outstretched arms and asked, *"How can I help you, my friend?"*

We had no more trouble from that side.

Because of such experiences, I said to the bedouin Emir, *"If the Lord Jesus has sent you, then give him a warm greeting, and He Himself will instruct you."*

"You don't want to?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know what motivates you. Perhaps you want to drink alcohol, or marry a Christian, or set a trap for us."

"You think so meanly of an Emir? Shame on you! I will tell you why I have come to you. I have come to know serious Christians in Damascus, Baalbek, Beirut, Homs, Aleppo; I was also in Antioch once. I found that serious Christians have something which we don't know about. You are so kind. We, on the other hand, are rough fellows. I have been thinking about that. Should Christians have more than we do? No, was my answer. We in Islam have the sole truth. However, when I meditated upon my bed, people with shining faces appeared before my inner eyes. I became more and more sure they must have something better. One night I said, O God, if there is a better religion than that in the Qu'ran, then show it to me! In a dream, I heard a voice say, Go to Palestine, there someone will tell you what to do. When I awoke, I laughed - I don't want to go to Palestine, for the Jews are there! But after a few days came the second summons, then the third. I set out on the road and came via Damascus to Tiberias. There someone took me to Dr. Christie, the Scottish Missionary to the Jews. This gentleman sent me to you. He says to you that you have two Arab evangelists, which he, in his mission to Jews, doesn't have, so one of them could instruct me."

With brother Ibrahim, whom he had already visited, he came into our rest home on Carmel and was instructed. I was often there. After 14 days, he came to me in Haifa, kissed me on the cheeks and said, *"Brother, now I have come to know the Lord Jesus. I must go and tell my 2,000 bedouin who Jesus is."*

So he rode off. After several weeks, he came again and was further instructed, and then again. After about a year, he came to my study one evening, fell on his knees and cried, *"Pray with me!"* I prayed with him. Then he jumped up and pointed to the Arabic Bible, *"Read! You know that I can't read."* Then he knelt again, asking me to pray with him. In between he cried out, *"I believe in Him! Even if they kill me, I shall believe in Him."*

More than an hour passed, reading and praying by turns. I feared for his reason and couldn't understand why he was so excited. At last, he knelt down once more and prayed as only a bedouin can, *"Lord Jesus, you know that in Nablus I confessed your name, and told the Muslims that we must believe in you. They gripped my hands, and others punched me with their fists, until the English police saved me, and I could come close to this brother. Now I say to you in front of this brother, even if they beat me to death, I believe in you. Have you understood? Amen."*

The next day, he came to the Carmel home at two o'clock in the afternoon and said, *"I*

apologize. I must have seemed mad yesterday. But think - a free bedouin is beaten by miserable palefaces! I would have most liked to shoot them but I couldn't use my revolver and today I am glad. Since coming to know the Lord Jesus, I have sworn not to shoot anymore men." Then he became completely quiet, looked at me in a friendly way and said, *"You and Brother Ibrahim must come to us. What I can learn is too little. My bedouin ask questions and I can't answer them."*

I thought over the cost of the long journey and replied, *"You can travel on any bus without charge. If they don't take you, they fear being attacked and robbed. But I must pay and my mission cashbox is empty. I have no money."*

"You are worried about money?" he answered. *"The whole world belongs to God, and if God wants my 2,000 bedouin to meet the Lord Jesus, then you must come, whether you want to or not!"*

I said to the Emir, *"If God enables me to, I will come."*

He turned and said, *"God will enable you to, I know it."*

I had to think that the man had more faith than I had. We had asked God to give us a guide to the bedouin. Now he stood before me. He answered for us with his life and I was worried about money. I felt ashamed before this simple man of nature. A missionary - above all among the bedouin - should never be worried about money, never worry about how he will manage. He must reckon only with the living God, go on God's mission and preach the glorious Gospel. If he starts looking at other things, then it is better for him to gather his possessions together and go home.

