

SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER – SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER

16 PAGES OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES INSIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR CHURCH

barnabasaid



**Suffering Church Action
and Awareness Week**

**His compassions
never fail**

Lamentations 3:22

 **barnabasaid**



bringing hope to suffering Christians
barnabasaid.org | September/October 2023

WE WORK BY:

- directing our aid only to Christians, although its benefits may not be exclusive to them (“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**” Galatians 6:10, emphasis added)
- channelling money **from** Christians **through** Christians **to** Christians (we do not send people, we only send money or goods e.g. food)
- channelling money through existing structures in the countries where funds are sent (e.g. local churches or Christian organisations)
- using the money to fund projects which have been developed by local Christians in their own communities, countries or regions
- considering any request, however small
- acting as equal partners with the persecuted Church, whose leaders often help shape our overall direction.

WE SEEK TO:

- meet both practical and spiritual needs
- encourage, strengthen and enable the existing local Church and Christian communities – so they can maintain their presence and witness rather than setting up our own structures or sending out missionaries
- inform and enable Christians in the West to respond to the growing challenge of other religions and ideologies to Church, society and mission in their own countries
- facilitate global intercession for the persecuted Church by providing a range of prayer materials
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low.

WE BELIEVE:

- in the clear Biblical teaching that Christians should treat all people of all faiths with love and compassion, even those who seek to persecute them
- in the power of prayer to change people’s lives and situations, either through grace to endure or through deliverance from suffering.

Published by Barnabas Aid
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England number 04029536

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Christian identity, Christian genocide

Some while ago, I was with a group of highly committed Christians from South Asia, all of them professionals. We were discussing the issue of Christian identity. One of them said that although he comes from a South Asian country he cannot identify as a national of that country because Christians there are persecuted and he is made to feel that he does not belong. Equally, he continued, although he had lived in the UK for some 20 years, he has encountered repeated racism and abuse and now finds he cannot identify with the UK either. The rest of the group agreed. He and the others concluded that all they had was their Christian identity, and this was paramount. It was their loyalty to Christ that was important to them, not their earthly nationality. Indeed, this is what the Bible teaches. “Our citizenship is in heaven,” wrote the Apostle Paul (Philippians 3:20).

Around the year 200, the pagan inhabitants of the Roman city of Carthage (in modern Tunisia) also recognised this, calling Christians the “third race” of human beings.¹ They meant that Christians were not considered to belong to either of the two categories into which their society was divided: Jews and Gentiles. (Little did they know it, but they were reflecting the words of Paul in Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Gentile ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”) This was at a time when to be a Christian was to lay oneself open to immense persecution by the Roman authorities. Many Christians were martyred in Rome, Carthage and Gaul (France) under Emperor Marcus Aurelius (ruled 161-180). In Lyon there were wholesale slaughters of Christians in the amphitheatre while others were individually martyred by cruelly ingenious methods, such as being roasted to death in an iron chair. Another bout of persecution soon followed, under Emperor Septimius Severus (ruled 193-211), and later came many more.

The history of the Church is a history of persecution, of suffering for Christ. There have been many mass killings of our brothers and sisters (see pages 8-14), as in Lyon, sadly unknown and unrecognised even by most Christians. If Christians are considered another race, the term “genocide” is particularly appropriate. Jesus suffered for us and He calls us to suffer for Him. There is no escape from this, for “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus took care to warn His followers of this (John 15:18 – 16:4). In our identification with our Lord, we must be ready for that suffering and ready, if necessary, to pay the ultimate price by dying for Him.

Much of the Christian writing and preaching that circulates in our world comes out of Western contexts where Christians have for centuries enjoyed freedom and, until recently, general societal approval. But this is an abnormal situation for Christians worldwide and throughout history. Furthermore, things are changing and increasingly we are all faced with the issue: what is my identity? If it is a Christian identity, founded on Christ and His cross, we are called to journey in the way of the cross, which will bring with it opprobrium. But we can learn lessons from the past, from the faithfulness of those who have gone before (Hebrews 11), and apply those lessons to our own age as we seek to be faithful to Christ in an ungodly world which lies in the hands of the evil one.

The Bible sees only two categories of person: either we belong to Christ or we do not. “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12). The world will inevitably persecute those who belong to Christ. Let us therefore rejoice in all our sufferings, especially if we are granted the privilege of suffering for Christ, and join our prayers with all our fellow citizens of heaven.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

¹ Tertullian (155-220) reported this indignantly in *Ad Nationes*, book 1, chapter 8

Contents

4 Compassion in Action

Work completed on 11 new Barnabas-funded schools in Pakistan



SUFFERING CHURCH ACTION AND AWARENESS WEEK

SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER – SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER

6-21

A range of resources about the Lord's faithfulness amidst persecution and suffering

22 Africa

No respite from violent persecution for Africa's Christians



24 In Brief

Five North Korean Christians arrested after church raid

26 Awards

Barnabas founder Patrick Sookhdeo honoured with international awards

27 In Touch

91-year-old supporter completes 21st cycle ride for Barnabas

how barnabas is helping

Strengthened and encouraged. This is what we often hear from Christians who have received support from Barnabas Aid. Thank you for making this possible. Here are just a few examples of the many ways we have recently helped persecuted and suffering Christians.

£19,460
(\$25,000; €22,495)



Churches deliver rice to thousands of hungry Haitians

“The practical relief is invaluable to our Haitian brothers and sisters,” our Caribbean church partners told us after Barnabas provided around 30,000 Christian families with 5lb bags of rice. “Food scarcity and even famine is an ongoing and desperate situation.”

The government of Haiti has collapsed, and people are too afraid to leave their homes because of violent gangs. Praise God, the rice distribution was safely completed through village churches. “Thank you again for your support,” our partners told Barnabas. “May God bless you.”



Barnabas-funded rice was safely delivered through Haitian churches

Project reference: PR1611 (Food, medical and other humanitarian needs in Haiti)

£9,597
(\$12,328; €11,093)



Barnabas funds health centres for Nigerian Christians

Construction has begun on the first two of 11 health centres that Barnabas is planning to build and equip in Nigeria’s Kaduna State, where Christians are regularly subjected to Islamist attack. The two centres will serve more than 67,000 Christians, and spare believers from risking their lives walking long distances to access medical care.

The two centres, due to open at the end of this year, will have a consultant doctor and nurses. “We see it as Divine providence to get this project,” said a village head.



Construction underway on the first two Barnabas-funded health centres

Project reference: 39-2516

£25,798

(\$33,136; €29,815)



Egyptian family serves the Lord by making sandwiches

Every weekend Egyptian Christian Rania and her teenage daughter prepare up to 900 sandwiches in their home using Barnabas-funded ingredients. On Sundays, Rania and her husband deliver the sandwiches to six Cairo churches for the Sudanese refugee congregants to eat after worship.

For many of the impoverished refugees it is their only food of the day. For Rania's family the tiring but rewarding work is their personal service to the Lord. "It is wonderful to see how the Sudanese are happy with the food we bring," says Rania.



Sudanese refugee children tuck into Rania's sandwiches after Sunday service

*Project reference: 48-1138
(Meals for Sudanese Refugee Congregation (Egypt) Fund)*

£25,000

(\$32,117; €28,897)

from Jan to June 2023



Food and aid for displaced Christians in Myanmar

"No matter where we run, we can't escape. They shell the internally displaced people (IDP) camps day and night," said "Zarni", a Christian mother in Myanmar, whose two daughters were killed in a bombardment by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military).

