Flora Davidson 1879-1959

A Servant of the Afghan People



Flora and friends in Kohat

Those who had the faith to laugh at impossibilities and press the battle to the gates are found in God's 'hall of fame'. Miss Flora Davidson is one of these heroes!

She came from Aberdeen in Scotland. Her father was a Scottish Lord. Both her parents were converted in a Moody and Sankey campaign in the 1880s in Scotland. Her brother, a future general, was an officer in a famous Highland Regiment.

In 1909, as a young woman, Flora visited her brother who was stationed in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in the city of Peshawar. It was in this city that Flora sensed God's call on her life to work among Afghans.

In 1915 she returned to Peshawar and rented a house in the old part of the city away from the cantonment area. She began to learn Urdu and Pushtu. In 1919 there was the Third Anglo-Afghan War – a rather short affair. During this period Flora learned nursing skills at Peshawar Military Hospital. She was to use these skills a great deal as she travelled in Pushtun villages on the borders of Afghanistan.

She became one of the most devoted workers who loved the Pushtun people perhaps in a way no one else has ever done. She served among them for 47 years together with Maria Rasmussen from Denmark. For much of that time they lived in Kohat City unguarded and alone except for Mir Baz, an Afghan Pushtun, who would have given his life to protect these two ladies, but who wouldn't let his son come near lest he come under the influence of the Gospel. He would not even let his son be educated at the primary school in case it would prevent him avenging his father if Mir Baz was injured or killed.

Two main characteristics of the ministry of Flora are **her prayer life** and **her courage**.

In 1924 Flora began to send out **The Afghan Prayer Cycle**. This was a monthly prayer letter. It began, *"Dear Rope-holders"* from an analogy originally used by William Carey. In 1938 this was replaced by a quarterly report called **Mission on the Borders of Afghanistan** edited by Margaret Haines who had been a co-worker with Flora but had been invalided back to the USA. This continued in production until 1959.

In 1929 Flora and Maria did a prayer walk around the borders of Afghanistan. They started up in North-Eastern Iran – north of Meshed near the Soviet border – and walked all around the west, the south and the eastern borders, finishing up in northern Kashmir near the present Chinese border. As they walked they prayed that Afghanistan would open to the Gospel and that God would establish His church there. So prayer walks are not so new and often ladies have pioneered in this area!

In 1925 Flora moved from Peshawar to Kohat in what was then British India. There were four towns that controlled the four major routes into Afghanistan from India:

1. **Peshawar and the Khyber pass**
2. **Kohat and the Kurram pass**
3. **Bannu and the Tochi pass**
4. **Dera Ismail Khan and Tank and the Gomel pass**

Dr. Pennell had started an effective work in Bannu. Others were in Tank and Peshawar. So Flora opened up a ministry in Kohat with Maria. They worked as a midwifery team and travelled extensively in the tribal areas of the Pushtun right up to the borders of Afghanistan.



Flora's house in Kohat

In Kohat Flora had an "upper room" constructed in her house [see the photo] with a large window facing Afghanistan. In front of that window she placed a little wooden bench. She spent many hundreds of hours in prayer for Afghanistan by that bench.

Wherever Flora went, she openly preached the Gospel. In 1938 she wrote that she had preached the Gospel in nearly every Pushtun village in what is now Pakistan. She showed incredible courage. The Afghans put a 5000 rupee bounty on her head – a considerable amount of money then. The British Army made her have four armed guards with her wherever she went. She allowed these guards to accompany her, but refused to let them have ammunition – a fact that was well known!

In 1939 the British government expelled her from Kohat because she was "a corrupting influence". What was her influence? That year twelve Afghan believers were baptised at one time! She really was an amazing lady. She feared no one! Her brother-in-law, also a British army general, was offered the governorship of the North West Frontier Province by the British government. He declined and said that although he had no doubt that he could control the wild Pushtun tribespeople; he doubted that he could control his sister-in-law!

