

30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World



Ramadan 1427

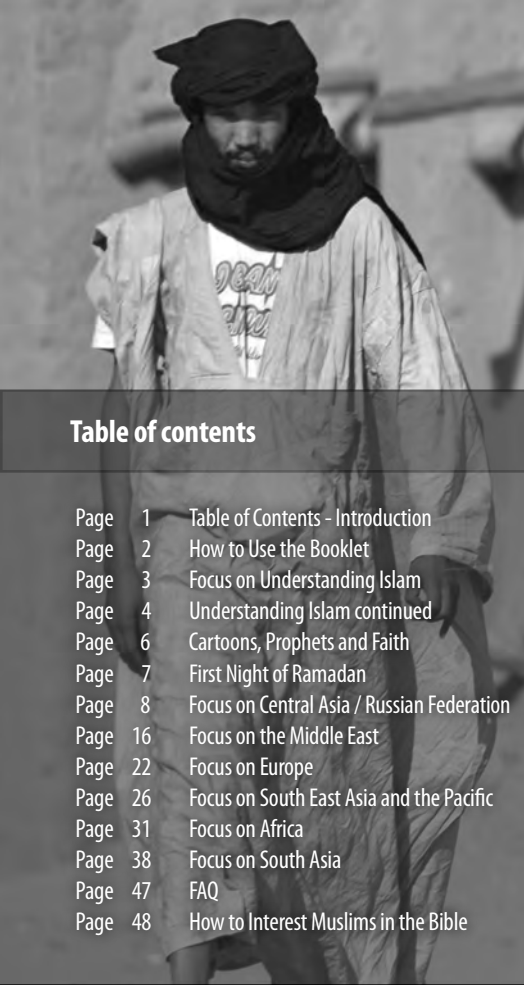
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September 24 - October 23, 2006

Inside Front Cover

Important:

It is best to view this document
in a “spreads mode” to see the
facing pages together.



Introduction

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This call to prayer for Muslims originally came during a meeting of several Christian leaders in the Middle East in 1992. These men and women strongly sensed God's desire to call as many Christians as possible to pray for the Muslim world. The prayer movement was planned to coincide with the Islamic month of Ramadan. The dates for Ramadan are established according to the Islamic lunar calendar. In 2006, Ramadan begins approximately on September 24th and ends on October 23rd, although this may vary slightly from country to country. The fasting period begins and ends with the sighting of the crescent moon. Because of the changing nature of the Islamic year the 2006 booklet is actually our 15th anniversary edition (There have been 15 Islamic lunar years since the beginning of "30 Days" in March 1993. This is the year 1427 of the Muslim lunar calendar).

Praying during the month of Ramadan does not mean that we conform ourselves to the Muslim practices of fasting and prayer. Rather it was originally intended that "30 Days" should be during the month of Ramadan for at least two reasons: (1) as a means for Christians to identify themselves with Muslims during a fixed period of

the year, (2) to call upon God's sovereign intervention in the lives of Muslims during a time of the year when they are particularly religious.

While being opposed to Islam "30 Days" emphasizes God's love for Muslims. The movement has always tried to cultivate a spirit of humility, love, respect and service toward Muslims.

The goal of this prayer guide is to inspire and guide each reader as he or she intercedes for the Muslim world. It is far from being completely informative about the Muslim world. However, each article will give you some ideas about the needs of Muslims. We encourage you to seek further information and so gain a greater understanding of the Islamic world and God's activities among Muslims (our list of recommended web sites might be a good place to start).

Again this year we have included a number of testimonies in the prayer booklet to encourage your faith as you pray. God is able to reach Muslims. He wants many of them to come to know Him.

The Editors

***See the following web site for more information on the children prayer calendar: <http://www.30-days.net>
New: A special youth multimedia "30 Days" site at <http://www.30daysfire.net>***

Getting Started

Ideas and suggestions for individual and group prayer

Over the coming weeks, you may pray and fast in a variety of ways. You can use this booklet to pray by yourself in your own prayer times, and also to join with groups of others to pray together. We would encourage you to find creative ways to involve as many people as possible with you in this prayer focus. Jesus gave special promises of blessing for Christians who come together to pray and agree as a group.

You could organise some weekly or twice weekly meetings over the 30 day period with your church, your youth group, your committee or leaders' meetings, your women's meetings, home Bible studies, cell groups, children's groups — in fact, any occasion when your Christian friends and associates meet together.

Take a social occasion and turn it into a prayer event as well. Have others join with you in a special meal using the prayer topic for that day. Find out all you can about that particular culture — including food and dress, music, sports, etc. It is helpful if one person is chosen as the leader/facilitator of the group for that time of prayer. This person can give direction and cohesion to the prayer time, and assist the group in using the following guidelines. As you pray through the prayer points that are suggested for each day, ask and expect the Holy Spirit to lead you in prayer, revealing certain areas

of detail and specific focus for you to pay particular attention to (Rom 8:26).

It is helpful if the group focuses its prayers for one subject area at a time, rather than chopping and constantly changing focus. Each person should wait before moving on to a different topic, allowing each one to pray their prayers over the current subject area (1 Cor 14:40). Make sure that all have an opportunity to pray for an area or need if they want to.

Our God stretched out the heavens, nothing is too hard for him.

Look for ways to make your times of prayer varied and interesting. God is infinitely creative, and has made us in His image, so we can expect creative ideas and prayers as we seek Him. For example, using a map or reading out a short article on a particular country or need related to the day's prayer theme can add interest and spark new ideas of needs to pray for. Photographs and pictures, maps or even radio, television and video documentaries can do the same.



The Muslim "Night of Power" is a strategic night of prayer which commemorates the moment when Mohammed supposedly first received the revelation of the Qur'an (it starts on the 26th day in the evening - October 19th). Consider setting aside this night for an extended prayer time with your church or mission group. Some Muslims spend many hours at the mosque making requests to God during this particular night. Let us believe God for an outpouring of His Spirit on our Muslim neighbours worldwide. Let us pray and believe for the fulfilment of Revelation 7:9, that every group, including the peoples of Islam, will be represented before the throne of God on that final day.

Our God is fulfilling his ancient promise to Abraham: He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Genesis 15:5

The followers of the Messiah are all sons of Abraham through faith in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26

Understanding Islam ...

Preparation for Prayer

The word "Islam" simply means submission to God, and a Muslim is one who follows the laws and practices of Islam. The revelation of Islam was given to Mohammed, who is revered by Muslims as the greatest prophet. "Mohammed" is not just a name, but a title which means "The Praised One".

The Life of Mohammed:

Mohammed was born AD570 in Mecca, a city in Saudi Arabia. He was a member of the Hashim clan of the powerful Quraysh tribe. His father died before he was born, and his mother, Amina, died when he was only six. Mohammed went to live with his grandfather, who was the guardian of the Ka'ba which is the sacred building of Mecca. Two years later his grandfather also died, so from the age of eight Mohammed was brought up by his uncle, Abu Talib, who was a merchant along the great camel trade routes.

Pagan worship abounded in Arabia: there were an estimated 360 gods and goddesses to appease, Mecca being the major centre

of idolatry in the region. Muslim historians record that even as a boy Mohammed detested idol worship and lived a morally pure life.

At the age of 40, Mohammed became very concerned about the state of his fellow countrymen and spent much of his time in meditation on religious matters. During the month of Ramadan, Mohammed often retreated to a cave on the slopes of Mount Hira, several kilometres from Mecca. It was during one of these times in AD 610 that Mohammed began to receive revelation and instruction that he believed were from the archangel Gabriel. These "revelations" form the basis of the Qur'an. At the beginning Mohammed had many questions about these revelations and even doubted that he was a prophet. In addition to the Qur'an Muslims rely on traditions called "Hadiths" about the life, teachings and practices of Mohammed. These traditions influence the daily life of most Muslims to one degree or another.

During his life, Mohammed met many people who called themselves Christians,



The Ka'ba in Mecca existed at the time of Mohammed.

"Mohammed" is not just a name but a title which means "The Praised One."

though it is debatable how many of them were really in the faith. Mohammed learned many aspects of Jewish religious customs from the various Jewish clans which were living in the region. Eventually he became the political and religious leader of Medina, a city north of Mecca which had a significant Jewish population. Mohammed's prophethood was not accepted by the Jews of Medina leading to serious conflict. Christian and Jewish ideas, concepts and history are very present in the Qur'an though they are often distorted.

Mohammed proclaimed that the Qur'an was the final and superior revelation from the One Supreme God. He banned the worship of idols, and taught that a Muslim's life must be wholly committed to Allah, with ritual washing before the five daily times of prayer facing Mecca. Friday became the appointed day for corporate worship.

Before the end of Mohammed's life Islam had become the religion for much of Arabia. Within one hundred years of Mohammed's death Islam had spread as far as Spain in the West and to India in the East. Later it spread through out Southern and South East Asia. Mohammed died of natural causes in AD632 in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

Mohammed's Family:

Mohammed was employed in his early years by Khadija, a wealthy widow, to manage her caravan trade. He became known as "Al-Amin", the trustworthy one. At the age of 25 he married Khadija. Their marriage produced three children including two sons who died in infancy and one daughter named Fatima who was

Continued on page 4

Muslim Beliefs continued



A page from an ancient version of the Qur'an.

Muslims believe in Allah, who is unique, all powerful, gracious and merciful to all Muslims. The Islamic faith is lived out according to five “pillars” that must be adhered to if one is to hope for salvation.

The Five Pillars are:

1. *Reciting the Creed (shahada) “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.”*
2. *Prayer (salat) - At five set times a day.*
3. *Almsgiving (zakat) - Both obligatory and voluntary giving to the poor.*
4. *Fasting (saum) - Especially during the “holy” month of Ramadan.*
5. *Pilgrimage (hajj) - At least once in a lifetime to Mecca, known as the Hajj.*

While a Muslim may observe each of these pillars, there is still no guarantee of salvation. Islam is based on a religion of self-righteousness. There is no atonement for sin in Islam and Muslims generally believe that their religious acts can purify them from sin. Muslims often think about the Day of Judgment, where they believe Allah (or an angel) will take a balance and weigh each person's deeds. Each person must hope that their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds, but even then Allah's judgment is based

uniquely on His sovereign will. Another interpretation is that man's deeds are written in a book and on the Day of Judgment Allah will open the book and the sum of a man's account will be placed in either His right or left hand. The only sure way to paradise is to die as a martyr during an Islamic Holy War (jihad). Muslims lack assurance of forgiveness.

Mohammed is Islam's highest prophet, but the Qur'an also speaks often of Jesus, who is also known as Isa. The Qur'an also refers to Jesus as Kalimat Allah, which means The Word of God. Muslims believe that Jesus was born by a miracle of God through the Virgin Mary. However, Muslims do not believe in Christ's death on the cross, His resurrection or His deity. Although Jesus is the second highest prophet in Islam, the Isa of the Qur'an is only one prophet among 124,000.

The belief in angels and evil spirits, also known as jinn, plays a prominent part in the lives of most Muslims. Islam generally teaches that “all good and evil comes from Allah” introducing a very fatalistic concept at the heart of Muslim faith and experience.

As with all religions, Islamic teaching and practice influences every aspect of life. Within the Qur'an and the Hadiths there is instruction for most every detail of a Muslim's daily life.

Continued from page 3

very highly treasured by her parents. The three daughters of Khadija's deceased sister also lived in the household. Shortly after Mohammed moved to Medina, Mohammed's cousin Ali married his daughter Fatima. Ali would eventually become the fourth Caliph (successor of Mohammed). Ali and his son Hussein have a significant place in Shi'a (Shiite) Islam. The present rulers of Morocco and Jordan are from the Banu Hashim, or “clan of Hashim” (descendants of the great grandfather of Mohammed).

Khadija and Mohammed were married for 25 years. Later, after Khadija died, Mohammed practised polygamy. According to some sources Mohammed eventually married 15 women but only consummated his marriages with 13 of them (in addition there were some concubines). Apparently Mohammed never had more than nine wives at any one time. Mohammed said that God permitted him to have numerous wives but his followers were only allowed to have a maximum of four (depending on their ability to provide for their wives). While these numbers often sound shocking to modern Christians, Muslims are quick to point out that David, Solomon and many other famous biblical figures had many wives.

Muslims believe :

One God, the Creator of all things

Angels and evil spirits

Prophets (Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Mohammed)

Mohammed was the last and greatest of the prophets.

Holy books (Injil, Zabur, Qur'an)

The Day of Judgement

Destiny

They think the Bible has been corrupted and modified.

They believe that Jesus is only a prophet.

Jesus was actually a good Muslim.

Jesus taught an earlier form of Islam.

Jesus did not die on the cross.

Jesus went to heaven and will come again,

marry, have children and die.

Jesus will be judged like all men at the Last Judgement.

Muslims do not believe :

That they can know God.

(They only think that they can know about Him).

That Jesus is the Son of God.

That Jesus is the world's true Lord.



Above : The hand of Fatima (as jewellery). This occult symbol is found in most Muslim countries. Used everywhere against evil spirits and the "Evil Eye"; its real influence is probably very evil. In many Muslim countries this sort of "Folk Islamic" practice is more important than orthodox Islam.

According to Phil Parshall: "Working for many years in a Muslim country, I have come to the conclusion that the power of Islam does not lie in its dogma and practices ... but in the occult practices of its leaders, thus holding sway over the people." Indeed almost all Muslims are influenced by occult practices in one way or another from the smallest peasant lady to the presidents of vast nations.*

**Phil Parshall, Muslim Evangelism (Gabriel Publishing, Waynesboro, Georgia, USA 2003), p. 101*



Muslims think that men are particularly weak in the sexual realm. Therefore they ask their women to not expose themselves.



Additional material about Muslims and Islamic beliefs on the 30 Days web site:

How to Witness to Muslims

God loves Arabs

The Love of God in the Qur'an

The Islamic Calendar

Prayer in Islam

Confession of Faith

Money and the Zakat

Muslims and God

Muslims and Jesus

Also see our FAQ page and

Muslims and the Bible

on pages 47 and 48 of this booklet

Cartoons, Prophets and Faith

by Roland Müller

In September 2005 not long before the month of Ramadan, a Danish newspaper decided to publish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Little did they realize that they were igniting an explosion that would ripple throughout 2006. As Muslims around the world eventually began to protest in anger and outrage more Western newspapers and magazines picked up the cartoon and republished them, claiming that they were defending freedom of speech. These publications invoked more outrage. Embassies and churches were burned and people were killed.

In the West, we watched with puzzlement. Why were the Muslims so upset about these cartoons of Muhammad? After all, people have mocked Jesus for centuries, but we don't go around killing people. Surely freedom of speech is far more important than a bit of scorn! After all, many in the West have fought and died to defend the right of free speech. Surely the Muslims realize this.

In the East, the feelings are quite different. Most Muslims live in what are known as shame-based cultures. These cultures are based on shame and honour rather than right and wrong. Almost every decision that they make is made by considering what is honourable and what is shameful. Sociologists tell us that in the West we live in what are known

as guilt based cultures where most decisions are made on the basis of right and wrong. Therefore in the West when necessary we will lay down our lives to defend our rights. In the East, people will lay down their lives to defend their honour. In addition Muslims even have a legal term known as "honour killing." They believe that the shedding of blood can wash away shame. Through this concept those who bring shame on a family or a tribe can be put to death, whether they are an enemy or an immediate family member.