Barnabas is continuing to provide aid for many of the tens of thousands of Christian IDPs, like Zarni, fleeing the conflict. In the first half of 2023 we distributed food parcels to 820 Christian families (around 4,100 individuals) and sleeping mats, tarpaulins and blankets to 235 families (1,175 individuals).



Some of the Christian women and children being reached by Barnabas Aid

Project reference: 75-763 (Aid for Persecuted Myanmar Christians)

£8,570

(\$11,000; €9,921)

per school



Work complete on 11 new Pakistan Christian schools

"I am thankful to Barnabas for this gift for our poor people," said Mariam, a pupil at one of 11 schools newly built by Barnabas for children of Pakistani Christian brick-kiln workers. "I'm getting academic education but also having Biblical study."

Five schools were built in 2021, and the final six were recently completed. Each school has three classrooms, electricity, a secure yard, a washroom, piped water and toilet. The education the children receive enables them to break free from poverty and illiteracy, and grow in the Lord.



One of the 11 new Barnabas-funded schools

*Project reference: 41-1236
(Schools for children of Christian brick-kiln labourers)*



His compassions never fail

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and Awareness Week**

SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER – SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER

In the Book of Lamentations we read the lament – a heart-felt cry of sorrow – of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah had much to lament as Jerusalem was destroyed, many of its inhabitants killed, and most of the survivors taken into captivity.

Yet in the middle of this lament, Jeremiah gives a declaration that has been described by the pastor and author John Piper as “some of the sweetest, most precious words that God has ever put in the mouth of a prophet”:

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:21-23)

The horrific situation facing Israel at that time has much in common with that facing the persecuted and suffering Church today. Yet we are reminded that there is hope: the Lord’s compassions never fail.

Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) is an opportunity for us to stand alongside our suffering Church family, to make known their situation and demonstrate Christ’s love to them in prayer and practical action.

With this special SCAAW magazine there is a range of inspirational material for you, your prayer group and your church to raise awareness of the plight of Christians suffering in the Name of Jesus.

We have suggested making SCAAW run from Sunday 5 to Sunday 12 November this year, but these resources can be used at any time that suits your church’s calendar.

Here is a guide to what resources are available within this magazine, online at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or to be ordered from your local Barnabas office (details on inside front cover). All are available free of charge in the quantities you need. You can also request extra copies of this magazine.

Persecution explained

“How long, Lord?” – A history of violent anti-Christian persecution, and where it persists today. Turn to **p.8** or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW overview video – To encourage your church or group to get involved. Available at barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Praying for the Suffering Church – Booklet covering 39 countries where Christians experience persecution and suffering. Download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or printed copies available from your local Barnabas office.

For your Bible study group, prayer group or personal devotions

Small group Bible study – A thought-provoking Bible study on Lamentations. Turn to **p.18** or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Eight-day Devotional Booklet – To help you each day of SCAAW to focus on the Lord’s compassion amidst suffering. Included with this magazine or from barnabasaid.org/scaaw or from your local Barnabas office.

Prayer diary – *Barnabas Prayer* will inform and inspire your prayers each day. Included with this magazine or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW 2023 prayer – A special new prayer for our persecuted Church family. Turn to **p.21** or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW prayer bookmark – To encourage you when reading or to carry with you to inspire you. Included in this magazine and available free of charge from your local Barnabas office.

For your church service or other meeting

Sermon Outline – Notes for a sermon on the Lord’s unfailing compassion. Turn to **p.16** or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

PowerPoint Sermon Outline – Main points of the sermon outline, to show at your SCAAW theme service or group meeting. Download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

SCAAW hymn focusing on the faithfulness of God – Turn to **p.15** or download from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Special recording of our SCAAW hymn, which can be played before, during or after your SCAAW church service. Available at barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Six suggested songs and hymns for SCAAW – Lift your voice in praise of our faithful Lord. Turn to **p.21**.

Activities for children – Puzzles and prayer wall challenge. Turn to **p.19**.

Preparing for persecution – Helping older children and young adults to think about opposition to their faith. Turn to **p.20**.

SCAAW event poster – See **p.7** for an A4 size poster to publicise your SCAAW event or meeting. An A3 size poster is available on request from your local Barnabas office and to download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw

Money box and Gift Aid envelopes for UK taxpayers – To encourage donations at your service or event. Available free of charge on request, in the quantities you need, from your local Barnabas office.



Suffering Church Action
and Awareness Week

His compassions never fail

Lamentations 3:22

What we're doing for Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week

What



When



Where



barnabasaid.org/scaaw



barnabasaid
bringing hope to suffering Christians



“How long, Lord?”

The blood of the martyrs
throughout the centuries



Christianity has suffered persecution throughout the ages, in a wide variety of religious, political and cultural contexts. Many believers have been martyred, often in their tens, hundreds or even thousands. Here we explore the history of these martyrdoms, seeking encouragement in the faithful witness of our brothers and sisters and the wonderful promises of our Lord God.

“Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem”, Rembrandt (1630)

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.” (Revelation 6:9-11)

The boys and girls at Lhubirira Secondary School in Kasese District, Uganda, were ending their day as usual, by singing hymns together and preparing for bed. Nobody expected that within an hour two-thirds of the residential school’s 60 pupils would be dead, slaughtered by jihadists affiliated to Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

About 40 pupils were either shot, hacked to death with machetes, or burned alive in their dormitories in this vicious attack on 16 June 2023. A school security guard was also among the victims. The sounds of Christian hymns were replaced with the Islamic declaration of “Allahu Akbar!”

Anti-Christian persecution takes many forms, often that of discrimination and marginalisation. Believers may find themselves deprived of educational opportunities or employment. They may be forced from their land or denied access to vital water sources. They may be excluded from the distribution of aid.

Yet there is a thread of anti-Christian violence that persists through almost the entirety of Church history. Christians have not just suffered discrimination, but wholesale slaughter. There are numerous examples of Christians being brutally killed in their dozens, their hundreds, or even their thousands. The dead children of Kasese have joined a great multitude of the slain from throughout the history of the Church and from many different lands.



A survivor of the dreadful attack on Christian boys and girls at a Ugandan school has been left with terrible burn injuries

EARLY MASS PERSECUTION AND KILLINGS

No wonder then that the souls of those who have been slain for their Christian faith cry out to the Lord – how long will this continue? The only answer recorded is that such killings will take place for “a little longer”, until “the full number” of believers have been martyred. Only the Lord knows that full number, but we know that Christians have suffered violent death since the first decades after Christ’s own death and resurrection, and will continue to do so until His return (Revelation 6:12-17).

The earliest mass killings of Christians occurred in the Roman Empire, notably under the emperors Nero (ruled 54-64AD) and Domitian (81-96AD). Massacres continued under Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), and many were tortured and killed in the period 250-312, a 62-year spell prior to Constantine’s official toleration of Christianity that included the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian (284-305).

When the Roman Emperor Diocletian began to suppress Christianity, he required everyone to sacrifice to the Roman gods. Among those who refused was a young Christian called Demiana, who lived in a Christian community of around 40 women who devoted themselves to prayer, fasting and Bible reading. The emperor ordered his soldiers to the desert house where these women lived their lives of devotion. Demiana, the leader of the group, told the soldiers, “As for me, I worship my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and His Good Father and the Holy Spirit ... in His Name I will die and by Him I will live forever.” She was tortured in many agonising ways, before she and her friends were beheaded.

