

Monday 4th February

Kazakhstan

Pop: 18.5 million

Muslim: 70%

Kazakhstan is a country the size of Western Europe. It is the world's largest land-locked country. Its president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has served since the country's independence in 1991, sees it as strategically placed between the Muslim East and Christian West. It is nonetheless, a Muslim-majority country and Islam is being promoted.



Khazret Sultan Mosque

In 1991, there were 170 mosques, more than half of them newly built. By 2013 the number of mosques had risen to 2,320. In 2012, the president unveiled the new Khazret Sultan Mosque in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, which is the biggest Muslim worship facility in Central Asia, holding over 10,000 worshippers.

Kazakhstan boasts one of the world's fastest growing economies and the nation's bountiful natural resources include enormous oil, gas and mineral reserves. Most of the population is bypassed by this wealth however, while a small, privileged minority reaps the benefits. The majority, especially in rural areas, continue to suffer from poverty and ecological disasters, including toxic waste, radiation and industrial pollution. Alcoholism and drug addiction are widespread, with heroin as easy to obtain as alcohol. Corruption and materialism continue to rise as well.

Within this economy live a huge range of ethnic groups. There are over 100 people groups, mostly Muslims, living there. It's a great example of multi-ethnic harmony. However, many remain unreached and do not have a gospel witness.

As well as Islam growing, the church also grew hugely in the 1990's, partly because of independence and partly because it was a difficult time and people were hungry for hope. Growth plateaued in the 2000's, and people are currently even talking of decline in church numbers, although there are dozens of churches. However, there is a growing interest in pursuing different church models that will be more relevant to the culture than some of the traditional foreign forms brought in by the Russians, Westerners and Koreans.

Praise God, the number of Kazakh believers today is in the thousands and Kazakhstan is becoming a missionary sending nation, with Kazakh believers reaching out to Central Asia and the Muslim world at large!

- Pray for Kazakh believers to seize opportunities to reach out to those within their country and beyond who do not yet have a gospel witness.
- Pray for President Nazarbayev and his leaders to hear and receive the Good News and to serve with loyalty, wisdom and a desire for justice.
- Let's pray for the people to continue to turn to Jesus and for the light of the gospel and the Kingdom of God to reign in Kazakhstan.

Did you know? In Kazakhstan, wolves outnumber people!

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

Tuesday 5th February

Shymkent Pop: 1 million

Shymkent is a strategic city in the south of Kazakhstan, close to the border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and so acting as a gateway to much of Central Asia. You can watch a great 2-minute video of the city [here](#)



Shymkent's name comes from the ancient Uzbek words meaning 'turf city' or 'city in the grassland'. The population is now just over 1 million people, and the rapid growth of the city means it has roughly doubled in size over the last 20 years. There are vast new areas of the city to the north which have been developed in recent years; however they are largely soulless new tower blocks which have yet to develop real communities. In the older more established areas of the city, many people live in Soviet-era apartment buildings that are drab and impersonal, though the city government is gradually working to improve these environments with redecorated

stairways and repaved parking areas.

Shymkent has always been an industrial city, with a lead factory (now closed) that supposedly produced over 75% of all the bullets fired by the Red Army during the Second World War. This led to significant pollution of lead and other toxic metals over a large area of the city that still affects the population today, though the government officially denies the problem. Other manufacturing industry in the city includes pharmaceuticals, cement, phosphorous, foodstuffs and an oil refinery. The majority of apartment buildings throughout the city are still heated in winter by hot water piped around the city through giant overground heating pipes from a large heating plant on the edge of the city.

Today, it is a city of contrasts. Whilst the city develops, with shiny new SUVs gliding past shiny new shopping centres selling shiny western branded goods, there are still so many stories of the less shiny side - a five month old baby abandoned by the river; another mother kicked out of her home by her abusive husband, now looking for some way of staying alive in the cold with her three children.

- There's contentment due to growing affluence and increasing consumerism that makes many people very dry spiritually. The enticement of the world is very strong. Let's pray for those living there, to find that true life and blessing comes from being in a relationship with our heavenly Father.
- Let's pray for a clear vision to reach the whole city with the Good News and in particular that the church in this city will reach out to those in need and practically demonstrate Christ's love for everyone.
- Pray for God to raise up Muslim-background believers who will bring genuine transformation to hearts and lives in this city.

