

CHAPTER 16

PERSIANS ARE EAGERLY RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL TODAY

Recently, I received a letter from a Persian pastor in Australia. He said that the Iranians are the most open of the Muslim groups living there and that ten Iranians were baptized at his Persian speaking church last Easter. This pastor was saved in Turkey in 1990 when he was living there as a refugee. Truly, the openness of Persians is worldwide. One web site (www.farsinet.com/icc) currently lists over 50 Persian fellowships with 20 different groups located in California, some in 16 other states in the USA, and many others in Canada, Europe, Australia, and a few other countries.

There are many incidents of how God is working in the Washington, D. C. area. Let me tell you about one. A Christian who works with Iranians there read a newspaper article about a Persian mother who was injured in an automobile accident and her daughter was killed. Even though this worker had no contact with her, he and his wife prayed that God would work somehow to His own glory because of the accident. About 8 months later, to their surprise, this woman walked into the Persian Fellowship holding high a Bible and proclaimed her faith in Christ. The accident had driven her to despair with no hope and no idea where to turn. At the same time, a relative on the west coast sent her the Scriptures and told her that it was the only place she could find hope. Praise God that through reading the scriptures, she put her personal trust in Jesus Christ alone as her Savior. God led her to see a special TV message sponsored by the Persian church and she found out there were other Persian believers nearby. She remains a faithful Christian to this day!

A missionary friend who visited Europe in the fall of 2000 wanted to meet the brother of an Iranian believer in the States whom he had heard professed faith in Christ. How amazed he was when he met him to find another Iranian with him who had come to Christ along with his wife through telephone calls from a Christian sister in Canada. This couple had been discipled by means of the telephone as well. Now this new believer who owns a store where he sells Iranian food and handicrafts gives out Persian scripture portions to all those who desire them.. Gathering around the kitchen table with him and his wife, the missionary and others sang Iranian praise songs which they had never heard. Tears of joy streamed down their cheeks as they shared in singing praises to Jesus. Surely, God is at work among the Iranians!

Iranian Christians International, an organization which specializes in working with Iranian refugees and has a pulse on the Iranian world, estimates that before the Islamic revolution of 1978 there were possibly 200 - 300 born-again Iranian believers which came from a Muslim background. Notice the phenomenal growth since then!

Year	Number of Muslim Background believers
1978	200-300
1990	8,000

1994	18,000
1999	27,500

These numbers include Muslim background believers in Iran, as well as those living outside the country. In addition, if the number of born again believers from other minorities such as Armenian and Assyrian are included, then the figures given for 1990 through 1999 can be doubled. However, this is just the beginning of God’s work among the 67,702,000 reported population in Iran in 2000, and the estimated 3,912,500 Iranian diaspora worldwide. (See chapter 18, Where are Persians Living Today, for more details!)

Note: The various ethnic groups and populations listed are estimates and other sources might list them differently. For example, World Christian Encyclopedia, Oxford Press 2001, gives different populations of some groups, adds other language groups, and combines some. What is really important though, is that these different people need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ in their own language.

Christian radio programs are broadcast into Iran from several different places. Mail sent in response to these programs often doesn’t get through, since mail is censored and destroyed. Yet in particular the spiritual interest among young people in response to these broadcasts is staggering! Also, there are Bible institutes and other opportunities for Iranians to receive training in their own language outside of Iran. Some Iranians are enrolled in Bible schools in the country where they reside studying in another language.

However, there is still much work to do! Some think Iran is made up of just one ethnic group, the Farsi speaking Persians. This is not true. Farsi was used as the educational language of Iran, but there are many different ethnic background groups in Iran as well. The following is a list of different ethnic groups with a population of 100,000 or more as listed in the prayer files of www.bethany.com/internet/profiles/c-code/Iran as estimated for the year 2000:.

Name	Population	Christians	Scriptures	Jesus film	radio	Location in Iran
Luri	5,369,499	0%	none	no	yes	South Western
Mazanderani	3,198,000	0%	none	no	yes	North Central
Gilaki	2,452,300	less 1%	none	no	no	North Central
Iranian Arab	1,088,900	less 1%	yes	yes	yes	South
Qashqai	1,045,000	0%	none	no	no	South Central
Khorasani Turk	839,500	0%	none	no	no	North Eastern
Southern Kurd	746,500	less 1%	portions	yes	no	North Central
Southern Baluch	588,900	0%	NT	yes	yes	South Eastern
Northern Kurd	317,800	less 1%	NT	yes	no	North Western
Mussulman Tat	179,100	0%	none	no	no	North Western

All people are precious in God’s sight, even one. Due to lack of space, I will list briefly the other people groups which are less than 100,000. There are the Afghan Persian, Afshari, Aimaq Jamshidi, Aimaq Timuri, Balkan Rom Gypsy, Baluch Western, Brahui, Dom Gypsy, Gilaki, Gujarati Gurani, Hazara, Herki, Karakalpak, Karingani, Khorasani Turk., Parsee, Western

Pashtun, Punjabi, Shikaki, Tadjhik, Talysh, Mussulman Tat, Urdu Speakers, and Vafsi. Who will be concerned for their spiritual condition?

Note: the scriptures, Jesus film, and 18 hours weekly of radio broadcasts are available in Farsi. Most people in Iran know this language as a second language in which they received their schooling, but it is the mother tongue which speaks to the heart and emotions. An effort is being made now to translate the Scriptures and the Jesus video into many of these languages and as well as produce radio broadcasts to reach some of these people.

Here is a sample letter from one of the thousand of listeners to the radio broadcasts:

“Accept my warmest love and sincerity. I hope that the day of the coming of the only Savior of this wicked world, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come as soon as possible. I long to see all of us together as you help me go forward in faith. I received your letter, including the answers to my questions. You should know that I am very happy. I thank God for you...Through your direction I am following the way of salvation, and my hoping this contact will last forever.”

Here's a joke I have told to many of my Iranian friends: “When a person speaks two languages, what is he called? ‘Bi-lingual,’ he will answer. When a person speaks three languages what is he called? After thinking for awhile he will reply, ‘tri-lingual.’ What about a person who speaks only one language? He will answer, ‘mono-lingual’ or ‘I don’t know.’ My response is ‘you’re wrong. It’s an American.’”

Oh course, everybody laughs because in America most think English is the only language they need to know. Only those who have come from another country like yourself know 2, 3, 4 or even 5 languages and are fluent in all of them. It is possible to hear the good news of Jesus in a language other than your mother-tongue and believe and trust in Jesus as the only way of salvation. However, usually your mother-tongue is the language of emotion and spiritual understanding for you. Shouldn't every person in the world and especially those in Iran, have a chance to hear the good news of Jesus in their mother-language? Perhaps God can use your knowledge of other languages in addition to Farsi in witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear reader, I challenge you to ask God to burden you for one these groups. Go into the web site mentioned earlier in this chapter, or ask a friend to do it for you. You can get a picture of these people, prayer requests, and more information. Then pray regularly for their salvation. Perhaps later you will discover other people, churches, and even missionaries burdened for the same unreached people group.