
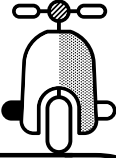
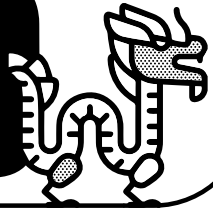


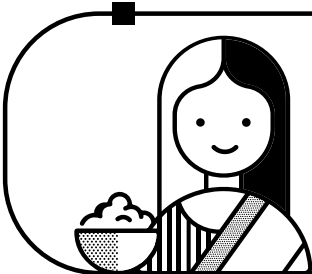
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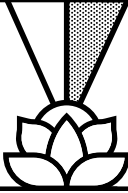
GRAND



TOUR



A 90-day prayer journey
across the continent of Asia



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PREFACE

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

(Ps. 33:8–9)

How great is our world! How vast! How awesome! And how great is the One who made all the world, speaking it into being! At the Lord's command, creation continues to stand firm. Generation after generation has spent much time and many resources exploring the extent, variety and beauty of all that God has made, and yet there remains so much to discover. How great is the task, then, of us getting to grips with Asia, just one of this wonderful world's continents, as we 'journey' over the next 90 days. By travelling the length and breadth of the continent, our goal is to explore the vast array of people and cultures living in God's world, to understand how He is at work among them, and to lift up those who are lost in powerful and passionate prayer.

Time will be far too short to explore the beliefs and customs of every one of Asia's many people groups. We will not visit every city, or even every country, and yet this journey offers an opportunity for us all. Here before each of us lies a chance to explore, discover, learn and grow, not just in our knowledge of places and peoples, but in our understanding of the Lord's purposes for them and for us.

As we embark on this adventure, a lot will be familiar to us. The scenery will vary from tropical islands to frozen tundras, and from gleaming white snow on mountain peaks to lush green paddy fields in expansive valleys. We will experience cultures shaped and defined by major belief systems such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, as well as groups which hold Shinto, communist and animist beliefs at their core. We will meet the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the saved and the lost.

Still, there will be much to surprise us along the way. Who can say which places will inspire us, whose stories will move us and what truths the Lord will teach us as we explore this part of His world? We cannot predict the ways in which He might speak to us and shape our hearts in the days ahead.

As we step out on this journey, let us do so in faith, prayerfully and thoughtfully reflecting on every sight, sound and story, and seeking the Lord at every turn.

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.*





DAY 1

DAY OF PREPARATION

In the final rush before any adventure begins, the panic starts to set in. Have I packed enough clothes? Did I buy the right toiletries? What time do I need to get to the airport? Checking the pocket where your passport should be, you breathe a sigh of relief that it is still there, as it was the previous five times. You print another copy of your itinerary, just in case you lose the other three. Finally, plane tickets in hand, you walk out of the door and climb into your taxi.

After the mad rush comes a moment of contemplation. Your trip has been prepared – flights, meetings, hotel bookings ... Your bag has been prepared too, bursting at the seams with t-shirts and socks, soap and sanitiser. But what about your heart? Are you truly ready for all that lies ahead? Are you ready to listen, learn, absorb and reflect? Are you ready to be taught, challenged and shaped by the places and people you will encounter? Are you ready to commit every place, person, thought and feeling into the hands of the One who will oversee your journey?

Perhaps that thought is new to you, and a little scary. Perhaps you know you should do this, but it remains an unmastered discipline. Welcome to the club! We are all so easily distracted by the good things of this world that we forget the One who made them and upholds them. So now is the time to bring your heart before the Lord. Commit it into His hands. Commit *yourself* into His hands! He is faithful in all He does, and the earth is full of His unfailing love (Ps. 33:4–5).



BIBLE VERSE

'... the earth is full of his unfailing love'
(Ps. 33:5).



REFLECTION

Turn to Psalm 33 and take a few moments to reflect on what it says about the Lord, about the world He has made, and about the nations and peoples who inhabit it. As you journey, you will encounter many people whose plans and purposes will one day be thwarted by the Lord (v. 10). You will also meet those He has chosen for His inheritance – your brothers and sisters in Christ. In some cases, these will be workers who can openly and freely declare the good news to their neighbours. Elsewhere, the lives of believers will be a powerful demonstration of what it means to live in the hope of deliverance, waiting for the Lord and trusting in His holy name (vv. 18–22). Is your heart ready to be challenged as you meet those who oppose the Lord, and as you witness the struggles faced by those who call Him 'Father'?



