

AUG 2025

# MISSION PATHWAY

PRAY FOR THE UNREACHED

IRAN



CROSSROADS  
mission



# IRAN

## FLAME, CRESCENT, CROSS

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Writer: Rita / Editor: Isa

*Photo by Shahab Zolfaghari on unsplash*

# The Pride of the Iranian People



## The Persian Empire

### The first empire to span Europe, Asia, and Africa

More than 2,500 years ago, a Persian king established the first empire in history to stretch across three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. Cyrus the Great was not only a military genius; he also left behind the Cyrus Cylinder, which records his policy of tolerance toward conquered peoples. The United Nations regards it as the world's first declaration of human rights.

After conquering Babylon, Cyrus freed the Jews and allowed them to return home—his name is recorded in the biblical book of Ezra.

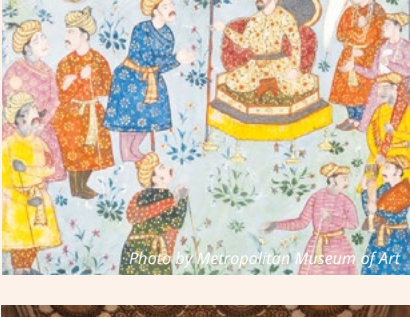


## The Sassanid Dynasty

### A beacon of ancient science and art

◆ While the Roman Empire was splitting and Europe was slipping into the Dark Ages, the Sassanid Dynasty shone as a beacon of world civilization. The Academy of Gundeshapur in western Iran became an international hub of scholarly exchange, where Chinese, Indian, Roman, and Greek scholars shared medical and scientific knowledge.

◆ The Sassanids' architectural mastery of arches and domes still shapes building design around the world today. So the next time you marvel at the stunning domes of the Middle East, remember—they trace their origins back to Iranian ingenuity!



## Poets and Stargazers

◆ Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), a monumental epic of 50,000 lines, preserves Iran's ancient myths and 4,000 years of history. Written after the Arab conquest of Persia, it became a cultural bulwark, helping Iranians preserve their language, history, and sense of self under foreign rule.

◆ Omar Khayyam was not only a master poet—he also devised a calendar more accurate than the Gregorian calendar still used in the West today.



## Physicians and a Female Mathematician

◆ In medieval Europe, doctors studied The Canon of Medicine by Avicenna, Iran's "Prince of Physicians." This textbook was used for centuries in European medical schools.

◆ The late Maryam Mirzakhani was the first woman to receive the Fields Medal—often called the "Nobel Prize of Mathematics."







Photo by Ahmet Kurt on unsplash

# Life in Iran

## Iran through the Eyes of Travel Bloggers

When people think of Iran, they often picture women in long black robes or a country feared for its nuclear ambitions. But travel bloggers' firsthand experiences paint a very different picture—one that challenges stereotypes and reveals a nation full of warmth, curiosity, and hospitality.

### Pretend to Be Lost, and You'll Be Brought Home

**Iranians Are Just Too Adorable!**

Ever since Iran was labeled an "enemy of America," Western nations have kept their distance. Iranians, as a result, face extreme difficulties traveling abroad. But that hasn't dampened their curiosity about the outside world—so they found a workaround: inviting foreign travelers into their homes! It's their creative way of connecting with the world.

Many bloggers confirm this "rumor" with real experiences:

"It's true! Ask someone for directions and you'll likely be invited home for tea."

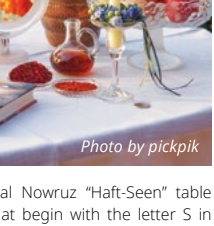
"Over a month of travel, I was constantly taken home for meals and tea!"

Jennifer Klinec, a writer who married an Iranian man, even revealed a trick taught to her by Iranian women: "Just wander the market and pretend to be lost—someone will surely bring you home." How can you not fall in love with the Iranians' warmth and hospitality?

**Travel Tip** The most popular messaging app in Iran is Telegram. If you want to make Iranian friends, better take note!



Recommended reading from The News Lens International: "A Different Iran" (article in Chinese)



### Read Me Poetry

#### The Romantic DNA of Iranians

In Iran, poetry is woven into daily life and romance. Jennifer Klinec says that the verses of national poets like Hafez and Ferdowsi are deeply treasured. It's not uncommon for couples to recite favorite poems to each other while walking hand in hand—a quiet reminder that for many Iranians, love and literature go hand in hand.

During the Persian New Year Nowruz, it's also tradition to recite verses from The Book of Kings while relaxing on spring grass. Forget the stereotype that Iranians only read the Qur'an—they're true lovers of poetry!

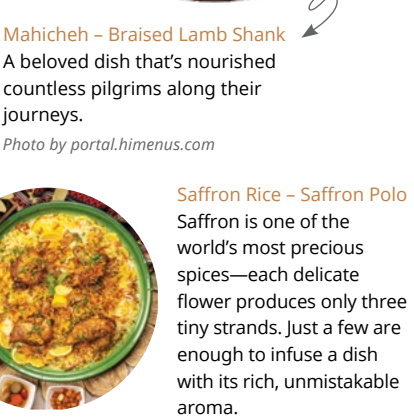


Photo by pickpik

Photo caption: A traditional Nowruz "Haft-Seen" table (decorated with 7 items that begin with the letter S in Persian)

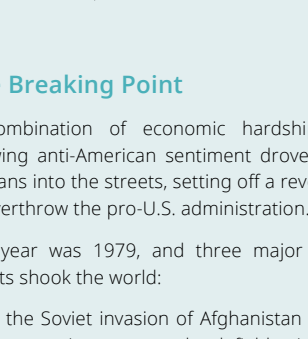


Photo by Petr Kahánek on Dreamstime

## Persian Gardens Galore

### Springtime Picnics Are a Must!

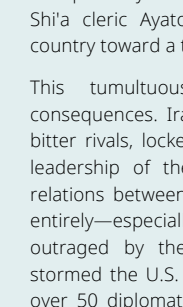
Just reading about Iranian cuisine is enough to spark a craving for a picnic in a Persian garden. If you're heading to Iran, be sure to add these to your food bucket list:



#### Mahicheh – Braised Lamb Shank

A beloved dish that's nourished countless pilgrims along their journeys.

Photo by portal.himenus.com



#### Saffron Rice – Saffron Polo

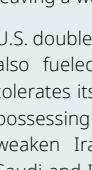
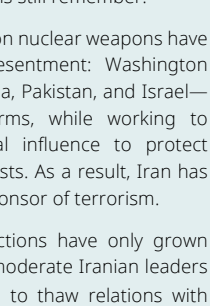
Saffron is one of the world's most precious spices—each delicate flower produces only three tiny strands. Just a few are enough to infuse a dish with its rich, unmistakable aroma.

Photo by Ali Dashti on pexels

#### Kotlet – Fried Beef Patties

A comfort food craved by Iranian expats everywhere—and a perfect picnic companion!

Photo by Alexander Mychko on Dreamstime



Recommended reading from "Let's Talk Iran": "Millennia of Persian Poetry at the Dinner Table" (Article in Chinese)

## We Were Once Close Friends

Before 1979, Iran and the United States were anything but bitter enemies—long before terms like "the Great Satan" or "Axis of Evil" defined their relationship.

Their relationship began to warm in the early 1950s, when Iran attempted to break free from British corporate control and nationalize its oil industry. Fearing Iran's defiance would inspire other oil-producing nations in the Middle East, Britain and the U.S. orchestrated a military coup that installed the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

As a reward, American oil companies gained control over 40% of Iran's oil. Over time, the U.S. overtook Britain's influence and became Iran's closest ally in the region. American pop songs filled the air, stylish suits replaced traditional attire, and American lifestyle was woven into daily life on the streets of Tehran—evidence of a deep friendship that touched every corner of society.

During the Cold War, Iran became the U.S.'s key strategic shield against Soviet expansion into West Asia. The U.S. provided aid and sold weapons, turning Iran into the region's most powerful military force. But this friendship came at a cost: the Iranian public grew weary of foreign interference and the economic burdens of militarization, which strained their everyday lives.

### The Breaking Point

A combination of economic hardship and growing anti-American sentiment drove angry Iranians into the streets, setting off a revolution to overthrow the pro-U.S. administration.

The year was 1979, and three major global events shook the world:

First, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan turned the country into a proxy battlefield, with U.S.-backed Afghan resistance fighters

confronting Soviet forces. Second, hardline Islamist militants seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, accusing the Saudi government of straying from Islamic principles and being too tolerant of Western and Shi'a influence—an event that prompted Saudi Arabia to adopt a stricter form of Islam. Third, a revolution in Iran ousted the pro-American Shah and unexpectedly handed the reins of power to the Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, steering the country toward a theocratic system.

This tumultuous year had far-reaching consequences. Iran and Saudi Arabia became bitter rivals, locked in a sectarian struggle for leadership of the Islamic world. Meanwhile, relations between Iran and the U.S. collapsed entirely—especially after Iranian students, outraged by the U.S. sheltering the Shah, stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took over 50 diplomats hostage. Enraged, the U.S. imposed its first round of economic sanctions on Iran. From then on, Iran chose to walk alone, while the U.S. pivoted to support Afghanistan. The two once-close friends became adversaries on diverging paths.