In some strange way, the Danish cartoons created a very volatile situation where the rights of the West and the shame of the East collided. Both sides are defending what they believe is of utmost importance. Both sides are willing to fight to the death.

Where do we stand as Christians? Jesus died on the cross, not only to remove our guilt, but also to take our shame. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden shame came upon all mankind. Some cultures are far more sensitive to this shame than they are to the guilt that Westerners often experience. No matter, Jesus died to free us all from the stain of sin, and this includes both shame and guilt.

The only way to really rectify the situation is for each side to recognize that the answer is in the death of Jesus on the



*Muslims remember the glories of their past.
They have a hard time supporting any humiliation.*

cross. Jesus is the only one who can both set things right and also restore the honour that was lost. Jesus took our guilt and our shame upon himself. The reason he was mocked and ridiculed was because our shame was being laid on him.

If only we were as enthusiastic about sharing the gospel message as we are about defending our rights. What a different place the world would be! The Lord Jesus honoured the Father through his obedience unto death. He has removed our shame and guilt. Let us live in such a way that we honour the Lord in word and deed.

Roland Muller is the author of numerous missionary books. His two book: Honor and Shame, Unlocking the Door, and MMC explore the topic of shame-based cultures further. <http://rmuller.com>



Mecca-Cola, which was developed a few years ago, is a symbol of the vast differences between Western society and Islamic culture. The founders of Mecca Cola resented giving money to large Western corporations like Coca-Cola. Twenty percent of the sales of Mecca-Cola are given to Muslim charities (often to Palestinians).

Muslims often believe that Christians are deceived and that they have an obligation to lead them to the truth of Islam. For many Muslims, the word "Christian" signifies materialism, a lack of spirituality and moral failure. Because of this they reject many things that come from Western society and which they consider perverted. For Muslims, alcohol consumption, pornography, a liberal lifestyle and a lack of religious practice are sure signs of the failure of Western countries. Muslims associate Christianity with Western culture. On the other hand, many Muslims do not practise their own religion. They find themselves torn between Islam and Western culture.

Having a right attitude about evangelism can also help us pray correctly and vice versa!

September 23, 2006

In many places around the world Muslims will be looking to the heavens this evening. They will be interested in knowing if they will be able to see the crescent moon. If it is visible this will be the signal for the beginning of the month of Ramadan. (In most countries religious authorities will make a proclamation concerning the beginning of Ramadan). No fasting will take place till tomorrow morning. Muslims will rise up early to eat their breakfast before the day begins. Afterwards they will not have anything else to eat or drink till nightfall. This will be their daily experience during the next 30 days.

See Islamic calendar article on our web site: <http://www.30-days.net>

The first evening of Ramadan

In the book of Genesis we read that "There was evening and morning, the first day." Ramadan begins in a similar way.

Focus on Central Asia and the Russian Federation

Days 1 - 6



Two testimonies from Central Asia :

An agreement was made between Sarah, a Western missionary, and her local Muslim friend Nazira. It was decided that they would follow the fast of the Muslim month of Ramadan together. For both of them it would be their first long fast: they decided to use their lunch-times to read from the book of Psalms and to watch segments of the Jesus film. During the 30 days of Ramadan, Sarah saw how God began to work in Nazira's heart, as the verses of Psalms began to take a more profound effect on her. As they drew closer together through prayer and sharing their thoughts, Sarah realised that Nazira's understanding of God's love and grace was growing rapidly.

On the last day of Ramadan, Nazira visited her missionary friend to share some amazing news: during the night Nazira had seen a vision. In her dream she had been reading the Bible when a snake appeared to her and began to say, "Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to enter you through your navel." At this point in the vision Nazira began to scream "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" Upon hearing this, the snake had cried out, "Is that you, Jesus?" and with that comment the snake's head was crushed as if it had been made of paper.

As Nazira shared her vision, Sarah and some other believers had an easy task to lead this dear friend to Christ. Nazira was amazed as she heard for the first time the words of Genesis 3:15, which is the first biblical promise of Jesus coming and crushing Satan's head. It was the very thing she had just seen in her dream. Within a month of Nazira's conversion her husband joined her in this newly-found faith. Since then, this couple with their two children have become cornerstones of an emerging Uzbek church in their city. Despite their daily struggle with unemployment and poverty, they have kept a firm walk with the Lord.

A young man came from a remote region of the Karakalpakistan on the border of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and met some Christians. He wrote a prayer: "Lord, My Father, this is the first time I call you my father, I never thought of you in terms of being my father. But here I understood and sensed that you are my father and I am your child. I sensed how much you love mankind. I used to think of you as of punishing God. But your love exists and it is alive. Thank you for such privilege that I could come here. Now I know that I have value in you."

Population: 26.8 million people (July 2005 est.)

Uzbek 79%
Russian 5%
Tajik 5%
Kazakh 3%
Other 8%

Religions:

Muslim 88% (mostly Sunnis)
Eastern Orthodox 8%
Other 4%

God is powerfully at work in Uzbekistan, a Muslim country of which is ruled by one of the most repressive regimes in the former Soviet Union. There are few personal freedoms in this land, but the Muslim background believers know true freedom and real life in Christ. Numbering several thousand, the young Uzbek Church has experienced some persecution, but many believers are incredibly committed to Christ and are actively proclaiming Him. Their sharing is not limited to their own countrymen. Some Uzbek believers are sharing their life in Christ in nearby countries such as Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Because there are no ethnically Uzbek churches that have been given permission to register and meet legally in Uzbekistan, the Uzbek believers have been forced to meet in existing registered Russian or Korean church buildings or in homes. Meeting in homes turned out to be a blessing, as it is much more

Uzbekistan

culturally appropriate and natural for Uzbeks to gather this way. Uzbek home fellowships tend to be full of life with much worship, intercession, sharing life struggles and joys, praying for each other giving people opportunities to quickly grow in leadership skills. In Uzbekistan anyone found guilty of holding a religious meeting in their home can be sent to prison for up to 17 years, in addition to having their home confiscated. While this has rarely, if ever, been carried out, this real threat has not stopped believers from opening their homes for fellowship gatherings.

Uzbekistan has been under the grip of darkness for centuries. There are many powerful spiritual and social strongholds besides the folk Islam including drug use and alcoholism and growing problems with HIV/Aids. The economy is struggling, and a very high percentage of the population is unemployed. The majority of the rural population is under tremendous economic pressures. Countless men have been forced to seek work in other countries, particularly Russia, which has sometimes led to the break up of families. Some women in cities have turned to prostitution to make ends meet. There are many human rights abuses and violations in which people suffer horribly. People are hungry and desperate for relief and answers. Almost everyone turns to folk Islam for help, not realizing the depths of its deceptive and dangerous practices.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for the Uzbek believers that they would develop culturally appropriate worship, teaching and fellowship which pleases the Lord and meets deep and pressing needs.
- ▶ May God give strength and courage to Uzbek believers who are being persecuted by the government, family members and religious leaders.
- ▶ Pray for the authorities under President Karimov's administration. May God bring hope and change. True servant leadership is needed - not oppressive abuse of power. May God raise up Josephs and Daniels at all local and national levels!
- ▶ President Karimov's second and last term ends in 2007 and no clear peaceful transition of power is in sight. Pray for God's protection during this season and his provision of wise, godly leadership which will foster the growth of the kingdom.

September 25, 2006

For centuries the Ferghana Valley was an important link on the trade route called the “Silk Road” used by merchants travelling between Europe and the Middle East to and from China. It was linked by mountain passes to the Oasis of Kashgar (Kashi) in Western China. Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara were other major stopping points to the West. The valley was the birth place of Babur (1483 - 1530) who founded the Mughal Dynasty in India. Presently the Ferghana Valley is split between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan. It is now seen as an Uzbek ‘heartland’ though there are also Tadjiks and Kyrgyz present there.

Altogether more than 10 million people live in the Ferghana Valley. The Valley represents less than 5% percent of land in Uzbekistan (about the size of the American State of New Jersey), but contains a more than one third of it’s citizens. It is home for one third of all Tadjiks, and half of all Kyrgyz. It is the most densely populated area in all of Central Asia, and it influences the whole region. “As goes the Valley, so goes the rest of Uzbekistan” is a commonly accepted idea.

The Ferghana Valley is 300 kilometres long and it contains thousands of cotton fields among mulberry trees, orchards and isolated villages. Besides cotton production it is the centre of silk production of Central Asia. The valley is very fertile and agriculturally prosperous because of irrigation water taken from rivers, which come together in the valley to make the Syr Darya which eventu-

ally flows into the Aral Sea over 1,000 kilometres away. Unfortunately the introduction of massive irrigation, cotton cultivation and the wide use of pesticides has depleted and harmed the soil in many areas. The majority of land is used for cotton and wheat cultivation. Millions of agricultural workers including some as young as 8 years of age, “volunteer” to plant, chop and pick cotton for small wages while large profits go to officials and middlemen. Corruption is rampant and laws are restrictive resulting in very few opportunities for legitimate businesses.

Rich in history and culture, the Ferghana Valley prides itself in being the cradle of everything Uzbek. Culturally, Uzbeks of the Ferghana Valley consider themselves the most pure Uzbeks. Yet this pride has been a hindrance to the Gospel. The false Uzbek idea, “To be Uzbek is to be Muslim,” is very much accepted in the valley. The city of Kokand, a major religious centre (pop. 200,000), boasts of having 300 mosques (including one which can hold 10,000 worshippers). In reality, knowing the True God would only make them more “Uzbek” as they understand who they can become through Christ.





A palace in Kokand

Jalalabad

China

Historically the Valley has been a seedbed of conservative Islam and anti-government opposition. During the early 1900s, as Communism marched throughout the region, insurgents in Valley were some of the last to oppose their rule. Some Muslims in the Valley have become involved in more radical movements which have resorted to violence to accomplish their dreams of a truly Islamic society. More recently, large protests about political and economic issues have taken place in some of the major cities of the valley. An uprising in the city of Andijon in May of 2005 was by far the most violent leaving hundreds dead as Uzbek troops shot demonstrators. Generally, Uzbeks are a peace-loving people not prone to violence. Unfortunately very few Muslims in the valley have found the real peace that comes from knowing God.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for the national believers in the Ferghana Valley to be bold in their witness and loving in their relationships with non-believers. The vast majority of Muslims in the Valley have not been evangelised.
- ▶ May the Holy Spirit show people in the Valley that being a follower of Jesus will in no way make them less Uzbek, Tadjik or Kirghiz. It will actually only help them to discover their real identity.
- ▶ Muslims in the Valley need to experience the Kingdom of God. Only God's new society is able to meet their most profound aspirations for peace and justice. Pray for God's righteous ways to rule in the business realm.

Testimony from the Ferghana Valley

I am 38 years old, I was born in Kokand, a small city in the Ferghana valley, and I am married and have small children. I am an ex-criminal, and was in prison for many years. Previously my life was awful and I had no one to rely on except for myself. Even my parents and close relatives refused to be involved in my life. Before coming to God, I was very aggressive, rough and dishonest. People were afraid of me because of my reputation.

In 1996, for the first in my life I heard about Jesus. I was still in prison and another inmate told me about Jesus. He explained to me that Jesus had died for our salvation on the cross, so we may have true life in Him. I studied the Bible with him each day, so even while in prison I began to change little by little. Other inmates also came to know Jesus. Now the kingdom of God is spreading to many villages and small cities in the Ferghana Valley. God is doing many miracles – healing people, setting them free, and changing lives. I also spend a lot of time counseling young men, who have not heard about Jesus, because I desire to serve and share with others what I received from God.

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Population: 2,300,000+ (2005 estimate)

Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, lies in a great oasis along the Chirchik River in the foothills of the Tian Shan Mountains. Being one of the oldest cities of Central Asia, Tashkent was a significant rest stop and trading centre from the time of antiquity. Merchants and caravans found refreshment there after crossing the mountains and deserts between Samarkand/Bukhara and China on the Great Silk Road.

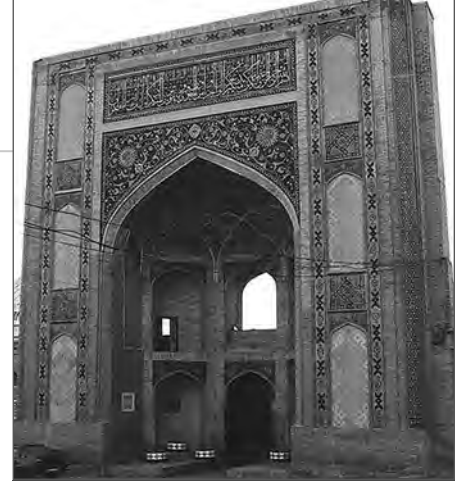
In 1966, the city was destroyed by a large earthquake (7.5 on the Richter scale). Over 300,000 people were left homeless but the rebuilding efforts were very successful. The modern city of Tashkent is only one possessing a subway system in Central Asia. Although about 50% of the people in Tashkent are Uzbek the city is also home for significant Russian (30%) Tatar, Tajik, Kazakh, and Korean ethnic minorities. Tashkent has a strong influence over the whole region as significant transportation hub, the largest city, and biggest industrial concentration in Central Asia.

The majority Uzbek population care deeply for their family members and love to host whoever comes through their door. The Uzbek proverb, “a guest is more honourable than your father” reveals two things. First, hospitality is a high virtue. Uzbeks have been known to say, “What is a house for, if not for receiving guests? We must care for all those that God brings to our door.”

Second, the proverb tells us that family is also highly valued. The authority of a father or mother is highly regarded and children are expected to take care of their parents as long as they live.

Until the Arab invasion in the eighth century, the prominent religions in the Tashkent region were animism and Zoroastrianism. Today, most Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims who also practise folk Islam that includes various animistic practices. Probably 60 per cent of the city's population is from a Muslim background. A significant minority also claims not to be religious as a result of communist influence.

In Tashkent most of the people from European ethnic minority groups (Russians, etc) call themselves Christians. However there are less than 10,000 who have a real living faith all denominations combined. There are a few small but growing Uzbek fellowships in Tashkent, (nationwide there are 5,000 to 10,000 Uzbek believers). Evangelising Muslims is prohibited and efforts to change religion is discouraged both publicly and privately. Persecution of practising Christians from both the government and society is very real and Uzbek believers have especially received very harsh treatment including beatings and torture.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Tashkent is being prepared for a church-planting movement through good training of believers. Pray that each of the city's 11 districts will be evangelised.
- ▶ Uzbek believers are learning to use their homes as a place to be hospitable to the body of Christ. Pray that the believers of Tashkent would be even more active, bold, intentional and Spirit-filled.
- ▶ Some believers are getting a vision to multiply and proclaim the good news throughout Central Asia. Pray that the Church would go forth from Tashkent and be a healing agent in this hurting land.

Kazakhstan

Written by a Christian in Kazakhstan.

My Kazakh friend invited me recently to visit the newest congregation in our town. I went, my heart full of anticipation. Several people were gathering together at our friends' home. I arrived on time, but the house church meeting could not begin yet, because hardly anybody else had arrived. Soon older and also younger Kazakhs arrived one by one. There were many friendly faces, though some were serious. They were mostly women and all spoke Kazakh, a Turkic language.

