

Get Ready—The Arab World is About to Experience a Spiritual Breakthrough

Amman, Jordan, September 1994,

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INTRODUCTION:

A question that world Christians should ask themselves is: “Is the statement that the Arab World is unreachable true?” After reading this article my hope is that you will say, along with an increasing number of Arab nationals and internationals who have worked there for years, a resounding “No.” As a veteran leading international says: “Tectonic changes are occurring in the Middle East. The Spirit of God is moving in currents across the Arab World. We are living in pregnant days.”

“The Middle East is a very misunderstood part of the world. Stereotypes abound, especially negative stereotypes about Arab people. In an area of contradictions and conflicts— excessive wealth and abject poverty; ancient Christian centers in the midst of Arab countries, the old in conflict with the new; western political ideologies and materialism in conflict with eastern culture; a society where passion is mixed with tolerance.” Abu Wasiim, CSG Report.

There are twenty-two Arabic speaking countries spread across North Africa, the Central Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. Together they have a population of some 230 million people, which is growing at the rate of half a million per month.

For centuries the Arab World has been thought of as spiritually impenetrable. But times are changing. Every Arab national and international Christian I spoke to in recent weeks have agreed that a major spiritual breakthrough is coming. As a mature international has said: “Let us gear to the times and anchor to the rock.”

There are five reasons given to point to the fact that a spiritual breakthrough is coming in the Arab World.

I. ARAB NATIONAL CHRISTIAN INITIATIVES ARE GROWING RAPIDLY

It was the sixteenth gathering of Arab evangelical Christian leaders from the Middle East. Arab Christians have been taking the initiative to cultivate fellowship among other Christians in the region, building unity, partnerships and effective missions. As with earlier meetings, the program and agenda were theirs. The leadership and vast majority of the speakers were theirs. The fruit of their efforts was demonstrable in two notable realities: first, this was the largest and most representative; 164 people came from 24 countries of the world. Second, the substance of the content, and spirit of unity was evident to all. A number of veteran Western missionaries who have been tracking the progress from the beginnings expressed awe at the maturing of the leadership, vision and impact.

In January 1985, a meeting was held in Belgium for a number of Arab Christian leaders to fellowship, dialogue and pray for the ministries in the Arab world. Their vision and dreams began to have an increasingly clear form as they prayed and had fellowship together. In successive years they met and whenever the group came together, they experienced the powerful presence of the Lord. Their unity in Christ became more tangible when they organized the Arab World Servants Fellowship (AWSF), a lay-guided Evangelical movement of like-minded Christian Arab leaders. The Lord met their needs for closer fellowship, ministry training and relief work. Paramount to all of them, however, was the need for a broader and deeper work of evangelism among Arabic speaking peoples.

In March 1992, a meeting was held in Cyprus by AWSF for a number of Evangelical ministers in the Arab world. This included a broader spectrum of Christian denominations. All who attended felt led by God's grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to establish the Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association—AWEMA. (The term “ministers” in Arabic speaks of “those who serve” and includes both lay and vocational ministers. The renewed vision of AWEMA for the Arab world was (1) to enhance deep fellowship among Christian ministers; (2) to coordinate evangelistic thrusts among Arabic speaking people worldwide; and (3) to support a number of ministers among Arabic speaking people throughout the world.

In 1995 the plan is to bring together western agencies to cultivate greater partnerships between the Arab world and the rest of the world. The Arab leaders have also taken the initiative with regard to the process of identification, selection and recruitment of the 170 participants from all 21 countries for the GCOWE '95 consultation, along with another 50 international Arabs living outside of the Arab World. Taking into account the recommendations by both national and international leaders from around the world for that region, they carefully reviewed and selected those persons who best fit the criteria established to participate in GCOWE '95, planned for Seoul, Korea in May 1995. A significant amount of the funding for the international travel will be provided by the Arab nationals from within the region.

II. PREPARATION OF THE GROUND THROUGH CAREFUL STUDY

A Cooperative Strategy Group (CSG) came together in an attempt "to correct distorted images and paint a more comprehensive and coherent picture" of the Middle East, to help inform and enable the Christian public worldwide and to help Arab evangelicals and international mission executives obtain a clearer perspective of the missionary task in the region. It was estimated that the survey covered approximately 90% of the work being done by international mission organizations in the Arab world.

It was a day a year ago in a country in the Middle East; I recall the scene of 4200 pages of data lying in piles around the apartment. A young international was pulling together several summary charts that would underscore the realities of Christian work in the Middle East as perhaps never before. I suddenly realized that, there in that small apartment, probably more information was gathered about the ministry in the Middle East than at any other place or time. This massive report was presented in summary form to fifty key leaders who met at a Cooperative Strategy Group consultation to evaluate and refine the findings.

The report clearly presents the state of the existing church and mission programs in the Middle East with an analysis of mega-trends in the region and the formulation of a commonly agreed upon set of mission priorities for the Arab world to the year 2000. One quarter of the agencies gave specific and measurable objectives to be reached by the year 2000.

