

INTERCEDE

VOL. XV, NO. 6

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1999

Through Muslim Eyes...

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

by Jim Bennett

A few months ago, a devout Muslim friend in the Middle East lamented about the widespread moral decadence and increasing frequency of calamitous events taking place in the world.

"It seems to me that the world may be coming to an end," he said.

I nodded agreement and replied, "Yes, I believe it is nearing the time when Jesus will come back."

"Oh," he said, "you are right. I also believe that Jesus will return."

My friend was simply reflecting the belief of most Muslims: that Jesus will come back to earth during the "end times."

Muslim Eschatology

While Muslim theologians have not provided a coherent chronological order of the events of the "last days," generally they feel that a series of dramatic events will occur culminating with the final judgment and humankind's assignment to either paradise or hell. Before the final judgment, a period of universal moral decadence will prevail. During this time godly wisdom will "suffer complete extinction" and there will be an increase in the use of wine; committing adultery and rape will be common activities. Truth, honesty and piety will decrease, and there will be a great rise in injustice and moral corruption.

Following this period of moral decadence, the *Qur'an* graphically describes some of the cataclysmic events that will precede the final hour. *Surah* 82:1-5, states:

"When the sky is cleft asunder; When the stars are scat-

tered; When the oceans are suffered to burst forth; And when the graves are turned upside down;—Then shall each soul know what it hath sent forward and what it hath kept back."

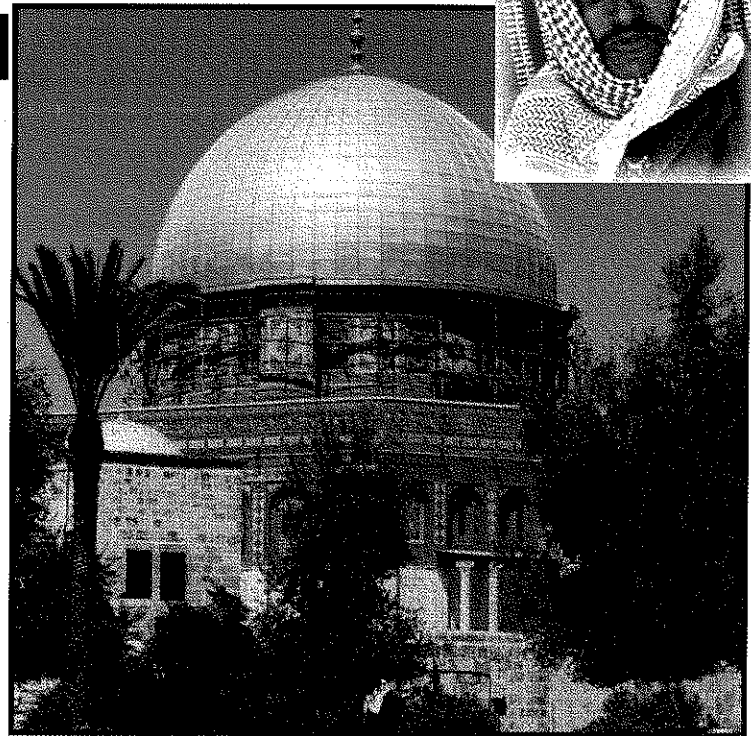
Surah 81:1-3, 6, 14, gives a similar description:

"When the sun with its spacious light is folded up; When the stars fall, losing their lustre; When the mountains vanish;... When the oceans boil over with a smell;... Then shall each soul know what it has put forward."

Ten Specific Signs of the End Times

Al-Muslim, a respected compiler of the traditions (sayings or acts) of Muhammad, indicates that at least ten signs will be present in the last days. He says:

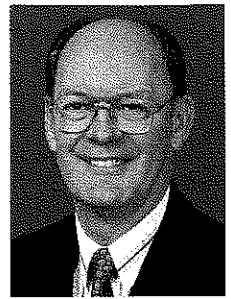
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Speaking on Behalf of Muslims

*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)*

Ron Peck, Director
Center for Ministry to Muslims



We have focused on the return of Jesus Christ in this issue of *Intercede*. The opening article presents this return from the Islamic point of view, and is filled with insight that we Christians often know nothing about. How interesting that the worldwide Muslim community is expecting the return of Jesus in relation to the final judgment.

For the followers of Jesus there is an urgent question to answer: When will this event take place? There are many followers of Jesus who think very little about the "second coming of Christ." This is often due to the unbalanced and distorted teaching on this subject. Some have gone so far astray as to set dates and predict the very day. How unwise and foolish.

