

# Syria Mission Report

*July 13 - 22, 2003*

## Overview

Syria is the second wealthiest nation among the Arab nations. This fact is commonly overlooked. The capital city of Damascus is considered the most beautiful of Eastern Asia. The ancient city is located approximately 133 miles from Jerusalem. There are as many as 700,000 Christians living in the city of over five million people. Sunni Muslims make up the majority of Syria's population. Sunni's are much more moderate than the Shiites. Syria's form of government is considered a Republic. In fact, it is referred to as the "Syrian Arab Republic. Damascus has much spiritual significance as the place of Paul's conversion. Sections of the old wall are still standing including the place where Paul was lowered in a basket. This is about 12 Kilometers from where Jesus appeared to him. Jesus of Nazareth Church is located just about a block from Straight Street. An orthodox church marks the site where Ananias prayed for Paul. Damascus is also the home of the famous Umayyad Mosque. The literature claims the mosque was built in 705 A.D. and took ten years to build. It says, "It is unique in its engineering, architecture & decorations, it is considered a school in building & architecture for the world mosques. It inspired the architects for many centuries as they always attempted to build its equals." The mosque boasts four doors, three minarets, four spacious halls, three domes, gilded mosaic portraits, a solar clock, and an astronomical clock. In addition, there is the head of the prophet, John, in the center of the main hall. Although the mosque is heralded as the "gem of Damascus," history disputes its origins as a mosque. In fact, it is told that the building was originally a Catholic Cathedral and was taken over only after the priests open its doors to welcome Muslims. Of course, the priests were killed. An attempt to remove a Scripture reference to Christ on the outer wall was quickly abandoned as an image of Jesus Christ appeared during the attempt. President Hafez Al-Assad decreed that Umayyad mosque be restored and improved in 1991,

## Highlights

**Jesus of Nazareth Church (Damascus, July 15-17)** - We arrived in Damascus around 1:00 AM where we were met by our dear friend and fellow laborers in the gospel, Ibrahim Samara (Syria) and Vachagan Davtyan (Armenia). We visited the church in the afternoon and observed preparations for the food distribution to Iraqi refugees. We also walked to "Straight Street" and the site where Ananias prayed for Paul. The Lord ministered to our hearts that this was still the "Acts, Chapter Nine, City" and that Jesus of Nazareth Church was also the Lord's chosen instrument with a global calling. We preached on this at the evening Bible study. Preparations continued the next day for the Iraqi ministry. We visited the Umayyad mosque, which claims to have the head of John the Baptist. We also met Lath, an Iraqi pastor

(Assyrian Christian) who came to Damascus seven months earlier and is now on the church team ministering to the refugees. The people began arriving at around 4:00 PM to receive medical care. There were well over 400 people within two hours. Pastor Samara boldly preached on Acts 10 and over 40 received Christ including some Shiites. A young Iraqi man also received Christ in the prayer line and it was soon discovered that his mother was one of the Shiites who had received salvation. We also prayed for Julian, another young Iraqi who became Christian a few months earlier. This young man had a reoccurring fever and we could see a calling upon his life. It costs \$60.00 a month to feed each family. The church is now ministering to over 600 Iraqi families. Although the church is applying all they have toward their care (approximately \$5,000 - \$6,000 each month), there are still many who are turned away because there is no provision. The food distribution was very orderly and done according to passport information.

**Ancient Ruins (Busrah, July 17)** - We visited the ruins of a Roman coliseum in the city of Busrah. The drive through the countryside revealed a rural lifestyle built around wheat and olive farms. Bedouin could be seen near large flocks of sheep. They appeared unaffected by modern culture with the exception of an occasional tractor parked beside their tents.

**International Meeting (Damascus, July 18)** - Ministers representing six nations (Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Brazil, Armenia, USA) gathered to discuss end time strategies to impact our regions for Christ. There was the sense that Jesus had brought us together for such a time as this. We presented the vision for High Mill Global Church Network (GCN) including medical missions, school of ministry, and training operations. There was a desire to part with traditional conference patterns (old wineskin) to a fresh pattern (new wineskin) one that will embrace applying what we learn together in the field. The Sudanese pastor informed us of a meeting of all Sudanese pastors being held on December 5-15 in Kampala, Uganda. Pastor Samara shared about his experience in Sudan and how the Lord led him to what he calls "the donkey project," where \$300 will provide a family with a donkey and cart giving them the potential to earn a living. Pastor Vachagan (Armenia) said he wants to have a Fire Conference in Armenia for the nations. Jesus guided these discussions and birthed what we are calling "Strategic Regional Training Operations" utilizing apostolic training teams from different nations and cultures. These operations will last two weeks with one week of training and one week of field operation in the region. We all had lunch together and attended a youth service in the evening attended by around fifty young people.

**Jesus of Nazareth Church (Bloudan, July 19-20)** - The church in the resort city of Bloudan is also in a very strategic location. Bloudan is located about 17 kilometers from Lebanon along the Mount Herman mountain range. People from all over the Middle East come to enjoy the cooler weather, scenic restaurants, and assorted shops. We met some Jordanian Christians who informed us of many evangelical Christians in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain including a growing underground church in Saudi Arabia. The evening prayer meeting was attended by around 30 believers. One person prayed while others affirmed. Pastor Vachagan preached to about 60 at the Sunday morning service.

## Lessons Learned

- Hospitality, as perfected by our Syrian brothers and sisters, is a very effective tool for advancing the cause of Christ.
- The apostolic calling and anointing upon the church today requires that we act together to take full advantage of windows of opportunity.
- Timing is everything in the planning and execution of strategic operations
- The importance of building relationships with the key leaders the Holy Spirit is raising up in a region or nation cannot be overemphasized.
- New wineskin strategies must be identified and more aggressively put into effect for networking partnerships to be most effective.

## **Conclusion**

This strategic operation revealed that God still has an international calling and plan for Damascus. It is part of an emerging network of key leaders and churches to impact the region for Christ. We praise the Lord for Pastor Ibrahim and Pastor Romy and their families for the unbelievable examples of love and hospitality shown to us. Regardless of how Damascus is portrayed by the western news media, the words the Lord spoke to Paul in Corinth also apply to Damascus, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."