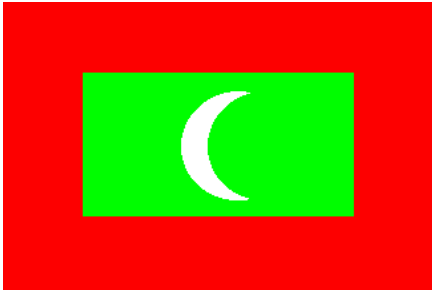
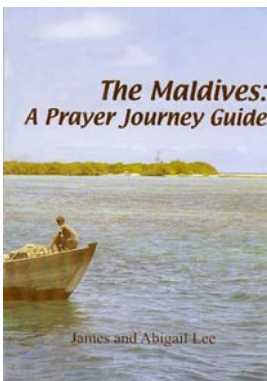




The Maldives - *Trouble in Paradise*



*The green in the Maldives flag represents the numerous palm trees, a source of life for the islands.
The red represents the blood of the Maldivian heroes who died for their nation.
The white crescent symbolizes purity and the Muslim faith.*



For information on ministry to the Maldives, or to order the book *The Maldives: A Prayer Journey Guide*, please contact:

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Few Christians around the world have ever heard of The Maldives. As a result, it remains one of the most unreached and unevangelized countries on the face of the Globe, with 100% of the population officially being Muslims. The Gospel has struggled to make any inroads into the Maldives, even though hundreds of thousands of Western tourists go there on vacation every year. The government closely guards the Maldivian people against the influence of Christianity, and

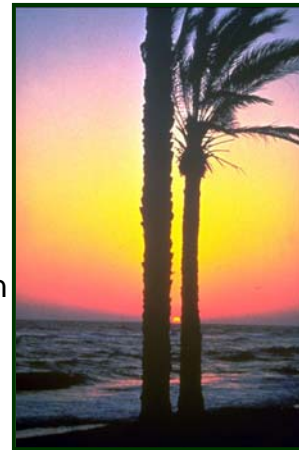
foreign visitors are largely segregated from contact with the normal people during their visits.



Let's look at some quick facts about The Maldives....

Quick Facts:

- **The Maldives** lies 160 km southwest of Sri Lanka. The country stretches 825km from north to south and 130 km from east to west.
- More than **99%** of the area is sea; less than 1% is land.
- **Population:** about 300,000.
- **Currency:** Rufiyaa (1 Rufiyaa = 100 Laari)
- **Language:** Dhivehi, which has probably been spoken for more than 2,000 years.
- **Main Source of Income:** Tourism, fisheries and foreign aid. The majority of food and various goods need to be imported.



Did you know that:

- The Maldives are a 100% Muslim nation?
- Maldivian citizens are not allowed to change their religion?
- Sharing about Jesus is not allowed in Maldives?
- It is forbidden to practice the Christian faith publicly, even for foreigners?
- The 2004 Tsunami devastated the Maldives, killing about 100 people and destroying much of the fishing industry?
- Maldives is listed at number five in the Index of Persecuted Christians worldwide?
- Maldivians do not have the Bible in their language?

- No local church of believers which meets regularly for worship has been established?

The Maldives are a collection of more than 1,190 islands, divided into 20 atoll districts. Approximately 200 islands are populated, plus an additional 90 islands set aside for tourist resorts. The largest island in the Maldives is 5 km long and 3 km wide. Most of the islands can be encircled on foot in an hour or two. The capital city of Male encompasses a tiny land area of just two sq. km., yet it is packed with 80,000 people. There are about 800 cars, 1,000 taxis, over 4,000 motorcycles and thousands of bicycles.

History

The earliest settlements in the Maldivian islands cannot be dated precisely. The islands are presumed to have been settled several thousand years ago by Dravidian people from the coastlands of South India and Sri Lanka who believed in folk religions and spirits. The arrival of the Royal Buddhist Dynasty put an end to the Dravidian government. They ruled the country over 1,000 years. This Maldivian-Buddhist civilization reached its climax in the 9th Century AD. During this period the Dhivehi language, script, cultural values and practices were formed.

