

Monday 23rd March

Iraq today Pop: 39.8 million Muslim: 99%

There are rising tensions between Iraq and Iran. In early January, Iran fired rockets at two air bases in Iraq that house US troops, in retaliation for the killing of its top military commander, General Qasem Soleimani, in Baghdad on the order of President Trump.



There are also ongoing tensions within Iraq. It has been a battleground for competing forces since President Saddam Hussein was overthrown in 2003. Over the past few months, the Iraqi government has been the target of many protests over Iran's influence in the country, together with complaints of poor governance and corruption. The economy has been shattered by decades of conflict and sanctions, even though Iraq has the world's second-largest reserves of crude oil.

In late November, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi stepped down after more than 400 people died during the weeks of anti-government protests. A former communications minister, Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, was appointed prime minister in February this year. Mr Allawi, a Shia Muslim like his predecessor, has expressed sympathy with the protests and plans to form a new government.

Mission Network News has reported that local Church leaders and pastors who went to the recent protests and spoke with people discovered that some had rejected Islam. For the many of them, Islam is a cultural part of their life, but not a faith part and many of them are disillusioned and searching for something more tangible and real than what they consider to be a political system made into a religion. In the midst of this brokenness God is working and bringing many people to Himself.

For more information and prayer fuel for this country, watch this video clip from Prayercast: <https://prayercast.com/iraq.html>

- Pray for the new prime minister of Iraq, Mr Allawi, that he will form a new government free from corruption which looks to the interests of all.
- Pray for Iraqi Muslims to be open to hearing the gospel and that God would reveal Himself to them in supernatural ways.
- Pray that God would encourage believers to stand firm in their faith and reach out to their Muslim neighbours at this critical time when they are searching for answers and for hope.
- Pray for those who are traumatised and suffering to find hope, healing and peace in Jesus.

Source of some material: <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/protests-in-iraq-change-or-transformation/>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14542954>

Tuesday 24th March

Iraqi Arabs

“for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.” 1 Cor 16:9

The vast majority of the Iraqi population is made up of Iraqi Arabs. Roughly 21 million Iraqi Arabs live in Iraq, with hundreds of thousands more outside the country. Sunni Muslims, a large majority in the Muslim world, are a minority in Iraq (35%). Conversely, Shia Muslims, usually a minority, are the majority (65%).

Sunni Arabs dominated the country's government and economy throughout the 20th century. Under the rule of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party, Sunni Islam was the state-established religion. Saddam ruthlessly suppressed Shia opposition, and during his rule Shia religious leaders were particularly targeted and many executed.

Following the end of Saddam's regime, the balance of power shifted. Foreign geopolitical and military decisions created dangerous vacuums filled by the likes of Islamic State (IS), the Sunni jihadist group that grew out of al-Qaeda in Iraq. IS overtook northern Iraq and eastern Syria in 2014. IS has largely been defeated, but the remaining struggles are immense. Nearly every family has been touched by violence. Some estimate that as many as 500,000 people have died violently in Iraq since 2003. Sunnis have been trying to reclaim relevance and influence in the country since then. More than 3.1 million Iraqis, the vast majority Sunni, remain displaced from their homes. Baghdad hosts over half a million of these people, who have been displaced from Sunni-majority provinces. Throughout much of history and again since the overthrow of President Hussein, the Sunni-Shia divide has caused much suffering and sorrow among Iraqi Arabs. These tensions continue as the Shia majority struggle to rule the Sunni and Kurdish minorities, while also dealing with extremist groups.

Prayercast have produced a short and moving video about Iraqi Arabs that you can watch here:

