

A Voice from the Back Seat

By Jerry Chase

Are We There Yet? Sizing up the Challenge of Taking the Gospel to the Whole World

How close are we to taking the gospel to all the corners of the earth, and how soon will the gospel be known by every kindred, tongue, and people? According to some, one of the signs that Christ's second coming is imminent is that the gospel has already been preached in the whole world as a testimony to all



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nations as a fulfillment of the conditions set out in Matthew 24:14 for Christ's coming. Is this fact or wishful thinking?

An often-quoted statistic is the number of countries with an established Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) presence. In 2001 Adventists were working in 203 of the 228 countries recognized by the United Nations. Although twelve of the countries with no Adventist presence are small, with a majority of the population Christian, a closer look at the demographics and conditions in the remaining thirteen countries reveals significant missiological challenges.

Unfortunate circumstances in North Korea have been in the press recently. Christianity in North Korea has been suppressed. No reports concerning SDA work there have been received since 1959. Not as well known are the conditions in the small Buddhist nation of Bhutan, between India and China, which has resisted influence from the outside world by controlling trade and by prohibiting all foreign missionary activity and proselytism. For both of these countries the church's recent efforts have focused on

evangelism from outside, near the borders.

A common denominator, for eleven of the countries listed in table 1 as having no SDA presence, is a Muslim majority population. The countries are neither small nor forgotten. Seventh-day Adventist work in Syria, for example, dates back to 1893 when four persons became Seventh-day Adventists in Aleppo. Unfortunately, the SDA work did not connect with the Muslim majority population of Syria. Consequently, when ministers and several lay members were imprisoned and the Damascus Center was closed in 1970, official SDA work ended. This disassociation with the majority population is not limited to Syria, but occurs in many of the Muslim majority countries where Adventist work has been established. The SDA Church has not impacted the followers of Islam. For example, in Turkey Adventist work began in 1889 among Christians in Constantinople. Before World War I there were 350 members, but in 2002 there were only 46 members in two congregations, with only one or two Turks (table 2).

The implication of this situation is monumental. Adventists have been unable to effectively witness in Muslim cultures. While just a few countries have no Adventist presence, a vast number of Muslim people groups in many countries remain totally unreached (see table 5).

The barriers in reaching Mus-

lims seem insurmountable in places. Not only do the laws of many Muslim countries prohibit conversion from Islam, but tensions between Christian and Muslim communities leave many SDA members fearful and uncertain about relating to their Muslims neighbors. For example, in one country an expatriate relief worker brought his Muslim interpreter with him to Sabbath worship. It took half an hour to get past the three armed guards at the gate and into the church compound. Even then, they were almost not allowed to enter the church. In parts of the world where Christians see Muslims as a real and present threat to their safety, there is little hope of reaching Muslims using traditional means.

The approximate 1.3 billion Muslims are by far the largest bloc of unreached peoples in the world today. Yet, Muslim peoples receive proportionally the fewest number of missionaries of any major religious bloc and the smallest allocation of resources. Judging by the challenge of the Muslim world, one would think Muslims would be at the top of the priority list.

Table 3 lists the top ten Muslim countries with the highest percentage of Muslim population. These Islamic states represent a continued challenge to the gospel. Christian mission cannot continue as usual if we wish to see the gospel go to the whole world in the near future. Resources and new methodolo-

Table 1. 25 Countries with No Established SDA Work

Countries	Population	Muslims	Christians
Afghanistan	22,720,416	98.1	0.0
Andorra	77,985	0.6	90.0
Bhutan	2,123,970	1.0	0.5
Brunei	328,080	64.4	7.5
Channel Islands	152,898	0.0	65.9
Falkland Islands	2,250	0.0	85.6
Gibraltar	25,082	8.6	85.2
Holy See	1,000	0.0	98.0
Isle of Man	79,166	0.0	66.2
Libya	5,604,722	96.1	3.0
Maldives	286,223	99.1	0.1
Mauritania	2,669,547	99.1	0.2
Monaco	33,597	0.5	92.6
North Korea	24,039,193	0.0	2.1
Palestine	2,215,393	73.5	8.5
Western Sahara	293,357	99.4	0.2
Saint Pierre & Miquelon	6,567	0.2	97.3
San Marino	26,514	0.0	89.7
Saudi Arabia	21,606,691	93.7	3.6
Somalia (& Somaliland)	10,097,177	98.7	1.1
Swalbard & Jan Mayen Islands	3,700	0.0	52.3
Syria	16,124,618	89.3	7.8
Tokelau	1,500	0.0	95.7
Wallis & Futuna Island	14,517	0.0	96.6
Yemen	18,112,066	98.9	0.2
Total	126,646,229	75.2	2.7

gies devoted to Muslim outreach must be dramatically increased.

