



Malvern Mashal Makon 95

IRAN: Keep praying for this country!

*The Lord's delight is in those who fear Him,
those who put their hope in His unfailing love. (Ps. 147:11)*

The way God is currently touching people in Iran is nothing short of miraculous. Only He can use the extreme difficulties of life under the present regime in such a way as to propel people towards the good news of Jesus Christ!

Technology has an important part to play in this. It is thought that up to half a million people have come to faith in Christ through television programmes that are regularly being beamed in. The hunger is unprecedented. Key leaders are being mentored by carefully arranged video conference calls.

One of the most important things to remember when we are praying for Iran is that we are not considering an entirely homogeneous nation. Iran is divided into seven or eight distinctly separate regions. (Baluchistan in the extreme south, for instance, is hostile to the central Shias). Whether these 'fault lines' will help or hinder the cause of the kingdom is another matter.

Strategic efforts are being made to launch church plants in new cities. Some of you might feel called to support 222 ministries in this major logistical endeavour. See <http://www.222ministries.org/>

Pray protection on key leaders and on 222 ministries. There is currently a million euro reward for anyone who can succeed in infiltrating the inner circle of the ministry. Their site is under regular cyber attack.

As the Spirit moves in power, denominational life in Iran appears to be dwindling, with much more cooperation between the churches.

The bigger the challenge, the bigger the grace of God.

There are now something like five million Iranians around the world. Many young Iranians head to Pakistan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Afghanistan as well as to the relative safety of Turkey. Nearly two million Iranians visit Turkey every year. Pray for the Lord to make it clear to each family and individual whether to head abroad to relative safety, or to stay put.

There are also many Farsi speaking people in Lebanon and Syria. Iranian influence has been to the fore (particularly Revolutionary Guards) in the killing machine of Assad's Syrian purge of his

people. Clearly, this represents a vast mission field. Not long ago, there were hardly any missionaries from Korea. Now there are 11,000. Pray for those who go out from Iran to be both vocal and effective for the Lord.

Following the Welsh revival, many who had been touched by the Lord fell away for lack of effective pastoring and teaching.

Clearly, the many new Iranian Christians require good follow up material.

There are currently very few publications available. As our small contribution to this very real need, we are hoping to have time later this year to rewrite one of my earliest books, *Praying Together* and have it translated into Farsi. The team are in place for this: it is mainly a question of time and energy!

It did not receive a great deal of attention from the western press, but large numbers of courageous people revolted in the Arab Spring in Iran too. The protests were brutally suppressed, with many of those arrested being raped and maimed.

Just how bleak the situation is for Iranians without Christ is reflected in the fact that there are now five million drug addicts in the country, and that something like a fifth of the people suffer from depression. Unemployment rates, particularly for graduates, are very high. There are thought to be up to one million prostitutes, many of them teenagers. May the Lord use and turn their sense of hopelessness, so that the good news comes as a welcome drink of cool water on a hot day.

The good news is that there have been more Iranian converts since 1979 than in all history before.

For many years there was almost no apparent fruit from the long standing Anglican and Presbyterian missionaries under the Shah, but they helped to pave the way for the much greater spiritual harvest that is happening now.

In those days they were free to share the Bible openly – but no one was interested in taking a copy. It is very different these days!

Pray for converts to become disciples, and for disciples to become agents of transformation.

People's willingness to share their testimony is all the more in the face of the suffering so many face when caught. Many believers use tube journeys and birthday parties as a deliberate opportunity to witness. As one Pakistani Christian put it, "Is there any way to witness without getting beaten?"

Whereas many believers in the West are so self-censoringly 'careful' (fearful?) that they hardly ever open their mouth for Christ, 222 Ministries encourage people to continue to share their faith, but without deliberately courting or provoking martyrdom. Many of those released from prison are psychologically as well as physically traumatised.

Many Christians dare not blow their cover but meet in obscure places and under cover of night. There are even believing Revolutionary Guards!

Some judges are, deep down, appreciative of the influence that Christians have. Others just send them to prison.

As in Egypt, 60% of pastors in the new churches in Iran are women.

Pray for the Lord to raise up many 'Daniels, Davids and Esthers' – and pray that nothing is missed of what God can do in this special season for Iran .

