

Tunisia

Kairouan, the oldest Islamic city in Northwest Africa



Sept. 12, 2008

Day 12

Tunisian population: 10,280,000 inhabitants

Kairouan population: 120,000

The city of Kairouan has existed for about 1,300 years. Founded as part of the expansion of the Islamic Empire, it boasts the oldest mosque in North Africa, with the oldest standing minaret in the world - a tribute to the city's original purpose: to be a base for the spread of Islam across the region.

The famous "Grand Mosque" is a significant destination for tourists. Elsewhere, the Zaouia Sidi Sahab, tomb of the barber who allegedly cut the Prophet Mohammed's hair, has gained a reputation as a being a place to pray for healing and for obtaining various blessings. If an appeal for favor seems to be granted, the recipient is obligated to bring a "gift" - usually food for the poor, in thanks for the answered prayer.

For many North Africans, Kairouan is considered the fourth holiest city of Islam. Its school trains religious leaders (Imams) for all of Tunisia. The city is known for its quiet conservatism, and women stay in their homes more than in other parts of the country. Kairouan lacks the bustle of many Tunisian cities, with little industry to boost the economy. Young people long to leave for the West in search of employment.



An entrenched fatalism seems even to cling to new believers. The few people who have heard and responded to the Gospel in Kairouan often struggle with personal issues; some manifest little evidence of spiritual growth, perhaps due in part to the hidden spiritual influences over the city.

PRAYER REQUESTS

► *Some believers in Kairouan are convinced that God has asked them to raise a banner of praise over this city, just as he called the worshippers to lead the march around Jericho. By His grace, they claim the promises of Isaiah 62 for their city. Pray through this text with Kairouan in mind.*

PAIN NEAR KAIROUAN

Rachid (pseudonym) has stopped hoping for a better job, or a better life. At one time, it seemed possible, but today, as he trudges along a dusty road, he is hoping for a free ride to the city.... and more sympathy from his friends.

His wife and two sons are asleep; when they wake up, they will find little to eat. His son was sick last week and the doctor kept his identity papers when Rachid admitted he could not pay the bill. He will hitch-hike the 12 miles to Kairouan, hoping to borrow funds from friends there. Life is a depressing cycle.

Rachid lives with his own family in one room of his father's house, as does an older married brother. That brother has a steady job and helps pay the family utility bills. Rachid's inability to contribute is a source of contention, especially with his unsympathetic stepmother, who has vetoed the use of a common kitchen.

