

We Are On the Road to Revival

Volume 41 1937 Wallamo Tribe Revival

In 1937, after 9 years of work in Ethiopia by Western Missionaries from the Sudan Interior Mission there were only 48 known indigenous believers made up of Wallamo tribes people (who had previously been devil-worshippers).

A year earlier, on this day, May 5, 1936, Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, had fallen to Mussolini's invading armies. Emperor Haile Selassie fled. Barefoot Ethiopian soldiers resisted bravely against tanks and mustard gas, but the Italians won.

Soon the victors came for the missionaries, who left just 48 baptized Christians behind them in Wallamo. They were all new in the faith and no longer had any missionaries to guide, teach, or instruct them. These had the *Gospel of Mark* and a few other passages of scripture in their language, but few knew enough to read even that. Several of the Christians already knew, first hand, what persecution was like, having experienced it from heathen neighbors.

The missionaries prayed constantly. "We knew God was faithful," one missionary wrote. "But still we wondered—if we ever come back, what will we find?"

The believers faced severe persecution from the Italian troops but stayed true. Beaten, tortured, killed, they stood fast, heroes of God. They even sang when told to tear their church down--and cheerfully obeyed.

Other Christians died of cold at night in unheated jail cells.

One of their leaders, Toro, was thrown face down in the mud of a jail cell and beaten with a hippo-hide whip. "Where is the God who can deliver you out of our hands?" he was asked.

"My God is able to deliver me--if he chooses--and if not, He has promised to take me to heaven to be with Him there." Soon afterward, a terrible storm blew off the prison roof and melted its mud bricks. The guards were terrified. They pleaded with Toro to pray for them, and then released him!

In his book, *Fire on the Mountains*, Raymond Davis tells of the love demonstrated by believers for each other during this period of affliction, which in turn made a major impression on unbelievers. For example, no provision was made to feed the prisoners in jail by the invading army. This was the responsibility of relatives and friends. Christians in the prisons had no problem, though. They were well cared for by friends and family. In fact, so much food was brought them by fellow believers and church groups that enough remained to feed the unbelieving prisoners also. This observable love, vibrant though nonverbal, brought many to seek the Lord. Such love was previously unheard of. As a result the word spread far and wide.

Nonbelievers sought out believers to learn more about the Christian faith. When prisoners who had come to know Christ while in jail were released, they went back home and attended the nearest church.

These Protestants perceived the persecution as motivated not by politics, but by differences in religious faith, since Catholic priests promised them freedom if only they would kiss the crucifixes held up to them. To the Wallamo, this seemed like a return to the idolatry they had recently left, and they refused freedom at that price. Their faith and courage attracted others to Christ.

On this day, May 5, 1941, five years to the day that he had left Ethiopia, Haile Selassie returned. The missionaries returned to the capital, too. What would they find?

Reports reached them from Wallamo. Not only had the church survived, it had grown. Not only had it grown, it had grown more than 200 times greater. The 48 believers had become 10,000!

The missionaries credited the Holy Spirit who guided the suffering Christians. Cheerful and forgiving under enemy savagery, they proved that their faith was genuine. They sang songs with encouraging words: "If we have little trouble here, we will have little reward there. *We will reign.*"

By 1950 the numbers had increased to 240,000; and by 1990 to 3,500,000.