

## Lost Land of the Bible

By Lea Eldred

Celebrating Mission, May 2023

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” — Revelation 7:9-10



Turkey



Turkey – global view

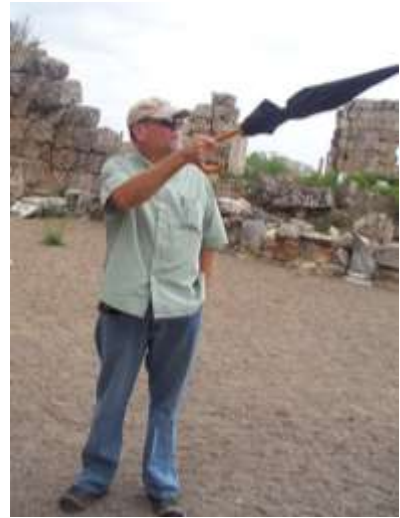
Turkey, once the Asia Minor of the Bible, is now one of the largest unreached nations in the world. While serving as missionaries there, everywhere we went, we were walking in the steps of the apostles. Ruins dotted the landscape: the 7 churches of Revelation, Galatia, the Mountains of Ararat, Haran, Tarsus, Troas, Myra, Antioch, Colossae, Iconium, Lystra...and in our city of Antalya alone, Attalia and Perga. Daily we crossed the steps walked by Peter, Paul and Timothy. John, whom Jesus loved, served the people of Ephesus, Miletus, Priene and Smyrna.



Location of the Seven Churches of Revelation



*Paul Reading Scripture to a short-term mission team at biblical Perga*



*Paul leading tour group at Perga*



*Paul and Lea Eldred*

When we moved to Turkey, it was estimated there were about 1,000 Turkish Christians and a handful of Kurdish believers. We soon met a Turkish pastor who came to the Lord in England in the 1970s.

He said, "When I returned to Turkey, I was only one of five believers that I knew of."



*Paul and Pastor Mark Sabin offer communion at the home fellowship in Side, Turkey*



*Antalya, Turkey (image by Lillie Fee from Pixabay)*

---

## So, What Happened?

---

First, Islam was thrust upon the people by the sword. By that time, many of the people were Christian in name only, and resistance was weak. When Constantine came into power, he declared his empire to be Christian but, without the Gospel going forth, declaring something does not make it true. Again, Islam came by the sword; the Ottomans came into power and the nation was once again Muslim.

In the early 1900s there was revival among the Orthodox until, from 1915-1920, the Armenian Genocide killed Armenians, Greeks, Ottoman believers, and missionaries. Most of those not killed were exported, and the few remaining went “underground” in fear of their lives.

The mantra became, “To be Turkish is to be Muslim,” and they could not separate their faith from their nationality, family roots, or even their being.

Missionary activity ceased and really did not take hold again until the 1980s. Our friends, Pastor and Mrs. M<sup>1</sup>, rode in from Spain on a tandem bicycle, and Ken and Norita Erickson<sup>2</sup>, Youth With A Mission (YWAM), landed in Izmir (Biblical Smyrna) and moved in with a Turkish family to learn the language and culture. There were a handful of other missionaries working among the people, but the work was hard and slow.

Fast forward to 2005 when we moved to Antalya with YWAM, later to transfer to East European Mission Network (EEMN). The number of missionaries was in the low hundreds for a land of 82 million people. It was estimated that the percentage of Christians was .00005%! We had our work cut out for us!



*Lea and Maryanne Kaiser with children at a Syrian refugee camp outside of Antalya*



*Reaching out to Turkish Neighbors and friends*

<sup>1</sup> Names and agency not listed to protect their identity

<sup>2</sup> Check out Norita Erickson's book *Cry Out* about her ministry among the handicapped children of Ankara, Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Pastor Ali Pektaş's story is featured in the film *More Than Dreams: Ali's Story*, which can be found on YouTube.