In one mass killing in 286, every member of a Roman legion of around 6,600 Christians from Thebes in Upper Egypt was executed near the town of Aguanum (now St-Maurice in modern-day Switzerland). The soldiers had refused to carry out the order of Emperor Maximian to kill some Christians as an act of celebration for a military victory.

It was not only the Roman Empire that carried out such massacres in the early centuries of the Church. From 339 onwards believers in the Persian Empire suffered severe persecution – in a single incident more than 100 were executed. In Yemen, many Christians were killed by soldiers of King Dhu Nuwas (also called Masruq), who was zealous in propagating Judaism and persecuting Christians. Among them were tens of Christian men who were killed after the town of Najran was forced to surrender to the army of King Nuwas. Their widows were rounded up and ordered to convert. When they refused, they and their children died in a hail of arrows. Soldiers were ordered to attack with swords to finish off any possible survivors. At least 177 women and children died.

THE RISE OF ISLAM

The seventh-century rise of Islam was the emergence of a whole new source of fierce anti-Christian persecution. At first Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, tolerated Jews and Christians as fellow monotheists, but this changed when neither Jews nor Christians accepted Islamic beliefs and practices.

A core Islamic doctrine that still shapes how Muslims view Christians is that of *dhimmi*. Christians and Jews were permitted to continue living in territory conquered by Muslims without changing their faith, but only if they accepted *dhimmi* status – that is, a second-class status as non-citizens. The *dhimmi* were subjected to humiliating rules and restrictions, including the payment of a *jizya* tax to their Muslim conquerors. In theory, despite the humiliation, this meant that Christians could safely live in an Islamic state. In practice, however, Christians were often killed, sometimes in their thousands.

In one example, when the Berber Caliph Abd al-Mumin conquered Tunis in 1159, the Muslim inhabitants were spared but the Christians and Jews ordered to convert to Islam. When they refused they were not subjugated as *dhimmi* – they were simply massacred.

The Eastern European land of Georgia still remembers the night of 9 March 1226 when 100,000 Georgian Christians were massacred by the Turkmen army of Sultan Jalal al-Din of Khwarazm. Refusing to denounce their faith, many were decapitated. Boys were castrated and women raped. Babies, torn from their mothers' arms, had their heads smashed against the bridge over the River Mtkvari. The river flowed with blood.

In another example, in 1342 the fanatical Muslim king of Ili (in modern-day Xinjiang Province, China) ordered all Christians to convert to Islam. When they refused, he ordered that seven missionaries should be tortured and beheaded. After this many other believers – among them Han Chinese, Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Mongols and Russians – were tortured to death.

Hyder Ali, the Sultan of Mysore in southern India, was another Muslim ruler who viciously persecuted the Church. In 1748 he ordered around 60,000 defeated Indian Christians on a 202-mile death march. Only a third reached their destination – at least 20,000 died, and another 20,000 were unaccounted for. Hyder's successor as sultan, his son Tipu, followed in his father's footsteps by massacring 25,000 Christians and 25,000 Hindus in the city of Mangaluru on India's western coast.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE KILLING OF MANY

Many religions, cultures and philosophies have been the source of anti-Christian persecution and, specifically, acts of violence against our brothers and sisters. The Gospel is anathema in many different contexts.



The execution of 55 Christians – including Japanese, Koreans and Europeans – at Nagasaki in 1622, painted by an unknown Japanese Christian

The growth of Christianity in Japan from the mid-sixteenth century onwards was met with a fierce response. A powerful *daimyo* (a landowning ruler, similar to a feudal lord) cracked down on believers in Nagasaki, which had become a centre of the faith. In February 1597, 26 believers – 20 Japanese and six foreigners – were crucified in the city. Anywhere from 4,000 to 40,000 believers had been killed by the time a ban on Christianity was lifted in 1873.

It was a similar story in Korea, where believers experienced the first severe and widespread persecution in 1801 – 156 Christians were beheaded and many others died in prison. Further waves of persecution followed. The fourth, which began in 1839, saw at least 254 Christians killed, whether by execution, torture, or death in prison. It was recorded that whole families died together. An estimated 8,000 believers died in the subsequent Great Persecution of 1866-71. Around 800 were executed, but most were murdered by their neighbours or starved to death in internal exile.

One of the largest mass murders of Christians at a single time took place in the 1900 “Boxer Rebellion” in China. The Boxers – officially called the Righteous and Harmonious Fists – rose up with the aim of returning China to its traditional Confucianist values, ridding their country of Western influences. Around 32,000 Chinese Christians were slaughtered, alongside 188 foreign missionaries.

THE FORGOTTEN GENOCIDE

Even the numbers of Christians killed in China at the turn of the twentieth century pale in comparison to the genocide of 3.75 million Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac and Greek Christians who were systematically exterminated in a 30-year campaign waged by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire from 1893 to 1923. This has rightly been termed the forgotten genocide – the world knows little of the horrors that took place in Turkey and other areas controlled by the Turkish Ottomans.

Massacres of Christians began in the decades prior to the empire's adoption of wholesale genocide as its solution to “the Armenian question”. In 1843 at least 10,000 Christians were killed in south-east Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) where the believers, having been encouraged by the British consuls in Van and Mosul, stopped paying *jizya* to their Muslim rulers. No military



Christians at a Red Cross camp near Jerusalem, around 1917-19. They had fled the Ottoman genocide of Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac and Greek Christians [Image credit: Library of Congress]

help came from the British after their advice to stop paying the tax led to this slaughter. Another 10,000 Christians were killed in Lebanon in 1860, and as many as 25,000 in Bulgaria in 1876.

In 1894-96 organised massacres of Christians took place, during which as many as 300,000 Armenians were killed. Sultan Abdul Hamid's agents would incite Turkish Muslims to rise up against their Armenian Christian neighbours, alleging that the Armenians were plotting to attack them. This procedure was repeated in 13 large towns. When 8,000 Armenians were killed in Urfa in December 1895, the young men were killed by the traditional Islamic method for slaughtering animals to eat: they were thrown on their backs, held by their hands and feet and then their throats were slit while a prayer was recited.

"We were taken to another village ... They started to kill us, one by one. They knocked my brother down first. They hit him in the back of the head. My six-month-old sister was hit and dropped to the ground. I was scared ... I hid ..."

"When we woke up the sun was shining. I saw a little boy ... 'How come they didn't kill you?' He said, 'I don't know'. There was blood all over the place."

– Eye-witness testimony from Nectar Vanetian, an Armenian Christian who was one of the few survivors of an Ottoman attack on the village of Tadem (modern Tadim, in Turkey) in 1915, the worst year of the Armenian Genocide

This violent persecution flared up again during the First World War. In 1915 alone approximately 800,000 Armenian Christians were killed, often in the most brutal and inhumane ways. The same brutality was meted out against Assyrian, Syriac and Greek Christians. In 1900, Christians were nearly a third of Turkey's population. By 1927 they were less than 2%.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It is not known how many Christians were killed by the various communist and far-right totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. By some estimates between 12 and 20 million Christians died in the USSR, though we cannot be certain that these victims of Soviet brutality were all killed as martyrs for their faith. More than 100,000 church leaders were killed between 1937 and 1941, at the height of Stalin's campaign against the Church.

Repression of Christianity was, if anything, even more severe in Mao Zedong's China. One of the differences between the Marxism-Leninism of the Soviet Union and Mao's communism was the Maoist focus on revolution by



The demolition of the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, 1931

changing hearts and minds rather than through action by a small revolutionary group (known as a vanguard). This lent itself even more clearly to totalitarian practices – Maoism could not rest content with merely outward conformity, but demanded heartfelt agreement with its dogma. Totalitarianism was at its most severe during the 1966-76 “Cultural Revolution”.

