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The Arab Spring

By Dick Brogden, with Jackie A. Chapman



The Arab Spring dates back to Ishmael, Abraham's son, a boy that had a father he loved, then lost that father. Ishmael develops an orphan mentality, a spirit handed down. The Arabs descend from Ishmael, and in A.D. 570 Muhammad was born, who as a young boy lost his father. One missiologist calls Islam an orphan religion, started by an orphan. It has no father figure, physically or spiritually. Muhammad inserts himself as the father figure of Islam and virtually deifies himself. The disavowal towards God as a father figure in Islam stems from this orphan mentality.

History of the Arab Spring

In that mentality are dynamics that affect the physical realm through the spiritual realm. Fast-forward several hun-

dred years from Muhammad to the squabbling of France, England, and Russia for control over the Fertile Crescent and the Middle East for trade routes to India. They carve out territories and establish countries, slicing through tribal and ethnic lines often arbitrarily; the peoples of these tribes and ethnicities have no recourse.

Following the bankruptcy of European nations after World War I and the fall of the Russian monarchy in 1917, the foreign powers can no longer sustain their entities in the Middle East, so they grant them independence. This becomes the first wave of euphoria for the people, as the orphans throw off the yoke of colonial powers. But the euphoria is short-lived as monarchies, military rule, or

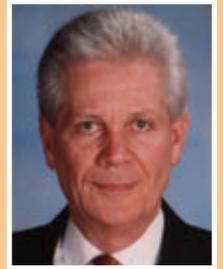
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Until All Have Heard

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

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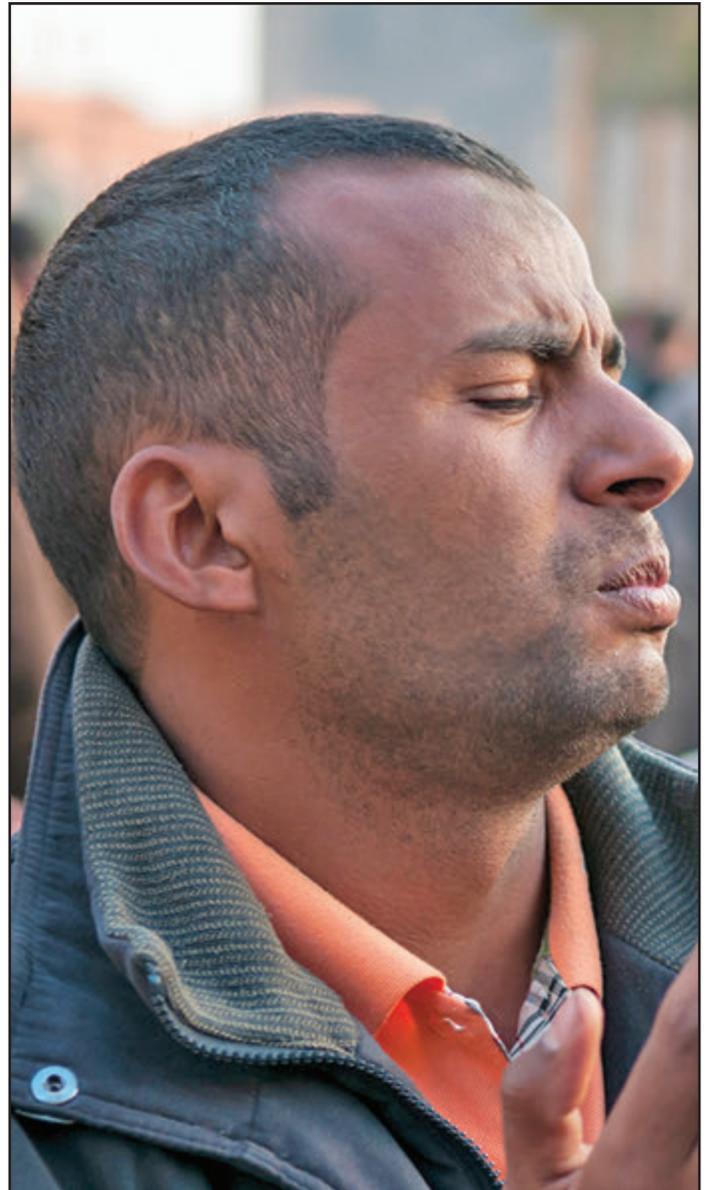
Before Dec. 19, 2010, no one in the world community had ever heard of Mohamed Bouazizi, and there was no thought of an “Arab Spring.” In an Internet article dated Nov. 6, 2012, Pastor D.W. has spoken eloquently about what happened to Mohamed Bouazizi, and the ensuing events. He says:

“The level of despair Mohamed Bouazizi reached on Dec. 19, 2010, was not unlike the despair many in developing nations experience. As the sole breadwinner of his family, the young Tunisian was distraught when police officers beat him and confiscated his simple vegetable cart because he lacked a permit. With this action, the police not only removed his sole source of income, but also stomped out what little hope Mohamed once had of a better life. The confiscated vegetables had been bought on credit — a financial arrangement in the developing world that often amounts to enslavement.

Having been refused justice by his government, the 26-year-old vegetable seller stood before his governor's office, doused himself with gasoline and lit himself on fire. Within weeks, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and much of the Middle East were in a revolutionary uproar.

The months that followed — now referred to as the Arab Spring — brought to light the injustice and corruption that was fueling the cycle of poverty in many Middle East and North Africa nations. The West quickly resolved that the root of the evil was a lack of 'democracy' and began to push hard for 'democratic change.' Arabs recognized much of the problem lay in 'economic issues' and discussed reforms to raise income level. But what manifested in the Arab Spring was not simply a call for better bread and cleaner water; it wasn't even simply a call for a better income. The Arab Spring might be viewed more as a manifestation of a deep-rooted discontent with life as it currently is on earth. Arabs throughout the Middle East have the sense and knowledge that something is missing, something is wrong.”

We are reminded that ultimate hope lies not in a democracy of earthly governments or the riches of the



world, but in the rule and reign of the Prince of Peace. He is the “missing piece” for the distraught Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa. The struggle to offer Jesus Christ as the ultimate “missing piece” will not be won on an ominous battlefield in some foreign land, but in the quiet space of our prayer closets. Let us join together in intercession on behalf of beleaguered Middle East and North Africa peoples. 

Muslim World News



Iran

US citizen sentenced to eight years

The wife of an American citizen sentenced to an Iranian prison for eight years expects she won't hear from her husband until 2021, unless U.S. pressure is able to pry him free. Naghmeh Shariat Panahi told World Watch Monitor that the last time she heard Saeed Abedini's voice was Jan. 9, during a cell phone call between Boise, Idaho and Tehran, Iran.

Abedini, 32, was sentenced by a Revolutionary Court judge who concluded that Abedini's work to establish Christian churches threatened Iran's national security. A native of Iran and born Muslim, Abedini converted to Christianity in 2000 and spent several years establishing small "house churches." He was arrested in September, though his U.S.-based advocates say Abedini had agreed in 2009 to stop organizing churches. Since then, they say, he had turned his attention to building a non-religious orphanage and had made several trips to Iran for the purpose.

His trial began Jan. 21. Though he testified that he had no political intent

in sharing his faith, he and his Iranian lawyer were barred from the next day's proceedings, in which other Christians were called in to testify about Abedini's church work.

Panahi said her husband's lawyer is preparing an appeal of the conviction. The window of opportunity won't be open for long, she said.

"Appealing his case, the sentence, we have limited time to put pressure on Iran," she said. But neither she nor Tiffany Barrans, a U.S.-based international lawyer who represents Panahi, said they hold out much hope for persuading the Iranian Revolutionary Court to overturn the decision of one of its most prominent judges.