### The Deadlock

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the U.S. supported Iraq, putting itself on the opposite side of its former ally. The two nations, once friends, became battlefield foes. Even when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iran, America's silence cut deeply—leaving a wound Iranians still remember.

U.S. double standards on nuclear weapons have also fueled Iranian resentment: Washington tolerates its allies—India, Pakistan, and Israel—possessing nuclear arms, while working to weaken Iran's regional influence to protect Saudi and Israeli interests. As a result, Iran has been labeled a state sponsor of terrorism.

For decades, U.S. sanctions have only grown more severe. Though moderate Iranian leaders have occasionally tried to thaw relations with the West and ease sanctions, these efforts have often collapsed under hardline U.S. administrations. In 2018, the U.S. abruptly withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran and six world powers, reinstating harsh sanctions. Iran's oil exports nearly plummeted to zero, and the nation's economy suffered deeply. According to Reuters, Iran responded by accelerating its nuclear development the following year.

Noting the increasingly severe sanctions, Zahra Karim, an economics professor at the University of Mazandaran, remarked, "These aren't just punishing Iran—they're punishing the Iranian people."

### Who Can Break the Stalemate?

At the time of writing, President Trump had once again escalated sanctions, calling for renewed negotiations. Iran responded with indifference, signaling just how far trust and goodwill between the two nations had eroded. Ironically, the same global powers now working to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions once encouraged its development. During the Cold War, the Pentagon sold reactors and fuel to the Shah's government. The so-called "monsters" the world now fears—Iran and North Korea—are, in many ways, products of Cold War politics.

After decades of diplomatic tug-of-war, there are no winners—only deepening hostility, and countless lives pushed to the edge of war.

May the world turn instead to the Wonderful Counselor, the true King, and bring these knotted relationships before God in prayer and humility, seeking a way toward reconciliation.



Recommended Reading: "A Brief History of Sanctions on Iran"

# Am I a Muslim?

Islam in Iran



Since the Arab conquest of Persia in the 7th century<sup>1</sup>, Islam has been like a thread woven through the fabric of Iran's history, stitching the crescent moon into its cultural tapestry. According to official statistics, Muslims make up 99.4% of Iran's population, with 90–95% identifying as Shi'a. However, a 2020 anonymous online survey<sup>2</sup> conducted by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) and the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center (ABC) revealed a very different picture: of 40,000 Iranian respondents, only 40% identified as Muslim—just 32% as Shi'a. The gap between official numbers and reality is striking.

After the 1979 revolution, the rise of Shi'a cleric Ayatollah Khomeini cemented Iran's role as a Shi'a stronghold in West Asia. Since then, Iran's leaders have aggressively pursued a theocratic system that fuses religion with state power. But their authoritarian tactics have fueled growing disillusionment with religious rule, and many Iranians have become far less inclined to observe Islamic practices. Iran remains one of the few countries to fully implement Islamic law. Those born into Muslim families are automatically registered as Muslims by law, with the designation noted on their ID cards. Yet many in the next generation have quietly turned away from Islam, becoming what some call "Muslims without faith." For many, the Muslim identity is a matter of legal and social pressure rather than belief. Behind the scenes, however, young Iranians are increasingly questioning the meaning of faith and longing for love, happiness, and belonging.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Muhammad in 632 AD, Muslim forces expanded rapidly by military means across Europe, Asia, and Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The survey's credibility was enhanced by preliminary market research and widespread promotion across major social media platforms. Its anonymous online format created a sense of safety, greatly improving the reliability of responses.

*Heavenly Father, although Islam has deeply shaped Iran's history, Your eternal love was prepared for humanity before the foundation of the world. As more Iranians grow disillusioned with traditional religion and feel spiritually lost, may they encounter faithful followers of Christ who will guide them to the path of life—Jesus Christ. We ask the Holy Spirit to move in power and bring humility to Iran's government, that it may govern with justice. May Islam no longer be a prerequisite for education or employment, and may people of all faiths have equal opportunity. We pray that the gospel will reach Iran's younger generation through the internet and every available means, planting seeds in their hearts so they may experience the fullness of Your love and belonging. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# We Are Not Fire-Worshippers

Zoroastrianism in Iran



If you're obsessed with dogs but see flies, ants, and snakes as mortal enemies, you may have more in common with Zoroastrians than you think. For Zoroastrians, loving dogs is a sacred duty—they believe dogs are creations of the good god Ahura Mazda, while unpleasant creatures and all that is flawed in the world come from the evil spirit Angra Mainyu.

Zoroastrianism, also known as Mazdayasna, traces its roots back to the 6th century BCE, when the prophet Zoroaster claimed to receive a divine revelation. He taught that the universe is a battleground between the forces of good and evil, but in the end, light will overcome darkness. At the final judgment, each person will be sent to either heaven or hell based on their deeds. Fire is used in worship as a symbol of purity and the eternal brilliance of the divine. The religion's emblem is a half-human, half-bird figure, whose three layers of wings represent its central values: "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds."

Zoroastrianism was once the dominant religion of the Persian Empire and was highly esteemed by its rulers. But in the 7th century CE, Arab conquerors brought Islam into Iran. What followed was over a thousand years of religious persecution. Zoroastrians were barred from political participation, subjected to religious taxes, saw their temples destroyed, and were forced to convert or face execution. These pressures led to the faith's rapid decline, with many followers converting to Islam or fleeing the country. Today, Zoroastrianism is officially recognized in Iran, but only around 15,000 adherents remain, mostly in the city of Yazd—home to the faith's sacred fire altar. Others have emigrated to India, North America, Europe, and Australia.

*Heavenly Father, Zoroastrians take great pride in their religious heritage. We pray that whenever they stand before fire, they would encounter You—the same God who spoke to Moses through the burning bush. May they meet You face to face and be touched by Your presence. Lord, You created the world with wisdom and saw that it was very good. Help Zoroastrians view creation through the eyes of its Maker and discover the depth of Your love. May the wounds of their history be healed by the stripes Jesus bore, and may their fears be calmed by the true peace that only He can give. We pray that Iranian Christians would bear much fruit and be good neighbors to the Zoroastrians among them—leading them home to You. Raise up ministries around the world to serve the Zoroastrian community. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# Glory and Justice

The Bahá'í Faith in Iran



Photo by A.Davey on flickr

The Bahá'í Faith is a relatively new religion that originated in 19th-century Iran. In 1847, as Iran reeled from internal corruption and foreign interference, the people were suffering under the weight of a broken system. Amid this turmoil, a Shi'a scholar named Ali Muhammad—later known as the Báb, meaning “Gate” to the Hidden Imam—proclaimed himself to be the Mahdi<sup>1</sup>, the messianic figure foretold in Islamic tradition. He proclaimed, “Justice belongs to the faithful,” called for a fresh interpretation of the Qur'an, and introduced a new legal code. His message resonated deeply with the masses, particularly those on society's margins. After Ali Muhammad's death, Husayn Ali—later known as Bahá'u'lláh, or “the Glory of God”—carried forward his vision and formally established what is now the Bahá'í Faith. But from the beginning, this movement was denounced as heresy by Islamic authorities.

“Bahá” means “glory” in reference to God, and “Bahá'ís” are those who follow the Glory of God. The faith teaches that all religions ultimately come from the same divine source. God has revealed His will through a succession of messengers throughout history, including Brahma, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Jesus, Ali Muhammad (the Báb), and Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í Faith is currently the largest non-recognized religious minority in Iran<sup>2</sup>. According to human rights organizations, Iranian authorities have continued to persecute Bahá'ís into 2024, seizing property and detaining large numbers of followers without cause.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> In Islamic tradition, the Mahdi is a messianic figure who will lead the faithful into the age of divine justice. Ali Muhammad claimed three signs of the Mahdi: being a descendant of the Prophet, bearing the name Muhammad, and appearing before the end times.

<sup>2</sup> Iran's constitution recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians (excluding Muslim converts to Christianity) as legal religious minorities.

*Heavenly Father, the story of the Bahá'í Faith began with a cry for justice from the marginalized. You are the God who defends the oppressed and upholds the cause of the poor. We pray that Bahá'ís—and all who long for justice—would come to see that righteousness and justice are the very foundation of Your throne. May they boldly cry out to You, the impartial and merciful King, for salvation. As they endure pressure from the government and the broader Muslim society, may Your presence bring deep peace, driving out fear and anxiety. Soften the hearts of Iran's leaders—cause them to relent, govern with justice, and protect the rights of all. Stir Your church in Iran to serve the Bahá'í community with truth and love. May they stand in prayer and in action, offering compassion and care in Your name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# Preparing the Way of the Lord

Christianity in Iran



Photo by naser jafari on wikimedia

In 2022, Iran's Supreme Court ruled that Christian house churches are neither illegal nor a threat to national security. Yet in reality, authorities continued to arrest Christians on charges of endangering national security. That year alone, 134 believers were detained—a number that climbed to 166 in 2023.

