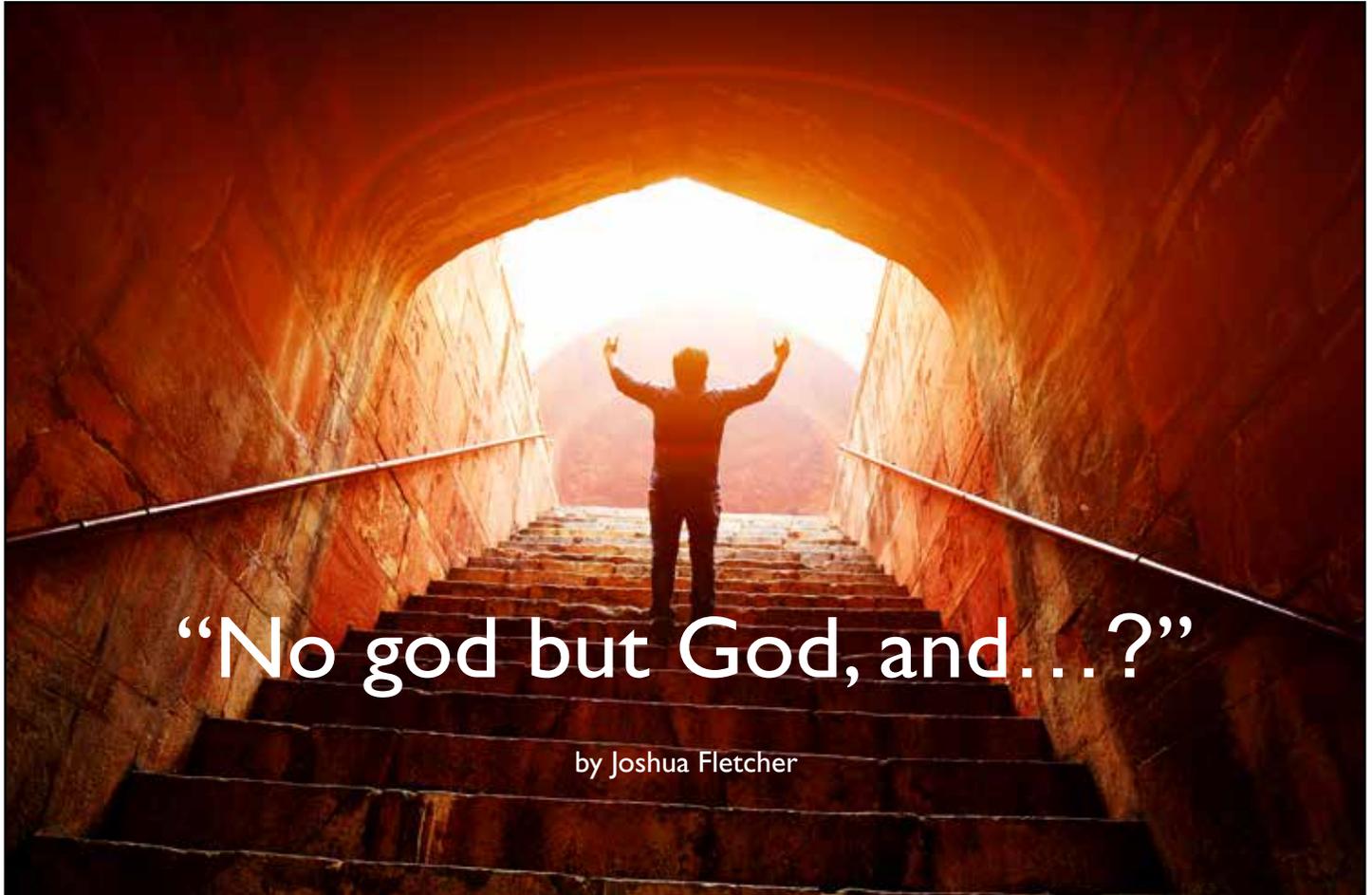


INTERCEDE

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“No god but God, and...?”

