

# THE GRAND TOUR

A 90-day prayer journey  
across the continent of Asia

**10** Publishing  
a division of **10**ofthose.com

**ASIA  
LINK**

# PREFACE

---

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the people of the world revere him.  
For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

(Ps. 33:8–9)

How great is our world! How vast! How awesome! And how great is the One who made all the world, speaking it into being! At the Lord's command, creation continues to stand firm. Generation after generation has spent much time and many resources exploring the extent, variety and beauty of all that God has made, and yet there remains so much to discover. How great is the task, then, of us getting to grips with Asia, just one of this wonderful world's continents, as we 'journey' over the next 90 days. By travelling the length and breadth of the continent, our goal is to explore the vast array of people and cultures living in God's world, to understand how He is at work among them, and to lift up those who are lost in powerful and passionate prayer.

Time will be far too short to explore the beliefs and customs of every one of Asia's many people groups. We will not visit every city, or even every country, and yet this journey offers an opportunity for us all. Here before each of us lies a chance to explore, discover, learn and grow, not just in our knowledge of places and peoples, but in our understanding of the Lord's purposes for them and for us.

As we embark on this adventure, a lot will be familiar to us. The scenery will vary from tropical islands to frozen tundras, and from gleaming white snow on mountain peaks to lush green paddy fields in expansive valleys. We will experience cultures shaped and defined by major belief systems such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, as well as groups which hold Shinto, communist and animist beliefs at their core. We will meet the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the saved and the lost.

Still, there will be much to surprise us along the way. Who can say which places will inspire us, whose stories will move us and what truths the Lord will teach us as we explore this part of His world? We cannot predict the ways in which He might speak to us and shape our hearts in the days ahead.

As we step out on this journey, let us do so in faith, prayerfully and thoughtfully reflecting on every sight, sound and story, and seeking the Lord at every turn.

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the people of the world revere him.*

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV®. Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2022 by AsiaLink

First published in Great Britain in 2022

The right of AsiaLink to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9781914966583

Designed by Pepper Collective

10Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com  
Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England  
Email: info@10ofthose.com  
Website: www.10ofthose.com

Printed in Denmark

1 3 5 7 10 8 6 4 2

# DAY OF PREPARATION

In the final rush before any adventure begins, the panic starts to set in. Have I packed enough clothes? Did I buy the right toiletries? What time do I need to get to the airport? Checking the pocket where your passport should be, you breathe a sigh of relief that it is still there, as it was the previous five times. You print another copy of your itinerary, just in case you lose the other three. Finally, plane tickets in hand, you walk out of the door and climb into your taxi.

After the mad rush comes a moment of contemplation. Your trip has been prepared – flights, meetings, hotel bookings ... Your bag has been prepared too, bursting at the seams with t-shirts and socks, soap and sanitiser. But what about your heart? Are you truly ready for all that lies ahead? Are you ready to listen, learn, absorb and reflect? Are you ready to be taught, challenged and shaped by the places and people you will encounter? Are you ready to commit every place, person, thought and feeling into the hands of the One who will oversee your journey?

Perhaps that thought is new to you, and a little scary. Perhaps you know you should do this, but it remains an unmastered discipline. Welcome to the club! We are all so easily distracted by the good things of this world that we forget the One who made them and upholds them. So now is the time to bring your heart before the Lord. Commit it into His hands. Commit *yourself* into His hands! He is faithful in all He does, and the earth is full of His unfailing love (Ps. 33:4–5).

## BIBLE VERSE

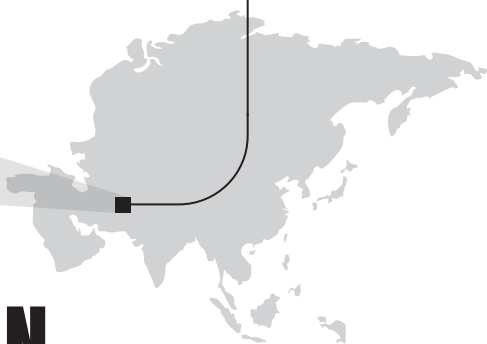
‘... the earth is full of his unfailing love’  
(Ps. 33:5).

