

"Bassai remained the only station until the close of 1923." P. 58

*Conquering*

# Oubangui - Chari

*for Christ*

by

ORVILLE D. JOBSON, D.D.

*Missionary to French Equatorial Africa*

THE  
BRETHREN MISSIONARY HERALD COMPANY  
WINONA LAKE, INDIANA

*To*

*My Faithful Wife*

CHARLOTTE H. JOBSON

*and to*

ALL MY FELLOW MISSIONARIES IN

THE OUBANGUI-CHARI MISSION

*To*

*My African "Son in the Faith"*

NOEL GAIWAKA

*and to*

ALL THE LEADERS IN THE AFRICAN BRETHREN CHURCHES

# *Foreword*

by

DR. ALVA J. MCCLAIN

*President of Grace Theological Seminary*

The Louis S. Bauman Memorial Lectureship was established by action of the 1952 National Fellowship of Brethren Churches; and provided that the areas of these annual lectures be chosen "within the range of Dr. Bauman's ministry, particularly in the fields of foreign missions, Biblical prophecy, denominational history, and theological education."

For the Third Annual Series the field of foreign missions was chosen; and since in the good providence of God Dr. Orville D. Jobson was to be in this country on furlough, he was requested by Grace Theological Seminary, acting jointly with the foreign-missions board of the Brethren Church, to prepare a short history of our Africa Mission.

For this important task no living person could have been better fitted than the author. For among the seventy-six missionaries sent out by the Foreign Missionary Society to French Equatorial Africa during the years 1918 to 1956, Dr. and Mrs. Jobson are now the senior members, having served continuously in that field since 1921, a period of thirty-six years. Both were intimately associated with James S. and Florence Newberry Gribble, founders of the Mission. And Dr. Jobson served as field superintendent of the Mission from 1938 until his last furlough, from which he has recently returned to Africa to resume that position. In May 1947 his long and valued contribution to the cause of foreign missions was recognized by the honorary degree of Doctor

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of Divinity conferred at Grace Theological Seminary.

His eventful years of missionary experience, his mastery of both French and native languages, his wide and diplomatic contacts with government officials, his acquaintance with the literature pertinent to this particular mission field, his close observation of native ways and cultures, his firm belief in the unlimited power of the Living Word to change lives and mores of primitive men, and above all his devotion to the Lord of the churches—these are the chief credentials for the task to which the author set his hand.

As I write this brief Foreword, memory goes back over the years to an unforgettable prayer meeting held in the First Brethren Church of Philadelphia of which I was the pastor, and of which James S. Gribble was a member. The year was 1921. Permission had been granted at last for the opening of a mission in French territory. Gribble was on the field, weakened with sickness, facing literally mountains of labor, but with no *man* to help him. We prayed that night for *two* young men, and God answered. At the close of the meeting a young man said: "I want to be one of those men." Within a few months he was on the field at the side of James Gribble. The author of these lectures was that young man. The other was Allen Bennett whose early death in Africa has borne its own precious fruit.

The history of the Mission Oubangui-Chari, as recounted by Dr. Jobson, constitutes a missionary document of deep interest and lasting value, not only to members of Brethren churches, but also to all those who pray and labor to win for the Lamb the reward for His sufferings. It demonstrates what God is able to do in saving the lost and also in fitting them for a place among "them which are sanctified by faith" in the Lord of the harvest.

Winona Lake, Indiana

# *Preface*

I am very grateful to Grace Theological Seminary for the invitation to deliver the Bauman Memorial Lectures for 1957.

The Seminary expressed the desire that the lectures cover the history of the Africa Mission of the Brethren Church with which Dr. Bauman was so intimately associated from its inception to his death in 1950.

The acceptance of the invitation has forced me to try to sort out the salient points and incidents in the Mission's history and arrange them in lectures of an hour's length.

It is assuming a great deal that what I have chosen to relate includes everything that those closely associated with the Mission might feel ought to be covered. However, I trust that these four lectures have presented at least an outline and a fair over-all picture of the Mission's activity since its beginning.

It is very fitting that these lectures were delivered in Grace Theological Seminary in connection with the annual Grace Bible Conference sponsored by the Grace Seminary Alumni Association inasmuch as forty-five of our missionaries to Africa have studied in this institution.

In the preparation of these lectures I am indebted to Dr. Russell D. Barnard, general secretary of the Foreign Missionary Society of the Brethren Church, who put at my disposal all available information on the Mission and who read the lectures and offered suggestions.