by Joshua Fletcher

Anyone who has spent much time in the Muslim world evangelizing among Muslims will know that sensitivity is required in addressing the prophethood of Muhammad. Exceptional are the encounters like the one that we had in a café in a Central Asian metropolis. Hamid had, prior to meeting my wife and I, concluded that Jesus was the Savior. Still, he could not understand the continuing relevance of Muhammad if Jesus were the Savior. When asked directly, we told him that, as Christians, we did not think that God had sent Muhammad. Hamid then asked for clarification, “So, you’re saying he’s a lie?” While not having been so blunt in our own words, we concurred with Hamid’s assessment. Hamid later claimed that event as instrumental in his decision to follow Christ. After Hamid had become a Christian, he would accompany us into the streets for evangelism. It soon became clear that Hamid needed some coaching in his approach. Hamid would initiate conversations with Muslims by asking, “Did you know that Muhammad’s a lie?” It comes as no surprise that Hamid’s approach merely angered

people and he could offer very little of Christ once the conversation had been soured in this way.

Unfortunately, and as Hamid’s subsequent experiences demonstrate, not all dialogues with Muslims about the identity of Muhammad are so easily resolved. Even among individuals quite interested in the Christian claims about Jesus, the issue of Muhammad’s prophethood can prove to be an intimidating barrier. This is not surprising. Accepting the prophethood of Muhammad is one half of the identity-defining “*shahada*,” or confession, the first pillar of Islam and the required oral profession in order to become a Muslim. Technically, the *shahada* uses the Arabic word *rasool* (messenger)—the meaning of which carries with it prophethood. (The other half of the *shahada* is the acknowledgment that there is no god but Allah.) For a Muslim to deny the prophethood of Muhammad is to essentially no longer be Muslim and invite sure condemnation to hell. Conversely, it is enough to merely recite the *shahada* to become a Muslim. Thus, it is

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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

Mark Brink

International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



In the November/December 2018 issue of *Intercede*, I referred to a meeting I attended in Europe with workers ministering to Muslim refugees and immigrant communities across that continent. Almost each day since writing that column, I have been amazed at the incredible testimonies that continue to come from outreach ministries in Europe. *As immigrants risk their lives trying to find peace in a new land, they are discovering eternal peace that comes through Christ alone!* As these “new Europeans” settle into life in a new land, the opportunity to share the gospel increases. In their displacement and disillusionment with Islam, they are open to hearing the good news of Christ’s love.

While immigration comes with sociological and political complications, both in Europe and elsewhere, one thing is sure: the Spirit of God is using the opportunity to awaken Muslims to their need for Jesus. *Conservatively speaking, within the past three years, over 20,000 Muslims have accepted Christ and been baptized.* That is cause to pause and thank the Lord for His love and mercy!

Effective outreach to Muslims is taking place in Italy, Macedonia, Austria, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Germany, Bulgaria, Holland, Finland, France, and England. Other locations are also seeing a mighty move of God but, due to sensitivity, not all can be identified. Allow me to highlight some of the diverse ways outreach is taking place:

- Churches have been planted with specific outreach to refugees. One such church is appropriately called “The House of Refuge.”
- International church fellowships have become a natural place for refugees to connect with diverse people.
- In locations where ministry to Muslim refugees has been in operation for an extended length of time, ethnic churches have been established.
- In cooperation with non-governmental organizations, missionaries gain initial contact with new refugees to meet their immediate felt needs.
- While refugees are in transit, missionaries and national constituencies are also able to work in established refugee camps.

Through these various outreaches, men and women from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are coming to faith in Christ. A number of Muslims from North African nations have also been baptized. *We believe this represents the tip of the iceberg for a great harvest of souls for the kingdom of God.*

Bottom line, we long to see another 20,000 plus Muslims coming to faith in Christ and being baptized. In fact, we long for every one of the world’s 1.7 billion Muslims to know the truth about Jesus. To that end, we ask you to continue interceding for the greatest supernatural ingathering of Muslims into God’s Kingdom that has ever been seen.





