



## Unreached People Groups: Proximity Theology

By Jerry Falley

Jesus' command is clear, unmistakable and biblically sound. In Matthew 28:19, He instructs the Church to make disciples of "all nations." The original Greek renders "all nations" as "panta ta ethne." This is a direct and obvious reference to ethnic groups.

The word "proximity" carries the thought of being near to a particular place, specific time or certain relationship. Proximity theology looks at the Great Commission through the lenses of generational, geographical and relational views to gain a fresh perspective in providing an adequate witness to all people groups.

### Generational Proximity

Were Christ's commands given and a response expected only from those who were privileged to sit under His ministry?

Or, do they apply to believers throughout the ages? The Protestant Reformers led by Martin Luther were slow to launch a missions program. Perhaps the main contributing factor was their theology. The Reformers taught that the Great Commission pertained only to the original apostles. The apostles fulfilled the Great Commission by taking the gospel to the then-known world; therefore, the Church in later ages had neither the authority nor the responsibility to actively engage in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all peoples.

What about our generation? Are we accountable to the command of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations? Many of the nations considered unreached today received the gospel through the apostle Paul's ministry. Paul stated in Romans 15:19: "So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ."

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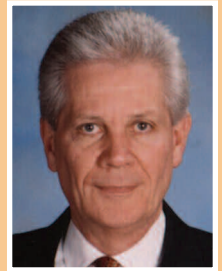


# Until All Have Heard

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

Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



There are 1.4 billion Muslims in the world. We believe every Muslim can and should have an adequate witness of Jesus Christ. The barriers are formidable; but with the Holy Spirit enabling through tools, talent and teams — the task can be done. The writer of our lead article challenges us to think about people groups generationally, geographically and relationally. Take time to read this article. Ponder and pray over it. Place it in your “toolbox” in preparation for your intercessory prayer time.

In this brief space I want to provide a few reminders about *Muslim unreached people groups*. The purpose is to encourage focused intercession for Muslim peoples in general, but especially for *Muslim unreached people groups*. Consider the following:

- A *people group* is constituted by people who have common history, customs, clan identities, marriage practices, age-grades and other obligation covenants, and inheritance patterns and rules. Language is a dominant identifying factor; although there are people who speak multiple languages, but still consider themselves one ethnic group.

- For missiological purposes, an *unreached people group* is defined as one in which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this group.

- An *unengaged people group* has no known believers and there is no known entity attempting to engage them with the gospel.

Please note a distinction between *unreached* and

*unengaged people groups*. An *unreached* group may have a few believers, but there is no indigenous church capable of evangelizing itself; whereas an *unengaged people group* has no known believers and there is no known entity attempting to engage them with the gospel.


Here are some powerful statistical reminders:

- 11,587 total people groups in the world
- 4,100 *Muslim people groups*
- 3,300 *Muslim unreached people groups* (a total of 1.26 billion people)
- 210 *Muslim unreached/unengaged people groups* of over 100,000 (with many more of less than 100,000)

Beginning with this issue we will highlight a *Muslim unreached people group*, and ask you to join us in praying for them. In this issue you will find a brief profile on the Kurds, a huge *Muslim unreached people group*. Thank you for interceding regularly and earnestly for the Kurds. As a result of concerted prayer, our prayer is that the Kurds move from being an *unreached Muslim people group* to a *reached Muslim people group!* To Him be the glory.

In closing, I would like to suggest two things:

(1) Visit Global Initiative’s two new Web sites — [globalinitiativeinfo.com](http://globalinitiativeinfo.com) and [jumaaprayer.org](http://jumaaprayer.org). On either of these sites you can discover how to pray for Muslims on a regular basis. Additionally, you can connect with us on Facebook through the group *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship*.

(2) For in-depth information on *Muslim unreached people groups*, visit [joshuaproject.com](http://joshuaproject.com). 



# Muslim World News



## Syria

### Face veils banned in Syria

Syria has banned the face-covering Islamic veil from the country's universities to prevent what it sees as a threat to its secular identity, as similar moves in Europe spark cries of discrimination against Muslims.

The Education Ministry issued the ban, according to a government official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak publicly.

The ban is only against the *niqab* – a full Islamic veil that reveals only a woman's eyes – not headscarves, which are far more commonly worn by Syrian women.

The billowing black robe known as a *niqab* is not widespread in Syria, although it has become more common recently – a move that has not gone unnoticed in a country governed by a secular, authoritarian regime.

"We have given directives to all universities to ban *niqab*-wearing women from registering," the official told The Associated Press. — AP

## Dagestan, Russia

### Pastor and apostate killed

A dynamic Christian pastor has died after being shot in the head as he was leaving church, in what is being seen as a bid to intimidate converts from Islam in the strongly Islamic republic of Dagestan.

