

Monday 14th January

An overview of the Caucasus

The Caucasus is home to one of the world's highest concentrations of unengaged Muslim people groups (MUPGs). Many of these groups are so obscure that they remain relatively unknown to most churches and sending agencies.



The tiny geographic area of the North Caucasus alone boasts more than 45 MUPGs, many of them small and isolated in remote mountain valleys.

The complexity of the region's peoples and politics can also be daunting. Prior to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, the Russian government expelled most of the foreign gospel workers from the region, meaning that the bulk of current workers are relatively new to the area.

However, there are signs that God is on the move! One worker reported that after only a relatively short time, a Muslim woman's study of the Scriptures resulted in an unprompted profession of faith. In another area, a labourer reports that those interested in spiritual conversations is on the rise. And perhaps most encouraging, the few Muslim-background believers who have been historically suspicious of one another are agreeing to cooperate in some church-planting initiatives.

Nonetheless, many more workers are still needed in this region. Be encouraged that your prayers are being answered. From Azerbaijan to Georgia, and from Adyghe to Dagestan, new workers are coming to the field.

- Pray for workers coming into this region, both those on the ground and those in the process of preparing to come there. Let's ask that they will be able to learn the language quickly and well and adapt to the culture.
- Pray for workers to find people of peace in each people group.
- Let's ask for boldness, humility and wisdom for the few Muslim-background believers in the region, as they begin to work together for God's kingdom to come in the Caucasus.

Tuesday 15th January

Gypsies – from gospel workers in the Caucasus:

There is currently a growing movement of Gypsies coming to know Christ. Workers have been helping local pastors to equip Russian Muslim-background believers serve this highly marginalised and rejected community. They are an itinerant group, travelling for work all across the region. Most of them are non-believers and do not adhere to any established major religion. Many others have some forms of animism and shamanism. Some are Muslim.

They live right on the edges of Russian society, despised, shunned, feared, discriminated against, begging for money, or collecting scrap metal, often loading it onto small donkey-drawn buggies. And yet they can be found in almost every large population centre throughout the North Caucasus and beyond. They also have a deep hunger for God.

In the central Caucasus, to our knowledge, there are currently three new groups of Gypsy believers in different cities, all in the process of becoming self-sustaining house churches. We don't know how many have been baptised, but it's at least fifteen.

To give an example of how this is spreading, one man believed and went to visit his aunt. He shared about Jesus and about the services they'd been having. She immediately responded, "I want those people to come here, tell them to come here and tell us about these things too." So the Russian leaders went to them, and at least four more people gave their hearts to Jesus that night.

This pattern has been repeating, spreading along family lines! People have been delivered from demons and healed from sicknesses.

Why is this exciting? Well, this people group is found inside almost every people group throughout the Caucasus and their presence is normal in almost every town. Imagine what might happen if they believed in large numbers and then got a vision to speak of God's love and grace to their Muslim neighbours?

- Pray God will do a mighty work among the Gypsies and they will believe in large numbers.
- Let's ask God to give them a vision to speak about His love, grace and mercy to their Muslim neighbours.
- As they pass through Muslim communities throughout the region with the good news of the gospel, let's pray God will use Gypsy believers for His glory and they will leave God's mark wherever they go.

Wednesday 16th January

This account is also from a gospel worker in this region:

Whenever the enemy's ground is taken, there is a backlash. We have heard of church services held for Gypsies, where people have turned up with sticks and metal bars to attack the leader. However, we have also heard of God's amazing grace. For those of us involved with this breakout of God's Spirit, this is an ongoing and ever-changing situation.

Recently I received an email, explaining that a MBB (Muslim background believer) who was leading work with gypsies had called to say that a group of new believers was being attacked. He asked for prayer and said that other MBBs were on their way to help.

Two hours later I received another email. It said that thirty-five to forty men from organised crime circles had turned up demanding money. There were two pastors who were also there with the Gypsies, helping to support the work of the MBB. Together, they and the gypsy believers decided to trust God to help and defend them. They confronted the enemy as sheep among wolves stating,

“We won’t pay money, but neither will we fight. We are Christians. If you fight against us, you fight against God.”

And then, in my friend’s words, “God showed up!”

The criminals began turning against the leader who started the whole attack saying, “What are you doing? We didn’t know these people were Christians. We wouldn’t have come.”

Obviously, the fear of God had come upon them. Everybody parted ways peacefully - even shaking hands! Among this group were Muslims and they too had seen the glory of God!

Undaunted, the MBBs then headed to a new village to share the gospel with another group of Gypsies.

God is clearly working here. What is interesting is that this is part of a worldwide movement of God amongst the Gypsies. People have been faithfully working and praying for the Gypsy communities for years and now are reaping the fruit of that faithful service and prayer.

- Pray that as this movement of Gypsies to Christ takes root in the Caucasus, the changes that happen within the Gypsy community will spill into other communities, including Caucasus Muslims that they live amongst.
- Russian believers are very involved in the work of praying and supporting the Gypsy communities as they come to Christ. Please pray that they will have a similar commitment to pray for, work with and support the Muslim communities of the Caucasus.

Thursday 17th January

Ingush – an unreached people group

The Ingush are found in Central Asia, but primarily in Russia. They are one of the most isolated groups in the North Caucasus, partly due to their location and partly due to the recent history of conflict in the region, sandwiched as they are between North Ossetia and Chechnya.



Recently a land swap agreement was signed between the leaders of the republics of Ingushetia and Chechnya. It resulted in substantial protests in Ingushetia. The Ingush maintain that the land belongs to them and the recent swap comes as another blow.