I wrote to a few friends of the mission in Germany and Switzerland, and through them God gave the means for the bedouin trip. For eight years, I was able to spend several weeks each summer among them with Brother Ibrahim. The last time was in 1938. There we ate crushed wheat and maize bread twice a day, and drank water from the Orontes, and were healthier than usual. God put His blessing upon bread and water. Missionaries themselves should not have to worry about whether they have at least bread and water. That is the business of the friends of the mission, the church of Jesus. God has promised, *"His bread will be given him, his water will be sure."* (Isaiah 33:16)

SHEIKH RAHAL EMIR OF THE 'ABU JEBEL' TRIBE

Some experiences in his tribe

The aforementioned Emir is our friend Sheikh Rahal. *"Rahal"* means *"wanderer"*. It is not possible to relate all our experiences in his tribe but some of the most important will be described.

The first journey we made to the Orontes was in 1932. In our Carmel home, we had as

guest a missionary from China, Sister Charlotte Hoff. A few days before our departure, she came to me and said, *“Brother Heinrich, I have been commissioned by the Lord to go with you to the bedouin.”*

I was shocked. We couldn't take a sister of over 70 years into those primitive conditions. Besides, it contravened every oriental custom for a foreign woman, even if it was an elderly lady, to stay among the bedouin for any length of time. I did what I could to point out to her that the journey was impossible. But she continued to say, *“The Savior has asked me to go.”* Others tried to talk her out of it, but without success.

We made the first stop in Baalbek. We stayed there with the English ladies of the British Syrian mission. The English ladies were not a little astonished when they saw Sister Hoff and heard about our plans. They asked the sister to stay with them until we returned from the bedouin. But all their objections failed. She kept to her story - the Savior had given her permission.

The next day, the English missionaries gave us their tent with two camp beds and so we went on our way, first by train in the direction of Homs, to Khasr Station, from where the Emir would take us by donkey. When the Sheikh saw the elderly lady, he clapped his hands over his head. *“She may not come with us,”* was his energetic command. *“I cannot do with her among the bedouin. In one hour, a train comes from Homs and she must go back. I am the chief, and I won't tolerate a European woman in my camp.”*

When these words were clearly translated to her, Sister Hoff declared, *“If he is prince of this tribe, so is the Lord Jesus above him a greater and more powerful prince, and the Lord Jesus has given me permission to go to the bedouin.”*

The Emir appeared to give way, but I saw from his face that he still had a trump card to play. A donkey with a wobbly saddle was brought forward. Before she could say *‘Jack Robinson!’*, the Sheikh had lifted her onto the donkey. When he let go, she couldn't hold on, and was about to fall off, together with the wobbly saddle. The Sheikh caught her with the words, *“You see! you can't ride; so you will stay here. We need more than two hours to get to my encampment, and you couldn't do that on foot. We will wait until the train comes, and then you'll go back to Baalbek.”*

Now Sister Hoff wanted to go on foot. However, Sheikh Rahal brought another donkey with a firm saddle. The sister couldn't ride alone without help. Friend Rahal and I had to hold her on each side. One man led the donkey and another urged it on. So we came to the camp in about two hours.

The white tent of the English missionaries stood out against the black *“tents of Kedar”*, and became the meeting point of the bedouin women. Since Sister Hoff knew no Arabic, she folded her hands and pointed upwards. The women understood well. They said to one another, *“The lady is praying.”* All day long, women sat with her; they remained silent, so as not to disturb the praying sister.

Brother Ibrahim spoke during the day in the individual tents. In the evening, there were big meetings in the open air, in which the women also took part. Time and again, one heard from the women, *“The lady is praying.”* Brother Ibrahim spoke with full power and great joy.

On the third night, a revival broke out. Until morning, Brother Ibrahim was hearing confessions. Stolen goods were returned. With tears, the bedouin asked for intercession. No doubt the underlying cause lay with the praying woman in the tent. The Sheikh was deeply moved. He asked the sister to forgive him that he hadn't wanted to bring her. We thanked God for His wonderful leading.