Artur Suleimanov, 49 years old, himself a convert from Islam, was murdered by a gunman who approached and opened fire as the pastor got into a car outside Hosanna House of Prayer in the capital, Makhachkala, on July 15. He died from his wounds in a hospital a short time later. Nobody else was injured in the attack. Pastor Suleimanov leaves behind a wife, Zina, and five children, the youngest of whom is 12 years old.

Mr. Suleimanov's church is one of the largest Protestant churches in Dagestan. In a context where Christians face regular harassment and intimidation, his life had been threatened on several previous occasions. — *Barnabas*

## Indonesia

### Police demolish church house

Public order personnel on July 19 supported Bogor police officers who demolished a house where a church regularly met in a village in Bogor Regency, West Java. Clashes broke out with church members and others as police tore down the Narogong Pentecostal Church building in Limusnunggal, Cileungsi sub-district, and officers arrested 10 people.

Local residents, including non-Christians, had accepted the presence of the church, said local Block Captain Junaedi Syamsudin, but a group called the Forum of the Muslim Brotherhood of Limusnunggal had been working since 2008 to have the church eliminated.

Three months ago members of the forum went to Cileungsi offices to object to the church's presence, Syamsudin said, and the regent promised to demolish the house. Eddy Hidayat, head of Bogor police operations, said the house lacked a use permit. — *Compass*

# Unreached People Group

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Illyricum includes modern-day Jordan, Syria and Turkey. As a result of Paul's ministry, believers from all of those areas are worshipping around the throne of God in heaven today. Is the 21st-century Church obligated to make contemporary disciples to see God's objective achieved and His command fulfilled?

North Africa is inhabited primarily by Arab Muslims. However, this was not always the case. The territory was once dominated by Berbers, a non-Arab people who were at one time mostly Christians. Beginning in the seventh century, Islam gradually changed the society as Arab invasions slowly displaced the Berbers. By the 15th century, the Berber people embraced Islam. Since Berber believers from centuries past will be in heaven, is it necessary for believers today to take the risk, even to laying down their lives, to reach today's Berbers and bring closure to the Great Commission?

The answer is not debatable! Why? Because it is embedded within the Great Commission itself: "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," (Matthew 28:20). Our generation has a command to obey and an obligation to fulfill. Until the rapture of the

Church, each generation must assess the needs of unreached people groups, develop strategies and move in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring closure to the Great Commission.

## **Geographical Proximity**

Many missions groups define reaching unreached people groups with the gospel as simply entering another culture. The distance between two cultures is measured by cultural differences rather than kilometers. Missiologists often consider a people group to be reached when an indigenous church emerges with sufficient personnel and resources to proclaim the gospel to the rest of their people nearby. Once achieved, the missions-sending church can withdraw and focus on another unreached people group.

But scripture is clear that geography also plays a role in fulfilling the Great Commission. Jesus' command in Mark 16:15 to "Go into all the world," certainly emphasizes geography. Everyone in every place is to hear the good news. For example, the Afar people of East Africa are Islamic, but several of them have become Christians. However, those believers primarily reside in Ethiopia.

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What about the Afar of Eritrea and Djibouti? What about the Afar diaspora scattered throughout the world?

A golden opportunity is afforded to Christians in Kenya to establish churches among immigrants from various unreached people groups. Currently, many Somalis live in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. They are primarily Islamic and the Somalia government permits no overt expression of the Christian faith. But, believers in Kenya have no restrictions on evangelism. Suppose hundreds of Somalis in Kenya accepted Christ, and many strong churches were established within their community. Could we then say that the Somalis are now a reached people group? What about the country of Somalia and the large Somali communities in Ethiopia and Djibouti? What about the more than 500,000 Somalis resident in northeast Kenya and the 50,000 displaced Somalis that have entered Kenya's refugee camps during 2009? What about the worldwide Somali diaspora?

Nigeria Assemblies of God church leaders recently researched around 70 people groups within their country. These groups have no Assemblies of God church among them, although some had access to other Protestant

churches. The Nigerian AG leaders asked representatives of those churches: "How many new churches have you started among these groups in the last two years, and how many people have come into a personal relationship with Christ in recent months?" If the churches had seen only limited to no success, they considered the people group to be unreached. They carried their research to every city and village among the targeted groups. In places where no forward thrust of the gospel was evident and no adequate witness given, they considered the group unreached and in need of aggressive cross-cultural evangelism.

Clearly, a people group can be considered reached in one area but unreached in others. Therefore, geographical proximity must be given consideration and added to our missions strategy. Unreached people groups are reached when a strong indigenous church engages people in every country, city, town and village where they are located.