PRAYER

Lord, I commit to You the adventure which lies ahead. Thank You for this wonderful world which You have made, and for the many nations, cultures and people found within it. I pray that as I travel around Asia over the next 90 days, You would go with me. Help me to seek You at every turn and to hear Your voice. I pray that Your Spirit would be at work in me, teaching me, helping me grow and softening my heart so that it might become more like Yours.



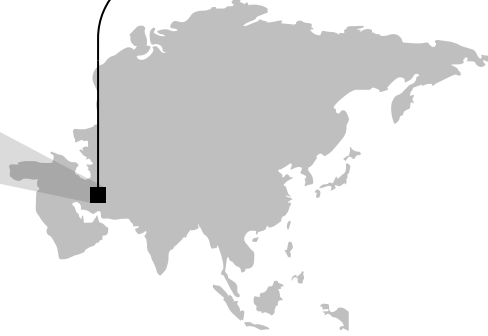


DAY 2



IRAN

Part 1



The plane is descending towards your first stop on this incredible journey. Looking out of the window, you are struck by the sight of the Milad Tower, which stands tall over the city. Its long needle, reaching up into the sky, passes in and out of your vision in the blink of an eye. The tower is perhaps the most famous and iconic image of the city of Tehran, Iran's capital.

In many ways, the city is just as you imagined, aligning with the impression formed in your mind from news reports back home. As you expected, it's hot. Very hot. Your bag sticks to your back as you make your way through streets thronging with bearded men, armed police officers and women in hijabs. You catch the eye of one of these women as you walk and try to imagine life in her shoes. Is she happy and content? Is she resolute in her obedience to her husband and local imam, or does she quietly long for something else?

In the distance, you spot a man apprehending another woman wearing a hijab. She's being told to wear her headscarf more respectfully – beneath it, her hair was streaming over her clothes. The man must be part of Tehran's morality police. While their numbers have decreased in recent years, many still patrol the streets, enforcing rules such as women being required to cover their heads in public. The morality police are just one example of the oppressive Islamic regime which governs this nation. However, much greater infringements to liberty are committed here. While great swathes of the Old Testament depict events within its borders, Iran now ranks among the ten worst countries in the world for persecution against Christians.





BIBLE VERSE

'He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free'
(Ps. 146:7).



REFLECTION

In the West, freedom is easily taken for granted. With many freedoms enshrined in law, we are largely allowed to say what we like without fear of recrimination, and to believe what we wish without fear of such persecution. Even more significantly, as believers we are free from the eternal consequences of sin. The punishment for our iniquities has been borne by the Lamb, setting us free to love, worship and serve Him. Psalm 146 reminds us that the Lord is concerned with the plight of the oppressed. Iranian believers can take comfort in the knowledge and presence of a Father who hates oppression and injustice. We long for a day, though, when all Iranians are set free not just from earthly oppression, but also from the burden of sin. As we pray for that day, how will we use our freedom for His glory?



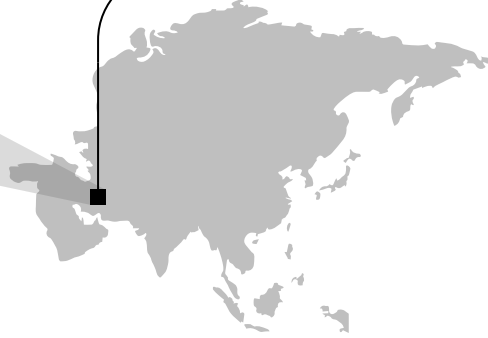
PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the freedom I have in You. I pray that You would burden my heart so that I make the most of the freedoms I enjoy to be a part of Your work in furthering Your kingdom. Thank You for Your Son, for His sacrifice and for the forgiveness I have received. Lord, I pray for those who are oppressed in Iran. Please bring both earthly and spiritual freedom to this land, so that Your name would be glorified.





DAY 3



IRAN

Part 2

It is strange making your way around a country with such a well-publicised and turbulent past, though you would never know it as you explore the city. The streets are full of people living normal lives – shoppers bustling between various outlets, women chatting in the street and a group of boys noisily playing football against a wall. However, it wasn't all that long ago that these same streets were filled with protesters and mourners following the assassination of one of Iran's most popular generals. For a few days in 2019, the whole world held their breath as tensions rose between Iran and the US.