How interesting that the worldwide Muslim community is expecting the return of Jesus in relation to the final judgment.

Jesus addressed this issue specifically when He said, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:13, NIV). On another occasion, Jesus spoke to this same theme when He declared that the day or the hour is not known even by the angels in heaven.

There are two urgent points to consider. First and most important: *Am I ready to meet Him?* No one is spiritually or morally qualified to stand before Jesus apart from His mercy and grace. But thanks be to God, mercy and grace are available. The primary purpose of Jesus' first visit to this earth was to provide forgiveness to sinners like you and me. So we can be ready to meet the Lord Jesus based on what He did for us by dying on the Cross.

For those of us who are interested in communicating the gospel to Muslim people, there is a second important question: When is Jesus coming?

How much time remains to complete the unfinished task?

The most relevant scripture to answer these questions is Matthew 24:14, "...*this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*"

When we analyze the unfinished task of world evangelism, we find that 35 percent of the unreached are Muslims. This vast bloc of people numbers 1.2 billion.

There is an assigned task that God has given to His people. It is the communication of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to those who have not heard. The return of Jesus is directly related to the completion of this assignment.

When we analyze the unfinished task of world evangelism, we find that 35 percent of the unreached are Muslims. This vast bloc of people numbers 1.2 billion. We Christians are under a spiritual mandate to share with Muslims the good news of salvation through Jesus.

When will Jesus return? From God's side, it will be at the appointed time known only to Him. From our side it will be when we, the children of God, have completed the assignment He has given to us.

Our praying, our giving and our sharing in personal witness needs to be planned with our unfinished task in view. It is reasonable to say that Muslims are waiting for the good news. It is also reasonable to say that Jesus is waiting for you and me to share it with them!





November 14, 1999

The next International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is November 14. A resource packet features stories of persecuted Christians on a new video "Four Faces." It will be available for a suggested donation of \$15.00.

Call 630-688-0440 or order at WEF website (www.worldevangelical.org). Credit cards accepted.

—WEF Update

Yemen

A group of militant Muslims in Yemen has threatened to kill all foreigners. The so-called 'Islamic Army of Aden-Abyan' is demanding the release of its leader and two other members, who were sentenced to death last month for kidnapping sixteen western tourists in December 1998.

The Yemeni army ended the kidnapping, but four tourists died during the action. The regime in Sana'a believes the threat to be extremists' bragging. Yemen depends for a large part of its income on the tourist trade.

—Islam Development Brief

Kosovo

The NATO-led operation to take over Kosovo in mid-June once again instigated huge population movements, and the entire conflict has impacted Christian communities in the province.

Kosovo is "a place of fear and death," a Serb evangelical who visited the region in June reported.

As Serbian forces withdrew, Kosovo Albanians who fled or were expelled have been returning from Albania and Macedonia. The Kosovo Serbs have been fleeing north into Serbia proper.

The Serb population is traditionally of Serbian Orthodox background. The majority of Albanians are Muslims. Among the minority, some 60,000 are Catholics and several hundred are evangelicals.

Church members want to know if their Christian communities survived. Numerous Serbian churches have been destroyed.

—Compass Direct

Uzbekistan

Two men arrested for their religious beliefs have died in Uzbek prisons.

One, a 40-year-old member of the banned Hizbi-Tahrir sect, died in pre-trial detention in Tashkent.

The second, Akhmadkhon Turakhanov, was sentenced in March 1999 to six years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism and attempting to overthrow the country's leadership. He had publicly criticized the Uzbek government's policies, specifically its failure to provide gas and water supplies to the population.

Turakhanov suffered from diabetes and possibly also tuberculosis. According to Amnesty International, his relatives believe he was denied adequate medical care in prison.

—Islam Development Brief

Pakistan

Two Pakistani Christian brothers have been jailed on charges that they blasphemed the prophet Mohammed during a dispute over ice cream service.

A vendor, Maqsood Ahmed, refused to serve the Christians in the same bowls used by Muslims, saying that they needed to bring their own bowls to receive service. Ahmed later informed the police that the Christian brothers had become angry and made "bad

remarks" against Islam and Mohammed.

They have been charged under a statute that requires a mandatory execution sentence.