Although some Iranian Christians have been released, many continue to face government harassment and surveillance. Friends and neighbors often keep their distance out of fear of being implicated. For those who have been detained or sentenced, life becomes even more difficult—many leave prison deeply traumatized, plagued by nightmares and frequent tears. Branded as threats to national security, they face immense obstacles and little chance of rebuilding their lives. Some have been forced to flee the country, seeking asylum in places like Europe, the UK, Turkey, and beyond.

Despite ongoing persecution, the gospel continues to take root in Iran. By 2020, the number of Christians had grown to over 700,000—a quiet but powerful sign that truth is flourishing across the country. While Christians are legally permitted to gather, the government prohibits worship in Persian and bans the printing or distribution of Christian materials, aiming to keep the gospel out of public understanding. As a result, many believers—especially former Muslims—worship and fellowship in secret. In recent years, however, Iranian church ministries have made significant strides, using uncensored online platforms and satellite broadcasts to share the gospel in places the authorities cannot reach.

*Heavenly Father, we praise You as the One who reigns forever! Though the Iranian government resists the gospel, You continue to draw hearts to Yourself, opening lives to the truth and the hope of salvation. We ask that You reveal the identity of Jesus Christ through divine revelation to Iran's religious and political leaders. May the light of the gospel break through every barrier, softening hearts with humility and leading many to repentance. Turn those who persecute Your children into seekers of Your truth. Strengthen and heal our brothers and sisters who live under fear and pressure. Surround them with Your peace that surpasses all understanding, guarding their hearts and minds in Christ. Fill Your people with courage and perseverance, that they may stand firm in their covenant with You and live as vessels that glorify Your name. Equip the Iranian Church with discipleship and training materials that speak to their context. Raise up wise, faithful pastors and devoted disciples to shepherd Your flock with love and truth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# A Beacon of Hope in the Refugee Camps

An Iranian Missions Story



Esther, originally from Taiwan, responded to God’s call to cross-cultural missions by joining a team serving Iranian refugees abroad. From the start, she approached the unfamiliar environment with humility, striving to adapt and walk in step with God’s leading. The Lord gave her wisdom and used her to speak words of blessing to those around her. Esther understands that the Great Commission isn’t just about bringing people to faith—it’s about faithfully following God’s guidance and participating in the work that brings Him delight.

In the beginning, Esther and her team reached out to Iranian refugees—most of them Muslims—through outreach events and partnered with a local Iranian church to start Persian-language home groups for deeper discipleship. As the number of seekers and new believers grew, Esther began supporting the training of local church leaders. While welcoming Iranian families, the team also recognized a growing need for youth ministry. After prayerful consideration, Esther and a few coworkers launched a youth group, exploring culturally meaningful ways to shepherd young people. Their ministry extended beyond Bible study, prayer, and worship—they built genuine relationships through shared meals, personal stories, and creative activities like art.

Some of the youth, disheartened by Islam and disillusioned with Iran’s political situation, began to long for truth and freedom. To Esther’s joy and surprise, several of them expressed a desire to read the Bible. She began walking with them through discipleship, and one by one, these young people encountered God’s love and chose to be baptized. Looking back on the friendships she’s formed along the way, Esther is reminded that her role is simply to plant and water the seeds—but only God can make them grow.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for equipping Esther and guiding her as she responded to Your call to cross-cultural missions. Through her obedience, many have heard the good news of Jesus. Strengthen her in body, soul, and spirit, and protect her from every scheme of the enemy. Keep her rooted in Christ and grant her discernment to follow Your heart—whether she’s raising up leaders or ministering to youth. Thank You for sending gospel workers to the Iranian diaspora and for leading Esther and her team to build a fellowship that feels like home. Bless their partnership with the local Iranian church as they serve together in unity to advance the gospel. Father, we ask that You continue to stir hearts and raise up more missionaries to walk alongside Iranian refugees around the world—joining them in grief and gladness, and embracing them with the love of Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.*

# The Sound of Faith in a New Generation

Iranian Diaspora I



Photo by Erik Lucatero on Unsplash

At just 20 and 18 years old, Vahid and Kaveh left Iran and became close friends while living in a refugee camp abroad. It was through a local outreach ministry that they eventually stepped into a church community. Both young men were warm and attentive, often volunteering to care for the younger children in the congregation. For nearly six months, a youth mentor journeyed with them—studying the Bible, introducing them to the Christian faith, and sensing their deep need for a personal encounter with God. The mentor faithfully and fervently prayed for them throughout that time.

Two months later, Vahid made the decision to be baptized. He shared with the mentor how deeply he had been touched by the music of an Iranian Christian rapper. “No one could write lyrics like that on their own,” he said. “It must be the work of a special God who touched his heart!” Moved by the artist’s close relationship with God, Vahid longed for the same—and so he committed his life to Christ.

Eager to share the good news, Vahid rushed to tell his friend Kaveh—only to be surprised that Kaveh and his mother had also decided to be baptized. What Vahid didn’t know was that Kaveh had been quietly struggling with addiction, which had been a heavy burden on his mother’s heart. At one outreach event, she cried out to God, “If You are the true God, please save my son!” God answered her desperate prayer. In the months that followed, Kaveh experienced a radical transformation and broke free from the chains of addiction. This miracle led both him and his mother to be baptized and surrender their lives to God.

*Heavenly Father, may Your true light shine brightly on the hearts of young Iranians who are lost and searching. Lead them to the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and nurture their faith to grow deep and strong. Raise up spiritually sensitive mentors and counselors, and equip them with the creativity and flexibility needed to journey alongside Iranian youth in the diaspora. Use Iranian Christian musicians as Your messengers—calling them to proclaim truth through music, and may the Holy Spirit use their songs to touch this generation. Prepare churches worldwide to care for Iranian youth, especially those struggling with addiction and mental health challenges. Just as the four friends faithfully carried the paralyzed man to Jesus, may these ministries persevere in love and support. Let every Iranian family abroad experience Your powerful grace. May Christ be honored as the head of every household, and may praise rise from every home. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.*

## PLAYLIST

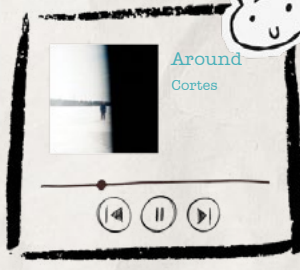


### Beyond the Spotlight: Christian Musicians Who Are Touching the World



**"What are crowns and riches without You? I've become a king of a ghostly dominion."**

Jesus makes Christians brothers and sisters—family. Inspired by this truth, David Cho released a collection of worship songs under the name Kindred. With poetic lyrics that reframe biblical truths and pure, gentle melodies, his music invites listeners to reflect deeply on their relationship with the Father. Each song is worth savoring for its spiritual depth.



**"My friends tell me to constantly, Focus — You're all I need"**

Cortes paints a picture of humanity hiding from God because of sin, fearing rejection, while God remains ever near. When drawing close to God feels difficult, this simple, catchy song becomes easy to listen to—so much so that one can't help but play it on repeat. In time, hardened hearts begin to soften, filled by the love of God.



**"And as I stood there in awe of everything You've made, I heard You whisper to me and say, 'Look how my love remains'"**

This song is perfect for barefoot summer nights on the grass, listening in stillness. Olivia writes like she's keeping a journal—capturing quiet moments in conversation with God. She reminds us that the essence of worship is intimacy. When we gaze at nature, we realize God is not far off; He delights to speak to His children.



**"I came with nothing which they knew, But truth is I have nothing without You"**

Cass is a Christian hip-hop artist who often writes about living out truth in a complicated world. In her track "Not for Sale," she challenges the culture's obsession with money and appearances. While everyone else chases success, she knows her focus should remain on God—because our true worth comes from Him.



# Light in the Wilderness

Iranian Diaspora II



The team serving Iranian refugees first met Amir at an outreach event. It quickly became clear that he was struggling with alcoholism, and some team members were concerned that his behavior might have a negative impact on others. But the team leader, grounded in the truth, responded with gentle conviction: “Jesus came for the sick—people like Amir are exactly why we began this outreach.” With that heart, the leader continued to care for Amir and faithfully shared the gospel with him, witnessing God begin to transform his life. Today, Amir is a new creation—actively following Jesus, serving in the church, warmly welcoming newly arrived Iranian refugees, and boldly sharing his testimony. The original outreach team gives all glory to God for the miracle they witnessed.

