

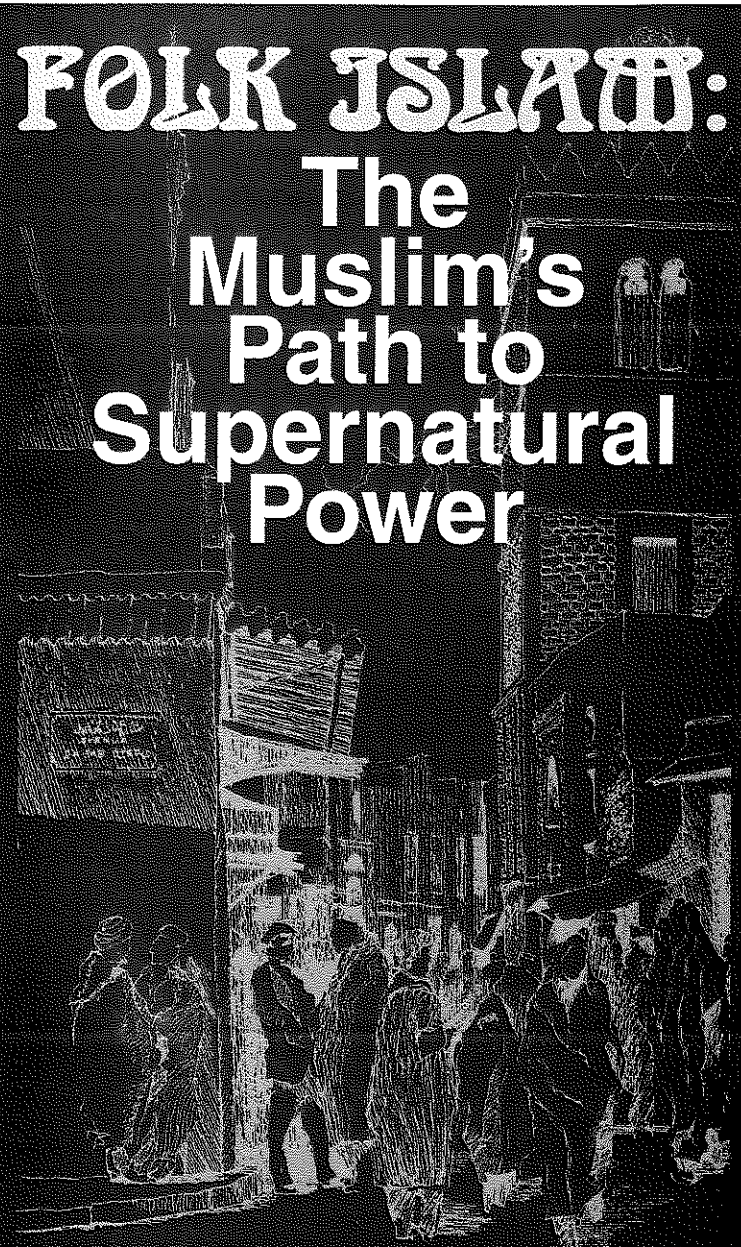
INTERCEDE

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FOLK ISLAM:

The Muslim's Path to Supernatural Power



While Muslims confess the greatness of God, many live in fear of evil spirits. Their religion teaches that there is one God and that there is no mediator between God and humankind; yet countless Muslims seek after someone to manipulate magical powers.

The Qur'an acknowledges that Allah is closer than one's jugular vein; yet He seems so distant, so unreachable and so inaccessible. Numerous times each day devout Muslims recite, *Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Rahim*, (In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate). They desperately want God to be merciful and compassionate, yet countless Muslims dread His unpredictable acts. Followers of Islam worldwide greet one another with *As-salam alaikum* (Peace be upon you). They talk much about peace, but without Jesus the soul is not at rest. Powerless people are in need of supernatural power.

People all over the world—rich and poor, sophisticated and illiterate—at times feel a desperate sense of weakness in the face of overwhelming problems common to humanity. The helpless and hopeless often take desperate actions to get in touch with supernatural powers. This phenomenon among Muslims is often referred to as Folk Islam.

What is Folk Islam?

Folk Islam is a broad catch-all phrase that describes the mixing of formal or orthodox practices with primitive, animistic practices. Animism is the belief that all of creation is pervaded or inhabited by spirits or souls; that all of creation is in some sense animate or alive. People try to influence these spirits by the use of magic or rituals intended to harness their supernatural power for human ends. This involves efforts to appease these spirits or use them to bring blessings to themselves or to put curses on their enemies.