In this period the Communist authorities attempted by extreme and brutal methods to re-assert Maoism. Mao urged the supporters of communism to destroy the “four olds”: old ideas, old customs, old habits and old culture. Many Christian believers faced censure and imprisonment, while church buildings and Bibles were destroyed. In the overall chaos and the subsequent attempt to restore order, between 500,000 and two million people lost their lives, among them thousands of believers. Today’s North Korea bears striking similarities to Maoist China in its totalitarian insistence on the hearts and minds of people, and its fierce denunciation of any religion, philosophy or ideology that challenges its domination.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, mass killings of Christians were fewer in number. Persecution still raged in many parts of the world, but was generally more to do with discrimination and marginalisation, often resulting in desperate poverty. However, the twentieth century saw the rise of the often violent religious extremist ideologies that are behind the mass slaughter of believers that have taken place in the early years of the twenty-first century.

BUDDHIST NATIONALISM IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that Buddhism is responsible for some of the worst mass killings of Christians in recent times. While Buddhist nationalism and the nationalist and extremist forms of other South and South-East Asian religions have caused many problems for our brothers and sisters, it is in Myanmar (Burma) in particular that Buddhist extremists have engaged in massacres of Christians.

For six decades the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) – which for much of that time was also the country’s government – has meted out violent persecution against Christians. The Tatmadaw represents the dominant national identity of Burman (or Bamar) ethnicity and Buddhist religion. These two elements are intrinsically linked: “To be Burman is to be Buddhist,” runs a popular saying. While there are Buddhists among Myanmar’s non-Bamar ethnic minority groups, many of these have adopted other religions. The Chin, Kachin and Karen groups are predominantly Christian, while there are also significant numbers of Christians among the Kayah (Karenni), Shan and Naga peoples.

The brutal genocide waged by the Tatmadaw against the Muslim-majority Rohingya people of Myanmar has rightly garnered international condemnation, but little has been done about it. In June 2018 a Sky News report concluded that because this anti-Muslim persecution went unpunished, the Tatmadaw felt emboldened to



A young girl forced to flee military bombardment of Christian communities in Karen State, Myanmar, in 2021 [Image credit: Karen Women Organisation]

turn its attention to Kachin Christians. The reports described “evidence of a second genocidal campaign”.

This campaign was ramped up after the February 2021 coup in which the military reasserted its full control over the government of Myanmar. Tatmadaw leaders issued instructions to “punish and break down” ethnic-minority Christians. Hundreds have died in aerial bombardments, artillery attacks and other military assaults on Christian villages, schools and church buildings. In just one incident on Christmas Day 2021, at least 35 people in a Christian area of Kayah State were shot and burned. “We all had tears in our eyes,” said a church leader. “We couldn’t say Merry Christmas anymore. Christmas was very dark for us ... The presence of the burned bodies was there around us.”

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC STATE

Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) first emerged in 2002, taking advantage of the chaos that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq the following year to establish its position in the region. It was from 2010 onwards that IS rose to prominence, capturing Raqqa in Syria in March 2013 and declaring it the IS capital. In June 2014 IS conducted a lightning strike through northern and western Iraq, seizing the cities of Mosul and Tikrit among other areas. At its height IS governed an area that incorporated a third of Iraq and a quarter of Syria, ruling over eight million people. IS declared the establishment of a caliphate, with its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the caliph to whom all Muslims owe allegiance.

Christians in IS-controlled Iraq and Syria were among the many thousands who suffered from the kind of brutality that even other jihadi groups had not meted out. IS fighters even cut out and ate the hearts of some of their victims. In 2016 first the European



The killing of 21 Christians by Islamic State in Libya, 2015

Union, then the US House of Representatives, and then the UK Parliament declared the treatment by IS of Christians and other religious minorities (such as Yazidis) a genocide.

In an infamous massacre, IS beheaded 21 Christians – 20 Egyptians and one Ghanaian – on a beach in Libya in February 2015. Each of the victims had refused to convert to Islam. The Egyptian Christians whispered the name “Jesus” in Arabic as they died. The terrorists then turned to the Ghanaian believer, who declared, “Their God is my God.” In a similar incident a year later, 34 Ethiopian Christians were beheaded by IS terrorists.

In July 2017 Iraqi forces liberated Mosul from IS rule, and had retaken control of all the Iraqi territory previously controlled by IS by the end of that year. Fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) liberated Raqqa, the former IS capital, in October 2017, and by March 2019 IS had lost all of its Syrian territory, with the SDF announcing the defeat of the caliphate.

IS, however, was never fully eradicated. It remains a security threat in the Middle East and elsewhere, while sub-Saharan Africa has become the venue for continuing violent atrocities carried out against Christian believers by Islamist terrorists, IS-affiliated groups among them. In May 2022, for example, IS published a video showing the murder of around 20 Nigerian Christians – revenge, they said, for the killing of IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi by US special forces in Syria earlier that year.

Such is the scope of Islamist activity in this vast region of the world that in November 2020 the Global Terrorism Index reported “a surge in terrorism” that proved that Africa had become the “centre of gravity” for IS. More recently experts, noting that at least 20 African countries have suffered Islamist activity, have made predictions of an Islamic caliphate stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. (See pp.23-4 for more.)

“How many of you are willing to die for Christ?” asked the Sunday School teachers to the children of Zion Evangelical Church, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, on Easter morning 2019. Each child raised a hand. Only moments later a suicide bomber detonated himself at the church, killing 15 adults and 14 of the children who had just pledged their willingness to die for the Name of their Lord and Saviour. This bombing was part of a co-ordinated attack by IS militants on Sri Lankan churches and other places where Christians were expected to be that Easter. The final death toll was 253.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND MOZAMBIQUE

The jihadists who carried out the July 2023 atrocity in Uganda were fighters from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a group that forms one part of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). The ADF was formed in Uganda in the mid-1990s as a rebel group opposed to the Ugandan government. The Islamist tendency within ADF came to the fore in 2017 when the group – now based in the restive Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – pledged allegiance to IS.

The slaughter in Uganda – the result of a raid across the porous border between western Uganda and the ADF’s stronghold in north-eastern DRC – was widely reported and widely condemned. Yet ADF Islamists have been engaged in the mass killing of Christians in DRC’s North Kivu and Ituri provinces for years.

At least 64 people in Christian-majority areas were killed in ADF attacks in North Kivu in early March 2023 alone. Nineteen were killed in a Sunday morning raid in which the Islamists also burned down a hospital. A few days earlier 45 had been killed in a neighbouring village. In a single incident 17 worshippers were killed and 39 wounded when an improvised bomb exploded during a Sunday morning church service in the town of Kasindi, also in North Kivu.

“I am traumatised by seeing people die around me,” said 25-year-old Masika, whose sister-in-law, sitting a few metres from Masika, died instantly in the bomb attack. Another Christian in north-eastern DRC declared, “Our strength has only come in the love and knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ who we know has given us hope and we are persevering.”

Since 2017 militant Islamists have been waging a brutal campaign in northern Mozambique against both Christians and moderate Muslims who refuse to join their cause. Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) – known locally as Al Shabaab (but not linked to the Somalia-based group of the same name) – killed nearly 6,000 people and displaced 950,000 between October 2017 and the end of 2022. ISM is the other half of Islamic State Central Africa Province.