Reza is another brother who encountered God through the outreach ministry. Back in Iran, he had openly defied the country’s alcohol ban, often bribing police and using illegal means to get alcohol. Over time, drinking became his only source of comfort in a life marked by instability—a reality shared by many Iranian refugees. One day, remembering that the outreach team had taught people how to pray, he knelt down with a heart willing to try. In that moment, God intervened—breaking his craving and even changing his taste buds. Reza was left with a strong aversion to alcohol. Since then, he has encouraged others to pray persistently, trusting that God is at work. Today, he leads Bible studies and prayer meetings at church and boldly proclaims the truth, becoming a vessel fit for the Master’s use.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for healing Brother Amir and giving him a new heart. Thank You that he is willing to share his past struggles openly—like the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well and kept telling others, “Come and see!”—testifying again and again to Your power. We ask that You continue to use Amir and Reza as living testimonies and sources of hope among Iranian refugees around the world. May those trapped in addiction be stirred to seek the mighty Savior and find true freedom and belonging in You. Father, we pray that You would raise up and strengthen outreach ministries that serve Iranian refugees with compassion and care. We believe that witnesses like Amir and Reza will surround the Iranian people like a great cloud, pointing them to Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.*

# Drawn by the “Name”

Bashkardi People



Tents in Bashkardi village

The Bashkardi people live in Iran’s southwestern Hormozgan Province, primarily in mountainous regions overlooking their surroundings. Nearby lie the well-known waters of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Though the Bashkardi are an ethnic minority, their population is significant—exceeding 100,000 as of 2014. That same year, a group of Russian scholars visited the Bashkardi, a journey sparked by the curiosity of scholar Zakiryan Aminev. After retiring, Aminev turned his attention to the study of the Bashkir\* people. Intrigued by the similarity between the names Bashkir and Bashkardi, he organized the 2014 expedition to Iran to explore a possible connection.

It’s remarkable that, despite nearly 3,000 kilometers of distance between the two peoples, researchers confirmed a close connection. The scholars observed that the Bashkardi’s brick homes resembled the tent structures traditionally used by the Bashkirs. Inside, modern appliances were common, and residents received government subsidies to build their houses. Even with temperatures sometimes reaching 50°C, the Bashkardi have sustained flourishing agricultural and livestock practices. Some migrate to major cities or neighboring Arab countries in search of work. The Bashkardi are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Women occasionally wear a distinctive traditional headscarf known as a Burko, which resembles a mask. According to the Joshua Project, the Bible has yet to be translated into the Bashkardi language, and digital gospel resources are extremely limited. Please pray for this people group.

\*The Bashkirs are a Turkic people mainly living in the Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia.

*Heavenly Father, though these two peoples are separated by thousands of miles, a scholar’s research has revealed their remarkable connection. We ask that You send gospel messengers across great distances to reach the Bashkardi, so they may come to know they are Your children and be restored to a close relationship with You. Guide Bible translation teams to provide Scripture and gospel resources in the Bashkardi language. Raise up and prepare local workers who are careful, faithful, and skilled native translators—may they become the firstfruits of their people, with entire families devoted to serving You. Wherever the Bashkardi go for work, open doors for them to hear the gospel and encounter loving Christians. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# Fragile Hearts in the Shadows

The Fars People



Photo by Ninara on wikimedia

Around 2000 BC, the Persians first settled in what is now Iran's Fars Province. This area later became the center of the First and Second Persian Empires, which ruled for over five centuries. Today, it has grown into Iran's fourth-largest city and is home to a diverse population, including an estimated 130,000 Fars people. Geographically, the Fars are divided into southwestern and northwestern subgroups. By tradition, the Fars people are Sunni Muslims. Beyond these basics, little is known about them—only scattered references in academic sources provide glimpses into their lives.

Researchers who have interviewed Fars individuals struggling with depression have recorded statements such as, "It feels like my thoughts are blocked. I can't make any decisions—even the smallest ones feel impossibly difficult..." Many live in large cities, where they face relentless competition for limited jobs and educational opportunities. Over time, the pressure takes a toll on both body and spirit.

Some Fars women do seek medical treatment for depression. However, when regular medication brings little or no improvement, their confidence in both the treatment and themselves begins to fade. Often, family tensions or a husband's behavior—whether directly or indirectly—contribute to their emotional decline. The stigma surrounding mental illness in Fars society, coupled with a lack of empathy or understanding from family and spouses, can leave these women feeling utterly alone in their pain.

*Heavenly Father, we lift up the Fars people to You and ask the Holy Spirit to intercede on their behalf with groans too deep for words. You are the One who daily bears our burdens—gather the sorrow of Fars women and hold it close to Your heart. When they call on Your name, may Your light break through the darkness, bringing healing, cleansing, and total transformation. Raise up female workers trained in counseling and medicine to walk alongside Fars women battling depression. Equip them not only to care for these women but also to support their families—helping them understand, adjust, and become sources of comfort and strength. Shepherd these families, Lord, and lead them to green pastures where they can find rest and renewal. We pray that Iranian society would grow in empathy and acceptance toward those suffering from depression. And may Your Church be filled with love, wisdom, and grace to minister well to those in need. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# Peace to You, Good Shepherd

The Galeshi People



*Photo by Marketa-Novakova on Dreamstime*

In 2013, researchers journeyed into the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran and visited villages inhabited by the Galeshi people. They found that the Galeshi formed a unique socio-economic community, made up primarily of male shepherds. Stretching from the Talysh Mountains in the northwest to the Gorgan region in the east, their population was estimated to be around several thousand. At the time, researchers observed that rising inflation and the pressures of modernization were rapidly eroding the Galeshi's herding lifestyle, predicting that this traditional community might soon disappear. It leaves us wondering: are they still safe and thriving today?

According to available sources, most Galeshi are Shi'a Muslims. Before embracing Islam, they had a legend about an evil spirit named Al, said to appear as a hunched old woman with disheveled hair, a dark, ghastly face, and sharp fangs—an image that struck terror into anyone who heard of her. The Joshua Project notes that parts of the Bible have been translated into the Galeshi language, and some online Scripture and Christian resources are available. However, it is unclear how widely these resources are used, and little is known about the spiritual condition of the Galeshi people or the state of Christian ministry among them.

*Heavenly Father, though we do not know the current state of the Galeshi people, we trust in Your unfailing love for each of them and believe that You are present among them. Thank You for receiving our prayers on their behalf. We ask that You watch over these shepherds as they face growing challenges—may they experience Your daily provision and sustaining grace. Raise up Christian believers with experience in livestock and shepherding to live among them as good neighbors, gently leading them toward the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. For those who have left shepherding behind and moved into cities, guide them to encounter mature and faithful followers of Christ who can walk with them, helping them adapt to unfamiliar surroundings and new trials. May the Galeshi come to seek You for direction, and may they walk the path of righteousness that brings You joy. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# A Tale of Two Sides

## The Talysh People



The Talysh of Iran once made their home in the Talysh Mountains, a range that now spans the border between Iran and Azerbaijan and is sheltered by the Caspian Sea. This unique geography helped shape their distinct language and culture. In 1803, after Persia lost a war to Russia, it was forced to cede a large portion of its territory. As a result, the Talysh homeland was split in two, eventually giving rise to two culturally distinct communities—one in the north, the other in the south.

Through years under the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now Azerbaijan, the northern Talysh have lived under cultural pressure and political restraint, searching for space to reclaim their identity. Many yearn for a clear cultural identity, but continue to face major obstacles. In contrast, the southern Talysh have experienced relatively more cultural continuity. Though Iran has gone through multiple regime changes, the region has remained within the broader Persian cultural sphere, making it easier for southern Talysh communities to adapt and maintain their traditions.

Today, the Talysh people are primarily concentrated in southern Azerbaijan and northern Iran. However, reliable population data is difficult to obtain—Azerbaijan’s census figures are often skewed for political reasons, and Iran only counts those affiliated with officially recognized religions. As a result, the true size of the Talysh population remains unknown. Most Talysh identify as Sunni Muslims, but the enduring influence of ancient Zoroastrianism has given rise to widespread folk beliefs involving evil spirits. At present, little is known about Christian outreach among the Talysh—information on the number of believers, Bible translations, or online gospel resources is scarce. We invite you to continue lifting this people group up in prayer.

*Heavenly Father, we ask that You send gospel messengers who will cross every boundary—geographical, linguistic, and cultural—to reach the Talysh people. Prepare the way for Bible translation, the proclamation of the gospel, and the creation of faith-building resources. For those in the north searching for identity, may they find their true belonging in Christ—returning to the Father’s house and discovering that their truest, most precious identity is as beloved children of God. Father, we bless the governments of Azerbaijan and Iran and pray that their leaders would turn their hearts to You. Help them understand the sacred responsibility You place on those in authority. May they lead with both kingly authority and a shepherd’s heart—governing with justice, showing favor to none, and caring for the Talysh people with fairness. Let those in power stand as priests before You, guiding their nations to fear the Lord and breaking the chains of fear that bind people to the power of evil spirits. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# From Distinct to Dispersed

Nafar Turk People



*Photo by Ninara on flickr*

The mountain view in Shiraz, Fars Province

The Nafar Turks originated in Iran's Fars Province and around Tehran. Though ethnically Turkic, they gradually assimilated into the surrounding Arab and Luri cultures. In 1862, during the Qajar Dynasty, the Shah\* called for the formation of a tribal confederation known as Khamseh, which included the Nafar. At one time, the Nafar had a strong presence in Fars Province, but they were gradually absorbed by neighboring groups—first by the Qashqai in the 19th century, then by the Basseri in the 20th. According to scholars, by 1945 the Nafar had become a scattered people: hundreds of families roamed the wilderness in southern Fars Province and survived by looting the few remaining residents in the area. Today, most Nafar live in the southeastern part of Fars, with many settled north of Shiraz.