—Compass Direct

Egypt

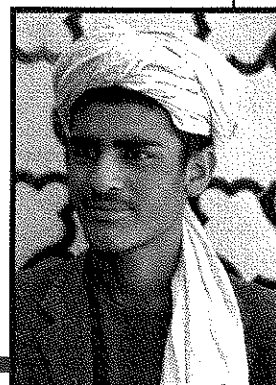
On the surface, Egypt's Christians appear to be doing well. They have no qualms about wearing crucifixes in public. They socialize freely with members of the Islamic majority. Their entrepreneurs are among the barons of the private sector.

Still, members of Egypt's Coptic Christian Church say they are victimized by discrimination born of favoritism toward Muslims and resentment over Copts' prominence during the days of the monarchy.

The law severely restricts the right of Copts to build churches. Schools ignore Coptic history. Local media give minimal coverage to issues affecting the Coptic community. Copts are underrepresented in politics and the public sector, which employs a third of Egypt's work force.

Responding to complaints, the government has made it easier to repair, if not build, churches. And the most recent Christmas Mass at Cairo's cathedral was televised live for the first time.

—Islam Development Brief



THE RETURN OF CHRIST

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Thereupon he [Muhammad] said: "It will not come until you see ten signs." And (in this connection) he made a mention of the smoke; the Dajjal [often called Anti-Christ]; the beast; the rising of the sun from the west; the descent of Jesus, son of Mary; the Gog and Magog; and land-slidings in three places, one in the east, one in the west, and one in Arabia at the end of which fire would burn forth from the Yemen, and would drive people to the place of their assembly (Al-Muslim, Hadith 6931).

It is interesting that many Muslim commentators feel that in the above Hadith, the most important sign mentioned regarding the closeness of the final hour of judgment is the return of Jesus Christ, his destruction of the false Messiah, and the establishment of peace and righteousness on earth. Preceding the return of Jesus, Islam teaches that the Antichrist, or *Dajjal*, will appear to "spread mischief" throughout the world, and everyone except true believers will be fascinated by him.

Popular Islam portrays the *Dajjal* as blind in one eye, with the word *kafir*—unbeliever—written on his forehead. His main activity will be to mislead the unbelieving masses by claiming divinity and the power to perform miracles.

The Moment of Jesus' Return

In order to stop the havoc being wreaked by the *Dajjal*, Messiah (Jesus Christ) will descend to earth and destroy him, and then establish the true religion

of Islam.

Al-Bukhari, the most widely-read compiler of the traditions of Muhammad, further explains when Jesus will return and what he will do. He records:

Allah's messenger said, "By Him (Allah) in Whose hand my soul is, surely, the son of Mary [Isa (Jesus)] will shortly descend amongst you people (Muslims), and will judge mankind justly by the law of the Quran (as a just ruler), and will break the cross and kill the pigs and abolish the jizyah [a tax taken from the people of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians), who are under the protection of a Muslim government. This jizyah tax will not be accepted by Isa (Jesus) and all mankind will be required to embrace Islam with no other alternative]. Then there will be abundance of money and nobody will accept charitable gifts" (Al-Bukhari, Hadith 2222).

Commenting on this Hadith in the book Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran, Drs. Muhammad Khan and Muhammad Al-Hilali confirm the Muslim belief that Jesus will return. They also place emphasis on three major things Jesus will do.

Isa (Jesus), the son of Maryam (Mary) will descend as a leader of the Muslims and it is a severe warning to the Christians who claim to be the followers of Isa (Jesus) and he will break the cross and kill the pigs, and he will abolish the jizyah (tax); and all mankind will be required to embrace Islam with no other alternative (p. 798, pt. 28).

Further Popular Viewpoints

Some versions of popular Islam go even further to claim that Jesus will marry and have children, destroy all churches and synagogues, and that after leading the effort to establish Islam on the earth (especially by convincing Christians to follow Muhammad), He will die at the age of 40 or 45 and be buried near Muhammad and the first two Muslim caliphs in the city of Medina. He will then be physically resurrected from the dead in the general resurrection of the last day.