The judge, Pir-Abbassi, is known in the West primarily for his harsh sentences, including execution, of students who participated in protests after Iran's 2009 elections. The European Union has branded Pir-Abbassi, among other Iranian judges, a human-rights violator. The U.S. religious-freedom commission has recommended that the State Department make a similar declaration, but it has yet to do so. — *Compass*

Mali

Church leader: relief and anxiety

The liberation of the main cities of northern Mali has created a great sense of relief and joy in the country, but the task of reconstruction and reconciliation is huge. After the French offensive, the Malian and African troops have regained control of the main cities in the north.

For nearly a year the Islamist armed groups imposed strict Islamic law in the regions under their control. Intimidation, threats, and mutilation became common practice. The practice of other religions was banned; places of worship and churches were desecrated and looted.

Despite regaining freedom, Malian people face new challenges created by the Islamic takeover. Nine months of occupation have left northern Mali in great need of reconstruction. Mali is #7 on the 2013 World Watch List, a ranking of the 50 countries where persecution of Christians is most severe. The list is published by Open Doors International, a ministry to persecuted Christians worldwide. — *Compass*

despotic powers take the place of imperialists. The people's euphoria at their independence is quickly followed by despair at the corruption that replaces the British, French, and Russians.

From this depression, the Arab Spring was sparked in Tunisia in December 2010. A street vendor working to support his family by selling fruit, Mohamed Bouazizi gets into an altercation with police who confiscate his wares. Bouazizi appears at town hall to seek justice and finds none. Frustrated, he sets himself on fire. While in the hospital, then-Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali visits him for a photo opportunity, to console him, but the move backfires. The Tunisians see nothing

The Arab Spring continues

To the surprise of many, the popular revolution worked. The wave of euphoria returns to the people. Throwing off colonial powers and corrupt leaders, the people see the opportunity for democracy. But in one of the great ironies of life, the democratic process opened the door for Muslim fundamentalists to be elected to the houses of parliament. As the most organized with the most popular support, they quickly assume majority rule with the most seats in parliament, and in Egypt's case, the presidency. With control of the parliament, they try to enact legislation to bring Islamic law as foundational guidance for juries, courts, constitutions, and processes of government. With that base, they undermine principles



A young man near Cairo's Tahrir Square runs with a container of tear gas fired by police.

but hypocrisy saying, "You are the problem in the first place. It is because of your policies that we do not have jobs or bread." The dissent spreads by social media, as the people communicate their dissatisfaction via Facebook and Twitter. Bouazizi dies on Jan. 4, 2011, but remains the catalyst for an expression of angst against oppressive rulers. From Tunisia the movement spreads to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria.

of free speech and freedom of religion. The next wave of despair crashes on the orphans: The revolution to rid themselves of despots opened the door for radical Muslims and now they have no recourse.

To this point, the movement has been a peaceable popular revolution. There have been trouble spots (Libya and Syria) but in most places there has not been outright

b Spring

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civil war. Still, the Arab Spring is one wave in a series of waves that will continue, and there will be greater hostility and bloodshed to these waves. People realize that what they longed for has been taken away from them and the hard-earned victories are fleeting. There is a civil clash coming across the Arab world as moderate Muslims and fundamental Muslims struggle for the souls of their countries. Some of these countries, like Egypt and Syria, have Christian minorities, but in most the struggle is between Muslim factions. The result is disappointment and disillusionment because Islam is antithetical to democracy. There cannot be a functional democracy and Islam, due to the coercive nature of Islam. There is not going to be a time when peace and prosperity reign across the Arab world. Instability is the new normal.

Looking through God's lens

The West has misunderstood the Arab Spring. Primarily secular, it does not see through the lens of God's redemptive purposes. At the front end, it believed democracy would triumph and all would be wonderful. But democracy was short-lived. That moved the West to the other extreme, despairing over the triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood, thinking everything would be terrible. That is not entirely true either — it is difficult for the West to see that what is happening is good for the gospel. God is using this cycle of history for His self-revelation, especially among Arab Muslims. The goal of mission and the goal of democracy are not necessarily synonymous. When there is oppression, suffering, and injustice, people come to the end of themselves and look for other options. That is what is happening now across the Arab world.