The most recent population figures go back to 1953, when around 450 Nafar families were recorded—a sharp decline from the 3,500 families counted in 1932. The Nafar Turks have traditionally followed Shi'a Islam. According to the Joshua Project, there are no known Christians among them. A full Bible translation in the Nafar language was completed after 2013, and some online gospel resources are now available.

\* "Shah" is an ancient Persian title for monarchs.

*Heavenly Father, though we have never seen the Nafar people with our own eyes, they are the apple of Yours. May the wind of the Holy Spirit sweep through every Nafar household, awakening a deep hunger to know the Creator of heaven and earth—their Father in heaven. This small and weathered people group has endured much. We ask that through the wounds of Jesus, they would find healing, and that their lives would be rebuilt upon Christ, the unshakable Cornerstone. Just as You have promised, adorn them with precious jewels (Isaiah 54:11–12), and cause their lives to flourish and shine with the beauty that comes from You. We pray that the Nafar Bible and gospel resources would be used effectively to quench thirsty hearts with the life-giving power of Your Word. Raise up compassionate Christian neighbors and mission workers to bless the Nafar people and help them come to know You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# A Flock Not Forgotten

The Vafsi People



The Vafsi are a little-known ethnic group in Iran—if not for scholars like Laurence Paul, they might have remained completely overlooked. This British researcher was deeply fascinated by Persian languages and Iranian folklore. It seemed his life was either spent immersed in Iranian studies or en route to further that work. In 1958, Paul collected folk stories from west-central Iran, carefully recording them on scrolls—including 24 oral tales in the Vafsi language. Though he poured himself into this project, the material remained unpublished during his lifetime. Thankfully, half a century later, a new generation of scholars took up the mantle, and in 2007, this important body of work was finally brought to light.

According to the Joshua Project, nearly all Vafsi people follow Shi'a Islam, and to date, there is still no Bible translated into their language. Yet perhaps the efforts of Paul and others may one day help pave the way for a Vafsi Bible and accessible gospel resources. The number of believers or presence of Christian ministry among the Vafsi remains unknown. Ongoing prayer is greatly needed.

*Heavenly Father, You have already sent Jesus to be the Good Shepherd for the Vafsi people—laying down His life on the cross so they might be called Your children. What an incredible grace this is! We thank You for the scholars who have poured themselves into preserving Vafsi culture. Now we ask that You raise up loving, Spirit-filled messengers of the gospel to live among the Vafsi, using diverse and creative means to build bridges that lead to Christ. Sovereign Father, gather the people and resources needed so that past academic work might be used for Kingdom purposes. May it contribute to an accurate Vafsi Bible translation and the creation of contextualized gospel resources that speak to real needs. Let these resources nourish the Vafsi spiritually, so they may be filled—just as it is written in Matthew 15:37: “They all ate and were satisfied.” In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# Envoys Arrived, Nations Entered

Qajar People



The Qajar people of Iran are a Turkic ethnic group whose name is believed to trace back to a commander in Genghis Khan's army. In Turkish, Qajar means "swift runner." Originally from what is now northeastern Iran, the Qajars have since spread to regions including Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and parts of Europe. Renowned for their administrative talent, the Qajars established the Qajar dynasty in 1796 and ruled Iran for nearly two centuries—forming the last Turkic kingdom in Iranian history. During this era, France under Napoleon and Britain, caught in a power struggle, both sought Iran's favor, sending envoys to strengthen diplomatic ties. As political interests eventually faded, foreign officers and travelers remained in Iran out of curiosity or leisure. The travel journals they left behind now offer modern readers rare insights into life during the Qajar era.

The Qajar dynasty referred to their ruler as Shah, meaning "the shadow of God on earth"—a title that conveyed immense authority. Although society was distinctly hierarchical, kinship ties often carried more weight than social or economic standing. While the dynasty officially embraced Shi'a Islam, the general population practiced a range of religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. Today, most Qajars identify as Shi'a Muslims. A complete Bible translation in the Qajar language was completed in 2013, and some online gospel resources exist, but there are still no known believers or active ministries among them.

*Heavenly Father, the Qajar people have long cherished their lineage—reveal to them that true life and lasting heritage come from You, the God who breathed the first breath into Adam. May they joyfully embrace the truth that Jesus Christ shed His blood for them, offering new life—so they may belong not only to an earthly ancestry but to the household of God, heirs to a greater Kingdom and an eternal inheritance. Pour out Your Spirit, Lord, and send gospel messengers so the Qajar people may hear and receive the good news. We bless this people—whose name means "swift runners"—to become champions in the race of faith, fixing their eyes on the hope set before them and running toward the imperishable prize. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# You Said Black Was Your Favorite Color

Qaragozlu People



*Photo by Pablo Merchán Montes on unsplash*

If you understand Azerbaijani, your first impression of the Qaragozlu people might be their deep, soulful eyes—after all, Qaragozlu literally means “black eyes.” The Qaragozlu speak Southern Azerbaijani<sup>1</sup> and are now primarily found in Iran’s northwestern Hamadan Province. Historical records reveal that they were not merely residents of the area but were once entrusted with its governance. Interestingly, the Qaragozlu trace their lineage back to the Qara Qoyunlu dynasty<sup>2</sup>, as though their very identity has long been woven together with the color black.

Records show that the Qaragozlu numbered just 12,000 in 1850, but by 1888 their population had surged to 60,000—an increase that also accounts for their rising political influence. As their community grew, so did their impact. Originally cattle herders, most Qaragozlu have since become merchants, playing a role in Iran’s economic development. In terms of faith, unlike the majority of Iranians who follow Shi’a Islam, the Qaragozlu are among the few Sunni Muslim groups. According to the Joshua Project, a complete Bible translation in the Qaragozlu language was published in 2013; however, no known believers or ministries currently exist among them.

Note:

<sup>1</sup> A dialect of Azerbaijani influenced by Persian and written in the Arabic script.

<sup>2</sup> A historic Turkmen dynasty that ruled parts of present-day Azerbaijan, northwestern Iran, and northeastern Iraq from about 1375 until it was overthrown by the Aq Qoyunlu in 1468.

*Heavenly Father, You formed the deep black eyes of the Qaragozlu; now we pray You would open the eyes of their hearts to be captivated by Your glorious light. As they have shifted from herding to trading, meet them on their journeys and in the marketplaces. May they encounter Your people in their commerce and discover that the kingdom of heaven is a treasure worth giving all to possess—Christ, the greatest treasure. You care for their daily needs but long even more for them to receive an eternal inheritance. As one of Iran’s few Sunni communities, protect the Qaragozlu from sectarian strife, and raise up workers to guide them toward faith in Jesus, their truest friend. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

# Don't Let the Door Hit You on the Way Out!

Semnani People



Semnani Poetry and Lexicon Books

When it comes to marriage proposals among Iran's Semnani people, you need to know how to read the signs. Traditionally, elder women from the groom's family take the lead in searching for a bride. When they find a young woman known for her good character and ability to manage a household, they pay a visit to her home. At this point, the bride's family serves tea—a simple gesture, but one that carries significant weight. The outcome of the proposal may hinge on this single cup. If there's mutual interest, conversation follows. But if the bride's family disapproves, they will quietly begin collecting the guests' shoes after tea, a subtle signal that it's time to leave. The groom's representative, recognizing the cue, is expected to take their leave without pressing further.

Also known as the Qumshi, the Semnani are the indigenous people of Iran's northern Semnan Province. Their language, Semnani, has attracted considerable academic interest. Linguists believe it to be a remnant of Middle Persian,\* once spoken throughout eastern and central Iran. Because of its distinctiveness, Semnani has been designated an official part of Iran's intangible cultural heritage. According to the Joshua Project, nearly all Semnani are Muslim. There is currently no Bible translation in their language, and few online gospel resources are available.

\* The main language of the Sasanian Empire in Iran from AD 224 to 654.

*Heavenly Father, You are the One who established marriage and family from the beginning, that through relationships, we might grow and learn to love as You do. May this community that so deeply values marriage be moved by the selfless sacrifice of Christ, and through the covenant between God and humanity, come to know the most enduring love of all. Raise up Semnani families who fear You, Lord, to stand as a great cloud of witnesses. We ask that You prepare a clear and faithful Bible translation and gospel resources in the Semnani language, so they may hear the Word of Life in the language of their hearts. Soften their hearts, Lord—may they welcome Christ and His messengers into their lives and homes, unwilling to “send them away.” We also pray that youth ministries would see and respond to the unique needs of the next generation of Semnani people, stepping in with wisdom and love at just the right time. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



# Password, Please

The Dari People



The Zoroastrian holy site located in Chak Chak village, Iran

Across the world, people use secret codes and hidden phrases to communicate messages they wish to keep private. These cryptic forms of speech not only offer a sense of security but also affirm a shared identity. The language of Iran's Dari people is one such example. As followers of Zoroastrianism (see August 2), the Dari are a religious minority in a predominantly Muslim society. Like an island in a vast sea, they developed their own oral-only language—Zoroastrian Dari—both as a shield to protect their customs from outside scrutiny and as a source of cultural pride. Today, as Persian dominates public life and many Dari have migrated to cities or moved abroad for work, their unique language is at risk of disappearing. Thankfully, scholars have launched preservation projects and other efforts to keep this language alive.

