

Monday 9th September

Ashura

Ashura is a holy time of grief and remembrance for all Muslims, Sunni and Shia, but is most significant for Shias (also known as Shiite). The exact date of Ashura depends on the sighting of the moon, so it can vary slightly from one country to another. It will be celebrated today and tomorrow around the Muslim world.

Through collective weeping, symbolic rituals and self-flagellation, Shia Muslims commemorate the sufferings and martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, who died in a bloody battle in Karbala, Iraq. The story of this battle in Karbala is orally chanted in homes and mosques during the 10 days and nights of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar year. Men, women and children all participate through chanting and weeping. Most Shias wear black to signify their grief and many fast from food and drink during this time.

On the tenth and final day of Ashura, families march through their streets chanting "Oh, Hussain!" Some men and boys in the community cut a small incision on their heads with a razor or knife, and some use chains to beat their chests and backs. As they march through the streets and chant in unison, men and boys hit their open wounds, causing blood to flow over their faces and bodies.

Ashura is deeply spiritual for Shias and defines them as a community. Although self-flagellation is not practised by all and is even condemned by some leaders, the ten days of Ashura are a unique time of communal remembrance and grief for both devout and nominal Shias.

- On the tenth day of Ashura, Shias believe God answers prayer and forgives them more readily than on any other day. Let's pray that many find forgiveness through a revelation of the truth of the gospel message.
- Shias place high importance on their dreams and visions. Ask God to give them dreams and visions to help them follow Jesus.
- Ask that Shia men will lead their families and communities to follow Jesus.

Tuesday 10th September

Mourning a Martyr on Ashura

You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever. Ps 30:11-12

Women also commemorate Ashura. The following story is from a frontiers worker:

The room heaves with black-robed women. They fill every inch of space and chat quietly while waiting for the rest of the neighbourhood women to arrive.

An older woman threads her way through the crowd and sits on a cushion in the middle. She begins chanting a story about a man named Hussain. Line by line, she recounts details of the battle that took Hussain's life over 1,300 years ago.



Photo by Freedom House

The old woman begins beating her chest, and a wave of grief sweeps across the room. Women rock and sway and cry as the leader punches out her mournful cries. The others chant loud, sorrowful responses in unison.

After about an hour, women pick up their stiff bodies and shuffle out to claim their shoes from a pile at the

doorstep.

They return home carrying the grief of Hussain's martyrdom—a narrative that has shaped this people's corporate psyche since the early days of Islam.

- Pray for Shia Muslims to discover Christ, the risen King who has defeated all sin, every sorrow and even death itself.
- Ask God to turn their mourning into dancing, leading them from grief to joy and life in Jesus.
- Pray for Shia communities to worship the Lamb of God who has redeemed people from all nations.

Wednesday 11th September

The origin of Sunni and Shia groups

The division between the Sunni and Shia Muslims dates back to the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 AD. His followers disagreed over who should replace him as the new leader.

Most of Mohammad's followers felt that the rightful successor was the Prophet's father-in-law and friend, Abu Bakr, whom they felt was capable of doing the job. However, a small group believed that future leadership of the Islamic community belonged only to certain blood relatives of the Prophet Mohammed or from among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God Himself. They began calling themselves Shia, meaning the "partisans of Ali." They said that Ali, the Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law and cousin, should lead all Muslims. Imam Ali, as he is known to Shias, was assassinated in 661 AD.

The two sides then engaged in a fierce power struggle. In 680 AD, Ali's son, Imam Hussain, was massacred along with 72 of his companions and family members during a bloody siege and battle in Karbala, Iraq. This battle led to the split between the Sunni majority and the smaller Shia group.

Hussain's death has come to symbolise martyrdom and suffering, two central values for Shias. His story emphasises their oppression within the world of Islam and their ideal of self-sacrifice. The public grief that happens during Ashura strengthens their identity as victims who have been denied their rightful role within Islam.

Many Shia Muslims make pilgrimages on Ashura to the Mashhad al-Husayn, the shrine in Karbala, Iraq, that is traditionally held to be Hussain's tomb.

