

## Lilias Trotter: Obstacles in Algeria, Power in Prayer

Born 14 July 1853

*Missionary to Algeria for 38 years*

Died 27 August 1928



Lilias heard the call from God to go to North Africa, and less than 9 months later she stepped foot in the city of Algiers. Lilias was nearly 35 years old she traveled to Algeria in 1888 with two companions, Lucy Lewis and Blanche Haworth. Lilias had a deep yearning to take the gospel where there was darkness, and her small team was going into the depths of it where Islam was in control.

Lilias, Lucy and Blanche began praying a three-fold prayer: that doors might be opened, that hearts might be opened, and that the heavens might be opened. The first challenge was to learn Arabic. Algeria was a French colony, and so French was widely spoken, but primarily by the men. Lilias wanted to reach the women, so she felt a driving urge to quickly learn Arabic.

The cultural standard was typically for the women to be secluded in their homes, and it was difficult to get invited into the homes. One of the best ways of being welcomed in the home was to befriend the children; sometimes the child would take Lilias inside to his mother.



While all these obstacles were large, the greatest one the little missionary team faced was that the gospel message was inconceivable. Lilias wrote,

We talked to one [woman] who could speak French; we began speaking of our Lord's love; she shook her head most sadly. "No, He does not love the women, only the men." We repeated John 3:16. But she only said again and again, "No, no, not the world, not the women."

As the women became fluent in Arabic and understood more about the culture, they also became more aware of the spiritual battle around them.

More than ever... we have sights of the deliberate power of the devil around us. The moral filth that lies on all sides comes into view in directions we had never imagined, even right down among the small children; they are sunk in it. All the outward ways in which the powers of evil are invoked—the spells, the sorceries, and witchcraft—come to light more and more as we get contact with the people. No wonder that the very air seems impregnated with devilry, and that the sense of knowing him as the adversary has

been keener than ever before, and a counter-move ready for every move God makes. More and more we come across strange, weird cases of illness brought on by anger, which seem more like cases of possession than anything else. One could literally do nothing but pray at every available bit.



Most of the women in Algeria were illiterate, but at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Liliyas could sense that change was coming and that more women would become educated. One of Liliyas' major creative efforts was to create booklets of stories and parables that displayed various aspects of Jesus and the gospel. She created the booklets in such a way that they would look Arab to an Arab reader instead of foreign and strange, and they included Arabic script and traditional borders and designs.

Of their work Liliyas wrote,

It came so strongly that our present work was just to sow; broadcast, as far and wide as we could, in preparation for the coming harvest. The sowing beside all waters must mean such unselfish sowing - not calculating what will take root on our little plot, but letting that just take its chance of sharing in the future harvest - and scattering meanwhile far and wide.

Liliyas' dream was for teams to be established in remote desert towns, but in the meantime she and Blanche made periodic visits. Their first expedition into the desert was to Biskra, about 250 miles south of Algiers. Today the trip takes only a few hours by car. For Liliyas and Blanche it meant 288 miles by train east to Constantine, south 150 miles by horse-drawn wagon, and then 30 miles by camel.



Liliyas loved these trips into the desert. She found beauty in the vast skies and shifting sands. She said of the desert,

Oh, the desert is lovely in its restfulness—the great brooding stillness over and through everything is so full of God. One does not wonder that he used to take his people out into the wilderness to teach them.

While in a desert town, sometimes Liliyas would just walk along the dusty streets and stop at doors to see where she might be welcome. Often the desert women would invite her in and they would ask her questions.

One of them showed me the scratches on her face made when mourning for her husband who died a few days ago. “What do you do when people die?” she asked. I told her that if we believed in Jesus, God comforts us. It seemed to strike them so, they kept repeating it to one another, “God comforts them! God comforts them!”

Lilias and her friend Blanche founded the Algiers Mission Band. They saw the Band grow to include twenty-nine workers with outposts in at least 14 desert towns. The AMB eventually merged with North Africa Mission in 1964, and this changed its name to Arab World Ministries in 1987.



During the final three years of Lilias’ life a weak heart often confined her to her room. However, she continued to pray for the country and the people she loved. On August 27, 1928 some friends were visiting her. They sang “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.” When they finished Lilias looked out the window and exclaimed, “A chariot and six horses!” A friend asked her, “You are seeing beautiful things?” “Yes, many beautiful things.” Then she lifted her hands in prayer, calmly drew her last breath, and entered into the presence of Jesus.



God had given Lilias the threefold prayer when she entered Algeria 35 years prior. In 1923 she wrote about God’s answers to that prayer.

The threefold prayer of early days comes back to memory. First, that the doors might be opened: that is answered already above all we could ask or think. Then, that hearts might be opened: and that is coming—the attitude has swept round from apathy to hostility, and from hostility to a large measure of welcome. Next, and last, that the heavens may be opened—when that is granted, the harvest will come.

Note: Watercolor paintings are by Lilias Trotter.

#### References:

*Faithful Women & Their Extraordinary God*, by Noel Piper, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 2005.

*I, Lilias Trotter*, by Blanche A. F. Pigott, Marshall, Morgan & Scott Ltd, London, 1929.

*A Passion for the Impossible—The Life of Lilias Trotter*, by Miriam Huffman Rockness, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003.

Lilias’ paintings and some of her devotional writings can be found at

<http://www.unveiling.org/lily/glimpses.html>