- Lord, you told Paul, "I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:10). We thank you in advance for how this will prove true in Shymkent and throughout Kazakstan too!

Wednesday 6th February

Shymkent (continued)

The ethnic mix of Shymkent is significant; with Kazakhs in the majority but also a significant population of Uzbeks, since it is located close to the border with Uzbekistan. Uzbeks tend to be the manual workers who run the construction trades, with many migrant workers unofficially resident in the city, particularly through the summer months. After independence, many ethnic Germans were able to return to Germany and many Russians returned to Russia, however there are still many Caucasian faces to be seen around the streets - many are Russian, but some are Tatar, Muslims from southern Russia. There are also minority communities of Azerbaijanis, Turks and Uighurs to be found, as well as Tajiks and some Turkmen.



There are a number of churches in the city and whilst the majority of people in these are ethnically Russian, there are some Kazakh believers too - it estimated around 500-600. Many churches are quite traditional and not attractive to outsiders, with a mix of Russian Baptist, Korean and Western-style denominations. There are some smaller churches that are experimenting with more culturally relevant home-based expressions, but they are

yet to see significant growth.

Whilst Uzbeks are reasonably observant Muslims, most Kazakhs are fairly nominal, and for them their Muslim identity is primarily a cultural one. However, Turkish and Middle Eastern influences have increased the number of mosques in the city in recent years, and attendance there is growing, with more people saying traditional prayers and more women wearing head coverings than previously. Growing prosperity has resulted in fewer Kazakhs and Uzbeks being spiritually open, but as a people they are still immensely hospitable and open to other cultures.

- Pray for Muslim background believers to grow in maturity, unity and fruitfulness, so that, as they lead lives of genuine love and concern for their Muslim neighbours and communities, the transformation in their lives will impact those around them.
- Pray for the church to grow in ways that are relevant and attractive to seekers and new believers.
- Let's pray for Shymkent to become a city marked by love and respect for others, regardless of ethnic background. As a strategic city, may this way of living ripple out to other parts of the country and beyond, bringing transformation and healing.

Thursday 7th February

Story of fatherlessness from a worker in Kazakhstan

“In this country, there is a curse of fatherlessness. So many here have grown up without fathers, without any reference point of unconditional love and acceptance and without the emotional support from immediate family that produces emotional resilience.

The cultural mind-set is one where fathers are seen as disciplinarians, distant, critical, unloving, to be feared. And of course, those who have a father should be grateful, because so many don't. The role of the mother can be similar; in withholding love, using shame to control others, and making acceptance conditional. This all leads to questions about the deeper identity of 'who I am and whether anyone really wants me'. All these issues are very relevant to people in this culture.

Once Muslims come to know the Father for themselves, they begin a process of healing. And through that restoration process, they are starting to see more and more how broken their culture is and how it has damaged them and those around them.

For millions in this land, this is the reality that they are growing up with - shame, lack of love, fear. And the more we understand, the more we see this culture's deep scars and the brokenness that directly stems from the curse of fatherlessness all around us every day.

It's time to teach a new story.

One of the things that came out clearly to me and my family as we chatted with local Muslims, was the reality that we are called here as a family and that we can model what good fatherhood looks like, what unconditional covenant love really means, as they are intrinsic within our family unit. We want to look for more opportunities to get 'out there' as a family to engage with the wider community - though quite what that looks like, we're still not sure.”

- May the perfect loving Father bring his unconditional acceptance into the lives of many through His people here, that wounds and deep emotional scars may be healed, and that they might embrace the reality of their identity as children of the King, whole, loved and honoured.

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18

- Let's pray for kingdom workers and labourers in Kazakhstan, that they will be role models, showing Muslims practically what it means to be loved by God.
- Let's pray for this family and all gospel workers in Kazakhstan, to know God's leading, guidance and wisdom in all they do and to find ways to engage with the Muslim communities where they live.

Friday 8th February

Kazakhs – an unreached people group

Pop: 13.8 million

Muslim: 66%

The Kazakh, a Turkic people, are the second largest Muslim people group of Central Asia. Most live in Kazakhstan, making up about 60% of the population. Their language is the official state language.