Muslim World News

Pakistan: Blasphemy Appeal?

A Pakistani court sentenced two Christian brothers to death for blasphemy in December 2018. Since their arrest in 2014, Qaisar and Amoon Ayub had been held in Punjab province, for allegedly posting “disrespectful material” on their website, according to *AsiaNews*.

Their story dates back to 2011 when Qaisar, following a quarrel at his office, started to receive death threats and the brothers had to flee the country. They were arrested on charges of blasphemy upon return four years later.

The Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS-UK) that has represented the brothers, said they planned to appeal the sentence, taking it to the Lahore High Court. “This is a very unfortunate situation,” director Nasir Saeed said, “because of threats from hardliners, lower courts pass their responsibility to the higher court and then it takes years to prove the accused innocent.”

“We have seen this in the recent case of Asia Bibi, who was similarly convicted by the lower court and it took her years to reach to the Supreme Court to get justice,” he said. “I am afraid now Qasir and Amoon will have to wait years to get justice.” — *World Watch Monitor*

Egypt: Three Years for Blasphemy

An Egyptian court has sentenced a Coptic Christian to three years in prison after he was found guilty of “insulting Islam in the first degree.”

Abdo Adel, 43, from Minya governorate, was accused in July 2018 of publishing a post on his Facebook page that insulted Islam. In his post, Adel had compared Islam’s prophet, Muhammad, with Jesus. Muslim villagers filed a

complaint with police in the nearby city of Matai and Adel was arrested on charges of insulting Muhammad and contempt of Islam.

Following his arrest, a mob attacked houses owned by Copts and the situation has remained tense ever since, according to Washington-based International Christian Concern. A lawyer familiar with the case placed hope on an appeal: “Usually the judge gives the maximum penalty in the first degree to secure himself that he applied the law, knowing that the other judge in the second degree will reduce or set him free.” — *World Watch Monitor*

Asia Report: 1 in 3 Christians Faces Persecution

One in three Christians in Asia faces high levels of persecution after a “shocking increase” of religious-based threats and violence across the world, particularly in China and sub-Saharan Africa, according to Open Doors.

Persecution worldwide increased for the sixth straight year, with a total of 245 million Christians — one out of nine worldwide — facing high levels in 2018, up from 215 million, or one in 12, the previous year.

More than 4,300 Christians were killed due to their beliefs worldwide last year, over 3,700 of them in Nigeria, according to the 2019 World Watch List. North Korea tops the violation list, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Iran, India and Syria.

Open Doors, a non-denominational mission supporting persecuted Christians, warned that the rate of discrimination and violence was likely worse than it has reported, as it only records deaths proven to be motivated by religion.

— *Agence France-Presse*

“No god but

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often the case that seekers wrestle with the issue of Muhammad’s prophethood for a period. Indeed, sometimes it is the status of Muhammad which proves to be the largest barrier to Muslim’s accepting the good news about Jesus. Thus, it is a shame that one’s opinion about the career of a dead man from Arabia should be a barrier to salvation through Jesus. For this reason, in recent years the question has been posed as to whether it may be possible to assent to some sort of prophetic status for Muhammad (perhaps in the way that Balaam was a prophet, for instance) so as to enable followers of Jesus to recite the *shahada* in good conscience and/or eliminate the barrier to conversion that renouncing Muhammad could entail.¹

It is not normally the case that such proponents actually espouse any special role for Muhammad personally, but are merely interested in the potential permissibility, from a Christian perspective, of granting some sort of status to Muhammad. Notably, this perspective recognizes the critical importance of the prophethood of Muhammad to Islam (while also attempting to redefine its meaning). At the same time, the perspective seems to assume that the *shahada* is of only negligible importance to being a Christian. Such an assumption, however, is mistaken and fails to consider a core component of the gospel as well as the function of the *shahada* itself.

