

IRAN 30

Discover. Pray. Transform.



Elam

The love of Christ for Iran and beyond



IRAN 30

Discover. Pray. Transform.

First published 2009

Revised edition 2013

Updated 2015, 2017, 2020, 2021 & 2023

© Elam Ministries 2023

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-78349-166-7

Cover: Photo by Mohamad Babayan on
Unsplash, showing an ancient caravanaserai
near the city of Qom, Iran.

Inside cover: Photo by M. Razaie on Unsplash,
showing a market in Mazandaran Province, Iran.

Contents

DAY 1 Iran, land of open hearts

SUFFERING, BUT GROWING CHURCH

DAY 2 Church in buildings, severely restricted

DAY 3 Martyrs, the ultimate price

DAY 4 House churches, all over the country

DAY 5 Often in prison, sharing Jesus

DAY 6 Evangelism, very natural

DAY 7 Discipleship, happens every day

DAY 8 Rapid growth, brings challenges

SOCIETY

DAY 9 Family, worrying trends

DAY 10 Economy, a disaster zone

DAY 11 Mullahs, men under pressure

DAY 12 Women, legally devalued

DAY 13 Youth, wanting freedom

DAY 14 Drugs, readily available

DAY 15 Social media, influencing many

REACHING IRAN

DAY 16 Scripture, a must for disciples

DAY 17 Leaders, more please

DAY 18 Making disciples, it's a journey

DAY 19 Christian books, prohibited

DAY 20 Sung worship, a new experience

DAY 21 The wounded, they need space to heal

DAY 22 Diaspora Christians, always in touch

INFLUENTIAL INSTITUTIONS

DAY 23 Shia rulers, need prayer

DAY 24 Military service, every man's duty

DAY 25 Judiciary, shadowy powers

DAY 26 Education, moulding minds

DAY 27 Healthcare, a reasonable record

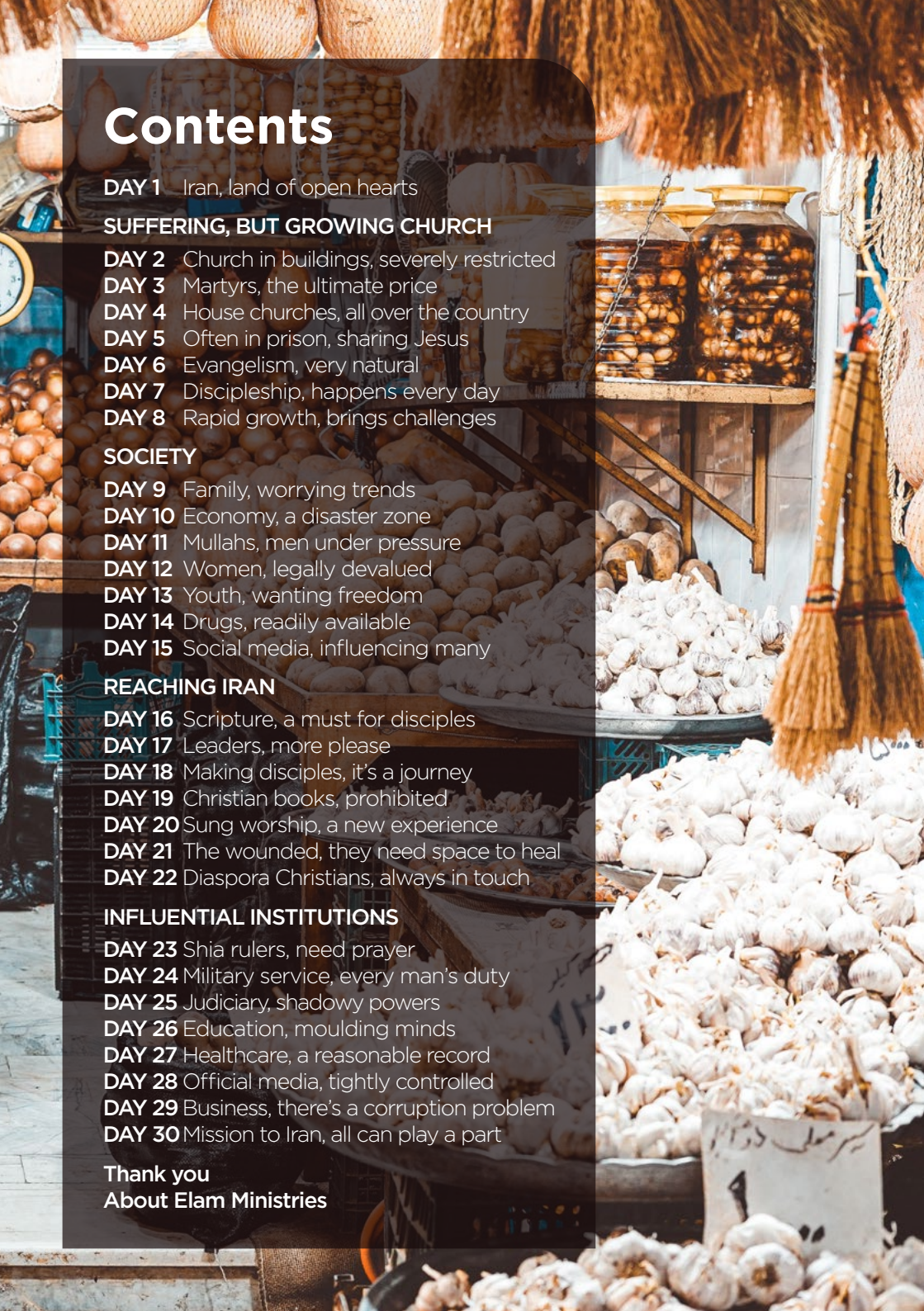
DAY 28 Official media, tightly controlled

DAY 29 Business, there's a corruption problem

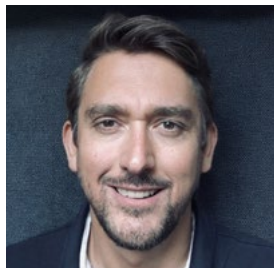
DAY 30 Mission to Iran, all can play a part

Thank you

About Elam Ministries



Thank you for praying for Iran



Dear friend,

My grandfather, Seth Yeghnazar, came to Christ in Iran in the 1930s. In the 1950s he held a prayer meeting in his Tehran home every night.

There the gathered saints got on their knees and cried out for Iran's millions of lost souls.

My father, Sam Yeghnazar - who went on to found Elam Ministries - was in those meetings. Their prayers were heard. Today, many estimate that a million or more Iranians from a Muslim background have come to Christ.

As intercession has ignited church growth in the Iran region, so intercession will sustain it. That's why I believe this Iran 30 prayer guide is so important.

Since Iran 30 was launched in 2009, we have seen many answers to prayer. There are now house churches all over Iran; Bibles are getting into the country; and more Iranians than ever are being trained for leadership. Thanks to advances in technology, ministry to Iran is rapidly expanding.

We live in a completely different world than that of my grandfather. But our heart cry is the same: for millions of Iranians to enter the Kingdom of God.

Will you join us in prayer?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Yeghnazar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

David Yeghnazar
Executive Director, Elam Ministries



Baptism service of 80+
Iranians and Afghans in
country near Iran, 2022.