I also acknowledge my gratitude to Miss Ava Schnittjer, associate professor in English and Speech in Grace College, for reading the lectures and giving valuable editorial assistance, and to Mr. Benjamin A. Hamilton, research librarian

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in Grace Theological Seminary, for the preparation of the maps and for offering many valuable suggestions.

To Miss Evelyn Schumacher who so generously typed the whole manuscript and to numerous others who have offered suggestions and who have made valuable contributions, I also express my sincere appreciation.

May these lectures, which have already received a token of God's blessing, continue to bring glory to the Lord of the harvest as they now go forth in printed form.

The Lecturer.

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# *Introduction*

The history of foreign missions in the Brethren Church began with the organization of the Foreign Missionary Society at Winona Lake, Indiana, on September 4, 1900. The minutes recording the steps which led up to this organization clearly state that the charter members were acting in the leading of the Holy Spirit. The same blessed Holy Spirit who directed the church at Antioch to send forth the first century missionaries (Acts 13:1-3), led this group of fifty-three pastors and laymen to effect a society through which missionaries could be sent forth to unreached areas of the world in this twentieth century. Among those present at this initial meeting was Dr. Louis S. Bauman in whose memory these lectures are being delivered.

It is of historic interest that this missionary-minded group of men and women had their first meeting on the Winona Lake conference grounds. The very spot of their meeting is enshrined by the stately oaks on the little knoll between the Auditorium and the Billy Sunday Tabernacle just in front of the Administration Building. The Winona Lake Assembly proposes to erect a prayer chapel on this historic knoll and the Foreign Missionary Society has, a bronze memorial tablet ready to install in the proposed chapel, which bears the following inscriptions:

On this knoll, September 4, 1900  
The Foreign Missionary Society of the  
Brethren Church  
was organized

"To Testify to the Gospel of the Grace of God."

During the first ten years of its existence the Society

began work in three areas of the world: Canada, Persia, and Argentina. In 1917 North Central Africa was approved as a mission field and the pioneer party sailed early in 1918. The Society has continued its advance into other unreached parts of the world, sending missionaries to China, Brazil, France, Mexico, and the Hawaiian Islands.

The work in Canada, Persia, and China has since been discontinued due to certain circumstances and difficulties.

The foreign board meeting of 1917, will long be remembered as an important meeting in the history of Brethren foreign missions. Two decisions which were reached at this meeting ushered in a new era in the church's foreign-mission program.

The first was the acceptance of North Central Africa as a mission field for the church and the approval of a pioneer party of four to open the first testimony in Oubangui-Chari.

The other was to commence immediately the publication of a magazine which would be devoted exclusively to a presentation of the foreign-mission program of the church.

The carrying out of the first decision is the subject of these memorial lectures on the history of the Africa Mission.

The second decision was implemented by the appearance of the *Brethren Missionary* in October 1917, under the editorship of Louis S. Bauman. This magazine began as a quarterly but was later stepped up to a monthly publication. It continued through seventeen years as the official organ of the foreign missionary arm of the church.

J. Allen Miller, the first and only president of the board for thirty-five years, sounded the need for and stated the policy of the new magazine in the first article.

Missionary intelligence is the key that unlocks the stores of reserve power within the whole church. The missionary church is the growing church; she is also the church of resourceful service

and of loyal enthusiasms for the program of Jesus. Lack of information is to be blamed for the indifference of multitudes of men and women of the church in their relation to the Great Commission. We must know the will of God about missions. We must know what he says about preaching the gospel and bearing witness to the ends of the earth. We must know what the gospel will do for a man, a lost man. We must know the needs of the vast and untouched fields by missionary endeavor. We must be brought face to face with our personal obligations both as to giving and going. We pledge the *Brethren Missionary* to a program of education and the spreading of all the information possible relating to this greatest of all work.

We hope to arouse a greater missionary zeal and enthusiasm among our people by this publication. Not only does one need to know. Intelligence is good. But men must be moved to action. Many know quite well but are not willing to do what they know. The consciences of men must be quickened and their souls fired by the Holy Spirit. Men need to learn the power of the divine *must*. Jesus says: "This gospel of the kingdom must be preached unto all the nations ere the end." See that *must*? That means that everyone of us must help do it, for to us has the gospel been committed as a trust. Brethren people have been slow to respond with men and means to do this will. In a great national crisis such as we now are passing through we must give both. Would to God we had the men for the mission work of the church we ought to have. Volunteers are wanted! We have the men but who will respond? We have the means as well. And we must learn to give it and give it freely. We pledge ourselves to our utmost to enkindle zeal for the missionary tasks of the Brethren church.<sup>1</sup>

This article is as pertinent today as it was when it was written forty years ago.

