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FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST MISSIONS INTERNATIONAL

INSIGHTS FROM A RECENT TRIP TO IRAQ

Highway 2 is a modern expressway that connects the Kurdish capital city of Erbil, Iraq, with Mosul (ancient Nineveh), 50 miles to the west. Much of the distance along that route evokes a lunar-like landscape with endless miles of barren, undulating, gritty earth punctuated by random fields of rocks. Abandoned structures and crumbling walls occasionally disturb the monotonous scene. Here and there, a postage-stamp-sized house or barely distinguishable flock of sheep blend into the vast backdrop of brown.

Life seemed to burst forth for our group of 7 at the junction for Dohuk. Traffic thickened. Roadside kiosks appeared. A steep, winding side road provided ascent to the top of Zawa Mountain. In 2017, a 10-day youth campaign to clean up the approach and afforest the rocky, unforgiving soil has resulted in increased tourist traffic and the subsequent establishment of no less than 25 restaurants and 10 kiosks on the road up the 3,200-foot-high mountain. At least a dozen communication towers soared hundreds of feet above the rocky crest. Below, filtered by a dusty haze, stretched the vast, arc-shaped Nineveh Plain and the scarcely distinguishable buildings of a displaced persons camp, which houses some of the 300,000 Kurdish Syrian refugees who sought asylum in Iraq after the ISIS occupation of their homeland 10 years prior.

Nothing prepared us for the view from the opposite side of the road. Far below, from left to right and as far as the eye could see in the noonday haze, sprawled a massive modern city with expressways and high-rises—a bustling, bursting-at-the-seams metropolis. The view was jolting! The enormity of it all was so vast—so unexpected—so incongruous with the other side of the mountain that we could scarcely process its vastness.

Four years ago, by the suggestion of our CRI Iraqi partners, we moved our tower from Bartilla (Mosul) to this mountain near Dohuk. “We will reach—not 5 million—but 10 million people,” they told us. It was just a number! It had no real meaning—until we saw it! Then reality hit! One lone tower piercing the heavens could reach this sea of humanity! It was incomprehensible! We were overwhelmed!

Aboud, the intelligent, Kurdish-Muslim, entrepreneur-owner of our rented tower, was working at the site with a group of men. One mixed rocks, dirt, and cement powder together in a pile on the ground. Another was building a wall of concrete blocks and packing the cement mixture into the empty spaces. He smiled at us and held his thumb up as if seeking our approval. We gave him a smile in return and nodded our heads. “Good!” we praised him. He smiled back—satisfied!

After a lengthy Arabic discussion with Pastor Maher, Aboud, who spoke some English, explained the technical improvements to the tower that would help CRI’s Iraqi radio station in Dohuk to produce a stronger, clearer signal. He proudly told us that all the men who worked for him were Syrian refugees. Then he gazed at the tower, looked back at us, and said quietly, “They listen!” Those two words put faces on CRI’s 20-year, 6-station, radio-network-investment in Iraq. These men—war-weary, Kurdish-Muslim refugees who were shoveling gravel, leveling concrete, and building a wall—they listen! We could hardly contain our emotions!

LOCAL CHURCHES MULTIPLYING LOCAL CHURCHES

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But the surprises were not over. Aboud questioned Pastor Maher: “Do you want to broadcast in Syria?” Our hearts leaped at the prospect of another restricted country opening to the unfiltered Gospel. “I can get you in,” Aboud announced matter-of-factly.

How? we wondered. A 10-year civil war in Syria has pushed the world’s oldest Christian community to the brink of extinction. Of the 2 million Christians (the total of every denomination) recorded in 2011, some estimate fewer than 50,000 to 300,000 remain because many families have emigrated to safer countries. Those remaining face a possible new round of purges as the recent Islamic government seeks to solidify its power. The 2,000-year-old continuous Christian presence in Syria is almost extinct. Our brains were telling us that broadcasting in Syria was impossible, but our hearts wanted to believe. “How?” we questioned again. Aboud smiled.

It was better not to ask!

IRAN

Multiplying Converts

Iranians are hopeless. Their repressive government has stifled every avenue of freedom and personal expression. The economy is on the brink of collapse. Inflation is soaring. Drug use and suicide statistics are catastrophic. Satellite television and the Internet are the only outlets to glimpse a better world. Iran Alive, a 24-hour Christian television network, has recorded over 15,000 personal decisions for Jesus Christ in 2025 and over 100,000 since their inception in 2012. CRI Broadcaster Michael Germi preaches multiple times per week on Iran Alive. He has discipled dozens of converts through his online Bible classes, has trained several men to be pastors, and has helped them start churches in the Middle East.

IRAQ

Two New Stations

New Testament Baptist Radio (NTBR) in Baghdad, Iraq, has added 2 more stations to their network of 6. Al Nasiriyah (ancient Ur of the Chaldees) and Al Amarah rebroadcast the signal from CRI’s flagship station in Baghdad. The government of Iraq is renting tower space to NTBR at a reduced rate so that an additional 1.3 million Iraqis are able to hear Christian programming 24 hours per day. Now, 85 percent of the country is able to hear the Good News.

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