



# How Much Are We Blessing ALL the Peoples?

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Most of us can remember where we were when we heard that airplanes were flown into the twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001.

After the initial shock, my first response was guilt. Why?

You probably remember that pre-9/11, most Christians were not very knowledgeable about Islam. Until that time, you couldn't find even one book in most Christian bookstores on Muslims. While William Carey Library (a ministry of the USCWM) had produced a number, sales were OK, but not what they should have been.

But those of us focused on the unreached were different. So, part of my reaction was that I felt like we had failed to make as much progress as we could have. What if we had prayed more? What if we had worked harder? What if we had gotten to those specific Muslim sub-cultures behind the terror with the message of love and peace in God's Kingdom through Jesus? How much might have things changed if the hearts of the radicals had changed first? Was I as determined at this "business" as Tiger is at golf or Bill Gates at software or global problem solving?

Ultimately God is sovereign, and yet he chooses to work through us. He tells us to pray. Given the focus of this issue, I thought of two questions:

- How do Christians view Muslims now?
- In particular, what more could be done now to reach Arab descendants of Abraham?

The answer to the first question ranges all over the map from deeper compassion (rare) to hostility (unfortunately, all too common).

The answer to the second question has become a "heated issue" for Christians as they have debated the role of modern Israel both politically and Biblically. Many Christians have favored the Jewish people over the Arabs in their attention, concern and prayers. This is understandable given the close Scriptural ties between Christians and Jews. But regardless of our theology and our views regarding the role of Israel today, Jews, Arabs and all peoples need and deserve the blessing promised to come from Abraham and his seed.

Genesis 12:3 says, *I will bless those who bless you* (referring to those who bless Abram). The verse continues to tell us that through Abram and his seed all families of the earth will be blessed. Ultimately, Jesus, the seed of Abraham will do that, and that is what we pursue in all peoples as our organizational purpose.

But later in Genesis, God clarifies who Abraham's immediate descendants are when it says of Ishmael, *But I will also make the son of the slave wife into a great nation, for he is your descendant too.* (Genesis 21:13, NET Bible) And later, *I will indeed bless him, and make him fruitful, and give him a multitude of descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes; I will make him into a great nation* (Genesis 17:20). We are told that Sarah will yet have a son, Isaac, and that God's perpetual covenant will come through him (Genesis 17:19). God sees both of these sons as those included in His blessing. Nowhere does God negate promises to Ishmael. Both are Abraham's immediate descendants.

As I was thinking about all this, I wondered; why don't more churches focus on blessing Arabs (as well as other peoples)? Usually, when we talk about blessing Abraham, we first think of the nation of Israel. We remember that those of us who are not of the physical seed of Abram on either side are grafted in (Romans 9-11) and thus receive the blessing of Abraham. But, John the Baptist reminds us (and Jews), *...and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones!* (Matthew 3:9) Throughout the Scripture, God looks for faith. Faith is more important to God than ancestry.

Which people or culture does your church want to bless? You can bless several of course. Just don't wait too long to get started. †



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