

Ivan Stephanovich Prokahnov (1869-1935).

“The Martin Luther of modern Russia”

Look at an atlas or a globe. Find the Black Sea. Now find the Caspian Sea. It is not far away from the Black Sea. In between these two seas are some great mountains: the Caucasus Mountains.



It is here that Ivan was born. His family had run away to this wild place to be safe. His parents were Christians and Christians in Russia had to hide away in such places in those days.

Before he became a Christian himself, Ivan had some hard times. He was fond of reading and he read some books by clever thinkers. They were not Christian thinkers and what they wrote made Ivan feel hopeless. He felt he wanted to give up living. His father knew something was wrong. He took away Ivan's gun. He put a note in its place that said, “Do you love Jesus Christ?” A great change took place in Ivan's life. He was sorry for his sins. From then on he really did “love Jesus Christ.”

Ivan was baptised in the Terek River. He began to learn to be an engineer. Times were hard for Christians in Russia. The government tried to stop them. “If I am an engineer I can meet working people,” he thought, “and I can tell them about the love of Jesus Christ.” He began to preach. He started a little magazine called *Conversation*. It could be secretly passed on from one person to another. In that way it could reach the Christians that were here and there. He wrote hymns too. Soon he began work as an engineer. Every evening he preached or worked on the magazine.

Ivan's gospel work was not welcome to the Russian government. His life was in danger but God made a way of escape. An American engineer working in Russia helped him go to Finland. He travelled to Sweden, Germany, France, and London. Now he was away from the hard life in Russia. Ivan still studied God's Word. He did not forget the poor Russian Christians who were put in prison or killed by their government. He began to get together money to help the Christians in Russia.

When Ivan went back to Russia he was arrested at once. "You may not leave your own house," the government said. But he did not stop wanting to spread the Gospel in Russia. He was allowed to go to St Petersburg in 1901 and he began working for the American company again there. In the evenings he went to secret meetings of believers. He preached again. He edited magazines again. He wrote more hymns and also leaflets and booklets for young people.



Ivan helped Russian Christians join together to send out missionaries. The first missionary went to Siberia. Can you find Siberia in your Atlas? It is a very cold place.

God blessed Ivan's work. Many, many churches began all over Russia. Ivan never stopped working. Sometimes he was working at his desk all day and all night.

Then came a terrible time in Russia. The Russian Revolution of 1917 began. Many, many Russians died of hunger or were put to death. Ivan lost his wife. He was parted from his sons while he stayed in St. Petersburg helping believers who had no food. He was arrested more than once and put in prison. When he was in prison he and the other prisoners would sing hymns. They sang and sang. The prison guards could hear the hymns all the time.

"We have had all kinds of prisoners here, but we have never had such noisy fellows as you are!" said the prison governor. "You sing all the time. You disturb us in our work. The people stand in the streets around the building. We cannot let you to go on with this noise any more!"

Ivan and his friends argued with the governor. In the end he let them sing twice a day in the prison courtyard. For two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening they could sing. They sang, read the Bible, and prayed in the prison courtyard. The Red Army soldiers came to hear them; so did the guards. Some tried to learn the words and join in. On the roofs of houses nearby were people. They had climbed up to listen to the singing in the prison courtyard. Outside in the street people all stopped to listen. "Was there ever such a witness!" said Ivan, "It was so unusual, it was wonderful! Who could ever forget it!" The Christian prisoners marched out of their cells singing. At the end of their two hours they marched back still singing.

In 1923 Ivan was let out of prison. He went to America on a visit to get money together for Russian Christians.

Then came the rule of Stalin, a wicked tyrant. He was even more cruel to Christians than the rulers of Russia had been before. By now there were many Christians in Russia. In 1928 Ivan was away again. He went to Canada to get money together for Russian Christians. "You are a spy. You cannot come back to Russia," said Stalin.

Ivan could not go back to his home country now. But he could write. He wrote to let everyone know what was happening to Christians in Russia. He wrote his own life story so now we too can know about what happened in his lifetime in Russia.