

Bahrain

As he sat in the Starbucks coffee shop, away from the bustle of the surrounding shopping mall, Hans* considered the difficult choice he had to make. Should he continue being a successful businessman here in his native Bahrain, or should he emigrate with his wife Maria* and their young son to a place where they could worship Jesus the Messiah, freely and without harassment from his family? Five years ago, after a time of seeking spiritual answers and reading the Bible, Hans was visiting the holy city of Mecca, and he dreamed of a person, the Lord Jesus, telling him that this city was the wrong place to be seeking Him! Soon after, a believer explained the gospel message to Hans and he decided to place his faith in the Messiah. Now Hans thought about how he might proclaim the Messiah to others.

Some believers have been present in the island kingdom of Bahrain, situated between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for about 100 years. Their teaching and loving service over time has made the Gospel attractive to many Bahrainis.

The half-million Bahrainis are descended from a mixture of indigenous peoples and settlers from the Arabian peninsula and Iran. Some tensions exist between the poorer Shi'a Islamic majority, and the politically-dominant Sunni minority, and between the

Arab and Persian background inhabitants. However, the country's traditional dependence on trading, plus the necessity of living closely together, have led towards the generally tolerant attitudes found among Bahrainis today.

About 250,000 foreigners are also resident in Bahrain – professionals from Europe, the Far East and South Africa; technicians and skilled workers from India and Philippines; and manual labourers and domestic servants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, and more recently, China. Because of a lack of comprehensive laws to protect foreign workers, construction workers and domestic servants often have to endure physical abuse, sexual harassment, confiscation of passports, non-payment or delay in payment of salary and long hours of work.

The government presently demonstrates a good level of tolerance towards foreign believers as they worship and practice their faith. However, Christ followers may be more restricted in the future, as competition occurs between Saudi-inspired government ministers and Shi'a parliamentarians to show which of them is the most "Islamic."

*** Names are changed to protect the identities of the individuals.**



Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ Bahraini believers like Hans* and Maria* need daily courage as they follow the Lord, in the face of family and community hostility.
- ▶ Bahrainis sometimes have opportunities to hear the Gospel through foreign believers and to see their example, but these opportunities need to be multiplied by at least a thousand! Pray for the opening of minds and hearts (Luke 24:32 and Acts 16:14).
- ▶ Poorer foreign workers need support and justice; and Bahrainis need courage to address the sins and injustices of their own society.