<https://www.prayercast.com/iraqi-arab.html>

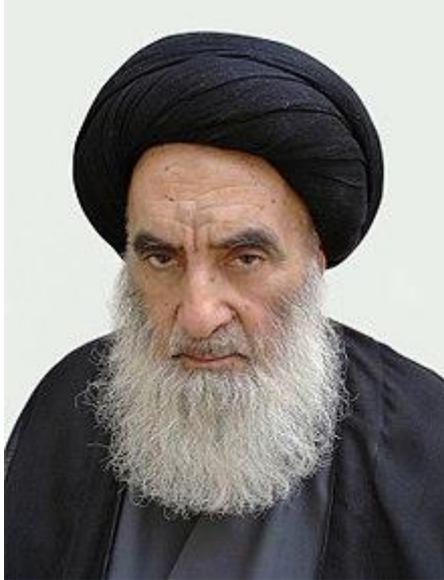
- Pray for an end to the Shia-Sunni divide, that has brought so much suffering to both sides and that God will send His Holy Spirit to break down division and bring an end to suspicion and misunderstanding.
- After a long period of being repressed, the Shia Muslims hold political power. Ask for wisdom for those in positions of leadership.
- Ask God to reach Iraqi Arabs through dreams and visions and through followers of Christ, so they may come to know Jesus in all His fullness.

Source of material: <https://www.prayercast.com/iraqi-arab.html>

Wednesday 25th March

Ayatollah Sistani, Grand Ayatollah

An Ayatollah is a high rank given to important Shia clerics. The word means 'sign of God' and those who carry the title are experts in Islamic studies and usually teach in schools of Islamic sciences. The city of Najaf in central south Iraq is regarded as the home of Shia religious authority. The Al-Najaf seminary there is one of the most important teaching centres in the Islamic world.



Only a few of the most important Ayatollahs are accorded the rank of Grand Ayatollah. There are more than 20 living Grand Ayatollahs and there is usually one in Iraq. The current and one of the most famous is Ali al-Sistani. He has been Grand Ayatollah since 1992. He started to read the Quran from the age of 5. Though born in Iran, he has lived and taught in Najaf since the age of 21.

Sistani's family traces its lineage back to Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad. He is the son and grandson of prominent Shia scholars who taught in the seminary in Najaf. He reached the top level of cleric, becoming a mujtahid, one who is entitled to make independent legal rulings based on

their interpretation of Sharia, by the age of 31. In Najaf he studied under and then taught alongside Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei for 32 years.

As the supreme religious authority in Iraq, Sistani has played a significant role in stopping sectarian violence and promoting democracy since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. He has often said, "Do not say, 'Our brothers, the Sunnis,' but say, 'Ourselves.'" He forbids sects from seizing mosques from one another.

When IS forces threatened Iraq, he called upon Shia Muslims to liberate Iraq from them, but only to fight within the Iraqi army. Thousands volunteered. He was commended by the United Nations Security Council for his role in combating terrorism and for his care of displaced minorities after the brutal assault of Islamic State jihadists in Mosul in 2017. Sistani wants Iraq to flourish once again as a unified modern nation.

- Ayatollah Sistani is the most influential person in Iraq and he also has a large following around the world. Pray for his salvation so his influence and reputation will lead many to turn to Jesus.
- Pray for his whole family to read and study the Injil (New Testament) with the mind of Christ and so understand the mystery of the gospel.
- Pray for Ayatollah Sistani's eyes to be opened and for God to reveal His glory to him so that he will follow Jesus.

Source of most material: <https://prayercast.com/ayatollah-sistani.html>

Thursday 26th March

Baghdad

Located on the Tigris River, Baghdad is the capital of a nation that gave birth to Abraham and Nebuchadnezzar, to ancient Assyria and ancient Babylon.



Before it became known as a place of battle and bloodshed, Baghdad was a thriving capital of the Islamic empire. From the mid-8th century until the 13th century, it was the centre of learning for the Muslim world and a place where Christians

helped Muslims to translate and preserve the Greek classics of philosophy and science in the famed publishing house, Dar al-Hikma (House of Wisdom).

Sadly, the glories of Baghdad's past are offset by its tragic history. It has always been at the crossroads of world power, having been devastated by many invasions, from the Mongols in the thirteenth century to the Americans and others in this. Iraq was occupied by Britain during WWI, but in 1921 Baghdad became the capital of the new nation of Iraq. Today it is estimated to have a population of more than 9 million, making it the second largest city in the Arab world. The population is made up of Arabs who live alongside Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians and Chaldeans.

