


'92

AFSHAR

Ministry To Persian Jews And Gentiles
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INTRODUCTION

In 1979 the Shah of Iran was dethroned and Khomeini's Islamic reign came to power. As a result, several million Iranians were forced to go into exile and face much hardship. Today there are Iranian exiles in almost every part of the world. Was this God's judgment upon Iranians or His mercy? Although it could be both, the intention of this paper is to show that with regard to Missio Dei, it is clearly the latter. God scatters in order to gather.

I. THE STATUS OF CHRISTIANITY IN IRAN

A. A Short History Of Christianity In Iran

The advent of Christianity in Iran is not clear. However, in Acts 2:5-9 we read:

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? and how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia...'

The Medes, Parthians, Elamites, and the residents of Mesopotamia were Iranian Jews, some of whom could have been among the 3,000 who returned to their country as baptized Christians. Tradition says that Andrew

went north to the Black Sea and the Caspian area, and Matthew went among the Parthians. Christianity prospered in the early century in Iran. "By the Sixth Century from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea the number of churches was almost infinite. Over 200 bishops are listed." (Al Huntzinger, 1978:22) The famous church historian, Latourette, said that,

Christians in the Sassanian and Abbasid realms were more active as missionaries than were Christians from any other kind from the Fifth to Sixteenth Centuries in which civil rulers were non-Christians. (Al Huntzinger 1978:22)

However, since the national religion of the country was Zoroastrianism, the church in Iran faced much persecution. During the reign of Shahpur II in the Third Century, about 16,000 Christians were killed. The Seventh Century invasion of Muslims in Iran replaced the national religion with Islam which has continued up to the present. With Islam, and especially the great persecutions and slaughter by Genghis Khan in the mid-1200's, came the gradual elimination of the church in Iran. ✓

B. Missionary History To Iran Before The Twentieth Century

The Roman Catholics were first to send missionaries to Iran to work mainly among nominal Assyrians and Armenians. This took place during the 1,600's. Today a small percentage of Armenians claim to be part of the Armenian Catholic church in Iran.

In 1811 after translating the New Testament into Persian, Henry

Martin, an Anglican priest, travelled from India to Iran in order to present the king of Iran with this translation. Soon after the Church of England began its outreach in the southern part of Iran. This mission work concentrated mainly among the Muslims and the Jews.

The Presbyterian missionaries came to Iran in 1832 under the American Board of Commissioners to work among Assyrians in northern Iran. As a result of a revival among these nominal Christians, the Evangelical Church came into existence in 1855.

C. Present Christian Groups In Iran

An unconfirmed report estimates that out of a total population of forty-three million in Iran, there are only 221,000 Christians. This makes the number of Christians less than one percent of the total population. The largest Christian groups in Iran are Armenians who number some 150,000; Catholics numbering 40,000; Assyrians (or Nestorians) numbering 25,000; Protestants numbering 5,000; and Greek and Russian Orthodox numbering 1,000.

Among the Protestants, the four major groups are the Assyrian Evangelical Church of Iran with some 3,200 members, the Assemblies of God Church with 1,100, the Brethren Church with 500, and the Anglican Church with 200 members. The ethnic breakdown of the Evangelical church is 50% Assyrian, 30% Armenian, 13% ex-Muslim, 6% Jews, and 1% other. But all these figures are subject to change. This is due to the increasing persecution of the minorities, which began with the

new regime. In some places, the work among the Muslims has gone underground. In other areas where the church has grown, it has been predominantly among the Armenians, Assyrians, and Jews. However, the greatest awakening has taken place among the unchurched, or those whom cannot be documented. (This data was accumulated by the author's personal interviews with some of the church leaders of Iran in 1987).