Historically, the Dari people lived in Iran's Yazd and Kerman provinces. Zoroastrianism was once the state religion of the ancient Persian Empire, and with a history spanning more than 3,000 years, it was at one time the most widely practiced religion in the world. Nearly all Dari people today still follow Zoroastrianism, which teaches a cosmic battle between a benevolent god of light and an evil god of darkness. According to the Joshua Project, there are currently no known Christians among the Dari, and no Bible translations or online gospel resources are available in their language.

\*While Zoroastrians refer to their language as Zoroastrian Dari, outsiders often call it Gabri, along with several other names.

*Heavenly Father, the once-vast Zoroastrian community was scattered by persecution, and those who remain—like the Dari—have learned to speak with caution. Fill them with Your perfect love that casts out all fear. May Iran's government and society respond with compassion, creating a welcoming space for religious minorities. Guide and strengthen ongoing efforts to preserve the Dari language, so treasured by this community. We trust that You are already preparing gospel workers—those willing to start by learning Dari and gently drawing near to this people. Open doors for Iranian Christians to encounter the Dari, and move Your children to welcome and bless them. As Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# Longing from Afar

Mamasani People



Photo by Yunus Tuğ on Unsplash

From a distance, an old song drifts through the air:

"One home, one joyful heart, one beloved."  
(Ye pain dari, ye del x asi, ye tia kali.)

The melody echoes through the valleys of the Zagros Mountains in Iran—the homeland of the nomadic Mamasani people. Herding their cattle through the seasons, they once lived lives of simple sufficiency.

In the 1960s, the Pahlavi government launched national reforms that abruptly changed their way of life. Tribal leaders were exiled or executed, and the land was seized and nationalized. Many Mamasani were forced to settle in cities. Adults entered the workforce, while the younger generation attended school or studied abroad. As a result, the Mamasani experienced upward mobility and now serve in fields such as the military, healthcare, and business. But the hardships they endured are difficult to put into words—experiences that have become the inspiration for Mamasani singers. Their songs, performed in traditional Mamasani melodies and style, feature instruments like the saz and noqareh drum.

According to the Joshua Project, the Mamasani population exceeds 130,000. However, a 2008 survey of Iran's nomadic populations found that only around 15,000 Mamasani still practice traditional herding; the rest have settled in urban areas. The Mamasani are a subgroup of the Luri people, and their traditional faith is Shi'a Islam. While only portions of the Bible have been translated into the Mamasani language, some online Scripture resources are now available.

*Heavenly Father, the scars of the past still linger in the hearts of the Mamasani. Even as they build new lives and serve in various professions, many carry a deep and silent longing for a homeland that can no longer be reclaimed. We pray that whether they are herding in the mountains or striving in the cities, they would come to know the unshakable home found in Your love—a place that always welcomes, never fades, and gently heals every crease in their hearts. May their instruments no longer echo only songs of sorrow and exile, but one day resound with songs of salvation—filled with joy and new life, bearing witness to Your power to make all things new! We ask You to advance the work of Bible translation in their language, and to raise up missionaries who understand nomadic ways and are willing to go the distance to find and walk with the Mamasani. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# Iran's Secret Weapon

Southern Tati People



In April 1980, escalating border clashes between Iran and Iraq erupted into what would become the eight-year Iran–Iraq War. Throughout the conflict, Iraq's counterintelligence forces intercepted Iranian radio transmissions and consistently succeeded in decoding them—no matter what language Iran used. Pressed for a solution, Iran turned to its cultural richness and unveiled an unexpected asset: the Tati language. This rare and little-known tongue finally baffled Iraqi intelligence. It became Iran's secret weapon, playing a crucial role in securing military communications until the war's end.

The speakers of Tati—the Southern Tati people—are primarily found from Azerbaijan to Iran's North Khorasan Province. Estimates place their population at around 400,000. Much of their cultural heritage is transmitted through the Tati language. Most Southern Tati follow Shi'a Islam, though there are also Sunni Muslims among them, and a minority still adhere to Zoroastrianism or Judaism. According to the Joshua Project, there is currently no Bible translation in their language, and no known believers among them.

*Heavenly Father, long before the Tati language served Iran in wartime, You already knew the worth of the Southern Tati people. You paid for their lives at great cost—through the sacrifice of Your beloved Son, Jesus. We ask You, the Master Strategist, to lead gospel workers into spiritual battle for the hearts of the Southern Tati. Use the cross—the ultimate “secret weapon” of the gospel—to gently and unexpectedly tear down the strongholds that keep people from knowing You. Melt every barrier and draw the Southern Tati home to their Father. Raise up those gifted in languages to begin translating the Bible into Tati—decoding the language of Your love so that the Southern Tati may hear the good news. May many be transformed, built up, and awakened through Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# A Carpet That Tells a Story

Baharlu People



Photo by mohammad hassan taheri on Unsplash

The Baharlu are a Turkic ethnic group living in Iran's Khorasan, Kerman, and Fars provinces, as well as in Azerbaijan. They once led a nomadic lifestyle. For example, the Baharlu in Fars Province used to spend summers north of Shiraz and migrate as entire families to southeastern Fars for the winter. However, in 1859, the death of a widely respected leader sparked a violent internal power struggle. The conflict was so brutal and deadly that the surviving tribe members could no longer endure the demands of long-distance seasonal migration. From that point forward, the Baharlu in Fars began to settle permanently. By the end of World War II, all Baharlu people in Iran had transitioned to a settled life. Scholars who visited Fars Province before the war's conclusion noted that tribal structures and ethnic identity were rapidly fading away.

Carpets handwoven by the nomadic Baharlu during their earlier years are now considered highly valuable. Their designs drew inspiration from the natural world they lived so closely with and reflected their unique worldview. The Baharlu are predominantly Shi'a Muslims. While there are no known believers among them, mission organizations have prepared Bible translations and online gospel resources in their language.

*Heavenly Father, You revealed Yourself through creation and through the words of Genesis. Do the same for the Baharlu, that they might come to see that all things are made by You and ultimately belong to You. We ask that You draw these gifted, skillful people to Yourself. Bless them like You blessed Bezalel and the artisans of the tabernacle—people filled with wisdom, understanding, and skill to carry out the work of building Your house. Lord, You remember the Baharlu's difficult past. You have counted their tears. Wherever they now live—whether in towns, cities, or rural places—help them carry the same resilience that once sustained them on long migrations. Raise up missionaries who understand their history and culture, and who can build bridges for the gospel through those shared stories and symbols. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# Who Reigns Forever?

Moqaddam People



When it comes to recognizing the value of perfect timing, few understand it better than the Moqaddam people. Their rise to prominence came at a pivotal moment in history, allowing them to thrive in Iran's political landscape for centuries. Although they no longer hold official power, the Moqaddam remain a family of great wealth.

Under the Safavid Empire (1501–1736), the Moqaddam gained the Shah's favor—a royal endorsement that led to rapid growth in both population and influence. They were appointed governors of Maragheh Province, a semi-autonomous position they held securely until the Pahlavi dynasty came to power in 1925. At that point, their political authority came to an end. Historians describe the Moqaddam of that era as possessing a rare blend of leadership, political acumen, and financial strength. They were adept at navigating the halls of power and loyal to their rulers—earning them a level of autonomy even from the Shah and crown prince. Though their political era ended nearly a century ago, the Moqaddam who remained in Maragheh have continued to live in comfort and prosperity, even as their influence has faded into memory.

Little is known today about the Moqaddam's current population, religious status, or needs. Traditionally, however, they have been followers of Shi'a Islam. According to the Joshua Project, a Bible translation and online gospel resources are available in their language.

*Heavenly Father, the Moqaddam people once held great power—yet history has shown that every earthly reign comes to an end. Help them see that only You, the true and eternal King, rule forever. Awaken in their hearts a desire for Your unshakable kingdom. We bless the Moqaddam, who still live in abundance and status. May the Holy Spirit stir their hearts to lift their eyes beyond worldly gain and fix them on things above. Teach them to store up treasures in heaven—where no moth or rust can destroy, and no thief can break in and steal. Lord, raise up gospel workers to go to Maragheh Province—messengers whose lives radiate the beauty of Christ within them. Give them the gentleness of doves and the wisdom of serpents, so they might speak with grace and discernment about wealth, power, and faith. Use their words to awaken a hunger for truth, until every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. In His name we pray, Amen.*

# Forever Outsiders

Jadgal People



*Photo by Mostafameraji on wikimedia*

It's often said that marriage unites not just two individuals, but two families—a truth the Jadgal people know all too well. Deeply distrustful of in-laws, they only trust their own kind and therefore insist on marrying within their group. The Jadgal also strictly practice patrilineal inheritance: daughters have no right to inherit property, and sons-in-law are considered perpetual outsiders—never truly accepted into the family circle. Though there have been internal proposals to allow intermarriage with other ethnic groups and grant inheritance rights to women, these ideas have yet to win community approval.