Missiologically, this is the best time to be in the Arab world. This is an opportune moment in missions, to take advantage of the upheaval and disappointment spiritually as Arab Muslims ask questions about the gospel. The events of the Arab Spring are opening doors for more Arabs to come to Jesus because politics and democratic reforms are not the answer. One of the best things to happen across the region is for the Muslim Brotherhood, in all its permutations, to come to power. They do not know how to govern and are proving that they are just as hypocritical and corrupt as the ones that they replaced. The association in the general populace becomes “if this is Islam, we do not want it,” and more Muslims are coming to Jesus now than ever before.



What the Church must do

While those called to reach Muslims with the gospel can understand the West's euphoria and then disappointment, we do not expect them to understand our perspective where the goal is not political stability or economic reform. We pray for these things, but our goals are radically different from the geo-political world that watches the effects of the Arab Spring so keenly. Our goal is the super-exaltation of Jesus among every people, and Jesus can use both tragedy and triumph for His ends. At a strategic level, the Church cannot wait for peace or stability. We have to be willing to deploy our people at great costs into difficult contexts. We have to commit to paying the price, whatever it costs us, and that cost will be manifested in different ways: prison, expulsion, loss of assets, and death. In the strategy of the Spirit, God uses the attention garnered by all these political changes to put it on the radar of His Church to pray, give, and go.

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Egyptian crowds at Tahrir Square in 2011 calling for an end to military rule.

The Arab Spring

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An Egyptian anti-government protestor injured at Tahrir Square in 2011.

The Church needs to deepen its search for God's sovereignty in the events of the Arab Spring. We have looked too closely with political eyes and pinned hopes on democratic freedoms that would only result in more pluralistic societies, not in Islamic societies. The Church needs to understand that revival does not come from prosperity; revival comes from desperation. Prayers should not be directed toward a political process that brings a liberal society, but toward the vein of "Jesus, do whatever it takes in these nations to bring these people to a place of utter desperation where no person can solve the problem."

The Church must drill into the emotional capacity to embrace suffering as a sending Church. The goal is the gospel, not peace. Too often we approach our prayers from a political or peace perspective and we do not wrestle deeply with the reality that it is the lack of peace and the lack of a liberal society that brings the most Muslims to Jesus. An Iranian pastor once said that the best missionary that ever lived in Iran was the Ayatollah Khomeini because he exposed the real face of Islam. In doing so, he opened the door for hundreds of thousands of Iranians to come to Jesus. The goal must be a combi-

nation of factors that brings people to desperation, and once people are desperate and all other avenues exhausted, can the bound Muslim mind investigate the claims of Christ and explore His invitation.

Prayer requests

- (1) Pray intentionally that God would send forth laborers into the Arab world, specifically into trouble spots, such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya.
- (2) Pray that Believers of Muslim Background (BMBs) overcome fear through faith.
- (3) Pray that God orchestrates events in such a way that it brings the most people to Him. We do not pray for trouble to fall on people but that God would act in His divine wisdom in a collection of ways that bring the highest yield to His kingdom.
- (4) Pray for the rise of the Word of God. Pray for the churches, the Christian nationals and expatriates, to disseminate the Word of God through sound doctrine and accurate Bible translations.
- (5) Pray for signs, wonders, dreams, and miracles.
- (6) Pray that these beloved Muslim orphans would find their heavenly Father. 



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Friday, May 3, 2013. Please pray

...for Iranian pastor Saeed Abedini. Pray for the release of Abedini, sentenced to eight years in prison for trumped up charges of “endangering national security.” Abedini, a U.S. citizen, has a wife and two children.

...for the people of Bangladesh where the government continues to trend toward hardline Islam.

...for two Coptic Christian boys in Egypt that may face a court trial for “insulting the Quran.” The boys are ages 9 and 10.

Friday, May 10, 2013. Please pray

...for the leaders of house churches and cell groups in closed Muslim countries. Many are laymen without any leadership training.

...for the Lord's protection over Muslims caught up in the fighting and political unrest in Mali.

...for Christians engaged in prison ministry to Muslims in the European penal system.