Think of orthodox, or "ideal" Islam as a shopping mall—which consists of neatly organized shops, a colorful and clearly marked directory with names and numbers, established patterns, prices and schedules. Folk Islam is like the open market or bazaar—which is a fluid, free-flowing maze that sprang up without careful pre-planning. It developed as the need arose.

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Until All Have Heard

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
(Romans 10:14)

Jim Bennett, Director

Center for
Ministry to Muslims



Seeing Folk Islam as a Pentecostal Opportunity

Recently while teaching a seminar in a Central Asian country, I met a pastor I will never forget! Speaking through a translator, he introduced himself and three other pastors from his area as former Muslims. "We were all demon-possessed" he said. "We even began worshipping the devil and offered sacrifices to him. We were desperate to have our needs met. A few years ago a Pentecostal pastor from a regional city came to the mountains and preached the gospel to us. He laid hands on us and exorcised the demons; then we all accepted Christ as Savior. The gospel is spreading among our people and we now have six churches."

Defining Folk Islam

By citing the above incident, I do not mean to imply that every Muslim is demon-possessed; not at all. However, this story is an apt description of Muslims involved in Folk Islam. The author of our lead article describes Folk Islam as: *a broad catch-all phrase that describes the mixing of formal or orthodox practices with primitive, animistic practices.* Many missiologists would agree that up to 80 percent of all Muslims are involved in some form of Folk Islam, or Popular Islam. One veteran observer insists that *all* Muslims are involved to some degree in Folk Islamic practices. Another longtime laborer in a Muslim country observes: *I have come to the conclusion that the power of Islam does not lie in its dogma and practices, nor in the antithesis of the Trinity against the Lordship of Christ and His redeeming death, but in the occult practices of its leaders, thus holding sway over their people.*


We should look for the plentiful opportunities in Islamic settings to be instrumental in providing deliverance for those who are captives of superstition and occult practices.

Muslim power-brokers

Throughout the Muslim world amulet-makers and fortune-tellers make good livings from their crafts. From headaches to demon possession, from love potions to astral travel, the ordinary Muslim often depends for his very life, and certainly for his healing and help against his enemies, on a local religious practitioner. These Muslim power-brokers of the spirit realm are called by different names throughout the Islamic world: sheikhs, marabouts, pirs and such. Their job? To manipulate the spirit-world on behalf of desperate clients.

The delivering power of the gospel

I believe Folk Islam is an expression of hungry hearts whose deep spiritual needs are unmet. For them, God is distant and uninvolved in their daily lives. Pentecostal believers have much to offer Muslims. Our first emphasis will always be on salvation through the person of Jesus Christ, but we also believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver those who are bound by superstition and occult practices.

Every missionary going to Muslim areas ought to believe in and practice some form of deliverance ministry. Again, that is not to say that all Muslims are demon-possessed. It does mean, however, that all Muslims need deliverance of some kind. Pentecostals believe in the *delivering* power of the gospel. We should look for the plentiful opportunities in Islamic settings to be instrumental in providing deliverance for those who are captives of superstition and occult practices. 



Ethiopia

A Muslim mob attacked an indigenous Protestant church in the eastern Ethiopian town of Asaita in early March. The attackers reportedly shouted slogans against the United States and other Western countries. Police arrived in time to save the Mekane Yesus church from being burned, but much of the property inside the building was destroyed, including Bibles, hymnbooks and choir robes. The Muslim protesters—many of whom were students—attacked two Christian evangelists: Molla Tesfay, who is still receiving treatment in Addis Ababa for his injuries, and Gureta Ahmad. Police detained Ahmad, which officials said was for his own safety. But he is still in jail, casting doubt on the true reason for his detention. Muslims leaders accused Ahmad of proselytizing. Estimates suggest that the number of Protestants and evangelicals in Ethiopia has grown from 3.5 million in 1985 to 10 million in 2001. Most of the Protestant churches have active outreach programs, which can have an abrasive impact upon the Muslims.

—Compass

Armenia

This spring the CMM team added a new country—Armenia—to its growing list of nations where it is partnering to train workers for outreach to its Muslim neighbors. Since the year 301, Armenia has been an historically Christian country, though it is surrounded by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia—all predominantly Muslim countries. As a result of persecution from its Muslim neighbors in the early 1900s, Armenians were dis-

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is November 10. Please put this on your calendar now and pray earnestly for your suffering spiritual brothers and sisters around the world on that date. Many resources are available on the internet at www.persecutedchurch.org.

persed throughout the Middle East and around the world. Interestingly, Armenians are now strategically placed in the Muslim world to have great potential for spreading the gospel.