We were sitting in the living room, mostly on the floor. I was surprised that so many had come, perhaps 30 people. Orinbek said a short prayer and then played his guitar which needed tuning, but this does not disturb the singing. We sang one song after another. Orinbek explained that there has been a spiritual breakthrough recently. Eight people have found "the Way". Since hospitality has an important place in Kazakh culture, a meeting such as this is very appropriate. However, there is more to this meeting than the usual hospitality. After each one had introduced themselves, we read a passage from the Holy Book. The sermon is like a conversation, followed by an exchange of thoughts. Orinbek and Gulnara did not seem to

be specially gifted teachers or leaders. They were more like spiritual parents who take care of their "new-born children" and love them with all their heart. It was a pleasure to watch them.



Afterwards several people shared recent experiences with the Lord and they all had a lot to say. An old Kazakh woman shouted, "Do you remember how I was a month ago? I was so nervous and agitated. Have you noticed the change in me?" Others confirmed that there has been a great change in her during the last month and praised God spontaneously for this. This group doesn't really seem to need a "proper church building". A lesson in tuning guitars would do nothing to improve the fellowship they have with each other. It is my prayer that there would be such a church in every street of our town. It is a real "house of God".

Kazakhstan is the size of most of Western Europe, with 16 million inhabitants. Of those, 9 million are Kazakhs whose religion has traditionally been folk Islam. Whereas there were hardly any Kazakh believers in 1990, they are estimated to number over 10,000 today! The church of God is continually growing. .



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Differences in culture and language are a great challenge for the emerging Kazakh churches. Pray for unity.
- ▶ The Gospel has not yet reached most of the villages and rural areas. Pray that the Kazakh churches have the courage and the wisdom to meet this challenge.
- ▶ Pray for healthy families and courage to be a witness for Jesus.
- ▶ Corruption, prostitution and crime are everywhere present. Pray for the country and the president (1 Tim. 2:1-4).
- ▶ The New Testament and half of the Old Testament have been translated into the Kazakh language. Pray for the work of the Bible translators that the Kazakhs would soon have the whole Bible in their native language



The “Mountain Tatars” of Kabardino-Balkaria

Population: 760,000 ▶ Balkars 8% ▶ Karachay 43% ▶ Russians 33%.

The Balkars live in the central Caucasus region of southern Russia. They are a Turkic people. Over time the Balkars have become very similar to their Caucasian neighbours as far as culture is concerned, but they faithfully retained their Turkic language. In the 13th century, the Balkar area was overrun by Genghis Khan’s Mongols for the first time, and they fought at the side of the Georgian king to whose kingdom they belonged. The Balkars later joined the Turko-Mongolian hordes of Genghis Khan. The Mongols, however, played the Balkars off against the other peoples and brought their land into bloody civil war.

Centuries later the Balkar homeland was finally annexed to Russia. The Russians used the name of Mountain Tatars or Mountain Turks for all of the Turko-Tatar people groups of the Caucasus. In 1942/43 numerous Balkars joined the German Army and there were combined with other Turkish people groups in the so called volunteer “Turkestan” division. Part of them were also assigned to the Waffen-SS as their “Turkish” armed unit. This act encouraged the Russians to displace the entire people group to Central Asia in 1943. Later in 1957 the Balkars were allowed to return to their homeland.

In 1991 the autonomous Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria was declared, and in 1992 a federation treaty with Russia was signed. Today there are about 85,000 Balkars and 170,000 Karachay who also have Turkic origins. The Kabardino-Balkaria Republic has significant Islamic

roots and is among the poorest regions of the Russian Federation. Wide spread unemployment and religious fanaticism are potentially an explosive mixture for Kabardino-Balkaria. Compared to the neighbouring republics of Chechnya, Northern Ossetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria has been considered relatively stable up till now. Covering 12,000 sq. km, the republic is about double the size of the English county of Devon. A gently sloping and undulating plateau is found in the northern areas and the great Caucasus Mountain chain dominates its southern frontiers. Covered with glaciers above 3,000m Mount Elbruz is the highest at 5.633 m. Much of the republic is a largely unsettled, roadless mountain wilderness. Much of its industry is related to agriculture. Lumbering and mining are also important.

For generations the area has experienced conflicts between the Karachay who are in the majority and the minority Balkars. The extremist organization “Jaruk” in the Balkars homeland is considered the inner core of recent terrorist conflict. This clandestine group is said to be have been founded in 2002 by the Chechen gang leader Ruslan Gelajev, who was later killed. These terrorist fighters want to introduce the Islamic sharia law in the Northern Caucasus. Often young men from Kabardino-Balkaria have been found among terrorists in significant incidents in recent years.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for peace for the whole region. The temptation to violence and Islamic fundamentalism is strong for some people.
- ▶ May God’s protection and blessing rest on the small numbers of Christians among the Balkars.
- ▶ Pray for reconciliation between Russians and Caucasus peoples.
- ▶ May God’s hope and light shine for the Balkars and Karachay.



Tatars / Tatarstan



The Tatar language is part of the Turkic group of languages and is related to Turkish, Kazakh, Uzbek, Uighir, Bashkir, Turkmen, Kirghiz and Tadjik. Altogether there are about 7 million Tatars living in various places in the Russian federation and several surrounding countries (Tatarstan, Siberia, the Caucasus and Central Asia). About 900,000 Tatars live in the Moscow area. Because of their extensive movements and intermarriage with other peoples the Tatars have quite varied physical features from Mongoloid to Caucasian, blond hair to black. The majority of Tatars are nominal Sunni Muslims. Several Tatar tribes (e.g. the Nagajbaken and the Krjaschenen) were Christianized into Russian Orthodoxy between the 16th and 18th centuries but most are nominal believers. Evangelical and Charismatic believers number far less than one percent of all Tatars.

Tatarstan:

This Republic of the Russian Federation is somewhat smaller than Scotland 67,836 km² situated about 900 km east of Moscow. It has a population of about four million people made up of Tatars (52.9%), Russians (39.5%) Chuvashes (about 3%) and other ethnic groups (5%).

In the last 15 years there has been a significant surge of Islam in Tatarstan though the majority of the Tatar population continues to be nominally or culturally Muslim. In 1990 there were about 100 mosques in the entire Republic. By 2004 there were over 1,000 mosques. By comparison there are only 176 Russian Orthodox churches in Tatarstan and only small numbers of Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. While the evangelicals among Tatar background believers are starting to number in the hundreds and possibly thousands there are still millions of Tatars with no profound or saving knowledge of the gospel.

▶ **Pray for the following cities in Tatarstan** that the Gospel would be fully proclaimed to all. The Tatar inhabitants in these cities need discover the Gospel through films, recordings,

web sites, Bible and Christian literature. Pray for new healthy, strong and multiplying churches are needed throughout Tatarstan.

Kazan or (Qazan in Tatar):

Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan with a population of about 1,150,000. Slightly over half of the city is of Russian origin and about 43% are from a Tatar background. Kazan was formerly the capital of the powerful Khanate of Kazan till it was conquered by Ivan the Terrible in 1552. It is a major industrial, commercial and cultural centre, and is the most important centre of Tatar culture. It is the largest port on the Volga River. The city celebrated its 1,000 year history in 2005. The ceremonies included the dedication of the Kul Sharif mosque, one of the largest and most beautiful in Europe.

Naberezhnye Chelny:

With a predominately Muslim population of 600,000 people Naberezhnye Chelny is the second largest city in Tatarstan. It is located on the Kama River, approximately 1,100 kilometres east of Moscow. Apartment buildings dominate the city architecture. The local economy is heavily dependent upon oil and gas exploration and production. The area also has very significant water, timber and agricultural resources but the standard of living is low.

Other Cities:	Nizhnekamsk	225,399
	Almetyevsk	140,000
	Yelabuga	67,500
	Leninogorsk	65,600
	Zelenodolsk	100,000

Recommended web sites:

<http://www.kazan1000.ru/eng/>

<http://www.tatarica.com/>

Focus on the Middle East

Days 7 - 11



Testimony from Iran:

Abdullah and Zahara considered themselves Muslim, but were not practising. They invited a Christian visitor to their home. After some conversations the Christian invited Abdullah to a church and he was profoundly touched by the experience. The following day Abdullah invited the Christian for one last visit before his departure. "Zahara thinks I'm going to become a Christian!" he confided. They both laughed about it.

Several weeks later the Christian received an e-mail from his friend in Iran. "God has been so good! He's in my heart in a brand new way and Jesus has become real to me. But more than that, Zahara has also become a Christian!" He explained how he had woken up one morning, being troubled by a dream in which Zahara asked why he never took her to church. At the very moment while he was thinking of the dream, Zahara actually walked into the room and asked him why he did not take her to church. He burst into tears and the rest is history. Both now go to Church. Their enthusiasm has resulted in two of Zahara's sisters becoming Christian and Bibles being distributed in their neighbourhood.

Testimony from Egypt:

In 1999, I was married to a difficult husband. I had two boys with him and at that time the oldest was two and the younger one was 6 months old. My husband did not trust me and always accused me of betraying him with other men. He eventually had an affair and did not give me money to buy food and milk for my baby. Every time I asked money for him, he would beat me and say: "Mohammed says that if you do not obey me, I don't need to give you anything." I confronted him because he went to the mosque, prayed and fasted but still treated me so badly.

Eventually I had a dream about Christians finding a job for me so that I would not need to depend on my husband, so I visited a church. I felt the peace of God as I talked with the Christians. A few days later a woman from the church asked me to return to see her. She told me: "Jesus will give you a job." She gave me a Bible and told me that Jesus wanted me to follow him. Before I left she gave a little money and told me that before the money is gone, I would find a job. She taught me to pray saying: "Jesus, if you really are God, give me a job." I thought nobody was listening to me but soon afterwards I met a Muslim man who told me: "I have a good job for you". He introduced me to a Christian family who wanted someone to take care of their little girl for one year. I asked myself: "Who is this God who heard me so quickly? Who are these people?" Afterwards I bought food for my boys, went to church, and eventually I gave myself to God.



Sulaimaniya, Iraq

Sulaimaniya is one of the newer cities in northern Iraq. It was founded in 1785 by the Kurdish prince Ibrahim Pasha and is named after Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566), who led the Ottoman Empire to the highest point of its power. (Suleiman is the Islamic name for Solomon). Sulaimaniya is situated near the Iranian border, with a population of approximately 800,000 inhabitants.

The city is the cultural centre of the Sorani-speaking Kurds and is known for being young and progressive. The first school for Kurdish girls was founded here in 1915. The first Kurdish diploma in history is said to have been issued in Sulaimaniya, and the first four Kurdish newspapers in Iraq were published in Sulaimaniya. The university, founded in 1968, is the oldest institution of higher education in northern Iraq. Currently there are about 8,000 students, of which more than half are women.

The city has experienced many dark periods in its history. During World War I, the population was reduced from 20,000 to 2,500. When Sheikh Mahmud, who had been instituted by the British as Governor of Sulaimaniya, declared himself King of Kurdistan, the city was repeatedly bombarded by the British air force. In 1985, when Saddam Hussein was in power, more than 200 surrounding villages were reduced to rubble.

Politically, the city has been dominated for a long time by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Celal Talabani, the

president of the Iraqi transitional government. Although Kurdish northern Iraq was considered to be particularly safe, a suicide assassin killed nine Kurdish soldiers in Sulaimaniya in October 2005. About the same time, the bird flu virus H5N1 was detected in dead geese in the surroundings of Erbil.

Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, even though the Kurdish form of Islam contains many mystical and ascetic elements, as well as meditation techniques (Sufism). The region of Sulaimaniya is heavily influenced by the Islamic brotherhoods/orders of Qadiriya and Naqshbandi. The Qadiriya order is one of the most widespread of the Sufi orders in the Islamic world Asia, Turkey and the Balkans and parts of Africa. The Naqshbandi order is a popular Dervish order and was founded in the 14th century in Bukhara. Both orders still have a lot of influence today.

The Christian quarters traditionally lie in the eastern part of the city, as well as one of the three churches. The oldest one was built in 1862. Most indigenous Christians belong to the Chaldean Church, an ancient oriental church linked with the church of Rome. Evangelical missions in Kurdistan began around 1830. Only a few isolated Kurds from an Islamic background have found faith in Jesus Christ. Many are held back by fear of being excluded from the Islamic community.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ That God would preserve the relative safety of Iraqi Kurdistan.
- ▶ That the Sorani Kurdish Bible could be distributed to many and that it would bring much fruit alongside with Christian radio and TV programmes, Christian literature and the Jesus film.
- ▶ May many Kurds may have increasing opportunities to meet credible witnesses for Jesus and loose the fear of following Christ.



Cities in Oman

Population of Oman: 3,001,600 (July 2005 estimate)
(including 577,300 non-nationals)

The Sultanate of Oman is situated in the north-eastern part of the Arabian peninsula. It is somewhat smaller than the United Kingdom. Most people live along the coastal lowland, which is about 1,200 km long. Major products besides petroleum include dates, citrus and tropical fruit, incense, and mineral oil. Some people are involved in fisheries and tourism. Sultan Qaboos bin Said has ruled the country for the past 35 years, during which time it has built up a modern infrastructure. Oman has a stable government and is trying to enlarge its economy. Its five largest cities are Muscat, Salalah, Sohar, Nizwa and Sur. One can easily travel by bus into the country from Dubai and also to all the cities.

Muscat (population: 514,000)

Muscat is the capital of Oman. Omanis from all over the country come here for study, for government services, for economic reasons and for medical treatment. A large percentage of the population are foreigners (engineers, specialists, university teachers, skilled workers), since Oman has only started to build up its own modern university education in the past 30 years.



Salalah (population: 186,000)

Salalah is situated about 1,000 km south-west of Muscat — about 11 hours in modern buses through barren wastes. The Salalah area is fruitful, since it is the only area in Oman where the monsoon rain falls. Because of its connection with the Sultanate of Zanzibar, off Tanzania, many Omanis in Salalah are Swahili-speaking. Every autumn, thousands of visitors come for the Khareef festival, when Salalah is green because of the monsoon rain. There are several Christian denominations in this city.

Sohar (population: 135,000)

Sohar is said to be home of Sindbad, the famous Omani seafaring hero. It is considered a conservative city with a traditional lifestyle. Many of the older generation have not received any schooling.

Nizwa (population: 85,000)

Nizwa is situated about 85 km west of Muscat in the mountains. For centuries, the city has been famous as a centre for handicrafts, craftsmen and the arts. However, it is also, together with the city of Bahla, a centre for superstition and the occult. Silver amulets manufactured in Nizwa are worn in many parts of the Arab world.

Sur (population: 75,000)

Sur is least evangelised Omani city, situated in the eastern point of Oman. Historically it is known for its famous shipyards. The famous Omani dhows sailed as far as China. Even today ships are being built and repaired in Sur. The population is very conservative.



PRAYER REQUESTS

In Oman, 75 per cent of the population follow Ibadī Islam, which is generally considered heretical by Sunnis. Ibadīs believe that they are the “true” Muslims, making them perhaps even more resistant to conversion to Christianity. Pray that God may bring breakthroughs.

Omanis are friendly and hospitable. But it is not easy to have a deeper conversation with them, because they are restrained and consider it impolite to discuss religious questions. This may be a result of having been persecuted by Sunnis. Pray for the Holy Spirit to open hearts for conversation.

