

The Turkmen: An Unreached People

by Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

This Central Asian people say about themselves, "Look at the heart of a horse. It is big and tough. No wonder the horse is a fearless animal—feeling no emotions. Then look at the heart of a man. It is small and soft. No wonder he is easily frightened and hurt." To strengthen their easily frightened hearts, the men of this people devour raw chicken hearts to strengthen and enlarge their own.

Only a hundred years ago, Europeans held that this people is "more like wild beasts than men, who have no sense of fear and will never submit. Even their women and children will die fighting." Although the former USSR in 1924 claimed them as Russian citizens, consistently they were a problem as to taxes and conscripting into the Soviet army. The Turkmen are a proud people who, as a people group, have never really been loved by anyone, they have suffered much, and worse, they have never been approached with the love of Jesus Christ.

Since the 10th century AD, Turkmenia has been invaded regularly by the Mongols, Persians and other peoples. Turkmen have developed military skills. Many still maintain a strong nomadic lifestyle. In the 1800s, they became a dreaded people of Central Asia, with a reputation as marauding brigands who preyed upon unsuspecting caravans and indulged in slave trading.

In Turkmenistan, some three million Turkmen live around the edges of the Black Sand Desert. They herd sheep and goats, grow mostly cotton and weave and sell perhaps the finest carpets in Central Asia. Another two million live in surrounding countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, with refugees in Pakistan, Germany and the USA.

In the arid remoteness of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen have been isolated from the rest of the world. In fact, some who were displaced by the fighting in Afghanistan in the 1980s, were shocked to find that their language and religion were not the only in the world. While many live in cities such as the cosmopolitan capital of Ashkabad, (population 517, 000) most still live subsistence life as semi-nomads.

All traditional Turkmen claim to be Muslims, while others, due to 70 years of Soviet domination, claim to be atheists. In most cases Islam is only a thin veneer over the old animistic beliefs and practices involving mediums, shamans, magic, charms and curses that describe their daily lives.

An Unreached-Hidden People

The Turkmen have not heard the gospel! But with the fall of Communism in 1992, a window of great opportunity has opened. Whole countries are capitalizing on the opportunity to influence the Turkmen. As Christians, what will be our part in seeing that the Turkmen hear the true way of Jesus Christ—the way that will fulfill their cultural heritage. The few Christian workers in Turkmenistan need God's refreshing and encouragement. Pray that more Christians will join them in ministry to Turkmen.

Only parts of the Bible are available in Arabic (translated in 1884) and the Gospel of John in Russian Cyrillic Script (1982). Translation of the N.T. in Turkmen (now the national language) has just been completed and translation of the O.T. is in process. But they have no Christian church! Among the more than four million Turkmen worldwide, only a few families are Christian.

Prayer for the Turkmen

* The Quran has been translated in Turkmen. Pray for the recent translating the N.T. in Turkmen, and the completion of the O.T. Pray for large scale distribution (sowing) of God's Word in all of Turkmenistan.

* Pray for more laborers to be called to reach the Turkmen; that missionaries may discover innovative and culturally sensitive ways to reach them.

*The Turkmen are searching for identity. Cults, secularism, resurgence of Islam are attempting to fill the void created by their Independence in 1991. Pray that barriers to the gospel may be overcome and that the Turkmen may find their identity in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

* Pray for the leaders of Turkmenistan to govern justly, and that some would come to Christ. Pray that the strong family ties in the culture may be vehicles for the gospel.

* Pray for the release of the Turkmen from the grips of superstition and the occult, that spiritual forces beneath the religion of Islam may be broken.

* Pray for the very small band of Christian Turkmen. Ask the Lord to give them courage and joy as they seek to serve Him among their people.

For more Information

More information on the Turkmen is available such as prayer and intercession guides, videos, a summary report on Turkmen culture and books and magazine articles. Contact the Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse in Colorado Springs, CO.; Caleb Project in Littleton, CO.; Anglican Frontier Missions in Richmond, VA.; Frontiers in Mesa, AZ.; People International in Pueblo, CO.

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