## **Relational Proximity**

Passages in Matthew and Mark state that the first action of the Great Commission is "go." A few synonyms  
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for “go” are “leave, travel, depart and move out.” The emphasis is on making personal contact with a specific people group. The primary thrust of Jesus’ command is to contact and connect with the group.


While doing field research in Africa among a number of coastal Islamic people groups, I was accompanied for two weeks by a national church missions director. We were deeply touched by the absence of any gospel witness among several groups. Making contact with the villagers, visiting in their homes, touring their schools, clinics and mosques, and eating with them in their local restaurants provided a basis for friendship. We built relational bridges for future presentations of the gospel. The missions director said, “I have traveled on the main road through this area at various times, but this time I met the people.”

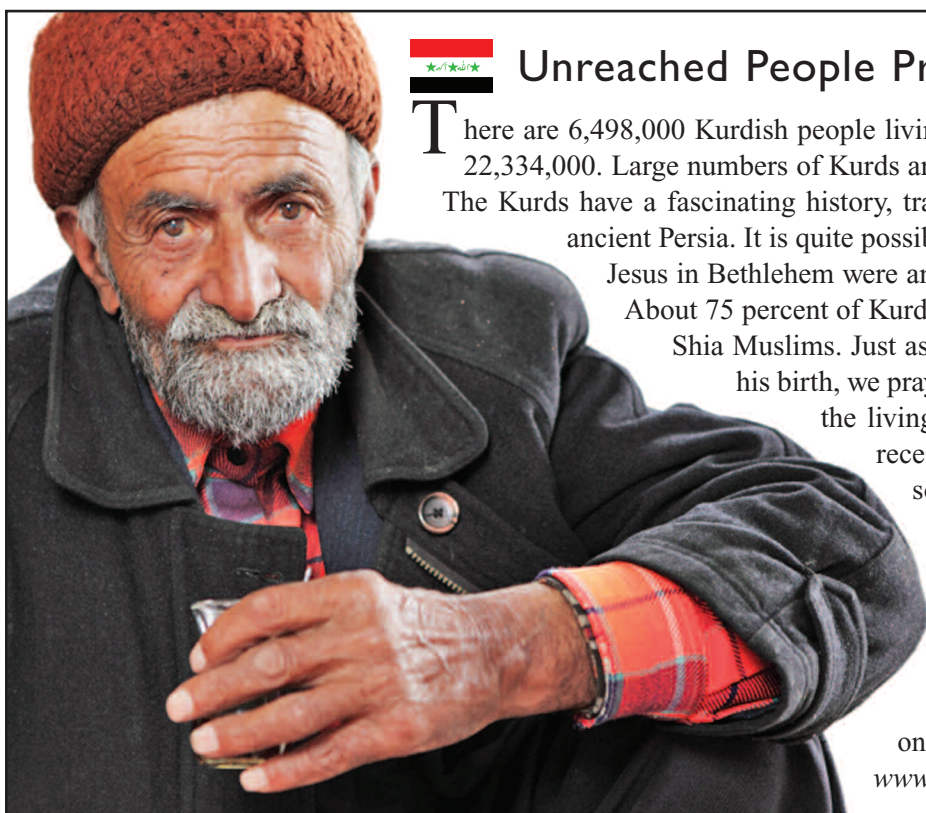
In 1995 I was living in Malawi. My wife and I had enjoyed seven years of fruitful ministry there. Then I made a trip to Eritrea to do research among the Beja people. Two colleagues and two Eritrean church leaders traveled with me in search of Beja living near the Sudan border. We located them, and the commissioner gave us a six-hour tour. We met briefly with several Beja chiefs, visited a “men’s only” market, walked through a Beja village and asked a lot of questions. It was my first


contact with the Beja, and my spirit connected with them and their lack of any overt presentation of the gospel.

Upon returning to Malawi, my heart was burdened for the Beja. I awakened in the night remembering the Beja chiefs and the desperate spiritual need of the people. After about a week, I shared my growing concern for this unreached peoples group with my wife. Together, we decided to leave Malawi and transfer to Eritrea to work among the Beja. Relational proximity moved us to action. A contact had been made, our hearts and spirits connected with the need, and we had the privilege to forcefully advance the Kingdom among the Beja.

## A Key Component

Proximity theology is a key component in Great Commission strategy development. All people groups must be reached with the gospel, and converts must be disciplined and churches planted. Jesus commanded that each people group receive an adequate witness of salvation through His atoning work on the Cross. May our generation respond enthusiastically, contact people groups wherever they are located and build a relational bond through which Jesus can be introduced as their Savior. 



