

# MESSENGERS *of* ETHIOPIA

Dick McLellan

*“Along the rivers of Ethiopia...  
Go, swift messengers, to people tall and  
smooth-skinned, to people feared far and wide,  
to aggressive people of strange language.”*

*Isaiah 18:1,2*

*Extraordinary stories of men and women  
who suffered and died for the gospel*

# LOST COIN

Messengers of Ethiopia  
*Ethiopian National Missionaries –  
Bearers of Good News in the Omo River Valley*  
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Unless otherwise stated, Scripture verses are rough translations or paraphrases of the Ethiopian Amharic Bible that is similar to the New King James Version or the New International Version translations.

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# DEDICATION

To the vast army of single women; nurses, teachers, translators, secretaries and helpers of every kind, who sacrificed so much and served so faithfully to share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We remember Selma, Fiona, Nelda, Betty, Daisy, Freda, Beverley, Merle, June, Ruth, Joy, Doris, Pearl, Kay – too many to name.

*“The LORD gave the Word; great was the army of women that proclaimed it.”*  
*Psalm 68:11*

To honour Ethiopian Christian girls Ruth, Tabita, Rahel, Mulunesh and many other teenagers who were imprisoned, abused, tortured and some killed for their faith in Jesus Christ during the “Red Terror” of the communist regime, 1974-1991.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dr Malcolm Hunter, my friend and missionary colleague who kindly wrote the Foreword to this book, also shared many of the details in chapters 11 and 12. To him I owe a debt of gratitude. His vision and concern for the nomadic tribes around the world has inspired many of us to pray and to go that all may hear of God’s gift of love, Jesus Christ.

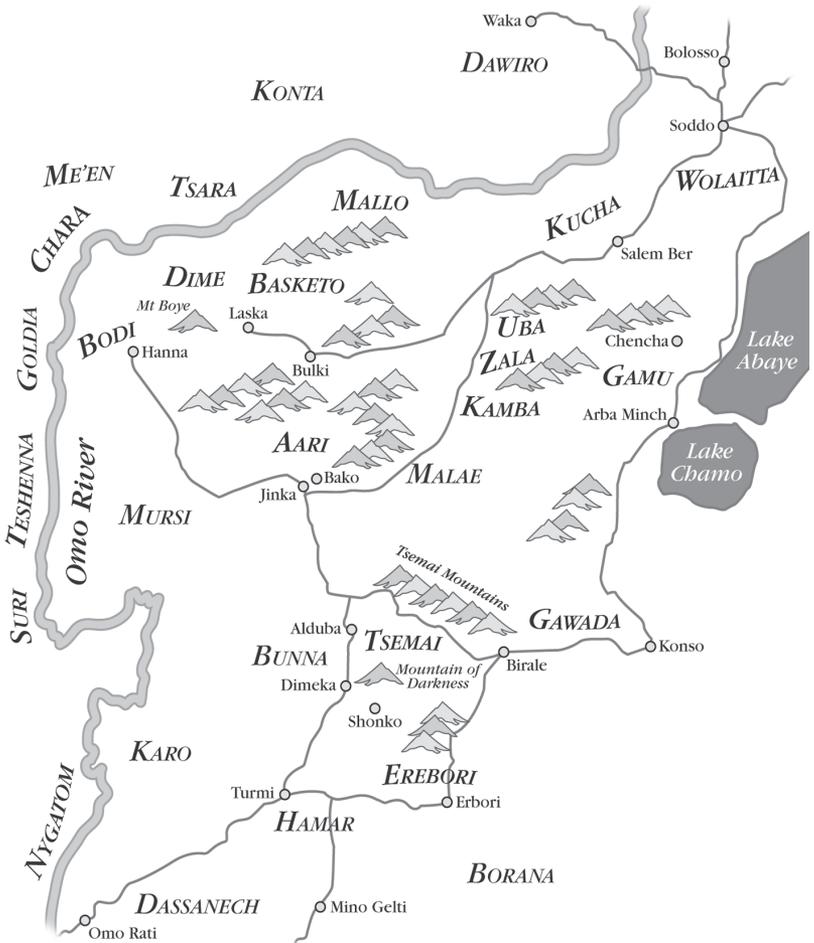
## THANKS

To Vida, Margaret and John who read, checked and corrected the manuscript, John who arranged the photographs, Amy who drew the picture of the Ethiopian letter carrier, and many others who, after reading *Warriors of Ethiopia* encouraged me to write more stories, and most of all, prayed for me as I wrote and struggled through some tough times this year.

