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### Armenians in Iran

*Dear friends,*

I my previous newsletter I related the oldest written mention of the word “Armenia” in the Persian Behistun inscription - in three antique languages - going back to 515 BC. But did you know that today over 150.000 Christian Armenians live in neighboring Iran (they were about 250.000 before 1979)? Like Jews and followers of Zoroastrianism, they are part of religious minorities (including other ethnic Christian groups such as Assyrian Christians) protected by law in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Surely, they are not allowed to proselytize among Muslim Iranians. Generally speaking, their women have to be veiled in public. However, they may freely worship within their churches, operate their own schools and cultural centers, also print their own papers, as long as they remain loyal to the authorities.

The impressive Vank cathedral in Ispahan (third largest city in Iran, about 200 miles South of Tehran) displays the influence of Persian art and decoration of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as does the cathedral of Echmiadzin outside of Erevan (the holy see of the Armenian Apostolic Church). Today there are about 200 Armenian churches in Iran, including an Evangelical one in Tehran. Protected and respected by the general population, the Armenian community has two representatives in the *Majlis*, the Iranian Parliament. It is certainly better treated in Iran than it is in Jerusalem where over two thousand Armenians still live in an old district that accounts for one sixth of the city. There, they are being regularly harassed by ultra-orthodox Jews who consider their presence as both ethnically and religiously impure. Never mind the fact that monastic communities of Armenians were established in Jerusalem already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, that is, quite shortly after the adoption of Christianity by Armenia as a nation.

The explosion recently unleashed over the whole Middle East, threatens the Armenian community in Iran just as it threatens the rest of the population (over 93 million people). A missile attack launched on the Armenian district of Tehran as part and parcel of the bombings on the capital clearly demonstrates this.

### A geopolitical context that our ministry cannot ignore

At various levers, these factors may seriously affect our ministry to the Armenian people. If for instance in the wake of current events, the Southern provinces of Armenia were militarily seized by its Western and Eastern neighbors (a move that Iran strongly opposes for the sake of its





own security), we would not be able to spread our literature among Armenian people living there, let alone bring them our translation of the Bible in modern Eastern Armenian.

During the last decades Christian communities formerly living in Iraq and Syria have been largely decimated by the *wars of the empire*. Armenians living there have sought refuge in the Republic Armenia in different waves. Our ministry has been reaching out to victims of ethnic cleansing by neighboring Azerbaijan : in 2023 110.000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabagh had to flee their homeland, where their ancestors had been living for 2500 years.

In this context, how sad to see that a 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant false teaching, namely *dispensationalism*, justifies today highly destabilizing geopolitical adventures in the eyes of many misguided Christians, by plainly negating the full and perfect accomplishment of the Law and the prophets through our Lord Jesus-Christ alone. Not support to the modern State of Israel and its extension, much less the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem, can ever hasten his coming in glory. There is only one temple in which believers are being built together through faith : his resurrected body (John 2.18-22, Eph. 2.22). To the Galatians who insisted on maintaining circumcision in addition to the saving work of Christ, the apostle Paul bluntly wrote : *If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed* (1.9). The very same statement applies to those who insist on promoting a modern earthly state as chosen instrument for the realization of God's plan. The resurrected Lord already warned his disciples about such abusive agenda (Acts 1.6-8).

“ There is only one Temple in which believers are being built together ”



Distribution of our New Testament & Psalms to Armenian priests and soldiers in Nagorno-Karabagh in 2022

## Our translation of the Old Testament is making good progress

After completing Jeremiah in February this year, our translators started working on the book of Ezekiel, which is quite a difficult one (level 4 out of 5, according to the scale we have set up in our schedule and budget planning). They aim at completing it by the end of May, after which they will start with the 12 *minor* prophets. In our next newsletter we will tell you more about our plan to finance the printing of the full Bible in at least 20.000 copies, and how you can support us. We thank you for your continued prayers.



Br. Artur Minasyan received a honorary distinction from the deputy mayors of Gyumri for the quality of our publications

In Christ the Lord,  
*Rev Eric Kayayan*

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