At this time when the Spirit is working in such unprecedented ways, it is important to reflect on how special moments in history are sometimes seized and sometimes missed. General MacArthur, who oversaw the occupation of Japan from 1945-1951, was a lifelong Episcopalian, and after receiving the Japanese surrender, asked for a thousand missionaries to be sent to the nation to reverse the spiritual climate. Initially told that he was mad, the venture came to be supported at the highest levels, with the result that something like two thousand Americans, went to Japan, not to lord it over an occupied country, but as much appreciated agents of reconciliation.¹ It did not prove enough to tilt the spiritual balance of the country significantly, however. The percentage of born again Christians remains obstinately low today, at about the same level as before Pearl Harbour.

It is so important to seize the moment! One of my greatest privileges was seeing glimpses of East Germany opening up following the overthrow of the Berlin Wall. There were good aspects to this but also bad ones. The first convoy into East Germany contained copies of Playboy! Liberal theology also followed close behind, as well as better things. It is a great tragedy that so much of western theology is veering towards the assumption that Allah is the same as the Christian God.

Pray for the twenty million Iranians who are between the age of 17 and 26. this is a key age and generation. Many are finding what they are seeing of Shiite Islam unwelcome. They feel seriously disillusioned, and betrayed by their leaders. (According to Operation World, unemployment figures peaked recently at 28%).

There are 253 cities with a population of over 50,000, many without a thriving overt church. May the Lord continue to use all means possible to reach every town, region and ethnic group.

Pray for those who are in prison

130 of 222 ministries' key people have been arrested in the last year. Many are very afraid when they are imprisoned. Those who share their faith there are bearing great fruit, however. One woman was told she would 'stay there and rot' unless she was willing to testify that her pastor had tried to rape her! Amazingly, she was subsequently released without having to pay the outsize bail that many have had to raise.

Syria

"Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God." 1 Kings 18:37

As the following report makes clear, Christians in Syria are extremely concerned about the present situation.

¹ Many but by no means all of these were evangelists. There were also teachers and social workers, who were additionally motivated by trying to prevent Japan from becoming communist following the downfall of the wartime regime.

"As Christians in Syria, we have been living in peace for a long period of time. The evangelical church including other Christian denominations have been practicing their faith under the current government without any threats or danger. The Christian community has been blessed and protected in the majority Muslim nation of Syria under the current secular regime. It has been our prayer and thanksgiving for the past years where we were able to flourish and live in prosperity and peace with our neighbours and other religious sects.

Since the situation in the Middle East erupted, many small and other self interest groups have been exploiting the situation to achieve their agenda in the region. For example, many extremist foreign fighters have travelled to Iraq and killed innocent Iraqis, Shiites, Sunnis and Christians. These same extremist groups have turned their Jihad to neighbour Syria, exploiting the situation to establish their Islamic Emirate. These groups have been living and operating in Syria during the past three months. They have been entering houses and threatening many Christians and minority groups. They even entered government buildings and murdered men and women for no reason other than working in a government building.

People have been shouting during the recent demonstrations: "Christians, your men belong to our sword and your women belong to our pleasure."

Extremist Muslim clerks, who belong to the opposition overseas, are calling the Muslims in Syria to shed the blood of more than one million Christians and Allawits in Syria to make up for the past years where the Christians and other minorities were living in peace.

Other peaceful Muslims in the region are suggesting that Christian in Syria should run away to Lebanon or other nations; however, it is the desire of the Christians to remain living in Syria and never leave their home nation.

We want the people to know that Christians in Syria do exist, and we do not want what happened in Iraq to the Christians to happen in Syria to the Christian community. This is not a war for freedom, this is not a war for democracy, it is a sectarian war and if people do not realize what is happening, it will be too late for many minorities group, including the Christian community. Please pray for the Christians in Syria."

Source: Open Doors Middle East

Please pray:

- 1. That the outside forces working to turn Syria into an extremist Islamic nation will be pushed back and not succeed in their quest.*
- 2. For the protection of Christians from those who wish to destroy, abuse and kill them.*
- 3. That the Christians will have courage as they stand firm and resist fear and the calls to flee their homeland.*

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