The Jadgal claim ancestral roots in Sindh Province, Pakistan, from which they migrated westward. As of 2008, an estimated 25,000 Jadgal people live in southern Iran near the Persian Gulf. Some have also settled in the UAE and Oman, though Pakistan remains their primary home. The Jadgal primarily speak Jadgali but are also fluent in several other languages such as Persian and Balochi. Most are Muslim, and there are no known followers of Christ among them. Only portions of the Bible were translated into their language by 2021, and online gospel resources remain limited.

It's often said that marriage joins not just two people, but two families—and no one understands this better than the Jadgal. Deeply wary of outsiders, they place their trust solely in their own community, insisting on marrying within their ethnic group. In line with their strict adherence to patrilineal inheritance, daughters are denied the right to inherit property, and sons-in-law are viewed as permanent outsiders—never truly welcomed into the family circle. Although some within the community have proposed allowing interethnic marriage and inheritance rights for women, such ideas have yet to gain widespread support.

The Jadgal trace their origins to Pakistan's Sindh Province, from where they migrated westward. As of 2008, approximately 25,000 Jadgal live in southern Iran near the Persian Gulf. Some have also resettled in the United Arab Emirates and Oman, though the majority still reside in Pakistan. They primarily speak Jadgali but are also fluent in other regional languages, including Persian and Balochi. Most Jadgal identify as Muslim, and there are currently no known followers of Christ among them. While a partial Bible translation was completed in 2021, online gospel resources remain scarce.

*Heavenly Father, within the Jadgal's patrilineal system, daughters and sons-in-law are often treated as outsiders. We pray that they may hear the good news—that through the cross of Jesus Christ, every barrier is broken down. In Your household, there are no strangers; Your salvation and glorious inheritance belong to them as well. May they joyfully enter the kingdom of Your beloved Son and become Your people forever. May those who are made new in Christ begin to create new family cultures—cultures marked by love and acceptance for those on the margins. We ask You, Father, to watch over Jadgal families striving for independence. Provide ministries and Christian neighbors who will surround them with warmth, care, and support. May the Jadgal people across all regions encounter mature and faithful gospel workers who can clearly proclaim the mystery of Christ in a language they understand. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# Experts of the Mountain Trails

Sangesari People



The Sangesari people reside in Semnan Province, located in north-central Iran. As habitual semi-nomads of the Alborz Mountains on the Iranian plateau, they migrate seasonally from April through August. Along their routes, they sometimes herd large sheep flocks, a sign of their social status. At other times they set up tall black goat-wool tents, which are easy to carry and assemble, providing shelter from the summer heat. They also engage in trade with neighboring villages and other nomadic groups. The Sangesari are believed to follow the longest nomadic migration route in the world—stretching over 1,500 kilometers. Their ancestors, the Parni, were likely experienced travelers too, reputed to have journeyed from southern Russia and settled southeast of the Caspian Sea around 200 BC.

Masters of handwoven carpets, the Sangesari expertly weave thousands of threads and dedicate months of patient work to create rugs that radiate traditional beauty—just as captivating as any fast fashion trend. In 2022, their craftsmanship was honored with an exhibition in Italy. Beyond their weaving skills, the Sangesari are also culinary artisans, producing 32 distinct dairy products made from sheep's or goat's milk, each boasting unique flavors and characteristics. Among these is Aroushe, a calcium-rich cheese that has been treasured for over 3,000 years.

*Heavenly Father, You long to pitch Your tent among the Sangesari—to live with them and call them Your own. We pray that on their nomadic journeys, they would meet followers of Christ whose lives reflect Your love, awakening in them a curiosity and desire for the gospel. Having lived as semi-nomads for generations, the Sangesari now face increasing challenges from climate change. Holy Spirit, move the hearts of leaders and communities throughout Iran to remember this minority and thoughtfully address the environmental impacts on their lives. May experts in ecology, anthropology, and related fields offer wise support. Father, we ask You to send missionaries who understand the rhythms of semi-nomadic life—gospel messengers who will scale the heights of the Alborz Mountains, following Jesus' example of love, willing to travel any distance to bring the Sangesari into Your embrace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# From Camel Herding to City Life

Korosh People



*Photo by mostafa meraji on Unsplash*

In Iran, the Korosh people are known for their skill in herding Bactrian camels—a talent that once served as their gateway into a powerful tribal confederation. Traditionally, the Korosh grazed camels in Fars Province. During times of drought, some migrated northwest and won the trust of the Qashqai\*, a major tribal group. As the Qashqai moved seasonally, they entrusted the Korosh with the vital responsibility of caring for the tribe's most valuable assets. In recent years, as pastoralism has declined, many Korosh have turned to agriculture or relocated to major cities to work in trade and industry.

A 2015 study reported that the Korosh are spread across southwestern Iran's Hormozgan Province, central Fars Province, and northwestern Khuzestan Province. Living in small, dispersed communities, their population has been difficult to estimate. Scholars counted just 40–50 Korosh households in 1979, a number that rose to around 200 by 2004 and exceeded 10,000 by 2015.

In the 1970s, researcher Hamid Mahamedi observed that the Korosh language was spoken only within the home, while Qashqai Turkic was used in public settings. Decades later, in 2011, scholars Carina Jahani and Maryam Nourzaei published Korosh texts accompanied by literal translations. By 2014, Abd-al-Nabi Salāmi noted that the influence of Persian on Korosh dialects varied from region to region. Though small in number, the Korosh people have increasingly captured the interest of scholars.

\* See Mission Pathway May 16, 2021 entry. (Only in Chinese)

*Heavenly Father, we lift up the Korosh people before You. As intercessors point to their place on the map, we trust that Your Holy Spirit is already moving across the land of Iran, interceding with groans too deep for words. We pray for those who have left behind tribal life and pastoral work: help them adjust to city life, grow in new skills, and navigate this season of transition with hope and dignity. May Your abundant love fill the emptiness left by lost traditions, and may You prepare Christian neighbors and coworkers to walk alongside them with care. Thank You, Father, for granting the Korosh stability in southern Iran and for stirring the hearts of scholars to take interest in this small yet significant people group. We ask that You raise up workers to reach the Korosh, to embrace every opportunity to serve through community-based ministry, and to bless Korosh communities wherever they are found. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



# New Name, New Life

Aynallu People



Photo by Turfantastik on Dreamstime

In Iran's Fars Province, the Aynallu people share a vibrant carpet-weaving heritage with four neighboring ethnic groups—including the Baharlu (see August 20) and the Nafar Turks (see August 12). Living in close proximity, these communities have passed down similar weaving techniques and are especially known for their abstract bird motifs. But the Aynallu stand apart for incorporating long-horned deer into their designs—an artistic signature unique to their tradition. According to local accounts, however, this distinctive element gradually disappeared after the Aynallu settled permanently in Fars Province in the 13th century.

The Aynallu are a Turkic ethnic group primarily located in central Iran, Azerbaijan, and the Fars region. According to tradition, they trace their roots to the family or followers of Ibrahim Inal, a prince of the 11th-century Seljuk Empire. In time, they were absorbed into the Shi'a Shahsevan tribal confederation, which led to the emergence of two alternative names: Imanlu, meaning "people of faith," and Inallu, meaning "believers."

The Aynallu speak South Azerbaijani—a language that received a full Bible translation in 2013 and has some gospel resources available online, according to the Joshua Project. Yet much about the Aynallu remains unknown, including their current population, living conditions, and specific needs—highlighting the ongoing need for prayer and greater engagement.

*Heavenly Father, though we do not know the current situation of the Aynallu people, You have never forgotten them. Like a father anxiously looking out, yearning for his younger son to come home, You desire to enfold them in Your love. We pray that the Holy Spirit would grant them the wisdom that leads to salvation, so that those called "people of faith" and "believers" would turn their spiritual fervor and the focus of their lives toward the Lord Jesus. Just as the Apostle Paul experienced transformation after he encountered You, may their eyes be opened, and their lives become closely bound to Yours. May the South Azerbaijani Bible and gospel resources circulate widely among the Aynallu. May Your living and discerning Word, which reveals the thoughts and motives of the heart, leave no one hidden before You. Let the Aynallu fall in worship before Christ, receiving His grace and mercy. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

# Dancing Tradition

Southern Luri People



Photo by Shadegan wikimedia

From a distance, the sound of drums and trumpets rises and falls amid the roar of a lively crowd. One person brandishes a branch to strike, while another leaps and dodges with agility. This isn't a scene of conflict—it's "Chubazi," a traditional Southern Luri dance performed at celebrations, inspired by tales of ancient warriors in combat. That spirit of heroism has carried into modern times. In 1915, when Britain invaded Iran, Rais Ali Delvari of the Southern Luri people rose up to rally the people in defense of their homeland. He is honored today as a national hero of Iran.

The Southern Luri are a subgroup of the Luri people, numbering around 1.2 million and living in western and southwestern Iran—in cities such as Ahvaz and Shiraz near the Zagros Mountains. Once semi-nomadic, they are now settled and primarily work in agriculture. Southern Luri is their traditional language, though Persian is used for business and official matters.

