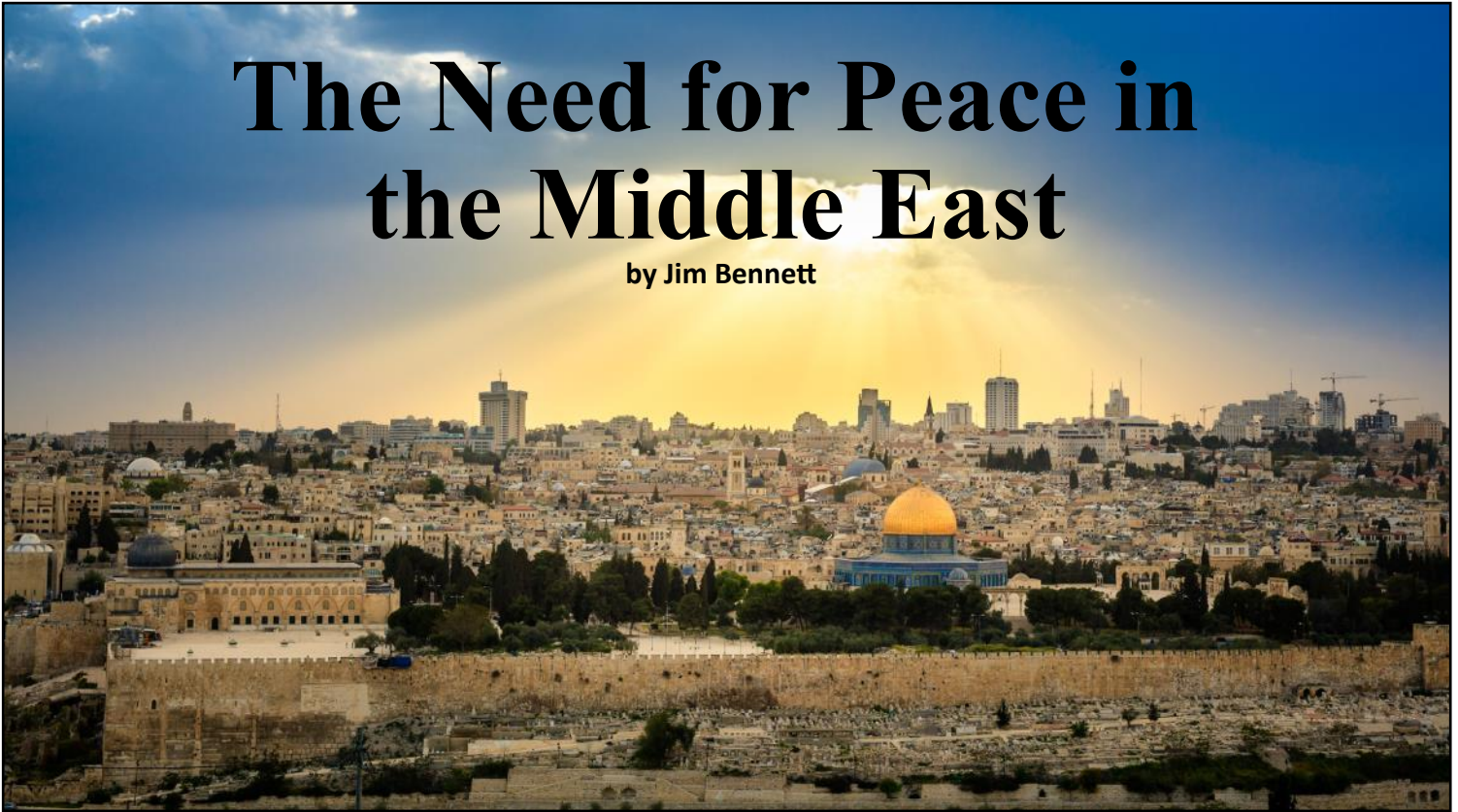


## The Need for Peace in the Middle East

by Jim Bennett



Here is a brief review of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent events in Israel, Gaza, and other parts of the greater Middle East:

- On October 7, 2023, 3,000 Hamas-controlled Palestinian Gazans poured through the border into Israel and began the deadliest attacks on Jews since the Holocaust. Their goal was to kill as many Jews as possible. The mayhem started at a music festival occurring a short distance from the border and spread through dozens of southern communities. The terrorists slaughtered babies, committed sexual violence, and burned whole families alive. They killed at least 1,200 Israelis and seized 251 people as hostages.
- Shortly afterward, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) engaged the perpetrators, then entered Gaza. The initial goal of the IDF was to find and rescue the hostages. Their secondary goal was the decimation of Hamas, the ruling party of Gaza. During the ensuing year and three months of war, an estimated 40,000 Gazans have died, including women and children, and 297 soldiers from the Israeli Defense Forces have been killed.
- Meanwhile, Iran's proxy in Lebanon, namely Hezbollah (the party of Allah)—taking advantage of Israel's preoccupation with Gaza—began firing missiles into northern Israel. Israel's air force struck back, bombing strategic Hezbollah sites—and finally killing Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah in Lebanon and a longtime proxy of Iran.
- In the midst of all the above, the country of Iran began firing long range missiles from the east into Israel. Israel's missile defense system intercepted and shot down most of the Iranian missiles. Yet another Iranian proxy, the Houthis of Yemen, also attempted to launch missiles into Israel from the south, albeit mostly unsuccessfully. On December 26, the Israeli air force slammed Houthi sites in Yemen.
- As of late December, 2024, a total of 97 hostages remain unaccounted for. One hundred seventeen hostages have been returned alive to Israel, with 105 released in a prisoner exchange deal, four released by Hamas unilaterally, and eight rescued by the Israeli Defense Forces. Several attempts to negotiate a settlement that



# Until All Have Heard

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? — Romans 10:14*

**Mark Brink**

International Director  
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



Muslims will observe their annual Ramadan fasting month—beginning on February 28 and lasting through March 29. During this time, they will focus attention on Allah, seeking forgiveness, and offering special prayers. The truly devoted will read the Quran during the month, seeking Allah’s blessing (*baraka*) for the next year.

During Ramadan, many Muslims go to the mosque and spend several hours praying. In addition to the five daily prayers that are part of the core of Islam, Muslims recite a special prayer called the *Tarawih* prayer (night prayer). On the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan, Muslims observe the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*), the night when they believe Muhammad received the first verses of the Quran. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*, the breaking of the fast.

Global Initiative provides a daily prayer guide during the month of Ramadan so Christians can intercede for Muslims during this month (available at

[https://l.ead.me/RamadanPrayerGuide\\_2025](https://l.ead.me/RamadanPrayerGuide_2025)). We ask that you pray daily for Muslims to know the salvation and intimacy that come through Jesus Christ. Ken Ferguson, a GI team member, has written a short blog with ways to intercede for Muslims during Ramadan (access article at: <https://bit.ly/4gWjpNq>). Let’s believe God to break the spiritual bondage of Islam over Muslim people.

Join us as we take time daily during this month of Ramadan to do spiritual battle on behalf of lost Muslims. Our goal is to see them changed by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

*“Prayer is not to be viewed as just another spiritual weapon, but as the very act of battle itself as we work together with God to gain the victory for ourselves and others.”*

Let’s intercede for Muslims to come to Christ and the Cross of Calvary!

## **Muslim Unreached People Group Prayer Profile: The Country of Yemen Population: 35 million 99.7% Muslim**

The Republic of Yemen is located in the southern Arabian Peninsula, bordering Saudi Arabia to the north, Oman to the northeast, and the Indian Ocean to the south. The social structure of the Yemeni Arabs consists of four classes of people: the *Sayyid*, or wealthy, (who trace their ancestry to the grandson of Muhammad), the *Qatani* (tribesmen), the *Shafi’ite* townsmen (merchants, artisans, and craftsmen), and the *Akhdam* (slaves).

Yemeni society is tribal in structure with over 1,700 different tribes or clans. These various tribes are ruled by *sheiks* (Arab chiefs), who often fight with each other. Today, the majority of the Yemeni Arabs still live in fortress-like villages that can be easily defended. Each house has windows on all sides and is built facing the outside of the village. All goods and persons passing through town are strictly controlled. 99.7 percent of Yemenis are Muslim, and the fanatical Zaydi sect of Islam is predominant. Most of the Zaydis are warriors and perceive all wars to be a manifestation of *jihad* (holy struggle on behalf of Islam).

### **Prayer Points**

- Pray that the few Yemeni believers will share Christ with their own people.
- Pray for a softening of Yemeni culture, creating open doors for the gospel.
- Pray that the Yemeni people will hear the gospel through TV and radio programs that are beamed into the country.
- Pray for Yemeni people to have dreams and visions that turn their hearts to Jesus.
- Pray for faithful intercessors to stand in the gap for Yemenis.