In one notable massacre in November 2020, ISM beheaded 50 people, most of them Christians, at a football ground in Cabo Delgado Province. Violence in Cabo Delgado has persisted. In just two examples, ISM announced the killing of more than 20 Christians in October 2022, and in February this year declared that “the soldiers of the Caliphate ... captured five Christians and slaughtered them, praise be to God”.

NIGERIA

Northern and Middle Belt Nigeria is currently the deadliest place in the world for Christians, with believers frequently slaughtered by various jihadists, including the Islamic State West Africa Province and Boko Haram, along with radicalised Fulani Islamists. The death toll keeps climbing. From February 2022 to January 2023 there were 1,350 reported deaths of Christians at the hands of Islamists. This figure is only a conservative estimate – Barnabas Aid contacts in Nigeria believe that fewer than half of the killings are reported, meaning that the annual Christian death toll from extremist violence is around 3,000 or higher.

In September 2021, 34 people – mostly women and children – were killed in Kaura Local Government Area (LGA), a Christian-majority area of Kaduna State. “We intend to have a mass burial to call the attention of the world to what is happening to our people,” said a local church leader – but the world took no notice.

In March 2022 at least 34 more were killed by Islamists in Kaura LGA, with at least another 50

believers murdered in other areas of Kaduna that same month. Pastor John Joseph Hayab, chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna, called for “substantial action by the government and security forces” – but there was no action. Two months later Islamist militants killed another 32 Kaduna Christians. A mass burial had to be interrupted because the terrorists were again sighted.

Examples can be multiplied, and Kaduna is not the only area affected, but this gives just a taste of the horrors being meted out against our Nigerian brothers and sisters by the implacable enemies of Christ and His people.

HOPE AMIDST SORROW

Mass killings, massacres and even genocide are an intrinsic part of the history of the Church. They are continuing still. They will continue for “a little longer” – until the triumphant return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The passage with which we began this account urges us to look ahead with hope, for the martyrs beneath the altar of God are given a white robe and blessed with everlasting peace. In the fullness of time they – and all who love the Lord Jesus – will be gathered together with Him.

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” (Revelation 7:13-17)

The testimonies in boxes above are abridged from Patrick Sookhdeo, *Heroes of Our Faith: Volume 2* (Issac Publishing, 2021). You can also read the full story of Christian persecution across the centuries in Dr Sookhdeo’s *Hated Without a Reason* (Isaac Publishing, 2019). See back cover for more details.

This is our God

TRADITIONAL IRISH
(CARRIGDONN / MOUNTAINS OF MOURNE)
Arranged by NOEL FROST
Words by CAROLINE KERSLAKE

"Take com-fort! Your years of hard ser - vice are spent." The mes-sage through an - gels and

pro-phets was sent. But who is the One who is set - ting us free? Our

Sav - iour, De - liv - e - rer, Hope who is He? O this is our God. He's the An - cient of

Days, the One whom the hea-ven - ly se - ra - phim praise. And high on His throne this great

King is our Friend whose love and whose faith-ful-ness ne - ver will end. end.

Verse 2

We humans are fickle and feeble and frail.
We bend in the wind and our promises fail.
Our love is as fragile as petals that fall.
But One who is coming will rescue us all.
O this is our God, who is faithful and true.
Whatever He promises, that He will do.
His Word stands for ever, and we can depend
On our God, for His faithfulness never will end.

Verse 3

O who is this Shepherd, so gentle and kind?
How happy the sheep are who follow behind,
For this is a Shepherd who knows each by name
And tenderly cares for the sick and the lame.
O this is our God, with the lambs in His arms,
Close to His heart and secure from all harm.
For ever He'll cherish them, love and defend.
The Good Shepherd's faithfulness never will end.

Based on Isaiah 40:1-11



Great is Your faithfulness

Lamentations 3:1-42

Introduction

In our Bible passage, the prophet Jeremiah pours out his heart – and we are shocked and shaken by the depth of his anguish. Jerusalem has fallen, the Temple has been destroyed and the people have been taken away into captivity. The disaster he warned against has happened. He is overwhelmed with a double sorrow: he grieves for the sins of his people which brought about their downfall at the hand of God, and he grieves for their current personal suffering.

Lamentations is a book rarely read or preached on in most churches today. Lament itself is seldom heard, at least in societies where “not giving way” is admired. Yet groaning, wailing and crying aloud to God can bring healing in times of sorrow.

1. The desolation of the people of God (vv.1-20)

a. An afflicted people

Jeremiah speaks for his afflicted people, suffering God’s punishment. In vivid language he describes their desolation and misery.

b. God has left them

Worst of all, the One who had protected them, their covenant God, has turned against them (v.3) and will not hear their prayers (v.8).

c. A people without hope

Jeremiah speaks for all the people of Jerusalem, those in exile in faraway Babylon and the pitiful remnant still in Jerusalem with him, when he says that all he had hoped from the LORD has gone (v.18).

d. Jesus

The experience of God’s people is rooted in the experience of their Saviour who suffered affliction for them (Isaiah 53:7). As He hung on the cross, punished for our sins, He endured not only physical pain but also the spiritual agony of feeling forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46).

2. The unending faithfulness of God (vv.21-25)

a. The *hesed* love of God

Jeremiah, at this lowest of lows, manages to re-ignite hope in his heart (v.21). By a deliberate effort he calls to mind the character of the LORD – specifically His love. The Hebrew word used here is *hesed*, which

This sermon outline can be used at a Suffering Church service or meeting. It can be read out as it stands. You could add some illustrations of your own or take some from the information on pp.8-14. You might also find helpful material in the small group Bible study on p.18 or the eight-day devotional booklet. Alternatively, the outline can be used as a framework for your own ideas and applications. A PowerPoint to accompany the sermon can be downloaded from barnabasaid.org/scaaw

occurs about 200 times in the Old Testament. It has no exact English equivalent but means the unwavering, steadfast love of our covenant-keeping God. It is not just a feeling but very much a love shown in action.

b. His mercy

Early English translations of the Bible render *hesed* as “mercy”. This remains a powerful word, laden with meaning. Its modern equivalent might be “compassion”, especially when kindness is shown to one who has offended although it is in one’s power to do them harm instead. Thus it carries a nuance of forgiveness. The English word “mercy” comes from a medieval Latin word meaning “price” or “wages” or “rent”. For we who believe that we have been “bought at a price” as the Apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 7:23), that price being the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, shed to take away our sins, the thought of God’s mercy is a treasure-house of precious meaning.

c. His faithfulness

The essence of *hesed* is that it is a love which never ends. This is God’s love for us. He is utterly faithful, His love utterly dependable. Although He may allow us, for our own good, to endure suffering for a time, it will not last for ever (vv.31-33). He will bring us through it, whether our suffering ends in this life or in the next.

d. Our hope

If God is faithful and His love never ends, if He is merciful and does not treat us as our sins deserve, then we have hope. What we must do is wait quietly for Him to deliver us in His perfect time (vv.25-26).

3. The judgment of God

a. Justice (vv.34-36)

Let us move our thoughts from the LORD’s love to His justice. The Bible repeatedly tells us that He is a God of truth, justice and righteousness. This is both comforting and sobering. We know that each of us must one day stand before God our Judge. Although our sins have been taken away by the atoning death of our Lord Jesus on the cross, so that we are assured of salvation if we trust in Him, still we must give an account of our lives.

The other side of the coin of God’s justice is the comfort of knowing that the Judge of the Earth will finally put right all the wrongs of our broken world. We may live in a society where injustice abounds, where people imagine that “The LORD does not see”

their evil and oppressive, even murderous, deeds (Psalm 94:7). But the Lord does see.

