



Land of the Amazigh



North African countries border the Mediterranean Sea in the north and the Sahara Desert to the south. These include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. More than 100 million live in the region. The vast majority are identified as Muslims. Islam and the official language of Arabic were brought there by Arab Muslim conquerors who colonized the Amazigh people of North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries after Christ. Yet, the native Amazigh (Berber) language was quietly preserved, spoken at home and in rural towns and villages. It is estimated that over one third of the

population today are still native Amazigh speakers.

Keen Interest

Before the Islamic conquest, through the witness of first century Christians, a native church was established. It produced great early Christian leaders whose writings still bless the church today, such as Tertullian and Augustine of Hippo. Yet, even before Islamic colonization, the church became distracted from the gospel by worldly interests and eventually its lampstand was removed (Revelation 2:5). North Africa became one of the most unreached regions of the world.

In recent years, how-

ever, there seems to be a growing tendency, especially among the younger generations, to question inherited Islamic convictions. North Africans seem to be among the most interested in inquiring about what Christians really believe. There is a keen attraction to know more about the life, teaching and redemptive work of Christ.

Many Amazigh people express a strong desire to recover the forgotten Christian heritage of their great, great grandfathers. A growing number are convinced that North African identity and culture are founded on the true Christian faith of the

past. So, there is a lively desire to hear about past great North African saints and martyrs.

Fruitful Ministry

MERF's Amazigh Media Ministry team established a popular weekly audio and video programme on the lives and teachings of historic North African Christian figures. It introduces Christian concepts and encourages listeners and online viewers to meditate on their roots. Hearts and minds are open. Many responses arrive expressing interest in the Christian faith. Those with a serious desire to follow Christ initially receive confiden-



tial one-to-one follow-up attention. In time, when their faith is proven, they are introduced to other local believers. Now growing numbers of small groups of believers meet quietly in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

All members of MERF's North African team come from a Muslim background. While some come from nominal Muslim families, others come from very religious ones. They all belong to small church groups meeting in homes. Quietly and wisely, they share the gospel with family members, neighbours and friends. Many rural

communities are known for their desire to learn about the Christian faith. They are ready to hear the good news. In addition to evangelistic short audio and video programmes, the Amazigh team prepares songs and hymns as well as sound teaching materials for the young home fellowships.

Joyous Testimonies

R is about 50 years old. God's perfect timing brought him to faith in Christ. The team was visiting a village to share the gospel with ministry contacts. Seeing him watering olive trees in his field and thinking he was

probably illiterate, most of the team were hesitant to get out of the car to offer him the Bible. One member, however, insisted. So, they all learned an important lesson. R joyfully met them and even invited them to his home for open discussions about faith and shared his telephone number with them. He kept in contact and continued to request more Christian literature. Eventually he announced his faith in Christ. When he did, the team humbly confessed how wrong they were to hesitate in offering him a Bible. In response, he enthusiastically testified: *"The Lord's love for me is so great. So, even if you had all agreed not to stop, the Lord's love would have pressed you to do what you did not desire to do..."*

H is in her 20's, a single mother of a little daughter. A follower of our Amazigh online family programmes, she contacted us to share about her situation, seeking Christian counsel. Her father threw her out of the house and disowned

*"Behold,
God is
my salvation;
I will trust,
and will not
be afraid;"*

— Isaiah 12:2a

her when she got pregnant and gave birth out of wedlock. She was humiliated by those in the community calling both her and her little daughter names. She was passionately grieved that Islamic law deprived her little daughter of family tenderness and all material privilege. *"What sin did my daughter commit?"* she asked.

Learning about Christ's mercy and love, H received a Bible and read it regularly. Eventually she confessed faith in Christ. She wrote: *"To me Christ is the truth."* She continues to follow the programmes. Her comments regularly bring encouragement and joy to the team.

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