If asked to summarize the gospel, a common reply would likely revolve around Jesus dying for our sins. It also might be the case that a summary of the gospel would never get beyond a discussion of Jesus’s atoning death. In popular evangelism, Jesus’s work on the cross is often considered the gospel while Jesus’s full identity is given less attention. A host of theological and historical reasons exist for why this tends to be the case. However, it is notable that a very large part of the Gospels and Acts are devoted to unveiling the identity of Jesus and His attaining to the highest place of authority as Lord and to persuading people to repent in light of Jesus’s current status (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 8:27-38; John 20:31; Acts 9:22; 17:30-31).

Interestingly, neither the Gospels nor Acts tend to present the gospel in the logical, almost mathematical, manner that often characterizes our approaches, which outline the problem of sin, identify the need for salvation, and then present the provision of atonement. Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18-3:26 certainly provides a measure of support for such approaches. Yet, Paul also introduces that very epistle by describing the gospel as “the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and



was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:3-4, NRSV). Thus, Jesus’s identity and status is fundamental to the gospel, even in Paul’s writings. (Recently there have been many useful books written that persuasively make the case for the centrality of Jesus’s Lordship to the gospel itself.)² Nothing in the above paragraph suggests that proclaiming the forgiveness of sins through the atoning death of Christ is misplaced. It is only being claimed that attention to Jesus’s identity and status must be considered central to the gospel, and indeed, is the paradigm through which Christ’s atoning death is understood to function in the first place.

The centrality of Jesus’s status as Lord, however, also has a bearing on how the *shahada* is to be assessed. Or, to put it differently, it is not only important to consider the claim about Muhammad’s prophethood within the *shahada*, but it is also important to consider the function of the *shahada* itself in relation to the gospel. In merely reading the Old Testament one could be forgiven for failing to no-

God, and...?”

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tice the centrality of Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” However, this simple claim became the central confession of Judaism, and was recited daily in the “*Shema*.”³ The command in the following verse, (and the greatest command according to Jesus [Matt. 22:37]), “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might,” flows from this acknowledgment that God alone is Lord. Jon Levenson writes of the confession and commands in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “It is manifestly an echo of the requirement of the old suzerainty treaties to recognize one lord alone. Since in the biblical case the lord is divine, the verse is a classic statement of covenantal monotheism, i.e., the prohibition upon the service of other suzerains.”⁴ Thus, the *Shema* was not merely a theological confession, but also a demand for loyalty, for allegiance. Accordingly, N. T. Wright writes that to recite the *Shema* was to declare “that Israel’s God alone was the true king of the world.”⁵

Interestingly, Paul also alludes to Deuteronomy 6:4 in his argument in 1 Corinthians 8:6 regarding the Corinthians’

involvement with idolatry when he writes, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” Paul has taken this foundational statement of Judaism of one God and one Lord and interpreted it as referring to “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.” The demand for loyalty and allegiance resident within Deuteronomy 6:4 has been modified to include loyalty and allegiance to Jesus as Lord.⁶ The observation is not surprising considering a central aspect of the Gospels (and the gospel generally) is the demonstration of Jesus’s identity and enthronement as Lord. However, what is interesting is that just as Deuteronomy 6:4 entails a claim on loyalty and allegiance, the conclusion to Paul’s argument, which began with the claim of “one God” and “one Lord,” is that loyalty is demanded of the Corinthians in that they must abstain from “the table of demons.” To partake in the table would “provoke the Lord to jealousy” (1 Cor. 10:22).