Day 1

Iran, land of open hearts

On this first day, let us lift up the whole nation of Iran to the living God who answers prayer:

A nation whose history stretches back 2,500 years and whose kings served God's people when they were suffering in exile in Bible times.

A nation that ended 25 centuries of monarchy in 1979 and brought in a revolutionary Islamic regime.

A nation of 86 million people: over 85.5% are literate; 24% are under 15.

A nation that geographically is the second largest in the Middle East, with vast reserves of oil and gas.

A nation whose government opposes Christianity, bans Bibles, arrests evangelists, and threatens the lives of apostates (converts from Islam).

But also a nation whose disillusioned people have become the most open to Christ in the region.

And a nation where the church is growing faster than at any other time since the arrival of Islam in the 7th century.

PRAY

- Churches to be planted.
- Church leaders to be raised up.
- Enemies of the church to be restrained.

Iranians are an Indo-European people. They speak Persian (Farsi), not Arabic. According to official statistics, 90%+ are Shia Muslim.



**Iran, in the heart
of the Muslim world**



FOCUS:

Suffering, but growing church

These are crucial days in the long history of the church in Iran. There is solid evidence both of unprecedented openness to the Gospel and church growth; but the church continues to face severe opposition. At least eight prominent Christian leaders have been murdered for their faith, hundreds have been imprisoned, and countless more face restrictions and daily discrimination.



Day 2

Church in buildings, severely restricted

Iran's government allows some registered churches to function with limited freedom. These are the historic Armenian and Assyrian Orthodox churches. They have served their own ethnic groups and been a faithful witness in Iran for centuries.

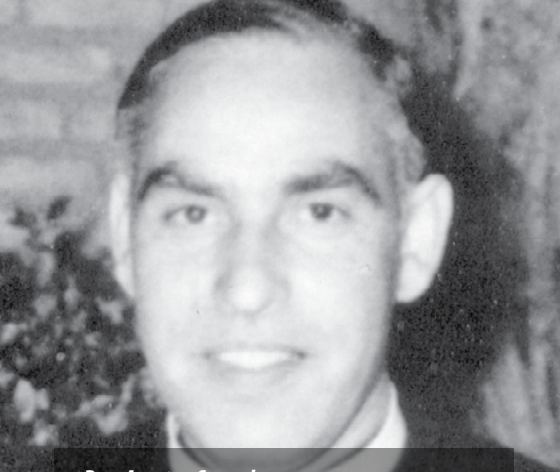
These Christian communities are tolerated partly because they are part of the ancient fabric of society, but mainly because they worship in their own languages, rather than the national language of Persian (Farsi). Therefore they are unlikely to convert Iranian Persian-speaking Muslims. However, Assyrians and Armenians still face discrimination: all non-Shia Muslims are treated as second-class citizens.

Before 1979, a couple of dozen Protestant churches (Presbyterian, Assemblies of God and Anglican) had also registered with the government. Their meetings were held in Persian and so Iranian Muslims could attend and understand the services. After the revolution, these churches came under increasing pressure to cease their activities.

Today almost all the Protestant churches have been forced to close their doors. The few that still are allowed to operate are small and closely monitored. No new Muslim-background members are allowed to join.

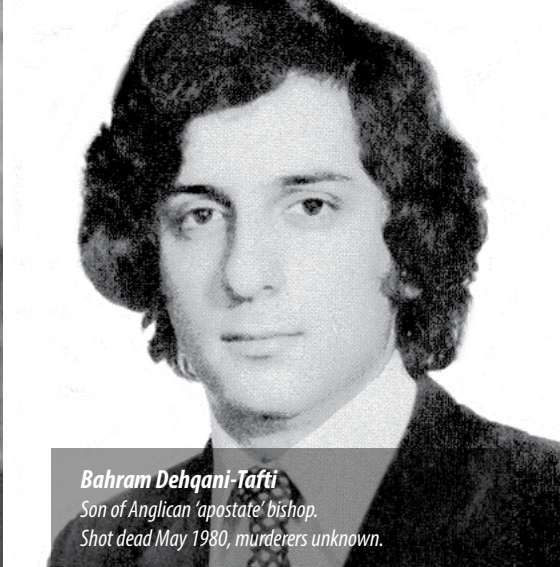
PRAY

- The witness of Armenians and Assyrians.
- Courage for leaders of churches that meet in buildings.
- Encouragement for these churches.



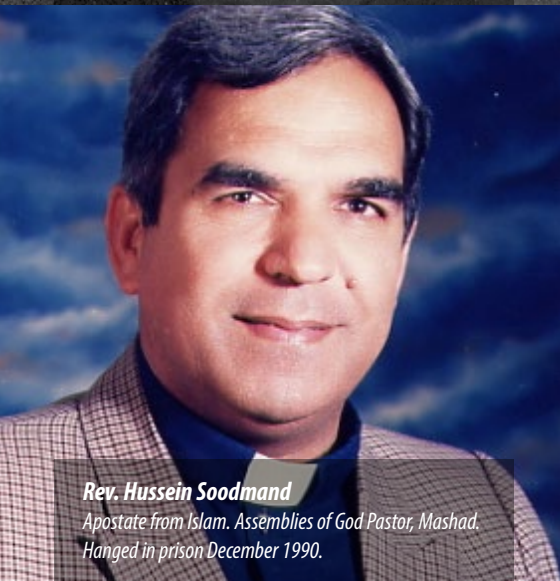
Rev. Arastoo Sayyah

*Apostate from Islam. Anglican Priest, Shiraz.
Throat cut February 1979, murderers unknown.*



Bahram Dehqani-Tafti

*Son of Anglican 'apostate' bishop.
Shot dead May 1980, murderers unknown.*



Rev. Hussein Soodmand

*Apostate from Islam. Assemblies of God Pastor, Mashad.
Hanged in prison December 1990.*



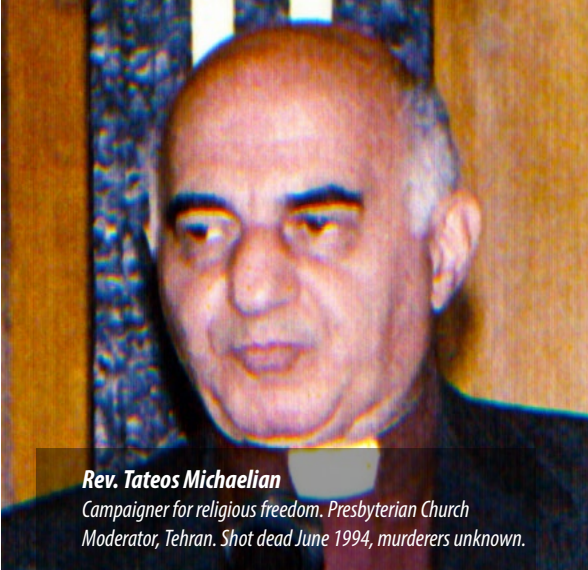
Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr

*Campaigner for religious freedom. AoG Superintendent.
Stabbed to death January 1994, murderers unknown.*

Day 3

Martyrs, the ultimate price

The eight pictured Christian leaders have been murdered in Iran since the 1979 revolution because of their witness.



