



Monthly Missions

Focus: Syria



Location: Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey

Area: total: 185,180 sq km – slightly larger than North Dakota
Population: 18,881,361 note: in addition, about 40,000 people live in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights - 20,000 Arabs (18,000 Druze and 2,000 Alawites) and about 20,000 Israeli settlers (July 2006 est.) Capital Damascus 2,550,000
Ethnic groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%
Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects 16%, Christian (various sects) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo). Prior to 1973 Islam was the religion of the state.
Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian widely understood; French, English somewhat understood
Capital Damascus 2,550,000.
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➤ Challenges for Prayer ◀

- 🌐 The Alawite minority regime has retained power by crushing all political dissent. Pray for both political and religious freedom.
- 🌐 Evangelicals currently enjoy good standing, so they are hesitant to jeopardize this by witnessing too forthrightly.
- 🌐 The Muslim majority has a false conception of what a true Christian is.
- 🌐 Pray for the Lord to infuse the church with zeal for the lost and give Christians godly discernment in their witness.
- 🌐 Conversions out of Islam are few, but increasing. Spiritual bondages, social barriers and religious prejudices must be broken down before some will take the decisive step.
- 🌐 Unreached peoples to pray for: the Sunni Arab majority, the Alawites, the Druze, the Kurds, and the Bedouin, Circassian, Turkmen and Gypsy minorities.
- 🌐 Missionaries are not allowed to reside in the country. Pray for those who pay occasional pastoral visits, and for a more open door to this needy land.

(Statistics are compiled from *Operation World* and *CIA: The World Factbook 2006*)

Alawites Of Syria

Alawites consider themselves Muslims, but among Sunni fundamentalists, they are thought of as heretics. Yet they hold considerable political power in Syria where the president is an Alawite. There is a sense of mysticism about them. Alawites have secret teachings that are only known from the inside and taught to specific individuals. In the past they had a form of moon worship, and they believe in reincarnation, a belief which goes against Islamic teaching. Zoroastrianism and the Greek philosophies of the Gnostics have influenced the Alawites. They are a break off of the Shi'ites from Iran and a specific break off from a split within the Shi'ites called the "Twelvers."

Alawites believe in the five pillars of Islam, but add two more. One is Jihad. Yet they do not believe it is necessary to actually practice these seven pillars. They also believe in a mystic Trinity which includes Allah, Mohammed, and Ali, his son-in-law. Though they worship all three, there is a hierarchy, with Allah at the top. Alawites do not have mosques. Despite their unorthodox beliefs, the Alawites are open to spiritual truth, perhaps including biblical truths. (*Global Prayer Digest – January 21, 2005*)

Kurds in Syria

Part of the Kurdish homeland is in Syria, yet Kurds are labeled by the Syrian government as "foreigners," and referred to as "alien infiltrators." The Syrian constitution recognizes no rights for ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Twenty percent of the Syrian Kurdish population, some 120,000, were stripped of their Syrian citizenship in a 1962 special census. By many accounts the 1962 census was carried out in an arbitrary manner. Brothers in the same family were often classified differently. As non-citizens they cannot obtain passports to legally travel outside and return to their own country, reports the Human Rights Watch.

Kurds in Syria are still stateless today. Syrian born Kurds are given "foreigner" identity cards. This means they are not eligible to own land, houses, or businesses. Nor are they admitted to public hospitals. The right to vote, the right to own property, and the right to have legally recognized marriages are denied. Children are in an even more tenuous position. They are listed as maktoumeen (unregistered) and singled out solely because they are Kurds.

(*Global Prayer Digest – January 21, 2004*)