Jan Goodwin in her book Price of Honor provides another revealing glimpse of what most Muslims believe about the role of Jesus Christ in the last days. In 1994 Goodwin visited Kuwait and was a guest at a Quranic studies class for women run by The Society of Islamic Heritage Revival. Their religious teacher was a 33-year-old Kuwaiti woman who holds an M.A. from the University of Southern California. This dynamic Kuwaiti woman feels that the revival of Islam may portend the end of the world..and that Jesus Christ will play a central

MAN Y MUSLIM COMMENTATORS FEEL THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT SIGN MENTIONED REGARDING THE CLOSENESS OF THE FINAL HOUR OF JUDGMENT IS THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST, HIS DESTRUCTION OF THE FALSE MESSIAH, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS ON EARTH.

role in the events leading to the final hour. Goodwin quotes her:

The Islamic revival started ten to fifteen years ago. The movement is growing more and more. It is now the time for Islam to spread. There is a hadith that says that Islam will rule the world just before the world ends. At that time, there will be a war between Muslims and Jews, a lot of killing. Jesus Christ will guide the Muslim troops as a Muslim. We believe he will come again and break the cross. He will show he was a prophet, not the son of God. The world will benefit when it is Muslim. Everyone will feel at ease” (p. 188).

The Return of Jesus: Solution to a Muslim Dilemma?

In Answering Islam, Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb raise an interesting point regarding what some see as a dilemma in Islam: *the widely held view that Jesus never died.* The authors note that one solution offered by Islamic theologians and based primarily on Al-Bukhari’s Hadith 2222 is to have Jesus return to the earth in the last days and eventually experience death. Geisler and Saleeb provide the following commentary:

Since most Muslims reject the fact of Christ’s crucifixion and death on the cross, they understandably have great difficulty explaining the resurrection, appearances and ascension of Christ. Since they believe Christ was merely a human being, they accept the fact of Christ’s mortality. Believing in Jesus’ eventual resurrection but rejecting his death on the cross, they are forced to

find some other place for Christ’s death. This dilemma has given rise to ingenious speculation. Many Muslim scholars believe that Jesus Christ was taken up to heaven alive without experiencing death. They suppose that his death will happen sometime when he returns to the earth before the last day. This they take from a literal understanding of 4:157-58 that says, “They killed him not, Nor crucified him, But so it was made to appear to them....Nay, God raised him up to Himself.” Others hypothesize that Jesus died a natural death at some unknown time after the crucifixion and remained dead for three hours, or according to another tradition, seven hours—after which he was resurrected and taken to heaven (p. 284).

An Important Distinction


In this brief study of the Muslim belief of Jesus’ return it is important to make one last point: *to note the distinction between the majority Sunni position and the minority Shi’ite position.* Most Shi’ite Muslims identify the last-day savior figure not as Jesus but as

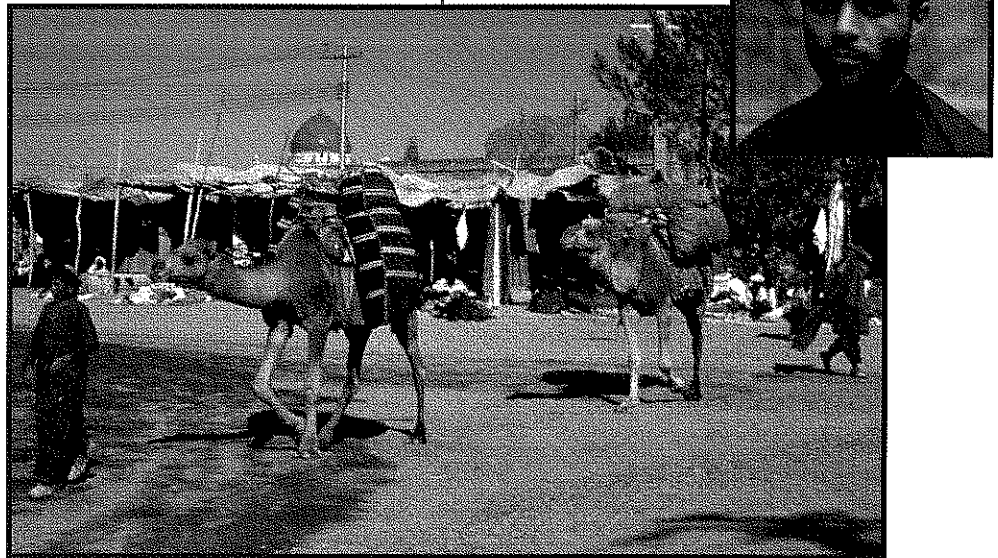
the *Mahdi* (the divinely-guided one). According to Shi’ite tradition, *Mahdi* was the twelfth Imam (successor and descendant of Muhammad) who miraculously disappeared and will one day reappear to establish righteousness on the earth.

The Blessed Hope

In the beginning of this article I spoke of my Muslim friend in the Middle East who expressed his belief that Jesus would soon return to the earth. Through his eyes the return of Jesus is something far different than what the Bible teaches us.