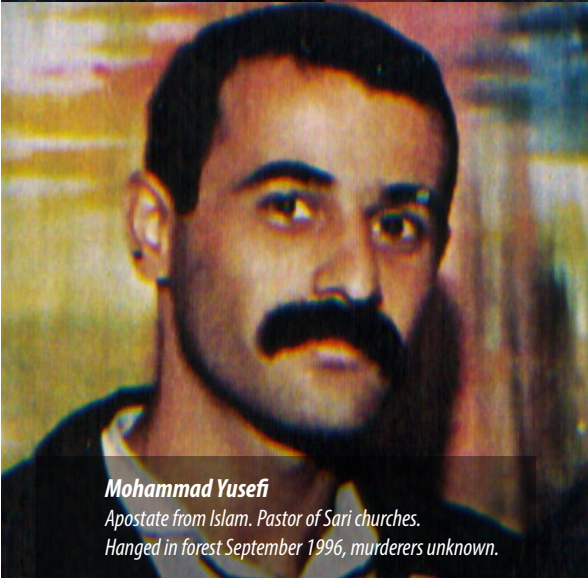
Rev. Tateos Michaelian

Campaigner for religious freedom. Presbyterian Church Moderator, Tehran. Shot dead June 1994, murderers unknown.



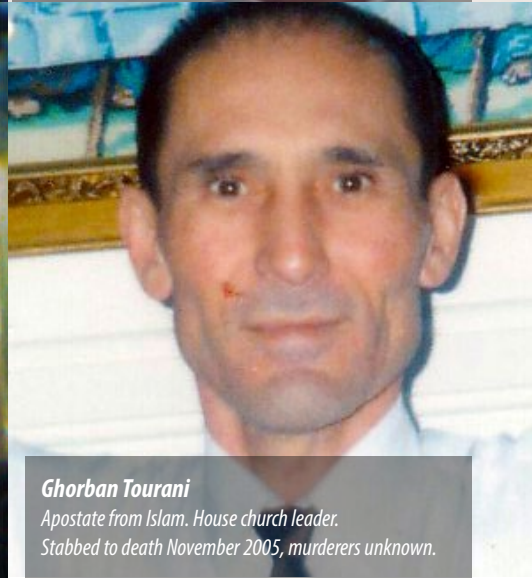
Mehdi Dibaj

Apostate from Islam. Evangelist. Shot dead June 1994, murderers unknown.



Mohammad Yusefi

Apostate from Islam. Pastor of Sari churches. Hanged in forest September 1996, murderers unknown.



Ghorban Tourani

Apostate from Islam. House church leader. Stabbed to death November 2005, murderers unknown.

Their martyrdoms underline the need to pray against the Islamic law of apostasy (abandonment of Islam), which demands the death sentence for any male “apostate” from Islam, and life imprisonment for women in most schools of Islamic thought. Most members of Iran’s growing house churches are deemed to be “apostates.”

- PRAY**
- Christians to preach boldly despite the risk.
 - New believers to continue to be inspired by the witness of the martyrs.
 - Families of martyrs to be comforted by the Holy Spirit.



Day 4

House churches, all over the country

In 1996, after the murder of Pastor Mohammad Yusefi, Christian leaders decided the church had to move into people's homes. The government would never allow a church with Muslim background believers to flourish.

House churches spread rapidly. They are now all over Iran. Nobody knows exactly how many groups there are, but a cautious estimate would be thousands of fellowships in large and small networks.

Through friends and family the house churches are growing naturally. When someone from outside the family wants to join a house church, security is a concern. Seekers are first seen separately, either through the internet or in a neutral location, to ensure they are sincere - not government infiltrators. Only then are they introduced to the group.

The group must also be careful about neighbours. So the meeting place often changes; singing must not be too loud; and if a fellowship grows to over ten or twelve, it is split to keep gatherings small.

The small size of the group does not just help security: it helps spiritual maturity. There can be no hiding on the back pew. Everyone gets involved, whether it be in running the meeting, evangelism, prayer, or serving the poor.

- PRAY**
- Growth and witness.
 - Protection from detection by hostile neighbours.
 - Protection from infiltration by authorities.



Day 5

Often in prison, sharing Jesus

An angry knock on your door. Strangers ransacking your house. An armed escort to a car. A blindfold. A prison cell. Hours of interrogation. Psychological - and sometimes physical - torture. Back to solitary confinement. Eventually, a move to a crowded general cell with thieves, murderers, and addicts. “What’s your crime?” they ask. “I am a Christian.”

This has been the experience of hundreds of Christians in countless different cities, towns and villages across Iran. The aim of the arrests is to weaken the church. The opposite has happened.

While persecution is deeply painful and wounds often take a long time to heal, many Christians released from prison testify that the Holy Spirit strengthened them and gave supernatural wisdom throughout their ordeal. Even in prison many have shared the Gospel and led others to Christ.

After some weeks or months of detention - usually without being formally charged and with no access to a lawyer - the believer is released, often on an exorbitant bail, to wait for their court hearing. If they flee Iran, their bail (often the title deed to a home or business license) is forfeited. If they don’t flee, the sentence can be several years of imprisonment.

PRAY

- Courage for Christians facing arbitrary arrest.
- Strength for Christians in prison.
- Release for all imprisoned for their faith.



Day 6

Evangelism, very natural

Evangelism in Iran is very natural, despite the risks. It is happening mainly among family and friends; between neighbours and work colleagues.

During a house church meeting, the Bible teacher (who might be physically there, or sharing through the internet) usually encourages any in the family who are not yet believers to put their faith in Christ. Families tend to be large in Iran, and so many hear, and often many respond. In one extended family, over seventy came to faith.

Modern technology is a gift to believers keen to share their faith. If a Christian senses that a cousin or friend is interested – and many are – the first step is usually to send them a link to a Christian TV programme or website. If they continue to show interest, they then can be included in a social media group where Christian things are discussed, or linked up with a believer for one-to-one discussion.

The internet is wonderful, but some church leaders believe there can be no substitute for talking to people face-to-face and giving them a physical copy of the Scriptures. And so they encourage their members to always carry a few New Testaments on them so to be ready for evangelism when the opportunity arises.

PRAY

- Continued fervent evangelism.
- Protection of evangelists.
- Continued openness to the Gospel.



Day 7

Discipleship, happens every day

Ask almost any Iranian church leader what the great need of the church is and they will answer with one word: discipleship.

Discipleship is crucial for all new Christians, especially so in Iran. There are reasons for this: a false view of God from their old religion; a tendency to separate public appearance and private behaviour; and, sadly, many new believers come from broken backgrounds.

When Iran 30 was first published in 2009, discipleship was definitely difficult. There were security concerns about whether to trust someone who had made a profession of faith and a scarcity of mature Christians to help new believers.

Now the numbers have changed. There are many more Christians all over the country who can meet with new believers face-to-face to mentor them.

And there is the internet. It provides anonymity, so people can be talked to without risk before an in-person encounter. Moreover the internet gives new believers access both to Persian-speaking Christians all over the world, and to discipleship resources such as Elam's one-to-one discipleship journey, "Safar."

