1999 International Mission Study

the Unfinished Task 1999
Loving the Lost
Beyond the sensational headlines about Sudan in Western newspapers lie a people who desperately need to know God's love.

A Sudanese man brings his cattle to be sold at a twice-a-week camel and cattle market outside Khartoum, the capital. As in many Third World nations, a Sudanese man's value is judged by how many cattle he has.
Mohammed Abdour-Rohman sits on a stool in his one-bedroom shack on the edge of Khartoum, capital of Sudan, watching two of his daughters play outside. A small rat, which has found a home under his desk, sits nibbling on a crumb.

A good sign—rats can't eat crumbs if there's no food.

Mohammed's wife left him shortly after one of their twin sons died of complications after birth. Left alone with six children, Mohammed could no longer hold down a job and take care of his children, so he chose the latter.

They all live with him in the shack. Dirt covers the floor where the children play. The ceiling offers little protection from the elements. At $6 a month, the shack is vastly overpriced.

Growing up as a Beja—a Muslim people group living in Sudan, Eritrea and Egypt—Mohammed was given few spiritual tools to deal with his current struggle. No vocabulary exists in the Muslim worldview to express heartfelt pain. "Smile of Allah," says Mohammed as he raises his head, revealing sunken eyes.

The phrase means "as God wills." It seems as if the only God he's ever known has sold Mohammed out. According to his Muslim beliefs, not only does God provide no help for his current problem, but it's God's will that he suffers.

The people who sit in darkness

In Sudan, eight Muslim people groups have more than 1 million people each. The largest, Sudanese Arabs, make up about 60 percent of the population. Sixteen million of them live in Sudan and Egypt. They control the political and economic landscape of the North African nation.

Regardless of which people group they identify with, some 70 percent of all Sudanese are Muslims.

Among Muslims in Sudan, choosing a religion is like going to the closet and pulling out your father's old checked jacket to wear—not because you like the style or fit, but because it's the only one hanging in the closet.

"I'm a Muslim because my family is Muslim," says Ahmed Hadi, a 30-year-old Arab in Sudan. He faithfully prays five times a day, like many of the nearly 1 billion Muslims worldwide.

Muslim domination of the area now called Sudan began in the 14th century, when the Egyptian Mamelukes invaded the area. In 1820, the Ottoman Empire, based in Egypt, took over Nuba and renamed it Egyptian Sudan. After Sudan gained independence from Egypt in 1956, a war began between Muslims in the north and animists and Christians in the south.

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and threw it into the Nile. Few places in North Africa are as safe (for Muslims, at least) as Sudan, where Islamic law keeps crime rates low.

But Islamic law has a darker side. A secret security force, run by the government, monitors Sudanese suspected of breaking Islamic law and forswears who might disrupt the government's control. Recently an American persuading one of the markets in the town of Omdurman encountered a security officer who discreetly displayed his gun—just a reminder of who's in control.

The law also delivers severe punishments for disobedience. According to Islamic law, any Muslim who converts to Christianity can be given the death penalty. Any Sudanese Christian who tries to share the gospel with a Muslim can expect harassment, persecution, and possibly a long jail sentence if caught.

That—and the brutal treatment of non-Muslim peoples in the south—explain why the West often perceives Sudan as a nation of religious fundamentalists and terrorists dedicated to enforcing their creed by any means necessary. For a long time missionaries were sent only to the south, an easier field compared to the Muslim-dominated north.

But many in the north are trapped by a fundamentalist agenda they disagree with. Like many Arabs throughout North Africa and the Middle East, the Sudanese Muslims are among the most hospitable people in the world. They're quick to invite foreigners—of whatever nationality—into their homes for a cup of tea or coffee. The only similarity the vast majority of Sudanese share with terrorists who make headlines is a deep need for the gospel.

No barrier too high for God

Theologically, every Muslim who becomes a Christian must confront four issues: the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the crucifixion and resurrection and the Bible as the Word of God. Missionaries and believers in many Muslim nations, like Sudan, struggle with how to present these truths in areas that are often hostile.

But that didn't prevent "Samir Muzur" from hearing the gospel. When Christians couldn't reach him, God intervened and reached into Samir's life in a way only He could through dreams, an increasing phenomenon in the Muslim world.

One night Jesus appeared to Samir in a dream and asked, "Why did you have to rise from the dead?" In the second dream, Jesus said, "I am the Lord." In a third He said, "I am the crucified Lord." Next He showed Samir the Bible and said, "This is the Word of God." Last He showed him a pit of fire surrounded by wailing people and told him: "If you do not believe, this will be your destiny."

In five dreams God had personally dealt with three of the four theological issues Muslims confront. A frightened Samir finally went into a Christian church Continued from page 33. Although cooling for short periods, it has raged for the last 10 years. In 1989, after years of political unrest, a military coup toppled the first democratically elected government in the country's history. In less than two years, the government imposed Sharia—strict Islamic law. Once Sharia was declared, the government confiscated all drinking alcohol
People groups in SUDAN

- Anuak: 120,000
- Dinka: 2.6 million
- Falint: 400,000
- Jassilin: 1.2 million
- Mahad: 410,000
- Mubun: 1 million
- Masalat: 400,000
- Nuba: 5.7 million
- Nubik: 2.7 million
- Sudanese: 16 million
- Zaghawa: 236,000

A related story. Seeing Sudan for the first time is available on the Web at www.imb.org/Timeline.

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in Sudan. But the pastor, fearing government reprisal, was reluctant to tell him how to become a Christian.

"Then I went and bought a Bible," Samir says. "The same one I saw in my dream. I read it in three or four months. There was a lot I didn’t understand, but God explained it to me."

The theological barriers to the gospel may be the easiest to overcome for Muslims who decide to follow Christ, however. Pressures from governments and families often present the toughest roadblocks.

"Hassan Abdoul-Karim" knows all too well that the government watches him. Several years ago he was imprisoned for holding church services in his home.

"They hit us, sometimes they didn’t feed us—many things," Hassan says. "But we felt Christ was with us. We even shared the gospel with others inside."

Hassan lives daily with the knowledge that the authorities would rather see him dead than preaching Christ. When he was released from prison, he was warned that if he told others about Jesus, he would be killed. But he’s since told many of his Muslim neighbors about the hope he’s found.

Hassan and Samir share a dream for Sudan. They want to plant 50 churches in the next five years, the beginnings of a church-planting movement. They know they might pay in blood for it, but they believe God will plant those churches and many more. Why?

Ibn el ’ala, because God wills it. A related story. Seeing Sudan for the first time is available on the Web at www.imb.org/Timeline.