The question often raised was, "How can less than one percent of the population reach out to the other ninety-nine percent?" For many the answer undoubtedly was foreign missionaries and more foreign missionaries. But in 1979 the Islamic revolution put an end to this idea. It was not long after the fall of the Shah's regime that every foreign missionary was thrown out of the country and many Iranian Christians began to face persecution and some even martyred. To many this was the end of Christianity in Iran. Some predicted an alliance of Iran and the USSR for a military attack against Israel. To these Christians, the majority being Westerners, this event was a partial fulfillment of the end times' prophecies. Many hinted at Armageddon being around the corner and looked forward to Iran's destruction (see picture on the next page), forgetting that Iran is a "part of God's world, for which He cares, with a place in His kingdom in which present ranks and races will be quite superseded." (Eerdman's, 1970:601) But God had other plans. God's Adventus was about to break through man's Futurum. To accomplish this goal, God displayed a pattern often seen in the Scripture.



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*Ezekiel 38 & 39

II. A BIBLICAL PATTERN

A. God Grants Man To Pursue His Folly

1. An Old Testament Example

At the outset of the revolution in Iran, the graffiti on the walls of the streets of Teheran, the capital of Iran, read, "Khomeini is enough for us." The majority of Iranians were of the opinion that Khomeini and Islam were able to provide for them all that the Shah did not. "Give us Khomeini and we shall be satisfied," they said. And amazingly enough, God gave the people what they wanted. He gave them a new king with new promises, just as He gave Israel a king when they persisted upon having one.

In about 1050 B.C. Israel was cut to pieces by her enemy, the Philistines. The Ark was captured, the priests of the Ark were killed; and Shiloh was destroyed. this was an emergency which threatened Israel with permanent slavery. "Charisma had failed; the

people of Yahweh were crushed." (John Bright, 1981:34). As Art Glasser says, God allowed this invasion to test the Israelites.

"Would His people trust Him to be their warrior, or would they endure a protracted period of oppression?" (Glasser, 1989:85). Israel persisted on seeking a human solution. They opted for a king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.' (I Samuel 8:4-5)
Samuel was truly grieved by the untheocratical spirit in which

their request was made. So he asked God for wisdom, and he was told,

And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day...with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods...so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.' (I Samuel 8:7-9)

But even after Samuel described what would result from their seeking a king, that this king would burden them with heavy taxations, that he would take away their sons and daughters, their grain and vintage, the best of their cattle and donkeys, and finally, they themselves will become his slaves, they still rejected Samuel's counsel and persisted upon having a king. So God granted Israel's folly and gave them Saul.

2. A New Testament People (Romans 1:18-32)

Speaking of men in general, Paul declares:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the

truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

What was this wickedness? "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man---and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things." (Romans 1:22-23) In other words, these heathens of Paul's time persisted on going their own way apart and clearly away from God's ways and desire. "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves..." (Romans 1:24) What was the outcome of this disobedience? "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions..." (Romans 1:26) And, finally: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;" (Romans 1:28)

The apostle three times asserts the divine abandonment, 'God gave them up' (vv. 24, 26, 28). It has been observed that this desertion is definitely punitive, not merely permissive in the sense that God allowed the heathen isolators to give Him up, nor just privative in that He quietly withdrew His grace. It is a positive punishment for culpable ignorance and willful sinfulness. (Eerdmans 1970:1018)

★ (Yes, God is in the habit of giving man what he persists upon having. And through that He accomplishes His mission.

In 1977 when Khomeini's "A Religious Sermon" cassette tape was being illegally distributed in Iran, many assumed it to be a "master coup" by SAVAK, the Shah's notorious secret police.

Its theme was the alleged collusion between the Shah and 'the Jews and the Cross-worshippers' first to 'humiliate' and then to 'eliminate' Islam in Iran. (Taheri 1985:18)

On his message Khomeini ignored the real economic and political issues of the country and made direct appeal to the basest sentiments of fanaticism among the illiterate masses. The sermon was a work of genius, and it masterfully accomplished its goal: to frighten the 'little people' of Iran to the point that they were willing to give their lives for a man whom they barely knew. "The Shah had tried to teach the 'little people' how to live and had failed. Khomeini set out to teach them how to die and quickly succeeded." (Karimi 1978:18) Although the intelligentsia at first waited and watched the revolution evolving, they too joined the masses and brought Khomeini's regime into Iran. Undoubtedly there were some voices of reason against this revolution, but the answer to them was generally the same: "Khomeini is enough for us." So God in His sovereignty granted them their wish (and Khomeini came to power). Soon after the revolution, the self-centeredness of the leadership was revealed. To "make a name," that which Glasser calls "a fundamental human desire," (Glasser 1989:53) appeared to be some of the main reasons for this bloody event.

