

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a geographically large central Asian nation of approximately 20 million people, bordering Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and the Caspian Sea. This beautiful country is comprised mostly of the Great Steppe, an expansive high grassland, but also boasts southern deserts with the famous "singing dunes", the Tian Shan Mountains in the southeast, the Altai Mountains in the northeast, Caspian Sea coastline, and the world's oldest spaceport (the Cosmodrome).



Kazakhstan is multiethnic, with Kazakhs making up about 70% of the population, followed by Russians (around 18%), and smaller groups like Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Uyghurs, and Tatars. Around 58% of the population lives in urban areas, with major cities like Astana (the capital, 1.2 million), Almaty (2 million), and Shymkent (~1.1 million) being economic and cultural hubs. Rural areas remain significant, often tied to agriculture and nomadic traditions. Islam is the dominant religion (about 70%, mostly Sunni), followed by Russian Orthodoxy (25%). Other faiths, like Buddhism and

Judaism, exist in smaller numbers. Kazakh, a Turkic tongue, is the state language, spoken by over 80% of the population, while Russian is widely used in business, government, and urban areas. Trilingual policies (Kazakh, Russian, English) are promoted, especially among youth.

Historically, Kazakhstan was one of the homes of the Scythians until about the 8th century when it was conquered by Turkic Muslims, who ruled until the Mongol invasion in the 13th century. In 1465 the Kazakh tribes united to form the Kazakh Khanate, which ruled until 1847. The Khanate was organized much like the hordes of the famous conquerors Genghis Khan and Timur, who left their imprint on the nation. Russian imperial expansion concluded in Kazakhstan in 1847 with the annexation of the entire territory. Kazakhstan remained a Russian province until 1936, when the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic was created and added to the Soviet Union. It regained independence in 1991, with the Soviet collapse. The country was the last Soviet Republic to declare independence, surrendering what was at the time the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal.

Today Kazakhstan's economy



relies mostly on the export of petrochemicals and raw metals. The country has slightly high inflation, but very little debt, although it is highly centralized. Rural areas and agricultural production are typically very far behind urban areas technologically, and struggle to attract investment in Kazakhstan's extremely international trade heavy environment. Kazakhstan is not a poor nation, boasting a GDP per capita of around \$13,000, but wealth distribution is still very pronounced between urban and rural areas. Even with lower incomes in rural areas, Kazakhstan maintains a poverty rate of only about 5%.

The earliest evidence of Christianity in Kazakhstan comes from the 4th century, along the silk road. These earliest Christians were probably Nestorians, whose influence remained among the people until at least the 13th century, when they were encountered among the Naiman tribes of the region by Marco



Polo. The dual impulses of increasing Islamization and Mongol conquest greatly reduced the Christian presence in the country, until the Russian Orthodox missions began in the 18th century. The Soviet Union ended all religion in the country by decree, but a substantial Orthodox community remains today. The first Baptist church in Kazakhstan was established in 1917 in the city of Almaty, by Ukrainians, and today a country-wide

convention of Baptist churches exists with about 10,000 members across more than 250 congregations, alongside about 20 Presbyterian churches, almost all following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. It is not known whether any of these are Reformed.

As in nearly all majority Muslim countries, converts to Christianity who are leaving Islam face severe persecution and even violence, though Kazakhstan has a reputation in the Islamic world for its moderation, and does not have Sharia law. Kazakhstan does not have protections for freedom of religion, however, and congregations in the country are regulated by the state laws on religious activity. Recently, Kazakhstan has begun to crack down on Baptists in the south of the country, leading to fear and uncertainty as to the future, particularly for Protestant churches.

Pray that the Lord would restrain hardline Islam in Kazakhstan, and move the leaders of the country to enact protections for religious belief. Pray also that He would reform the Protestant churches in the land and help them to spread the true gospel throughout the land. May God receive His due glory in Kazakhstan!