PRAY

- A growing movement of intentional one-to-one discipleship.
- Healing and closure from wounds, addictions and abuse.
- Iran's Christians to be life-long, committed disciples.



Day 8

Rapid growth, brings challenges

The rapid growth of the church in Iran is momentous. The impact is already being felt in Iran itself, and in other countries in the region.

Why not pause and give thanks for the growth God is giving?

This growth brings challenges that face any new Christian movement, such as ensuring good order, accountability, and orthodoxy. In Iran though, these normal trials of growth are exacerbated by two other factors.

The most obvious is the hostility of the government. Every day these new Christians face the threat of arrest, abuse, imprisonment and - as apostates from Islam - there is the danger of execution. Due to the long reach of the state, day-to-day living is also more difficult for Christians. Accessing education and employment can be especially problematic.

The other is the influence of the Islamic culture. Many of these new Christians were previously Muslim and - whether they were devout or nominal - their mindsets and habits have been shaped by Islamic teachings and culture.

Church leaders need wisdom and tenacity as they gently but firmly teach new believers to think, act and speak in a God-honouring way, and to understand what it means to be a local expression of the body of Christ.

PRAY

- Unity within the fast-growing church.
- Wisdom for leaders within this young church.
- A strong sense of Christian orthodoxy.



FOCUS:

Society

There is much to be admired in Iranian society: a strong emphasis on family, respect for the elderly, and generous hospitality.

Yet underneath the exterior there lurks drug addiction, abuse, widespread financial hardship, and a rising divorce rate.

We need to pray that those suffering would find His peace.



Day 9

Family, worrying trends

In the midst of all Iran's storms, the strength of the family has remained.

Nearly every Iranian grows up surrounded by many relatives. Iranians are renowned for their exuberant hospitality, and families and friends spend much time enjoying each other's company at large parties or at picnics in the park.

But there are worrying trends tearing at the fabric of families. Divorce is on the increase: between 2008 and 2017 the divorce rate went from one in eight marriages to one in three. Some attribute the rising divorce rate partly to the increasing number of girls forced into early marriages, particularly in rural, poverty-stricken areas. Meanwhile mothers may choose to stay in difficult marriages to raise their children, because Islamic divorce law means children usually end up in the father's custody.

With low wages, high unemployment and inflation, families live under severe financial pressure. Fathers are often absent from home as they have to hold two or three jobs to make ends meet. Millions of young Iranians are not getting married because they simply cannot afford to do so. This stress also leads many to seek a better life abroad and so families are separated from each other.

There are official reports of a dramatic increase in promiscuity, which leaves behind a miserable trail of abortions and broken hearts. Most Iranians frown on polygamy, but the Shia faith allows men four wives and also "temporary marriages."

PRAY

- Entire households to be saved.
- Strong family life.
- Promiscuity and abortion to cease.



Day 10

Economy, a disaster zone

Rich in oil and gas, with endless acres for agriculture, and a largely well-educated work force, Iran's economy should be thriving.

It is barely breathing.

Why? The long-term diseases are an inefficient state sector, scarce investment in the infrastructure, and widespread corruption. Add to these more recent wounds – sanctions, the coronavirus pandemic, the fall in oil prices – and we have a disaster zone.

Inflation was over 30% from 2018 to 2022 according to the IMF. Sustained high inflation has meant a substantial reduction in households' purchasing power.

All of this means a further plunge in living standards, and that can fuel unrest. When anti-government protests were sparked in Autumn 2022, the protesters were primarily demanding their fundamental rights and an end to oppression, but widespread economic desperation added fuel to the calls for change.

Apart from the very rich, all Iranians are struggling with this economic disaster. There are no jobs for the young; the salaries of the middle-aged do not cover costs; the pensions of the old are eaten up by inflation.

In this storm, Christians can shine. As small churches offer help to friends and neighbours, they show that the God they worship provides for those who fear Him.

PRAY

- Christians serving the poor.
- People to experience God in their need.
- Wisdom for officials responsible for the economy.



Day 11

Mullahs, men under pressure

Hundreds of thousands of Muslim clerics work in over 50,000 mosques and Islamic seminaries in Iran. They have a lot of influence, but they are under pressure because of people's intense frustration with the religious regime.

Some mullahs are no doubt motivated by political power, but many are ordinary men who want to please God and serve their communities. As well as their ceremonial duties, they deal with local disputes, give support and offer words of wisdom.

They lead the Friday prayers, deliver sermons, officiate at weddings and funerals, and they are very active in numerous Muslim schools and charities. All of this means they have tremendous influence, particularly in the small towns and villages.

Many of these mullahs can become "obedient to the faith." Like religious men in Paul's day, they "are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge" (Romans 10:2). Already some mullahs have turned to Christ - some through extraordinary dreams or visions - and some church planters in Iran today became Christians while studying in Islamic seminaries.

PRAY

- More mullahs to meet Christ through dreams and visions.
- Islamic seminary students to come to Christ.
- Christians seeking to share the Gospel with clerics.



Day 12

Women, legally devalued

Iranian women, renowned for their strength of character, are active in nearly every area of life. From family, to education, and even to politics, women make their mark.

However, they face severe discrimination at every turn. While strict dress regulations irritate some women, their legal status is offensive to most.

For example:

- A woman's testimony in court is worth half a man's testimony.
- In cases where blood money is demanded, for example after a fatal accident, a woman's value is half a man's value.
- A man can have four wives and as many temporary ones as he wants.
- In divorce, a man can initiate proceedings for many reasons. There are limited exceptions where women can start the process.

This injustice, coupled with a low view of the value of women, often leads to abuse. When they suffer, their religion offers no protection. This helps explain the special interest women have in Jesus who showed them such radical respect. It is estimated that 60% of believers in Iran are women.

PRAY

- More women to follow Jesus.
- Their legal position to improve.
- Access to counselling for those who have endured abuse.



Day 13

Youth, wanting freedom

Iran is full of young people. 37.5% of its 86 million population are under 25 years old. 24% are under 15.

Sick of religious hypocrisy and corruption, these millions of young people switch off when their leaders talk about their revolution. The minds of the youth are not on the past but on the future.

They have two major frustrations.

First, they want more social and intellectual freedom. They are tired of being told what they should wear, watch or read.

Secondly, they want meaningful jobs. Nearly one million enter the labour market every year.

For the church, this is an opportunity. Millions of young Iranians have time to browse the internet and watch satellite TV where they can hear about Jesus. This curiosity has led many to look for a New Testament.

House churches are often full of young people, and many church leaders and planters are in their 20s or 30s.

PRAY

- Youth to come to faith and find God's purpose for their lives.
- Young Christians to be a powerful witness.
- More ministries to reach the youth.



Day 14

Drugs, readily available

Drug addiction is an open wound across Iran.

Whatever the number of addicts – Iran's Drug Control Headquarters says nearly 3 million, others say it's more – the pain is etched on the face of the user, their shame and sickness shared by the family. Some blame unemployment, but a key reason is that heroin is cheap and plentiful.

Attempting to intercept heroin and opium flooding in through porous borders with neighbouring Afghanistan, government officials are fighting a hard war against the traffickers. They have had some success. According to the UNODC's 2020 World Drug Report, Iran accounted for 91% of the world's opium seizures and 33% of heroin and morphine seizures in 2018.