With the end of the British Raj in 1947 and the birth of Pakistan, it was possible for Flora to go into Afghanistan. She got a visa to enter Afghanistan and she went to Kabul. Her passport said she was 'a spinster' – i.e. unmarried. The Afghan officials thought this must mean a textile spinner or weaver and so she got her visa. She only managed to stay four months, but during this period she travelled all over the country, praying and witnessing – claiming the ground she walked on! She wrote:

"Suspicion is heavy in the air. Outwardly Afghanistan is a country of terrible barrenness. Inwardly its people have an appalling need of the Lord Jesus – the only One who can give freedom, justice and peace."

Her courage was amazing. Sometimes she slept at night fully clothed when there were rumours of kidnappings taking place. She hoped that she would be kidnapped and taken away into the remote hills so she could be among people who had never heard the Gospel! She couldn't imagine another way the Gospel could reach these people. She was a brave woman, generous and humorous, with a laugh that others said reminded them of the pealing of bells.

In Kohat Flora and Marie worked day and night witnessing to men, women and children. They witnessed boldly for the Lord Jesus through dispensary work and hospitality to the Pushtun tribal people. She earned an incredible amount of esteem among the tribal leaders and even among the fanatical mullahs – fathers of today's Taliban. When she started in Kohat, a mullah threatened Flora. He said that on giving the first piece of Christian literature in Urdu or Persian she would be killed. But she gave them out to all. Many spat at her and often she had to wipe the spittle from her face.

In 1952 her health broke down. Just before going back to Scotland, she went out on one last tour up to the villages on the frontier with Afghanistan. She wrote:

"I am just off again – break of day – and I do need your prayer help. I'm rather dreading it again. You know what it all means. But the yellow light flashed and now the green is on, so go I must. It was good seeing you again. Maybe next time will be in the air with Him – higher than the planes go and no coming down! As you know, I did not want to get better or go on, but last Sunday at the breaking of bread His wonderful love came over me once again and I am glad if I have something to give – though only the dregs ....
Blessings on you,
Flora Davidson."

The “dregs” of a life poured out in His name for the salvation of others!

By then she had had a bad accident and she had to be invalided back to Scotland in December 1952. Flora served on the field until she could serve no longer.

She wrote two books on her return to Scotland, **Hidden Highway** and **Wild Frontiers**. These contain almost no biographical details, but are full of amazing stories of people coming to faith!

Flora entered into the presence of the Lord Jesus on February 25 1959 aged 79. She had poured out her life for the Afghan peoples.

There was a hymn that Flora really loved. It was written by Anna Shipton and published in 1872. It is based on Is. 32:20, ***“How blessed you will be sowing your seed by every stream.”***

See also Jer. 17:7-8, ***“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes. Its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”***

Sow ye beside all waters.
Where the dew of heaven may fall;
Ye shall reap if ye be not weary.
For the Spirit breathes o’er all.
Sow, though the thorns may wound thee.
One wore the thorns for thee.
And though the cold world scorn thee,
Patient and hopeful be.

Sow ye beside all waters
With a blessing and a prayer,
Name Him whose hand upholds thee,
And sow ye everywhere.
Sow where the sunlight sheddeth
It’s warm and cheering ray;
For the rain of heaven descended
When the sunbeams pass away.

Sow, though the rock repel thee
In its cold and sterile pride.
Some cleft there may be riven,
Where the little seed may hide.
Fear not, for some will flourish;
And though the tares abound,
Like willows by the waters
Will scattered grain be found.

Work while the daylight lasteth
Ere the shades of night come on;
Ere the Lord of the vineyard cometh,
And the labourer’s work is done.
Watch not the clouds above thee;
Let the wild winds round thee sweep.
God may the seed time give thee,
But another’s hand may reap.

Have faith, though ne’er beholding
The seed burst from its tomb;
Thou know’st not which may perish.
Or which be spared to bloom.
Room on the narrowest ridges
The ripened grain will find,
That the Lord of Harvest coming
In the harvest sheaves may bind.

Will Jesus chide thy weakness
Or call thy labour vain?
On, with thy heart in heaven,
Thy strength thy Master’s might
Till all the wild, waste places,
“Blossom in the warmth
Of the Saviour’s light”.
All glory be to Him.