Map 01: Ethiopia and its neighbours



Map 02: The Omo River Valley and Southwest Ethiopia





# FOREWORD

Dick McLellan's second book is a worthy and appropriate sequel to his *Warriors of Ethiopia*, as that is what God has done in Dick and Vida's lifetime; turned warring, cattle-raiding killers into messengers of the gospel of peace. I had the exciting privilege over more than 15 years of following behind Dick in his pursuit to advance the Kingdom of God through tribes he opened up in the Omo Valley. Being able to work in several different ethnic groups simultaneously and progressively is not the typical missionary experience but the secret of this success was the national evangelists who were sent by their own ethnic churches to carry the gospel to those largely nomadic people groups. This book, like its predecessor, is the story of these heroes of the faith who came to live among those different tribes, learn their languages and culture and to be the agents of change that God needed. There were very few white missionaries involved as there are not many who are willing to live the sort of life which Dick pioneered.

God used us to challenge thousands of believers who came to hear the word of God at their annual conference. When we called for volunteers to go with us to take the gospel to unreached tribes, dozens would respond. The church leaders who knew their people best chose and sent the most gifted and dependable men with their families for the long haul – no short term mission tourism here. There is nothing more motivating than when a foreign missionary who has earned the respect of the national churches says, "Let us go together to those who have never heard of the Lord Jesus," and there is nobody more respected and used by God in this way than Dick. There are many big preachers who chal-

lenge other people to go, but they themselves do not go, nor struggle and suffer with the 'long haul' evangelists like Dick did. In his books Dick does not focus on his trials and struggles but if you read between the lines you will see a little of what he and Vida suffered for the sake of the gospel.

One evangelist with a truly apostolic ministry who appears in both books is the amazing Ato Mahae. I had the enormous privilege of taking over as Mahae's driver when Dick left his long term service in Ethiopia. Mahae is the man whom God used to start a pioneer movement in most of the ethnic groups you will read about in this book. With the power of the Holy Spirit and fervent prayer he would lead a few men and women to Christ in each tribe, call in other better trained workers to teach the new believers and then challenge a few of them to go with him to the nearby tribes where there were no believers. These were often traditional enemies so the dangers of crossing over the tribal boundaries were very real. This is where we foreigners with modern medicine, teaching and development technologies served with the national evangelists.

It was usually Mahae who would say, "God has told me that we should go to that next tribe who has not yet heard of Jesus." We listened to this anointed messenger as we had learned that Mahae sensed where the Spirit of God was moving and we would find the people whom God had prepared to receive the Gospel and believe.

One day Mahae was preaching in a small local market when a man from the despised Wato Wando people of the Borana tribe heard the message and said "I heard the message and it seemed so good. Could I also believe and receive this Jesus as my Saviour?" Mahae was thrilled to meet the man and without delay followed him to his settlement; five hours walk away through the bush. Within weeks Mahae saw God working and most of the community of about one thousand people said they were ready to follow Jesus. This happens most often amongst the very lowest, despised people who rejoice to hear that in God's eyes they are loved and accepted, the same as other people.

That was the beginning of Ato Mahae's latest effort to advance the Kingdom of God, going into the large Borana people group. There are about three million of them, thinly scattered across southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. At ninety years of age, Mahae is not so actively leading the charge these days but praying long and hard for the churches he has founded. He ventures out alone into the isolated grazing lands of western Borana where the national evangelists he recruited are serv-

ing. It was on such a trip this year that after three days on the road he collapsed and was found unconscious. Mahae very nearly died but after spending several weeks in hospital he came back home.

He sent a message recently that he is now ready for Mr. McLellan or Dr Hunter to come and take him to visit the evangelists again. I am hoping it might be both Dick and me together again, as a grand finale for a grand old saint, and perhaps also for my much esteemed mentor. God bless them both!

Malcolm Hunter

*October 2009*



# INTRODUCTION

At the top of the high mountain range, I pulled my mule to a halt and somewhat stiffly, climbed down off the saddle. I needed a rest and the mule was glad to stop after the long climb. As I rested in the shade of a juniper tree, the mule nibbled on tufts of grass by the side of the road. Then I saw, for the first time, an Ethiopian melikitenya – a bearer of messages. He was a special messenger in the days before the present efficient postal service was established across the land.