The blessed hope of those who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord is that He will appear in the clouds in order to catch away or rapture His church. We also look forward to that great day when He will return and establish His millennial reign and bring peace to this troubled earth.

Thank you for praying with us that Muslims everywhere will continue to come to a knowledge of who Jesus really is. 



Condensed from Islam Development Brief, May-June 1999

If we really have freedom of religion, shouldn't I then be allowed to go to the market and address my fellow Christians here in an open air meeting? Samir* thought to himself after he had read the statement in the newspaper regarding religious freedom. *Perhaps I should talk to the police and ask for their protection. Perhaps other church members would like to join me; I'd better go and talk to them right now!*

After talking it over with the elders of his church, he went to the police station to tell them his plan.

"No way," they told Samir. "This is impossible. If you start preaching in public, we'll have riots. . . . Do it in your church building. Don't provoke the others; you know how sensitive some people are."

Samir insisted, however, and showed the police the statement in the newspaper. "It says here that we have the freedom to practice our religion, and Christianity is not a religion that is restricted to church buildings!"

After a while the officer decided to give Samir a police escort.

Early the next morning the believers met in the market place. There was already quite a bustle. The cacophony of car horns, shouting of merchants, braying of donkeys and roar of buses was overwhelming. Samir wondered how he would get the attention of people.

The believers formed a circle and prayed together for God's blessing and protection on them. Even before they had finished praying, the circle had grown and dozens of the curious gathered around. When the believers noticed what was happening, they sat down around Samir who immediately took advantage of this opportunity.

"My dear fellow citizens, I know somebody who can truly bring peace to this country. We all realize that we live in times of crises, conflict and war. We haven't seen peace for a long time. How many of you have had to flee your houses, villages and provinces? How many of you are suffering the consequences of a conflict that seems to go on and on?"

The crowd was growing; many were sitting down in the dust to listen to this man who spoke about seemingly impossibilities. *Who in the world could*

bring peace to their country?

"I know someone who can bring reconciliation between people," continued Samir, "someone who knows how to deal with the heart of the problem; someone who can take the hatred out of your heart and replace it with love." Hundreds of people listened spellbound until Samir mentioned the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus.

A man cried out: "Rubbish, nonsense! What is this country coming to that those infidels have the opportunity to spread their lies? They should be put behind bars or be silenced forever!" While he was still shouting, he suddenly brought his hands to his throat as if in great pain and ran away.


Instead of the unrest that Samir expected to break out after this incident, a complete hush fell over the people. "If you would like to know more about the Prince of Peace and what He can do for us and for our country, feel free to take a copy of the Injil," said Samir, showing the people a pile of Gospels. No one moved! No one dared take a copy. What if anybody saw them doing it?

The color of the sky slowly began changing; a yellowish haze descended and before anyone could move, a thick sandstorm filled the marketplace, obscuring vision. A greyish dust covered everything.

Samir sensed that people were moving around, but he couldn't see much. He tried to cover his nose and mouth, but the fine desert sand penetrated everything. *What a dirty end to such a beautiful meeting!* he thought.

After the sandstorm ceased, Samir saw that the people who had been listening had disappeared; so had all of the Gospels.

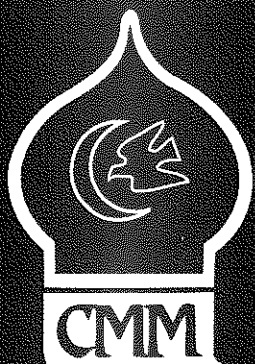
The policeman who had provided protection said to Samir, "I have a problem! There are no books left, and I would like to have one. I protected you, so I think you should give me a book as well!"

Samir quickly took his own copy of the Gospel and gave it to the policeman. "Thank you for your protection and may God protect you and give you His peace." 

*pseudonym

Jumaa Prayer Fellowship

Praying for Muslims
Around the World!



Friday, November 5, 1999. Please pray

...for CMM team members who are conducting Muslim Awareness Seminars at the American Indian College in Phoenix and Southwestern AIG University in Waxahachie, Tex.as, next week.

Pray that students will respond to the challenge to reach Muslims with the gospel.

...for those who are attending the Muslim Awareness Seminars being conducted in various centers in India by CMM team members throughout this month. Pray that many additional workers will respond to God's call to reach out to Muslims.

...for converts from Islam in the Netherlands who have been refused refugee status and face deportation. Pray for God's intervention, especially in the urgent situations.