\*For further information about Yemen, see [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net)

would release all hostages have failed. Israel continues to occupy Gaza, and the 97 hostages remain in custody.

- In early December 2024, opposition forces *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (Organization for the Liberation of Syria), based temporarily in the northern city of Aleppo, advanced southward toward the capital of Damascus. On December 8, 2024, the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, left Damascus and sought refuge in Russia. To weaken the new Syrian rulers, Israel immediately bombed their missile cache sites, as well as strategic locations in the northern Golan Heights. The full intentions of the new leadership in Damascus are yet unknown. Thus, in addition to Gaza, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Houthis, Israel is now on high alert regarding its Syrian neighbor to the northeast—with a population of 24 million.
- And then there is Türkiye! Notwithstanding its enormous losses during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their always nefarious intentions seem clear—temporarily hold powder and keep all options open.

The bottom line is that Israel has had the unique responsibility of facing a seven-front opposition!

### Digging Deeper

The events described above are but the latest chapters in the long series of wars and conflicts that have been a part of the Middle East—especially in modern times and particularly since the birth of Israel in 1948. Major wars involving Israel have occurred in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, interspersed with frequent “minor” skirmishes. For a better understanding of the latest chapter, “The Hamas Invasion,” one must take a closer look at the particulars.

First, it is important to know more about Gaza, often referred to as “The Gaza Strip.” Gaza is 25 miles long and 3.7 to 7.5 miles wide—literally a thin strip of land. Before the “Hamas Invasion,” 2.1 million Palestinians, all Muslims except for approximately 1,000 Christians, were jammed into this tiny strip. Gaza is bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt (Sinai) on the south, and Israel proper on its north and east sides. Its two main cities are Gaza City in the south and Khan Younis in the north. The two land crossing points in and out of Gaza are Rafah in the south (abutting Egyptian Sinai) and the Eretz Gate (abutting Israel proper) on its northeast border. Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on earth and, at the same time, is one of the poorest spots on the planet.

In September 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza and turned it over to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Subsequently, Hamas rejected the PA and elected its

own leaders. The origin of the word Hamas derives from its status as an acronym—reflecting in Arabic something close to “The Islamic Resistance Movement.”

Hamas has proven that they deserve their designation as a terrorist organization. They operate from a radical Muslim worldview—not from a patriotic “God save Gaza” standpoint. Hamas’ official documents state that Israel should not exist. When Hamas soldiers perpetrate barbaric acts, they do not offer a “Long live Gaza” refrain—rather they parrot, “*Allahu Akbar*” (Allah is Greater), which commonly accompanies Islamic terrorist activities. Again, they are not acting as patriots seeking the best for their people, but as radicals with a bent toward fulfilling Islamic eschatology—whether wittingly or sometimes unwittingly.



Hamas followers are quick with an Arabic quote that rings heavy on the ears of Israelis: “*Min an-nahr illa al-bahr*,” which means, “from the river to the sea.” It clearly indicates that their territorial intentions run from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The implication of this adage is: “Once we occupy the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, Israel will no longer exist.” As Australian theologian Mark Durie has stated, “You cannot negotiate or reason with people of such persuasion.” Upon refusing to appease Germany by accepting their false overtures of peace, Churchill said: “An appeaser is one who feeds the crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.” Hamas should never be considered a legitimate negotiator on behalf of any faction of Palestinians. Israel has decimated Hamas’ key leadership.

Even given the facts presented thus far, it is fair to say that not all Palestinian negotiators would endorse Hamas’ positions; thus, in a general sense, it is also certainly unfair and incorrect to say that Hamas represents all Palestinians; they do not. In the past, properly appointed Palestinian delegations have proven to be astute—and they are capable of repeating that record.

Many observers recognize that Israel has expropriated land, installed illegal settlements on the

# The Need for Peace

*Continued from page 3*

West Bank, and perpetrated humanitarian crimes against the Palestinian people. Their acts of injustice are enormous, and they must be held accountable.

Opposition must be voiced to the injustice against the Palestinians, including the continued Israeli settlement movement. The theft of Palestinian land and the destruction of Palestinian homes and fields is one of the major causes of the strife that has resulted in terrorism and the loss of so many Palestinian and Israeli lives.