Friday, May 17, 2013. Please pray

...for the 177 million Muslims of India.

...for secret believers in the world of Islam and for those who try to help and disciple them.

...for millions of Muslims attending mosques today.

Friday, May 24, 2013. Please pray

...for physical protection for Eva Abdullah in Tanzania. Abdullah was found not guilty of Quran desecration by the high court, but she had been imprisoned for 371 days.

...for Muslims in Syria, where the political future hangs in the balance as President Assad attempts to keep power.

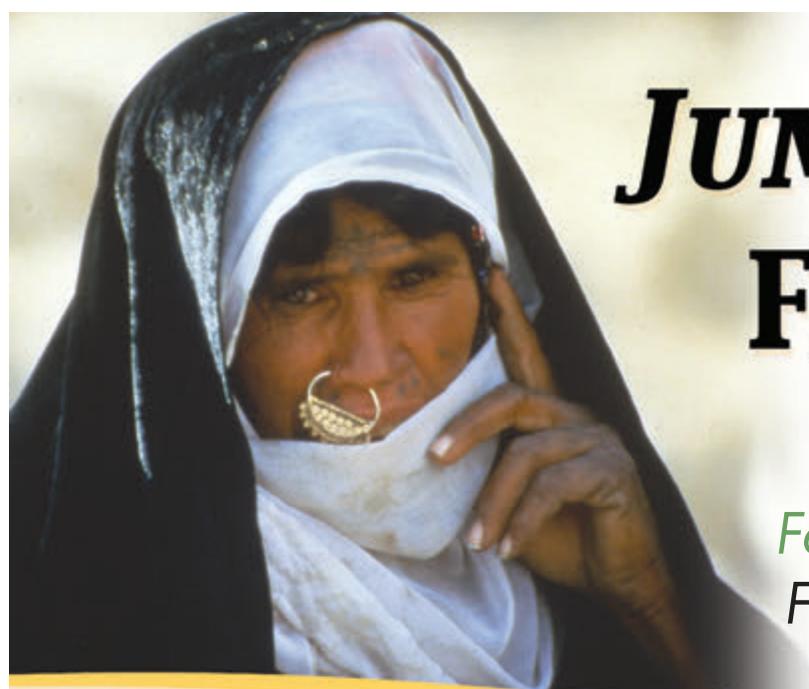
...for national churches across the Muslim world as they continue training Christian leaders.

Friday, May 31, 2013. Please pray

...for millions of Muslims tuning in to Christian media programs each day: Internet, radio, and television. Pray that God will minister through the different types of programs.

...for churches in Kazakhstan. Due to a 2012 law, a church is required to have 50 local members, 500 regional members, and 5,000 national members. Essentially, the law allows the legal liquidation of small churches.

...for Christians in Iraq that still face hostility and violence.



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Friday, June 7, 2013. Please pray

...for God's love to reach Algeria's 35 million Muslims.

...for Christian teachers working in Muslim schools across the Islamic world. May doors open for them to share the love of Jesus.

...for the forgotten Christian community of Eritrea. MBBs face grave danger and tremendous risks.

Friday, June 14, 2013. Please pray

...for continued witness efforts to Egypt's 80 million Muslims.

...for the country of Nigeria. Since 2009, the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram has killed approximately 3,000 Nigerian citizens.

...for the people of Indonesia where sharia law continues spreading. Over half of Indonesia's provinces have enacted some form of sharia law.

Friday, June 21, 2013. Please pray

...for the Christian community in Pakistan where violence against non-Muslims, church burnings, and blasphemy against the Quran charges are frequent.

...for young believers in Jordan to be filled with wisdom and the vision to share the gospel with friends and neighbors.

...for the Church in Uzbekistan which faces consistent government persecution and harassment.

Friday, June 28, 2013. Please pray

...for Christians in Mindanao, Philippines, faced with becoming part of an Islamic sub-state.

...for Muslims living in Western countries. Pray that through conversions and testimonies, the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread into the Muslim world.

...for Muslims in Turkmenistan, which is currently the most closed country in Central Asia.

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