B. God Disperses In Order To Redeem

The oracle against Egypt in Isaiah 19:1-25 gives a strong expression of the truth that: "God smites in order to heal." (Eerdmans 1970:601) In verse 22 it says, "And the Lord will strike

Egypt, He will strike and heal it; they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them." God smites in order to heal. He scatters in order to gather. He sends into exile in order to restore. He disperses in order to redeem. This was the second step in the pattern which God followed in order to bring more Iranians into His kingdom, a pattern He had followed both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

1. Dispersion From Babel (Genesis 11:1-25)

The record of the first human attempt to create a universal kingdom is filled with pathos and tragedy. Fallen humanity reveals its insecurity, vanity, and self-centeredness by disobeying God's command to scatter and populate the earth. The descendants of Noah were determined to maintain their primeval unity, based on the language, a central living-space, and a single aim. (Anderson 1977:63 as quoted by Glasser 1989:52)

Where as man at Babel tried to establish a universal kingdom on the language, Imam Khomeini tried to establish his kingdom by means of a unity based on the religion of Islam. As Taheri says:

The objective of the Imam, who considers all existing governments in Muslim countries to be illegitimate, is the creation of a single universal Islamic state which can emerge as a world power capable of standing up to the 'Satanic powers' of the day: the United States and the Soviet Union. (Amir Taheri 1985:22)

Having called himself "Vilayat-e-Faghih", which means "Guardianship of the Supreme Religious Leader, Khomeini allowed himself to speak as Islam's chief authority who understood the importance of political power. And having established his authority he called upon Iranians to, "Prepare yourselves to be of use to Islam. Act as an army of the

Imam of the Age, in order to be able to serve him in spreading the rule of justice." (Shaul Bakhash 1984:233 as quoted by Otis 1991:123) Using the name of God, Khomeini was definitely looking to make a name for himself and the people of Iran. Just as men at the tower of Babel attempted, "To give posterity to know that there had been such men as they in the world. They would leave this monument of their pride and ambition and folly." (Matthew Henry 1976:25)

So God scattered the arrogant sons of Noah who had rebelled against Him. At first glance, this judgment appears to be a curse, "A centrifugal force separating men and retarding the subjugation of the earth." (Eerdmans 1970:92) But this curse proved to be a blessing for it also retarded the fruitfulness of iniquity that goes hand-in-hand with civilization's progress. "And so it forestalled such judgment as would have interfered with the unfolding of redemption." (Eerdmans 1970:92). It is true that at Babel God fractured the human race, "Shattering its unity, and scattering people over the face of the earth. But His mission through the church will be to reverse this fragmentation." (Glasser 1989:53)

2. Exiles And Restoration Of Israel

Prior to the period of Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, Israel and Judah were both characterized as Baal worshipers. The worship of Yahweh had become a formality. Over and over again God raised prophets to denounce Baal worship and warn Israel of the

coming judgement, but to no avail.

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.
(II Chronicles 36:15-16)

In the latter part of the Eighth Century dark days were brought upon both kingdoms. Although the Northern Kingdom attained the zenith of its glory at this period, since she was absolutely corrupt, God brought His judgment upon them. His Rod was Assyria. Israel was captured by Shalmaneser, The Assyrian king, and most of the Jewish survivors were deported.

Only Judah remained, but not for long. She, too, was an ungodly nation. And "Although Yahweh loved Jerusalem and the Temple, the sins of His people demanded judgment." (Glasser 1989:97) The final defeat of the Southern Kingdom came when Babylon invaded her. Many lost their lives, but many were taken into exile to Babylon. In reaction to this event in history, Glasser raises the following question: "Why did God allow such massive catastrophes to overtake His people, and at the hands of cruel peoples that did not honor His name?" (Glasser 1989:98) He then goes on to list the following answers.