 **Unreached People Profile: The Kurds of Iraq**

**T**here are 6,498,000 Kurdish people living in Iraq, but worldwide they number 22,334,000. Large numbers of Kurds are found in Turkey, Syria and Iran.

The Kurds have a fascinating history, tracing their roots back to the Medes of ancient Persia. It is quite possible that the Magi who presented gifts to Jesus in Bethlehem were ancestors of the modern Kurds.

About 75 percent of Kurds are Sunni Muslims and the others are Shia Muslims. Just as the Magi presented Jesus with gifts at his birth, we pray that the Kurds will once again present the living Christ with a gift – their lives – and receive Jesus’ gift of salvation. Here are some beginning prayer points:

- The small number of MBBs.
- *Yezidi* “Kurds” – an offshoot of Zoroastrianism and Islam.
- That church planting teams be raised up.

For further information on the Kurdish people, visit [www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php).



# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.*



**Friday, September 3, 2010. Please pray**

*...for Muslims in the Russian Republic of Dagestan.* Located in the north Caucasus beside Chechnya, tensions are heating up between extremist Muslim groups and the Russian government.

*...for the 200,000 Muslims of Angola.* Pray they would receive a true witness of Jesus Christ.

*...for the Muslims of Indonesia.* With approximately 13 percent of the world's Muslim population, Indonesia continues to experience strife as extremists exert more influence.

**Friday, September 10, 2010. Please pray**

*...for Muslims in Somalia.* Waves of fundamentalism continue to sweep the country, with radicals labeling televisions and satellite dishes as un-Islamic.

*...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) across the Muslim world.* Pray they would receive true shepherding and encouragement from fellow Christians.

*...for Christian witness in Bangladesh.* Bordered by India and Myanmar, Bangladesh is home to 150 million Muslims.

**Friday, September 17, 2010. Please pray**

*...for the Muslims of Turkey* to receive supernatural revelation of Jesus Christ. A large percentage of Turkish MBBs have accepted Jesus as Lord after having dreams and visions.

*...for Muslims in Bosnia.* Saudi Arabian money is driving a resurgence of mosque building and fundamental Islam.

*...for the Muslims of Argentina.* Despite its location in South America, Argentina is home to 750,000 Muslims.

**Friday, September 24, 2010. Please pray**

*...for Muslims in the U.S.* Pray they would receive a witness of Jesus Christ from neighbors and co-workers.

*...for Germany's 4 million Muslims.* Germany now has a higher Muslim population than Kuwait, Lebanon or the U.A.E.

*...against the fear that often grips Muslims* and hinders many from making a commitment to Jesus Christ — as they are fully aware of the consequences of conversion to Christianity.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND  
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. — 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.



**Friday, October 1, 2010. Please pray**

...for *Muslims in Oman*. Located to the southeast of Saudi Arabia, Oman officially guarantees religious freedom — but legislation follows *sharia* law and there is no freedom for Christian witness.

...for the *4 million Muslims of Thailand* to have an opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

...for *stability in Mauritania*. A growing presence of terrorism threatens to make Christian witness increasingly difficult.

**Friday, October 8, 2010. Please pray**

...for the *Maldives*. Pray that Christian radio would penetrate the Maldives, where all citizens are required to be Muslims.

...that through *dreams, literature, or Christian witness*, Muslims would have opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ.

...for *persecuted Christians in Yemen*, who are only a tiny percentage of the population.

**Friday, October 15, 2010. Please pray**

...for *Muslims in Somalia*. Without an effective central government since 1991, Somalia has been ravaged by waves of Islamic rebels, and the situation shows little sign of abatement.

...for *secret believers in Iran*. They often risk betrayal or death from their own families and kin.

...for *Muslims in Angola*. Despite its location in southwestern Africa, Angola is home to approximately 200,000 Muslims.

**Friday, October 22, 2010. Please pray**

...for *Shia Muslims throughout the Islamic world*. Pray that Shias would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

...for *Muslims in Central Asia*. In 1991, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan became independent countries following the break-up of the Soviet Union. They are home to 60 million people; most are Muslim.

...for the *Muslims of Burkina Faso*. Landlocked in western Africa, Burkina Faso is an impoverished country with 9.5 million Muslims waiting to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**Friday, October 29, 2010. Please pray**

...for the *Muslims of Egypt*. The Egyptian president appears to be terminally ill, and new leadership could cause severe political tremors. Pray that any change would result in greater freedom for Christian witness.

...for the *28 million Muslims of Afghanistan*. Despite a change in government, prospects appear dim for permanent change. Pray for God's protection of MBBs in Afghanistan.

...for *Muslims across Europe*. Pray that God would use missionaries, local pastors, literature, and MBBs to reach this growing demographic of Islam.