In the last few years Armenia has experienced a sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal church has grown to well over 50,000. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has come an evangelistic, missionary fervor. Though the country is very poor, they have an eager desire to spread the gospel.

A CMM team member taught courses on Islam in three different locations: Yerevan, Vanadzor and Savan. Future plans include returning to provide further training for workers from this nation.

—CMM

Nigeria

“Muslim leaders aim to eradicate Christianity in northern Nigeria,” says Nigeria’s Defense Minister, Lt. General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma. Danjuma told a gathering of the Northern (Nigeria) Christian Elders Forum that Christians are now under severe pressure. “Our religion is under assault in our country. If Christians are not careful, there will be a time that the propagation of the teaching of Jesus Christ will become an offense,” Danjuma said. He said the only way out is for the church and its leaders to ensure that indigenous citizens of northern Nigeria are massively recruited into the pastoral ministry so that they can effectively reach their Muslim brothers with the gospel. Meanwhile, the government of Katsina state has cancelled the teaching of Christian Religious Knowledge by removing its curriculum from all public primary and secondary schools, while making the teaching of Islamic Religious Knowledge compulsory.

—Compass

Turkey

In the wake of the deadly attack against an international church in Pakistan, Turkey put its security police on high alert around churches and synagogues. Turkish authorities specified that Islamic militants had threatened similar attacks against non-Muslim places of worship in the country. The International Protestant Church of Ankara (IPCA) received a telephoned bomb threat from an unknown caller. A man with imperfect but “pretty good” English called the church number, declaring that he was going to blow up the church. “We aren’t afraid to die,” the man said, and then identified himself as a Palestinian before repeating the bombing threat and hanging up. After consulting with the embassies representing members of the congregation and the Turkish authorities, the IPCA elders cancelled all Sunday services at the church the following day. No subsequent threats or cancelled church activities have followed the incident.

—Compass

India

Shocking slogans have surfaced on the walls of Ahmedabad, Gujarat state’s capital city and economic center, calling for the ethnic cleansing of Christians after Muslims have been wiped out. Gujarat, which has gained worldwide infamy as India’s “laboratory of fascist Hinduism,” is embroiled in communal riots that have claimed more than 2,000 lives. Since the riots began, Christians, along with their Muslim neighbors, have been living in fear. Atul Setalvad, a prominent Mumbai lawyer, said, “The last 10 years have seen a consistent, organized campaign of hate against Christians and Muslims in Gujarat.”

—Compass



FOLK ISLAM: THE MUSLIM'S PATH TO SUPERNATURAL POWER

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In practice Muslims range from the strict orthodox Muslims who reject all forms of magic, to those who overtly and consistently involve themselves in magical practices.

Between these extremes are perhaps the majority who covertly visit a shaman during a time of crisis or secretly use charms for protection. The actual life of most Muslims is quite different than the "advertised" Islam.

Folk Islam is about solutions—not so much concerned about life after death but rather focused on solving the everyday problems of the here and now. Since overwhelming afflictions are common to humans everywhere, most Muslims are involved in some forms of magical practices in search of supernatural solutions. Folk Islam is generated by the need of powerless people for power to overcome the problems of this life. If the spiritual well of Islam satisfied their thirst and met their felt needs, Muslims would not be involved in animistic practices.

Folk Islamic Experiences

Let's examine some common experiences Muslims encounter in everyday life and observe their search for supernatural power to resolve their situations.

Fear of Stillborn Child

Aisha is about to give birth to her first child. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, she is overcome with the thought that something is seriously wrong. She is paralyzed with fear—believing her baby will die at birth. Desperately wanting to hear a word of hope that everything will be all right, Aisha frantically calls for the neighborhood fortune-teller—an elderly lady who mysteriously knows the secrets of Aisha's heart and future.

Shame of Barrenness

Fatima, Aisha's neighbor and friend, has been married for six years and has been unable to conceive. She feels painful shame that it is all her fault. Fatima has been saying her prayers faithfully and has regularly visited the tomb of a saint to say special prayers. She believes this

shrine to be a place of power, but she is still barren. She is lonely and vulnerable. Then she hears about an elder of the community who is considered a holy man—a living saint—with supernatural powers. He is not highly educated in religion, but friends say he possesses *baraka*, special blessings or powers to bring results. Fatima is told that this man has magically helped others with this "positive spiritual force" he possesses. She gathers money that ought to buy food for her family, approaches the practitioner, kisses his hand and tearfully tells him of her troubles.