Israel was 1) unthankful for the divine love behind all the mercies lavished upon them; 2) unfaithful to the marriage vow that had sealed the covenant God made with them in Sinai; and 3) Israel deliberately rejected the standards of Sinai in order to give themselves to ease and luxury.
(Glasser 1989:98).

Therefore, God scattered Judah. Judah was judged by a holy God whose punishment she could not escape. But God has a purpose in history, which included sending His people into exile. He was the ~~Sower~~ scattering His seeds (people of Israel) throughout the world, so He could in due time gather a mighty harvest.

Palestine would never again be the home to the majority of Jews and,

Jewish colonies are known to have existed there throughout the Persian Period (cf. Isaiah 19:18)...Soon the number of Jews living abroad far exceeded the number remaining at home; the time would ultimately come when Jewish communities would be found all over the known world. (Bright 1981:129)

It has clearly been shown that God's judgement towards Israel was just. However, God is a God of mercy who turns tragedies into opportunities for expanding His kingdom.

Although Jews in exile never made any attempt to become missionaries and win converts to Yahweh, through them God "prepared for the missionary outreach of the apostolic church in a variety of ways." (Glasser 1989:108) This diasporal Judaism became a synagogue-centered religious community.

Eventually, throughout the Gentile world of the Middle East and Mediterranean basin every town or city had synagogues where Jews maintained their worship of the one true God. Through their witness, Gentiles increasingly became aware of 'the acts of Yahweh' and His moral governance of human affairs. One recalls the witness of James at the Jerusalem Council: 'From early generation Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in Synagogues.' (Acts 15:21) In time Gentiles began to sense that the Jews were willing to extend to them the privilege of studying the Scripture with them. They increasingly

appreciated the Jewish concern for the poor, the stranger, and their uplift of local culture.

Eventually, due to the initial tolerance of the Greeks and the interest of upper class Jews to share the Scripture with the Greeks, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. This made a great impact on the Greek speaking world of the day. "The stage was now set for the coming of the Messiah and the Apostolic Age...the beginning of the kingdom of God in history." (Glasser 1989:16)

Several centuries later, when Paul set out for his missionary journeys, he began his ministry by preaching in the synagogues, synagogues which were everywhere along his path because of the Jewish dispersion at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. This was a pattern he and his company often followed (cf. Acts 13:14,46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1,10; 18:4,19; 19:8; 28:17). "Not only did it follow the principle of 'to the Jews first', but also it made practical sense in establishing a point of contact for the gospel," (Marshall 1980:218) a point of contact that was made available through a dispersement that had taken place hundreds of years ago by God's own Rod of justice, the Assyrian and the Babylonians.

3. The Dispersion Of The Early Church

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the

regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
(Acts 8:1)

Stephen's death led to a widespread attack against the church. For the first time we see the word persecution in the Book of Acts. Was this God's judgment upon the church? Certainly not. But it was God's mercy. Stephen's martyrdom led to the scattering of the Christians and to the consequent spread of evangelism. "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."
(Acts 8:4) And "Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God." (Acts 11:1)

The dispersion, however, did much more good than harm to the cause; those who were thus scattered carried the good news with them and disseminated it everywhere, even as far north as Syrian Antioch, which led to a remarkable development in the City in a few years' time.
(Eerdmans 1970:982)

III. IRAN UNDER ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

The 1978 through 1979 revolution and what took place after awakened widespread public interest in Iran and, to a large degree, bafflement and confusion. In some ways, Iran's "Islamic Revival" was very new, with ideas never voiced before. In other ways, it followed a long tradition in both Iran and the Muslim world of expressing

social, economic, and cultural grievances in the only familiar to most people--a religious belief, displaying the forces of good against the forces of evil, promising to bring justice to the oppressed.

'We were ecstatic with the new freedom,' one Iranian remembers, 'but Khomeini had returned from Paris, and gradually the mullahs gained power, executing and exiling rivals.' (Nathan M. Adams 1985:35)

Khomeini declared Iran an Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979. This was a Republic which,

In form and style it bore some resemblance to the French Revolution. But it rejected the French Revolution's trinity of value: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Unlike the French Revolution, which advocated liberty as an absolute value, even perhaps especially against the Almighty, the Islamic Republic was to end liberties taken with divine law and to restore men to their bondage with Allah. (Amir Taheri 1985:20)

From the start, the Islamic revolution was aimed at the creation of a society in which every single aspect of individual and community life was ordered and closely monitored in accordance with the strictest interpretation of Islamic rules. Khomeini himself had explained this in three large volumes and further spelled it out in more than 400 interviews and more than 1,000 public statements between December, 1977 and February, 1979.


