

Chapter 37

South Asia

(Name of country withheld for security)

— By David Wilson —

How can one describe a country where Christians are a small, growing minority, while the vast majority belong to other religions; where some are very rich, while millions live in poverty; where some areas give freedom for preaching the gospel, while other areas have caused Christians to be martyred? Although missionary visas for evangelism are denied, there are a number of Bible Schools where some of the graduates are reaching their own countrymen for Christ.

In 1979-80, I took a one-year sabbatical in this country with my wife, Elaine, and two sons, to be involved in church planting and evangelism. Shortly after we arrived, the missionary I was to work with was diagnosed with TB. He soon left for treatment in Canada, and we were left alone with a precious group of 35 believers. By God's grace, this grew to 100 believers in six months, and when the missionary returned, he joined us in our baptism service. Elaine started a Good News Club, where the children showed great interest in God's Word. Desiring to do evangelism, I saw that the Catholic schools had the best education, and most of their students were non-Christians. They allowed me to come and show Christian films, along with presenting the message of Christ through a sketchboard message. Over 50,000 were reached in these assemblies, with hundreds sending in for Bible correspondence lessons. I also saw the great potential for open-air evangelism as I later traveled into the interior and worked with another missionary. Then a Christian organization asked me to train their young people in evangelism, and I went with one of their teams from town to town near the border of China preaching the gospel. The fields were "white" for harvest. Soon, however, the visas of foreign missionaries were canceled.

After returning to the US, I asked God to send an evangelist to me who could pioneer OAC in this land. A few years later, while at a mission's conference in Baltimore, I was approached by George Oommen. He had graduated from Bible college in the US and felt led to talk with me about joining OAC. This led to me training him in New York City, after which he returned to his home country. In 1987 I visited the church we had helped to plant in this country, which led to annual visits when I would baptize new believers in the sea, hold open-air meetings on the beach, and preach in the church services. Soon the church had over 300 attending. On each visit, I flew down to join George and his two workers.

With George translating, we preached to crowds of over 1000, presenting Christ as the only way of salvation. People thronged the platform to get our decision booklets. A local

pastor said, "Never has a crowd gathered like this to hear the gospel." Everywhere we went, even across the border into another state, it was the same. To see all levels of society, young and old, rich and poor, upper class and lower class, listening to the good news of salvation, was like a scene from the Bible. George had over 7,000 enrolled in his Bible correspondence school, which continued on under OAC. I flew to another city to check out a new film on the life of Christ called "Daya Sagar." It had been made by a secular film studio for cinemas and was in several languages. After three nights of testing in villages, I saw it could be effectively used for attracting crowds to hear us preaching the gospel. I bought a copy for George (16mm), and gave him the projector that I had bought for our school programs back in 1980. God provided the funds for the first OAC van, and soon OAC was registered with the government. The ministry of frontline evangelism was now established in the country and began to reach multiplied thousands.

Every year I visited this country, and in 1998 we began another branch in the far north with two of our evangelists. We preached in villages on the border of another country and could see their soldiers on the other side of a huge dividing electrical fence. They were told in advance that we would be holding meetings so they would not see us as a threat. Hearts were open to receive the gospel. The pastor we worked with had previously wanted to kill Christians, but Christ had changed his heart. Now he had a Bible school and almost 200 believers in seven house churches. He said about 100 of these believers had come as a result of our open-air outreaches.

In one village, where radical young men had broken up our meeting by driving the people away, our evangelists went back in December and used a tent where they told the Christmas story to children. From that, new believers gathered, and a house church was formed. They found a pastor, and the church began to grow. In another village, the people were so interested in the open-air meeting that they immediately started a fellowship. On the first day, 30 people attended, and a pastor was called.

In 2001, we opened another branch near the China border with one of our experienced OAC evangelists. Crowds of up to 1,300 gathered at tea tree estates to see our film on the Bible, covering creation to the second coming of Christ. Following the preaching of the gospel, they almost trampled us for our New Life in Christ decision booklets in their



OPEN HEARTS IN A COUNTRY OF IDOLATRY



SEEKERS PUSH TO GET OUR DECISION BOOKLETS

language. Each meeting was held with a local pastor present, who invited them to his church. Many of the tea tree pickers were from a nearby country that was closed to the gospel. We also went to villages, including one where the chief and his men had chased away the pastor who was with us. They had used knives and sticks, but now the same chief welcomed us and instructed his young men to help set up our film equipment. Almost the whole tribe came to our meeting, and a church was built there.