Many Christian groups have pioneered alternate forms of Muslim outreach that allow Christians in Muslim countries to practice their faith in secret. Such followers of Christ are often called "Hidden Believers," since they dare not worship openly. It is time that Seventh-day Adventists also explore new and viable options for the Islamic world. Table 4 shows the encouraging numbers and the high an-

little is left to be done. Celebrating what God is doing for his people is important, but glowing reports must always be balanced by presenting the remaining challenges as well. Our church, our leaders, and Adventist media must shift from self-congratulation to championing the needs of the unreached.

Second, we need to give sacrificially on behalf of the unreached. The funds available for the unreached as compared to what we expend on ourselves and on

- **1 out of 3 unreached persons is a Muslim**
- **2 out of 3 countries in the 10/40 window are Islamic**
- **Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world *and* in the US**

nual growth rates that have resulted from Protestant work when these new methods are used.

The gospel can be spread quickly to all the peoples of the world. However, methods, focus, and the allocation of resources must change. If the SDA Church is going to reach the Islamic masses and all the other unreached peoples in our world, several changes are needed.

First, there needs to be balance in reporting on missions. A steady diet of glowing reports from around the world has left the impression among many Adventist members that very

our own local congregations should cause much shame. Can we really make a credible case that we care about the unreached when there is such an imbalance in our allocation of resources?

Third, and perhaps most importantly, we need to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. Our hearts need to be broken by the things that break His heart. We need to open our hearts to love those who, whether far away or nearby, are different from us. We need to get rid of our prejudice towards those among whom God is already working, drawing all people to Himself.

Table 2. Ten Muslim Countries with Largest Population

Countries	Muslims	Population	Churches	SDA Members	%
Pakistan	150,365,313	156,483,155	73	7,085	0.005
India	122,570,042	1,013,661,777	1,258	456,664	0.045
Indonesia	116,105,310	212,107,385	1,141	188,926	0.089
Bangladesh	110,848,684	129,155,152	92	23,103	0.018
Turkey	64,713,833	66,590,940	2	46	0.000
Iran	64,706,769	67,702,199	2	32	0.000
Egypt	57,779,805	68,469,695	17	941	0.001
Nigeria	48,999,663	111,506,095	647	186,638	0.167
Algeria	30,441,669	31,471,278	0	15	0.000
Morocco	27,735,853	28,220,843	0	20	0.000
Totals	794,266,941	1,885,368,519	3,232	863,470	0.046
Global Total	1,188,242,789	6,055,049,115	48,987	11,687,229	0.193

Table 3. Ten Countries with Highest Percentage of Muslims

Country	% Muslim	Muslims	Population	SDA Members
Somaliland	99.6	2,820,452	2,832,677	0
Sahara	99.4	291,602	293,357	0
Mauritania	99.1	2,646,306	2,669,547	0
Maldives	99.1	283,613	286,223	0
Tunisia	98.9	9,484,802	9,585,611	11
Yemen	98.9	17,919,414	18,112,066	0
Somalia	98.3	7,144,028	7,264,500	0
Morocco	98.3	27,735,853	28,220,843	20
Afghanistan	98.1	22,296,095	22,720,416	0
Comoros	98.1	581,330	592,749	6
Total	98.5	91,203,495	92,577,989	37

This is not to suggest that current church work should be stopped in favor of reaching Muslims or other unreached groups. Rather, the unreached and unentered areas in the world must become mission priorities. This shift in priorities would mean that the funds and personnel allocated by the SDA church for the unreached would have to grow exponentially. We should be constantly asking the question “Where is the need the greatest?” and then deploy missionaries, funds, prayer, attention, education, and all possible resources in direct proportion to

the magnitude of the task. How else can we claim to be faithful to the Great Commission?

Works Cited:

139th Annual statistical report. 2001. Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Office of Archives and Statistics.