Fear of Unfaithful Husband

One of Saida's greatest fears is that her husband might be unfaithful to her. She knows she cannot be with him at all times to monitor his behavior, so Saida put a few drops of her urine in his tea. She hopes this specially blessed "love potion," this object of power, will magically keep him faithful to her.

Helplessness in Sickness

Daoud has a law degree from his country's esteemed university and is a respected superior court judge. His eldest son Ahmed is not developing properly and is barely able to talk. Little Ahmed's condition occupies Daoud's mind during the day, and it consumes his time and energy in the evenings and on weekends. At work he possesses authority to render difficult decisions in complex criminal cases, yet at home Daoud feels so helpless because of his inability to find a solution for his son, whom he loves dearly. He feels shame that his six-year-old child is not mentally ready to start school.

Judge Daoud secretly visited the sheikh, a respected scholar who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca and who eloquently teaches the great traditions of Islam. After explaining many mystical insights, this spiritual leader gave Daoud several instructions which included fasting on certain days, saying special prayers and memorizing and reciting certain verses of the Qur'an. Then Daoud was given a folded piece of paper which contained carefully selected verses of the Qur'an. This he inserted into a small leather pocket. Ahmed must wear this amulet, an

object of power, on his body. However, if Daoud is to truly witness the healing of his beloved son, he must make a vow and kill an animal for a sacrifice.

Fear of Failing Exams

Young Azamat has dreamed for years of becoming an accomplished architect. He envisions designing beautiful homes and functional office buildings. However, he knows if he doesn't pass the final exam, those dreams will never become a reality. Azamat visited a holy man, a person of power, who burned incense and prayed. Azamat was instructed to take a bath at midnight with seven types of flowers in the water. While bathing he must repeatedly mention the name of the headmaster of the school where he was going to take the exam. Following these directives would guarantee positive results on this critical exam.

Fear of Evil Spirits

Musa keeps having the same horrible nightmare over and over. He wakes up trembling in fear. He believes that jinn (spirits) are troubling him and causing this horror in his life. He is convinced there is great agitation in the unseen world among evil spirits at this time of the year. Due to a lack of sleep, he has become extremely irritable and difficult to work with. He has not been able to concentrate on his accounting duties at the bank. After visiting a practitioner, Musa now wears a white thread around his wrist and an amulet attached to his pillow at night.

Fear of the Evil Eye

From another person of power, Samira received an amulet to ward off the effects of the "evil eye" of a jealous neighbor. Samira lives in fear that someone will put a curse on her or on her newborn son.

Aisha, Fatima, Daoud and the other individuals described above represent Muslims around the world. They believe in supernatural powers—persons of power, objects of power, power places, power times and power rituals. Though these individuals may have vastly different ethnic and social backgrounds, they all have something in common: When faced with difficult situations, they all recognize their need for supernatural power, and

they look for someone perceived to be in touch with the spirit world.

Presenting the Gospel of Christ as the Answer

This is the spirit world in which the average Muslim lives. However, this phenomenon represents a marvelous backdrop for the presentation of the gospel of Christ to Muslims. How appropriate for a follower of Jesus to reassure Samira that she doesn't have to worry about the "evil eye" if God's eye is on her.

The suffering of some is so severe that they have given up all hope for recovery. Perhaps you have a Muslim friend whose life is filled with unhappiness to the point of despair or one who is anxious about something that has happened. They may be asking themselves, "Is this truly the purpose of life? Did God create us to live with such anxiety, hopelessness and fear of evil spirits? Is this the fate of the human race, with no hope of deliverance and inner peace? Is this the desire of Him who is *Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim*, the Merciful, the Compassionate?"

The answer, of course is "no!" Spirit-anointed followers of Jesus have the answers to the desperate search of their Muslim friends, for ultimate power is in Christ.

The Qur'an gives Jesus the unique title Al-Masih (The Christ) without explaining His significance as the Anointed One. The message to our Muslim friends must be *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him* (Acts 10:38).

All the people described above demonstrate that Muslims long for real and lasting solutions to real-life problems. The *baraka* (power to bring results) they are searching for when they go to a mediator to manipulate magical powers is illusive, deceptive and short-lived. The anointing that Jesus possessed and passes on to His followers is the true *baraka* that people are seeking today to meet the desperate needs of their souls. Through Jesus, Muslims can find equilibrium in a shaky, unstable and hostile world.