Around the world, Christians run effective rehabilitation centres. Their methods work. The Iran region is no exception. Many have been delivered from addiction and their witness wins many to Christ.

A great need remains for more Christian rehabilitation centres in the Iran region. And as addiction rates rise among women, more rehabilitation centres for women are needed.

PRAY

- Addicts and their families to know freedom in Christ.
- More Christian rehabilitation centres.
- Christians to minister to addicts.



Day 15

Social media, influencing many

Social media permeates every aspect of Iranian life. Between 2014 and 2017 its use tripled across the country, according to the Statistical Centre of Iran, and now more than 47 million Iranians are users. So it's not surprising that social media has power to influence - and indeed to cause addiction.

Popular platforms like Telegram and Instagram are vital for businesses seeking advertising space, for friends and family eager to connect, and they also provide Iranians with a window onto the wider world.

But social media is also a political battleground.

Iran's government fears social media because it can be so effectively used to mobilise anti-government sentiment and action. That's one reason Facebook and Twitter are banned, and why, since 2010, the Iranian regime has set up the "cyber-army" to keep a close eye on online content.

Iranians are generally tech-savvy and, with some effort, use VPNs (Virtual Private Networks) to get around blocks. So when Christians use social media to share the Gospel, many curious minds can join the conversation. Many have become Christian thanks to online evangelism.

PRAY

- Ministries and Christian individuals active on social media.
- Increasing respect for freedom of speech online.
- Iranians navigating the hazards of social media addiction.

A prayer for Iran

by an Iranian pastor

O Lord, O Lord, Hear our prayers.

Your people are crying out to you from the land of Iran.

We know that you are good and that your will for the people of Iran is that they would taste and see how good you are. We long for all the people of Iran to know you as their Heavenly Father, the Almighty One.

Amid so much suffering in our land, look down from heaven on our tears and see the desperation the people have for you and your salvation.

Raise up an army of those who - though they may pay a high price - walk in courage and faith, bringing your light to the darkness.

We pray Psalm 126 over Iran.

We believe you will restore our fortunes Lord, like streams in the Negev. We believe those who sow in tears today will reap with shouts of joy tomorrow.

And those who go out weeping with seeds to sow shall come home again with shouts of joy, bringing their sheaves with them.

In your beautiful name, Jesus, we pray for Iran.

Amen.





FOCUS:

Reaching Iran

The rise of the internet has opened new doors for sharing the Gospel in Iran. And ministering online – although not free of challenges – has expanded opportunities to strengthen the church.

Whether accessed digitally or in-person, the Scriptures, leadership training, Christian books and resources, and especially discipleship remain essential.



Day 16

Scripture, a must for disciples

There was a time when a Bible in Persian was so rare in Iran that it was like gold. No longer.

In answer to prayer, Scripture is getting into the hands of Iranians. With the rapid spread of internet and smartphone access across Iran, it is now far easier to access the Bible online than it was before, despite the government's ongoing attempts to block access.

Why not pause and praise God for this great answer to prayer?

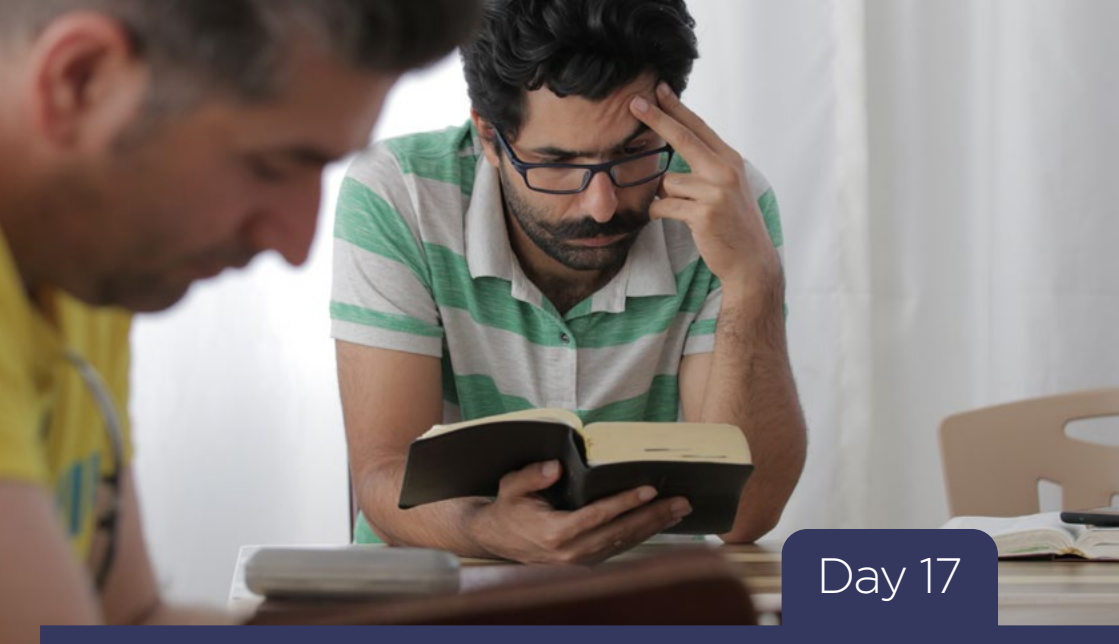
Despite the wide reach of online Bibles, there is no substitute for Christians having their own physical Bible.

Since 2003, Elam has printed around 2.5 million copies of the New Testament and more than 500,000 Bibles, most of which have been distributed in the Iran region. Delivery is still fraught with danger, but brave distributors can now usually deliver a Bible within a week of receiving a request.

But, with a population of over 86 million, and the widespread openness to Christianity, the demand for more Scriptures is intense. Funds are constantly needed for new print runs.

PRAY

- More Scripture to be printed to meet the demand.
- The Spirit to open the hearts of those who read.
- Protection for the brave believers who distribute Scripture.



Day 17

Leaders, more please

Iran's house churches are small and informal, and they spread organically.

Many house churches are made up of new believers. They need mature and wise leaders who can not only help them grow as individual Christians, but who can also set safe boundaries and structure for the church body.

That's the challenge. There are many potential leaders, but the government does not allow Bible Colleges or Christian training programmes. Leadership training must happen outside the country.

Elam was the first agency to take up this challenge. Today, it operates an effective three-month residential leadership and church-planting course. Many graduates are now involved in the house church movement. Elam also provides accredited BA and MA courses. There are regular advanced training conferences, and much ongoing online mentoring for these leaders.

The other major agencies engaged in training leaders for Iran are: Pars Theological Centre and Iran Alive Ministries. Open Doors, Mohabat TV and Sat-7 Pars also provide leadership training initiatives.

PRAY

- Programmes to train more godly leaders.
- Training to become possible inside Iran itself.
- Protection, courage and wisdom for current leaders.



Day 18

Making disciples, it's a journey

The ideal for a new believer is that an older Christian discipled them from day one. It is best if this can happen face to face.

However, in Iran there are countless new believers who all need discipling. The relatively few trained church leaders cannot personally disciple them all. The whole church needs to be involved.

