

Monday 21st January

Tajikistan Pop : 9.2 million

Islam: 94%

Prayercast have produced an interesting 4-minute video of this country:

<https://vimeo.com/81011815>

Tajikistan is a beautiful country in Central Asia, but is remote owing to its challenging mountainous



terrain. It is home to the Pamir Mountains which rise to altitudes of 25,000 feet. It has hot summers and freezing winters and a vast variety of landscapes, ranging from glaciers, to mountains, to lush valleys. In the midst of this spectacular beauty, 84% of its people live in poverty; Tajikistan ranks as the poorest nation in Central Asia.

Once a Soviet Republic, Tajikistan gained independence in 1991. Following this was a costly five-year civil war, leading to the death of up to 50,000 people, as well as the emigration of one-tenth of the population. Tajikistan's economic

infrastructure has never fully recovered. Corruption, weak governance, power shortages and debt have left it a fragile nation. Over one million men are currently working outside the country. Although these migrant workers bring in about half the nation's GDP, they leave local villages mostly inhabited by women, children and the elderly. Border security remains a crucial issue, as Tajikistan is one of the first stops on the drug route from Afghanistan. Crime and corruption are increasing, as well as continued issues of domestic violence against women. Although human rights are guaranteed in the constitution, many prisoners, elderly, widows and orphans suffer much injustice.

Fear of radical Islam has led to many religious restrictions. Preaching, distribution of religious materials, and registration of churches is now very difficult, if not illegal. Journalism is restricted, as are news and social-media websites and there have been recent reports of periodic blockage of news and internet sites by the government.

With over 94% following Islam, few have had the opportunity to hear the gospel. According to Pray4Eurasia, over 58% of the people remain unreached. Despite these setbacks, the Tajik church is growing. The Bible has been translated into Tajik, and the Jesus film is available in most local languages. Economic hardship has led many to look for religious answers, providing greater opportunities for the gospel message.

- Pray for the gospel to spread and bring spiritual change in this country.
- There are many different people groups living there. Pray for them to live and work together in harmony.
- Let's pray for President Rahmon and Tajik governmental leaders. Pray that God will open their hearts to the gospel. It has been reported that the President is open to the Bible as he said it shows people how to live better lives. Praise God for the signs of a turnaround taking place in high places in government.

Source of most material: <https://prayercast.com/tajikistan.html>

Tuesday 22nd January

Gypsies

When Central Asia and Tajikistan were part of the Soviet Union, Gypsies were forcibly settled and their wandering, peddling and begging lifestyle ended. Much of their culture was lost as they were assimilated. Even their language declined. Their culture became like that of the majority they lived amongst, but they were never really integrated. Today, as then, they mostly live in separate villages. Few ever marry outside their group.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, their begging and peddling way of life resumed, but they now remain mostly in their villages and no longer move around. They can be found close to major towns and cities. Women sit with babies at the roadside begging, children knock on doors collecting crusts of old bread and men buy scraps of old metal. Some have normal jobs but always menial and low paid. Many travel to Russia for work.

Most girls don't go to school. Children who do attend often leave early, so that illiteracy is increasing. When revival has reached the Gypsies, they are often motivated to read the Scriptures and make great efforts to become literate.

On YouTube there is an informative 4-minute video clip of a gypsy group in Tajikistan known as the Luli: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3v8RN522S8>

Gypsies face discrimination and are widely despised, much like the Samaritans in Jesus' day. Although largely unreached with the gospel, this Muslim people group are turning to Jesus in increasing numbers.

- Let's pray that revival breaks out among the Gypsies in Tajikistan. As their villages are close to others, if revival starts in one place it can quickly spread via family networks to other gypsy villages and beyond.
- Pray that Gypsies will take the Good News to other people groups they live near and in the towns and villages where they go to.
- Pray for scripture and films to be available in everyday Gypsy language.

Wednesday 23rd January

The following is from a worker reaching out to the Gypsies:

I work with others providing medical help to Gypsies living in a nearby village. We have prayed for healing, told Bible stories and built good relationships. We specifically asked the Lord to lead us to the mayor of this village and He answered our prayers. We met his family and others on the street, because one day I took a wrong turn when trying to visit another home!

It transpired that the mayor's sister became ill over a year ago and since then one of my team mates has been visiting her and teaching the family how to do exercises with her so she can get some mobility back.

During our visits, the mayor told us he used to drink a lot of alcohol and beat his wife, but he stopped three years ago. We were very surprised that he spoke so openly about his past life. He said he regrets what he did. He has heard part of a Bible story but we have not yet had a deeper conversation about spiritual matters. This is our hope.

- We praise God for leading us to the mayor of our local village. Please pray for a deep repentance in his life and that he will know there is only One who can set him free from his guilt and shame.
- Please pray for opportunities for good spiritual conversations with the mayor and other gypsies in the village and beyond.
- Pray we can meet with local believers who have a heart of compassion and will come to gypsy villages with us.

