

Prayer Profile

THE UIGHUR OF KAZAKSTAN



The Uighur are a Turkic people located primarily in northwestern China. Significant communities can also be found in Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Their origins can be traced back to Turkish nomads who lived in Siberia. They became independent of the Turks in 744 AD, but were forced to leave their homeland in 840 AD. It was then that most of them immigrated to western China.

The Uighur in Kazakstan represent less than 1% of the country's total population. They have been heavily influenced by Russians and other Central Asian peoples; and today, most are bilingual and only about 15% of them speak Uighur as their first language.

Uighur literally means "united" or "allied." For centuries, the Uighur were an important link between China and the rest of the world. They lived along the silk road and worked as caravan drivers transporting Chinese goods. The strategic location of their homes allowed them to be the commercial "middlemen" between the Orient and Europe.

What are their lives like?

Traditionally, the Uighur were shepherds and oasis farmers. Today, however, many of them are involved in businesses such as manufacturing, mining, oil drilling, trading, and transportation. One can easily see that their diet has been greatly influenced by their rural past. Meat is eaten at every meal, and dairy products are enjoyed daily. The Uighur love to drink tea with milk. Their staple foods also include noodles and round bread made from maize or wheat flour.

The typical Uighur house is square. It includes skylights, and a flat roof that is used for drying grains and fruits. Bed frames are low to the ground, and made of bricks so that they can be heated. They are used for both sleeping and sitting. Wall carpets are often used to decorate the home.

Various political, religious, and ethnic conflicts have characterized the history of the Uighur. Nevertheless, they are still described as being a "proud, happy, and independent people." They possess a unique blend of cultural elegance all their own. While remaining isolated enough to preserve their rural simplicity, they successfully made many contacts with other cultures. Such a rare mixture of simplicity and sophistication has given the Uighur a unique and obvious charm.

Singing and dancing are important social activities among the Uighur. They play stringed, wind, and percussion instruments. The *Mukam* ("Twelve Great Melodies") have been part of the Uighur culture for many centuries.

Uighur men usually wear long robes that have distinctive collars. The robes are fastened on the right side and have long waist bands. The village women wear loose-sleeved, one-piece dresses covered with black vests. Today, however, it is becoming more common for those living in cities to wear western style clothing.

The Uighur of Central Asia play an important role in the lives of the Chinese Uighur who are struggling to gain their independence. For example, they often help by smuggling needed materials into China. In China there is evidence of much hostility, bitterness, hurt, and mistrust between the Uighur and the Han Chinese.

What are their beliefs?

Islam has been the dominant religion of the Uighur since the tenth century. In the past, they were Muslim in name only; however, there is some renewal that is currently taking place among them. Today, virtually all of the Uighur in Kazakstan claim to be Hanafite Muslims.

What are their needs?

There are currently three missions agencies working among the Uighur in Kazakstan. Sadly, however, there are still less than 100 known converts. As Muslims, they are taught that Christians are their enemies. The Bible has already been translated into the Uighur language; Christian radio broadcasts and the *Jesus* film are also available. Nevertheless, in spite of these efforts, they remain almost untouched with the Gospel.

The eyes of the Uighur need to be opened to the saving truth of Jesus Christ. They need to experience the love and grace of the one, true God.

Prayer Points

- Ask God to raise up prayer teams who will break up the soil through worship and intercession.
- Pray that the Lord will call missionaries to go to Kazakstan and share Christ with the Uighur.
- Ask God to grant favor to the missions agencies that are targeting the Uighur.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to anoint the Gospel as it goes forth via radio.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Uighur towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.
- Pray for effectiveness of the Jesus film among the Uighur.
- Pray that God will open the hearts of Kazakstan's governmental leaders to the Gospel.
- Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Uighurs.

Statistics

Latest estimates from the World Evangelization Research Center.

THE PEOPLE

- **People name:** Uighur
- **Country:** Kazakstan
- **Their language:** Uighur
- **Population:**
 - (1990) 187,600
 - (1995) 192,600
 - (2000) 199,100
- **Largest religion:**
 - Muslim (Hanafite) 99.9%
- **Christians:** <1%
- **Church members:** 96
- **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:** 3
- **Persons who have heard the Gospel:** 61,700 (32%)
 - Those evangelized by local Christians: 7,800 (4%)
 - Those evangelized from the outside: 53,900 (28%)
- **Persons who have never heard the Gospel:** 130,900 (68%)

THEIR COUNTRY

- **Country:** Kazakstan
- **Population:**
 - (1990) 16,669,700
 - (1995) 17,111,100
 - (2000) 17,694,000
- **Major peoples in size order:**
 - Kazak 39.7%
 - Russian 37.8%
 - Ukrainian 5.4%
 - German 5.2%
 - Uzbek 2%
- **Major religions:**
 - Muslim 45.4%
 - Christian 24.4%
 - Nonreligious 18.4%
- **Number of denominations:** 23