There are many Christians among the foreign workers in Oman. Pray that their light will shine (Matt 5:14).



The Behdini speaking Kurds of Iraq

One finds the Behdini speaking Kurds of Iraq in the northern most portions of the country, in the region of ancient Nineveh near the regional capitals of Mosul and Dohuk. There are about 1,7 million Behdini speaking Kurds in Iraq. Behdini is related to Kurmanji which is spoken by about 10 million people worldwide.

The entire Kurdish ethnic group numbers about 30 million people, who live mainly in south-east Turkey, western Iran, northern Iraq and northern Syria. Germany has the largest number of Kurds living in one place outside of the Middle East (more than 400,000 Kurds live there at the moment). Some Kurds consider their ancestors to be the Medes who are mentioned in the Bible. The various Kurdish tribes and clans have an important role to play in every-day life.

The most important holiday of the Kurds is their New Year's festival, which is traditionally celebrated on 21 March. On its eve bonfires are lit in the whole region around the Kurdish villages and towns, in remembrance of the legendary liberation of Kurdistan from an oppressing king. Special pastries are baked for this day of festivity and new colourful clothes are worn. Many Kurds drive to the mountains on their New Year's Day to celebrate the festival with a picnic with family and friends.

More than 90 % of the Behdini speaking Kurds are Sunni Muslim, but in reality most practice superstitious folk Islam.

Besides Islam some Northern Kurds are involved in the Yezidi religion which is a complex pre-Islamic belief possibly related to Zoroastrianism. The main Yezidi sanctuary is found in Lalish, not far from Dohuk.

All Kurdish languages (Kurmanji, Behdini, Sorani) are related to Persian and belong to the Indo-European language family. They are not related at all to Turkish, a member of the Ural-Altaic language family, or to Arabic, a member of the Semitic language family.

According to the different towns and regions, there are many dialects. At the moment only the gospel of John has been published in Behdini. Other portions of the New Testament are being circulated, but are still being revised. The Jesus film in Behdini was broadcast on Kurdish TV in Northern Iraq.

Despite the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in the Spring of 2003, the Kurds feel much insecurity concerning their future, but they are thankful for their liberation (they were oppressed by him). At the moment, Behdini may be taught in schools in the Kurdish Autonomous Region. The present president of Iraq is a Kurd and it can be hoped that autonomy of the Kurds will remain part of the new Iraq. Creating their own political state, however, cannot ultimately solve the Kurds' problems. True peace can only come through the Kingdom of God.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for the very small number of Christians among the Behdini speaking Kurds. May they put their trust fully in King Jesus, while growing and being strengthened in the faith.
- ▶ May the numbers of new believers grow in numbers and establish new congregations of believers.
- ▶ Pray also that the complete New Testament can be translated into Behdini as soon as possible, be approved for publication, printed and distributed. May audio and video versions of the Gospel be widely distributed as well.



The Zaza in Turkey

"Are you a Turk?" – "Yes."

"Are you a Kurd?" – "Yes, of course!"

"Are you a Zaza?" – "Yes, that's for sure!"

The answer becomes more and more emphatic the more we approach the core of the matter.

The truth is, the Zaza, or Dimli, are neither Turks nor Kurds. They live in the Eastern part of Turkey, in East-Anatolia, and have their own language, history and culture. In spite of this they have not been and are still not recognised as a separate people group. They are a people with an oral culture, which means that they don't have a written language. Their stories are passed on orally from generation to generation. Unfortunately because of this they suffer considerable disadvantages inside the political state of Turkey.

Since its coming into existence, the Turkish republic has tried to assimilate the different people groups, so that research of their own history and culture and with that of their own identity has been systematically banned. Therefore the Zaza (Dimili) are an unknown people, although they number approx. 3 to 5 million all over the world of which 250,000 of them live in Germany alone. Possibly half of this people has already either emigrated into the Western world or has moved to the larger cities of Turkey.

The Zaza are not a homogenous group but are divided into two groups in terms of religious orientation: the Northern Zaza are

followers of the Alevi branch of Shiite Islam which many Sunnis do not consider to be truly Islamic. The Southern Zaza, like their neighbouring Kurds, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam.

This religious division is mirrored by the ethnic-cultural realities of both groups, which is significant because both groups speak different dialects. The differences in vocabulary and grammar are so important (comparable to the difference between German and Dutch) that the two groups have problems understanding each other. For the Northern Zaza group, the Jesus film has already been made available, and work is being done on the version for the southern group. This type of film ministry is specially important for oral cultures because many people do not know how to read and write in their own language.

While some immigrant families have become believers in Jesus Christ while in other countries, there are hardly any such reports about similar developments in Turkey, their country of origin. It is thought that there are just a hand-full of believers among this people in Turkey. Hearing the words of Jesus in their own language will certainly have a tremendous impact so translation work is very important.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ May God help this people to discover the identity which He has planned for them in Christ.
- ▶ Pray for culturally appropriate means of proclaiming the Gospel among this people.
- ▶ For a wide acceptance of the translated Jesus film among the people from the northern group and the completion of the film translation for the southern group.
- ▶ For the growth and strengthening of the few existing Christians and the establishment of new congregations.
- ▶ Pray for the existing work of Bible translation in the southern dialect.

Muslims in Isfahan

The name is also written: Esfahan and Isphahan

Population: 1,001,000 inhabitants

Isfahan is one of the oldest cities of Iran going back about 2,500 years. It is located in West Central Iran at the edge of the Zagros Mountains about 420 km south of Teheran and 480 km north of Shiraz. Isfahan was the capital of the Safavid Empire from 1598 – 1722. The city experienced a type of “golden age” during that period as it was beautified and enlarged.

Every year tens of thousands of Iranians and tourists from many nations visit the city of Isfahan. Very often they come to admire the beautiful Safavid period architecture and old gardens. Isfahan is famous for, amongst other things, the early 16th century bridges which span the Zayandeh river. The Imam Mosque on the Imam Khomeini Square is a magnificent example of Islamic architecture at its finest.

Today there are very small numbers of Christians from a Muslim background in almost all major Iranian cities including Isfahan. However, the overwhelming majority of the Iranian population is still Shiite Muslim. Few believers reveal their true thoughts about Christ publicly because of potential and actual persecution.



What does God see when he looks at Isfahan?

Certainly God sees the beautiful buildings but he sees even more beauty and craftsmanship. He also sees the human beings made in his image. He knows the names of every person in the city. He knows where they live. He knows their lives. He knows their pains, their worries and their joys. He knows all that the future could possibly bring to them. He knows and he cares. They are his creation. He wants them to be woven into the fabric of the new creation which is in Christ Jesus. See (Psalm 8:1-9 especially verse 5, as well as Heb. 2:5-15 and Ephesians 2:10).



PRAYER REQUESTS

▶ There are hundreds and probably thousands of people with the names listed below living in Isfahan. Name these groups of people before the Lord asking him to bring them and the entire city to salvation. Ask the Lord “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in the Messiah.” (Acts 26:18)

Men:

*Mohammed
Hassan
Ali
Hussein
Rasheed*

Women:

*Fatima
Roxanne
Soraya
Jasmine
Khadija*

Recommended web sites:

<http://www.iranchamber.com/>
<http://www.iranpix.com/> (see Esfahan)
<http://farsinet.com/> (Christian)
<http://www.persianwo.org/> (Christian)



Marseille, in southern France, has several hundred thousand Muslim inhabitants.



Testimony from the UK:

Last year in the UK version of “30 Days” there was a testimony about two young Muslim men. Here is an update about one of them (called “A” for the purposes of this text).

Times were difficult for A. financially and otherwise. He was living with other Muslim friends felt he could not be open about his growing interest in Jesus. He read his Bible when no one was around, he endeavoured to look for Christians friends but he was fearful of going into a local church. He was persuaded to go to the mosque with

one of his house mates, but he felt so offended about what was being taught there that he left the mosque saying he would never go back.

A’s personal love for Jesus has grown steadily over the past year as he has seen God answer his prayers for work in spite of the difficulties. On a recent visit back to his home country he was able to share with his family about his love for the Lord. They have been so open and A. believes they soon will also become followers of the Messiah.

Back to the Bible in France’s suburbs:

Yosri* belonged to a large family of first-generation Algerians growing up in the suburbs of Lyon, one of France’s largest cities. In the 1980’s, he witnessed the same kind of trouble and racial tensions in his area that are being reported in France’s suburbs in November 2005.

Like thousands of others, Yosri was educated in the Islamic traditions of his parents. He spent his spare time playing football (soccer) or ‘hanging out’ with the other boys. One Saturday afternoon, another option presented itself. He was invited to attend a Bible club run by a missionary who lived in his part of town. Soon, ‘going to the Bible’ became a regular pastime for Yosri and his friends.

But, unlike his fellow North Africans who were deterred by criticism and opposition, he kept attending the club even in his teenage years, and started to read and study the Bible for himself.

Gradually, the Word of God sown over so many years in Yosri’s life began to bear fruit. After completing his military service, he was led to study at a Bible College in the UK. Today, he has a key ministry working in a theological training section. This involves preparing courses specifically adapted to the needs of believers from a Muslim background and travelling into North Africa to provide Bible teaching and training.

(*Yosri is a pseudonym).



Population: 2–2.2 million
Ethnic composition: Albanian 88%, Serb and Montenegrin 7%, Others 5% (Turks, Romani)
Religion: Islam, Catholic, Orthodox
Area: 10,887 km²

This region of the Balkans is known by two names: Kosovo by Serbs and Kosova by Albanians. This article uses the word Kosova since it is about Albanian Muslims. Kosova has been part of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. It became part of Serbia before the First World War, and Yugoslavia just after it. Since June 1999 Kosova has been under United Nations administration, following the extreme ethnic violence between the Serbs and Kosovar Albanians which began in 1998 and resulted in several thousand deaths and massive refugee problems. Kosova has become increasingly calm and peaceful over the past few years. The European Union is playing a major role in its reconstruction.



Kosova

Here is a report from some Christians who visited Kosova in the past few years: "We spent most of our time with one of the congregations in Pristina, the capital. The hand of God is moving in Kosova, and many are hungry for the gospel. We were amazed at the openness of the people to discuss Christ. Wherever we went we had great freedom to share the gospel, and we gave out many Bibles and tracts. One brother gave some seminars at a university campus which were attended by about 100 people each time. When some Muslims fundamentalists were loud and disruptive during the meeting, this only encouraged others who were discontented with Islam. Afterwards Albanian believers were sharing their faith with people present. It was exciting to see the Albanians share their stories with boldness!"

One movement of Kosovar Christians has seen numbers increase from three people to hundreds (possibly as many as 500), and from one church to over 30 churches, during the past ten years. The group started meetings in one room, without a car and with little money and walked for hours each day visiting people from one end of their city to another. They have also published 60 books and booklets covering many topics from apologetics to the Christian life. A Christian magazine is also being distributed to thousands of Albanians.

Some former Muslim Kosovars have even been involved in missions. Recently, six of them joined a team of Western Christians and spent a week in Istanbul. They walked the streets, handed out Christian literature and talked to Muslims. The Kosovars were very touched to see that the Turks — who originally brought Islam to Kosova — were open to the gospel and wanted to know more about Jesus. As God worked in their hearts the Kosovar believers gave up negative attitudes towards Turks and were filled with compassion and love for the Muslim Turks.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Thank the Lord for the positive things which are already happening in Kosova.
- ▶ The new Kosovar believers need teaching and discipleship training. Pray that the new believers will continue to grow in the knowledge of God and become even more effective in proclaiming their faith to others in word and deed.
- ▶ Pray that the Lord will continue to create an even greater spiritual hunger among the Muslim Kosovars.
- ▶ Pray that the Kosovar believers would be filled with God's wisdom and so be a light and a source of hope to their people and to their land.



Lyon, France



Population: 1.26 million people in the Lyon area, including 150,000 Muslims

It is not necessarily a simple task to proclaim the gospel in the Lyon area; there is a real spiritual battle. The city basically follows French national trends. The city has a largely Catholic past and has been formally dedicated to the Virgin Mary. While 70 per cent of French people call themselves Catholics, less than 10 per cent are involved in any form of regular Catholic practice (that's 6 per cent of the total population). Protestants and evangelicals form about 1.75 per cent of the population. About 25 per cent of the French place their faith in astrology and mediums; over 15 per cent spend approximately 45 billion euros per year on occult consultations. Others profess not to have any religion.

The majority of Muslims in the Lyon area come from North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Some have lived in Lyon for several generations or longer. Cities such as Vénissieux in the greater Lyon area are well-known for their large Muslim populations, which include a hard core of fundamentalists. Many young Muslims in the area have been influenced by a South African Muslim preacher named Ahmed Deedat, who for many years has poisoned their minds against the Bible by his video teachings. (Deedat died last year.) His statements against the Bible were not always very scholarly nor honest. For instance, he has said that the Bible was certainly corrupted and changed because in some Bibles the words of Jesus are written in red and not in black type. Chris-

tian workers have often been confronted with many accusations against Christianity rather than with hungry seekers. In addition, there is a growing lack of respect among the younger population not only toward their elders but also toward their own religion, even though in public they often express their opinions loudly and repeatedly in its defence.

Most former Muslims say they came to faith through the steady witness of French Christian friends. Some of them are growing in maturity but others still carry heavy baggage from difficult childhoods. Of the 150,000 Muslims in the Lyon area, there are probably around 40–50 practising Christians from a Muslim background: most of them have been believers for several years. A few more convert each year. Since 2001 a group of former Muslim believers has been meeting regularly with culturally-appropriate worship songs and special meals. This group is growing in faith and encourages church participation. They are involved in active witness to Muslims through their meetings and on a personal level.

Eight people from different missions are specifically reaching out to Muslims, as are some of the 5,000-plus evangelical/charismatic believers in the city. Small numbers of Catholics in the Lyon area have made significant efforts to build relationships and dialogue with Muslims, however they generally do not seek to bring them to faith in Christ in an explicit way.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for a spiritual breakthrough in Lyon among the Muslims and the French people.
- ▶ Pray for workers, who can be culturally sensitive and determined in the face of opposition, to work among the Muslim young people.
- ▶ Christians working among Muslims in France almost always need to address occult influences in the lives of Muslims as well as resentment over experiences of racism and prejudice from portions of the French population. Ask God to equip His servants to deal with these challenges.



Geneva, Switzerland



Summer after summer Geneva receives an important number of tourists from several countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Certain wealthy families from the region come to Geneva to profit from the peace and security for their vacations. Some local Christians have had opportunities to speak to the Middle easterners about the Gospel.

A young Saudi woman who teaches religion was very intrigued by the crosses which she saw on churches in Geneva. She even took several photos of them. When two Christian women started a conversation with her she expressed her perplexity: "Why do people in Europe have the freedom to purchase a Qur'an if they want but in our country it is impossible to buy a Bible. Another young man from Saudi Arabia expressing a different perspective told the Christians: "We live in an open world, if I want a Bible I can find it through the internet."

A group of Christians from an Arabic background has had excellent contacts with the Arab tourists who were walking in the parks and quais beside Lake Geneva. In 2005 during the course of one month they contacted 600 men and women of which 200 heard a detailed explanation of the Gospel. About 30 people indicated that they would like to know much more about Jesus. The last evening of

this special summer project several Arabic speaking Christians sang Arabic Christian songs and many of the tourists stopped to listen. After listing to the Christians for a long time an older Syrian man with a throat cancer allowed the Christians to pray for him. He left them carrying a New Testament.