## REFLECTION

Turn to Psalm 33 and take a few moments to reflect on what it says about the Lord, about the world He has made, and about the nations and peoples who inhabit it. As you journey, you will encounter many people whose plans and purposes will one day be thwarted by the Lord (v. 10). You will also meet those He has chosen for His inheritance – your brothers and sisters in Christ. In some cases, these will be workers who can openly and freely declare the good news to their neighbours. Elsewhere, the lives of believers will be a powerful demonstration of what it means to live in the hope of deliverance, waiting for the Lord and trusting in His holy name (vv. 18–22). Is your heart ready to be challenged as you meet those who oppose the Lord, and as you witness the struggles faced by those who call Him ‘Father’?

## PRAYER

Lord, I commit to You the adventure which lies ahead. Thank You for this wonderful world which You have made, and for the many nations, cultures and people found within it. I pray that as I travel around Asia over the next 90 days, You would go with me. Help me to seek You at every turn and to hear Your voice. I pray that Your Spirit would be at work in me, teaching me, helping me grow and softening my heart so that it might become more like Yours.



# AFGHANISTAN

## Part 1

Your attention turns from the steady hum of the jet engines to the blue sky stretching above the white-topped mountains. In the near distance, you trace the line of Kabul airport's runway just north of the city, surrounded by brown hills. Once again, a mixture of feelings sweeps over you: excitement but also fear due to the turmoil you know is affecting this land.

Of the world's 26 million refugees, several million are Afghans who have fled regions where conflict has been a near constant for years. After the Taliban had been ousted in 2001, responsibility for the country's security was handed to Afghan forces in 2014, before the Taliban's sudden resurgence. As a result, opportunities for education, for settled farming and for prosperity have all been lost. Many consider Afghanistan to be a lawless, ungovernable region, best left to its own devices. You wonder whether this visit will cause you to agree.

As you travel towards the city, you gaze from the bus window. Trees line the busy road as men dressed in white shalwar kameez ride decrepit bicycles between the traffic. By the roadside, rickshaw stalls sell huge yellow-green watermelons beneath fading red plastic sheets. Your thoughts are abruptly interrupted by a muezzin's song, amplified and crackling through the loudspeaker, calling the faithful to prayer. This country is full of hospitable and charming people. However, extreme forms of Islam are pervasive, with deviation from the majority faith not entertained lightly. This is perhaps one of the greatest paradoxes of this beautiful, ruggedly austere nation.

Though numbers are small, the church exists here. There were believers in each of the 34 provinces before the Taliban returned. It is hard to know exactly how many remain, given that the death penalty is a real threat for all who follow Christ.

## BIBLE VERSE

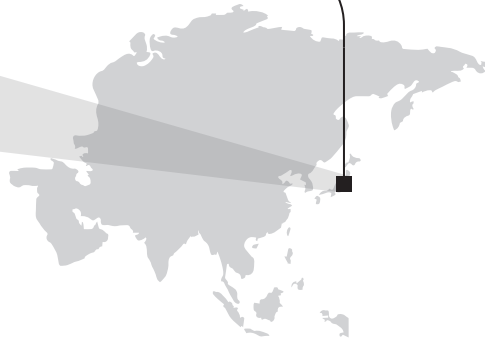
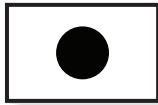
*'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays'*  
(Mal. 4:2).

## REFLECTION

The land of Afghanistan has known the scars of strife for years. Its mostly young population has known nothing but a time of war and rumours of war. Yet God promises healing and peace for those who fear His name. There is healing through the Son of God, both now and on that promised final day which will dawn on every land in this world. The sun of God's righteousness will rise and cast healing light on all who turn their gaze towards Him. Jesus has not overlooked Afghanistan but instead promises to build His church among its rugged hills. He will not be denied; He will triumph over all the earth. May we be people who accelerate the return of the Lord Jesus as we hold out good news to every nation!