Thursday 24th January

Shughni People Pop: >119,000 Islam: 96%

The Shughni are an unreached people group living in the rugged Pamir Mountains on each side of the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border.

Traditionally, upon entering a Shughni house, a person is expected to greet the shastan if no one is home. The shastan is the main column holding up the roof of the house and is decorated with carvings. In this way, you are showing respect to the spirits of his ancestors; otherwise, the master of the house will be offended.

Despite these and similar customs, Shughni claim to be followers of Islam. They follow Ismaili Islam which doesn't have mosques. Instead, the public centre of the village is a common house called the 'house of five.' This building serves as a place for communal feasting and marriages or as a type of men's club. They have private houses for prayer.

They send out missionaries to convert other Islamic groups to their brand of religion. At the same time, much of their doctrine is kept secret. They keep themselves separate from Tajiks, who form the largest people group and follow Sunni Islam.

Although they are isolated from Christian influences, portions of the Bible have been translated into Shughni. There are recordings of evangelistic messages and Bible stories in their main language, but they can still be hard to reach with the gospel message.

- Pray that despite restrictions, the Lord will open a door for the Shughni people to hear the Good News of the gospel.
- Let's ask God to soften the hearts of the Shughni people so they will be receptive to the gospel message.
- Let's pray for strong local churches to be raised up among the Shughni.

Source of most material: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14921/TI
<http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/issue/day/shughni-people-in-tajikistan/>

Friday 25th January

Reaching beyond one

Irina was new to the neighbourhood where Frontiers workers Vance and Kelly lived.

Irina and her family came from a village several hours away and didn't know anyone in the city. As an illiterate village woman, Irina was shy, lonely and insecure. Like other women in her society, she didn't go out in public often, and she felt uncomfortable venturing out of the home in search of friendship.



After several weeks of thinking about her new neighbours, Kelly plucked up courage and knocked on their door.

Irina barely opened it to peer at the foreigner smiling on her doorstep. She was suspicious, but she was also desperate for a friend so she invited Kelly in.

At the end of the visit, Irina hugged Kelly saying, "You are my only friend here."

After a few visits, Kelly invited Irina to study the Word of God with her. They have since completed eighteen Bible study lessons - from creation to Christ. And Irina is growing in obedience to Jesus Christ.

"Irina may be illiterate and insecure," Kelly says, "but she's also eager and open, more so than anyone else we know here."

To start a movement to Jesus Christ in this Muslim people group means reaching beyond Irina.

"We want to include Irina's whole family," Kelly says. "As a woman in this culture, Irina has little influence. It's unlikely that the men in her life would listen to her on spiritual matters."

Vance adds, "We want to help her introduce Jesus Christ to her family in such a way that the men say, 'tell us more!'"

- Pray for Vance and Kelly as they help Irina discover the hope of Christ and share it with her family.
- Pray that the Word of Christ would dwell richly in Irina, producing fruits of wisdom, worship and thankfulness (Colossians 3:16).
- Pray for the gospel to spread through Irina's family network, drawing many to Christ.

Saturday 26th January

Tajiks Pop: 7.2 million Islam: 98%

The Tajiks of Central Asia are the oldest surviving people group in that region and their homeland is Tajikistan. They number over 7 million, most living in the valleys below the Pamir Mountains. Tajiks have repeatedly been invaded and conquered throughout their history, which has been the major factor in their dispersion throughout Central Asia.

Asia harvest has produced a 3-minute video of the Tajik people:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=177&v=vNpoerdzAxY

Most Tajiks are mountain farmers and shepherds. Seasonal grasses create suitable pastures for raising sheep, goats, cattle, a few camels, and some horses. They also practice a remarkable system of terraced, mountainside irrigation so that wheat and barley can be grown at the higher, dry altitudes.

More and more Tajiks have moved to the cities over the past fifty years. Most families farm during the summer period, then return to the cities for the remainder of the year. This has resulted in an unstable work force throughout the region. Most of the urban Tajik live in government housing. Rural Tajiks live instead in village communities located on non-farmable, rocky land. There they build low, square, or rectangular houses out of unbaked mud. Pressed mud bricks made with stone are used for the foundations. Flat roofs are made of tightly packed earth and twigs and are supported by mat covered beams.

They are a hospitable people and enjoy entertaining visitors with tea and conversation. Over 98 percent of them are Sunni Muslims. There were almost no believers among them when Tajikistan became independent in 1991, but now there are estimated to be over 2,600. God's church is growing among these people.

- Ask God to raise up long-term workers who will go to Tajikistan and share Christ with Tajiks.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will give vision for outreach and a genuine burden for the Tajiks, to believers in this region.
- Pray for Tajik believers to live boldly for Jesus and share his ways with their Muslim neighbours, until there is a great movement to Christ in Tajikistan.

Source of most material: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/15201/TI