- Pray that God will reveal to them that Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood was shed to redeem people from every tribe, tongue, language and nation – including them.
- There are literally millions of Muslims around the world named Ali, Hassan and Hussain. Pray for them to encounter the living Messiah.
- Ask God to move believers, all of us, out of our comfort zones to reach more Shias.

Thursday 12th September

Shia Muslims

Shia Muslims make up between 10% - 15% of the world's Muslim population and number between 130 and 195 million.

They live in strong, close-knit family communities, guided by religious leaders who give them practical, everyday instruction and spiritual guidance. Throughout history, Shia Muslims have not recognised the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams which they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or God Himself. Shias believe that the final Imam (Mahdi) will return before the Day of Judgement and be joined by Isa (Jesus).

The Mahdi will lead Muslims in a final war against Dajjal, the false Messiah, and Isa will kill him. Then the Mahdi and Isa, they believe, will rid the world of evil and unite all in submission to Allah. Today most Shia Muslims live in the Middle East in Iran, Iraq and the Arab Gulf, and also in India and Pakistan. The most remarkable work of God among Shia Muslims is among Iranians, both inside Iran and among the tens of thousands of Iranians living in the diaspora. He appears to be at work in every Iranian community!

God has raised up a number of very fruitful Iranian leaders, most of whom live in the West, who minister in multiple ways to their own people in person and through satellite TV and internet ministries.

Movements to Christ among Iranians show no sign of slowing. In response, the current Iranian rulers appear to be doing all they possibly can to slow the growth of Christianity inside Iran. They carry out unrelenting and often severe persecution of believers, especially of those who are seen as leaders.

Watch a great new video from PrayerCast about Shia Muslims [here](#)

- Pray for Jesus to reveal Himself to Shia Muslims as they expect visions from Allah's messengers.
- Pray for imams to turn to Jesus and lead many Shia Muslims to do the same.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of their understanding when they read the Injil (New Testament).
- Pray for endurance for persecuted believers.

Source of some material: <https://prayercast.com/shia.html>

Friday 13th September

Shia's Religious leaders

As Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell to the floor before him in worship. But Peter pulled him up and said, "Stand up! I'm a human being like you!" Acts 10:25-26

"What colour do you like to use on your fingernails?" a follower of Jesus asked a young Shia woman in a beauty shop one day. "Oh, I don't paint my nails," she responded. "My religious leader says that is forbidden for us."

Many Shia communities adhere to the teachings of specific men who serve as religious guides called marjaa, an Arabic word referring to "the one you emulate." High-ranking Shia religious leaders give judgment on all points of life, while lower-ranking leaders provide guidance on how to live within the judgments decreed by the top leaders.

An example of a famous high-ranking "marjaa" from recent history is Ayatollah Khomeini from Iran, and more recently, Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq.

- Pray that Shia religious leaders will hear the truth of the gospel and will adhere to the teachings of Jesus as their Supreme Leader and Lord.
- Ask that Shia communities will give their allegiance completely to Jesus.
- Pray that they will emulate Jesus and follow His teachings.

Saturday 14th September

A Prayer for Shia Communities across the Earth

Listen to this worship song, Move by Jesus Culture, as you pray for Shia Muslims today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYfso90zhHw&feature=youtu.be>

Followers of Jesus who live and work among the Shia communities prepared a prayer guide, which included a prayer for Shia communities everywhere.

“Most Gracious Lord of Heaven and Earth, You are the One who sent down Your Special One to this blood stained earth to form a New Kingdom that is not of this world. We humbly ask You to reveal your Special One, Jesus, to Shia communities all over the earth. We ask You to change Shias’ mourning into dancing. Lead them from this season of great grief to passionately celebrate You. Lord of the nations, You know the extent to which many Shias already understand how bloodshed in a battle for earthly power has formed their communities today, but we ask that You reveal to them how the blood of Jesus cleanses sin and brings people into the Community of the Redeemed.

May we see many Shias fall down with that Great Community in Heaven before Your Throne and worship you, our Precious Lamb and our Great Redeemer!

All for Your Glory!”