## PRAYER

Lord, please bring healing to the troubled land of Afghanistan. May You soften people's hearts and cause them to surrender their swords as they submit to the Prince of Peace. Thank You that You have Your people in this country. Strengthen them to persevere and help them cling to their Saviour. Lord, defend Your people and Your cause! I pray that Your kingdom might come soon among the Dari, Pashto and Turkmen people who reside here, no matter who claims to rule the nation.



# JAPAN

## Part 1

Buses, taxis and trucks thunder down the busy streets of Tokyo between towering concrete and glass structures. Some buildings are plain, others brightly decorated and creatively designed. Slipping into a bookstore, you explore the manga comic section – far larger than any back home. There are stories of love and hate, heroes and villains and epic adventures, but not of mercy, grace or forgiveness – concepts alien to Japan’s culture of honour and shame.

A local man, Riku, introduces himself. He is intrigued to discover that you will be meeting believers here – he has never met a Japanese Christian. In contrast to many Asian countries, Japan allows churches to meet freely. However, Christianity is seen as a Western religion. ‘It is interesting, but it is not ours,’ Riku says, affirming that Buddhism and Shinto are the true religions of Japan. Although few of the younger generation take their family religion seriously, obligations to exercise religious ceremonies remain and they often inherit altars, idols and tombs. Anyone who turns away from these practices faces a real risk of disownment as shame is brought on the family. Here, harmonious relationships are far more sacred than truth.

These are not the only challenges believers face. Some struggle to attend church as Sunday is their employer’s busiest day of the week. Meanwhile, the religious sphere is considered private and the working culture has no place for social conversation, making gospel witness a real challenge. Add to this the scarcity of faithful literature and the empty theological colleges and you begin to see why as few as 0.2% of Japanese people are committed followers of Jesus. There is much work to be done.

### BIBLE VERSE

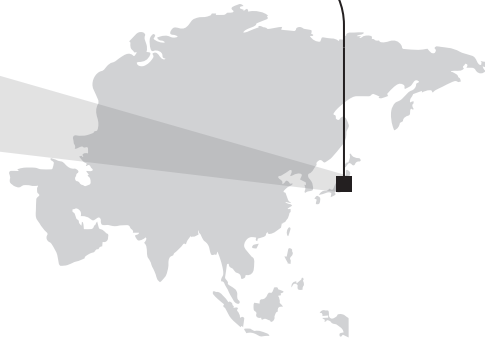
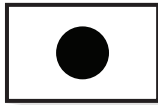
*‘... my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace’*  
(Acts 20:24).

### REFLECTION

The gospel message jars against some central elements of Japanese culture. Ideas of honour and shame stand in stark contrast to God’s message of mercy and grace. The desire to maintain family harmony goes against Jesus’ promise of rewards for those who leave houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives and children for His sake (Mt. 19:29). Nor does the Japanese language even have a word which suitably conveys the idea of sin, making gospel presentations a significant challenge. Nevertheless, the Lord is mighty to save. He knows the heart of every person in Japan and He will call those who belong to Him. Our response must be the same as Paul’s – to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given the church. One way or another, the people of Japan must hear the gospel (Acts 20:20–23).

### PRAYER

Lord, thank You for bringing people into my life who shared the gospel with me, and for softening my heart to that glorious message. I pray for the people of Japan, who have grown up in a culture so opposed to this good news. Please break through the barriers of false religion, of honour and shame and of linguistic difficulties, so that the people of Japan might seek You while You may be found. Please help the church in Japan to be salt and light, set apart in a culture which has so little desire to know You.



