

Current Missions Group

Iran [ih-RAHN] is a land of vivid contrasts.

Nomad tribes still roam the desert. . . . The crown jewels of Iran have been called the richest and most dazzling collection of jewels in the world. . . . Wealth and power gush from oil refineries on the Persian Gulf coast.

As one walks down the streets of Teheran [teh-eh-RAHN], one sees women wearing the *chodor*, a drab, dark veil that covers the head and body. On older and middle-aged women, high heels show beneath the veils; on young women blue jeans or slacks can be seen. Women talk while holding the *chodor* between their teeth.

Although Iran is still a "man's world," the Empress Farah has done much for women. Since 1963, women have had the vote; and they can be elected to public office.

Steeped in tradition, Iran is trying to become a progressively modern country.

The site of one of the world's earliest known civilizations, Iran is a new area of Southern Baptist missions work. It is a growing country. In 1920, for instance, the capital city of Teheran had two hundred thousand inhabitants. Today this city has over 3 million.

Reza Shah the Great unified the country and launched a series of reforms starting in 1924. He wanted to make Iran a modern and developed country, but a war from 1939-45 made it impossible for him to finish what he had started. So it was his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who continued and broadened his work. Since World War II, he has moved forcefully to develop the country as fast as possible.

The Drive for Education

A boom in education has been spreading across the Middle East since the price of oil went up. Iran is opening new schools, planning

new universities, and teaching by television. Education is the third largest item in the budget after military expenditures and housing.

The Iranian government has emphasized efforts to teach poor people to read. So far this program has had limited success, since it is estimated that more than 60 percent of the population are illiterate.

In 1974, the Shah stated that no Iranian would be denied an education because of financial need. Government subsidies extend to all types of educational institutions. The government has begun setting up university-level institutions since the great oil boom began.

The government of Iran has also begun the Free University. Students learn through television and teaching machines located at several hundred teaching centers around the country.

The emphasis is on useful education. The Shah once quoted from the Koran to emphasize the fact that education is more than just the accumulation of formal education. "The Koran says that a man who amasses much knowledge without understanding how to apply it resembles a donkey burdened with a heavy load of books of which he is totally ignorant."

Baptists in Iran

The English-speaking Baptist church in Teheran was begun because some Baptists, in Iran on industry and military assignments, felt the need for a church.

In 1972, a group of lay people started meeting in homes for fellowship. Charles Arrington—interim pastor of University Baptist Church in Beirut, Lebanon—came to meet with the group quarterly to help them get started. Dwight Baker, Southern Baptist representative to Israel, also came to help in preparation for the organization of the church.



Nancy Blevins Ryals

Ancient-
Modern-
Iran