His promises were as follows: to drive the Shah out, abrogate the country's Western style constitution, destroy the middle class, put the clergy in charge of the Quran, erase rights given to women and mobilize youth for the spread of "true Islam," first to the rest

of the Middle East, and then throughout the world.

The revolution's record is very bloody. According to figures collected from different sources by exiled Iranians living in Paris, at least 12,000 political opponents representing almost every shade of opinion were executed, and about 100,000 opponents were imprisoned.

According to reports, many of the condemned were first brought to the notorious Evin prison outside Teheran, where thousands have perished by gunfire or torture. Those who were facing firing squads often had their blood drained beforehand for use as plasma on the Iraqi front and were left with just enough to remain conscious to feel the executioner's bullets.

Within a short period after the revolution, on the streets one could find no music or laughter, just the roar of traffic and the anonymous dark shadows that are Iran's women today, well-covered from head to foot. They need not veil their faces, but may not speak casually to men, other than relatives. On many occasions thumbtacks were used by the agents from the Department of Morals (Munkarat) to pin head covers to the foreheads of women without head covers; or handkerchiefs containing razor blades and other sharp objects were used to remove makeup and lipstick from women's faces. People of various backgrounds, including the relatives of those killed in war between Iran and Iraq were sanctioned to stop and arrest anyone for indecency. Men who did not have long sleeve shirts on were insulted and also physically assaulted; those wearing neckties had their ties



cut in half. As one Iranian put it, "We have been treated with such indignation, that our souls have been injured and marred."

The Islamic revolution brought a fresh wave of interest and pride in Islam to the people of Iran. However, after just a few years of the new regime, Islam left many Iranians in disillusionment. The revolution and war between Iran and Iraq, which started in 1980, brought nothing but heartache and despair to a large number of people. As one seventeen year old woman writes,

How can one live in a society where men and women can be arrested and lashed simply because of the clothes they are wearing? Is this the promised Islam? If so, we do not want this religion. (Letter written to the author, 1985, anonymity required)

★ So, in a short few years, Khomeini accomplished something that all the missionaries and Christian workers in Iran were not able to do--foster broad disillusionment in the Islam the Iranians experienced, which along with other things such as hardship and the war, forced them into exile.

A. Dispersion Of Iranians

Revolution in Iran brought a mass exodus of Iranians from the country. In August of 1985, the border station of Gurbulak under the shadow of Mount Ararat on the joint Turkish-Iranian border, was the only port of exit for thousands of Iranian tourists who were seeking temporary relief from the constraints of the revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran. For the first six months of that year, an average

of 1,000 passed through the jointly-manned building every day. Turkey, one of the three countries in the world where Iranians could go without having to acquire a visa (the other two were Yugoslavia and Japan), is the closest place to get an American visa. Since the fall of 1985, over 15,000 applicants for tourist visas to the United States have been processed at the Consulate in Istanbul. Perhaps that many again were sorted out at the American Embassy in Ankara's visa section during the same period.

Today there are an estimated 3 1/4 million Iranians living outside of their own country, out of which approximately 23% live in Turkey, 12% in Western Europe, 15% in the Middle East, 5.6% in Asia and the Far East, 1.85% in Canada, 38.5% in the United States, and 4.05% in other countries. Out of the 1,250,000 Iranians in the United States, approximately half live in California with an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 living in Los Angeles County. 80% of this exodus took place after the Islamic revolution. (Personal interview with Dr. Abe Ghaffari, Director of Iranian Christians International 1991)

Every 7-11
Coils Station
attendants
(own way to stay
in oil)