The Islamic religion arrived in the Maldives relatively late in the 12th century AD. Nevertheless, in all the Maldivian chronicles it plays a major role. The pre-Islamic history has been rewritten and changed so that Islam is portrayed as an improvement for the country. Solid historical evidence and many archaeological findings are purposely ignored.



Many stories about important Maldivian people have been rewritten to promote the figure with false Islamic values. History books which tell about the true Maldivian history are not allowed in the islands.

Maldivians are very sensitive against any criticism or challenge about the “triumphant Islamic era which gives joy to the country”. To show hostility against other religions, especially the Christian faith, is considered their patriotic duty.

The country experienced massive social, cultural and material changes during the last 30 years. Up to the 1980's there were no paved roads, multi-storey buildings or computers. Books were handwritten and copied. Currently, the traditional life is quickly disappearing. The authentic Maldivian culture, including architecture, clothes, folk music and social values, is being replaced by western materialism and Muslim fundamentalism. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has been in power since 1978. He has managed to survive two coup attempts and is the Head of the State, the Government and all of the religious institutions.

Society and Culture

Maldivian society is governed by male Islamic clerics who propagate a moderate Muslim lifestyle. Women have more freedom there than women in many other Muslim states. They have the freedom to get an education, may freely choose their own spouse and have the choice to divorce him. Even though the present government has fundamental tendencies, there is a growing movement of stricter Muslim fundamentalists. For these people the Maldives is not Islamic enough.

Many Maldivians are seafarers and have the opportunity to get to know other countries while working aboard international vessels. They see different religions and can get what Christian literature is available in their language from abroad.

Music and dance are popular forms of entertainment in the whole country. Traditional forms of music are passed on from generation to generation. Raivaru, Farihi and Bandhi music is practiced in the islands and has its own style of singing. Maldivians are skilled craftspeople who create lovely crafts with resources that are available in the country. The skills are traditionally handed over from generation to generation. Unfortunately only a few of these skills still remain.

Marriage is practiced with very little care in the Maldives. An average Maldivian woman will get married four times in her life. There are islanders who get married up to 40 times! In Islam, it is very easy for men to get a divorce, and people take advantage of that. There are very few examples of a fulfilled and lasting marriage. Maldives has one of the highest divorce rates in the world! Because of the extremely high divorce rate, many children grow up without the love and care of both parents. This often results in the development of behaviour problems. The incidence of sexual abuse in the islands is staggering. Most young children are abused by their stepfathers, uncles, brothers and others.

It is estimated that 70% of the youth in the Maldives are regularly taking drugs! There are many cases of addiction to drugs and pornography. The combination of both has led to an increase in violent and inhuman sexual behaviour. Many of the young people are occupied with watching violent and sexual films or playing video games. Young people who were trained in Egypt, Malaysia, or Pakistan often become Muslim fundamentalists. Others who studied in non-Muslim countries are rather tolerant but very hedonistic. They focus on a materialistic lifestyle. Due to the drug problem criminality has



increased dramatically over the past few years, especially in Male. Unemployment, family problems, social and personal frustrations are often associated with crime. Many young people are disappointed by their leaders. Some youth join gangs and rebel; however, they tend to obey the Islamic orders of their government. Today there are some individual Maldivian youths who do not have negative attitudes against Christians.

Women



Premarital pregnancy is one of the problems faced by Maldivian women. They have to bear the shame and sometimes severe punishment, while generally the men responsible escape without even a chiding. Therefore many women choose to have illegal abortions. Even if there are only a few stable families, many stepmothers take good care of their stepchildren. Some women get married to foreigners as the local men sometimes have bad reputations. The women hope to go abroad in order to gain a higher quality of life. There are many sad stories of abused women. The ones who manage to go abroad may find themselves lonely and isolated in completely foreign surroundings. The history of Maldives shows that women sometimes held the highest office of the sultan. Today women hold important positions in the government.

Occultism

Many Maldivians are bound in magic and occult practises from childhood. Fear is widespread. The belief in witchcraft is still very prevalent. People are afraid of evil spirits which come from the sea or live in the trees. Until recently the social life in Maldives was deeply embedded in “fanditha”. Fanditha is a mixture of traditional medicine, spells, and black magic. It has its foundation in pre-Islamic rituals and superstition in connection with Arabic verses from the Qur’an. It is used for manipulation of political power, love and marriage relationships, inauguration of new ships, successful fishing, finding the guilty, curing sickness and efforts to weaken or kill enemies. Effective fanditha practitioners are highly respected and well paid for their work even if its influence has been decreasing in the modern Maldivian society.