Muslims are seeking a mediator—someone who is in touch with God. They must know that the Holy Spirit is at work today. Will you be God's instrument to display true, biblical *baraka*—the anointing of the Holy Spirit?



Pakistan

Pakistan is a land of great diversity—culturally, linguistically and geographically. There are more than 90 distinct ethnic groups, largely due to the repeated invasion of the region throughout its history. Muslim politicians insisted on a separate state in the partition of British-ruled India at independence in 1947. This has resulted in continual conflict with India, which continues to this day, presently over Kashmir.

Population: 180 million

Religions: Muslim 96%, Christian 2.3%, Hindu 1.5%

Official Language: Urdu

Peoples: Indo-Aryan 78.8%, Indo-Iranian 18.5%, Dravidian 1.6%



News In Pakistan

Five people died and 46 were injured in the grenade attack in the Protestant International Church in Islamabad. One Pakistani evangelist responded: "This is the time the Christian community must look up to the heavenly security system. There is one who never sleeps or slumbers. He is our refuge."

—WEA Defender

Unreached People Group: Hindko

Location: Northern Pakistan
Population: 5.8 Million
Religion: Muslim, 99%

The Hindko are a smaller ethnic group that has intermingled with the larger ethnic groups within

Pakistan. They are divided into two sub-groups, Northern and Southern, as well as a number of dialects, including Kaghani. Very little detail is known about the specific lifestyle or culture of this people group.

The Hindko typically live in large extended family units that are male-dominated. A woman's place in society is low, and she is expected to perform household chores and fulfill the role of a dutiful wife and mother.

The spiritual needs of the Hindko are great. Only about 1 percent of them know Jesus as their Savior.

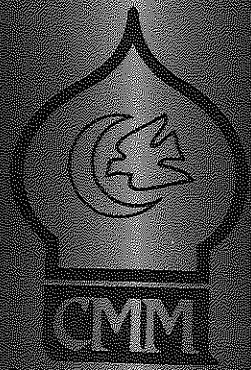
Pray that...

- ...God will raise up laborers who are willing to invest long-term service among the Hindko.
- ...Hindko believers will find opportunities to share their faith with their neighbors.
- ...the Pakistani government will be favorable toward Christians and allow them to freely preach the gospel.
- ...medical teams and humanitarian aid workers will go and minister to the needs of the Hindko.



Prayer Fellowship...

Praying for Muslims Around the World



Friday, September 6, 2002. Please pray

...for the students who are taking the Approaches to Muslims class being taught by a CMM team member at Evangel University in Springfield, MO. Pray throughout the month that their hearts will be open to learn how to understand Muslims and reach out to them with the gospel message.

...for the Muslim Awareness Seminar and Convention which is being held in Ecuador next week. Pray that God will guide the CMM team members as they share in a meaningful, culturally-sensitive way.

...for the many moderate Arabs who know fear and violence caused by the radical Muslims in their own countries, i.e. 100,000 Algerians have been killed in the last 10 years. Pray that God will open their hearts to the gospel and a mighty move of the Holy Spirit will be seen.



Friday, September 13, 2002. Please pray

...that God will continue to draw men and women to himself in Niger, a secular country with a Muslim majority. Pray for the Christian student movement to grow under new leadership.

...that God will thrust more laborers into Somalia. Nearly seven million Somalis are still waiting to learn about Jesus and come to the Savior.

...that a lasting peace may come to the areas of Indonesia that have been attacked by the Laskar Jihad for a long time. Pray that the Laskar Jihad will not be allowed to continue to cause havoc in new areas, such as Papua and Aceh where they are now engaged in aggressive Islamic propaganda.

...that God will give wisdom to a former imam in an African nation as he shares the truths of Jesus with other imams in that nation. More than 20 imams have come to Christ through this man's ministry and have been baptized in water and are being disciplined weekly at a church in the area.

Friday, September 20, 2002. Please pray

...for the CMM team member who will be sharing in an Islamic course at Zion Bible Institute next week. Pray for physical health and safety in travel for him, as well as responsive students.

...for the project of taping and dubbing the children's version of the Jesus film for the children of Bangladesh. Pray that many will see the film and understand the truth of the gospel story as they watch.

...for the Christian book project in Pakistan. Eleven titles are in various stages of publishing. Pray that these books will meet the needs of new Christians and those who are seeking the truth.

