



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

Unreached People Prayer Profile
November & December, 2004

The Turkmen People of Turkmenistan

Nearly three million Turkmen live in [Turkmenistan](#), which is located in south central Asia along the Caspian Sea. Many others live in the surrounding Asian nations of [Iran](#), [Afghanistan](#), and [Uzbekistan](#). Smaller groups can also be found in [Russia](#) and [Syria](#). They are mostly Muslims who, for the most part, have had little or no contact with Christianity.

Their culture has been strongly influenced in the past by both the Turkic conquerors, who imposed their language on them, and the Arabs, who forced them to convert to Islam. Long ago, they developed a strong ethnic identity as "children of the desert" because they would plunder rich caravans of Persian traders. Eventually, they became involved in slave trading as well.

For centuries the Turkmen lived as nomadic herdsmen. In more recent years, however, many have changed to a "semi-nomadic lifestyle," living in permanent homes as well as in tents.



What are their lives like?

The Kara Kum ("Black Sand") Desert lies in the center of Turkmenistan, and has served as a place of refuge for the Turkmen during wartime. Cattle, sheep, cotton, wheat, and barley are raised along the desert's edges. Since this area has very little rainfall in the winter and none in the summer, the Turkmen are forced to live near water sources.

For centuries the Turkmen lived as nomadic herdsmen. Their society was characterized by a distinct economic division between the cattlemen and farmers. However, the past seventy years of Soviet rule has virtually eliminated their nomadic lifestyle. The socialization of farmland has changed their traditional settlement patterns, and movement into the cities has naturally weakened their customs and traditions.



However, tribal loyalties continue to have a strong influence over the people. Although there have been political and economic changes, there have been less changes in the areas of family life and religion.

Very little industry has been developed in Turkmenistan, and what does exist employs the Slavic people. The Turkmen are especially known for their brisk trade in the bazaars, where many samples of their handicrafts can be found. Some of

these include metal and wooden household utensils, tools, and furniture. Many have also supplemented their income by producing carpets.

The Turkmen are generally tall and thin. They are physically strong and easily able to endure the harshness of the environment. They are characterized by their hospitality, sincerity, and trustworthiness; however, they are also known as being hot-headed and revengeful.

The Turkmen language, which is divided into many dialects, belongs to the Oghuz group of Turkic languages.

What are their beliefs?

Ninety-five percent of the Turkmen in Uzbekistan are [Muslims](#) of the Hanafite branch. The Nestorian Christians penetrated Turkestan in the fourth century A.D.; but by the beginning of the fourteenth century, this had been totally replaced by Islam. This transition gradually came to influence the political, civil, and economic lives of the people.

Despite the outward conformity to Islam, mysticism and other past religious traditions are still prevalent.

In 1928, the Soviet authorities launched an anti-religious campaign aimed at the complete destruction of Islam among the Turkmen. The campaign was the harshest and most violent of all anti-Islamic attacks in central Asia. It lasted until 1941; but after a short delay during the war, this attack was resumed in 1948.

What are their needs?

There is little awareness of Christianity among the Turkmen. The four missions agencies targeting them have made very little progress. More laborers and evangelistic tools are desperately needed. With modern technology, there may be some inroads possible through satellite television and radio. Presently, there are no known believers among them.

Prayer Points

- Ask the Lord to call people who are willing to go to Turkmenistan and share Christ with the Turkmen.
- Pray that Christian television and radio broadcasts will soon be made available in their language.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to grant wisdom and favor to the missions agencies that are targeting the Turkmen.
- Pray that God will open doors for Christian businessmen to share Christ with the Turkmen.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Turkmen toward Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- Pray that God will open the hearts of Turkmenistan's governmental leaders to the Gospel.
- Ask the Lord to raise up a strong local church among the Turkmen by the year 2010.

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

THE PEOPLE

- **People name:** Turkmen
- **Country:** Turkmenistan
- **Their language:** Turkmen
- **Population:**
(1990) 2,663,900
(1995) 2,952,100
(2000) 3,227,900
- **Largest religion:**
Muslims (Hanafites) 95%
Nonreligious 5%
- **Christians:** None
- **Church members:** None
- **Scriptures in their own language:** New Testament
- **Jesus Film in their own language:** Available
- **Christian broadcasts in their own language:** None
- **Mission agencies working among this people:** 4
- **Persons who have heard the Gospel:** 738,000 (25%)
Those evangelized by local Christians: 0
Those evangelized from the outside: 738,000 (25%)
- **Persons who have never heard the Gospel:** 2,214,100 (75%)

THE COUNTRY

- **Country:** Turkmenistan
- **Population:**
(1990) 3,656,900
(1995) 4,098,700
(2000) 4,551,100
- **Major peoples in size order:**
Turkmen 72%
Russian 9.4%
Uzbek 9%
Kazak 2.4%
Tatar 1.1%
- **Major religions:**
Muslim 81.2%
Nonreligious 8.8%
Atheist 5.1%
- **Additional People Group Information:**

Complete Bible:	Yes
New Testament:	Yes
Bible Portions:	1981
Jesus Film:	Yes
Christian Radio Broadcast:	FEBA
Audio Recording of Gospel:	Yes