An even-handed approach towards Israelis and Palestinians does not give a blank check to either side, nor does it bless violence by either side. An even-handed approach affirms the valid interests of both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Both sides deserve to be free, secure, and economically viable.

## Further Identifying the Role of Iran

Hamas' "from the river to the sea" refrain is music in the ears of their puppet masters in Iran, a Shia Muslim state of 88 million. Eighty-five percent of the world's 2 billion Muslims are called Sunnis—"those of the right path." Minority Shia Muslims ("partisans" or those who have broken away from the "misguided" majority Sunnis) make up about 15% of the world's Muslim population. The epicenter of Shia Islam is the state of Iran. Upon the return of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, Iranians installed a theocratic government based on a cardinal belief that a great savior figure called the Mahdi will return in the last days and lead Islam to final world dominance. In order to trigger the return of the Mahdi, certain cataclysmic events must occur—and simultaneously the Great Satan (the United States) and its proxy (Israel) must be eliminated. Thus, the present-day goal of the world's most dangerous terrorist state (Iran) is to cut off the heads of the U.S. and Israel.

In a strategic sense, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen—and until late December of 2024—Syria, along with Iran itself, constitute what experts refer to as the "Shia Axis." While all these entities do not necessarily qualify as purely Shia in their beliefs, still the Shia Axis was and is dominated by Iran's Shia eschatology. Bottom line: Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis in Yemen, and Syria have served as Iranian proxies to cut off the head of Israel. Notwithstanding its recent "defeats" at the hand of Israel, Iran still has nuclear capability and, under its present regime, will never give up its quest to cut off the heads of Israel and the United States.



## The Pressure of Demographics and Unfulfilled Aspirations

Here are essential and informative demographic statistics that cannot be ignored. There are:

- 9.6 million people in Israel proper (2.1 million of this number are Palestinian Arabs—called "48ers"—meaning they and their progeny have kept citizenship status in Israel proper since Israel became a nation in 1948);
- 14.8 million total inhabitants in the area—including Israel proper, the West Bank, and Gaza;
- 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza (pre-October 7, 2023);
- 3.1 million Palestinians in the West Bank;
- 7.3 million Palestinians in the area—including Israel proper, the West Bank, and Gaza;
- 300,000 (plus) Christians in the West Bank and at least 1,000 in Gaza;

# in the Middle East



Palestinians eligible for right of return, Israelis recognize this to be a major point of contention for future negotiations.

The picture gets even more complicated when considering the full range of issues that must be addressed in future negotiations. Major agenda items would include Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the status of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, borders, security assurance, water rights, freedom of movement, and the Palestinian right of return. Finally, and perhaps most important, negotiations must determine whether a two-state solution with a return to 1967 borders or a federated state involving Jordan, or yet another scenario can be agreed upon.

## More Deep Questions

Why are we featuring the Middle East conflict in this issue of *Intercede*? First, is the matter of human suffering. Israelis and Palestinians (as well as Lebanese and others) have suffered enough. All of us have seen the carnage on television. Years of conflict and heightened attacks have taken their toll, especially on Israelis and Palestinians. Young and old alike suffer from high levels of post-traumatic disorder, heightened depression, anxiety, sleep problems, and aggressive and anti-social behavior. Israeli hotlines report a tripling of calls in the last few years, and even before the latest conflict, camps in Gaza for traumatized children had waiting lists.

Second, is the issue of justice itself. The majority of evangelical Christians believe Israel's existence as a people and nation is a reflection of biblical fact. They believe it is reasonable to say that the establishment of the modern state of Israel is indeed a fulfillment of prophecy. And most evangelicals would say that God wants Israel to prosper in the land, in preparation for the day when the Jewish people will acknowledge Christ as the promised Messiah. None of this, however, exempts us from assessing and criticizing, when necessary, the details of Israeli policies. The Old Testament prophets make it clear that the nation of Israel will never be truly blessed by God unless she pursues justice. To want present-day Israel to flourish as a nation is to want her to treat her citizens and her neighbors justly. We are not on the side of God's plan for Israel if we refuse to subject her actions to critical scrutiny in the light of revealed norms for what it means for a nation to please the Lord. In like manner, the same critical scrutiny should be stringently applied to the Palestinian side.