*To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land,
to deny people their rights before the Most High,
to deprive them of justice – would not the
Lord see such things?
(Lamentations 3:34-36)*

What a comfort it is to know that one day “judgment will again be founded on righteousness” (Psalm 94:15) when the God of justice acts.

What’s more, if we have personally suffered injustice, violence or abuse, this truth can bring peace to our seething hearts. We strive to forgive our enemies, to pray for them, to help them in practical ways as opportunity arises and not to seek revenge (Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:43-44). The Word of God tells us to do this. And the same Word also tells us that God Himself will avenge and repay (Romans 12:19).

b. The chastising hand of God (v.37-39)

As we have already seen, although the Lord “does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone”, He may, in His love, discipline us to help us grow more like Him. He loves us too much to abandon us to our sins and their dreadful consequences. Let us praise Him that

*the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in
(Proverbs 3:12)*

So let us learn to recognise and even be thankful for God’s discipline, which shows that we are His children and, despite our failures and sinfulness, He still loves us every moment of every day.

4. Return and repentance (vv.40-42)

These are serious matters. It is clear that we must return to God. But how?

a. Examine ourselves (v.40a)

True repentance requires a knowledge of our sinfulness. How can we discover our sinfulness, especially if we live in a society where “anything goes” and many proudly affirm that they have no need for guilt or remorse? “Let us examine our ways and test them,” says verse 40. Let us look at our own lives, earnestly and often, confessing our sins to God and asking His forgiveness.

Asking our heavenly Father for forgiveness is part of what the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, in words that perhaps we repeat daily (Matthew 6:12). But we must say them thoughtfully. That is Jeremiah’s meaning in verse 41, which talks of praying with the heart, not simply adopting a traditional prayer posture, such as the upturned hands of Jewish prayer.

Likewise Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth about examining themselves to see if they are in the

faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) and especially before taking communion (1 Corinthians 11:28). Many churches include a prayer of confession in their communion services. In centuries past some of these were rigorous and robust, for example, confessing that we have sinned against God and against our fellow humans “in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault”.

Another confession includes the words, “We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”

Comprehensive confessions like this, prayed from the heart, will keep us humbly dependent on God’s mercy. It is a tragic indicator of the spiritual state of some churches that confessions like this have been replaced by all-but-meaningless prayers which fail to recognise the serious nature of sin and the kind of holiness that God wants us to attain.

We do not have to wait until we go to church to examine ourselves and confess our sins. We should make it a regular habit in our private prayers.

“Keep short accounts with God,” it has been said.

b. Return to the LORD (v.40b)

An honest, serious examination of our personal conduct will lead us to return to the Lord, from whom we have departed. Although we may come “trembling”, as Hosea describes (Hosea 3:5; 11:10-11), we can come confidently, knowing that our Father is “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

c. Recognise our sinfulness and transgressions (v.42)

The appalling scenario that Jeremiah describes of not being forgiven (v.42) and of our prayers not being heard (vv.43-44) applies only to those who have not returned humbly to God, acknowledging their sins.

We can imagine Him, in human terms, like the father of the prodigal son in Jesus’s parable (Luke 15:20). The father, so sinned against by his greedy, arrogant, wayward son, was nevertheless watching eagerly for him to return; we know that because he saw his son “when he was still a long way off” and was “filled with compassion for him”. Dare we even say that, when He sees us in the distance, making our faltering way to Him, our heavenly Father runs to meet and embrace us, as did the father in the parable?

When we are walking closely with Him, confessing our sins regularly, our heavenly Father delights to forgive us and to hear our prayers. As Jeremiah tells us,

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him
(Lamentations 3:25)*

Great is Your faithfulness



This study follows the same Bible passage as the sermon outline (pp. 16–17). It can be used before or after hearing the sermon. If it is used without the sermon, it may be useful for the group leader to read through the sermon outline beforehand. You may also like to read the SCAAW 2023 eight-day devotional booklet, which is enclosed with this magazine and can be ordered from barnabasaid.org/scaaw or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (details inside front cover).

The section headed “Digging Deeper” is for those who would like to explore the theme in more depth.

1. What afflictions affect God’s people today? Are any self-inflicted?
2. Is God’s wrath directed against Christians today (v.1)? When is punishment by God for Christians justified?
3. Have you ever experienced times of apparent hopelessness or even bitterness towards God (vv. 15, 18)? How did you recover from such times?
4. Because of the LORD’s great love (*hesed*) we are not consumed (v.22). How has this active, unwavering, steadfast love of our covenant-keeping God been most apparent in the history of God’s people, in both Old and New Testaments?
5. Can you think of situations when human compassion, despite the best of intentions, runs out but God’s compassions do not fail? What do we learn about the limits of our compassion without God?
6. God is good (v.25). Psalm 23:6 talks of God’s goodness and mercy pursuing us. Have you experienced that kind of close pursuit? Share with the group how you felt and how God’s constant pursuit benefitted your Christian walk.
7. Jeremiah states that “no one is cast off by the Lord forever” (v.31). Are there times or situations when you have had reason to challenge this statement?
8. Is it your experience that God brings grief (v.32) or is grief simply the inevitable consequence of living in an imperfect world?
9. What examples spring to mind of God exercising justice on earth? How is your faith tested by justice being delayed, or apparently not being administered?
10. Reflect on God’s foreknowledge (vv.37-39). Is this just a philosophical concept or can it have a positive impact on our day-to-day lives to know that God decrees and knows what is going to happen in advance?
11. God used the Babylonians to get His message across. How do you feel about God using the ungodly to communicate to His people?
12. We are called to examine our ways (v.40) and test them, and return to the Lord. Is there a sinful habit of which you need to repent? Is there any way that you can enjoy closer fellowship with God? Share with your group, if appropriate.



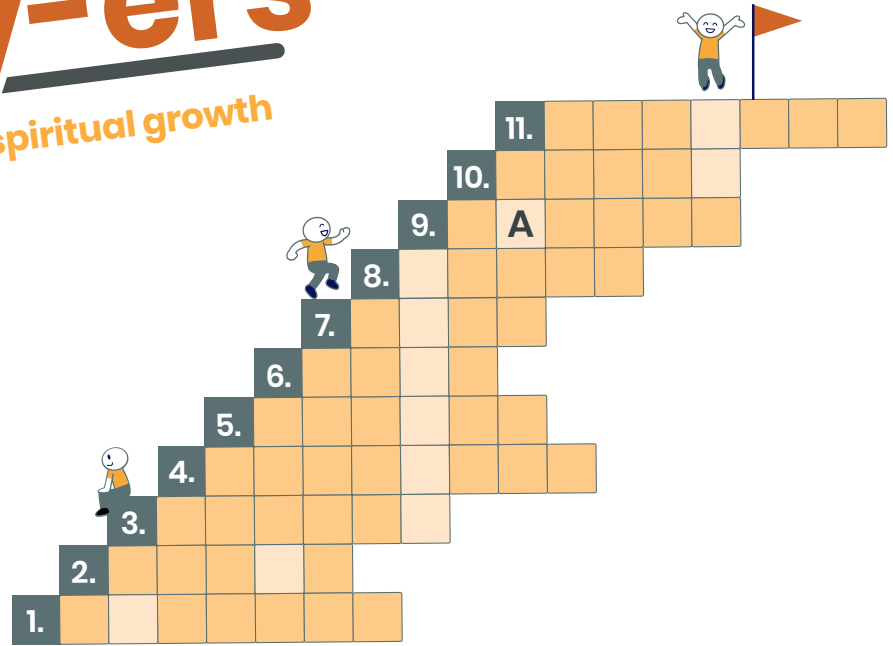
13. King Zedekiah did not heed God’s warning (Jeremiah 21:8-10) and suffered the consequences (Jeremiah 52:1-11). How can we understand God’s will better when it seems that a crisis is getting worse? How can we discern that God sometimes is using unlikely means (such as pagan rulers from Babylon) to achieve His purposes? Are there modern-day examples of God raising up ungodly leaders or governments to further His kingdom and build up His Church?
14. Are there instances when godly resistance to evil is called for? If so, how should we act when faced with oppression, imprisonment or severe restriction on our freedom? See Esther, Daniel, Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-50), Paul and Silas (Acts 16) and other instances in Scripture. Share examples of Christians who have had to wrestle with these questions over the centuries.
15. The Church will not be cast off forever, even if it may be virtually wiped out in places. Identify examples from Scripture where God’s people suffered to the point of despair and apparent extinction. How should the Church respond under such circumstances?
16. How should churches (or even nations) examine themselves? Think about how calls to self-examination may apply to the Church as a whole, or a local congregation (2 Corinthians 13:5-7; 2 Peter 1:10-11; Psalm 119:59; Ezekiel 18:27-28; Galatians 6:4). What part can those in leadership play (Jonah 3:6-10)?