# JAPAN

## Part 2

Today, you are meeting several local believers in a sushi bar to learn more about the church in Japan. After taking their food recommendations, you ask about their experiences. Izumi speaks first, energetically describing a training course whose goal is to train 20–40 interns per year as they serve full-time in local churches. So far, 18 have taken the course. Some went onto plant churches or continue in their existing ministry, while others returned to the workplace to witness there.

Takahiro takes over. Older and more pensive than Izumi, he carefully explains more about office fellowship groups. These meet regularly in the mornings, at lunchtime or after work, either in a restaurant or in the office block itself. The key is for groups to be accessible to outsiders, with content varying to suit those attending. The lady to Takahiro’s right is called Noriko and is in her mid-40s. She explains that she has been working in offices for 18 years and had never shared the gospel with her colleagues. However, after attending a lunchtime group, she felt encouraged to invite her colleagues out for coffee after work. Several people came along, and she then had the chance to invite one to the next lunchtime meeting. Noriko is praying that her colleague will turn up and be receptive to the gospel.

Finally, an older lady named Tamiko tells of her experience in the local church. She has been trying for years to get home groups up and running, despite meeting in people’s homes and learning through discussion being quite counter-cultural. She is finally starting to see fruit but wonders whether these groups would continue without her. Her greatest concern is who will lead Japan’s churches with so few believers among the next generation.

### BIBLE VERSE

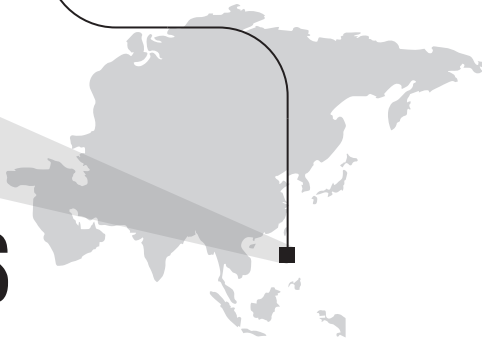
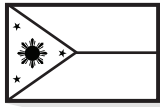
*‘... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD’*  
(Ps. 78:4).

### REFLECTION

With so few believers in Japan, it is encouraging to hear that training ministries, office outreaches and home groups are beginning to take place. However, the church in this nation remains fragile, with few leaders being prepared for the task of taking the church forward as the Spirit leads. When the current generation of pastors retires, there are simply not enough mature believers there to replace them. It is essential that solid theological and pastoral training schemes are made not only available but accessible, and are enthusiastically encouraged. The church in Japan must rise to the task of telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, that they might not forget His deeds but keep His commands (v. 7). We too must take note of the need to raise up future leaders for our own nations and for the global church.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I pray for each of Your beloved children in Japan. Please help them to grow closer to Christ day by day, looking more and more like Him. Help them to live radical lives for You, cutting across the grain of their culture for Your glory. Please strengthen the churches and raise up leaders among the next generation who will boldly proclaim Your Word and faithfully serve the body of Christ. I pray that the church in Japan would grow in number, in depth and in love for You.



# PHILIPPINES

## Part 1

You arrive in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, with a strange feeling of familiarity. For once, you are not overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and smells of a new location, nor do you feel that hard-to-define sense of being out of your comfort zone. Manila is worlds apart from other Southeast Asian capitals you have visited. Rather than being exotically Asian, much about the city is reminiscent of the West. It isn't until you step into some local museums that you discover why. In the early 1900s, American influence was strong here.

The Philippine archipelago had been under colonial rule since the mid-1500s; Spain was the first to lay claim to the islands, before ceding to the US in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was even a brief period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War. As the Philippines slowly fought for independence, the US helped and hindered in many ways before recognising the land as a stand-alone nation in 1946. But the American influence can be seen clearly even today with the nation's rectangular-shaped network of broad streets and open avenues.

Basketball is a hugely popular sport here, one of the few nations to favour it so heavily. The political system is also familiar, with a president, Senate and House of Representatives. Thankfully, the Philippines also maintains true freedom of belief unlike most Asian nations. The country is considered to be overwhelmingly Christian, but the vast majority follow Catholic traditions. It saddens you to think that so many here may have grown up identifying as Christians and yet failing to understand the gospel of God's grace in Christ.