In 2002, we sensed that God was leading us to start a new branch in a neighboring state. Arriving at a Bible college, I asked God for two signs: no opposition and responsive crowds in our open-air outreaches. After some training of the students, we went to an open market. Immediately a large crowd gathered as the gospel was preached. The students counseled some of the many who took our decision booklets. The next day, we drove to a village where our film attracted nearly everyone. Our message clearly showed that Christ is the only way to heaven, and those who come to Him must have no other gods. People thronged us for the New Life in Christ booklets, which had a response card for our free Bible correspondence course. Some begged us to cross the river and do the same program in other villages. With these two signs confirming God's will, I asked God to give me an evangelist of His choice from the Bible School.

The Lord led us to Upen, and we began his training. When he was 12, a native missionary from another state came to his village. The people planned to kill him, but then Upen, his family, and 25 others turned from idol worship to Christ. Now Upen had just graduated from the Bible College and felt called to be an evangelist. The Lord provided funds for a new jeep, video projector, generator, etc., and in 2003, we opened the new branch. In this state of 22 million people, less than 4% were Christians. We were welcomed by the General Secretary of the Baptist Churches. In villages, we saw almost everyone come to see our Christian films and to hear the gospel proclaimed. At one village, the local pastor showed us a monument in memory of the first believers who were martyred in 1996-97. Now the church had 65 members. Many came to our open-air meeting at this same place, and more believed. In one month, the new branch reported reaching 7000 people, most of whom were animists worshiping spirits and objects. Upen began preaching to his tribal villages in their language, and people were responding to Christ.



NEW BELIEVER BAPTIZED



*DAVID WILSON PREACHING IN
NE BAPTIST CONFERENCE*

In one town, the police chief became alarmed that I, being a foreigner, would be kidnapped and held by terrorists for a high ransom (not knowing that we do not pay ransoms). The chief insisted that I have an armed bodyguard, which was the last thing I wanted. Lutfor was assigned... a young Muslim policeman who had already shot two terrorists. We became good friends, so I asked him not to point his machine gun at me while we bounced along the bad roads in our jeep. In one bad terrorist area, six policemen in a jeep were assigned to us, and they heard the gospel for two hours. As Lutfor saw our film each night and heard the preaching, he began to ask questions. When our outreach was coming to an end, he asked, "How can I become a Christian?"

We drove north and boarded a boat going to the largest river island in the world, where about 120,000 people live. Over 300 people crowded onto the boat, leaving us perched on the roof. I counted only eight life jackets. Our jeep, with the film equipment, was precariously straddling the front of the boat. We were glad to reach the island safely and drive our jeep off onto solid ground. Hundreds gathered for our two-hour film showings and preaching. Many responded and were invited to the few local churches.

In another area, our evangelists held an open-air meeting in a small mountain village where there were no Christians. A few years later, they returned and held another outreach. From the Word of God that was sown, a church was planted. When we visited again, there were 70 people attending the morning service. Some of the young men helped us carry all the film equipment and the generator up the mountain, and about 80% of the village came out. Even during the program, a woman came to the pastor, saying, "I want to become a Christian; how can I?" The pastor brought her to Upen, who spoke her tribal language, and soon she was led to the Lord.



THE MINISTRY GOES ON WITH FILM AND ILLUSTRATED PREACHING

In 2016, the church we attend in Florida asked me to plant a “daughter” church among an unreached people group. I felt led to ask Upen and his team to help. Taking a mission team with me from our church, we went to an



area where there had never been a church. Open-air film meetings and preaching over eight nights with our OAC evangelists reached 2300 people. There was great interest, as probably all were hearing the gospel for the first time. A Bible College graduate was chosen to be the pastor, and soon about 50 were attending the church services with over 20 baptized. Persecution of believers at the time of this writing is being tolerated by the government, but by God’s grace, this new church has been spared. It has even started a second church, which is our “granddaughter.” We moved our free sewing school and teacher to this area, and the first class began with 30 local women (another 60 were put on the waiting list). This disarmed opposition and gained respect from the



UNREACHED PEOPLE HEARING THE GOSPEL

non-Christian population. Each day the women joyfully sang Christian choruses, like “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus,” and studied the Bible. One woman was contemplating suicide when she saw our sign board for the school. She came in, was welcomed, enrolled, and soon put her trust in Christ as Savior.

In order to be able to send foreign funds to support the OAC ministry,

the government requires us to help the poor, so we have sewing schools in four of our branches for about 100 poor women. The graduates not only find sewing jobs to help them leave poverty, but some also find eternal life through Christ. We also established an orphanage, where many of the children became believers.