That's why Elam has devised "Safar," a one-to-one discipleship journey for new believers, which can be used either face to face, or online.

Safar - "journey" in Persian - provides a discipleship roadmap for a mature "hamsafar" ("co-traveller") to disciple a new believer one-to-one in the early days of their faith. Comprised of 30 simple, biblical steps, Safar is available in English, Persian and more at safar.org. Thousands of new believers - as well as hamsafars - have grown in their walk with the Lord through this resource.

Other tools have also been effective for rooting believers in their new faith. For personal study, Elam offers an accredited correspondence course called "Christian Life." Meanwhile, Transform Iran (formerly "222 Ministries") has translated the "Freedom in Christ" course into Persian, for small-group discipleship.

PRAY

- Thousands more to grow through Safar.
- Protection for all the hamsafars.
- New churches to be born because of intentional discipleship.



Christian books and resources, prohibited

Publishing Christian books in Persian – in print or digitally – is prohibited in Iran. So, while some courageous believers do print crucial titles on underground presses, the main burden of providing Christian books and teaching materials to Iran's church falls on Christians outside the country.

Getting physical books into Iran is dangerous and – as with Bibles – the demand for more books keeps growing.

That's why digital resources have proved invaluable for resourcing Iran's church and strengthening believers. Many agencies have excellent websites rich in teaching resources, such as Kalameh.com and shabakeh7.tv.

Still, physical books are prized by many and so work continues to get them in.

But there is another challenge: there are probably fewer than 500 Christian titles in Persian. Compare that to over 10,000 Christian books available in Arabic. Iran needs many more titles - especially on family matters. The many gifted writers in Iran's church need encouragement to put pen to paper.

PRAY

- More Iranian Christian authors to publish helpful books.
- Publishing of Bibles and Christian books to be allowed inside Iran.
- Protection for websites and apps providing resources.



Day 20

Sung worship, a new experience

Musical worship is deeply rooted in the Christian faith. But for most of Iran's new believers, expressing devotion through music is entirely new. In the religion they left behind there is no singing.

What a privilege to help Iranians enter the presence of God through worship.

Via Instagram, Telegram and satellite TV, Iranians in the diaspora are pouring content into Iran to help believers learn to worship. Tens of thousands of believers tune in, and the programmes often also attract the interest of non-believers who are intrigued by the joyful singing. Elam's "Time For Worship" show is very popular, as is the work of Gilbert Hovsepian, the son of the martyred Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr.

The late Anglican Bishop of Iran, Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, was a wonderful writer. Fifty years ago he was the only Muslim convert writing hymns for the Iranian church. Now he is joined by hundreds of other gifted Iranian musicians.

May they write music and hymns that will bring glory to God.

PRAY

- Iranians to worship in spirit and in truth.
- New worship music from Iranian song-writers.
- Programmes that train budding Persian worship leaders.



Day 21

The wounded, they need space to heal

Many of Iran's Christians have aching wounds. They may be from battles with addiction or from past traumas. Women are especially vulnerable to abuse in Iran. Others carry scars from persecution.

They want to be committed disciples, but they need healing and closure.

That's why residential conferences in countries near Iran are so crucial. Much ministry can be done online, but for the healing of wounds, nothing compares to the safe atmosphere of a residential conference. Soaked in worship and solid teaching, the Christian has plenty of opportunity for one-to-one counselling and prayer with wise, older believers.

For more than a decade Elam has hosted women's conferences that are specially designed to provide a safe space for ladies to be counselled and discipled. Thousands of women have attended and many have received healing. Men's conferences have also been held for several years, as well as Bible teaching conferences and youth conferences.

Other agencies also wisely invest in residential conferences. As the church continues to grow, there is an ongoing need for more regional conferences.

PRAY

- Increase of residential conferences.
- Energy and wisdom for counsellors.
- Protection for believers who travel from Iran for conferences.



Day 22

Diaspora Christians, always in touch

The Islamic revolution has driven at least five million Iranians abroad, where, more than any other group of immigrants from the Middle East, they have been turning to Christ.

These Christians are playing a major role in strengthening the church inside Iran. They share the Gospel with their families – either in person if they are able to visit, or online. They disciple new believers using Elam's Safar journey; others are teaching through webinars; some are regularly preaching. Some are remotely leading house church networks.

It is these diaspora Christians who are behind the many Christian TV shows that are broadcast into Iran through satellite TV and online. They also host the many websites that exist to strengthen and resource the Persian church.

And when the innocent are persecuted, it is nearly always an Iranian Christian in the diaspora who campaigns on their behalf.

PRAY

- Christians contacting and visiting family and friends in Iran.
- Their role in sending resources and advocating for the church in Iran.
- More churches worldwide to reach out to Iranians in their communities.

Unprecedented openness

The scene is set in Iran for a massive turning to Christ.

It has already begun. More Iranians are believed to have become Christians in the 21st century than in the previous thirteen centuries combined.

But much more can happen.

Thank you for continuing this journey of prayer.





FOCUS:

Influential institutions

The Bible is clear: Christians are to pray for those in authority, whoever they are. And that includes all the institutions the rulers rely on: the judiciary, the military, the commercial leaders and the media.

Our prayers for these institutions can make a difference to the lives of millions of ordinary Iranians.



Day 23

Shia rulers, need prayer

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority..."

(1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Though the rulers of Iran have been enemies of the church, we should still pray for them as they rule over more than 86 million people. Their decisions matter at home - and in the world. The key positions in the government are:

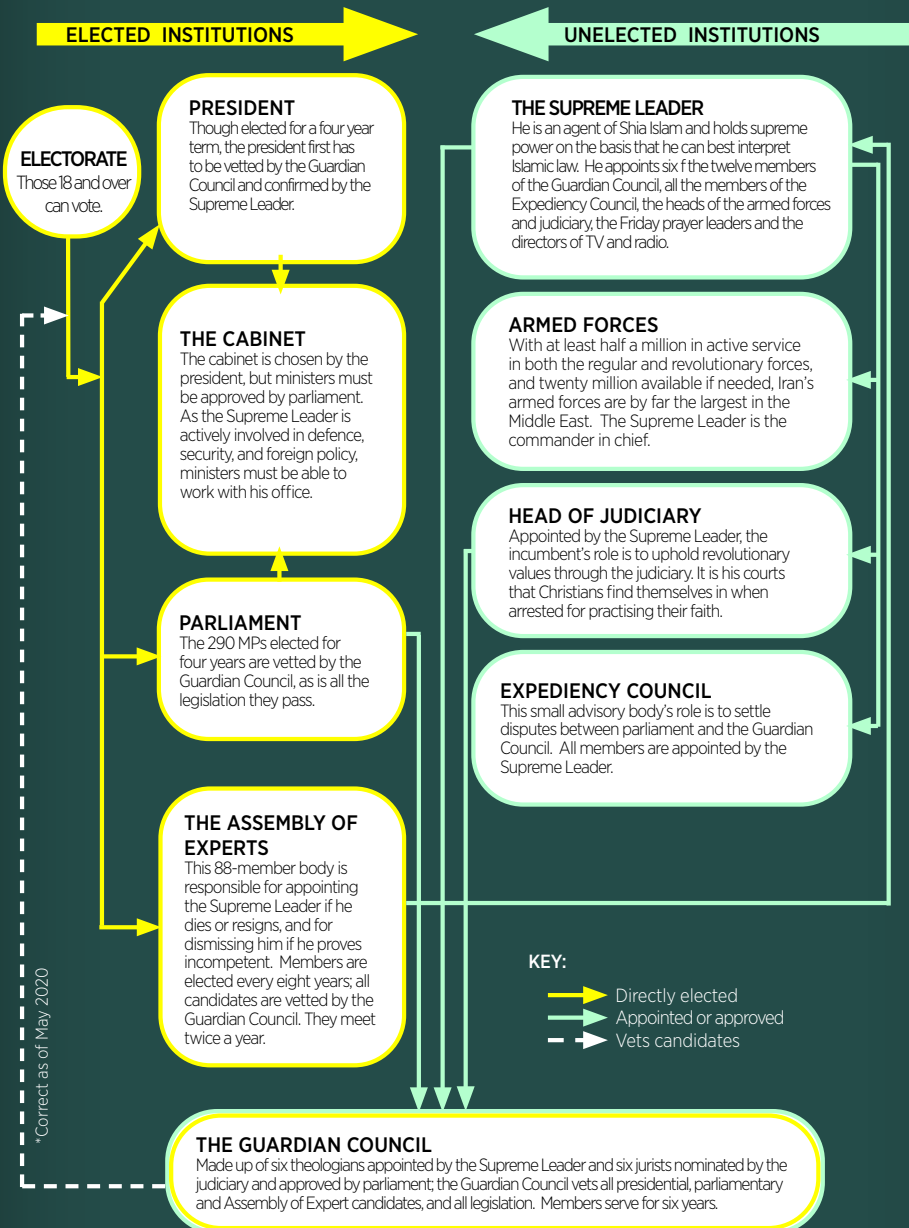
- Supreme Leader
- President
- Chairman of the Assembly of Experts
- Speaker of the Parliament
- Chairman of the Guardian Council
- Head of the Judiciary
- Head of the National Security Council

Pray also for thousands of regional leaders who impact Christians in their communities.

PRAY

- The Holy Spirit will lead them to Christ.
- God will influence their decisions.
- Christians will be allowed to live peaceful and quiet lives.

How Iran is governed*





Day 24

Military service, every man's duty

Every able-bodied man over 18 is required to do military service in Iran, usually for a period of 18-24 months. Women are exempt. Young men can opt to postpone their service until after their academic studies but must complete their service before the age of 35.

Hundreds of thousands of ordinary young men serve at any one time. Most join the regular armed forces or police, but some serve in the more fanatical Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Sepah).

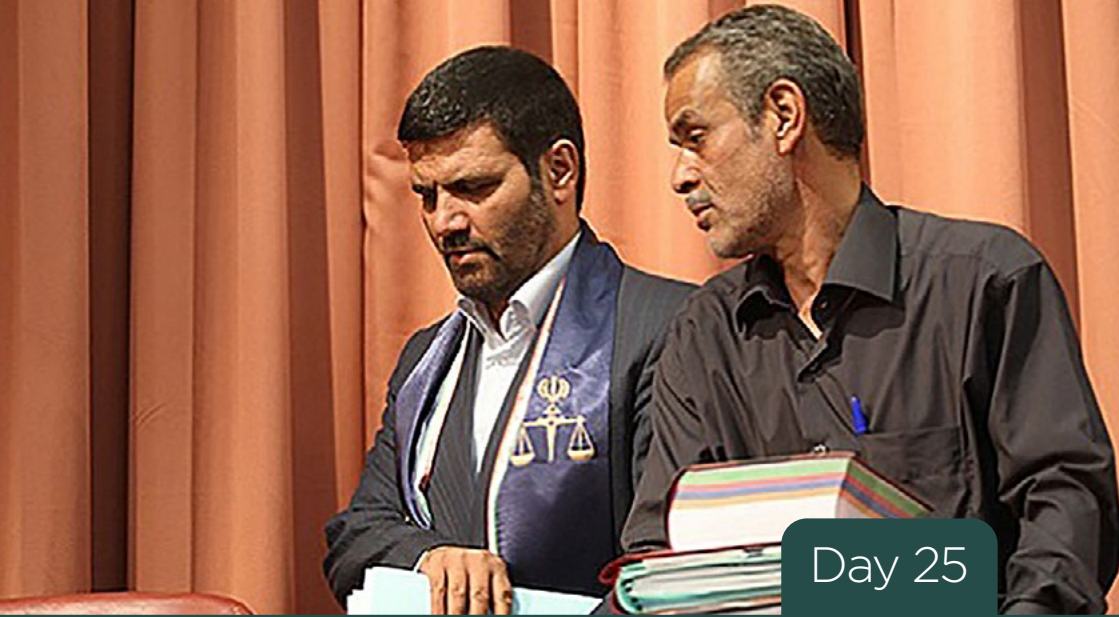
Military service is the state's opportunity to impress upon young men the values of the Islamic revolution. So as well as going to prayers three times a day, there are compulsory lectures on revolutionary Islam.

Military service can therefore be very challenging for any former Muslim who has become a Christian. This is especially true for those serving within Sepah, where fitness for duty rests on both competency in religious matters and military skill.

Despite the challenges, some brave converts see military service as an opportunity to share their faith with peers whom they would never have otherwise met.

PRAY

- Protection for those serving in the military.
- Openness to Jesus Christ.
- Wisdom for Christians doing military service.



Day 25

Judiciary, shadowy powers

There are two judicial systems in Iran, the public and the revolutionary. Both are Islamic (all secular law was abolished in 1982) and come under the unelected head of the judiciary – accountable only to the Supreme Leader.

The public courts deal with criminal, commercial, and family law. The revolutionary courts deal with perceived threats to the Islamic regime. Here there are arbitrary arrests, and often defendants have no access to lawyers or a right of appeal. Charges can be as broad and sweeping as “propaganda against the regime” or “insulting Islam.”

This court system is frightening for all Iranians, but journalists, human rights defenders and trade unionists have to be especially wary – as do Christians. For it is to these courts they are brought when arrested by the authorities. And it is in these courts that believers are often charged with “action against the national security.”

Believers are also often falsely accused of supporting or colluding with foreign “Christian” powers. Conviction can mean many years in prison.

PRAY

- All judges to love justice and mercy.
- Prisoners to have fair, impartial trials.
- Prisoners and officials to hear the Gospel.



Day 26

Education, moulding minds

Iran's record in education since the 1979 revolution is good. School is free, and for gifted students, higher education is as well. The teacher to pupil ratio (about 1:30) is reasonable; discipline throughout the single sex system is strong, and academic standards are high. Education, then, for most Iranians is a true learning experience.

However the government does not only want to educate: it wants to mould the minds of the young.

So education is very Islamic: a generous amount of the timetable is given to Islamic studies; all the textbooks and teachers are vetted for religious orthodoxy; and failure in the Islamic examinations can seriously impede a student's career. Those in the educational system who fall out of line are swiftly dealt with, especially at the universities.