### BIBLE VERSE

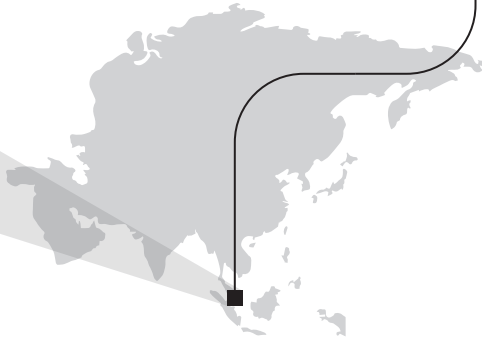
*'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Mt. 7:21).*

### REFLECTION

It is remarkable how pervasive Catholicism is in the Philippines. Churches are found everywhere, and most hospitals and schools are named after a saint. As it is rare for Christianity to be welcomed in this part of the world, there is reason to feel encouraged. However, when it comes to salvation, it is not enough to be 'a good Catholic' or to attend mass regularly. Salvation comes through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone. Many here have never heard the gospel explained, despite considering themselves Christians. Jesus warns that there will be those who recognise Him as Lord yet will not enter the kingdom of heaven. It is a humbling warning. Do you belong wholly and truly to Christ? The Catholic majority in the Philippines must heed this warning too, and ensure they live in the light of the one, true and glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

### PRAYER

Lord, I thank You that there is freedom in the Philippines and that the glory of Your name can be declared freely and widely. Please use those who trust in the cross and resurrection of Jesus to witness to others, imploring their neighbours to consider Jesus' warning in Matthew 7. Lord, please grow the evangelical church here and help them take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the truth about Your grace. May many who call themselves Christians truly be welcomed into Your kingdom, for Your glory.



# MALAYSIA

## Part 1

You are making your way through the throbbing streets of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. There are people everywhere! Many streets, while not officially pedestrianised, have been colonised by chairs and tables as restaurants and cafes extend into the road. Those dining here enjoy all kinds of East and Southeast Asian food as they soak up the electric atmosphere. Illuminated by faintly buzzing neon lights, conversation and laughter flow freely. Families embrace before taking their seats and groups of women set down their many bags of shopping to eat. Meanwhile, tables full of tourists look on curiously at the community and camaraderie which surround them.

Towering over the scene are numerous high-rise buildings, home to apartments and offices. Their sleek modern appearance is a stark contrast to the rough-and-ready streets below. You also notice the sheer diversity around you. Aside from the predominant native Malay people, there are many Indians and Chinese. You hear conversations in an array of languages, recognising a little Mandarin and Hindi being spoken, alongside several languages and dialects you could not begin to place.

Kuala Lumpur, like Malaysia in general, is full of not only life but all kinds of people. As you explore the city, you come across a wide variety of religious places of worship: mosques, Buddhist and Hindu temples, and Christian churches. With such a plethora of beliefs and ideologies co-existing, it can be hard to convince people of the unique offer of the gospel and the cross as the only way to find salvation. This begs the important question: how will these people come to know Christ?

### BIBLE VERSE

*‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).*

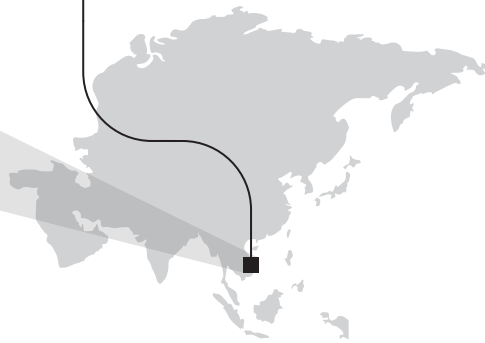
### REFLECTION

The melting pot of Malaysia is home to communities from numerous faith backgrounds. Each has a different set of beliefs regarding the way they should live and what happens in the next life, if they believe in an afterlife at all. Some believe their way is the right way; others believe that all religions are simply different paths to the same God. In a place where so many faiths are practised openly, Acts 4:12 is an essential reminder that there is only one way in which salvation can be found – through faith in Jesus Christ. How important it is, then, for the gospel to be made known in places like Malaysia, so that all might hear of the saving power found in Jesus.