Among the bedouin, it is the custom not to lay claim to hospitality for longer than three days. The next clan is two to three hours by camel away. Early on the fourth day, the Sheikh's tent and ours were taken down and loaded onto camels. A number of men accompanied us. Rahal and I did not let the honorable service of accompanying and protecting the sister be taken away from us. Ibrahim, who had been talking all day long and many hours of the night, rode on a camel.

If we didn't experience such a powerful revival in the following groups, yet the hearts of the bedouin were really eager to hear the Word of God. In every encampment, Sister Hoff was surrounded by women. As they couldn't talk to one another, the women just sat still near her. If others entered chattering among themselves, the first group would say softly, *"Be quiet! She is praying."* We couldn't have been sent a better present than the praying sister. We looked upwards thankfully and prayed to be shown God's way. Even if we could not have said, like the 70 disciples, *"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name,"* (Luke 10:17), we were able to watch daily the effect of the testified Word of God. God has wonderfully heard the persistent prayers of our sister, who has long gone home.

Later my wife was able to go with us, and as she could talk to them, she was always surrounded by women. Sick women and girls let themselves be treated by her. The illnesses and wounds that were apparent among the women are indescribable. This Samaritan service among the women made the bedouin more open to the Gospel. There was no end to their questions. The evening meetings usually continued till midnight.

The Sheikh is also the judge in his tribe. On a later journey, Rahal had to give a judgment in a small encampment two hours away by camel. At the beginning, it was difficult for him to leave us alone for this night. He appointed four men to guard us. The men put their hands on their heads, saying, *"Ala Rassi"* (literally *"on my head"*, meaning *"I shall do what you ask."*). I scraped a hollow in the earth, put the straw mat in it and soon fell into a deep sleep. Brother Ibrahim, my loyal protector and teacher in the bedouin mission, had become uneasy, and kept watch. The four men kept a fire going at the edge of the tent, boiled their coffee (which, incidentally, to be properly made must be boiled for two hours), and chatted together. At about one o'clock in the morning - believing that we were asleep - they held the following conversation:

"Why have these men come?"

"They bring us new teaching."

"We don't need it," the third joined in.

The fourth said, *"Each two of us must tackle one man and strangle him, and rob him - for they have money - and throw him into the Orontes. When the Sheikh questions us in the morning, what do we know about where the men are?"*

Now Ibrahim sat up and looked the men sharply in the eye. They raised their hands and called out, *“Sleep! Nothing will happen to you.”* Then they put the fire out and lay down in the same tent; soon they were asleep.

At about three o'clock, Ibrahim woke me. But my eyes were full of sleep, so I turned over and said, *“You go to the stream to wash; I'll come later.”* Ibrahim saw that he must tell me something about the situation. Now I was just awake, and on the way to a tributary of the Orontes, he told me of his experience. After washing, I asked Ibrahim to remain there, as I wanted to speak to the men alone. So Ibrahim had a swim while I returned to the tent. The four men were sitting at the back of the tent waiting for us.

“Tonight we should have been strangled,” I began.

“No. How would we kill such good men?”

“If you deny it, then I must report it to the Sheikh.”

All four jumped up and shouted, *“Please, say nothing to the Emir! He will instantly shoot us!”*

Then one asked, *“Isn't it allowed to kill men in your Book?”*

“Men are created in the image of God. Whoever kills a man lays hands on the prototype, God.”

“Are Christians also created in the image of God?”

“All people, since flesh, blood and bones are alike in all. If one is brown, another black, or white - that plays no part.”

“So is it, according to your Book, not allowed to kill?”

“No, but you have killed!”

“In raids, and also in other cases, it occurs. But we kill only when someone defends himself. Whoever lets himself be robbed will not be killed.”

