

# DICK McLELLAN IN ETHIOPIA

(story used by permission)

## **AN AMAZING 'COINCIDENCE'**

Mahae, Dick, Nana – 3 missionaries from 3 different tribes – brothers in getting the Gospel to the tribes in Southern Ethiopia.

*“Do you have the Word of Life? Do you have the Word of Life?”*

My three Ethiopian evangelist friends (Mahae, Dick, Nana) and I were walking along the ridge from one village to another when we saw the crippled old man sitting at the edge of the trail 200 yards ahead. He had seen us first and was shouting his question at the top of his voice. I don't suppose too many missionaries get an invitation like that, so I waved my Ethiopian Bible and shouted, “Yes, I have the Word of Life!” He got all excited, bouncing up and down and calling back, “Come, come, come!”

But let me retrace my steps and show you the amazing set of circumstances that led to this moment. Dare we call these coincidences, or are they the hand of God?

## **AUSTRALIA 1976**

My wife Vida and I had returned to Australia on furlough, and in my ministry I was challenging young people to go to the ends of the earth to preach the Gospel. As I was doing this, we heard the news that the Bodi warriors had suddenly swept through the part of Ethiopia where we had been working. Fifteen churches and the Bible School were destroyed. Very few of the 3,000 baptized believers had escaped. In fact, over the next few months, 10,000 people were to lose their lives in that area and thousands scattered to other places.

As I was challenging young people to go out, the Lord said to me, “Dick, I want *you* to go to the Bodis.” And so it was that Vida stayed with our family and I went back for 9 months and lived with some Ethiopian Christian men among the Bodi people.

## **BODI COUNTRY, ETHIOPIA 1977**

The Lord burdened us for many months to pray for a certain area where no missionary had ever been. It was up on a little ridge near the forest and was very difficult to get to because it was surrounded by the tribe that I was living among, the savage Bodi.

Knowing that the Lord wanted us to go, we had alerted hundreds of people in the homeland to pray for us. We knew it could be dangerous as we had to go through some areas where there had been a lot of killing, and we never knew what might happen. Early one morning we set out, and on that first day arrived at the main Bodi village. The tall Bodi chief, (6' 9". and about 270 lbs.) welcomed us and let us stay overnight. Early the next morning as we were leaving, he said, "Where are you going?"

"We're going to Gifara," I replied.

"Oh," he said, "I know that way. I was there recently."

I didn't tell him that I knew he had been there! He had gone 2 months before with a raiding party. When the people saw him coming they had scattered in every direction. The only person that he could catch was a pregnant woman, whom he tied to the center pole of a house and tortured before burning the house down. He knew the area all right and he showed us the trail to follow.

As we went, very much in prayer, we found the way blocked by very thick thorn bushes. We just couldn't cut through, tunnel under, or walk around them. And so instead of going on the main path, we found ourselves sidetracked, stumbling up and down for 2 days over very rough country, the worst in which I've ever trekked. *Later we found out that that main track was ambushed and the Lord had delivered us.*

Finally we arrived in Gifara, the village where no missionary had ever been. Usually when people saw my red hair and fair skin, they would run in all directions! To entice them back, we would take a cassette or a record and just sit back while it played. In a few minutes people would come to see this thing going round and round, and they would watch it and listen. But when we came into Gifara, instead of the people running *away*, they ran *toward* us. They just came flocking by the hundreds from every direction. They grabbed hold of us and sat us down. The people boiled coffee and roasted grain to feed us.

They said, "Stay with us and tell us the good news."

We said to each other, "We don't get too many invitations like this," and so we stayed there and had a marvelous time witnessing.

The Spirit of God in answer to prayer, had prepared the hearts of those people. We played cassettes over and over again, and they just drank in the Gospel. As we preached the Word, it was marvelous to see the response. And that's when we met the

man who asked “Do you have the Word of Life?” – But that’s not all the story. Let me go back further.

