Institute for Bible Translation

• Moscow   R U S S I A

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

Caspian Sea

The Kurds

Population: 153,000 (Soviet census 1989)
Today approx. 197,000
Language: Kurmanji Kurdish
Language family: Iranian
Region: Caucasus
Religion: Muslim, Yezid
Growing number of Evangelical Christians
Scriptures: Matthew (1993)
Luke & Acts (1997)
New Testament (2000)

The Kurmanji speaking Kurds of the former Soviet Union have primarily been found in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, but Kurdish communities also exist in the Central Asian republics. In recent years, significant numbers of Kurds have left Armenia and surrounding areas to move north to the Krasnodar region of southern Russia.

Kurds in the Caucasus speak the northern Kurmanji dialect of the Kurdish language and have developed a further, distinct "Caucasian" Kurmanji verison of Kurdish sometimes referred to as "Soviet standard". Northern Kurmanji is also spoken by Kurds remaining in northeastern Turkey.

The appearance of Kurds in the Caucasus dates back to the tenth century. Their presence grew over the centuries, and in the beginning of the 19th century Kurds requested permission to settle in Russia and be allowed Russian citizenship. Earlier, most Caucasian Kurds were illiterate and the first Kurdish grammar was not published until 1787. Shortly after the 1917 Revolution in Russia, however, schools for Kurds were established. In 1925 more than fifty schools were opened for Kurds in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The 1989 Soviet census showed that 80% of the Kurds considered Kurdish their native language. Both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts are used in the written form of the language.

Islam spread among Kurds in the seventh and eighth centuries. Today most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, with some Shiites. A number of Kurds adhere to a syncretistic religion called Yezidism and worship water, stones, the moon, and the sun. By personal accounts, some Yezidis worship Satan. In recent years, Evangelical Christian congregations have sprung up among Kurds in Armenia and Georgia, with many Kurds in Armenia worshipping with Armenian Evangelical Christians.

Bible translation into Caucasian Kurmanji Kurdish started in 1982. **The entire New Testament was printed in 2000**. Translation of the Old Testament is in progress, in cooperation with SIL and UBS.