After the death of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who loved to visit Geneva, many of the city's great hotels were concerned that the Arab tourists might go elsewhere. Indeed Geneva is not the only tourist destination in Europe for the Saudis, Qataris and others from the Gulf countries. However even if the number of tourists does decline in the future, the Muslim presence in Geneva will probably continue to be strong. Over 180 different nationalities are present in the city including 35 official representations from Muslim countries (Consulats, etc). There are two mosques and several Islamic institutes along with many North African Muslims and numerous illegal Muslim immigrants from Sub Saharan Africa. Christians in Geneva find themselves before significant opportunities to live among Muslims and to proclaim their faith to them. Several churches in the city have started to make specific efforts to reach the Muslim community.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ May Christians in Geneva be able to see the opportunities which are available to them to proclaim Christ to the Muslims visiting and living in their city.
- ▶ Pray for those Muslims who do convert that God would help them to become real disciples in living Christian communities. Christians need to devote time, energy and much thought to discipling new converts from Muslim backgrounds.
- ▶ Pray for the development of ministries in Geneva and many other parts of Europe where there is a significant presence of Muslim tourists and inhabitants. Native Europeans and Arab Christians all have their place in such ministries.

Focus on South East Asia and the Pacific



Days 15 - 18



Recently a Muslim met the Lord in a peculiar way. This man was running a type of fishing enterprise harvesting a bottom dwelling sea animal called “beche de mer” which are eaten in some Asian countries. The Muslim’s wife regularly attended church. However he became very seriously ill. He was sick enough to make him want to go to the church with his wife. There, he was given a Bible and he became interested in reading it.

Later, he was on his boat and his workers were all below the surface diving for beche de mer. They were not catching anything much to their frustration. Being alone on the deck of the boat the Muslim got out the Bible that had been given him at church and started to read. He fell asleep and had a dream. In the dream he was out on the sea and as he watched, a shining figure arose out of the water. He somehow knew that this supernatural figure was Jesus. Jesus pointed, directing him in a particular direction, then he woke up.

When his men were all back on board, still with no catch, he asked, “Are you willing to go to wherever I direct you?” They replied that they would because they were not catching anything. So he led them to the spot indicated by the figure in his dream. It was a place at which they knew that nobody had ever caught anything before. However there they dived and they spent the next three weeks there bringing up all the beche de mer! The man turned to Christ and is now bringing other Muslims to Him as well!

Second testimony:

A Muslim Background Believer named “Alf” (not his real name) went with some relatives to see his uncle who was very sick. During the course of the visit, Alf had some time alone with the old man and was able to lead him to faith in Christ. This would be astounding in itself, but the uncle also happened to be an imam! The old man asked Alf if he could talk to Jesus and Alf told him it was good and he should talk to Jesus naturally just as they themselves had been speaking to each other. Later Alf went outside for a few minutes but he heard the old man carrying on a conversation inside the house. Alf then returned and asked his uncle who he had been talking to. He replied, “To the man who was sitting over there.” “Alf” looked around and could see no one. “What did he say?”, he asked. “He told me that tomorrow He would be returning for me, but would be leaving my body behind!” Later Alf was informed that this uncle died the following day!



Muslims in Fiji

Population of Fiji: 893,354 (2005 estimate)
Religious populations: Muslim 7.5% (67,000 people - largely Sunni Muslim); Christian: 52% (Methodist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and others); Hindu: 38%; Other: 2.5%

Fiji is an independent island republic in the Pacific Ocean made up of a few large islands and over 300 smaller ones. The total land area of the islands (18,270 km²) is slightly smaller than Wales. Fiji became independent in 1970, after nearly a century as a British colony. The islands have a varied population of Fijian Melanesians (51 per cent), Indians (44 per cent), Europeans and others. English is the official language of Fiji, but among themselves the ethnic Fijians usually speak Fijian, while those with an Indian background often speak Hindustani.

Fijian Muslims were originally Indian immigrant labourers for the sugar cane industry (brought to the islands between 1879 and 1920). Many Muslim families were eventually farming small plantations of 5–10 acres (2–4 hectares) of sugar cane. Indian Hindu groups invested in building schools and pursuing Western education. Muslims historically put an emphasis on traditional Islamic schooling to protect and promote their identity. Because of the educational differences Muslims have often been under-represented in institutions, civil service and in the professions.

In recent years Islamic teachers have been employed in Fiji's mosques and schools. Saudi Arabian finances have been used to

organise trips for local Muslims going to Mecca. In the past 20 years an increasing number of Muslims have also begun using Arabic forms of dress (thought by some Muslims to make them "real Muslims"). The majority, however, remain fairly nominal, though they usually react strongly if someone converts to Christianity.

The majority of Muslims live in the western areas of the largest island. The first mosque was built in Navau in 1900; now there are approximately 200 mosques and "prayer houses" in Fiji. In the rural areas the Muslim communities can be identified by the presence of a mosque or "prayer house". However, in the urban areas, and particularly in the capital Suva, the Muslim population is largely mixed in with other groups and is less easy to identify.

Christian mission attempts are just beginning to recognise the cultural and religious distinctives between the different Indian people groups in Fiji. As a result, the conversion of Muslims has so far been more accidental than deliberate. However, small numbers of Muslims are coming to Christ through many denominations. At the present time there are only a few former Muslims who are actively witnessing to the Muslim community on a consistent basis.



PRAYER REQUESTS

▶ In recent years the church in Fiji has grown in unity, with notable miracles taking place. Pray that these positive events would also influence Muslims toward Christ (Acts 2:42–47).

▶ Christian congregations and fellowships of former Muslims are needed to help new Muslim converts grow in discipleship and be established in church. Pray for church-planting teams to establish groups of former Muslims (Col 4: 5–6).

▶ Most Muslims who are coming to Christ receive threats from their religious leaders and pressure from relatives. Many lose their jobs and are cast out by their families and friends. Pray that they would have courage and commitment (Rev 12:11).



The Jambi Malay of Indonesia

Population: approximately 800,000

A majority of the Jambi Malay live in the sparsely-inhabited province of Jambi on the central eastern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. The modern provincial capital of Jambi combines the old city (seat of the former Jambi sultanate) and a new administrative centre of Telanaipura just to the west.

This province comprises a lowland basin of dense jungles and swamps linked to the Batang Hari River and its tributaries. Many Jambi Malay seek their livelihood from work related to the rivers near their villages. One of their main economic activities is fishing, and they catch a variety of fish using traditional equipment. As many as 60 per cent of Jambi people work as farmers, though only 30 per cent of the province's income is provided by agriculture. Other major products from the area include timber, plywood, rubber, palm oil, copra, coffee, and tea.

Few Jambi Malay have received higher education. Most seem satisfied with their lifestyle, or else believe that little can be done to change it significantly. The official language of Indonesia is Bahasa Indonesia, but many Jambi Malay speak a dialect of Malay known as Bahasa Jambi in their homes and villages.

The Jambi Malay are Muslims known for their Islamic fanaticism. Islam was established as a religion in Jambi in the 16th century when Arab traders arrived on the island. Today, every village and nearly every

"kampung" (close-knit neighbourhood) and Rukun Tetangga (neighbourhood unit) has a building for worship and a training place for the practice and teaching of Islam, complete with at least one "ulama" (Islamic teacher and Islamic law expert).

The Jambi Malay take great pride in their villages being completely Muslim. However, people in the villages practise folk Islam much more than people in the cities. Just as each village neighbourhood has an RT (elected leader of the Rukun Tetangga), they usually also have a "dukun" (traditional healer). The dukun intercedes on behalf of his patient/devotee with pleas to Allah or the spirits for healing. Religious leaders of the "masjid" (mosque) provide mothers with amulets for their young children to protect them from evil spirits.

Some aspects of the Jambi culture are centred around a rich, beautiful fabric called Jambi batik (bah-teek). Within the village, many skilled women join together to make batik cloth. An intricate, colourful design is applied to fabric by a lengthy process using wax to make the pattern and using dyes made from plants and berries. Many women wear batik sarongs and use the fabric to carry their babies with them as they go about their tasks. Exceptionally good batik is also prepared for wedding parties.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for long-term Christian labourers to work among the Jambi Malay people.
- ▶ Pray for the love of Jesus Christ to penetrate the walls built up against the gospel, so that the people of Jambi may find their identity and freedom in being children of God.
- ▶ Pray for the Jambi Malay who have accepted the gospel, that they would become strong and courageous witnesses to their own people, resulting in a culturally-adapted Jambi Church.



The Western Cham People of Cambodia

The population of the Cham people is 308,000 living in Cambodia, 127,000 in Vietnam, 15,000 in Laos and a few other countries. The Cham people live in about 378 villages in Cambodia. Most of the villages are just north of Phnom Penh. The Cham language is related to, among many others in the Pacific, the languages of the Western Indonesia and Malaysia. The Cham people were originally people of an ancient kingdom located along the central coast of Vietnam called Champa. Champa was a wealthy maritime nation in frequent contact with China.

The Cham people are an important ethnic minority in Cambodia. They are mainly rice farmers but also grow other crop such as cotton, maize, tobacco, castor-oil plants, manioc, peanuts, ferns, beans and vegetables. Some Cham are involved in animal domestication, hunting and fishing. There are some Cham fishermen in the villages along the banks of the Mekong and its tributaries. Some of them are also cattle traders and butchers.

The Cham have been involved in Hinduism and Buddhism historically but finally there was a gradual conversion to Islam over a period of several centuries. Their most ancient beliefs were in a "Mother Goddess." The lives of the common people of Champa centred around ancestor worship. Fertility cults and hero worship. Islam arrived in Cambodia via India and Malaysia. Those living in the rural areas mix Islam with their indigenous culture and animistic elements, resulting in folk Islam. The spiritual centre for the Cham Muslims of Cambodia is Chur-Changvra near Phnom Penh.

In Cambodia, there are a few Islamic groups such as Chang Veng, Imam San, Da'wa and Wahhaiyya. The Chang Veng group of villages tend to mix more Malay words with their vocabulary than those from the Imam San group of villages. This is because of their strong connections with, and support received from Muslims in Malaysia. The Imam San group has fewer connections with outside Muslims world because of their stance on animistic traditions that are unacceptable to fundamental Muslims.

The Da'wa is a missionary movement from a variety of Islamic countries outside Cambodia. Visiting groups of Da'wa missionaries can be seen in Cham villages of Cambodia today. They travel from village to village spreading their beliefs and normally preach in village mosques where they also live during their stay. The Wahhabiyya is also a missionary movement similar to the Da'wa in that they also preach a more fundamentalist type of Islam.

Only a few dozen Cham have been reached with the gospel. There is no churches are known and there is no Bible in Cham language.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ The Islamic missionaries need to come to Christ. May God open the eyes of the Cham to see the truth so that will come to know Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.
- ▶ Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into His harvest field reaching the Cham for Christ.
- ▶ Pray for safety and protection for those workers who are working among the Cham.
- ▶ Pray for the spiritual growth in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ for those Cham believers.



The Rejang of Indonesia

Statistics:
Population: 700,000
Islam: 99,9%
Christians: Less than 50
Bible portions: none
Jesus-film: no
Rejang churches: none

The Rejang (also called Djang) live in the tropical rain forest on the heights of the Barisan mountains of Sumatra, the largest of Indonesia's islands. This forest is the home of the Rafflesia, the largest flower in the world (nearly one metre across). The tropical island of Sumatra has a humid and hot climate, although it is comfortably cool in the mountains.

The Rejang are divided in five groups located in the fertile highlands, the Musi valley and the coastal area next to the Indian Ocean. For many centuries the Rejang were cut off from the rest of the world. Proud of their own history, they show little interest in other cultures and are suspicious of outsiders. Both men and women wear colourful traditional batik cloths, called sarong or kain. Their main food is rice mixed with vegetables, and fruit. Products from the area include rice, tea, coffee, palm oil, ebony and rubber. Some Rejang work on the plantations and others are experienced craftsmen working with wood, metal, leather and paper.

Rejang villages vary in size from 15 to 900 homes. Villages having of an irrigation system can have more than 4000 people living in them. The village chief is elected by the community. Each village has a

hall, where ceremonial dances and feasts are celebrated. A traditional Rejang house is built on poles, about 1.5 to 2 meters above ground. It has an open porch, for receiving guests. Artistically carved horizontal poles and pretty, colourful panels decorate the outer walls of the houses. Traditionally the father is the head of the family but marriage agreements determine whether a child will belong to the family of the mother or of the father, or to the clan.

What do they believe?

In earlier times the Rejang practised animism. They believed that all natural things like rocks, trees and animals have undying souls. Islam was brought to Sumatra by Muslim merchants at the end of the 13th century, and since the 20th century all Rejang with the exception of a few, have converted to Islam. However, animist rituals play an important role in everyday life. Magic and occultism are used for protection and to fight against sickness, infertility and enemies. Unfortunately there are still no translation of the Bible available in the Rejang language, nor Christian radio or TV programs. A few local missions are working among the Rejang, but so far they have had little success and only about 50 Christians are known among this people.

The "Rafflesia Arnoldi" grows where the Rejang live in Indonesia. It is the world's largest flower (up to one metre across).



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray that the Lord would call men and women to witness for Christ among the Rejang.
- ▶ Pray that God would keep, strengthen and encourage the few Rejang believers who often live isolated among their people. May the find the courage to witness for Christ among their own people.
- ▶ Ask God to call qualified linguists to translate the Bible into the Rejang language.
- ▶ Pray that there will be a spiritual breakthrough so that many will become open to the Gospel.

Days 19 - 23

Focus on Africa

Testimony from Cameroon:

"I am from the Kanuri ethnic group in Nigeria. I did Qur'anic studies in Nigeria and Cameroon. I eventually even received a scholarship to do studies in Saudi Arabia. After coming back from Saudi Arabia I became a Muslim chaplain in a large prison. There I met a Christian who was also a chaplain and we became friends. I so wanted this man to become a Muslim but his life impressed me greatly. I invited him to attend the regular Muslim Friday prayers with me and he invited me to several Christian worship services. Unexpectedly I found myself asking God which was the right way.

"Not long afterwards I received a letter from one of my former Muslim spiritual leaders who had become a Christian. He challenged me to seek God to know the truth and it was then that the Lord revealed Himself to me. I declared myself as a Christian along with my former spiritual leader. Four times I was nearly murdered by members of my own family who wanted me to return to Islam. The church in my community was attacked because of my conversion as well. Eventually some Muslims captured me and asked me to recite the Muslim

confession of faith — 'the Shahada' — or else they would kill me. I told them that it was not I who was in danger but in reality they were in great danger. They beat me till I lost consciousness but I survived. Later I had problems with the police but God delivered me. I continue to serve the Lord with my whole heart."

2nd testimony

Last year an African prayer group of five participating in "30 Days" had the following experience:

On the 17th day of prayer during Ramadan the Imam who was leading the local prayers found it impossible to continue praying. Another Imam also tried but also found it impossible to pray in the Muslim fashion. Then the first Imam saw in a vision that the local Christians who were praying at the same moment were actually blocking the Muslim prayers. In the vision it was as though both sides were throwing rocks at each other in prayer but the Christian rocks were breaking the Muslim rocks. The Imam even asked the Christians not to pray at the same time as the Muslims. After this event several young Muslims came to faith in Christ.



