



The Cham

Muslims in Cambodia

History

The Cham of Cambodia trace their ancestry to the ancient Champa Kingdom, a wealthy maritime population having frequent interactions with China. Initially centered in Vietnam, the Champa kingdom gradually lost territory between the 15th and 19th centuries, leading many Cham to seek a new homeland in Cambodia.

The Cham suffered heavily under the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, which ravaged the country under Pol Pot's radical communist rule from 1975-1979. While 25% of Khmer Cambodians died of starvation, disease or murder, an estimated 50-80% of the Cham perished.

Many of the survivors pretended they were Khmer. They were not allowed to speak their language to each other, and most of their books were destroyed, leaving little surviving Cham literature.

The People

Most of Cambodia's Cham Muslims live in impoverished villages along the banks of the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. Many are fishermen, often living on houseboats. However, as the fish population declines, many Cham have moved elsewhere in the country and are found in every province.

Some Cham are farmers, cultivating rice as well as cotton, maize, tobacco, beans and a variety of vegetables. The Cham also hunt for meat and raise domestic animals. Even the smallest children help their parents fish, cook, gather firewood and care for animals.

For almost two thousand years, the Champa kingdom reigned along the coast of present-day Vietnam. Today, they are a dispersed people, divided into Western Cham in Cambodia and Eastern Cham in Vietnam.

There are an estimated 500,000 Cham in Cambodia, where they live as Muslim minorities in a majority Buddhist country. These followers of Islam make up less than three percent of the Cambodian population.

The first missionaries began work among the Cham in 1972. Yet today, there are still no churches. The New Testament was recently completed in 2021, but only a handful of people are using it.

World Team has formed a small team to plant churches among the Cham, but there are hundreds of Cham villages scattered throughout Cambodia. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few!

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Reaching A Scattered Minority

Beliefs

Religious practices among the Cham have varied widely over the centuries. Indian traders in the 3rd and 4th centuries introduced Hinduism, and ruins of ancient Cham Hindu temples can be found in Vietnam today.

The Cham in Cambodia gradually accepted Islam over a period of several centuries, and today 99.9% are Muslim. Despite their commitment to Islam, they have many animistic practices.

There are two groups of Cham in Cambodia: The Chang Wang and the Iman San. The Chang Wang are the majority group and follow orthodox Islam. They pray five times each day and receive support from Muslim countries like Malaysia.

The Imam San only pray once a week and follow ancient Cham traditions. Thus, they are not considered orthodox by other Muslims.

Christian missionary efforts have been sporadic in various locations. It is estimated that a few hundred Cham have decided to follow Jesus, but there are still no churches, and most believers live in places far away from the nearest missionary. Discipleship is urgently needed for these believers.

Ministry Overview

People	Cham
Language	Cham (Western)
Location	Cambodia
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evangelism• Church Planting• Discipleship

"We're forgetting what we have learned because there is no one to teach us." - quote from a Cham believer

Join the Team!

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Glorifying God by working together to establish reproducing churches focusing on the unreached peoples of the world.