...for God to over-rule as Malaysia prepares for general elections. Pray that leaders will be chosen who will rule in the fear of God, free from greed and immorality.

Friday, November 12, 1999. Please pray

...for the CMM team member who is teaching a bloc session on Islamics at West Africa School of Theology in Lome, Togo, for the next 2 weeks. Pray that students will apply themselves and that God will use this as a turning point in their lives.

...for the country of Malawi in Central Africa, a special target for the Islamic movement in Africa. Pray God will thwart the Muslim plan and bring a greater awareness in the Church.

...that many Christians will observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on November 14 and pray regularly for those suffering for the sake of the gospel.

...for a missionary on the East Coast as he and an Iranian leader prepare to plant a church among Iranians.

Friday, November 19, 1999. Please pray

...for the ongoing efforts to help the people suffering in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Turkey. Pray that the Church will view this as an opportunity to not only meet their physical needs, but to minister to them spiritually as well.

...for the many Kosovar families who are returning to Kosovo. Pray that their lives will be impacted for Christ by the Christian love being shown them in their time of great need.

...for a former "Black Muslim" prison inmate who now acts as a busy chaplain's assistant. Pray that his testimony will bring other embittered and wounded men to Christ.

...that God will bring an end to the conflict between Pakistan and India and that Christians will lead the way by their repentant attitudes to bring healing.

Friday, November 26, 1999. Please pray

...for Burkina pastors who will attend the Muslim Awareness Seminar next week in Burkina Faso. Pray the Holy Spirit will inspire them to evangelize their Muslim neighbors.

...for the young Christian boys and girls who have been taken as slaves in northern Sudan. Several thousand were bought by Christian Solidarity International and given their freedom. Pray they will be able to overcome the psychological trauma and establish productive lives. Pray for those still being traumatized as slaves and being forced to become Muslims.

...for small groups who are secretly meeting each week in homes for Christian fellowship and study in restricted-access countries. Pray that unity and love will prevail among the believers and that they will experience divine protection.

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

—(1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)



Jumaa Prayer Fellowship...

Praying for Muslims
Around the World!



Friday, December 3, 1999. Please pray
...for gifted writers and other media personnel needed to bless the Arabic-speaking world with their talents by helping to communicate Christian truths in the languages of the people.
...for the effective follow-up of people who make decisions for Christ as a result of radio or television broadcasts, correspondence courses or other outreach activities. Pray that the Lord will guide every piece of mail and every telephone call from genuine inquirers.
...that Kosovar refugees will be reached with the gospel.

Friday, December 10, 1999. Please pray
...for Christian families in Egypt who are being pressured to give their daughters in marriage to Muslims. This is bringing great disharmony in these families.
...that there will be a flow of God's healing grace and mercy across the nation of Indonesia.
...that the Christian tourists and pilgrims to Turkey will make a spiritual impact on that nation. The Ministry of Tourism is expecting ten million within the next few years as the 2,000th anniversary of Christianity is commemorated.

Friday, December 17, 1999. Please pray
...for a growing ministry among street kids in a large Turkish city. Workers teach them reading and writing skills, and provide food, shower facilities, and counselling. Pray especially for one young man who has made a profession of faith and been baptized.
...that the Church in Uzbekistan will take seriously its responsibility to help converts who have lost their jobs and families as a result of conversion. Pray the Lord will give wisdom and ingenuity as to how to meet these real challenges.
...that Middle East churches will be creative in developing, nurturing and welcoming new believers into discipleship groups so that the fruit will be conserved.

Friday, December 24, 1999. Please pray
...that the Church in Ethiopia will continue to reach out to their Muslim neighbors. Pray that those who made recent decisions for Christ during an evangelistic meeting will be integrated into local churches.
...that God will call workers to share the gospel in creative ways with the nomadic peoples of the world. A large number of these are Muslim people groups.
...for the few Saudi Christians who are really committed to following the Lord. A few of them have recently had to leave the country.

Friday, December 31, 1999. Please pray
...for American Christian women who are married to Muslims. Many find themselves in desperate situations because of their incompatible beliefs, unable to raise their children as Christians. Pray especially that Michelle will find a supportive friend to encourage her.
...for Rene Camahort, a Filipino who was recently released from a Saudi Arabian prison. Pray for the re-integration of his family and for a new place of ministry for him.
...for the visa problems being experienced by workers in several difficult-to-access countries. Pray that God will intervene so workers can continue to harvest in these productive fields.

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.
—(1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)