The Ingush are a people who have suffered a history of conflict. In 1944, Josef Stalin abolished Ingushetia and deported its residents en masse to

Central Asia. Their homes were taken from them by Russian ‘Christian’ Ossetian families. When the republic was restored thirteen years later, it had lost twenty percent of its original territory to neighbouring republics.

The Joshua Project tells the story of Imran, an Ingush man living in Ossetia. Imran's Ingush grandfather had been seven years old when his family and whole nation were gathered onto trains by Stalin's KGB on February 23rd, 1944. His grandfather survived the three-week train journey to the Central Asian steppe of Kazakhstan with no heat, no food, and only melted snow for water. Finally, in 1957, his grandfather was allowed to return to his home region of Ingushetia. Sadly, Ossetian families had resettled in his village home, where Stalin had put them to take over Ingush lands. Imran, whose own father died in the 1992 war between the Ingush and Ossetians, now couldn't bury his grandfather in the centuries-old family cemetery. Mercifully, Imran's new boss in a Russian construction firm happened to be a Protestant Christian. His new boss helped him to find a burial plot and even helped to pay for it.

Imran has seen two kinds of Christians; those who are Christian in name only, and those who actually follow the teachings of Jesus to love one another. The Ingush have had very little opportunity to see and experience the self-sacrificing love that Jesus calls for.

- Pray for the stability of this republic, particularly in the light of the recent protests and the recent abductions of human rights observers there.
- Pray for workers to catch a vision for the Ingush and come to work and serve in this region.
- Pray for breakthroughs of Jesus' grace in Ingush villages.
- There are very few known Ingush believers and they tend to live in scattered locations. Let's pray for the Ingush to seek and find their Saviour.

Source of some material: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12231/RS

Friday 18th January

Kabardians – an unreached people group

The Kabardians number over one million worldwide, with approximately 600,000 living in the North Caucasus. They are the largest surviving 'tribe' of the north-western Caucasus' Circassian language family. They too have suffered expulsion and destruction of ninety percent of their population from their homelands in Russia, following century-long Russo-Circassian wars that ended in 1864. The Kabardians' national survival in any form is almost unbelievable, having come dangerously close to ethnic extinction.

More recently there has been unrest in Kabardino-Balkaria. A group of Kabardians were trying to honour the 310th anniversary of a battle fought against the Balkars which resulted in confrontation when they tried to march through a Balkar village. Kabard students from regional universities have been returning to get involved in the protests.

Yet they remain a hospitable people. They have many sayings reflecting this such as: "a guest is a messenger from God," or, "the guest of a Kabardian is as safe as if protected by a fortress."

Honour for elders and those with recognised status is also one of their values. One familiar with the social rules of the Kabardians, known as Khabze, would be able to tell which persons in a line of people walking abreast down a pavement are accorded the proper places of respect in that line.

Khabze would also determine the intentional seating arrangement in a living room conversation or at a meal. Youth are trained to serve and defer to elders.

However, the Islamic beliefs of the Kabardians keep them very tightly insulated from outside influences. They are very resistant to the light of truth in the gospel. In urban areas, the Kabardians are often in leadership positions and wield influence over entire sectors of society. Their conversion could yield a great harvest. There are known believers among them, and although only few in number, they are growing.

- Let's pray that the future of the Kabardians will be filled with hope, life and blessing as they encounter the living God.
- Praise God for recent translations of the books of Ruth and Daniel in Kabard. Let's pray this will encourage believers and impact the wider communities. Let's also pray for translators as they struggle to persevere in this work, that they will be encouraged and know God's hand is on their lives.
- Pray for new believers who are struggling to live out their faith in full view of family and friends. Pray they will find joy and strength in Christ alone.

Source: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/11675/RS
<http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/issue/day/Kabardian-Cherkess-People/>

Saturday 19th January

Could God Save Me Too?

"God, could You save me, too?" Ahmet pleaded silently.

For ten months, Ahmet watched his wife, Ranya, as she was transformed. As a new follower of Jesus Christ, her anxious and manipulating ways were disappearing. In their place, he saw her blossom with joy and peace.



When Lisa, a long-term worker, first shared the gospel with her, Ranya was immediately drawn to Christ. But their village, nestled on a hillside in a former Soviet state in the Caucasus, had roots that stretched far and deep into Islam. When the other villagers found out that Ranya had become a disciple of Jesus, they rejected her.

The most severe opposition came from Ahmet, her husband. He yelled at her, cursed her and even locked her out of their house.

Still, nothing seemed to take away Ranya's newfound joy in Christ.

Ranya learned to endure her persecution with patience and kindness. When faced with Ahmet's cruelty, God gave her strength to respond with love and gentleness.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Her faithfulness and kindness caused Ahmet to wonder if a miracle was taking place before his eyes. "How can someone change so much unless God has met them?" he silently asked himself.

Ahmet began crying out to God in silent prayer, pleading for the same transforming miracle he had seen in his wife.

After several weeks, he could no longer keep quiet. His thirst for the Saviour grew so strong that he finally confided to Ranya, "I want to be saved from my sins, too. I need to follow your Lord. Show me how!"

Today, Ahmet enthusiastically tells his neighbours - the same villagers whom he helped persecute his wife - of the transforming power of God's love revealed through Jesus Christ.

- Praise God for revealing His transforming power, love and salvation to Muslims like Ranya and Ahmet! Let's pray this will clearly be seen by their neighbours, who too would desire the same transforming miracle in their lives.
- Pray that new Muslim-background believers would be strengthened to endure persecution as they testify to Christ's love.