A major challenge for these people is the monumental task of rebuilding their lives and nation. The economy, the infrastructure, the national identity and the very fabric of society have been shattered. A colleague of Arab World Media wrote: 'Baghdad is a city with a stigma. But it is a city that God loves, filled with millions of souls for whom Christ died.'

To read the full article about Baghdad by Arab World Media follow the link:

<https://www.arabworldmedia.org/prayer-guides/in-this-city-baghdad/>

- Pray that the Lord would give us a glimpse of His heart for Baghdad, a truly great city, with its millions who have never heard the Good News.
- Pray for Muslims and Christians to once again be able to work alongside one another there and for their example to spread to other parts of Iraq.
- It is difficult for workers to get long-term visas in Baghdad as well as in other parts of southern Iraq. Pray that workers will be able to find ways to remain in the city long term.

Friday 27th March

What is God doing in Iraq?

Christians fled Iraq in droves during the rise of IS. Some returned, but far too few. The loss of Christians from this country is a great loss for the communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Despite this some Iraqi believers chose to stay or even return to Iraq to live as witnesses for Christ among their neighbours. Christian literature has directed people to media sites, leading to increased

interest in the gospel. They are also hearing about the gospel through Christian radio, but it is a challenge to find people who can walk with these seekers and disciple them into mature followers of Christ who can, in turn, reach their families and communities.

Sadly, since many inquiries come from outside major cities, follow up is difficult as the security situation prevents easy access to these provinces. Unfortunately, the bonds of trust are so shattered throughout society that people are terrified of strangers. Nonetheless, numbers of Iraqi Arab believers from Muslim backgrounds are being disciplined and are growing in their faith. Although there are far fewer foreign Christians in the country now, some who are there are trying to gather interested people into Bible studies. Praise God, there are plenty of resources available for sharing the gospel with Iraqi Arabs.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis live in diaspora throughout the world and Christians are reaching out to them through friendship and service in countries where there is freedom to share.

- The few workers in Iraq are seeing incredible opportunities to connect with seekers face to face as a result of social media campaigns. Pray for even more opportunities, as well as more workers who speak Arabic who will be able to help share the load of follow-up with seekers.
- For those remaining, pray that God would encourage believers to stay and to stay strong where they are.
- Pray for Iraqi Arabs to open their homes and hearts to Jesus' followers.
- Pray for the diaspora to hear and receive the gospel and share it with those back home.

Saturday 28th March

To the ends of the earth

"Perfect love casts out fear and we love because God first loved us." 1 John 4:18-19

As we read yesterday, there is a great need for more workers to go to Iraq. Today we read the account of two Frontier workers who felt called to go there.

One wrote, "Christ Jesus is not just for Christians; He is for all peoples. And He calls His followers to the greatest commission of all: to go and love the least of these. One Sunday in church, we sang, "I'm going to live where God can use me, anywhere, anytime." My heart broke for the people of Iraq as I sang those words.



"No, not anywhere," I thought to myself, "but there, in Iraq. Let's serve God in Iraq. Let's foster a heart for people who are not like us."

Another Frontiers worker shared: "Our hope is in the great King Jesus, who is called Faithful and True, who is coming in righteousness to right every wrong committed in Iraq. Our hope is in the gospel, which is so much stronger than IS, so much stronger than Satan and so much stronger than

sin. Through His cross, Christ has purchased people who are without hope and brought them into His light. No matter what the situation - in genocide, in war, in persecution - the gospel cannot fail. It will continue to advance and is advancing, especially as we see many who are becoming disenchanted with the ways of sin and war and who are longing for the true King. And, most of all, our hope is in God.

We believe God is calling Christians to go and live in Iraq. Not just to hand out supplies for a few days, but to live there, for the sake of all that is good, for the sake of Jesus Christ's name, for the sake of humanity."

- Ask God to raise up labourers who have the experience as well as Arabic language skill to serve in Iraq. Those who go will face great hardship, but also the joy of sharing Jesus with Iraqi Muslims.
- Ask God to stir up the church to follow the example of the early church in Antioch, in sending out those with the skills to serve the unreached in Iraq (Acts 13:1-3).
- If you have been moved by what you have read and are wondering how to go about serving God in Iraq, then get in touch with us at info@frontiers.org.uk.