### PRAYER

Lord, thank You that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. I thank You for opening my eyes to this truth but I pray for the billions in this world who believe that there is some other way to You. Lord, have mercy on them as they seek to find salvation through works, through false gods and even from within themselves. I pray in particular for the people of Malaysia. Please help many to hear of Your Son and trust Him as their Lord and personal Saviour.





# VIETNAM

## Part 1

You arrive in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon. The humidity of the afternoon is stifling. You also find yourself in the moped capital of the world. With the roads fast and full, it seems impossible to navigate them safely! This is a popular tourist destination, attracting those who enjoy both the French architecture of colonial times as well as the impressive skyscrapers which would not look out of place in large Western cities. You settle into your modest but clean hotel. As evening approaches, you decide to take your life in your hands, using local transport to find a restaurant and visit one of the bustling markets. The city is filled with light, and the noise pollution from both humans and vehicles almost makes you wish you had stayed in and ordered room service!

In the 65 years since the North Vietnamese conquered this city, evangelical churches have slowly sprung up, giving an outward impression that the government is open to the Christian faith. However, when travelling to the provinces where ethnic minorities make up the population, it is an entirely different scenario. Here, churches face severe persecution, with pastors regularly tortured and imprisoned for their faith. For many, finding Christ means exile from family. In cases where a whole family comes to faith, they can find themselves thrown out of homes, schools and jobs, making it difficult to survive. However, many freed from animist practices into new life in Christ profess that the persecution they now suffer is no worse than their previous state. And wonderfully they no longer live in bondage to fear of every kind of spirit. Instead, the Holy Spirit lives within them!

### BIBLE VERSE

*'For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline'*  
(1 Tim. 1:7).

### REFLECTION

Consider the differences that exist between the regions of this beautiful country. In the provinces, there is little freedom of expression or worship; yet in the cities, there would appear to be a tolerance. But, on reflection, perhaps there is just a hairsbreadth between them, and at any time the tide could turn either way. As Christians, we should guard against becoming complacent in our faith and taking for granted our freedom to express ourselves in worship. Social and spiritual dangers remain for those within the cities who are relatively untouched by persecution, and they learn much as they hear of the trials endured by their provincial brothers and sisters.

### PRAYER

Father, You are a generous and a merciful God. Thank You that in the struggles I face, Your Spirit dwells and is at work within me. Thank You that Your gifts of power, love and self-discipline are available to use for Your honour and glory. I pray that You would daily grant these gifts to Your people in Vietnam as they face social and spiritual opposition to their faith. Please help me not to take for granted the freedoms I have, but to live out the gospel each day with urgency and with a thankful heart.