In 1935, the *Brethren Missionary* merged with the *Brethren Evangelist*, a weekly denominational paper, which henceforth carried a monthly foreign-mission number, edited by the foreign board in the interest of foreign missions. In

J, Allen Miller, "Greetings from Our President," *Brethren Missionary*, I, No. I. October 1917.

1940, the *Brethren Missionary Herald* succeeded the *Brethren Evangelist* and continued the same arrangement of publishing a foreign-mission number monthly.

These momentous decisions constituted for the foreign board a real act of faith, which God blessed and used in a marvelous way for His glory.

The composition of the board in 1917 being of historic interest, we record here the names of the members and indicate their full years of service on the board. The first four of these men were charter members of the Society. Out of the nine men listed, the first six died while still members of the board, two were succeeded later by election of other members, and one, Dr. Alva J. McClain, remains to the present an honored member of the board.

|                      |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| J. Allen Miller      | 1900-1935 |
| Jacob C. Cassel      | 1900-1919 |
| Louis S. Bauman      | 1904-1950 |
| Marcus A. Witter     | 1906-1927 |
| E. L. Kilhefner      | 1915-1929 |
| Arthur De Losier     | 1917-1940 |
| Herbert L. Coughnour | 1908-1918 |
| W. S. Bell           | 1917-1919 |
| Alva J. McClain      |           |

These lectures will concern only the Africa Mission of the church. We express the hope that at some later date our missionary endeavors in other areas can be considered in such a series of messages.

The Africa mission field of the church is located in French Equatorial Africa. This equatorial country is a federation of four territories; namely, Gabun, Middle Congo, Oubangui-Chari and the Tchad. The Federation as a whole

covers an area of 965,250 square miles, four times the area of France, and has a population of 4,500,000.

The initial attempts at evangelization in French Equatorial Africa were made in the Gabun area by the American Board of Commissioners in 1842. This beginning was followed by missionaries of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. which later ceded their work to the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and moved into the German Cameroun in 1892.

During the first decade of this century the Swedish Missionary Union (Svenska Missions Forbundet), which began work in the Belgian Congo in 1881, moved across the Congo river by special permission from the local French authorities and began evangelizing in the Middle Congo.

The two other territories of the Federation, Oubangui-Chari and the Tchad, remained practically unreached by Protestant missions until 1921, when the government granted permission to begin evangelization in these areas. It was for this very permission that the Brethren pioneer party prayed and waited for three long years. Early in 1921, the party proceeded to Western Oubangui-Chari and established the first mission station in that area.

This section of Oubangui-Chari is a plateau with some elevations reaching 4,000 feet. From the Massif Yade four great river systems begin their courses. The Territory was named for the Oubangui River in the south and the Chari River in the north. Just fifty miles north of Bangui the celebrated Mbali Falls leap more than a hundred feet into the Mpoko Valley.

Oubangui-Chari covers approximately 255,000 square miles of grasslands and tropical forest, and has a population of 1,210,000—9,000 of which are Europeans. The native population is Negroid and composed of a heterogeneous mix-

ture of many tribes. In a general way those in the southern section are related to the Bantou group of African tribes and those in the north to the Soudanic; however, the line of demarcation is very irregular and undefined. The natives are animistic, but there is among them a sprinkling of Islamic peoples from neighboring areas.

The capital of the Territory is Bangui, a modern tropical city on the Oubangui River. The population is given as one hundred thousand — twenty-five hundred of which are Europeans.

Today there are three major missions engaged in the evangelization of Oubangui-Chari:

1. The Swedish Baptist Mission (Orebro Missions Forening)—the Swedish counterpart of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.
2. The Mid-Africa Mission—an independent Baptist society.
3. The Brethren Mission—which operates in Africa under the name, The Oubangui-Chari Mission.

The Africa Inland Mission has three stations in the extreme eastern part of the Territory and a Pentecostal group from Switzerland operates a station at Alindao.

It is a matter for thanksgiving that all of these missions are fundamental in doctrine and practice immersion as a mode of baptism.

The Sango tribal language has become, with numerous additions and adaptations, the *lingua franca*, or commercial language of the Territory. While much work has been done by the missions on the tribal languages toward reducing them to writing and translating the Word of God into them, yet Sango must be used in preaching the gospel at all large post towns because of the many tribes represented at these centers.