Barrett, David B., and Todd M. Johnson, eds. 2001. *World Christian trends, AD 30-AD 2200 : Interpreting the annual Christian megacensus.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Table 4. Countries with Hidden Believers

Countries	Hidden Believers	% Annual Growth	Population	Affiliated	%
Pakistan	40,000	57.3	156,483,155	3,812,245	2.4
Indonesia	40,000	57.1	212,107,385	26,364,858	12.4
Bangladesh	30,000	52.8	129,155,152	931,740	0.7
Egypt	25,000	53.1	68,469,695	10,320,466	15.1
Turkey	17,000	51.9	66,590,940	373,155	0.6
Iran	14,000	49.7	67,702,199	313,990	0.5
Algeria	10,000	47.3	31,471,278	90,877	0.3
Syria	6,000	44.5	16,124,618	1,257,709	7.8
Sudan	6,000	5.0	29,489,719	4,874,391	16.5
Saudi Arabia	6,000	11.4	21,606,691	786,985	3.6
Morocco	6,000	45.0	28,220,843	174,476	0.6
Iraq	5,000	44.5	23,114,884	724,662	3.1
Uzbekistan	4,000	45.3	24,317,851	394,334	1.6
Malaysia	3,000	41.1	22,244,062	1,771,189	8

Table 5. Nations with a Muslim Population of at Least 10% or More than One Million

Country	Percentage	Population
Afghanistan	97.89	22,241,015
Albania	38.79	1,207,701
Algeria	96.68	30,426,432
Azerbaijan	83.67	6,471,050
Bahrain	82.31	508,031
Bangladesh	85.63	110,556,810
Benin	20.03	1,221,141
Bosnia	60.06	2,385,471
Brunei	64.39	211,185
Bulgaria	11.87	976,313
Bukina Faso	50.00	5,968,412
Cameroon	25.00	3,771,242
Central African Republic	15.60	2,544,424
Chad	55.00	4,208,040
China	2.00	25,251,136
Comoro Islands	98.07	581,309
Cote d'Ivoire	38.60	5,707,331
Cyprus	23.00	180,677
Turkish Republic of North Cyprus	98.00	Not Available
Djibouti	93.90	598,738
Egypt	86.52	59,239,980
Eritrea	47.97	1,847,031
Ethiopia	31.00	19,395,111
France	10.00	5,907,971
Gambia	88.80	1,159,162
Georgia	20.00	993,512
Germany	3.70	3,042,158
Ghana	21.00	4,244,624
Guinea	85.41	6,346,259

Country	Percentage	Population
Guinea-Bissau	43.00	521,638
India	12.50	126,707,722
Indonesia	80.30	171,032,517
Iran	99.02	67,038,717
Iraq	96.85	22,386,765
Israel	14.60	747,766
Italy	2.40	1,375,149
Jordan	96.19	6,415,239
Kazakhstan	60.50	9,814,651
Kenya	8.00	2,406,430
Kuwait	87.43	1,723,800
Kyrgyzstan	78.08	3,669,242
Lebanon	59.76	1,961,196
Liberia	13.00	410,000
Libya	96.50	5,408,557
Macedonia	25.00	505,895
Madagascar	7.00	1,115,921
Malawi	13.00	1,420,281
Malaysia	58.00	12,901,556
Maldives	99.41	284,534
Mali	87.00	9,773,424
Mauritania	99.84	2,665,276
Mauritius	16.30	188,509
Mayotte	96.50	98,064
Morocco	99.85	28,178,512
Mozambique	18.10	3,562,163
Myanmar	3.80	1,733,225
Nepal	5.00	1,196,525
Niger	97.59	10,471,507
Nigeria	41.00	45,717,499
Oman	92.66	2,355,175
Pakistan	96.08	150,349,015

Country	Percentage	Population
Palestine	86.56	2,935,590
Philippines	5.00	3,798,325
Qatar	79.43	475,837
Russia	10.20	14,987,252
Rwanda	10.50	811,978
Saudi Arabia	92.83	20,057,491
Senegal	92.07	8,729,305
Sierra Leone	70.00	3,398,068
Singapore	14.90	531,425
Somalia	99.95	10,092,128
Sri Lanka	8.00	1,506,164
Sudan	65.00	19,168,317
Suriname	19.40	80,923
Syria	90.32	14,563,755
Tajikistan	89.50	5,538,440
Tanzania	31.80	10,658,410
Thailand	5.24	3,217,321
Togo	24.00	1,111,012
Tunisia	99.66	9,553,020
Turkey	99.64	66,351,213
Turkmenistan	91.84	4,095,415
Uganda	6.00	1,306,707
United Arab Emirates	65.45	1,597,920
United Kingdom	2.00	1,176,603
USA	1.49	4,147,521
Uzbekistan	83.50	20,305,406
Western Sahara	100.00	Not Available
Yemen	99.94	18,099,388
Yugoslavia	16.20	1,723,704

Population percentages and figures are based on 1998 Population estimates from *Operation world: 21st Century edition*. 2001. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Lifestyle.