Third, is the matter of a non-negotiable commitment to evangelism. There are 15 million Jews in the world,

- 500,000 Jews occupying illegal settlements in the West Bank;
- 13 to 14 million total Palestinians, when including those of the diaspora; and
- 6 to 7 million Palestinians strewn around the world—part of the Palestinian diaspora. Many live in refugee camps, while others have pursued a new life in various countries. Large numbers of diaspora Palestinians still hope to return to Palestine under the “right of return” clause contained in previous negotiation documents.

Pondering these facts elicits several observations. Two of the most startling are: (1) given the fact that 93 percent of all Palestinians are Muslim—and Muslims tend to have large families—it is an eye-opening reality for Israel to recognize that the demographics are rapidly changing in favor of the predominately Muslim Palestinians; and (2) a part of any negotiation for settling the Israeli/Palestinian dilemma will inevitably include the “right of return” clause for diaspora Palestinians. Considering the huge number of

composing 0.2% of the world's 8 billion people, and each of them should be given the opportunity to hear the gospel. On the other hand, there are 2 billion Muslims in the world, close to a fourth of the world's population, and they, too, must be adequately evangelized.

The Church in the West cannot afford to eliminate doors of mission opportunity among Muslims by uncritically aligning herself with Israeli policy-making. This does not mean we embrace Muslim political policy or ideology or are not abhorred by their twisted methods. Make no mistake about it, Muslims are spiritually lost and going to hell. The Church needs to realize how its religio-political position may affect the approximately 15 million Christians in the Arab world, especially Christian Palestinians, and how its position either provides leverage or hinders the enterprise of Muslim evangelism. Bottom line, if the Church does anything other than follow the path of scriptural justice, opportunities to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus among the 2 billion Muslims of the world stand to be jeopardized. Let us remember that scores of Muslims are dying each day without Jesus as Savior. Also, it behooves us to realize that missionaries in the trenches are giving their lives as they try to reach Muslims with the gospel, and every advantage is needed.

#### **And the Good News Is...**

Many Christians in the West think all Arabs, including all Palestinians, are Muslims, yet that is not true. Of the 473 million Arabs, some 10 to 15 million are Christians, albeit most (approximately 10 million) are in one country—Egypt, with a total population of 106 million. And between 4 and 5 percent of the overall 5.2 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are Christians. Many more are born-again “secret believers” from Muslim backgrounds—and are not a part of any official numbers. Reports from the West Bank suggest that converts from Islam are plentiful—and that there is no West Bank city that does not have “new believers” from a Muslim background.

In any case, those who are truly born again are as much a part of the body of Christ as any other Christian. The Apostle Paul says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body” (1 Corinthians 12:13-15). Paul provides a sobering reminder that we have all been grafted into the same vine (Romans 11:17, 19, 23, 24)!

#### **In Conclusion: Let Us Pray**

In these moments, knowing what to do can be difficult. As Christians, we know we can pray! We, of

course, pray that the Lord will end all the violence in the Middle East, and that He will bring peace to the area. We pray for all the suffering people on every side in this conflict. Our hearts cry out to the Lord: “Oh Lord, rise up and exercise your sovereignty over the peoples and countries of the Middle East.” Let us pray specifically for the following:



- The remaining hostages and their families;
- An immediate cessation of violence in the area;
- Alleviation of suffering for the people of Gaza and Israel;
- The innocent children of Gaza and Israel;
- Security for the people of Israel and Gaza;
- All Palestinians: West Bankers, Gazans, Israeli Arabs, and those of the diaspora;
- A miracle of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians;
- Every person in the area to seek peace in Jesus Christ;
- Humanitarian efforts on behalf of Gaza;
- The peoples of neighboring countries, especially Christians in Lebanon and Syria; and
- The leaders of all sides—that they will do that which promotes justice.

It is also important to pray for workers, missionaries, and believers in the region who are sharing the truth about Jesus at this time when so many people have deep, spiritual questions. They are doing their best to respond to the crisis—both in humanitarian and spiritual ways. Pray for their safety and that the love of Christ will shine through to everyone they meet in these unsettling days.



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## **Friday, March 7, 2025. Please pray for**

...*a cessation of violence in the Middle East*. Especially pray for restoration and reconciliation in the lives of both Gazans and Israelis.

...*dreams and visions to occur in the lives of Muslims* during Ramadan. The world's 2 billion Muslims are observing their annual fasting month from February 28 through March 29.

...*the people of Syria*. The deposing of President Assad has created both hope and apprehension. A Syrian refugee couple in Türkiye says, "We want to go home and tell our people about Jesus."