The New Testament has been translated into Sango by

the Inter-Missions Language Committee and scores of thousands have been sold to the Christians of Oubangui-Chari.

There are now sixty thousand Christians in this area including those in prebaptismal classes, but there are sections still unevangelized.

In the proposed lectures it is my desire to recount the unusual events that led up to the choice of Oubangui-Chari as a mission field for the Brethren Church, and to relate the steps by which God led the pioneers through suffering, prayer, and waiting until the doors of Oubangui-Chari were opened unreservedly to the preaching of the gospel and the founding of indigenous churches.

Then we propose to trace the advance of the Mission down through the three and one half decades that have passed, pointing out the experiences through which God has led us in the establishment of African churches—self-propagating, self-governing, and self-supporting.

# *Chronological Table*

- PERIOD I. VISION, WAITING, REALIZATION *Period of Pioneering 1918-1923*  
*From the Beginning to the Death of the Founder*  
Years Covered, 6 Missionaries,  
9 Station, 1
- PERIOD II. STRENGTHENING THE FIRST BASES  
*First Period of Expansion 1924-1934*  
*From the Opening of the Yaloke Station to the Exploration for the Fourth Station*  
Years Covered, 11  
New Missionaries Arrived, 15 New Stations  
Opened, 2
- PERIOD III. WIDER HORIZONS  
*Second Period of Expansion 1935-1946*  
*From the Opening of Bekoro Station to the Arrival of the Board Delegation*  
Years Covered, 12 New Missionaries  
Arrived, 19 New Stations Opened, 4 18

