

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" Matthew 28:19



Unreached People Prayer Profile November & December, 2003

The Azerbaijani People of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is located in the Caucasus Mountain region on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. It is there, in the land of the ancient Medes, that we find more than six million Azerbaijani (also known as the Azeri). The name "Azeri" is thought to have come from the fourth century ruler, Atropat, who governed the area that is now northwestern Iran. However, it may have been derived from azer, the Persian word for "fire."

While the origins of the Azeri are unclear, we do know that they have been subjected to numerous invasions throughout history. The homeland of the Azeri was first conquered by the Persians in the sixth century B.C. Islam was introduced into the area during the seventh century A.D., and has been practiced there ever since. By the eleventh century, Persian influence was overpowered by Turkic influence. During the thirteenth century, this region of Asia fell under the dominion of Genghis Khan.



What are their lives like?

Azerbaijan is a low, fertile, almost treeless plateau. The climate ranges from warm to sub-tropical temperatures. Grain, grapes, cattle, sheep, and goats are raised in abundance. Vegetables, fruits, and some teas are also important products. Although the land is ideal for farming, about one fourth of the population now lives in Baku, the nation's capital, working in industry.

Russian involvement in the Transcaucasus began in the early eighteenth century in attempt to obtain raw materials. In 1922, Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Soviet Union. This changed the face of the nation, mainly through the development of petroleum resources. Most Azerbaijani continued to farm the rich soils, but many moved into the cities to work in industry. There they found themselves working unskilled jobs and taking direction from Russian managers.



Azerbaijani settlements were traditionally divided into villages made up of extended families. In an attempt to protect their culture, marriage within the family was encouraged. Unions between first cousins were considered the most desirable. Marriage to a non-Azerbaijani was almost unheard of prior to the Soviet period. Polygamy (having more than one wife) was only allowed in cases of infertility.

The Azerbaijani diet consists mainly of rice *pilaf* and a variety of grilled and boiled meats including beef, goat, and lamb. Traditional dishes include *bozartma* (mutton stew), *dovga* (a soup made from yogurt), meat, and herbs. Tea and wine are popular drinks.

The Azeri language belongs to the southwestern (Oguz) branch of the Turkic language family. Azeri has a written tradition that dates back to the fourteenth century. Arabic script is used in Iran and the Cyrillic alphabet is used in Azerbaijan.

What are their beliefs?

The Azerbaijani are primarily [Shi'ite Muslims](#), but there are a number of Hanafite Muslims as well. Islam among the Azerbaijani is a reflection of the historical ties that exist between Azerbaijan and Iran. Until the twentieth century, most Azeri identified themselves as Muslims rather than Azerbaijani or Turks. They believe that being a "spiritual community of Islam" was much more important than being a nation.

In Azerbaijan, religious practices are less restrictive of women's activities than in most other Muslim countries. Most women have jobs outside the home, and a few have attained leadership positions. However, some evidence of the traditional, restrictive female role remains.

What are their needs?

Azerbaijan faces the most severe economic problems of the three former Soviet Transcaucasus republics. It is burdened with high unemployment and a long tradition of corruption, both of which pose a threat to economic growth. Armenian Christians and Azerbaijani Muslims have been bitter enemies for centuries. This has made spreading the Gospel very difficult. Today, there are no known Azerbaijani Christians in Azerbaijan.

Prayer Points

- Ask the Lord to call people to go to Azerbaijan and share Christ.
- Pray that prayer teams will be raised up to intercede.
- Ask God to reveal Himself to the Azerbaijani people through the proclamation of God's Word.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to soften their hearts towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- Pray for God to give strategies to the missions agencies that are targeting the Azerbaijani.
- Ask God to open doors for Christian businessmen to share Christ with the Azerbaijani.
- Pray that God will open the hearts of Azerbaijan's governmental leaders to the Gospel.
- Ask the Lord to raise up strong local indigenous churches among the Azerbaijani.

Statistics (Latest estimates from the World Evangelization Research Center.)

THE PEOPLE

- **People name:** Azerbaijani
- **Country:** Azerbaijan
- **Their language:** Azeri
- **Population:**
 - (1990) 5,749,300
 - (1995) 6,105,000
 - (2000) 6,437,500
 - (2005) 8,282,000
- **Largest religion:**
 - Muslims (shi'a) 63%
 - Muslims (Hanafite) 27%
 - Nonreligious 10%
- **Christians:** None
- **Church members:** None
- **Scriptures in their own language:** Bible
- **Jesus Film in their own language:** Available
- **Christian broadcasts in their own language:** None
- **Mission agencies working among this people:** 9
- **Persons who have heard the Gospel:** 1,343,100 (22%)
 - Those evangelized by local Christians: 0%
 - Those evangelized from the outside: 1,343,100 (22%)
- **Persons who have never heard the Gospel:** 4,761,900 (78%)

THEIR COUNTRY

- **Major peoples in size order:**
 - Azerbaijani 80.7%
 - Russian 5.5%
 - Armenian 5.5%
 - Lezgian 2.3%
 - Talysh 1.9%
- **Major religions:**
 - Muslim 85%
 - Nonreligious 9.9%
 - Atheist 3.3%
- **Number of denominations:** 6
- **Additional People Group Information:**

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|-----------------------------------|------|
| Complete Bible: | 1891 |
| New Testament: | 1878 |
| Bible Portions: | 1842 |
| Jesus Film: | Yes |
| Christian Radio Broadcast: | FEBA |
| Audio Recording of Gospel: | No |