The revolution in 1979 transformed this land. The Shah was seen by many as an oppressor who was too friendly with America. Discontent grew amid economic struggles and perceived marginalisation of the true Islamic faith. The revolution put in place a new leadership and government. Suddenly, the moderate and modernising Shah-led nation became ground zero for a Shia Islamic revival. Thousands, in fear, fled to safety outside of the country, while Iran also quickly became one of the most difficult places on earth to follow Jesus Christ. To this day, the church meets underground, the Bible is a difficult book to obtain and the gospel cannot be shared openly.

You stop in the street outside a mosque. Men and women are filing in through two separate doors, removing their footwear and washing themselves in preparation for prayer. You can hear the low murmur of prayer to Allah from beyond the doors. Your heart hangs heavy in your chest as you wonder whether those inside will ever hear the gospel.



BIBLE VERSE

*'He rules for ever by his power, his eyes watch the nations –
let not the rebellious rise up against him'*
(Ps. 66:7).



REFLECTION

It can be tempting to believe that places like Iran will never change. Severe opposition to the Christian faith can lead us to wonder how God's kingdom could ever be proclaimed here. Psalm 66 reminds us that the Lord still rules – even in places where it doesn't look that way. The nations are carefully considered by Him. He watches them, rules over them and, by His Spirit, still works for His glory through them. If humankind was able to turn Iran upside down in the Iranian Revolution, surely our Almighty God can turn it right side up again? There is always hope to be found in our Lord.



PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your concern for the nations in our world. You watch them and nothing that happens is beyond Your sight. I praise You for Your sovereignty; nothing is beyond Your control. Lord, I'm sorry for when I believe things will never change. In You, all things are possible. I pray that Iran would be opened up to the gospel, so that Christ might be proclaimed and churches might meet openly for Your glory!



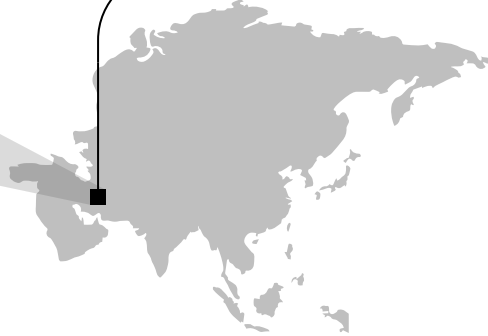


DAY 4



IRAN

Part 3



As you speak with young adults and students, you begin to identify a sense of hopelessness. They don't seem particularly proud of their nation. In fact, many are keen to highlight the issues plaguing their land. They speak of widespread unemployment; millions are out of work and thousands of young people are leaving the country in search of opportunities elsewhere.

New friends also tell you about Iran's pressing drug problem. Estimates of the number of addicts range from two and a half million right up to seven million. As a result, Iran has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Most of the prison population have been incarcerated for drug-related offences. With all these factors in play, an acute sense of emptiness and futility seems to have settled into Iran. Sadly, this is evidenced by a rise in suicides, with a 66% rise among women and a 71% increase among men. You wonder if these are signs of a God-forsaken land.

A contact leads you to a local church meeting in secret, but which has grown rapidly in recent years. As you step into the small house, it is filled wall to wall. Remarkably, despite its fierce opposition to the gospel, Iran is currently home to the fastest-growing church in the world. There are many protests in Iran against the regime, with people wanting to be not an Islamic Republic but an Iranian Republic. There is a strong and growing desire for freedoms of press, of speech and even of belief. But more significantly, the hopelessness you detected among the people of Iran has led many to recognise Islam for what it is: an empty and false religion. God is moving here, bringing thousands to Himself. Praise God there is hope for Iran!





BIBLE VERSE

'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped'
(Is. 35:5).



REFLECTION

The deep sense of discontentment that is evident in Iran is truly remarkable. The country's influence and power make it appear untouchable, while the Islamic regime and oppressive attitude towards Christianity can make it seem impenetrable with the gospel. Not to our Lord! As ever, He is working behind the scenes, orchestrating events by His power in order to make His name known and bring glory to Himself. His actions are stirring people's hearts. Long-shut eyes are being opened to the falseness of Islam and long-closed ears are opening to the truth of His Word. Without a doubt, the Lord *is* building His church in Iran. Hallelujah!



PRAYER

Lord, I praise You as the only hope for this world. When all seems lost, when the enemy appears to be winning, You are still watching and working for Your glory. Lord, I delight with those in heaven at the growth of Your church in Iran. Thank you for opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. I pray for Your continued blessing on the people here. Please would many more come to know Your Son as their own Lord and Saviour!