PERIOD IV. FILLING IN THE FRONTIERS

*Third Period of Expansion 1947-1956*

*From the Visit of the Board Delegation to the Present*

Years Covered, 10

New Missionaries Arrived, 33

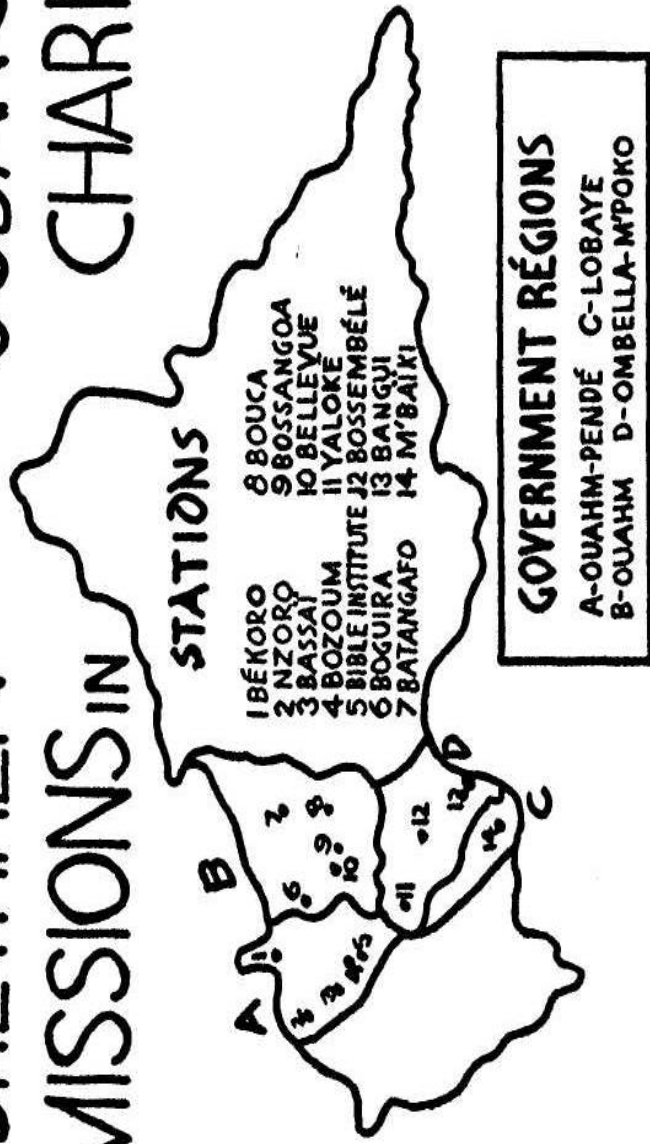
New Stations Opened, 7

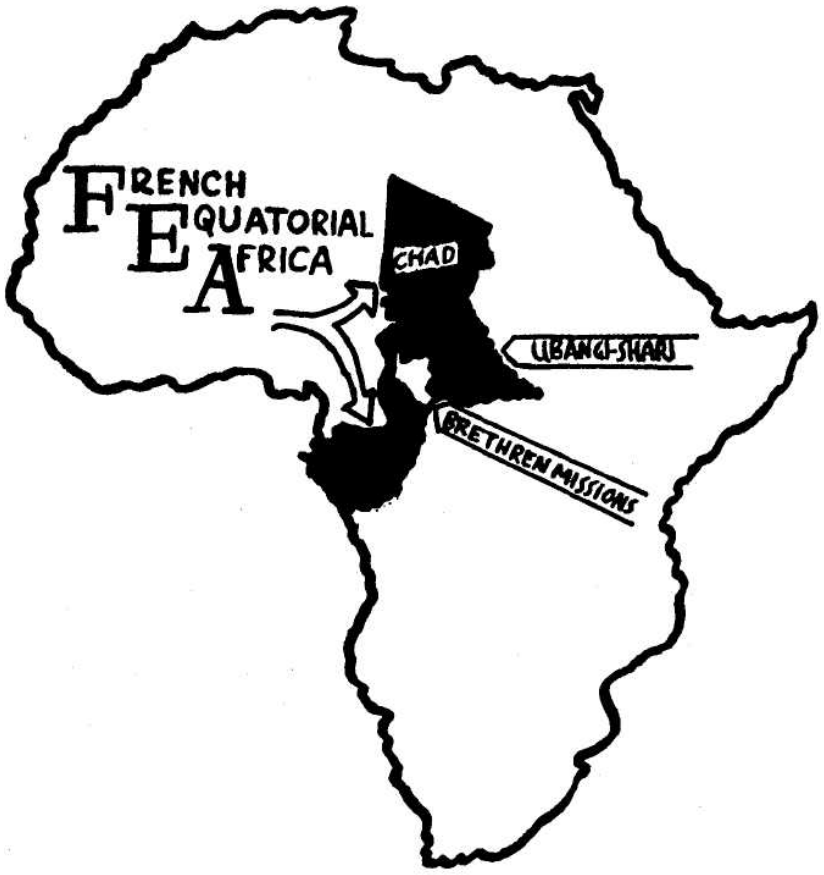
Total Years Covered, 39

Total Number of Missionaries Sent Out, 76

Total Number of Stations, 14

# BRETHREN MISSIONS IN OUBANGUI-CHARI





FRENCH  
EQUATORIAL  
AFRICA

CHAD

UBANGI-SHARI

BRETHREN MISSIONS

# I

## Vision, Waiting, Realization

To appreciate the way in which God wrought to open this territory for evangelization, one must know something about the man God used to accomplish His purpose. The history of God's dealings down through the ages is the history of men He chose to accomplish His will and purpose. To deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt, He called Moses. To subdue the land of Canaan, He chose Joshua. To provide an apostle to the gentiles, He laid hold upon Paul. To launch the modern missionary movement, He called William Carey. And to besiege the doors of Oubangui-Chari, He chose James Gribble, a man eminently fitted for the task.

This man of God's choosing was born in a humble farm home near Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, on a cold night in February 1883. Like many of the Lord's "chosen vessels" he was a child of his mother's prayers. The giving of his

life to the Lord as a missionary of the cross was due largely to her devoted influence.

The oldest of a large family, he attended the country schools near his boyhood home and at the age of fifteen distinguished himself in public speaking. At sixteen he began working on neighborhood farms and in nearby manufacturing plants, but continued his education by mail with the Scranton School of Correspondence, which he completed several years later.

James Gribble was an exemplary young man, clean, upright, honest and hard working. His childhood habit of kneeling nightly at his bedside for prayer continued through his early years away from home, but he did not yield his proud and rebellious heart to Christ, until, at the age of twenty-one in the city of Philadelphia, the Holy Spirit wooed him in tender tones: "My son, give Me thy heart," and "Come unto Me and be saved." He made his first public confession of Christ as Saviour in the First Brethren Church of Philadelphia and was baptized by the pastor, Rev. Louis S. Bauman, and received into the fellowship of the church.

Like the Apostle Paul, who being struck down on the road to Damascus, immediately asked: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" James Gribble was possessed with a burning desire to serve the Lord and was now "ready to 'write his name,' " as he often afterward expressed it, into the Great Commission. For he interpreted "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," to mean "Go, *James Gribble*, into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."<sup>1</sup>

The young disciple became an ardent student of the

<sup>1</sup> Florence Newberry Gribble, *Undaunted Hope* (Ashland, Ohio: Brethren Publishing Company, 1932), p. 6.