There followed a serious conversation with the four men, and when finally Ibrahim arrived, I gave him to understand in German that he mustn't say anything more about what happened in the night. I asked him to bring the Gospel message to them. He did it as though he knew nothing of the happenings of the night. The clear and living testimony so gripped the men that they listened without moving. Since then, they had accompanied us for weeks, and led our riding camels. They always wanted to be present when this strange Savior was being talked about. In later years, we came no more into such danger among the bedouin. The Gospel had gradually transformed them.

One late summer day, after some years of regular visitation work among the bedouin, Sheikh Rahal stood before us in the Mission house in Haifa with three of his children. There was a little girl of 4, Zita; one of 6, Shaha; and a boy, Ahmed, of 8 or 9. They were to be put in the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. After my wife had cleansed them from vermin, bathed

them, and dressed them in new clothes, they played merrily in our Mission compound, for they were our guests for several days. I had already spoken to Director Schneller. After some hesitation, in the face of the difficult character of the bedouin, Herr Schneller declared himself ready to take them. We paid six pounds per annum for each child. For that they received food, clothing and education, and later pocket money also. We could not have had a cheaper education for our bedouin children. They stayed for years in this good school. Later, the two girls learned housekeeping.

Ahmed was educated to be a teacher and passed the examination with a "very good". In the second world war, he turned to Arab politics, in which he is still involved today. During my internment between Haifa and Nazareth, I received a letter from him, in 1943 or 1944. Among other things he wrote, *"Dear Uncle, My sisters are believing in the Lord Jesus. I am searching for the right way and hope that one day I shall get to where my sisters are already. But I shall never forget that you brought me into the Syrian Orphanage and the good education and learning that I enjoyed there."*

The two girls also received a good education. Shaha remained true to the Savior and knew that she was *"dearly bought"* with the blood of Jesus. She died of pneumonia, still a believer. Zita was married to a Muslim. In 1953, she was baptized by our Mission Inspector. Her husband, who was present at the baptism as a spectator, was so moved that he requested instruction and the following year he also was baptized. Zita and her husband live in Beirut.

* * *

It was in 1937 that Emir Rahal and I found ourselves in the desert between Baalbek and Homs. All around us we saw dusty gray hills and just as dusty black tents. The clothes of the bedouin were also covered with dust. The Sheikh described to me the poverty and need of his tribe. I observed how many things distressed him. Certainly it was not always easy to say a clear "No" when his men, according to old custom, planned raids. I knew from his people, who complained about it, that through the prohibition of the Emir they had become poor. Other things also may have depressed him. He became ever more earnest. His wish and his prayer were that his bedouin might come to Jesus. And how many setbacks he himself and his people had to witness! He became more and more silent. More and more gravely he looked upon the tents lying before us. Suddenly he began to relate the cruel deed of a tribal comrade, the chief of a clan.

One day, a young man came to a distant tribe seeking a bride. In a sheikh's family, he found a suitable girl, and asked the father for the girl. After many questions, it came out that he belonged to an enemy tribe. The father understandably said, *"You belong to an enemy tribe, and you cannot have my daughter."* The young couple, however, loved each other, and the girl said, *"Steal me away!"* The father knowing nothing about that, told his daughter, *"Don't let yourself be abducted. If you do that, you are a child of death!"* The father believed that with this warning he had warded off any possibility of that happening.

Far away from the camp of the Abu Jebel tribe, young men were practicing riding on swift camels. The night of the raid was announced to the young girl by a spy. The bride-raid was wild with enthusiasm. The daughter, who stood ready - it was long after

midnight - was mounted on a camel and the troop disappeared with the bride as rapidly as they had come. Before the men had rubbed the sleep from their eyes, nothing more of the raiding party was to be seen.

The father swore, *"When I get my daughter back, I shall tie her by her hair to a tree and carve her up alive."* To his sons he said, *"Your sister has brought disgrace on our tent. Practice your riding, and bring your sister back, so that the disgrace may be wiped out from our family."*

It happened. The daughter was brought back and the cruel father was as good as his word. In spite of the screams and fury of the women and girls, the disobedient daughter had to die in terrible agony inflicted on her by her own father's hand.