Despite this indoctrination, it is clear from numerous internet blogs that not all minds have been moulded: many question the Islamic creed.

Moreover, it is known that some teachers across various cities have become Christians and they want to be a witness in their schools. They need our prayers.

PRAY

- Christian teachers and students to be wise in their witness.
- Many staff and students to hear the Gospel.
- All teachers to impart wisdom and courage.



Day 27

Healthcare, a reasonable record

Iran has a reasonably good healthcare system. Since the mid-1980s life expectancy has risen from about 60 to 75, while infant mortality has fallen from around 50 per thousand live births, to 12. Its reputation for good but affordable care attracts up to 100,000 health tourists a year.

There is a laudable emphasis on primary healthcare. In rural areas there are Behvarzes (health houses) manned by medical auxiliaries, and visited by a doctor weekly. If a case is serious, the patient is referred to the district hospital.

The system is funded through a mix of direct government subsidy and insurance schemes. An estimated 90% of the population can access healthcare and it is not normal for the sick to be turned away if they cannot pay.

In recent years, sanctions have put pressure on the system. There is a shortage of drugs for some diseases such as thalassemia and maintaining imported equipment is difficult. Improved management systems are also needed.

Christians work in healthcare and, like colleagues around the world, need prayer for wisdom as to when it is appropriate to share Jesus with a patient.

PRAY

- Ministers responsible for the delivery of affordable healthcare.
- All doctors, nurses and other health professionals.
- Christians to shine as they serve the sick.



Official media, tightly controlled

The religious establishment closely controls all official TV and radio broadcasts. Newspapers and major websites are closely monitored. Editors and journalists must be careful.

In this controlled environment there is some room for discussion between different factions of the conservative elite. However, there is no questioning of the basic values upholding the Islamic Republic: the Supreme Leader is never questioned; Shia Islam is the true faith; nuclear power is Iran's undeniable right; the USA is the big "Satan"; and Israel is the "crusader" state.

Christianity usually appears in the media only in order to reinforce the regime's official narrative that Christians in Iran are free to practise their faith. For example, a news article might focus on the relative freedom Assyrian and Armenian communities have to celebrate Christmas, while failing to mention the harsh persecution faced by Christian converts.

The government also uses the media to try to counter people's interest in Christianity. But this has been known to backfire. In 2010, an official showed a New Testament on national TV and warned people not to read it. Interest in the New Testament soared.

PRAY

- Propaganda discrediting the Bible and Christianity to cease.
- Media leaders to be reached by the Gospel.
- Increased freedom of speech.



Day 29

Business, there's a corruption problem

Iran doesn't do well on Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index," which has become the leading global indicator of public sector corruption. In 2022 Iran ranked 147th out of the 180 countries listed.

Iranians don't need this chart to tell them their country has a corruption problem. Scandals have been headline news. So much so that in 2019 the Chief Justice, now the sitting president, Ebrahim Raisi, launched a crackdown on corruption in the judiciary. He declared that the problem was systemic rather than sporadic.

With the state and the Islamic charitable foundations dominating about 80% of the economy, the opportunities for insiders to line their pockets are endless. Most Iranians conclude that corruption is a way of life and see it as one reason why their naturally rich country delivers such poor living standards to its citizens.

The extent of corruption in Iran makes Jesus' teaching to resist greed and to trust God for daily needs even more attractive. It is also a call for all Christians to be salt and light in this area of life.

PRAY

- Corruption to be rooted out of Iran.
- Honesty in government and business.
- The church's generosity and honesty to be an example.



Day 30

Mission to Iran, all can play a part

We all have a part to play in mission to Iran, as these three stories show:

Hossein and Azin are faithful witnesses in Iran - they are discipling a large group of new believers. But they didn't have access to Bibles. Azin started fasting and praying for this need, and Hossein soon followed. After many weeks of prayer they made an online connection with an Elam leader. It was not long before they had hundreds of copies of the Scriptures in their hands.

Praise God for the faithfulness of Hossein and Azin and for the Christians around the world who provided funds for these Scriptures.

Ziba suffered with deep depression. Then one day she came across a Christian TV show. After tuning in for a week, Ziba gave her heart to Jesus. Noticing her new joy, Ziba's husband soon became a Christian too. Within a year, 13 of Ziba's and her husband's families had come to Christ.

Praise God for those praying for the salvation of people like Ziba, and for those making media content that reaches many with the Gospel.

Farshid is a church leader who spent five years in prison because of his church-planting ministry. While in prison, Farshid recalls sensing the prayers of the saints around the world, upholding him during difficult days. Today, he continues to minister among Iranians. He has led many to faith and - through his powerful testimony - has inspired many to stand firm amid suffering.

Praise God for those who faithfully interceded for Farshid and who continue to pray for suffering believers so that they may stand firm.

The church in Iran is growing because - as ordinary believers around the world are faithful in playing their part - Jesus is building his church.

JESUS

SPEAKS FARSI



START
LISTENING
TODAY

THE PODCAST

that invites you into the story of

IRAN'S

SUFFERING
BUT GROWING
CHURCH

elam.com/podcast



About Elam Ministries

Elam Ministries was founded in 1990 by senior Iranian church leaders with a mission to strengthen and expand the church in the Iran region and beyond.

Our desire is that all the people of Iran would have the opportunity to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and follow him as disciples. We pray that Iran will continue to grow in becoming a missionary-sending nation, reaching Muslims in other countries for Christ.

Through Elam, by God's grace:

- Thousands of Iranian Christians have been trained for ministry.
- House churches have been planted across Iran.
- Around 3 million Persian Bibles and New Testaments have been printed.
- 250+ Christian books have been published in Persian.
- Christian TV and online teaching content is reaching large numbers.
- Thousands have been helped through relief programmes.
- Scores of persecuted Christians have been supported.

Elam works with a number of different organisations to serve the Persian-speaking church.

Visit www.elam.com or get in touch via contact@elam.com.

UK office: PO Box 75, Godalming, Surrey, GU8 6YP

USA office: 5755 North Point Parkway - Suite 217, Alpharetta, GA 30022

Australia office: PO Box 4170, Winmalee, NSW 2777

Germany office: c/o FZF Anwälte, Ludolfusstr. 2-4, 60487 Frankfurt

Greek office: Kotsika 6, 2nd Floor, Athens 10434

Thank you for praying for Iran.

Want to pray more?

Scan the QR code to subscribe to our monthly prayer email with latest prayer needs and encouraging stories from Iran's church.



IRAN 30

Discover. Pray. Transform.

With short, easy-to-read prayer topics, Iran 30 will help you play your part in the beautiful story God is writing for Iran and beyond.

Before the Islamic revolution of 1979, there were fewer than 500 Christians from a Muslim background in Iran.

In 2023, many estimate there are a million or more.

Despite severe persecution, this is one of the fastest-growing churches in the world.

This amazing story began with prayer. In the 1950s a group of believers faithfully met every night for four years to pray for Iran's millions.

Today, the need for prayer is as great as ever. As the church grows, persecution is intensifying and more courageous leaders are needed.

With faithful intercession, Iran could become a strategic missionary-sending nation to the entire Middle East.



ISBN



9 781783 491667

www.elam.com