You can watch a short and very interesting video of the Kazakh people [here](#).

The Kazakhs developed a distinct ethnic identity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.



Several of their clans formed a federation that would provide mutual protection. As other clans joined the federation, its political influence began to take on an ethnic character. During the nineteenth century, the Russians acquired Central Asia through a steady process of annexation. They eventually claimed the entire territory of Kazakhstan. Tragically, about half of the Kazakh population was killed during the Russian Civil War of the 1920's and 1930's. During this time, many fled to China and Mongolia.

Since the collapse of Soviet Communism, the Kazakhs have been searching for their identity.

Traditionally, they were nomadic shepherds; however, under Soviet rule, much of their land was seized and used for collective farming. As industry developed, their economy and culture became dependent entirely on the Russians and many were forced to move to the cities and live in houses or small apartments.

Family relationships are very important to them. The foundation of the Kazakh culture is hospitality, which always starts with a cup of tea. The host offers tea to any person who comes to his house. Guests must accept the kindness, or the host will be offended.

The Kazakhs embraced Islam during the sixteenth century and still consider themselves Muslim today. Changes in Kazakh society (mainly from a nomadic to a settled lifestyle) and an attempt by the Soviets to suppress religious freedoms have led the people to adopt Islam more closely. However, their Islamic practices have been combined with traditional folk religions. They also practice various traditional rituals before and after marriage, at birth and at death.

Many Kazakhs are disillusioned, poor and searching for something on which to base their lives. Praise God, thousands have found this in Jesus and the number of believers among this majority people group is growing.

- Pray for the window of opportunity for the gospel to be preached to remain open among the Kazakhs.
- As Kazakhs search for their identity, let's pray many more find it in a relationship with Jesus Christ.
"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
(John14:6)

Source: <http://en.etnopedia.org/wiki/index.php?title=Kazakh>

Saturday 9th February

Screwdriver and the Gang – a story from a Frontiers worker

Mark and his team didn't expect to get involved with the local gang when they opened up a fitness centre in a city in Central Asia.

From opening day, the gym was filled with young Muslim men from the neighbourhood. About twenty of them started showing up each day.

One day, a tall young man walked in. He had a commanding presence and his arms were covered in tattoos, which are frowned upon in the conservative Muslim community. Other men in the gym seemed to respect him. They deferred to him when he talked to them and they treated him as a man of influence.

He was called the Screwdriver. His gang controlled the neighbourhood around the fitness centre. Whenever someone needed to borrow money, the Screwdriver was the lender.

That also made him the collector—and a brutal one if needed.

The Screwdriver became one of the regulars at the fitness centre. He worked out with the other young men and often chatted with Mark and his teammates who helped run the centre.

"My family members are all Muslims," the Screwdriver told Mark one day. "But we don't really practice Islam."

He described the rough life he had lived and had little hope he could ever earn his way into heaven like good Muslims are taught to do. "I've sinned far too much," he shared.

"All have sinned," Mark explained to the Screwdriver, "and no one can earn their way to heaven." He shared that it doesn't matter how religious we are - we still can't depend on our own devices to save us.



"But there is a solution to sin," Mark added. He described how Jesus made a way for us to enter God's Kingdom. The Screwdriver listened as Mark shared that hope, peace and forgiveness are available through Christ.

"Then the only way I am getting into heaven," the Screwdriver stated, "is if God forgives me through Jesus Christ."

The two men prayed together and the Screwdriver became a disciple of Jesus Christ and committed to learning more from the Bible. He shared the gospel with his brother, mother and several of his friends, and they also believed. Many of his gang members also started following Jesus.

It's been months since then and the Screwdriver is still growing in his faith and studying the Word. He's also sharing the Good News with others and many more Muslim men and women have discovered Jesus Christ through his witness.

- Praise God for using this team's fitness centre to introduce the Screwdriver to Christ. Pray for the Screwdriver, his gang members, and his family to grow in love for Jesus, knowledge of the Word and passion for expanding the Kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to lead Frontiers teams in Kazakstan, Central Asia and around the world to men and women of influence for His glory!