Top 10 Pray-ers

Steps in spiritual growth



Find the names of ten people from the Bible who really knew how to pray. If you identify them correctly, the number in brackets each time refers to the letter in each person's name (and in one case, what makes prayer powerful!). The letters spell out the name of a country where Christians face persecution and need our prayers today. Start at the first "step" and go upwards to spell out the country. For example, for the ninth step, the second letter (2) is the letter needed (A).



- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. cried out for mercy on a wicked city (2) 2. prayed the most famous prayer of all time (4) 3. fasted and prayed before approaching the king on behalf of her people (6) 4. because he prayed, an invading army was defeated (5) 5. kept praying to God despite a new law against it when in Babylon (4) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. prayed persistently over years, day and night (3) 7. glorified God after hearing miraculous news (2) 8. what we all need to make prayers work (1) 9. promised to dedicate her son to God (2) 10. pleaded for a sinful and wayward people (5) 11. asked God for wisdom instead of riches (4) |
|---|---|



All these people in the Bible were teenagers (or younger) when God used them mightily. For some, we don't even know their name, but God does. Read their stories and see if you can find qualities (good or bad) about each of them in the "prayer wall". Use arrows to link the person to the qualities shown in the bricks in the wall. There are no right or wrong answers and some qualities may be used for some, or even all five people! You can add some other points in the spare bricks if you like. Then try to turn your thoughts to prayer, perhaps by asking God what you can do for Christians, especially young people, suffering in the world today.

Jeremiah (Jeremiah chapters 1 to 3) Mary (Luke 1:26-56) The boy with the bread (John 6:9-15)



loyal		bold	feeling inadequate
	trusting	obedient	good listener
worshipper		compassionate	unselfish
			hard-working

The slave girl (2 Kings 5: 1-14)

Joseph (Genesis chapters 39 to 41)

Create your own prayer wall with names of people you know who need prayers. This time write in the key words of prayer that answer his/her needs (e.g. salvation, healing, greater faith, assurance, protection, wisdom, direction, making friends). Some needs may be practical such as finding a job or passing an exam. Focus on Christians suffering for their faith. Perhaps they are made fun of at school or college or even have a hard time in the workplace. This could include Christian teachers or adult believers at school or college, or even well-known Christians active in politics, sport, the media or entertainment. Again, some of the bricks may apply to more than one person, or even all of them.

Preparing for persecution

Persecution isn't just something that affects Christians in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. More and more young people here in the West have experienced incidents of anti-Christian discrimination. How can you prepare for the possibility of persecution?

Members of the Christian Union at an Oxford University college were shocked to find themselves banned from appearing at a freshers' fair event for new students over concerns at the "potential for harm" to non-Christian students.

The event organisers told Balliol College Christian Union (CU) that the freshers' fair should be a "secular space". The presence of the CU, it claimed, might "alienate incoming students". "Historically, Christianity's influence on many marginalised communities has been damaging," they concluded.

The decision was later reversed and Balliol students voted unanimously to prohibit the barring of religious societies from future events. Yet these events in 2017 are just one example of Christians in schools, colleges and universities in the West being discriminated against simply for believing in Jesus.

Another young person has since made a stand for Christ in a very different environment. Samaru Madkani, a 14-year-old Indian believer in the state of Odisha, was described by his pastor as "a passionate Christian". Samaru

was active in sharing the Gospel with other young people until 6 June 2020, when his horribly mutilated body was found by the police. He had been murdered for his Christian witness.

You are not likely to be called upon to give up your life for Christ, as many of our brothers and sisters are called to do. But don't underestimate the challenges you might face at school, college or university, when classmates or fellow students – or even teachers and lecturers! – are hostile to you and your beliefs.



Samaru was lured into the jungle by extremists and murdered in June 2020 [Image credit: Kerosomen Gospel Ministries]



Christian groups represent some of the largest student-led organisations in many universities in Western countries. In the UK Christian Unions have been part of university life for more than a century [Image credit: UCCF – The Christian Unions]

Here are just a few questions to think about how the Bible can help you prepare to face this hostility.

- **How should Christians speak out for the Gospel? Are there times when they need to be silent and just pray?** Ask the Lord how you can make the best impact in your school, college or university. (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8)
- **Should Christians avoid talking about certain issues to avoid giving offence?** Is it always wrong to offend people? How can we balance the need to speak the truth with the right desire not to hurt others? (Ephesians 4:15)
- **Expressing Christian views on medical or sexual ethics is increasingly viewed as an act of hatred or even violence.** How can you prepare for being viewed as a hate-filled person, or someone who does not view others as human? Are there ways you can live in a Christ-like way that demonstrate love and compassion even for those who hate you? (Matthew 5:9–10)
- **What should you do if a course of study or series of lessons goes against what you believe?** Christian children in Iran, for example, have been barred from school for refusing to take Islamic studies classes. How can you respond to situations like this? (Daniel chapters 1,3,5)
- **Who can help you work through difficult issues?** How can being connected to a local church or having fellowship with others through a Christian Union help you in dealing with challenges to your faith? (Hebrews 10:24–25)
- **How would you respond if persecution in your country increased so that your life was in danger?** (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Raise awareness at Sunday services or group meetings

Dedicate a special service on 5 November or 12 November (or another Sunday that suits your church calendar) to stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters, and praise our faithful and loving Lord whose compassions never fail.

When you are planning your themed Sunday service or other group meeting you may find the following resources useful: Sermon Outline (p.16) with a PowerPoint presentation available to download from our website; small group Bible Study (p.18); "How long, Lord?" – a history of violent anti-Christian persecution, and where it persists today (pp.8-14); new hymn on theme of perseverance, entitled "This is our God" (p.15) and a recording of it, with words and images, available from our website; other suggested hymns (this page); our special SCAAW prayer (this page) and our pages for children and young people (pp.19-20).

Make sure everyone goes home with something to remind them of their suffering Church family. So order plenty of copies of our new prayer bookmark or the Devotional Booklet or more copies of this magazine to give out to the congregation. All are available free of charge in whatever quantity you need.

We have an A4 poster (p.7) and an A3 poster (available to download from our website or from your local Barnabas office) for you to advertise your event.

