

Berber



Quick Facts

Population: 26,000,000

Algeria: 12,000,000

Morocco: 10,500,000

Niger: 1,500,000

France: 1,200,000

Religion: Sunni Muslims

Believers: 0.015%

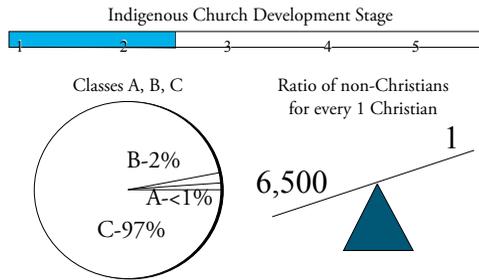
Scriptures: 3 NT, Portions

Ministry Tools: JRGT

Church Status: 2

Mission Status: 2

MS Subgroups: 100+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

Identity: The Berbers are a complex cluster of ethnic groups which speak dozens of mutually unintelligible, but linguistically related dialects. They have inhabited North Africa for thousands of years, but were conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century. The name Berber is Roman in origin, meaning barbarian. Their name for themselves is commonly Imazighen (free men).

Lifestyle: The way of life for the Berbers ranges from the nomadic Tuareg in the South, to the semi-nomadic agro-pastoralist Shilha in the Atlas-mountains, to the Arabized Berbers of the North African coastal cities. The drain of young people to urban centers has put pressure on the traditional Berber economy and threatens the survival of their culture and language.

Customs: Among some Berber groups women have a high place in society and can divorce their husbands and remarry. They can inherit wealth and

status, and have been known to lead men in armed conflicts. Being strong and tough is a highly valued female attribute, though largely subject to male dominance and control. Women are the preservers of language and culture, and hold the responsibility of preparing their sons for manhood.

Religion: Conversion to Islam was gradual over a period of several centuries. Once complete, the Berbers became a significant missionary force, advancing Islam throughout West Africa. The practice of saint devotion is widespread among Berber tribes, and one of the unifying cultural traits. Berber holy men are sought after for their healing power and may live in communes with their disciples, or at the burial shrine of a previous saint.

Christian Outreach: A recent breakthrough among the Kabyle Berbers, and the completion of the New Testament in their language, is a cause for great rejoic-

ing. Ongoing translations and literacy work among every major Berber dialect may prove to be a significant factor in evangelism as the Berbers seek to re-claim their culture and language.

How to Pray:

☞ Pray that the breakthrough among the Kabyles will result in a church-planting movement that would impact the neighboring Shawiya and Shilha tribes.

☞ Pray for wisdom and creativity in discipling the 1.8 million nomadic Tuareg and for the effectiveness of an ongoing inter-mission partnership to reach them.

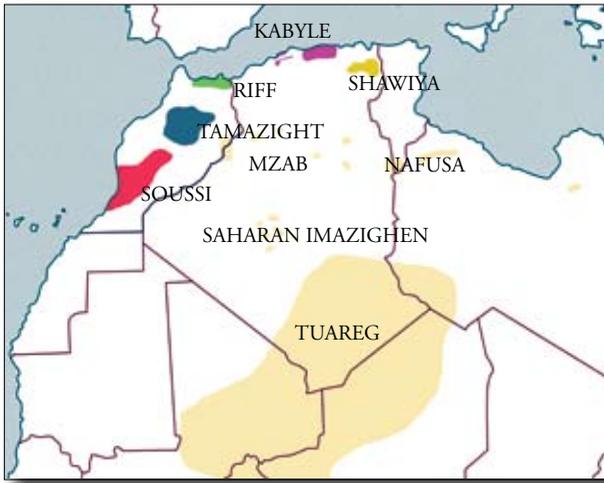
☞ Many Berbers wear crosses on their foreheads and clothing, a remnant of a time when Berbers were influenced by Christianity. Pray that the Cross would be restored to its true meaning and power among them.

☞ The Berbers led the Islamic conquest of Spain and influenced their culture. Today, Latin American missionaries are helping to rebuild the Berber Church. Pray for their success!

☞ Intercede for the ongoing development of radio broadcasts in the influential Tamazight dialect.

Every year 230,000 Berbers die without Christ.

MAJOR BERBER SUB-GROUPS IN NORTH AFRICA



Sub-Group	Hub	Population
Shilha	Morocco	7,300,000
Tamazight	Morocco	3,000,000
Sousi	Morocco	2,800,000
Riff	Morocco	1,500,000
Kabyle	Algeria	2,600,000
Tuareg	Niger	1,800,000
Tayert	Niger	560,000
Tawellemet	Niger	520,000
Bella	Mali	250,000
Shawiya	Algeria	1,600,000
Mzab	Algeria	220,000

SHILHA

The Northern Shilha, known as the Rif Berbers, live in a coastal mountainous stronghold of 6,000 peaks and valleys. From the 11th to the 13th century they established two strong Islamic empires, which spread Islam throughout sub-Saharan Africa and ruled most of North Africa. The Rif Berbers are sedentary, unlike the Tamazight and Sousi to the south which observe summer or winter transhumance—the practice of leaving permanent residences during parts of the year and moving the village herds to more suitable pasture. There is no complete Bible in any of the Shilha dialects and no Church-planting movement among any of the 50+ Shilha tribes.

KABYLE

Like the Riffians, the Kabyle are sedentary mountain farmers. Their territory is a coastal mountain fortress called Djurdjura, which has afforded them a great deal of autonomy throughout the centuries. Their villages are made of stone and are built on high mountain ridges while their farmland lies below in the valleys, or on terraced slopes. Despite plentiful rainfall, limited agricultural land has forced many Kabyle to abandon their traditional way of life. Hundreds of thousands have immigrated to the cities or to Europe. Dozens of discipleship groups have been established among the Kabyle and thousands have turned to Christ in what may be the first large-scale Church-planting movement in Muslim North Africa.

TUAREG

Traditionally regarded as the “guardians of the Sahara,” the Tuareg are nomadic Berbers which traverse over a million square kilometers of desert. There are seven major Tuareg groups, one of which, the Bella, were former slaves of the Tukulor (a Fulfulde speaking tribe). With the exception of the Bella, the Tuareg have maintained fierce independence for centuries, though decades of drought are forcing many to abandon the nomadic way of life. The Saharan oil boom, and the development that followed, has further restricted their movements and eliminated their historic occupation as guides and caravan protectors. Response to the gospel in Mali and Burkina Faso has resulted in two Tuareg discipleship groups being established.

MZAB

The Mzab are a small, but unique desert dwelling Berber tribe known for their strict adherence to Islam. They are sedentary and live in oasis-based towns along the Wadi Mzab, which flows only once every twelve years. Well-water is drawn through disciplined labor to maintain a network of palm-groves and gardens which sustain the communities. Surviving in this harsh environment has brought about a system of social regulation which has not changed for centuries. As a result, the Mzab may be the most difficult Muslim people to reach with the gospel.