## **Friday, March 14, 2025. Please pray for**

...*success for Operation Mobilization personnel* who recently declared, "We dedicate ourselves to spread the gospel among the Muslim communities of the Arabian Peninsula."

...*a group of Muslims from Qatar* who recently vacationed in Interlaken, Switzerland. Swiss Christians witnessed to them and gave them Bibles. A worker says, "Some resisted but most openly engaged in lengthy discussions about Christ."

...*the online ministry of The Digital Embassy*. TDE's hundreds of volunteers have one thing in common—to see Muslims come to Christ. To date, TDE has connected with 2,500 Muslims.

## **Friday, March 21, 2025. Please pray for**

...*the power of God to strike the hearts of Muslims* as they observe *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Power) on March 27. *Laylat al-Qadr* commemorates the date of Muhammad's first revelation.

...*Osman Jama, a Somali Muslim* who came to Christ in 2007 while living in Minnesota. His family disowned him and refuses to speak to him. Osman feels called to share Christ with the 116,000 Somalis in the United States. He says, "If God can reach me, He can reach any of them."

...*the North Kivu area of the Democratic Republic of Congo*. Thirty people were recently murdered by the Islamic State group. A pastor says, "Mourning is a constant presence in our lives."

## **Friday, March 28, 2025. Please pray for**

...*the world's 2 billion Muslims* who will complete their Ramadan fasting month on March 29. The occasion is celebrated with a religious holiday called *Eid al-Fitr* (Breaking of the Fast).

...*Hamzeh, a Syrian convert from Islam* who now lives in Jordan. Hamzeh struggled against unclean spirits and demonic oppression. Upon being anointed with oil and prayed for in the name of Jesus, Hamzeh was set free and is now steadfast in his commitment to follow Christ.

...*Pastor Muhammad in Tyre, Lebanon*. In the midst of chaos, the Church is reaching larger numbers of people than ever before. Five new converts were recently baptized in water.



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## **Friday, April 4, 2025. Please pray for**

...*a young Christian in Gaza* who prefers to remain anonymous. He is one of 260 Christians who have sheltered in a church for more than a year. He says, “We’re constantly feeling unsafe.”

...*a powerful anointing on classes at the annual Institute of Islamic Studies* at a major seminary in Asia. Equipping classes designed to reach Muslims occur April 7 through May 2.

...*strong anointing on the ministry of “E-Mission to Islam.”* Their report states, “We engaged about 350,000 Muslims in the past year. We would like to increase that to a million in 2025.”

## **Friday, April 11, 2025. Please pray for**

...*Rozan, a converted Muslim in Iran.* He is a member of a “motorbike team” that distributes Bibles throughout villages in Iran. He reports, “Yes, there is danger, but our people need Jesus.”

...*Saree, a medical student in a Central Asian country.* She says, “Several Muslims from the hospital where I work attended a secret house meeting. I told the doorkeeper, “Please let us in. We drove 5 hours and want to know more about Jesus. Most of us accepted Jesus that night.”

...*safety for the growing number of Muslims* converting to Christ in Indonesia. A radical Islamic group started a campaign to incite action against the spread of Christianity.

## **Friday, April 18, 2025. Please pray for**

...*Moeen, who grew up as a Muslim in Central Asia.* He accepted Christ through an online ministry. He says, “Pray for us. We have never had this many Muslims coming to Jesus.”

...*Omar, a convert from Islam who became a pastor in Uganda.* Islamic militants poured acid on his face, destroying eyesight in one eye. Omar responded, “I forgive my attackers. I can still pastor my church. Whatever the cost, we must reach Muslims with the gospel.”

...*church planting efforts in the African country of Guinea,* a nation of 13 million, that is 90% Islamic. Pastors of the Assemblies of God are asked to plant a new church each year.

## **Friday, April 25, 2025. Please pray for**

...*Reza, a house church pastor in Iran.* He says, “Our discipleship courses for new believers from Islam are crowded. We have a long waiting list. All of them want to serve Jesus.”

...*a miraculous re-opening of Non-Government Organizations and Christian ministries* who provide for the vulnerable and needy in Afghanistan. Muslim authorities have launched a crackdown on many such entities whom they fear are “spreading Christian propaganda.”

...*Holy Spirit enablement for the Church in Türkiye,* where there are an estimated 8,000 Protestant Christians left—fewer than 1% of the Turkish population of 85 million.

*\*All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*