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The Yao of Tanzania

*Population: 500,000 in Tanzania
(There are also 1 million in Malawi and 450,000 in Mozambique.)*

The Yao of Tanzania live in the south of the country along the border with Mozambique. They are mainly peasants; they raise animals and have small businesses, while living in small groups of clans. Their chiefs are Mataka, Kanduru, and Mtalika. Traditions are passed on during initiation ceremonies carried out with dancing and other activities. Women receive sexual instruction before their marriage, and there are special initiation rites for women at the beginning of their first pregnancy.

Around 1800, Arabs started slave-trading in the Yao region. The Yao enslaved people from neighbouring tribes and sold them to the Arabs. Through the slave trade the Yao started to practise Islam; at present about 95 per cent of the Yao of Tanzania are Muslims. Islam has become a central part of Yao culture, so much so that when a Yao turns his back on Islam he cuts himself off from his tribe and his clan. He is completely abandoned, and will not be given any help. In addition, he will be threatened in many ways to make him return to his original Islamic faith.

The abolition of the slave trade in Tanzania in 1873 did not please the Yao and resulted in some negative relations with their colonial rulers. As the religion of the colonial rulers, Christianity was hated, despite the introduction of medical care and education by Christian missionaries. The Yao did not allow their children to attend the schools, fearing that their children would start eating pork or possibly become Christians. They considered Christians to be uncivilised, but after many years this situation is changing and today relations are much better. Muslims may meet with Christians for different events such as burials and weddings.

The gospel was first spread among the Yao by Anglicans and Catholics. Today, there are several evangelical and Pentecostal churches, many of which were established through the witness of missionaries and also by local Christian tradesmen. These churches spread the gospel through open-air meetings, personal witnessing, and Christian radio ministry in the Yao language. Some Tanzanian pastors and Christian workers are Yao.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Some Yao men are especially lazy; some are unfaithful to their wives. Pray that Yao men will take a more godly role in their families and society.
- ▶ The Yao do not consider schooling as essential. Parents sometimes have to be forced to send their children to school. Pray for a change in worldview about education among the Yao.
- ▶ Sexual instruction given during initiation rites tends to lead to poor ethics. The young develop a promiscuous lifestyle from an early age. Where television is available it is also having a negative influence on the youth. Pray for a change in Yao society that leads to a more moral lifestyle among Yao young people.
- ▶ New believers often find it hard to have their basic needs met, which encourages them to return to Islam. Pray that the young Yao churches will develop a greater ability to work together and to help believers.
- ▶ Christian radio service is limited in time and frequency. Pray for more workers and financial support so that the ministry can be more extensive and touch hearers so that they turn to Christ.



The Worodougou in Ivory Coast

Many years had passed since M. last visited his native village. He was one of the first believers among the Worodougou. He has suffered much because of his faith but it has also created in him a greater trust in God. He has grown in faith and God has called him to reach his own people group with the Gospel. M. is the first person who was sent out as a missionary by his church.

In his native village, many doors have opened up before him. During the first two visits, five people came to faith in Jesus. During the third visit, the Muslim imam invited him to preach on Friday in the mosque. All the men in the village came and listened to M. preach various themes from Genesis to Revelation. The meeting started at 9:00 AM and ended four hours later after the question and answers time. Many of the listeners are pleased with the answers given.

The imam said, "We have to consider these words. If we had heard them from a stranger (a Western missionary) we could say, "This message is not for us. But now, our son has spoken to us, therefore we have to consider it carefully."

The Worodougou people live in the sub-Saharan, in the Northwestern part of Ivory coast. They number about 100,000 people and are Muslims and Animists. They worship their

ancestors and also certain mountains, rivers, 'holy woods', serpents. They are afraid of evil spirits, evil sorcerers and death.

During recent years, missionaries from over 10 different ethnic backgrounds have worked among them. Christians have used various methods to proclaim the Gospel including: Friendship evangelism, humanitarian aid, open-air evangelism in the villages, the Jesus film and audio-cassettes of God's Word. Other Worodougou have experienced dreams and healing. Even more recently new Worodougou believers have been inviting their own people to believe in Jesus through their personal testimonies.

After 25 years of sowing the Word of God and the tedious reaping of a hand-full indigenous believers who suffer persecution by their families, the time seems to ripe for a spiritual harvest among the Worodougou!

*"All the ends of the earth will remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him ..."*
(Psalm 22:27-28)



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ May the Word of God penetrate the hearts of the Worodougou and bring them to a living faith in Him. Pray for a great spiritual harvest!
- ▶ Pray that believers may be a living testimony for Jesus in word and deed.
- ▶ Pray for the indigenous believers who are telling Bible stories in a chronological fashion in order bring their people to faith.
- ▶ Pray that the Word of God may spread like a bush fire into all 200 towns and villages among the Worodougou.
- ▶ May the growing churches be characterised by their obedience to God.
- ▶ May the Lord raise up spiritual leaders and evangelists who can reach the approximately 20 unreached people groups living in the surrounding area of northern Ivory Coast.



Libya



Population: 5,766,000

In the Bible we are told that a man named Simon of Cyrene, who was passing through Jerusalem on a journey, was forced to bear the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). Cyrene was the region around present-day Benghazi in eastern Libya. Even though at least one Libyan is mentioned in the New Testament, the present Arab inhabitants of this nation have never had any significant opportunity to receive the message of Jesus.

President Muammar Gaddafi has ruled the nation after leading a bloodless coup to depose the ruling monarchy in 1969. For many years, Libya was often negatively associated with international terrorism and Islamic revolution in the eyes of the world community.

The oil industry provides Libya with one of the highest per-capita incomes in Africa; other industries include agriculture, food processing, textiles, fishing, and, more recently, tourism. The Great Man-Made River Project, one of the largest water development projects in the world, is being built to bring fresh water from aquifers under the Sahara to coastal towns.

Tripoli (Tarabulus in Arabic) is the capital, largest city (urban population 1,682,000), principal sea port and largest commercial and manufacturing centre in Libya. Its climate is typically Mediterranean, with hot dry summers, cool winters, and some modest rainfall. Benghazi — also on the Mediterranean coast — is the second largest

city (population 850,000). It has more religious Muslims because of the presence of Islamic fundamentalist movements. It is also the most intellectual Libyan city. Prostitution has become more present in Benghazi recently since, in the past decade, traditional marriage has become too expensive for many people. Traditional weddings often involve hundreds of people and enormous expenses.

About 96 per cent of the Libyan population is Muslim, and 3 per cent Christian. Perhaps one quarter of the total Libyan population is composed of foreign workers, but estimates vary greatly. The majority of Christians in Libya are mainly nominal Egyptian Copts. There are only a handful of Libyan Christians. Sunni Islam is the state religion, and any form of Christian witness to Libyans is strictly prohibited.

Libyan young people have grown up with widespread government subsidies and free handouts. The strict media censorship has isolated them from most outside influence. Yet the growing presence of the Internet is causing some problems; about 70 per cent of Internet café users visit pornography sites. However, the oil revenues have also enabled students, who will be the future leaders of the nation, to study abroad. This may give some the opportunity to hear the gospel.

We encourage you to visit the following web site for more information: <http://www.springsinthedesert.org>.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for President Gaddafi and others in authority in the nation.
- ▶ Pray for Libyans living abroad, that they may hear and receive the gospel outside their own country.
- ▶ Pray for more intercession teams, entering as tourists, to go and pray for this precious land.
- ▶ Pray for the Christian radio and satellite broadcasts. Over 100 hours of Arabic programmes can be heard by Libyans each week. Many Libyans have written to the radio stations, but censorship hinders follow-up correspondence.
- ▶ Pray for the development of the Jesus film into Libyan Colloquial Arabic, the spoken language of most Libyans. Until this is available, pray for Libyans to watch and be touched by other Arabic versions.



Muslims in Gambia

Gambia is the smallest country in Africa. Situated on the West coast of the continent, surrounded by Senegal, it only has 1.5 million inhabitants, who belong to several people groups. The Mandinka, Wolof, Fula and Jola are all traditionally Muslim. Thus 95 % of all Gambians are Muslim – and yet there is religious liberty in the country.

Gambia's young people often move to the coast, where they hope to find a job. Also most colleges and high schools are usually found there. One should not underestimate the influence of tourism on the country. Christianity is often seen as the religion of the whites, and therefore some sadly mistake the tourists' lifestyles for that of practising Christians. Happily there is a large variety of missions organizations and churches that work mainly near the coast.

In Gambia the Gospel really speaks at the innermost needs of people. The desire for personal and relational peace, the fear of evil spirits and the fear of God's judgement move many toward a deep longing for the liberating and saving power of the Gospel.

Here are some of God's saving activity in the Gambia:

Dreams have proven to be very influential personal seeking after God, and there are a number of testimonies of how God

has called many to follow Him through dreams. F. had lived and worked with Christians for 10 years. She dreamed the same dream three times. Being Wolof, this repetition was decisive for her decision to follow Christ. Even when she was later kicked out of her family and disinherited, she remained faithful to the Lord. Today she is married to a Christian and opens her home to others who experience the same persecution.

M., a Mandinka Christian, had his marriage cursed by relatives so that he would remain without children. The relatives had hoped that this would drive him back to Islam. M's little son is a testimony for all the neighbourhood and extended family. Without a single magical amulet on his body, only trusting the Christian God, the little boy is healthy and strong, in spite of the curse that he should not have been born.

B., a Fula, had a deep longing to meet God and even Islamic fasting did not bring him any fulfilment, until God himself brought him in contact with an evangelical pastor from his own ethnic background.

These and other young Christians need a lot of encouragement, practical help and love from Christians.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for more missionaries who would be willing to commit themselves long term, to learn a local language as messengers of the Gospel.
- ▶ Pray for a spiritual awakening among the traditional Muslim people groups.
- ▶ Pray for the Bible translation efforts in the different local languages.
- ▶ for many individual encounters in private bible studies, but also in churches and Christian families.
- ▶ Pray for thorough life and discipleship training of the young Christians, so that they are able to make their way in a world full of hostility and challenge.
- ▶ Pray for a growing willingness among local Christians to help those who have been rejected or who have lost employment because of their faith.

The Darfur conflict

Darfur is a largely desert region of western Sudan with a population of about six million people. This area has been the scene of much horrible torture, death and destruction in the past few years. For centuries, the Muslim settled farmers and nomadic herder tribes in the area largely coexisted peacefully, with extensive ethnic intermarriage among the tribes. Recently, however, conflict has arisen over access to water and grazing land between the more settled “African” farmers and some of the “Arab” herder tribes. It is actually somewhat difficult for outsiders to distinguish the two groups because both speak Arabic as a trade language, and both are black with Negroid traits — though the “Arabs” are somewhat lighter-skinned.

The present crisis began in April 2003 when an armed group of Darfuri rebels desiring autonomy for their region attacked a Sudanese government force in Darfur, resulting in the deaths of over 100 soldiers. Afterwards the Sudanese government supported the Janjaweed armed militia (the herders) against the rebels. “Janjaweed” roughly translates as “armed men on horseback”. The Janjaweed militia is composed of people mainly from the nomadic and semi-nomadic

Baggara (Baqqarah) tribe who live in Sudan and several other African countries. They are also known as the Shuwa Arabs. Few of them have had much exposure to the gospel, and little has been done to reach them. The Sudanese government has given logistical and military support — including air strikes against the farmer villages — to the Janjaweed. These activities also seem to be part of an effort to Islamicise more thoroughly the region and stamp out any hopes of Darfuri autonomy.

In early 2006 it was estimated that 300,000 have died in this conflict since 2003. More than 2.4 million people had been displaced from their homes. About 200,000 people have fled to neighbouring Chad. Hundreds of villages with populations numbering in the thousands have been burned to the ground. The systematic nature of this campaign has been confirmed by eyewitness accounts. The UN World Food Programme estimated that up to 3.5 million people faced famine in Darfur in the autumn of 2005. It is uncertain what the situation will be in 2006. Many of the refugees are asking why other Muslims are treating them so badly. Some are even questioning Islam.





Few Darfurians have heard the gospel of Christ: their only concept of Jesus is the one given to them through Islamic belief- that Jesus was a prophet like Mohammed. The practice of animism and witchcraft is common among the Darfurians. The region is one of the least evangelised areas on earth: fewer than 50 believers are known among all Darfur's tribes (2005 figure). Yet the small numbers of Christians in the area are the real hope for the future. God's plan for the area is linked to them.



One of many refugee camps in Chad and Sudan

*May it be that
 "The people who walk in darkness
 will see a great light;
 Those who live in a dark land,
 The light will shine on them."
 Isaiah 9:2 NASB*

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray for peace and reconstruction efforts in Darfur at all levels: international efforts, Sudanese efforts and inter-tribal efforts.
- ▶ Ignorance and poverty are major problems for the Darfur people, leading to tribal conflicts, banditry and violence. Pray for labourers who can bring reconciliation, solutions to enduring problems, and salvation.
- ▶ Pray that the Spirit of God will inspire and motivate the people of Darfur and prepare them to receive the Word with humility.
- ▶ Pray that the works of the kingdom of darkness involving Islam, animism and sorcery will be exposed and bring freedom to the Darfurians.
- ▶ Ministries are needed for the widows and orphans left destitute from the conflict. Pray that God will raise up people and teams to work with these groups.

*Table used with permission from:
 Mission Frontiers March-April 2005*

The Peoples of Darfur

People Group	Population Estimate	Known Believers
Baggara	215,000	1
Bargo	1,400	1-3
Barno	unknown	0
Bederia	503,000	0
BeniAmir	unknown	0
Beni Helba	15,000	0
Berti	171,000	0
Bideyat	44,000	0
Birged	95,000	0
Daju	134,000	0
Falata	418,000	1
Fulani	131,000	0
Fur	710,000	4-8
Gimr	100,000	0
Habania	unknown	0
Hawara (Jalaba)	unknown	0
Humir	55,000	0
Khuzam	16,000	0
Maba	191,000	5
Massalit	168,000	2-3
Meidob	62,000	0
Mima	75,000	0
Rizeigat	249,000	0
Sara (Sinyar)	21,000	0
Songar	21,000	0
Taelba	unknown	0
Tama	88,000	0
Tarjam	5,000	0
Tunjur	163,000	0
Zaghawa	155,000	20-30
Ziadia	unknown	0
Total	6,000,000	34-51

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*Testimony of Mohammed Abdul, Age 32,
from a Sunni background.*

I am married and blessed with three children. Years ago I studied in a Qur'anic school (madrassa) which could have allowed me to become a Muslim Imam. During the winter season I also ran a small business; I used to buy woollen shawls from one city and carry them to another part of the country and sell them in order to make a little income.

I was eventually introduced to a former Muslim Imam and observed his life and teaching. He was explaining salvation through Jesus to several other Muslims. I doubted that he was really well informed about Islam, so I asked

him questions about the Qur'an. He was able to easily quote 15 verses about Jesus from the Qur'an and this intrigued me. Afterwards we had a lengthy discussion and he cited various verses from the Qur'an and the Bible which convinced me to explore the matter further.

