

Remembering Africa Missionary Rowland Bingham

Rowland Bingham was heard to say, "I will open Africa to the gospel or die trying." He nearly died trying. But amid the pain of friends' deaths and against seemingly insurmountable odds, he succeeded in establishing the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and bringing the Good News to the people of the Sudan.

As a young man he became friends with Walter Gowan. Gowan had studied the special needs of the world and determined the people of the Sudan in central Africa were some of the world's neediest. In 1893, while still in his early 20s, Bingham sailed with a college friend, Thomas Kent, to join Gowan on his journey to Sudan. Filled with excitement they were stopped short when they reached the shores of West Africa. "Young men, you will never see the Sudan," the head of a mission agency there told them. Your children will never see the Sudan, your grandchildren may."

This dire warning seemed true when Bingham soon fell ill and had to stay in West Africa. His two companions attempted the 800-mile journey to the Sudan but within a year they both died. Gowan died soon after being released from being held by a hostile tribe; Kent died from the effects of malaria.

Grieving over the loss of his friends, Bingham returned to England heartbroken. He regained his strength, finished a medical course, pastored a church and married Helen Blair. That year Bingham also founded the Sudan Interior Mission. He launched a second attempt to reach the Sudan, only to be rebuffed again by missionaries in West Africa. Again he was struck down with malaria and had to return home. At this point, Bingham recalled, "I went through the darkest period of my life." Still, he refused to give up.

Gathering four more recruits Bingham made a third attempt the next year. This time he succeeded. He established the first SIM mission station but converts were few. At the end of four years in Sudan, only one of his recruits remained. One had died and two others had to return home, too ill ever to return.

Through the difficulties Bingham learned to pray with power and the tide turned. Many came to faith in Christ and churches sprang up across the Sudan. The ministry of SIM International continues to be a powerful force for the gospel to this day. When Bingham was 69 years old he looked back with amazement at how the gospel had taken hold throughout the Sudan. Even though believers were often tortured or killed the church continued to grow. Bingham was completing a book relating the stories of his 50 years in Africa when he died of an apparent heart attack in 1942.

Today, many national pastors (frontline shepherds) in that region trace their spiritual roots to the ministry of Rowland Bingham. His courage and tenacity continue to inspire us today. God had called him and he simply would not give up.

David Shibley *is the founder and international representative of Global Advance, a ministry that equips tens of thousands of church and business leaders every year in many of the world's neediest areas.*