

The Ghosts of Anatolia: An Epic Journey to Forgiveness

Steven E. Wilson

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"If a man lets hatred into his heart, it will control him, and then anything can be justified." This is one of the painful lessons Sirak Kazerian learns in *The Ghosts of Anatolia*.

Set in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire, on the brink of WWI, this novel traces the splintered lives of an Armenian family after two of the Kazerians are accused of treason in Diyakebir, despite having a son in the Turkish army and a relative in the government in Istanbul, and four Kazerians are cast out of Anatolia, force-marched across the scorching Syrian plains, and attacked by Bedouin tribes. The two who live are children, seven-year-old Sirak Kazerian and his traumatized little sister. Sirak is a fighter, who survived a viper bite as a child and will need the same inner strength to endure the unspeakable hardships he will face before he and his sister are rescued.

This book is bound to raise the hackles of modern-day Turkey, which still has trouble admitting to any significant wrongdoing in its treatment of Armenians. *The Ghosts of Anatolia* nevertheless strikes a commendable balance between "the evil forces on the march" in Muslim Anatolia and "the faith to accept whatever life brings us" of the battered, broken people of Christian Armenia. Wilson's characters illustrate the differing perspectives of the people who were caught up in the massacre. For example, various people come to the aid of Sirak's family, including their good-Samaritan Turkish neighbors in Anatolia, an American missionary-doctor and nurse in Diyakebir, the Druze in Syria, and the Jews in Jerusalem, where Sirak and his sister find shelter in an Armenian convent. They are soon fated to move again, this time to America when the Arab-Israeli wars shatter their lives in Jerusalem.

The story takes a surprising twist when Sirak, who has become a doctor, is confronted with the ethical choice of whether to save a Turkish doctor at the American hospital where they work or to let the Turk suffer an unjust accusation. As Sirak says, he didn't bring his own sons halfway around the world "to escape the brutality and perils I was forced to endure" only to have them be swept up in the next generation of "retaliation and reprisals" of Armenian extremists against the Turks.

Although the author has an unfortunate tendency to let the air out of the story by foretelling the end and dropping several narrative threads (one wonders, for example, what happened to the Turkish neighbors, the arrested father and brother, and the abducted mother, all of whom are allowed to disappear from the story even though it is told from a third-person omniscient narrator's point of view), this is a meaningful tale which will be enjoyed by those who like survival stories.

TRINA CARTER (September 13, 2010)

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