

Pain in Basrah, Iraq

Al Basrah, (also called Basorah) is the capital of Basra Province in Iraq with an estimated population of about 3,800,000. Basra is a significant port, although most of the deep water maritime traffic is handled at the port of Umm Qasr nearer to the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. The city is located near the historic location of Sumer which was one of the world's first civilizations. It is not far from the ruins of Ur of the Chaldeans where Abraham was born. The city began in 636 AD as an encampment for a Muslim army stationed in the area. It is Iraq's second largest and most populous city after Baghdad.

In the 1970s, the region along the Shatt al-Arab waterway near Basrah had between 17 to 18 million date palms, an estimated one-fifth of the world's palm trees. However, by 2002 war, salt infiltration, and pests had wiped out more than 14 million of the palms, (9 million in Iraq and 5 million in Iran). Many of the remaining trees are in poor condition.

Basrah is awash in petrol. It is estimated that at least 90% of the city is built on oil fields. The gas and petrol fumes are part of the daily life of Bas-

rah's residents. The fumes and city's brackish water have contributed to large numbers of childhood cancers and other illnesses. Local sewage systems and garbage pickup have long been overwhelmed by the growth of the population. Many people live in very unpleasant circumstances among heaps of garbage, stinking sewage and petroleum fumes.

While the city is very involved in the petroleum industry, many of its inhabitants actually do not profit directly from oil. Relatively few are employed in the oil industry. Hundreds of thousands live in the villages surrounding the oil fields while knowing that they are not qualified or else they do not have enough money to bribe someone to get a job (bribes sometimes amount to \$2,000 - \$5,000).

Basrah's population is 99.9% ethnically Arab from dozens of tribes. About 20% of the population is Sunni Muslim, but the vast majority are Shiites. There is a very small number of believers in the Messiah as well as a dwindling minority of Gnostic Mandaean.



Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray that God would raise up officials and community leaders who seek the well-being of their people more than their own prosperity and self-indulgence.*
- ▶ *Pray especially for leaders to have inspiration, wisdom and courage to take the urgent steps necessary to solve the many health, garbage collection and sewage problems. The people of the city are suffering greatly.*
- ▶ *Pray for breakthroughs in the area of education and jobs. Some schools are very overcrowded and lack basic facilities like toilets.*
- ▶ *Many people live in fatalism and can see no future. Pray that many of Basrah's Muslims would encounter the Messiah, the giver of hope, through television, radio and personal witness.*