When we reached this group of tents after several days, the Emir pointed out a certain man. *"That is the man I told you about. Speak to him."* When I reproached him with his cruel deed, he said in reply, *"I am not sorry. Our women and girls must know that, when a father says "No", then it is "No". No other girl will let herself be stolen from our clan if it was forbidden beforehand."*

Normally, bride-raiding is a permitted and beloved affair amongst bedouin. The service of Brother Ibrahim has brought about fundamental changes in this tribe in all areas of their life. Such cruelties are not perpetrated any more today.

AMONG THE BEDOUIN TO THE SOUTH OF BEERSHEVA

An experience of our late missionary, Pulus Doany

One day, an American missionary came and asked Brother Pulus to let him travel with him. He wanted to visit bedouin to the south of Beersheva. To begin with, the two missionaries stayed three days in the town of Beersheva. Pulus spoke twice each day in the market place and on the streets. The bedouin of the neighborhood were his loyal listeners. After three days, they went to the bedouin encampment. It was a long ride on donkeys and in the late afternoon, they reached the encampment. The foreigner, the American missionary, was watched critically. After they had offered the two messengers a tent to rest in, Pulus noticed how they gathered together in another tent. He was able to creep around behind the tent unnoticed and hear the following resolution, *"We will accompany the two strangers over the mountain. Up there they will be robbed, for the American has money. If they defend themselves, they will be killed. We must act quickly, before the Sheikh comes from Beersheva."*

Upon that, Pulus moved back and waited for the men. The spokesmen said, *"We have decided to show you the way to the next camp. Behind the mountain is a big camp. There you will be better looked after than among us."*

Pulus thanked them for their consideration but explained firmly that he and his friend

wanted to stay here, in these simple conditions. Pulus was able to refute all their arguments with true Arab friendliness.

At last, it was evening, and all the bedouin were saying, *“The Sheikh is coming!”* and they all went to meet him. Pulus and his companion set out on the way. From the direction of Beersheva came a group of bedouin on horseback, coming nearer and nearer to the camp. Suddenly one sprang from his horse, gave the reins to another, ran to Pulus, embraced him and kissed him on the cheeks. Then he cried, *“Friend, how is it you came to my camp? God bless your entry into our midst! I shall never forget the sweet words you told us about the Lord Jesus for three days in Beersheva. We looked for you in vain early today and so in the afternoon we rode home. I rejoice that the Almighty God has brought you to us. Please, speak to my men this evening about Jesus and his death on the cross for sinful people like us.”*

Quickly a lamb was slaughtered and roasted on skewers and rice cooked. After the feast, the men listened to the joyful message about Jesus. The next day, the Emir said, *“It is dangerous for you to ride alone through our camps. I will accompany you. In his company, the brothers were able to visit various groups of tents for fourteen days. The Word of God was well received. Then the brothers returned with joyful hearts, saying, “We have seen the protecting hand of God. His Word will not return to him void.”*

Some experiences of Brother Ibrahim Doany

Since 1948, the way to the bedouin was opened again for brother Ibrahim. The war years had put a stop to this service. Everywhere he was greeted with joy. Sheikh Rahal had remained true and was happy again to serve as a guide.

One day, Brother Ibrahim was sitting in a tent, showing the men the way to Jesus. Since only a thin straw partition divided the women’s section from that of the men, the women were also listening. Suddenly a blind woman stood up and called over the dividing partition, *“Isn’t that the voice of Sheikh Ibrahim?”*

“From where do you know me?”

“Fifteen years ago, you were here with a German man. You so wonderfully told us the story of the Lord Jesus and how He let Himself be put on the cross for all men. Since then, I have prayed daily to the Lord Jesus and thanked Him that He has died for my sins also. You must tell us more about Him today.”

Then a meeting was arranged for the women also. Today Ibrahim has again an entrance to all the groups of tents in Sheikh Rahal’s tribe.

