

Spiritual Landscape of I R A Q

Weapons of mass destruction sit not only in the hands of a volatile dictator but also at the center of religious conflicts between two kinds of Arabs, the Kurds, and several exotic minorities.

In doctrine and bloody rivalry, Sunni and Shiite history parallels that of Protestants and Catholics. Sunni standards for faith and practice derive primarily from “the written word” – the Qur’an and Sunna. Ancient biographical stories about Muhammad called Haddiths are compiled to make the Sunna. (Accounts of Jesus are gospels.) The principle of relying on “only the Qur’an and Haddith” parallels the Protestant reformers’ slogan “*sola scriptura*.”

As Roman Catholics believe Saint Peter’s divine leadership passes down through a succession of Popes, Shiites maintain that Muhammad’s divine authority continued in a line of Imams that began with Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law. Although the line of Imams terminated with the twelfth who is supposed to return as a messiah, Shiites still revere their Ayatollahs, but Sunnis disdain them the way Protestants disregard priests and popes.

Sunni orthodoxy, like Protestantism, considers venerating saints to be heresy (though many Sunni are not orthodox in this regard). For Shiites, tombs and relics of the Imams establish holy sites for pilgrimage. Shiite Islam’s four holiest cities, Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and Samarra, are all in Iraq.

In the war against Shiite Iran (1980 to 1988), Saddam Hussein minimized Islam’s distinctions and civic role. He united Shiites and Sunnis around himself and a common Arab identity.

During the Gulf War, however, most Iraqi Shiites allied themselves with the coalition against Hussein. Since then, Shiites have been marginalized and their pilgrimages restricted. Over half of Iraq’s population is Shiite.

Saddam Hussein’s tightly knit power base falls within the minority Syro-Mesopotamian Arabs who comprise just one quarter of the population. They are mostly Sunni Muslims of the Hanafite system of Muslim law and predominate centrally between the mountains and lowlands. Saddam Hussein himself hails from Tikrit, a town on the banks of the Tigris River just north of Baghdad.

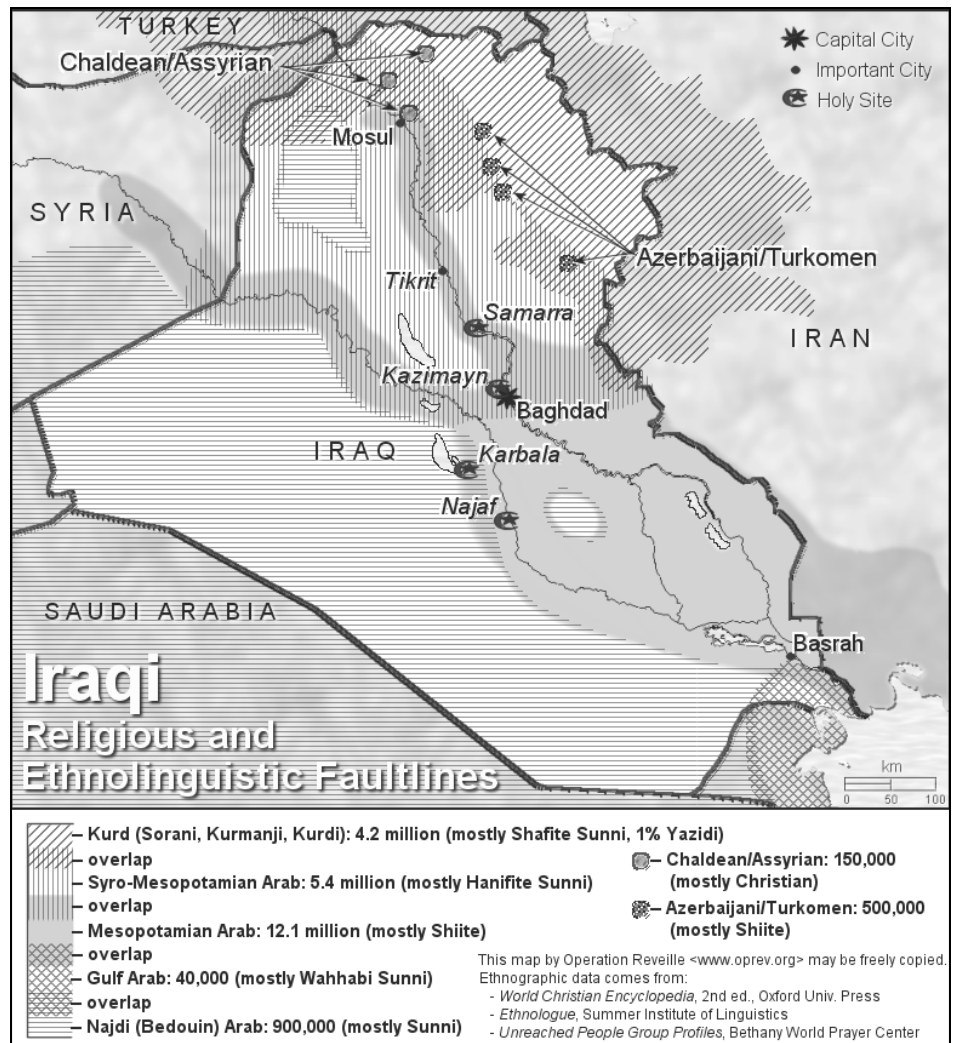
The Kurds are also oppressed. They live in mountains across Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. They are mostly Sunni Muslims of the Shafite system of Muslim law, but they speak several dialects and belong to different political factions. In their bid for national autonomy, they end up fighting each other more than their respective host country governments. Yes, Saddam Hussein has used nerve gas to subdue these rebellious citizens of his own nation, but he would hardly consider them to be his own people.

