

Country Spotlight:

Afghanistan - In Need of the Prince of Peace



Population: 28.5 million
Capital: Kabul
Ethnic Groups: 91
Religion: Islam 98%
All Christians: 0.02%

Afghanistan has long been known as the crossroads of Central Asia. The famous Khyber Pass has seen numerous invading armies attempt to seize control of the area, with the fertile plains of today's Pakistan and India positioned on the other side.

Afghanistan currently has approximately 28 million people, distributed among nearly 100 different ethnic groups. Many of these groups have long been in hostility with one another. The largest ethnic group is the Pashtun, or Pathan, which itself is a collection of dozens of smaller tribes and subgroups. About one-third of the people of Afghanistan

are Pashtun. Some of the largest other groups in Afghanistan include the Hazara, Turkmen, Tajik and Uzbek.

The Bible states that after Cain murdered his brother

he traveled east of Eden to a land where he built a city. Afghan legend states the land he settled in was Afghanistan, and the city he constructed was



Kabul.

Whether Cain did in fact live in Afghanistan or not cannot be proven, but what is known is the murderous spirit of Cain has reigned supreme throughout the nation's

history. Death and slaughter have been commonplace. It is said that when the Mongol hordes swept through in the 13th century they put more than one

million people to death in the city of Herat. Bodies were piled in heaps around the city, and just a handful of people escaped the carnage.

Centuries of localized wars have seriously

hindered the development of Afghanistan, which has rich natural resources that have never been mined.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, which led to a disastrous 10-year stalemate, before the Soviets cut their losses and removed their military forces in 1989. The strong opposition encountered by the powerful Soviets reflected the proud, stubborn spirit of the Afghan people.

The ten-year war saw numerous foreign Muslims join the battle, many of whom became today's terrorists. One Saudi who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan

was a man named Osama Bin Laden, who developed many of his warped philosophies during his time there. Later, Bin Laden saw in Afghanistan a perfect opportunity to nurture his

Country Spotlight Country Spotlight Country Spotlight Country Spotlight

dark plans, and moved his base of operations to this poor nation. The 9-11 terrorist attacks on the United States were planned and staged from Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. The reigning Taliban government instituted years of extreme Islamic rule. Thousands of Afghans were executed by the Taliban.

The United States military attacked Afghanistan in late 2001 and the Taliban was quickly overthrown, giving birth to hopes that the Gospel would find an opening in this war-weary land.

Somewhat surprisingly, Christianity has a long history in Afghanistan. The Gospel first came to the area within 200 years of the resurrection of Christ. By 400 AD a Bishop had been appointed over Herat. The Church survived in Afghanistan for almost a thousand years, until it was eradicated by Timur in the 14th century.

Throughout the 1900's a small band of dedicated missionaries tried to plant the Gospel in Afghanistan with their blood and tears, but the Church remained a tiny fragment of society and was strongly persecuted. It is said at one time during the 1990's there were 48,000 Islamic mosques in Afghanistan, but not a single church.

The U.S. takeover of Afghanistan led many Western Christians to believe a door would open to the Gospel, but this has not automatically taken place. More prayer is needed before this troubled land yields to the call of the Holy Spirit.

At the present time the main focus of Christian ministry in Afghanistan continues to be aid

work. These expressions of Christ's love have caused many Afghan people to open their hearts to the message of eternal life, but great challenges remain for most Afghans to become aware of their need for Christ.

Much of the most effective ministry that is presently taking place in Afghanistan is done by former refugees, who first heard about Jesus while living in camps along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Hundreds of Afghan refugees, from numerous different ethnic groups, became believers in response to the practical love and friendship of foreign Christians during their years in confinement. After the Taliban was overthrown, many of these Christians returned to their homeland, taking the Gospel with them. They represent the best hope for the future of the Church in Afghanistan.

There are small pockets of believers meeting in house fellowships throughout the country. Despite the new politi-



cal environment, Christians are still strongly persecuted by the community.

Islam remains the official religion of Afghanistan, and Christianity is still viewed as an irrelevant foreign religion by most of the population.

The recent history of Afghanistan clearly shows the dangers that can spring from nations that have been devoid of spiritual light for generations.

The people of Afghanistan will not experience external peace in their nation until the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ, is enthroned in the hearts of people there.