When I saw him, the messenger was far away, on another mountain and there was a deep valley between us. As he ran sure-footed down the steep mountainside he shouted out news from the place he had come from to the people in the village down below. He did not even stop in the village but kept going, and kept calling out the news as he raced on. At the crossing place of the stream he stopped for a few minutes to gulp down some water and to wash his face before starting the climb up the mountain I was descending.

As he approached me I saw he had a small leather satchel at his side, probably containing roast corn or chickpeas to eat as he travelled. He was obviously in a hurry. He gave me a kind of Boy Scout salute as he approached, gave a quick greeting with a grin, and rushed on past up the mountain. The stamina of the messenger was amazing.

In his right hand the messenger carried a short stick that he held out in front of him as he ran. It was like a sign of his position and authority while on duty. The stick was split at the top and tied between the two halves was a bunch of letters. They were messages he carried from the

district office to the provincial capital – official government business. Only on one other occasion did I encounter that kind of special messenger – it was an era that was rapidly passing away.

In my Ethiopian Bible, Second Corinthians 5:20 we are called “Messengers for Christ” to announce good news. We are to reconcile lost people to God. The stories in this book are of ordinary Ethiopian people whom the Lord Jesus Christ sent out as His special messengers of the Gospel. Be blessed and challenged by their commitment to the Saviour as they delivered the message with which they were entrusted.

Dick McLellan





# LIDJAE

(LID-JAY)

## A NEW RELATIONSHIP

The little boy came running through the doorway when he heard his master call. About six years old, he was shiny black, naked. But as he came into the house, he saw something he had never seen before – and it frightened him! He froze in mid-air, his hair standing up on his head! Eyes wide open! Then he dropped to the ground, spun around and started to race back the way he came – but much faster than he had arrived!

The thing that frightened the boy so much and panicked him into flight was what was sitting on a stool in the house. It was a man – a white man! The boy had heard rumours, fearful rumours about people who were white, but he could not believe those stories. It was like other weird tales frequently told around the fire at night.

One time the boy heard his master, the landowner, speak about meeting a white man at Konta. He had called him a red man. This man was red! He had red hair, reddish, sunburnt face and hands. He looked so big! Would he eat him? The boy was scared out of his wits and turned to run!

Vida and I flew in the Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) plane from our Mission station at Waka to Konta Koysha. It was a five-day trip by mule over rugged country, but only thirty minutes in the small Cessna aeroplane. When possible we chose the high way – I mean the sky way! Each month we went out to Konta for five or six days of ministry.

As the plane flew off, the pilot promising to return for us on the appointed day, we quickly pitched our tent. We put our few possessions inside, made beds and stacked the food and medicine. The noise of the plane announced to people for miles around that we had returned.

As usual, people soon started arriving for medical help. It seemed that everyone had malaria or tuberculosis or both. Syphilis and gonorrhoea were prevalent because of their promiscuous lifestyle and there were lots of tropical ulcers, yaws, typhoid, eye diseases and many more illnesses. As the people had never had antibiotics before, Vida saw amazing results that earned her the reputation as a powerful Hakim, doctor. Superstitious people thought she had magical power in her hands as she touched the patients and prayed for them. Others thought all her power was in the jab of the injections she gave!

While Vida conducted the Clinic, a Wolaitta evangelist shared the Gospel of Christ with the people who waited their turn. I went with other evangelists to share the Gospel in villages around the airstrip. Sometimes I had meetings with the evangelists or with the elders chosen in the new emerging churches.

One day a small man from a different area, another language group, came to the Clinic. He wore only a rough, wrap-around made from the bark of a tree. Through a local interpreter, I asked the man where he came from. He pointed with his chin to the mountain range toward the south and said, "Tsara."

"Is it far?" I asked him.

"No," he replied, again pointing with his chin, "It is very near, just there. Just over the hill."

"Will you guide me there?" I asked, and the man said he would take me to his village. We arranged for the man to meet us and guide us to Tsara when we returned a month later.

I did not believe the "very near, just there, just over the hill" estimate of the distance by the Tsara man so I sent two young men with our mules from Waka to be there in Konta Koysha when the MAF plane flew us out for our next visit. My guess proved right! The Tsara man was there to meet us and the men had arrived with the mules. With some evangelists I followed the little man.

He led us along the valley, up the mountain range, down the other side, across a stream, through the tall grass, up another steep mountain and down the other side. We went through thick forest with giant trees, and we rode, mostly walked and stumbled through the ruts and ravines until finally, after nearly 48 hours, we finally arrived in part of Tsara!

There was a large cleared area surrounded on three sides by thick