Other sometimes persecuted groups trying to keep a low profile include Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans, Shiite Persians (from Iran) Azerbaijanis (also called Turkomen), and Sunni Bedouins speaking the Nadji Arabic dialect.

Some Iraqis practice Mandaeanism which traces back to 2nd century gnosticism. Some of the Kurds practice Yazidi which mixes elements from

Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Mandaeanism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam. Jews in Iraq have dwindled from 250,000 before WWII to fewer than 200. The Baha’i religion was outlawed in 1970, but about 2,600 practitioners remain. Arab Christians in Iraq are few but growing.

Most of Iraq’s Christians have ancient roots. Like the native American Indians, Iraqi Christian peoples have either been killed off, assimilated, or “put on reservations” to be preserved as curiosities. Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syrians use Syriac liturgy, and still speak Syriac language in some villages. In small, mostly Christian communities, state schools actually teach Christian religion. Some Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholics established communities in Iraq when they fled post WWI Turkish massacres. Roman Catholic expatriates do medical and educational work around Baghdad and Mosul.



RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY IN IRAQ

Resources	Sponsors	Telephone	Web Site
Online digital Scriptures: various Arabic dialects, Azerbaijani, Farsi, & Kurdish dialects	Ethnic Harvest International Bible Society FarsiNet (Farsi) The Grace (Arabic) Arabic Bible Outreach Bible Gateway	- - - - -	www.ethnicarvest.org/bibles www.gospelcom.net/ibs/bibles ww.farsinet.com/bible www.thegrace.com www.arabicbible.com http://bible.gospelcom.net/languages
Christian Radio Broadcasting: Arabic dialects, Azerbaijani Kurmanji, & Kurdi	(broadcast frequencies & times) Trans World Radio FEBA	- 1-800-456-7897 1-562-947-4651	www.febc.org/phptest/wbr/index.php3 www.twr.org www.feba.org.uk
Christian TV Broadcasting: Arabic dialects & Farsi	Sat7 (program guide)	1-610-995-9151	www.Sat7.org
Audio Messages & Scriptures: various Arabic dialects, Azerbaijani, Farsi, Sorani & Kurmanji Kurdish	Faith Comes by Hearing Audio Scripture Ministries Bible Gateway (on-line in Farsi) Global Recordings Network	1-800-545-6552 1-941-748-4100 - 1-888-444-7872	www.fcbh.org www.gospelcom.net/aurora/pages/general/home.htm http://bible.gospelcom.net/languages www.gospelrecordings.com/catalog
Bibles & New Testaments: various Arabic dialects, Azerbaijani, Farsi, Kurdish dialects Aramaic & Syriac	Amazon.com Multi-Language Media The Good Way International Bible Society American Bible Society Scripture Gift Mission	- 1-717-738-0582 - 1-800-524-1588 1-800-322-4253 1-877-873-2746	www.amazon.com www.multilanguage.com www.the-good-way.com www.gospelcom.net/ibs www.americanbible.org www.gospelcom.net/asgm
