

Cham



Population	500,000
Major Religion	Islam
Language	Cham
Percent Christian	Less than 1 %
Bible Translation	None



Who are the Cham?

The Western Cham used to have their own kingdom called Champa in present-day south-central Vietnam. According to ancient legend, the Vietnamese king persuaded the Cham king to marry a beautiful Vietnamese woman so that she could find out how the Vietnamese could overthrow the kingdom of Champa and take their land. When she learned from the king of Champa that the secret of the kingdom's strength lay in a special tree that was in front of the palace, she complained of stomach pains and blamed them on the tree daily until the king, who could no longer bear her complaining, had the tree cut down. Shortly after the tree was cut down, the Vietnamese went to war with the Cham and took their land. The majority of the Cham fled west into present-day Cambodia.

In Cambodia today, the Cham are a minority group with a population of about half-a-million. The Cham are bilingual and speak both Khmer and Western Cham. Some Cham also speak Malay, Arabic, Vietnamese and Thai. Angkor Wat, a famous Cambodian Hindu temple, depicts the ancient war between the Cham and the Khmer and also has Chamic inscriptions on its walls.

What are their lives like?

The Cham are skilled fishermen and have been for centuries, but recent regulations have limited the amount of fishing that can be done. So many Cham have left the river banks and headed for the jungles and mountainous regions to clear the land and do cashew, mango, tobacco, pepper and coffee farming. Many Cham are rice farmers and enjoy two harvests per year in good years. Logging used to be a lucrative pursuit for Cham in the northeast

provinces, but, with rapid deforestation a growing concern, laws have been enacted against logging and many Cham who were involved in logging have left Cambodia to find work in Thailand or Malaysia as illegal immigrants.

What do they believe?

Originally, the Cham were Hindu, but in the year 1421, a clever Muslim trader from Malaysia went to Champa and converted the King to Islam. Shortly after that the king declared Islam to be the official religion of the Cham. Today, the majority of the Cham follow a very basic form of Malaysian Sunni Islam with Mohammed as the prophet, prayers five times a day and fasting at Ramadan. The Western Cham are less well-informed about Islam and more tolerant of other faiths than their Malaysian and Middle-Eastern counterparts. A small portion (about 40,000) of the Western Cham only have prayers once a week and incorporate the worship of spirits and animistic rites. These Cham claim that they hold to the ancient form of Islam that was held in Champa.

What are their needs?

The first known Cham convert to Christianity came to Christ in 1999. By 2002, there were only two known believers. The Western Cham desperately need to hear the truth about Jesus who they think is only a prophet that came before Mohammed and they need to know that only his merit can take them to heaven. The Western Cham are also in need of good medical care as well as economic aid and development.