---

## God Was With Us, Had Called Us

---

God is on the move in Islamic nations! People are having dreams and visions and experiencing miracles. Very few Muslims come to the Lord through reading the Bible and having a revelation. They need God to break into their world. We know a Turkish pastor<sup>3</sup> who had a vision of Jesus while on Haj in Mecca. Jesus told him, "Leave this place. You belong to Me now."

A dear friend with a fatal disease was healed, and within a year was married to a Turkish pastor and serving with a mission agency.

A former high government official was drawn in through the love of believers in Antalya. We were amazed, as over and over, God revealed Himself to people. By the time we left Turkey in 2017, there were estimated to be 4,500 Christians.



*Paul witnessing to a Turkish man in Antalya*



*Paul and Lea with Ali Riza, an Iranian refugee believer, at St. Paul Cultural Center*



*Lea doing ministry with a group of Turkish and international women at the St. Paul Cultural Center, Antalya*

---

## Lockdown!

---

Then COVID-19 hit, and the Turkish people experienced some of the most severe lockdowns in the world. Because of this, churches and ministries closed and over half the missionaries returned to their home countries. President Recep Erdoğan used the crisis to end tourism and usher in a more Islamic government. This caused economic collapse and personal hardships beyond anything these people had experienced for over 100 years.



*Haluk Bilgen, our teammate, who is the director of the Turkish radio station, Sema*

However, Erdoğan could not shut down the airwaves; through the internet, the people, who were frightened and uncertain, could access Christian radio, YouTube sermons, Gospel-centered websites and ZOOM. The Turkish church had matured and was ready!

---

## Exciting and Unique Times!

---

Once things opened up last fall, the Turkish church in Antalya, who normally baptized 6 people a year, baptized 18. In a closed area in the north, the Samsun church baptized 13 in one day and continues to baptize and disciple new believers weekly.

Our friend, Pastor Ramazan Arkin of Antalya Incil Kilisesi (Antalya Bible Church), says:

“We are experiencing very exciting and unique times in church ministry. We are having record numbers of people visiting our church locations on a daily basis. Church attendance is high, and almost weekly we see at least one person at both of our church locations committing his or her life to Jesus.

Last Sunday, we baptized 18 new believers who finished their baptism lessons! It was the most people the church has ever baptized at one time. We don’t like to focus on numbers in our ministry, but at this point the numbers are so significant that it is hard not to take notice and to examine the contributing circumstances.

We are so thankful for what God is doing in Turkey and in our city. We pray that all the new believers will experience real and lasting life change.”



Turkish church baptisms, June 2022

---

## How Can You Help?

---

As you read this, what can you do to help the Gospel go forth into Turkey and other Islamic nations?

- You can pray! Pray for the people of Turkey and those ministering there, many suffering great persecution.
- You can send! Romans 10:15 says, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Support those working among Muslims and the indigenous workers.
- You can go! Go short-term or long-term. We've led short-term mission teams, received teams while in Turkey, and served as long-term missionaries. Mission is for **everyone**. We've seen families with very young children to people well into their 80s serving both short and long term. A mission trip will forever change you and will bring the Gospel to the Islamic world.

Some are called to be evangelists, some teachers, and some called to works of service... (Ephesians 4:10-12), but *The Great Commission* is not only for some...it is for everyone!

God commanded all to: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." — Matthew 28:19.

He calls us to go to the uttermost parts of the world, including the Islamic world: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." — Acts 1:9

**For more information, visit [alwm.org](http://alwm.org)**

**Full author bio:** Pastor Paul and Lea Eldred are second career missionaries. They trained with and served with Youth With A Mission at Wisconsin Northwoods and in Antalya, Turkey; later transferring to East European Missions Network (EEMN) and seconded to St. Paul Cultural Center / St. Paul Union Church. They served in Turkey for 12½ years, and are now living in Southern Minnesota and serving as Midwest Representatives for Awakening Lives to World Mission (ALWM). The Eldreds are parents to three grown children and grandparents to eight exceptional grandchildren. Paul is ordained by LCMC and their home church is AALC. The Eldreds are available to speak at your church, Christian school or events, or to do workshops on missions or Biblical archaeology and history.