One day, Sheikh Rahal came to Beirut to Ibrahim and said, *“Brother Ibrahim, tomorrow we are going to the bedouin.”*

He answered; *“Sheikh Rahal, I have just come back from fourteen days working in the prisons. I am very tired and have fever. Wait a few days until I am stronger.”*

“Tired or not, we are going tomorrow. I have already made an appointment for you for

tomorrow with a new tribal chief. He is waiting for us. You have not yet been in that camp. Should people die without having heard the message of Jesus? God will give you whatever you need. We are expected by my friend."

After a long journey, they reached the new tribe. Sheikh Rahal introduced Ibrahim as follows: *"I have brought my friend and brother, Ibrahim Doany, to you. He and a certain German are my best friends. Through Ibrahim, I have come to know the Lord Jesus. He will explain to you and your men who Jesus is."*

Soon about 50 men were listening to the message of Jesus. When Ibrahim wanted to stop, the men called out, *"Go on speaking! We have never heard anything like this."* And every time he wanted to finish, the men begged him to let them hear more. When evening came and he could hardly speak from exhaustion, he ended with a short prayer. Sheikh Rahal went to him and said, *"Do you know how long you have been talking?"* Ibrahim didn't know. Wiping the sweat from his brow, the chief said, *"Six hours!"* The bedouin had listened for six hours and still wanted to hear more about Jesus.

As they were all sitting together, the new chief said, *"Brother Ibrahim, you have been sent from God to bring the message about Jesus to all the bedouin."* On other days, the two sheikhs went with Ibrahim to other camps. After a week, Ibrahim was obliged to return home. The fever had not abated. He traveled back to Beirut and the sheikhs rode to their camps.

Once more with my bedouin

One travels from Beirut over the Lebanon range through the Bikaa plateau to Baalbek; from there to Hermel and then still further as far as the other side of the Orontes. On the Syrian-Lebanese border area is the little bedouin school. We needed a good three hours to get there by car. We were received with joy by the young teacher, Amira, who is the 18-year-old daughter of Sheikh Rahal. On our first visit, we found 48 children assembled. Our second, unexpected visit was in June, at harvest-time. Most of the children were at work in the fields as far as the ones belonging to the neighboring villages. Those who were present were beaming with their teacher. Psalms and Bible verses were recited, writing cards in Arabic and English displayed for us. One could see they had been working hard.

The schoolroom has tables and benches. The open door lets in the scanty light - the room has no window. Nowhere would one find a simpler school. But it is at least built of stone. In a bedouin tent, it would be still more primitive. Everyone showed great respect for the teacher.

In a letter, Amira told me that she joyfully does this service for Jesus. She writes, *"The Lord Jesus has bought us dearly with His blood through His death. It is important that we walk as he walked."*

I look back. Twenty-nine years ago, Amira's father came to me in Haifa and said, *"The Lord Jesus has sent me to you for you to instruct me."* Now He has led Brother Ibrahim for 28 years through his encampments and others. For eight years, I went with Ibrahim every summer for a certain time among the bedouin. Once we went as far as Palmyra. Sheikh Rahal still has constant contact with Ibrahim. He knows Christ as his Savior from sin and guilt. But one should not forget that he is a bedouin and lives among bedouin.

Emir Rahal's request for a school for bedouin children is 28 years old. The school has been open for half a year and is a very strong member of the Carmel Mission. Friends can help this young plant with prayers and gifts.

Friedrich Heinrici
Nördlingen, Easter 1958

POSTSCRIPT

The school opened by Amira is now under government control, and she is not well enough to teach now. But there is another small private school for bedouin children run by her brother, Talal, who is now chief of the tribe. This was first opened when the Spangenberg were working in Lebanon but it is no longer supported by the Carmel Mission. It is supported by private donations from Germany and the sale of this report. If any friend would like to help this work, I would be pleased to receive any contributions, however small, and will pass them on to the Spangenberg family.

Barbara Wilson
36 Burleton Road
Tile Cross
Birmingham
B33 0LN