Bible Translation

The Scottish poet and linguist John Leyden (1775-1811) started a Bible translation work with Maldivians. Unfortunately he died before the gospels were printed. Leyden's Maldivian translator continued the work under Mr. David Brown. Ten months after the death of Leyden the work had another setback, when tragically all the manuscripts got lost or disappeared. After many years of hard labour the Gospel of Luke was translated into the Dhivehi language and printed in January 2005. Often there are no suitable terms or expressions available in the Maldivian language to convey the concepts found in the Bible. Words like snow or city are very difficult to translate. Some terms which are taken from the Arabic language do have another meaning for the Muslim readers. Geographic details such as mountains (Psalms 121) are unknown to Maldivians, since the flat, coral islands lie no more than two to three meters above sea level.

Church



Maldivians take a huge risk if they accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. In so doing they bring dishonour and shame to their family. The government considers conversion to be a criminal offence that may be punished with imprisonment for months. Believers may be tortured in the prisons without pity from their friends or family who consider it the believers' own fault and the just punishment from Allah for leaving the religion of Islam. Honesty and integrity are attributes which are not practiced in the Maldives.

There is a great lack of trust and reliability in the society. Even believers in the tiny emerging church have a hard time trusting each other. To confess to a friend a mistake or sin is frowned upon. These cultural presuppositions make it very difficult for believers to apply the commands of Jesus regarding sin and broken relationships.

Up to now there is no group of believers that meets regularly for worship and fellowship. Only God knows the number of Maldivian believers. So far more than 20 Christian songs have been written in Dhivehi by Maldivian believers.

Christian Outreach

Humanly speaking it is not easy to share the gospel with Maldivians. The government controls the people, and the hearts of many islanders are not open for Jesus. People have been driven by fear. Even terminally sick islanders are afraid and may refuse the prayers of believers. There are Christians from other countries who work in the islands to earn their

living. Sharing the gospel is very difficult for them. If they are discovered they will be imprisoned or deported. Until now results of hard labour of many workers have been far below the expectations for a fruitful harvest.

Christian radio programs have been broadcast to the islands. An evangelistic website with many articles and downloadable audio files has been blocked in the islands in the past years although it can be accessed through roundabout means. Some time ago the Maldivian president spoke very negatively against the Christian radio programs. He said that a 100% Muslim country cannot tolerate the spread of another ideology. He warned the listeners of consequences and called the programs “a distasteful effort that undermines the Islamic foundation of the Maldivian nation”. He emphasized that the writers of the programs are trying to destroy the national unity of Maldives.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for doors in the country to be opened so that the King of Glory can enter in.

- Pray for the government leaders and everyone in leadership.

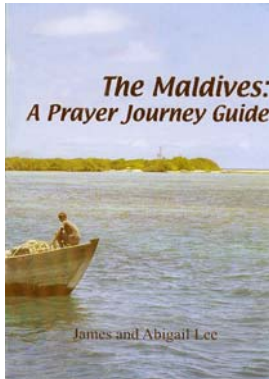
- Please intercede before God for the young generation of Maldivians!

- That God will visit them and reveal Himself to them.
- That they will hunger for truth.
- That God's light will break through and set people free.
- That Maldivians will become courageous and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- That new believers will experience and demonstrate the authority of Jesus over all powers and authorities.
- That the Lord will reveal Himself to them and heal them from their misconceptions of fatherhood.
- That God will heal their wounds from abuse.
- That God will build His church through this generation in the Maldives.
- For the protection of the children.
- For an end to the impurity and perversion that rules in the country (e.g. sexual abuse).

- Please pray that God will build His church in the Maldives.

- For the protection, strength and courage of the believers.
- For special trust and courage to reveal themselves to fellow Maldivian believers.

- For bravery to confess their belief in Jesus publicly and to stand firm in their faith.
- For foreign Christian workers who will help to bring local believers together.
- That the translation of the Bible can be finished in this generation.
- That the translated Bible portions will reach the islanders and bring forth fruit.



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