Persecution

In one of the least evangelized states, known as the land of the gods, only one percent are Christian. A few years ago, our evangelists crossed the border to conduct open-air film meetings. They had been invited by one Christian family. The first meeting was stopped, and the next night, a mob came with sticks, etc. Our evangelists were quickly taken into the Christian’s home, and the door was locked. They knew they could be killed, but when they heard the police coming, they thought they would be safe. Instead, they were taken to prison, blamed for the riot, and the jeep and equipment impounded. The next morning, our evangelist called a police chief who knew OAC in another state, who then called and ordered them released. By God’s

grace, they were sent on their way with all their equipment, but with a warning not to return. In 2011, we crossed the border again with a pastor who was overseeing a church plant there and held the first open-air evangelistic meeting that the town had ever seen. There was tremendous interest and response. The Lord is now building His Church in this unreached area.

In April 2012, I was on my annual visit when a pastor invited OAC to come for evangelism in an area where he was planting churches. There have been many martyrs in this state, but he said this area was safe. He had two Christian families in the town and wanted our meeting to expose more to the gospel. As we set up on the street, the people were friendly, and some of the young men helped us. While the film progressed on the life of Christ, the crowd continued to build. I went up to the front to take a photo and had just taken it when I heard a commotion. A mob of about 30 young men was charging down the road toward us, yelling and waving wooden clubs. In 20 seconds, everyone had fled for their lives! I stood still and was going to try and reason with them, but it soon became clear that this mob only intended to attack and destroy. Our sketch-board and blacklight for the illustrated gospel message went down with one blow, and then also the screen. The amplifier in its metal box was bashed in. Then they surrounded me and attacked with their clubs. I wondered if this was to be my homegoing to heaven. Great peace and grace came upon me from the Lord, with no fear at all. Like David, the Psalmist, said, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." The thought came to me that my camera would soon be smashed, so I lifted it above my head. A second later, a blow came aimed at my head, but it hit my arm instead. Had my arm not been uplifted, which quickly turned black, the blow would have surely knocked me out. Later, we saw videos of Christians being martyred, and once knocked to the ground, they were beaten to death. It wasn't my time, however, as we are immortal in God's will on earth until He calls us home. Suddenly, the pastor appeared at my side at great risk to his life, grabbed my arm, and pulled me from them. Then not letting go, he ran with me down an alley. I saw Chip Welton, our Field Director, running in the distance. Thankfully, he had escaped the attack. We were rushed into one of the two Christian homes and then put on a motorbike to be taken out of the area. When the mob quickly left, the people came back out on the street. Some wanted to go and fight this gang that had come from another part of town, obviously alerted by a cell phone call. But the pastor said that as Christians, we forgive our enemies. When the police came, the pastor made no charge against them. This was a tremendous testimony and witness to these people, who had seen that, as Christians, we were motivated only by the love of Christ and never fought back. What happened had actually served to promote the gospel.

Stanley, an OAC branch director, writes: "On the 18th of July 2015, we had a program in a village which is 40 km away from my home. As the program was going on, a group of 40 radical people came at about 9:30 p.m., took us to a place near a temple, and started to beat us. They kept hitting our faces and made us lie down on the ground. They started to lash our body, saying, 'You are converting people and teaching against idols.' They also wanted to take us to the temple and make us worship the idol, but

because we are meat-eating people, they thought the temple would be made unclean. God amazingly spared our lives from that situation, because they could not worship the idol.

“As they were torturing us, we pleaded for our lives, but they were furious, and no one was willing to listen, so we lost hope of escape. We were in their custody for two hours, and we had no clue what they wanted to do with our lives, but we were praying to God for our lives. After some time, an old man came to that place and started to talk to the mob. They finally decided to set us free at about 12:30 a.m., with a warning. Somehow, we got to the jeep and brought it out of the village (with a broken window). They had taken our cell phone, but that day we had taken one more cell phone with us, so we could contact a pastor. He came along with some pastors to us, and that night they admitted us into the hospital.

“Now, we three are fine, and treatment is going on. My right eye is having problems, and it took one month to restore. God saved our lives in a dangerous situation.”

When I (David) asked our three evangelists if they wanted to resign after this experience, they said, “No.” They would continue evangelizing, regardless of the cost. The group had taken our film equipment, and later asked us to buy it back, or they would take us to court on a false charge of forcing conversion. There was no option but to pay. Months later, one of the mob said they were sorry!

In obedience to the command of Christ, and by His grace, this front-line ministry of evangelism continues to reach many thousands each year with the good news of salvation in this “closed” country. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.”



OAC SOUTH ASIA STAFF CONFERENCE