



## **Monthly Missions Focus:**

### **Iraq**



Location: Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait

Area: total: 437,072 sq km – slightly more than twice the size of Idaho

Population: 26,783,383 (July 2006 est.)

Capital Baghdad 4,850,000

Ethnic groups: Arab 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%, Turkoman, Assyrian or other 5%

Religions: Muslim 97% (Shi'a 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%), Christian or other 3%

Languages: Arabic, Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions), Assyrian, Armenian

Literacy: 40.4%

### **Answers to Prayer**

1 Twenty years of war, diplomatic isolation and economic disasters have brought both a lowering of prejudices to the gospel among Muslims and an openness to witnessing and to reading the Scriptures.

2 The Christian community has suffered even more than the general population and in its pain nearly every denomination has experienced some renewal, revival and hunger for God's Word. Praise God that hundreds of tons of Bibles and Christian literature have been legally imported into and printed in Iraq.

3 A genuine Kurdish Church is now a reality. There are five known congregations of Kurdish believers and a scattered sprinkling of Christians in the KAR.

### **Challenges for Prayer**

1 A broken and demoralized society is the fruit of the harsh dictatorship.

3 Emigration is a major 'disease'; pray for Christians willing to remain as lights in the darkness.

6 Leadership for the churches is a desperate need. Many good leaders have had to flee.

8 The Kurdish Autonomous Region has emerged since the Gulf War and is under UN protection. It provides a homeland for many Kurds and Turkoman.

(statistics are compiled from *Operation World* and *CIA – The World Factbook 2006*)

### **Sunni Muslim Arabs in Iraq**

"As trust builds up along the way, I hope we will have a better and safer Iraq by the end of the year." These were hopeful words in the new Iraqi parliament. However, the majority of the Iraqi Shi'ite Muslims were justifiably skeptical. Sunni insurgents had been mercilessly setting off car bombs, trying to destroy Iraq's infrastructure and interfere with its lucrative oil trade.

Iraq has the world's second largest oil reserves, estimated at 113-115 billion barrels. It is now only producing 2.4 million barrels per day, and they are importing gasoline. The primary cause for this is attributed to the Sunni insurgents who are making it dangerous to work in the oil industry.

Arab Sunnis make up about 35 percent of Iraq's 26 million people, according to the CIA Fact Book. They have not wanted to give up the control they had under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. At the time of this writing, the Sunnis are becoming more agreeable to sharing power in parliament with the other sectors.

(*Global Prayer Digest – November 14, 2005*)

### **Muslim Kurds in Iraq**

"You will serve six years in prison for raping this girl!" After hearing the sentence, Shirin Amedi, Secretary-General of the Kurdish Women's Union, hugged young Shamsa, the rape victim. Amedi later commented, "This is a turning point for the Kurdish society in Iraq. Finally women are beginning to have rights. The day will come when there will be no more fear of being murdered by one of your own family."

Later Amedi talked with a group of Kurdish women. "The judge believed Shamsa! All he had was her testimony and the testimony of the rapist. Her family still will not take her back, but they are considering it. Her father said the family will not kill Shamsa to bring honor back to the family. All this is promising, but for now Shamsa still needs the safety of the woman's shelter."

Worldwide about 5,000 women die each year in "honor killings" by their families. These murders usually occur in Arab countries, often among Arabs or Kurds. In most cases the women were raped. Western and national women's rights groups are trying to eliminate honor killings. (*Global Prayer Digest – October 12, 2005*)