

Answering Aceh's cry

-- a history lesson about an unreached people

Aceh is the northernmost province on the Island of Sumatra, part of Indonesia. Three million Acehnese are there, plus some Chinese and a few others. There are no known Acehnese Christians among them; it is illegal to print the Bible in Acehnese, or for an Acehnese to be a Christian, or to evangelize them. Islamic law rules here. Aceh has been known as the "front porch of Mecca", "the bedrock of Islam". It was this people that propagated Islam throughout South East Asia. Acehnese have a reputation for hostility and violence, some directed against Christians. They have been overlooked by modern mission efforts; Never in 2000 years has there been an Acehnese church.

Ten years ago some YWAM'ers tried to street preach in south Aceh. Stones and threats made a quick end of that.

A Singapore church had a van equipped for outreach, which was totally stripped overnight in Aceh. That was the end of that.

During the late sixteen hundreds many Catholics were tortured and murdered on the beaches of Aceh, by the Sultan.

From a biographical sketch of the most famous Dutch priest in Aceh, Henricus Verbraak, this is taken:

"The greatest missionary of the 16th century was Franciscus Xavierius. He tried to bring Christianity to Aceh. Many a page of the old mission history was written with the blood of martyrs. In 1565 the Sultan Alaadin of Aceh imprisoned a number of Portugese and five of them were beastially tortured and finally killed on one of the beaches. The Sultan was a very cruel man who persecuted Christians. Sometimes he gave the Christians the choice to either convert to the Islamic religion or die."

"The persecution went on for a long time. In 1638 once again 60 people were tortured and killed on one of the beaches. Among them were two Carmelite missionaries, Dionysius and Redemptus."

And so the Acehnese have been left alone by Christians since then. The Dutch, who ruled Indonesia for 350 years, did not allow mission work among them.

Even Batak Christians (the Bataks are from a region bordering on Aceh) cannot live peacefully in Aceh. Our missionary told of their "becak" (motor rickshaw) driver, a Batak living here in Aceh. He was threatened with poverty and death if he did not become a Muslim. His wife left him, not willing to become Muslim; but he capitulated. However, he confided: "In my heart I am Christian; on the outside I am Muslim."

"WE WRESTLE NOT WITH FLESH AND BLOOD"...

Our first time in Aceh in 1991 gave us a big surprise. The Acehnese people were not the fierce, hostile Muslim warriors that we were expecting to see. They were warm, open, and eager to greet us, glad to see us. A few threw kisses; and a wave or a hello from us, or even a glance in their direction caused their faces to light up like we were the greatest thing they had ever seen.

Our next exposure to the people was with a club dedicated

to English speaking. Twenty of them came to our missionary's house, cooked an Acehnese meal and ate it with us. These students, the "cream of the crop" in Aceh, were warm, open, and friendly.

We learned that many of them were interested in the Bible, and some had made many inquiries concerning Jesus. Where is the hostility for which the Acehnese are famous?

It is here, but it is not the personality of the people. It is obvious that the fight is with powers of darkness, not people.

THE "NEVERTHELESS GANG"...

Other mission agencies would not consider placing missionaries here. They say it is "closed". Many would say it is impossible and unthinkable to work here. I remembered I Samuel 5:6,7 when this was mentioned; it is the story of David invading Jerusalem, which had never been captured since Joshua's day. It was inhabited by a fierce people called the Jebusites, who taunted Israel with their bold declaration that the city could not be taken. They said "You will never come in here!" However, the Bible records this: "NEVERTHELESS...DAVID CAPTURED THE STRONGHOLD OF ZION...!" The stronghold of the enemy gave way, and it finally became the stronghold of Zion, the seat of David's government! "You will never come in here", the saying of the Jebusites, is just like the reputation of Aceh towards Christianity -- "you can't come in here!!!!" Our missionary told of another missionary, a 20 year veteran in Indonesia, who had been every place in the nation except Aceh. He had even seen people raised from the dead -- obviously knowing the power of God. He asked our missionary, "Where are you living?" Our missionary said, "Aceh." The missionary said emphatically, "You can't do that!!"

Our missionary told of Singaporean and Malaysian Christians who on coming to their house in Aceh were paralyzed with fear at even leaving the house. The reputation of Aceh is all over SE Asia. But God's grace is with these missionaries: They are God's NEVERTHELESS GANG!

THE VISION FOR ACEH...

Why are they in Aceh? In the missionary's words, "to see the establishment of an Acehnese church, a church with a vision to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the same areas of Southeast Asia where the Acehnese were the propagators of Islam...Indonesia, Malaysia, Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, Brunei, and Singapore."

I was reminded of Revelation 5:9,10: "For Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood, men from EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE AND PEOPLE AND NATION." The Acehnese are one of them, and God will have His way!!!

OUR TASK...

The Lord sends us there to intercede for these people whom God loves; He wants to bring them life in Jesus. And so we have sought for the mind of the Lord in carrying out our intercessory war against the powers of darkness who have held Aceh too long. **Will you help us get there again?**

John and Jackie