### THE CLINIC, ETHIOPIA 1956

My wife and I were missionaries many miles south of Gifara. Vida had a little bush clinic there and one day, into it came a very sick man. Although Vida treated him with everything she had he just got worse and worse. Finally it was decided that the only thing that could save him was to send him to the mission hospital days away over the mountains. Men had to carry him the first 50 miles. Then he was put on the back of an old coffee truck that bounced for 2 weeks over those terrible roads. Finally he arrived at the hospital. Nobody could converse with him. He spoke only his own language that nobody at the hospital could understand. He had wandered down the valley, became sick, and passed on from village to village until he came to the clinic. Now we had sent him on, even further from his tribal home. Kebeda (as we later discovered his name to be) was getting so bad the doctor decided to operate. But his condition was deteriorating and they sutured him up again and put him in a bed in the ward. There was no way of getting word to his people – nobody knew where Kebeda came from.

### NEAR THE HOSPITAL 1956

A couple of weeks later a muleteer was in the area. He passed through only once a year with his hundreds of mules on his way to Gifara for coffee beans. But this time, as he was some 20 miles from the mission hospital, he got a toothache the likes of which he never had before! It hurt his jaw, neck, ear, head and everywhere else, and he thought he was going to die! It got so bad he didn’t know what to do until somebody said, “You go to that hospital and they will be able to help you.” When he arrived he was so infected they pumped him full of penicillin, and after more treatment placed him in the men’s ward next to Kebeda. *Was it a coincidence that this man could speak in Kebeda’s language?!!*

### LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1956

A few months before in Los Angeles, the Lord said to Joy Ridderhof, founder of Gospel Recordings, “I want you to go to Ethiopia.” And so she went with a couple of other workers and in a miraculous way was given permission by His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie, to go throughout Ethiopia recording Gospel messages. Was it by chance that she was at that hospital when the muleteer arrived? Joy recorded Gospel messages in Kebeda’s language using the muleteer as interpreter. Those tapes were sent to Los Angeles. Records were made and sent back to that mission hospital, but no one could

understand them, so they put them in a cupboard. They just collected dust and the years went by.

### BODI COUNTRY, ETHIOPIA 1977

Kebeda never returned home. He died in the hospital and was buried in the little cemetery alongside. The muleteer had long since gone on his way. Years later, another missionary took those dusty records and transferred them onto a cassette. Was it by chance that I was passing that way and picked up that cassette?

And so on that day when this old man was waving and shouting, "Do you have the Word of Life?" we had that cassette with the Gospel messages that were actually *in his language!* He told us how many years before he had had a dream. He had seen a man running down the trail shouting out, "The Word of Life is coming! Believe the Word of Life and you'll live forever!" At night time, in pitch dark, in an area where there are elephants, lions, hyenas and any other wild animal you can think of, *nobody* travels at night; particularly because of the Bodis who kill on sight. But he had heard someone running and shouting.

From that time on, this crippled man had slid on his bottom down to the edge of the trail, waiting for the Word of Life, and now after all these years, here we were.

"Do you have the Word of Life?"

"Yes, we do."

"Sit down and tell me about it."

For two hours he just drank in the Gospel as we told him of Jesus. It was just like a sponge drinking up water! We left the cassette and player behind with one of the evangelists and went on our way.

### SAME PLACE, EVENING OF THE SAME DAY

When we returned that evening our man was waiting. He was ready to come to Christ, just like that. Although he couldn't stand, he held his hands high, renounced Satan and gave his heart to Christ. He was one of the 30 people in that area who came to the Lord during the five days we spent among them.

The thing that got through to him was that when we played the cassette *he heard the voice of his own son Kebeda* who had left that area all those years before and who had died in the mission hospital!

Today we marvel how God brought so many things together: a dream – a toothache – a bush clinic – a mission hospital – a heathen muleteer – praying Christians – God's many obedient servants – a tape recorder – dusty 21 year old records – a cassette – some "coincidences" – and the voice of that man's lost son – *all to bring this one man the Word of Life!*

*Dick McLellan*

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