Books & Literature: various Arabic dialects, Azerbaijani, Farsi, & Kurdish dialects	Multi-Language Media CCCI (<i>Four Spiritual Laws</i>) Arab World Ministries The Good Way	1-717-738-0582 1-407-826-2000 1-800-447-3566 -	www.multilanguage.com www.ccci.org/laws/languages.html www.gospelcom.net/awm/resource.htm www.the-good-way.com
Arab Christian Resources: audio, video, magazines, books & literature	Middle East Media Arabic Bible Outreach Good News Radio Hadith Al-Asdika The Light of Life Through the Bible Voice of Preaching the Gospel Call of Hope	- - - - - - 1-719-574-5900 -	www.middleeastmedia.org www.arabicbible.com www.inarabic.org/index1.htm www.domini.org/malaga www.light-of-life.com www.ttb.org/arabic.htm www.vopg.org www.call-of-hope.com
Farsi Christian Resources:	Farsi Net	-	www.farsinet.com
Jesus Film, Video & DVD: in all major Iraqi languages	CCCI, the Jesus Film Project Multi-Language Media	1-800-560-8713 1-717-738-0582	www.jesuskfilm.org www.multilanguage.com
Christian Videos: in Arabic note: VTV has many titles!	Jeremiah Films Arab World Ministries Films for Christ Vision Through Video (VTV)	1-800-828-2290 1-800-447-3566 1-800-332-2261 Cyprus 3574650953	www.jeremiahfilms.com www.gospelcom.net/awm/resource.htm http://EdenCatalog.com e-mail: vtvcy@vtvcy.charis.co.uk
Classic Bible Films (in English)	Mount Carmel	1-800-272-2442	www.mountcarmel.com/cart/videos/biblical.htm
Language Learning: phrases & products online self study courses Kurmanji dictionary & lessons	TravLang.Com Transparent.Com Ms. Cherie Rempel	- 1-888-245-1829 1-703-455-5741	www.travlang.com/languages/cgi-bin/langchoice.cgi www.transparent.com e-mail: CJRempel@cs.com
Bible Corresp. Courses: in Arabic & Farsi	Voice of Preaching the Gospel	1-719-574-5900	www.vopg.org/free/bible_corr.htm
Equipping for Understanding and Ministry: "Working with Middle-Easterners" online brochure resources on Islam from Center for Min. to Muslims resources on Islam from Arab World Ministries dialog via the Internet support for Christian women married to or dating Muslim men		1-770-410-6000 - 1-800-447-3566 - -	www.namb.net/cp/About_CPG/brochures.asp www.cmmequip.org www.gospelcom.net/awm www.answering-islam.org www.domini.org/lam/home.html
Recommended Reading: <i>Daughters of Islam: Building Bridges with Muslim Women</i> , by Miriam Adeney, Intervarsity Press, 2002. <i>Magic and the Kingdom of God: Church Planting Among Folk Muslims</i> , by Rick Love, William Carey Library Pub., 2000. <i>Ministry to Muslim Women: Longing to Call Them Sisters</i> , edited by Fran Love and Jeleta Eckheart, William Carey Library Pub. 2000. <i>Touching the Soul of Islam: Sharing the Gospel in Muslim Cultures</i> , by Bill Musk, Monarch Publications Broadway House, 1995. <i>The Cross and the Crescent: Reflections on Christian-Muslim Spirituality</i> , by Phil Parshall, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989.			

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