...for the churches in Azerbaijan that are being threatened with closure and harassment. Pray they will be strengthened and grow during this difficult time.

Friday, September 27, 2002. Please pray

...that God will give guidance to the CMM team members who will be teaching an Islamic course in Thailand at an institute next week. Pray that the participants will gain a greater understanding and heart for Muslims so they may effectively reach them with the gospel.

...for the Kazakh believers who are struggling to support their families. Praise God for the small businesses that have been started by some of these people through the generosity of a businessman. Pray they will flourish and provide employment opportunities for many other believers.

...for a spiritual awakening among Tajiks in Tajikistan and other parts of the world where they are living. May many who are outside come to know the Lord and return to share the good news within Tajikistan. Pray they will have an opportunity to hear about Christ.

...for Muslims that are seeking truth in the midst of the continuing war against terrorism. God is giving believers incredible opportunities to share the good news with Muslims due to the world's chaotic situations.

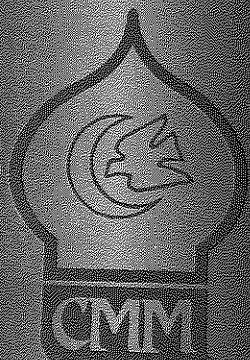


Urge, then, first of all
that requests, prayers,
intercession and
thanksgiving be
made for everyone.

—(1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)

Muslim Prayer Fellowship...

Praying for Muslims
Around the World



Friday, October 4, 2002. Please pray

...for the Church in Turkey. In recent months Christian schools have been closed, teachers deported, churches threatened and homes entered and computers confiscated. Pray that the Lord will protect and encourage Christians to remain faithful to Him.

...for Christian girls who have been kidnapped in Egypt. Pray for comfort for the families of those already taken and protection for other girls.

...that Palestinians will turn to the Lord at this time of need. Pray for protection of innocent civilians and for justice and repentance for those promoting terrorism

...for the Church in southern Sudan that has suffered unbelievable pain, violence and loss for many years. May the Lord help us to put ourselves in their place as we pray for them.



Friday, October 11, 2002. Please pray

...for a team of evangelists who are sharing the gospel through films in the villages of Mindanao, Philippines. Pray for God's protection, wisdom, cultural sensitivity and spiritual discernment.

...for the Full Life Study Bible project in the Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo languages in Nigeria. Pray that through this endeavor, more pastors will be better equipped to reach out to their Muslim neighbors.

...for Christians in Muslim regions of Ethiopia as they face increasing hostility. Several churches have been destroyed and believers attacked near Wello.

...for those around the world reaching out to Muslims in love and sharing with them the gospel of truth. Pray that God will give them wisdom and courage, and that He will bring peace to their hearts as they share these truths in areas where they are in great personal danger.



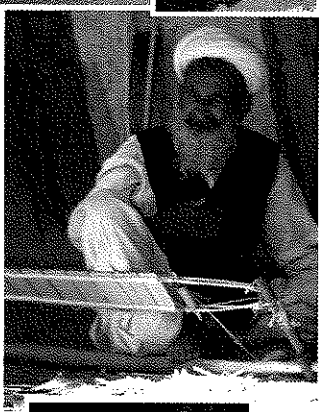
Friday, October 18, 2002. Please pray

...for the southern Pashtun of Pakistan and Afghanistan who represent one of the greatest challenges to the Church today. Pray for the few Christians, most of whom are secret believers, and for the penetration of the gospel to these people.

...for radio broadcasts that are being aired especially for Afghanistan. Pray that these new initiatives will bear fruit and bless the listeners.

...for the continuing production of Arabic literature, correspondence courses and Bibles being made available in several Muslim communities. Pray that God will use the literature to reach many with the gospel.

...that God will send more workers to Albania to teach and train the Albanian Christians. Thousands of villages still need to be evangelized.



Friday, October 25, 2002. Please pray

...for the increasing coverage in the Middle East by Christian programs by satellite television. Pray especially for the SAT-7 team as they work together to present programs that appeal to Arabs.

...for a worker who is reaching out to young Malians who are living in western Europe in a dorm-style housing unit. Pray for great wisdom in the presentation of the gospel to these Malians.

...for Christians in Turkmenistan who experience the least freedom of all 15 former Soviet republics.

...for the church members in Turkey whose church was nearly completed, but have been forced to stop construction. Pray for the pastor who is on trial for allegedly making illegal changes in the architectural plan of the church.



I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone

—(1 Timothy 2:1, NIV)