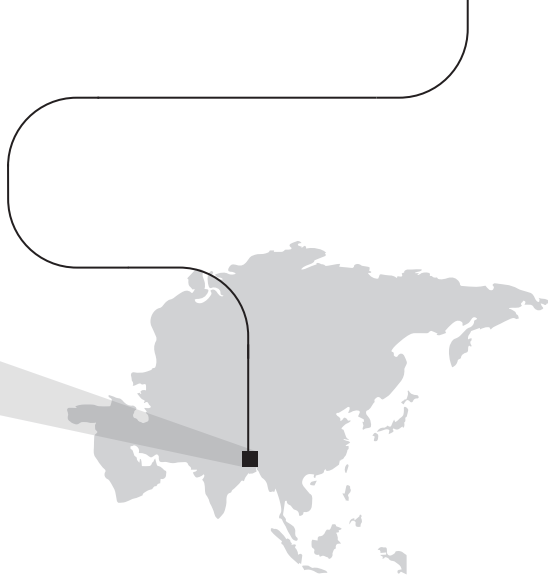
# NEPAL

## Part 1

Boarding your last connecting flight to Kathmandu, you have the golden ticket: a window seat on the left-hand side of the plane! This will give you a perfect view of the Himalayas, the rooftop of the world. You are not disappointed and find yourself rummaging around in your head for words to describe the vista. The best adjectives you can muster are ‘majestic’ and ‘awesome’, yet even these seem inadequate.

Stepping out of the airport, a sensory overload of sound and colour awaits, but it’s the smell that hits you hardest. Wherever you go, it’s impossible to escape the stench of burning. It’s not long before you understand why. Kathmandu is sometimes called the city of temples, with Hindu and Buddhist places of worship everywhere you look. The northern Himalayan region is mostly Buddhist, but central and southern parts are strongly Hindu and make up 84% of the population. Although currently a secular state, a Hindu nationalist undercurrent is pushing for a return to the way things were prior to the abolition of the monarchy in 2006. As a result, Christians are facing increasing opposition.

Travelling around the city, evidence remains of the massive earthquake and aftershocks which rocked the entire region back in 2015, killing over 9000 people. Repairs to some of the world heritage sites, with their ornate architecture, will take years. Many streets are still surfaced with compacted rubble, making for a bumpy ride. It seems that every other westerner in your guesthouse has come to trek in the mountains, either along the Everest base camp route or through the Annapurna range. Though these mountains declare the glory of the Lord, so many in Nepal have yet to meet Him.



### BIBLE VERSE

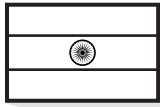
*‘... for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God’*  
(1 Thes. 1:9).

### REFLECTION

The believers in Thessalonica turned from idols to God, the one true and living God who will not tolerate rivals. When visiting a country like Nepal, where Hinduism is the majority religion, it is difficult to comprehend people recognising and worshipping 33 million gods. Idols and images are everywhere, and the devotion displayed at the various shrines is heartbreaking. Idolatry in any form is an attack on the character of God Himself and reveals the spiritual blindness of the perpetrator. The gospel exposes the futility of worshipping either gods of silver and gold or unknown gods. Two hundred and seventy-five people groups in Nepal remain unreached by this message. That’s over 25 million people who still need to hear of the one true and living God who has made Himself known in Christ.

### PRAYER

Lord, I come to You today acknowledging that You are the one true and living God. Thank You for the reassurance of knowing that You are able to hear my prayer and answer. I pray for the millions of Hindus in Nepal who will bow before idols today, vainly hoping that their prayers will be heard. Please bless the witness of Your people in Nepal and cause the light of Your Word to shine into the darkness. I ask that many more in that land will hear the good news, reject idols and turn to You.



# INDIA

## Part 1

With Indian and Pakistani nationals unable to cross the border, just a handful of European businessmen take the daily flight from Lahore to Delhi. Your onward connection then takes you to Srinagar, the largest city in Jammu and Kashmir.

This region has suffered violence between India and Pakistan for decades, with both nations claiming authority here. The power struggle is evident even upon landing, with the airport resembling a military base. You pass numerous mosques and several military checkpoints on the drive into town before asking why so many broken bridges remain unrepaired. Your host, KP, explains that terrorism has discouraged the authorities from investing in infrastructure, fearing it will simply be destroyed once again. The instability has also scared tourists away, causing unemployment to rocket. As you enjoy the beautiful vistas of Dal Lake and reach the quaint houseboat upon which you will stay, you are saddened that this beauty is so overshadowed by darkness.

