

THOUGHTS OF DISCIPLESHIP, MARTYRDOM AND GOD'S WORK IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

Abu Dawood

Abu Dawood, along with his wife and children, has lived and ministered among Gulf Arab Muslims for over sixteen years. He teaches at a higher education institution and serves on a team that seeks to befriend Muslims, minister to those seeking God, disciple believers, and, by God's grace, establish indigenous churches.

To be a good son or daughter, to be a good citizen, and to be a good Muslim are one and the same for most people of the Arabian Peninsula (AP). To lack in one aspect of these is to fail in all and bring shame upon the family and tribe of the individual. As missionaries here, we endorse the importance of honouring the family and nation by way of Christ and the Gospel. But as many seekers here claim, it is difficult to follow Jesus and be an AP citizen alone, without any support of the family and nation.

In the late 1990s, we felt God moving us to place the *Jesus Film* in local video stores as many Gulf nationals did not believe that God would allow one of his prophets to die. We thought it was a big project for the region until God brought the *Passion of the Christ* film in 2004. This film was shown in many of the theatres of the AP and those countries that forbade the film experienced wide-spread distribution of bootleg DVD copies. Since that film, I rarely hear Muslims of the AP say that Jesus did not die on the cross. We heard the call of God and worked to impact our city for Christ, but *God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think* (Eph 3:20), and he impacted the entire Arabian Peninsula.

In more recent years, we have seen an increasing number of seekers in the AP but many are afraid to follow Jesus as they feel there are no other AP national believers. Of course, there are believers but community aspects of the Arab culture are strong and the thought of being alone brings fears. Thus, many of us felt God's call to initiate the writing, filming, and production of a film entitled, *Flowers in the Desert*, which dramatically portrays the testimonies of three actual AP believers. The project is soon to be filmed for eventual satellite and Internet release so those viewing it will know that there are believers among the citizens of the AP. However, again God has gone far beyond our expectations in the person of Fatima Al-Mutayri, who was martyred in August 2008.

Christian martyrdom in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has happened before, but the situation is different with Fatima who was an active blogger and

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poet. She was above reproach, from a distinguished tribe, and well respected among her friends. In the past, martyrdom was dismissed and denied, like any other shameful family event. However, with Fatima, the martyrdom has not been hidden or denied and many are discussing on the blogs the 'dangers' of the Internet and whether her family followed Islamic judicial protocol in her execution. In other words, no one is questioning whether or not Fatima was a Christian. In fact, as one AP missionary was discussing the martyrdom with Gulf friends, the response was, "That's not that strange. I know others like her."

Fatima writes, 'Oh history record and witness (that) we are Christians walking on the path of the Messiah'. She may have veiled the truth of her new faith from her family but the Internet gave her an outlet for the expression of her faith and nationalistic pride. Being from a renowned Bedouin tribe, she desired for all the people of KSA to see the truth and understand the nation's pitiful condition due to the influence of religious zealots.

Since Fatima's departure, others continue to discuss her martyrdom on various Internet blogs. Some write prayers for KSA and another blog posts poetry under the name 'In the way of Fatima'. Some Muslims discuss the family's involvement, honour, and the necessary time to elapse before executing an apostate. Other Muslims are repulsed by her death and discuss the need for improved human rights. However, whatever the blog topic, *Fatima's witness as a follower of the Lord Jesus is not questioned* and it is upon the blood of the martyrs that the church is established. In other words, through Fatima's martyrdom, the thought that there are AP followers of Christ is out among the people, and seekers now know that they are not alone. And in the Arab World the fear of being alone is a far greater fear than martyrdom. As Fatima wrote in the end of her last email message describing a religious debate with her brother, "If I am away for a while, don't worry as *The Lord is with me. He is my light and salvation so from whom do I fear?*"

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For further reading, check out the following websites and search for additional news on Fatima.

In English: <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/08/12/10236558.html>
<http://newsletter.persecution.com/>

In Arabic: <http://gch1.org/ar/>
<http://www.fouadzadieke.de/>