Considering the claims for loyalty that are resident within the *Shema* as well as in its reworking in Paul, the Islamic *shahada* appears quite differently. Just as the claim about God in Deuteronomy 6:4 was a demand for allegiance, and just as Paul’s reworking of the confession to include Christ was also a demand for loyalty, the claim that Allah is God alone and that Muhammad is his prophet is itself a demand for loyalty. The Islamic confession about Muhammad is not merely a tangential speculation about how to categorize the status of a certain man in Arabia but rather a demand for loyalty. Consequently, to only consider the nature of Muhammad’s prophethood in relation to his life and work rather than to also consider the rhetorical function of the *shahada*, its claim of loyalty and allegiance, is to miss the point of the *shahada* altogether. Once it is recognized that a fundamental component of the gospel is the confession of Christ as Lord (and the response of submission to His Lordship), it then becomes apparent that the *shahada* is effectively an “anti-gospel.” This is so because by declaring that “there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet” it also implicitly makes the claim “*and Jesus is not Lord*.” Even though Christians have not always recognized the centrality of Christ’s Lordship to gospel proclamation, the enemy of truth has recognized the centrality of the claim in that throughout the Muslim world it is effectively announced five times a day that “Christ is not Lord.” For this reason, often when we, and often even our children, hear the call to prayer, we respond with, “Jesus is Lord.” While none of this suggests that we must make it our mission to proclaim that Muhammad’s personhood is a lie, it does require we recognize that the

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issue of Muhammad’s prophethood is not an innocuous or tangential concern, but is a claim for loyalty diametrically opposed to the gospel—the claim that God alone is God and Jesus is Lord.

Our hearts yearn for Muslims to come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. We must strive to make scriptural truth available in the most culturally sensitive manner possible. However, a clear reading of Scripture emphatically rejects the syncretistic practice that recognizes elements of Muhammad’s prophethood as valid or merely innocuous. Nor does the Scripture provide affirmation for new believers from Muslim backgrounds to continue reciting the Islamic *shahada*. The Holy Scriptures require abandonment of both ideas. May the good news ring out louder and clearer than ever that Jesus Christ alone is worthy of our loyalty and allegiance.

¹ Harley Talman, “Is Muhammad also among the Prophets?,” *The Journal of the International Society of Frontier Missiology* 31, no. 4 (2014).

² Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017); Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012).

³ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 84. Kindle edition.

⁴ Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1985), Kindle locations 1445-1447.

⁵ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 84, also 179.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 365.

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Prayer Profile: *Afghan Pashtuns* Population: 11 Million



Comprising less than half of Afghanistan’s population, Pashtuns currently number beyond 11 million in Afghanistan and 35 million worldwide. Pashto is their traditional language. Traditional Pashtun territory lies in the southern and eastern mountains where extended families dwell in tents or mud houses, amid typically unsanitary conditions due to lack of safe water sources. In one of the world’s poorest countries, many people depend on raising livestock, limited farming, and cultivating the notorious opium poppy for income. Islam has been the chief religion of Afghanistan since the 10th century. Presently 99.9% of the Pashtun people are Muslim.

Prayer Points:

- Encouragement and protection for the small number of Pashtun believers.
 - God to once again open the doors for Christian agencies desiring to work among the Pashtun.
 - Afghan children who grow up in fear and hatred of outsiders.
 - A softening of the hearts of Pashtuns towards Christians so that they will be open to the gospel.
 - Peace in the land of the Pashtun peoples.
- *For additional information about the Pashtun, please visit: www.joshuaproject.net.



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*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, March 1, 2019. Please pray for

...*a video series in Arabic entitled “People of the Book.”* Workers reaching out to Middle Eastern Muslims are finding that this tool leads to “deep conversations about Christ.”

...*Mehmet, a Turkish convert from Islam* whose internet ministry is flourishing. In one six-month period, 40 Muslims placed their faith in Christ. Of Turkey’s population of 81 million, 96% are Muslim.

...*a thriving Iranian congregation in Austria* with an average attendance of 70 refugees.

Friday, March 8, 2019. Please pray for

...*Nuri, a mother of two sons with a baby girl on the way*, whose husband worked as a Christian bookstore manager, and was murdered in Gaza. Nuri commented, “I forgive this man.” Of Gaza’s population of 1.8 million, 98% are Muslim.

