



Country Profile

IRAN

Iran is an Islamic nation in southwestern Asia whose government does not tolerate diversion from Islam. The *Koran*, the Islamic holy book, teaches that Islam should be spread by force, and that *Allah* (their god) will reward them for killing non-Muslims. “Muhammad said, ‘Whoever changes his religion, kill him.’ – Al Bukhari, Vol.9:57.”(1) Despite that, God is still bringing Muslims in Islamic nations to Himself, and a growing number are answering the high calling of martyrdom for Jesus’ sake.

Five Thousand Year History

Around 3000 B.C. the area we know to be Iran, was settled by Elamites. Later the Medes and Persians lived and ruled there. This is the area known as Persia in Old Testament times. Both the Medes and Persians were Aryans migrating into this new homeland from central Asia. They called this homeland *Iran* meaning



“home of the Aryans.” It was likely here that Daniel was thrown into the den of lions and miraculously delivered by the angel of the Lord.

During the 600s Arabs began converting Iranians to Islam. Dynasties rose and fell, and the nation prospered many times and in numerous ways. Some of their leaders promoted architecture and arts, land reforms, education, new industrial projects, etc. British and Russian influence brought Western prosperity and ideas of political reform. The people were Muslim, but the government was not.

The Loss of Blessing

Revolutionaries took control of the government in 1979 and declared it to be an Islamic republic, strictly controlling all areas of people’s lives. Not only did this cause severe economic problems, but it also brought strained relationships with Western countries. According to *World Book Encyclopedia*, this new government closed down newspaper and magazine publications, shut universities, placed restrictions over people’s personal freedoms, and banned political parties. (2)

Speaking of the results of those things, a converted Muslim from Iran says: “Whenever Islam is the primary focus of a government, the majority of its citizens languish in an abased existence. If those same people immigrate to a democratic society, where the pursuit of happiness is primary and their degree of religious expression is optional, they are apt to flourish.”(3)

The Church Under Pressure

The people of Iran are suffering under theocratic tyranny, bigotry, hatred, and cruelty. This, in conjunction with the anti-Western and anti-Christian propaganda, is causing many Muslims to seek answers in Christianity. *Operation World* (4) reports that in 1979 there may have been only 500 Muslim-background believers. Despite severe persecution, that number has multiplied to the undetermined thousands since then. Pressure of Islam against

Christians has been increasing since 1988. Church buildings have been closed, spies are sent into Christian groups, conferences are illegal, and witnessing is not allowed.

Generally speaking, the Protestant churches were small, introspective and struggling before the revolution. The traumatic changes have brought about increased church attendance and commitment, along with fervent witnessing and literature distribution. Within the first twenty years of Islamic rule, ten of the twelve Pentecostal pastors had been imprisoned and one martyred.

Freedom in Christ

The Islamic law requires praying Arabic-form prayers five times a day while kneeling on prayer mats. Many Iranians do not understand Arabic, and therefore are only repeating dead sounds. According to Mina Nevissa, (5) many Muslims experience a hunger of heart to be able to pray in the common Farsi language freely, anytime, anywhere. God uses such hunger in the heart to draw Muslims to Himself. He often reveals Himself through miracles to Muslim people that they might believe on Him. When they experience the blessed redemption of Christ they not only are free from sin, but also enjoy a great liberty from Islamic law.

Becoming a Christian makes them instantly a hated infidel in the minds of Muslims. The death sentence is given to Muslims being caught in possession of Christian materials in Iran. Often brutal torture precedes execution. Many Christians hire others to smuggle them out of the country to find asylum in other nations. Even though we live in an age of easy air travel, these Christians' way of escape is often still a rugged and hard land trip across desert and mountains by foot, donkey, cart, and auto.

It is not the will of God that any should perish. (6) He is extending His merciful hand into Iran and working miracles. His Spirit is wooing souls to Christ. Jesus the Saviour is redeeming lives unto Himself. Let us remember these persecuted, rejected, disowned, and suffering but triumphant Christians in our prayers.



¹Mina Nevissa with Jim Croft, *Miracle of Miracles*, Touch of Christ Ministries, Fairfax, VA, 2004, p. 205

² Ali Banuazizi, "Iran," *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1996, p. 406a

³ Mina Nevissa, p. 216

⁴ Patrick Johnstone, "Iran," *Operation World*, 21st Century Edition, 2001, p. 353

⁵ Mina Nevissa, p. 25

⁶ II Peter 3:9