IV. CONCLUSION

At first glance, this dispersement might appear to be a curse, just as it was with the sons of Noah at the tower of Babel, or as with the children of Israel. But as it has been shown from the Scripture, God scatters in order to gather. God gave the Iranians what they demanded. He allowed them hardship and disillusionment so He could break them and bring them to a point where they would listen to His calling. Glasser explains it quite masterfully when he writes,

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The judgment of God--taking His people into captivity after destroying their national and religious life--were designed to strip them of all that previously enabled them to live apart from Him in difference to His will. (Glasser 1989:98)

A. Spiritual Status Of Exiled Iranians

A while back on a radio show which is listened to by many Iranians, I debated Dr. Maher Hathout, the director of the Islamic Center in Southern California. In the course of our discussion, we received many phone calls from listeners. One sarcastic Iranian caller in particular summed up the typical spiritual attitude which today exists among many Iranians: "You people are crazy to be talking about religion. I do not believe any more in God, let alone Islam."

Iranians have always been a prideful people...proud of their 2,500 year history, of their Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes. And with the Islamic revolution came a new found source of pride. Why should not have any Iranian Muslim been proud when he or she heard his or her religious leader say: "Islam was dead or dying for nearly fourteen centuries. We have revived it with the blood of our youth...we shall soon liberate Jerusalem and pray there." (Ayatollah Khomeini in Qom, 1979 as quoted by Karimi 1985:243). But God used Khomeini to strip Iranians of their pride and stiff-neckedness.

Whereas before the revolution Iran was one of the most prestigious countries in the third world, soon after the revolution

the word Iranian became synonymous with terrorist. Suddenly many Iranians became too embarrassed to call themselves Iranians any more. For a Muslim, Islam is his identity. You take that from him and he will not be able to tell you who he is. So now we have several million Iranians with no homeland, no honor, no pride, and no identity, who for the most part are desperately trying to assimilate into the foreign culture that fate has brought them into.

The psychology of displaced people is quite fascinating and out of the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, displaced people suffer from a spiritual and emotional vacuum. Who and what can fill this vacuum? Now that all the walls of protection - spiritually, emotionally, and traditionally - have come tumbling down, who will repair the lives of these Iranians?

God dispersed the Jews in order to spread His word among the Gentiles. Is it possible that this time by spreading Iranians among the Western nations, especially the United States, He is bringing the dough to the yeast, the unbeliever to the believer? Is it possible that in the case of Iranians the Master Sower is scattering the fertile land among the seeds? The answer is without a doubt, "YES." God brought Iranians out of Iran so that He can bring them into His kingdom. "And you shall be called Repairer of of the Breach, the restorer of Streets to Dwell In." (Isaiah 58:12)

In 1978 when two Iranian Christians from Muslim background met in Los Angeles for the first time, neither one could believe that there had been other Iranians besides himself whom God had saved.

That meeting was the beginning of the first Iranian Christian organization in the United States. Soon after that meeting the revolution broke out and Iranians began to pour into the Los Angeles area. Whereas in years past there had been much resistance to change and hearing the gospel, suddenly many were craving for something to fill that spiritual and emotional vacuum they were feeling. And interestingly enough, no cultural stigma could stop them from inquiring into this new way. This was due to the fact that they were no longer living in a shame culture, but in a guilt culture. Soon the little home Bible study began to flourish, and little by little Iranians started to surrender their lives to Christ. Although the number is still extremely small, today there are five Iranian churches in Southern California serving and trying to reach Iranians. We have seen more Iranians come to Christ within the last thirteen years than in the past several hundred years. Today, at least with regards to Iranians, God is clearly saying to the Christians in the Western countries,

You don't need to go to Iran, I have brought Iran here. You don't need to learn their customs, language, and traditions, they are trying to learn yours. You don't need to learn how to eat their food, they are trying to eat yours. All I'm asking you to do is in My Name take a cup of water to your displaced neighbor and share My good news with him or her. I HAVE SCATTERED SO THAT THEY CAN AGAIN BE GATHERED.

"'But it shall come to pass in the latter days: I will bring back the captives to Elam,' says the Lord." (Jeremiah 49:39)

May the church wake up to this opportunity God has created for
her and begin a mighty harvest among Iranians.

What an insightful and
a firsthand reflective essay.

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