The Southern Luri follow Shi'a Islam, and there are currently no known believers among them. Yet we give thanks that in 2024, a Southern Luri Bible app was launched—opening up new doors for the gospel. It's worth noting that while Southern Luri men are generally more fluent in Persian, women tend to prefer using Southern Luri in everyday life. Learning their heart language is key to building genuine relationships, especially with women. However, caution is advised, as the Iranian government closely monitors the activities of foreigners in the country.

*Heavenly Father, the Southern Luri people deeply revere those who rise to defend their homeland. May they come to see that lasting security is found in You alone—for when You watch over a city, it will not be shaken (Psalm 46:5). We thank You for the release of the Southern Luri Bible app, and we ask that many would be drawn to explore it. As they read, may their hearts be stirred by the faith of spiritual heroes—Moses' unwavering trust, David's bold courage, and Jehoshaphat's prayers that turned back armies. Lead them to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, the true Savior and King who gave His life to rescue every nation. Lord, the Southern Luri have faithfully tilled the land for generations. Send Your autumn and spring rains; bless the ground beneath their feet. And may the gospel water the soil of their hearts, that they may come to know Christ—the Bread of Life—and thirst no more. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

# A Day Off at Home

Lak People



At the dawn of time, after God created the heavens and the earth, He rested on the seventh day. In a similar way, the Lak people of Iran observe a weekly tradition of rest—though uniquely, each family chooses a different day. This sense of familial identity is passed down through generations: your family rests on one day, mine on another. The Lak also follow a distinctive calendar rich in cultural meaning. It marks religious festivals, agricultural rhythms, and seasonal changes significant to their lives. Each month and festival carries a name and significance rooted in tradition—preserving a deep reservoir of ancient wisdom, much like the way the Chinese lunar calendar reflects the natural rhythms and cultural patterns of the year.

The Lak people primarily reside in western Iran. In Persian, the word “Lak” means “hundreds of thousands,” perhaps a reference to their population size. Though no recent census is available, a 1992 study estimated their numbers at around 500,000. The origins of the Lak are still debated—some scholars suggest they may be related to the Luri and Kurdish peoples. Historically, the Lak have been recognized for their warrior spirit, with a notable tradition of women joining their husbands on the battlefield.

Most Lak adhere to Shi’a Islam, while a minority follow the mystical Yazidi faith, which has roots in Sufi Islam and teaches that the soul must undergo 1,001 reincarnations before it can unite with God. At present, there are no known followers of Christ among the Lak people, and the Bible has yet to be fully translated into their language.

*Heavenly Father, You are the Creator of heaven and earth—the One who established the Sabbath, that we might rest from our labor, turn our hearts toward You, and be renewed in Your strength. We pray that one day the Lak people will come to see that their tradition of weekly rest finds its true origin in You, and that only You can lead them into lasting rest. May they treasure a deep connection with You and experience the peace that only You can give. Lord, Your Word is light and life—it transforms hearts. Stir the hearts of linguists and translation teams so that the Lak people may hear and receive Your living Word. Let it become a lamp for their feet and a light for their path. We ask You to prepare and send missionaries into this unreached land, to sow the seeds of the gospel in their hearts. Through the watering of the Holy Spirit, may the fruit of faith take root and grow. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# Write a Poem of Our Own

Khalaj People



Photo by getarchive.net

The Khalaj are a Turkic people who migrated to Iran in the 11th century alongside the Seljuk Turks. Today, they are primarily found in central Iran, with a population estimated between 500,000 and 600,000. Over the past hundred years, Iran has experienced sweeping political and social transformations. As rural life grew increasingly difficult, the once-isolated Khalaj began to disperse, adapting to urban environments and the digital age. But because the Khalaj language has traditionally been passed down orally, this migration has placed their cultural heritage at serious risk of fading away.

“I love the sweet Khalaj language. I long for our villages and lands. Day and night, I pray for a gentle breeze to carry my greetings to my people—and bring their news back to me.”

In recent years, a wave of modern poetry has surged among the Khalaj on social media. This revival is being led by Khalaj intellectuals racing against time to preserve their endangered oral traditions. Using digital platforms, they are working to breathe new life into their cultural heritage—reviving festivals, traditional games, and proverbs. These efforts have not only reignited ethnic identity and pride but have also helped transmit cultural treasures to the next generation, even drawing praise from UNESCO.

Their poetry has also expanded to explore deeply personal and emotional themes. For example, most Khalaj are Shi’a Muslims who eagerly await the return of the Mahdi. This longing often finds voice in their verses:

“O Merciful One, how I long for the day I see You.

Our Mahdi, the promised hour draws near.

O Merciful One, when will You appear?”

*Heavenly Father, the Khalaj people are earnestly striving to preserve their cultural heritage. Social media has become a key platform for reviving their language and traditions. We pray that Christians would have opportunities to engage with them online, and that the message of the gospel would enter the digital spaces where the Khalaj gather. Raise up Christian scholars, Lord, to participate in the study and revitalization of Khalaj culture—not only to help safeguard their history and language, but also to equip gospel workers with deeper insight into this people, so they might share the good news in forms the Khalaj can recognize and receive. May the love of Christ be revealed through academic collaboration and cultural dialogue. We ask for new ministries to take root in the cities of central Iran, where Khalaj communities are adjusting to a changing world. Let these ministries walk with them, offering friendship, wisdom, and hope. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



# A Language Like Poetry

The Gazi People



“It sounds like poetry—melodic, musical, never harsh or awkward.”

This is how linguists describe Gazi, the native language of the Gazi people. With a history spanning over 3,000 years, Gazi was once widely spoken across central Iran, from the region surrounding Isfahan to as far as the Caucasus. However, after the Safavid Empire established Isfahan as its capital in the 16th century, Persian gradually supplanted Gazi as the dominant language. In recent years, the Iranian government has shown renewed interest in this beautiful yet endangered language. In 2016, it was added to Iran’s National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and officials called on society to help preserve it. Still, safeguarding the Gazi language remains a formidable challenge.

Although nearly 40% of Iran’s population speaks a language other than Persian at home, the country’s entire education system operates solely in Persian. For Gazi children, starting school can feel like being caught between two worlds—home and classroom. To succeed academically, they must quickly learn Persian, but in doing so, many gradually lose the ability to speak Gazi with their elders. As the language fades, so too does their connection to cultural memory and identity. This painful reality is not unique to the Gazi; it echoes across many non-Persian-speaking communities throughout Iran.

*Heavenly Father, every people group expresses its deepest emotions in the language closest to their hearts. We pray that the Gazi would come to know that no matter how their language may shift or fade, You are the God who understands and responds to the unspoken cries of their souls. When the Gazi feel powerless in the face of changing times—when children speak one language at school and another at home—may that very tension stir in them a hunger for Your grace and a longing for deeper connection. Send workers, Lord, who will help the Gazi not only preserve their cultural heritage but also discover the living hope found in Christ. We pray for effective language preservation efforts in Iran. Raise up Gazi-speaking teachers and open doors for mother-tongue education in Gazi communities. May families cherish their language and pass it down with love and intentionality. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# Curiosity Woven into Friendship

Qashqai People



What do a New Zealand carpet restoration expert and an Iranian nomadic tribe have in common? The answer: magnificent handwoven carpets. Anna Williams, New Zealand's only carpet conservator, was so captivated by the Qashqai people of Iran that she traveled there seven times to live among them. Her goal was to study their carpet-weaving techniques up close. This deep cross-cultural friendship was even turned into a documentary.

The Qashqai are a Turkic people numbering about 960,000 in Iran, mostly living in central and southwestern parts of the country. Traditionally nomadic, the Qashqai migrate twice a year—each spring and autumn—journeying for three to eight weeks across Iran's Zagros Mountains. Though donkeys and horses have largely been replaced by cars, the daily routines of setting up camp, chopping wood, fetching water, tending livestock, and cooking meals remain arduous. Some Qashqai take great pride in preserving their nomadic heritage, while others have chosen to settle in cities and adapt to a more urban lifestyle.

Government policies have deeply shaped Qashqai life. In earlier decades, the nationalization of tribal lands led to the dispersal of their communities. Since then, tensions have simmered as the Qashqai continue to seek access to their ancestral territories. Living under an Islamic regime, most Qashqai identify as Muslim. Yet their interaction with Islamic clergy and other Muslim communities is often limited—making Islam, for many, more a matter of cultural identity than active religious practice.

*Heavenly Father, we ask that You fill Iranian Christians with curiosity and compassion, inspiring them through the love of Christ to draw near to the Qashqai and form genuine, lasting friendships. Raise up Christian artists, craftsmen, and businesspeople who can connect with the Qashqai through creative mission and marketplace ministry, bearing witness to Your presence with love, creativity, and integrity. May these partnerships open doors for the gospel. Lord, we pray that these nomadic herders—always seeking green pastures and fresh water for their flocks—would themselves be found by messengers of the Gospel, those sent by the Good Shepherd who offers rest and renewal for their souls. We ask for peace between the Qashqai and the Iranian government. May wise economic policies improve their living conditions and foster mutual understanding. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Today, as the Spirit leads, write your own prayer for Iran.

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