KP takes you to a fellowship of believers who are small in number but mighty in spirit. They meet in secret, changing the time and location of their gatherings to avoid detection. Hannah owns a salon through which she engages local women in gospel conversations. She also runs sewing classes for women in the villages, teaching them truths about Jesus through songs as they work. Karim had been like many secret atheists here – someone who had lost faith in Islam but was afraid to tell his friends and family. After trusting in Christ through an online debate, his goal is to befriend and share the truth with other atheists, praying that they too might find joy and salvation in Christ.

### BIBLE VERSE

*I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world'*  
(John 16:33).

### REFLECTION

To meet with believers in the underground church is a powerful and sobering experience. You see first-hand the impact of their marginalisation, preventing the regular and public fellowship to which most of us are accustomed. And yet we should not be surprised. Even Jesus was marginalised and considered crazy by His own family (Mark 3:21), while His opponents sought to kill Him long before His eventual death on the cross (John 8:59). In this world, God's people will have trouble, but take heart! Jesus has overcome the world. There is nothing that can separate us from God and nothing that can take away our salvation! And so, like Hannah, Karim and countless others, let us take up our cross daily, proclaiming the gospel, sharing in Christ's suffering and awaiting His glorious return, confident of our reward in heaven.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the good news of the gospel. I pray that You would give me a fresh hope in that radical message, today and every day. Thank You for the hidden gatherings of believers which take place not only in Kashmir but in every place where Your people are marginalised and persecuted for their faith in You. Please give these brothers and sisters confidence in Your faithfulness, justice and power. Help them cling to Jesus through every trial and boldly speak of Him as they await their reward in heaven.



# SRI LANKA

## Part 1

You have so far visited many unusual and unfamiliar parts of the continent, each opening your eyes to new practices and ways of life. You have been used to a heightened sense of anticipation while walking the streets of other countries. But here in Colombo, the capital city of this island nation, that feeling is replaced with a comfortable sense of familiarity. The scene is not altogether dissimilar to some European cities. The sun is gloriously bright, but the proximity to the sea means there is little humidity. The streets are wide, with clean pavements from which tall palm trees grow. These are lined by the storefronts of boutiques and idyllic cafes, with tourists noticeable throughout much of the city. Even the traffic is less busy than in most Asian destinations, and is certainly the calmest you have seen on your travels. You have never felt safer zipping about a city in a rickshaw!

It is incredible to think that a peaceful place like this was embroiled in civil war as recently as 2009. Tensions remain, but the most recent act of violence suffered here was religiously rather than politically motivated. On Easter Sunday in 2019, 269 people were killed as bombs were detonated at various locations including three churches. An Islamic extremist group claimed responsibility.

However, the Lord is still working here. You meet a local Christian who tells you that the bombings opened up some incredible gospel opportunities. Many people wondered why Christians didn't retaliate after the attacks, and believers were able to explain the essence of the gospel to those enquiring – that Christ forgives all those who have sinned against Him if they repent and put their faith in Him. Freely forgiven, the Sri Lankan believers have been able to forgive others in turn.

### BIBLE VERSE

*'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'*  
(Mt. 6:12).

### REFLECTION

At the heart of the gospel is a message of forgiveness and reconciliation. All have sinned against God; no one outside of Christ can be counted as righteous. Each one of us needs the forgiveness which was bought at the cross, and is offered freely through God's gracious gift of faith in Him. As we examine our hearts, the extent to which we need this forgiveness becomes clear. Despite this, forgiving others still doesn't always come naturally to us, even in the little things! What a witness Sri Lankan Christians are as they forgive those who attacked their brothers and sisters. Others can only look on them in wonder. Praise God, who even in the worst of situations is able to bring about good for His glory!

### PRAYER

Lord, I owe everything to You and to Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the cross and for the forgiveness which has been offered to me. Please help me to forgive others as You have forgiven me. Thank You for the ways in which You have used the witness of Your servants in Sri Lanka. Only You can bring good from the darkest situations. Please continue to use believers there as a light for the gospel, bringing glory to Your name as Your Spirit works in the hearts of Your people.