“We move every day to a different site. Tomorrow, we go to village C for eye screening. We pray they are open to receive Gospel tracts like they were today! Josephat had good conversations with a couple of the volunteers. Seeds are planted.”



*Cataract patients awaiting their turn for surgery at the hospital*

## **Day 2**

“We saw 140 again today at village C and 24 had eye surgeries. People were reading the tracts we gave out. All went well.

Tomorrow, we go to a community with a mixture of Somali people and Waarda people. I think I will call it village G. It will be a new outreach site for CAPRO Kenya Global workers after the eye work there. This event is getting a chance to put their foot into a door there. It’s exciting to see all the people who will soon be able to see much better!”

“It rained heavily today, a real blessing but makes traveling tricky on the non-paved roads. We made it safely back to Hola tonight.”





*Eye clinicians examining and screening patients for cataracts*



*3 Patient prep for surgery*



*Lunch break of staff and eye screening team at a village*

**Day 3**

“Something I forgot yesterday is that the village elders chose their primary school for the site of the eye camp. My first time to do an eye camp in a school from the primary religion!!”

*After a village eye camp, being invited to come back again by a local leader*



#### Day 4

“We saw 125 patients today at village U, 18 people had surgery. I worked with a Samburu-speaking global worker with CAPRO who lives there and teaches at the government preschool, made up of the students from the primary religion in the area. She is trying to master the language. After 4 years of work, the ground remains fallow. But the villagers have given them a parcel of land to build housing on. For now, she lives with a local family.”



*Patient receiving his auto-refraction results from Josephat for possible need for distance glasses*



*Gloria making/issuing distance glasses*



*Being fitted for a pair of life-changing glasses!*

Tomorrow is the last day, and we will be in village M, not far from village U. It is another new outreach site Capro is hoping to open up. Pray for stamina, I am a bit tired.

They went to the village today to open bandages for day-after surgery care and teaching.



*Surgery patients lining up for removal of eye patches*

## Day 5

Well, we are done now and had another fine day at village M. Total seen for the week was 771 and 103 eye surgeries. Ready to get back to Nairobi tomorrow. CAPRO global workers here are now tasked with the follow up. Josephat is helping them with some strategy for that. We are grateful for your prayers and God's favor on this event.



*Two of the CAPRO staff*



*Waiting for rechecks and getting instruction in eye care*

“Toward the end of the day a fellow came through the line needing glasses and said he had something to tell me. I noted on his patient card that he was a Christian and he did not look like the local people. He said he was involved in a family-based foundation which financially supports organizations doing things which serve the local community. He was very impressed with our eye camp and gave me his card so we can discuss later about a possible future partnership with them and VMFKS (Vision and Mission for Kenya Society). Wow, another door opening up is possible, maybe even for funding some of Josephat's future work??? My head is spinning!”

## Week 2 Eye Camps

We are having a good week at Kisii area eye camp. Around 95 so far need spiritual follow up after accepting Christ, want baptism, or have other spiritual concerns. We have seen a little over 1,000 so far and around 50 or 60 cataract surgeries. Heavy rains daily are a blessing but do deter people from coming in the afternoons.



*Surgeons at work*



*Another row of patients waiting for rechecks at Kisii during 2<sup>nd</sup> eye camp week*

---

## You Can Help Change Lives!

---

For more information on how you can contribute to eye clinics and other exciting projects, contact World Mission Prayer League at: [wmpl.org](http://wmpl.org)



Gloria worked with the World Mission Prayer League from 1991-2021. After returning from this recent eye camp, Gloria herself underwent cataract surgery! She is recovering well.