For nearly one year I made a careful comparative study of the Qur'an and the Bible and the truth was revealed to me. I decided to hold on to the truth and escape

from the darkness. The light of the truth has taken away my darkness. I now believe in Jesus as Lord.

When the leaders of the local mosque started suspecting that the former Imam had put his faith in Jesus, the first thing they did was to remove him from the mosque. The Muslim villagers said I had also become a betrayer of the Islamic faith and they continued to watch my activities carefully. Finally the villagers gave an ultimatum to the

former Imam who had helped me discover Jesus. They asked him to repent and return to Islam or else to leave the village with his wife and children. I also felt threatened and consulted my own brothers. They did not want to protect me in any way so I took my wife and three children and moved to different place. My wife is standing with me in the new faith and that is a great encouragement for me. I am glad to have been able to make the decision to follow Jesus.





The Gujjars of Pakistan and North India

The Gujjar tribe is scattered across the mountains and foothills of Pakistan and north India. Traditionally, the Gujjars are nomadic pastoralists, looking after herds of sheep, goats, or water buffalo. Over the centuries some Gujjars have taken up a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle. However, many are still to be found migrating to the mountain pastures each summer. Gujjar life is hard and beset with difficulties, including poverty, illiteracy, lack of medical facilities, and disempowerment.

The Gujjar lifestyle has been disturbed by 15 years of militancy in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The mountain heights are no longer considered safe, and this has caused many Gujjars to give up migrating altogether. Other areas have seen over grazing of pastures and jungles, so that the migration routes no longer support the animal herds. Other Gujjars have given up migrating to pursue a better life in the towns with salaried employment and access to education and health care.

As the Gujjars move from a traditional lifestyle to a modern one, their culture is experiencing rapid change. Family relationships are struggling to adjust to a new social environment, and often there are tensions between family members. Traditional clothes are being replaced by modern ones.

Historically, Gujjars have been known as folk Muslims. Today, though, many Gujjars are becoming increasingly orthodox

through the efforts of Islamic teachers. Nevertheless, most Gujjars still visit Muslim shrines in times of need, and traditional cures and amulets are dispensed by holy men called “pirs”. The most influential pir for Indian Gujjars is Mian Bashir, a Sufi whose father and grandfather are entombed at the shrine of Wangat Sharif in Kashmir. In the spiritual worldview of Gujjars, these holy men are close to God, whom they consider to be distant and inaccessible apart from the assistance of a pir.

Certain shrines are said to have power to grant particular requests, such as for health, wealth, children, or deliverance from evil spirits. The supplicant pledges allegiance to the entombed saint, vowing his or her loyalty and life in exchange for the granting of the favour asked. A positive result is sometimes achieved, but only at the cost of spiritual bondage and demonisation. A small group of Gujjars has already exchanged this desperate servitude for the abundant life given freely by the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.

The past 15 years have been turbulent times for the Gujjar people, and an assortment of external pressures have led to an increased receptivity among the younger generations. Many, perhaps most, young Gujjars have begun to question the worldview, religious beliefs and practices of their elders. They are looking for real spiritual answers.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray that the Lord of the Harvest will send out additional workers among the Gujjar.
- ▶ At present there is no Gujjar Bible, but translation work is in process. Pray that Gujjars of all dialects will be able to understand the translation. Pray also for audio/oral Bibles in the Gujjar language, as most Gujjars are illiterate.
- ▶ Pray for the fellowship and spiritual growth of the Gujjar believers.
- ▶ Pray that the Lord will help the Gujjar believers to organise themselves into groups. May these groups be healthy and multiply to become salt and light to their people.

Maldive Islands

The Maldive Republic in the Indian Ocean is a chain of 1,190 coral islands grouped into 26 atolls covering 300 km². The larger Maldive Islands have an average size of about 1 km² and are only 1 or 2 metres above sea level. The population is about 350,000 people (200 inhabited islands, plus 80 islands with tourist resorts). The population remains almost totally indigenous except for seven per cent who are of mixed foreign descent. (Note)

Tourism is the Maldives' largest industry. Over 90 per cent of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes. Fishing is the second largest economic activity. The Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004 left more than 100 dead, 12,000 displaced, and property damage exceeding US\$300 million. (Note)

All Maldivians are required to be Muslim culturally and legally under threat of life imprisonment. The practice of any other religion and of missionary work is forbidden. Yet materialism, fear and "black magic" abound. Also the islands have the highest divorce rate in the world, and approximately 70 per cent of young men on the main island called Male are addicted to drugs.

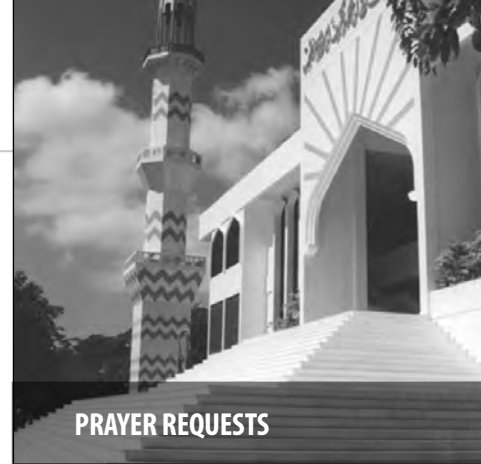
Only a few Maldivian people have come to faith in Christ in recent years, and some have suffered imprisonment and

torture. Yet, owing to the importance of the tourism industry, Christians may still have an inroad for the gospel. Portions of the New Testament exist in the local language, Dhivehi. Gospel radio programmes have been broadcast since 1998 despite all efforts to stop them. In the 1990s the government cracked down on non-Islamic religions. Christians were imprisoned and even tortured, though international attention and pressure secured their release. Maldivian Christians are still being closely watched and are unable to meet together openly. They often suffer loss of family, jobs, public reputation, etc.

One Christian has recently seen three or four Muslims come to faith and another was able to baptise one person. On the same island two people have had dreams about Jesus and they want to know more about Christ. A visitor to the Maldives has said, "It was really weird to be in a country where it is against the law to be a Christian. There weren't any signs of anything Christian. There is not a single church or anyone wearing a cross. There were no Bibles, if you can imagine." In spite of the absence of man-made evidence of God's presence in the islands, you can be sure that He is there. He remembers his promise to Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth (Gen 12).

Statistics from The World Fact Book

Web site: www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray that God will reveal Himself on every island and in every village of the Maldives through dreams, visions, radio broadcasts, cassettes and witnessing.
- ▶ Pray for the strengthening of the faith of the Maldivian Christians, though they be scattered and in hiding.
- ▶ Pray for the financial well-being of Maldivian believers who have suffered material loss owing to their faith.
- ▶ Pray that Maldivian Muslims will see the good deeds of the Christians and glorify the one and only True God (1 Pet 2:12).
- ▶ Pray for the translation of the Bible in Dhivehi.
- ▶ Pray for the authorities in the Maldives (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

The Muslims of Meerut, India

Population of Meerut: 1.5 million; Muslims 400,000 (27%)

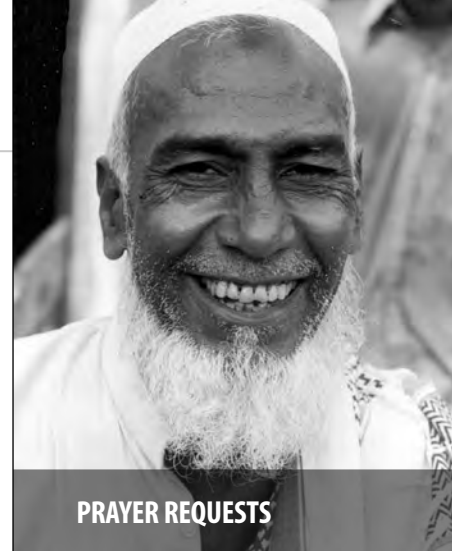
Several years ago, five Muslim men approached a Christian in Meerut and wanted to get baptised. Three of the young men were, while the other two backed out in fear. The two men who refused baptism reported what had happened. Shortly thereafter, local and national newspapers and television news reported about a man in Meerut who was trying to convert Muslims. This man was, and remains, the only known Christian worker among the 400,000 Muslim people in the city of Meerut, India.

This story illustrates the hostile climate in Meerut, a city whose former name literally translates as “City of Demons”. Meerut is still known as a “hotspot” because of its long history of conflict. The city gained international prominence on 24 April 1857 as the starting point for the Indian mutiny against British rule. The area was again in the headlines in 1987 when some of the most deadly communal riots in the India’s history occurred between Meerut’s Hindus and Muslims.

Meerut is located 70 km north-east of Delhi in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India. The majority of the Muslims in the city live in an area of only a few square kilometres. They are typically poor and practise folk Islam. The two largest Muslim people groups in Meerut city are the Ansari and the Shaikh.

Despite the hostile environment in the city, God continues to work. Many Muslims in Meerut have had dreams where Christ has appeared to them. Other people are coming to Christ through answered prayer and direct verbal witness. One of the greatest needs in Meerut is for Indian Christian workers who will build relationships with Muslims, pray for their felt needs, explain to them about dreams in which Jesus has appeared to them, and proclaim the gospel to them.

One former Muslim from Meerut shared about how he became a believer. Jesus appeared to him in a dream with blood on His face and carrying a cross on His shoulder. In the dream, Jesus told the man, “I suffered this for you.” This Muslim man had the same dream two more times during the next few years before eventually believing in Christ. When he told his parents about his decision, the man’s father drew a gun and attempted to shoot his son in the chest. The son quickly dodged and was wounded in the shoulder. Fleeing from his parents’ home he found a pastor who cared for him. The young man received some ministry training and now he is travelling throughout north India, training Muslim-background believers about how to reach Muslims for Christ.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray against the hostility and fear in Meerut. Muslims who are seeking Christ, Christians and some missionaries are equally inhibited from speaking about Jesus because of persecution.
- ▶ Pray that God will continue to speak to Muslims through their dreams. Pray for Muslims in Meerut to accept Christ and then be used to reach their own people.
- ▶ Pray for God to raise up bold Christian workers among the Muslims of Meerut.
- ▶ Pray for God to meet the needs of Muslims in Meerut in supernatural ways, leading them to faith in Christ.

Sufism

(Written from an Indian perspective.)

It was Thursday night, Jumrat, Anwar was filled with excitement, anticipation and perhaps a little bit of the kind of fear one can feel when at the threshold of a new chapter in one's life. This was his night; after completing nearly a year of exercises to be accepted into his father's order of Sufism, he was to be initiated at last, along with a number of other devotees of the Murshid. Once initiated, Anwar would become a Murid, or a disciple in mystical communion with Allah through the power of his spiritual guide, his Murshid.

He arrived at the appointed hour, and found the room already filled with disciples, with those to be initiated sitting in a row towards the middle of the room, facing one another in pairs. They were listening to a younger man up in the front of the room singing a devotional song called a ghazal. Then the Murshid himself appeared and led the rapidly growing group in dhikr, or ritual, often hypnotic chanting, in this case of the simple phrase, "There is no god but God". Yet as the chant increased in speed and volume, and the level of excitement and emotion built in the room, the Murshid, the pir, the spiritual guide, descended the makeshift platform on which he had been sitting and sat at the head of the row of new initiates. He was a middle-aged man with a longish beard and the long hair of a mystic. With the help of some of his other Murids, he unraveled his turban, the length of which was placed along the facing rows of disciples. At the proper moment, each of the initiates took hold of the cloth before them as the pir prayed a prayer of blessing and forgiveness for them. Each responded in a vow of complete obedience to their Murshid.

Right: Calligraphy of Sufi poetry. Sufi religious experience and teaching has often been expressed through poetry.



The roots of Sufism go back to the Middle Eastern and Near Eastern context of founding and initial spread of Islam. As Islam spread from Arabia to other parts of the world, it began to interact with new cultures and philosophies. Islam encountered, Christian monks in the desert, Gnostics of various sorts, Neoplatonic philosophy, and Buddhism and Hinduism from India which had made inroads and had influence especially in Central Asia. Some Muslims came under these influences, and began to develop a more mystically oriented version of Islam that was centred less on shari'a, or law and more on an expression of hunger for God and longing for union with Him (although rarely was shari'a dispensed with completely; it was usually reinterpreted mystically). It took the emphasis on God's love from the Christian mystics, an emphasis on ascending spiritually through secret, esoteric knowledge from the Gnostics, and an interpretation of "union" with God, which veered towards the pantheism of both Neo-Platonism and the Indian religions.

Below: A Sufi mystic in India



Early on, more mainstream Muslims often persecuted the Sufis, including the martyrdom by crucifixion of an early Persian Sufi leader, Husayn ibn Mansoor al-Hallaj. However, largely through the efforts of 12th century Islamic theologian Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, Muslims eventually brought Sufism within the mainstream of acceptable Islamic thought.

The Sufi path is generally marked by a progressively increasing union with and eventually absorption or annihilation of one's personal identity, first into one's pir, and eventually into God. Although there are many versions of the "stages" of Sufi progression, a representative list could be put as follows:

- ▷ *Shari'at, or "Law", coinciding with the "natural" initial human stage of nasut.*
- ▷ *Tariqat, or "Path", in which the devotee takes up the path of their spiritual journey, thus advancing into malakut, or the nature of angels.*
- ▷ *Ma'rifat, or "Gnosis", special knowledge, in which the devotee advances to the stage of jabrut, or "possession of power".*
- ▷ *Haqiqat, or illumination of Reality, in which the devotee is now ready for lahut, Divinity, of being absorbed into Deity Himself in eventual fana fi'llah, or absorption into God, often described as a "drop falling into the Sea".*

The path of spiritual progression can thus seem rather complex at times. Certainly the Sufi concept of being absorbed into God is contrary to the Christian understanding of union with God. The Christian concept of the creature's being taken into close fellowship with God in Christ is leavened by the reality that the creature can never reach the state of being as God is, uncreated.

At the core of most Sufi belief is a deep yearning for intimacy with God, a yearning which can only truly be fulfilled in Christ. Despite the pantheism which is often mixed in with the Sufi understanding of God's nature, Sufis often have a more biblical understanding of God's character as being related to His love for humankind rather than the stern understanding often emphasised in more orthodox expressions of Islam.

At the core of most Sufi belief is a deep yearning for intimacy with God, a yearning which can only truly be fulfilled in Christ. Pray for them to have divine encounters with the living God.

PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▷ Pray that God would reveal Himself directly to Sufis who are truly "hungering and thirsting for righteousness" (see Matt 5:6).
- ▷ Pray for the Lord to raise up more people with a desire to reach Sufis, as well as discernment and boldness for them in their witness to the reality of Jesus.
- ▷ Pray against the powers of darkness who would want to keep Sufis from grasping "...the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor 4:6 [NKJV]).

*In him was life,
and that life was the light of men.
John 1:4*

Sufis are well known in Turkey. The so called Whirling Dervishes are famous worldwide.



The Muslims of Mysore

Population: 877,000 (2005)

Muslims: about 250,000

Mysore is a historical city situated in the southern India State of Karnataka. It is religiously as well as culturally conservative. Muslims and Hindus live in sharply defined areas and hardly mix together as is common in more cosmopolitan cities. Historically the Muslims have had a major influence in Mysore. The most prominent Muslim influence came from Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, known as “The Tiger of Mysore”, who ruled the Kingdom of Mysore from 1782 to 1799. Tipu was a learned man, a good poet and an able soldier. Being a strongly religious, he practised the Sunni branch of Islam.