...*the Comoros Islands*. Last year, a referendum declared Sunni Islam as “the religion of the state.”

...*Mahmoud, a Pakistani convert from Islam*. Mahmoud has led 10 men to Christ so far.

Friday, March 15, 2019. Please pray for

...*equipping classes being taught by a Global Initiative team member* in a Central European capital during March 21-30.

...*the first live daily Christian Women’s show* on the Turkish SAT-7 TV channel.

...*New Testaments that have been completed and printed* in the two largest Kurdish languages, Kurmanji and Sorani.

Friday, March 22, 2019. Please pray for

...*the mounting tension in Indonesia*. Recently three churches in the Jambi province of Sumatra were shut down.

...*workers in Italy conducting training sessions* for fellow workers on how to best use a video Bible study program called Al Massira (The Path)—to reach immigrant peoples, especially Muslims.

...*the Democratic Republic of Congo*, where 27 Christians were murdered in the Christian town of Beni. The massacre was perpetrated by the Muslim Defense International terrorist group. Of the DRC’s population of 83 million, 2% are Muslim.

Friday, March 29, 2019. Please pray for

...*a “refocused church” in Germany*, with an emphasis on outreach to immigrants. In 2017 they baptized 96 new people, 80 of which are Iranians. In 2018 they baptized 82 Iranians, 4 Arabs, and others.

...*Assyrian Christian schools* in the Kurdish-governed northeastern region of Syria. Authorities have forcibly shut them down for their refusal to implement curriculum aligned with Kurdish nationalist ideology.

...*wisdom and discernment for Egyptian Christians*. Of Egypt’s population of 99 million, 86% are Muslim.

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



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, April 5, 2019. Please pray for

...equipping classes being taught by Global Initiative team members in the country of Cuba during April 7-15.

...house church members in Algeria. Qader, a faithful 67-year old house church attendee in Bouira will go before a judge shortly; he is charged with attempting to convert a Muslim to Christ.

...Padina, who was a dedicated Iranian Muslim. She heard a powerful sermon on satellite television and surrendered her life to Christ. Padina has developed an entire house church network. Of Iran's population of 82 million, 98% are Muslim.

Friday, April 12, 2019. Please pray for

... "new Christians" in Malaysia who wish to be baptized in water. Due to fear of persecution, local pastors are sometimes hesitant to baptize new believers from Muslim backgrounds. Of Malaysia's population of 32 million, 56% are Muslim.

...Rafik, a missionary for nine years in the dangerous Northwest Frontier province of Pakistan. He was kidnapped and held in total isolation. After his escape and recovery, he has bravely returned to his ministry of "sharing the gospel."

...Attilee, a South African who served with her husband for 10 years in Afghanistan until militants attacked their home and killed her whole family. Today, she ministers both inside Afghanistan and around the world on behalf of Afghans.

Friday, April 19, 2019. Please pray for

...ministry to Muslim refugees in the country of Greece. Habib and Aoula have faithfully ministered to arriving refugees and have now "seen the church of Jesus Christ established in two refugee camps."

...Saudi Arabian believers who have left Islam to follow Jesus. A spiritual hunger exists in Saudi, particularly among young people under 30 years of age who are disillusioned with fundamental Islam.

...Christian workers and believers in Mozambique. The northeast region is increasingly insecure due to atrocities by an extremist group. One believer had his house burned down. Of Mozambique's population of 30 million, 17% are Muslim.

Friday, April 26, 2019. Please pray for

...Islam classes being taught by Global Initiative associates at a seminary in Asia Pacific during April 29 – May 3.

...the country of Ethiopia. Ably Ahmad, a convert from Islam to Christianity, became prime minister of Ethiopia in 2018. Ask the Lord to guide and use him for His purposes. Of Ethiopia's population of 106 million, 33% are Muslim.

...Iranians Fadele and Fatima who have received prison sentences of 18 months and 12 months, respectively, for "spreading propaganda" against the regime. Pray for a successful appeal against their sentences.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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