The CSG recognized some limitations, such as the lack of data from the Arabian Peninsula and some parts of North Africa, and the fact that the report reflected the perception of the church and mission leaders participating in the survey and in some areas, there may be differences between perception and reality. Regardless of these limitations, the report graphically and clearly highlights the mega-trends, priority tasks emerging out of these trends and long-term planning suggestions.

One interesting conclusion of the report was the warning given to both Arab nationals and international missions, in as much as there has been a tendency in the region to focus more on quality than quantity—“to the point where we lose sight of the whole task in front of us.”

Another conclusion that was instrumental in calling for the latest consultation on partnership was stated as follows: “Arab nationals felt that their biggest problems were lack of unity in the church...” Thus, this concern and report contributed to a plan to bring unity, cooperation and partnership both among national Christians in the Arab world as well as between Arab nationals and internationals.

III. COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP ARE INCREASING

So much has progressed toward cooperation and partnership since the CSG report. A major consultation brought together national Christians from almost all of the countries of the Arab world in an Arab country. The purpose was to forge bonds of unity and cooperation among national Christians in the region in order to partner together. Full discussion was given to such topics as the realities and obstacles of partnership, the biblical patterns of partnership, the model of partnership, the challenges of partnership, the potential areas of partnership and a plan for partnership. The spirit of unity and strong commitment to work together toward the future was evident to all. As one of the organizers of the gathering concluded afterwards: “This is why I believe we are about to experience a major spiritual breakthrough in the region. There is a new spirit of unity and desire to work together.”

For the future, a gathering has already been planned to bring together internationals representing agencies and organizations all over the world who are interested in cooperating together with the emerging national partnerships to take new strides in international partnership. In fact, new international groups with proven credibility in their work in other regions of the world have been encouraged to participate in the next gathering.

IV. GLOBAL PRAYER FOCUS ON THE ARAB WORLD GROWS ANNUALLY

While significant advance is being made within the region in working together, interest is growing around the world for a spiritual breakthrough to take place in the Arab world. Last year for the October, *Praying Through the Window* effort more than 1200 local churches from different parts of the world adopted one of the twenty-one Arab countries for special prayer during the month of October. On-site intercessory teams came to each of the countries for days of prayer and fasting, asking God for a spiritual breakthrough to take place. Millions of others worldwide joined in the concerted prayer effort.

Beginning in the month of global prayer focus in June 1994, culminating with what has been called “The Day to Change the World,” there will again be special prayer by millions of Christians around the world for the Arab peoples. The prayer pamphlet highlights a different family of peoples for global prayer focus each day of the week. On Monday each week it will be for the Arab peoples. A suggested “gateway people,” “gateway city” and “gateway ministry” have been described for each of these family of peoples in the pamphlet, as specific ways to lift up the Arab peoples through prayer.

In 1995, building upon the prayer momentum of 1993 and 1994, there will be a further global prayer focus on the megacities of the 10/40 Window. Each of the megacities of the 21 countries will attract special prayer from Christians throughout the world. Ten thousand on-site intercessors in four hundred teams are expected to enter cities throughout the 10/40 Window. And so, in 1996 and 1997 specific efforts are already planned to continue to focus global prayer on this part of the world.

When a well-respected international working in the area commented that he anticipated a spiritual harvest in the Arab world in the near future, I asked him: “Why?” He answered: “Growing awareness and prayers of the saints around the world.”

V. EXPECTATION OF ON-SITE NATIONALS AND INTERNATIONAL WORKERS HEIGHTENS

"We are in the generation in which the Arab world will dramatically see a spiritual breakthrough." Clancy Murphy, veteran worker in the Arab world. Why? "For three reasons: First, the Arab world-view has changed, influenced by western materialism, the Gulf War and Islamic Fundamentalism. Second, there is growing awareness and prayers of the saints around the world. Third, my own on the ground experience of the move of God's spirit drawing people to Himself."

Another long-term international noted: "One of the greatest challenges we face is that the churches already in place may not be ready for the influx of new believers that we are going to see in the near future."

It is being observed that: "God is doing something new. There is a new spirit of unity in our midst." Another Arab national put it this way: "God is about to do something that we have thought less than even one half of."

CONCLUSION:

It is time for God's people around the world to get ready—undoubtedly, a spiritual breakthrough in the Arab world is coming.

1. Arab national Christian initiatives are growing rapidly.
2. Preparation of the ground has been made through careful study
3. Cooperation and partnership are increasing.
4. Global prayer focus on the Arab world is intensive and increasing.
5. Expectation of on-site nationals and international missionaries heightens.

What should the global Christian do? First, let us gear to the times and anchor to the rock. Let us become informed and aware of what God is doing in our time. Second, let us get involved through personal and corporate prayer for the Arab world. Begin praying with your family, at your church, with Christians at school, at work or in your neighborhood right away and don't stop until the spiritual breakthrough occurs!

As Dr. Rev. Ghassan Khalaf, President of the Arab Theological Seminary in Lebanon and Pastor of the Hadith Baptist Church said, "I believe revival is coming soon to the church in the Arab world. I have been a student of church history for many years. Every other region has experienced revival except ours! Now it is our turn." So be it Lord!!