Present day Mysore has several Muslim groups with significantly varied practises. Although most Muslims in Mysore are Urdu speaking there are about 4,000 Tamil speaking Labbai and an equal number of Malayalam speaking Mapilla Muslims. The Bhangi, who speak Hindi earn their living by sweeping and begging. The Memon are traders and merchants and speak Gujarati and Urdu.

A recent survey of Muslims in Mysore revealed that only 18 per cent of Muslim male adults do their five daily prayers. Less than half of them attend the Friday prayers, which is an obligation for Muslims. The largest gatherings of Muslims happen during religious holidays when as many as 35,000 people pray together in an open field while others gather in mosques.

Several active Islamic organizations are found in the city involved in politics but is also active in social work and propagating Islam to non-Muslims. There are 120 mosques in Mysore City as well as 180 schools where religious instruction is imparted to 10,000 children. However nearly 80 per cent of the Muslim children receive no basic religious education. The city has 300 people who have completely memorized the Qur’an (they are called Hafiz). Many Muslims in Mysore follow Sufi traditions including visiting the tombs of Muslim saints and put an emphasis on mystically praising Allah through songs. The Sufis focus on attaining unity with Allah through various means including meditation, chanting and music.

None of the almost 100 churches in Mysore are reaching out to the Muslim community in an organised and active way at this time. But this is beginning to change. There are three Christian workers who are concentrating on reaching the Muslims . They have seen eight families from Muslim background which have come to faith in Christ and are being disciplined. They are also seeking to motivate churches to reach Muslims by offering Muslim evangelism training for pastors.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ May God reveal Himself to the Muslims as a personal God even as they seek to experience Him through their Sufi traditions.
- ▶ Pray that they will see that Jesus is the only way through whom they can attain “unity” with Allah and not through their meditations, chanting, music or visits to the shrines.
- ▶ Pray that the churches will take up their responsibility to reach out to the Muslim community in ways that are culturally sensitive to the Muslims.
- ▶ Pray that the new Muslim background believers will have the courage to walk with Jesus and to be witnesses of Him in their community.

The Pain and the Sorrow

Christians definitely have the promise and the hope that one day the pain and the sorrow of this present world will all be washed away. The Kingdom of God will someday come in its fullness. We pray for this to happen "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We have the blessed hope that God's desires will be totally accomplished in the age to come. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him (Heb. 2:8).

It is certain that these last five years has seen the Muslim World groaning in great pain. The Afghan and Iraq wars, the Bam Earthquake were already very difficult experiences for several nations in 2001 – 2003. Then during 2004 and 2005 the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the huge earthquake in Kashmir only showed us the reality of our fragile world. Before the forces of nature we and our civilisation are not much stronger than an egg shell which breaks. There may be other significant events before this booklet actually arrives in your hands.

- ▶ Afghan conflict and Iraq War: The casualties number in the tens of thousands. The actual numbers may never be known.
- ▶ Tsunami: 130,000 Muslim Indonesians died (thousands more died in other countries). About 200,000 houses, 1,900 schools, and countless businesses were also destroyed.
- ▶ Kashmir earthquake: 80 ,000+ dead, 106,000+ injured, possibly 3,000,000 homeless.
- ▶ For many the daily struggle to recover from these events continues.
- ▶ The May 2006 Java earthquake (6,000+ deaths and hundreds of thousands of homeless).



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ For Christians God is our very present help in a time of trouble (Ps. 46:1). Let us pray for the millions of people affected by these events that they would see the salvation of our God. Try to pray as specifically as possible for the various relief efforts that you may know about. Pray for people to encounter God in their distress. Ask God to guide you if there are other practical things you can do to be a partial answer to the pain and suffering of Muslims.
- ▶ ***Please pray for the needs of Muslim people affected by these tragedies:***
 - Many have lost father and mothers.
 - Many have lost their children.
 - Many have lost their entire living family.
 - Many have lost their family inheritance.
 - Many have seen horrible deaths before their eyes.
 - Many have lost their homes.
 - Many have lost their jobs.
 - Many have lost their favourite teacher.
 - Many no longer have schools.
 - Many no longer have their best friends.
 - Many have lost their health.
 - Many have lost limbs.
 - Many have lost their sight.

- Many still lack appropriate food.
- Many still lack medicines.
- Many have lost their doctor.
- Many are ruined financially.
- Many have seen rivers of blood.
- Many have seen anger.
- Many are angry.
- Many have known bitterness.
- Many are hurting.
- Many have lost hope.



Varanasi, India

Varanasi India, formerly known as Benaras, is a sacred Hindu City on the Ganges River. Signs greet visitors at the airport announcing "Welcome to the Holy City of Varanasi!". According to Hindu belief, Varanasi is the cosmic centre of the Universe. The air is filled with the smoke of funeral pyres and the streets are littered with the marigolds used in Hindu funerals. On the vast ghats (steps) that line the sacred Ganges River Hindus bathe, conduct business, worship, and die. Dying in Varanasi guarantees a Hindu a path directly to Nirvana without having to suffer through another life here on earth.

Interwoven within the pageantry and drama of one million Hindus are 250,000 Muslims who have made Varanasi their home for the past 500 years. Standing high over the Hindu temples and shrines, the Mosque of Aurangzeb evokes the past when Mogul Muslims ruled India for generations. Muslims continue to live in close-knit communities founded in those days.

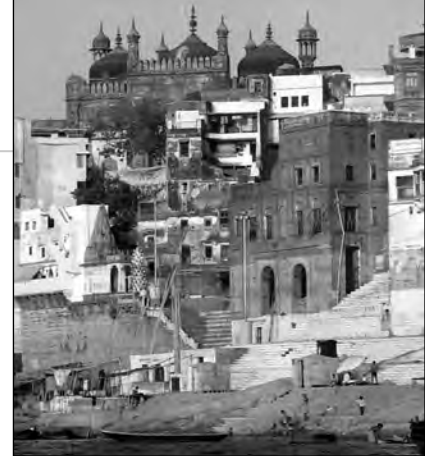
Entering a Muslim area is like stepping back in time to that Mogul past. The call to prayer can be heard rippling through the air and into homes. Narrow streets are crowded with people. Instead of marigolds, textile scraps and bright-colored thread litter the street.

Many of Varanasi's Muslims belong to a weaver caste called "Ansari", or "helper" in Arabic. For generations they have passed

on their craft from father to son, hand-weaving silk on room-sized, foot-powered looms. The silks they create are so beautiful and intricate that they are fashioned into saris worn only for special occasions. Many a Hindu girl has dreamed of a Varanasi silk sari for her wedding day. Even as they value the saris, Hindus look down on the Ansari saying they are upstarts who will never be high caste.

The economic challenges of the 21st century are pressing in on the Ansari. Chinese silk and weaving is competing for the silk market. Fabrics woven by power looms also compete for the important sari market. Some Ansari are beginning to abandon the old ways. They are branching out into other lines of work that they hope will be more profitable and stable, although they often continue to create beautiful handicrafts. The realities of the modern world require more of them to mingle with the outside world. Often, one or more boys from a family are sent to school to learn about the business world and to speak English.

In the past, Christians have overlooked the Muslims of Varanasi, but that is changing. In recent years, God has led some workers to these people. As a result, there are now some house churches among the Muslims in this city.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ Pray that as the Ansari mix more with the outside world, that God would reveal Himself to them, and that the Ansari will find believers to help them be true disciples.
- ▶ Pray for the house churches, that the converted Muslims may continue to grow in their knowledge of God and their understanding of His plans for them.
- ▶ Pray for emerging leaders of house churches to be identified and trained to take the Gospel to their family and friends.
- ▶ Pray for the missionaries living in Varanasi that God will sustain their ministry and lead them to the harvest fields.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Is the God of Islam also the God of the Bible?

Answer: Yes and No

Explanation: Muslims use the word Allah as the name for the God of Abraham. The word "Allah" is also used by Christians in the Arabic Bible as the word for God. The Islamic holy book, the Qur'an, is full of references to the Biblical characters and prophets. Here is a short list of Biblical characters found in just four verses of the Qur'an (chapter 6, verses 84-87): Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmail, Elisha, Jonas, and Lot. There are dozens of other references to biblical characters in the Qur'an. While these people are all mentioned in both the Qur'an and the Bible this does not mean that Muslims and Christians are in total agreement about God.

The abundant references to Biblical characters in the Qur'an definitely show that Mohammed was influenced by many aspects of Jewish and Christian teachings. However his idea of God does not include very significant Christian concepts about God. For example Muslims are unitarians and Christians are trinitarians. Islam does not know God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross and that he was raised from the dead.

Is Mohammed prophesied in the Bible?

Muslims often point to two texts in the Bible as evidence that the coming of Mohammed was foretold even in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you (the Israelites) a prophet like me (Moses) from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Muslims attempt to say that the Ishmaelites are the "brothers of the Israelites" mentioned in this text. Mohammed is said to be a descendant of Ishmael through one of the sons (either Nebajoth or Kedar). However in Deuteronomy 17:15 the Israelites receive specific instructions concerning kings using the same words: "You shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother." From the context it can plainly be seen that the word "brother" here means someone from among the Israelites themselves. The Apostles believed that Jesus was "the Prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18 (See Acts 3:22-23 and 7:37).

The other main passages which are cited by Muslims are John 14:16-18 and 16:7-15. Muslims sometimes try to say that Christians changed the original Greek wording of the text concerning the "helper or comforter". For them the original word was not "helper or comforter" (parakletos in Greek) but "periklytos" meaning "glorious or honoured one." They say this refers to Ahmed, a form of the name Mohammed, which means "the praised one". It is significant that there are no known Greek texts of John 14 and 16 which use the word "periklytos" instead of "parakletos." In addition the activities of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the texts do not match well with the life of Mohammed.

You can find additional material about Muslims and Islamic beliefs on our web site: <http://www.30-days.net>

How to Interest Muslims in the Bible

By Georges Housney

Here is an approach which has proven useful in showing the value of the Bible to a Muslim. This activity takes between 15 and 30 minutes. I typically open the Bible to Genesis chapter one and begin by showing the story of the Creation. I take a few moments to point out the wisdom of God in the process of creation and the progression from day to day. I continue by giving them glimpses of the whole book of Genesis. "Look, here is the story of Cain and Abel ... Here's the story of Noah. Did you know that the genealogy of Noah is here in full? Were you aware that all the peoples of the earth today can be traced back to Noah's three sons? Do you know the details of the events of the flood? Oh, I know that the Qur'an makes a brief reference to it, but here in the Torah is the full story." (It is good to use the term 'Torah' because it is also mentioned in the Qur'an). I go on to Abraham, pointing out the geography and history (use the maps at the back if your Bible has them).

As I flip the pages somewhat more quickly through the rest of Genesis, I stop at the story of Joseph and point out a synopsis of his life and journey to Egypt, and how God gave

him the strength to stay faithful to Him even in difficult circumstances. "We go now to Moses ..." and there I show how God gave Moses the Law and briefly look over the Exodus story. From there I begin to flip through book by book and call out the names of key prophets of God. Psalm 19 is a good choice. I point out that this is the "Zabur" (Psalms) mentioned in the Qur'an. The Bible has the full text of all 150 songs of praise, worship, prophecy, and teaching. Then I jump to Jonah, pointing out that the Qur'an mentions him as the Prophet Yunus. Daniel is also mentioned as a prophet in the Qur'an. Then I go on to the New Testament.

I show them the genealogy of Jesus and how it covers many centuries and includes several major prophets and kings. "The entire life of Jesus is recorded right here for us." I then read several texts from the Sermon on the Mount. I go on to describe how Christianity spread in the early years (Acts and the Letters). I point out in Acts 2 how Arabs, Kurds, Egyptians, Libyans, Turks and other peoples from the Middle East were converted. I read a few verses from the Epistles, especially 1 John, emphasising the love of God. Finally, I move on to the book of Revelation and point out that the Bible has prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled. "Here are some of them." In conclusion, I show how the Bible begins at the beginning and ends with the end.

Muslim evangelism is not about winning arguments.



كتاب الحياة
ترجمة تفسيرية

A Bible cover in Arabic (The Word of Life)

Finally, here are a couple of practical points. Almost always, the listener attempts to take the Bible out of my hands, but I hang on to it until I have finished my presentation. Muslims need to know that there are treasures within the Bible, but I do not recommend that we only talk about the Bible. Also I do not recommend asking people if they want a Bible: ideally they should ask for it. When they do, it shows that they are serious. I do not want to give a Bible to someone who does not value it as a present, hoping that somehow they will come to value it later. I like to make them hungry and thirsty for God's word.

Editor's note: Our personal sharing with Muslims are dynamic events involving interaction. It is certainly probable that one might not totally finish this presentation or that it might be wise to spend more time on some aspects of it than others.

Inside Back Cover

Web sites to better understand Muslims and Islam: *

Christian Sites:

Muslim - Christian Dialogue:

<http://www.answering-islam.org/>

(see the links on the 'Answering Islam' site to access a long list of sites)

Sites for Muslims:

<http://the-good-way.com/>

<http://www.injil.org>

<http://members.aol.com/alnour/index2.html>

<http://www.isaalmasih.net>

Muslim Sites:

Islamic religion:

<http://www.islamic.org.uk/>

<http://www.hajinformation.com> (Saudi Ministry of Hajj)

<http://www.submission.org>

<http://www.answering-christianity.com/ac.htm>

<http://www.islamicity.com/>

<http://www.al-islam.org>

Other Sites:

<http://www.secularislam.org/>

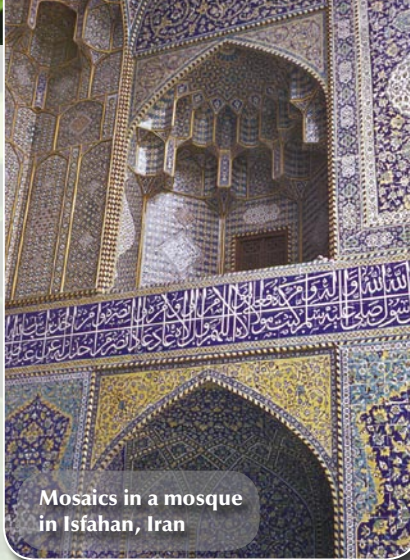
<http://www.apostatesofislam.com/>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/homepage.htm>

Islamic History: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islam/islamsbook.html>

30 Days Online: <http://www.30-days.net>

Please note: Several new resources are available on the "30 Days" site.



Mosaics in a mosque
in Isfahan, Iran

* Note: 30 Days International does not necessarily endorse or agree with all the arguments, ideas or attitudes presented by the web sites listed on this page. These sites contain at least some valuable material. It is possible that they are not the best sites available but the editors are simply familiar with them.

New Youth Site:
<http://www.30daysfire.net>

A prayer calendar designed for children and families is also available this year in some languages. Check our main site for details.

This prayer booklet is not designed to be given to Muslims. It is also not recommended to show it to Muslims for evangelistic purposes. They generally will not understand your motivations to intercede for them.

"30 Days International" maintains a positive attitude toward Muslims. We are not interested in denigrating or criticising them. Islam is not merely a religion or a philosophy. Islam concerns people. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

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