Suggested hymns and songs for your SCAAW church service

Great is thy faithfulness

Thomas Chisholm

Lord for the years

Timothy Dudley-Smith

New every morning is the love

John Keble

There is an everlasting kindness

(Compassion Hymn)

Keith and Kristyn Getty/Stuart

Townend

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases

Edith McNeill

Your love never fails

Chris McClarney

Pray for your suffering brothers and sisters

We encourage you to uphold in prayer our suffering Church family. You may like to commit to praying regularly for a project (some examples can be found on pp.4-5) or for members of our Church family suffering because of violent and persistent anti-Christian persecution (explored on pp.8-14).

We encourage you to use our eight-day Devotional Booklet based on Lamentations 3:22 to inspire your daily prayers during SCAAW. Perhaps your prayer or church home group could organise a special daily prayer event following the booklet's eight daily themes.

Our new prayer for SCAAW is featured on this page and also on the enclosed SCAAW bookmark. Keep the bookmark close at hand to inspire you in prayer at all times of the day. Every *Barnabas Aid* magazine includes our prayer dairy, *Barnabas Prayer*, to inform and spur your prayers each day.

Show your love with a gift

Ask your church leadership about taking a collection for persecuted Christians at your SCAAW church service or meeting. Perhaps you would like to give to a particular project (examples are on pp.4-5) or you could order three boxes to fill with dry foodstuffs for our hungry brothers and sisters in need around the world (p.26).

Alternatively, you could give to our General Fund and we will use your gift wherever the need is greatest. Donations to the General Fund enable us to react quickly to emergencies, and meet needs that are too sensitive to publicise.

We have Gift Aid envelopes and cardboard money boxes available – please order in whatever quantities you need.

Our supporters frequently inspire us with their commitment to raise money on our behalf (p.27). Could you organise a fundraising event for SCAAW?

A prayer for the suffering church

Our Father in heaven,
We cry to You in lament, for the suffering in the world and experience ourselves because of rebellion against You.

Have mercy on us.

Our Father in heaven,
In the midst of overwhelming trouble, we lift our eyes to gaze on You, our eternal refuge.

Our hope is in You.

Our Father in heaven,
We rest our weary souls in Your steadfast love that never wavers, fails or comes to an end.

Do not let us be consumed.

Our Father in heaven,
We wait in faith and confidence for You, Who alone are truly good, to save and deliver us in Your perfect time.

We trust and adore You.

Our Father in heaven,
Who does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone, help us to love You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Do not forsake us.

Our Father in heaven,
The God of truth, justice and righteousness, may the lives of us, Your children, reflect Your character.

Let Your justice reign.

Our Father in heaven,
Who alone is all-knowing and all-powerful, Who always works for the good of those who love You,

Give to Your people a hope and a future.

Our Father in heaven,
We confess that we have sinned in what we have thought, said and done, and in the things we have left undone that we ought to have done.

Have mercy on us.

Amen

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Order your SCAAW resources

Go to p.6 for a complete list of the resources that you can request from us free of charge.

No respite from violent persecution for Africa's Christians



A Christian widow and her three children in Plateau State, Nigeria, mourn the loss of their husband and father in a violent attack. Thousands of Christians have been killed and are still being killed in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria

“I smeared the blood of my dead colleagues on my mouth, ears and on my head so that the attackers would think I was dead.” This was how one school pupil, Julius Insingoma, survived the massacre of nearly 40 schoolchildren by Islamists in Mpondwe, Kasese District, western Uganda.

Gunmen from jihadi group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) stormed the boarding school as children were singing Christian hymns and preparing for bed. Julius took shelter in a gap in the ceiling from where he watched his young friends being hacked to death with machetes. The gunmen left, but Julius fell from his hiding place, the thud alerting them to his presence.

It was then that he coated himself in the still-warm blood of the dead children, so that the returning gunmen thought he was just one more corpse. He was able to escape the scene before the school building succumbed to the flames.

The African caliphate

The sickening details from the Mpondwe massacre have been widely reported. The world has sat up and taken notice of this despicable atrocity – but the world has no understanding of the scale of this problem, nor why it is happening.

Islamist mass killings of Christians are a regular occurrence in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in hotspots of terrorist activity

such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), northern Mozambique, as well as northern and Middle Belt Nigeria (see pp.13-14 for more on of how our persecuted brothers and sisters are suffering in these lands).

The cause is Islamism. The ADF are not just rebels or militants, but jihadists. They are affiliated to the Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh). Along with Islamic State Mozambique they form the Islamic State Central Africa Province. The violence in Nigeria and across West Africa is carried out by the Islamic State West Africa Province, jihadi group Boko Haram, and other Islamist extremists.

Terrorist groups affiliated to IS or al Qaeda have proliferated across sub-Saharan Africa, to the extent that observers are making sobering predictions of an African caliphate stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

“Heaps of Christian corpses and rivers of their blood”

Governments and the international community rightly condemned the massacre in Uganda, but one simple fact has been largely ignored: the victims were Christians who were targeted for that very reason.

The ADF terrorists who carried out this reprehensible act have been slaughtering Christians in their hundreds in north-eastern DRC. In northern and Middle Belt Nigeria, more than 11,000 Christians have been murdered by Islamists since 2015. One expert rightly called this “a Christian genocide”.

We should not ignore that people of all religions and none end up as victims of jihadi violence. Islamic State Mozambique (ISM) has perhaps made the clearest declarations that Muslims who refuse to support the Islamist cause will also be killed.

But ISM has also made a point of rejoicing in social media statements when Christians specifically are killed by “the soldiers of the caliphate”. Its leaders have boasted of building their Islamic province “on heaps of Christian corpses and rivers of their blood”.



In a 2022 poster campaign (pictured below) IS rejoiced in the killing of Christians and the burning down of church buildings across Africa, a campaign they termed their “Harvest of African Christians”. Christians are not the only victims; other groups are targeted by jihadists, including moderate Muslims.

Atrocities like that in Uganda – and the dozens of similar attacks across Africa – are often blamed on economic downturns, marginalisation and lack of opportunity, corrupt or authoritarian government, or environmental problems that reduce the supply of arable and pastoral land. All these play a part, but naïve commentators are making these aggravating factors into primary causes, ignoring – whether deliberately or otherwise – the stated aim of Islamists across Africa: to kill as many Christians as they can.

“Where was the security?”

“Where was this security when these killers came to Uganda?” This was the pointed question raised by Ugandan MP Florence Kabughu. “There is no reason why this attack should have taken place,” declared Daniel Bwambale, a Ugandan expert on government and law, adding, “There are air assets available, unmanned aerial vehicles, artillery and most definitely enough personnel.”

These questions echo the cries of Christians in Nigeria, who have long called for their government to do more to prevent the ongoing Islamist violence. “I have never seen a nation so comfortable watching the killings of its citizens on a daily basis,” said a senior Nigerian Bishop in April this year, adding that “nothing has been done for the past 15 years”.

“Almost on a daily basis we hear people being killed in their tens and hundreds,” he continued. “The government must wake up.”

The Bishop was speaking at the reopening of a church in Ondo State, Nigeria, where more than 50 believers were gunned down by IS-affiliated terrorists during a church

service in June 2022. In the days following that anti-Christian attack, one Western leader infamously said that the cause was “food security issues” and “climate change”.

Such obfuscating by governments in all parts of the world is a major part of the problem. It is clear that Christian communities are especially vulnerable to attack by vicious Islamist terrorists who are being allowed to wage jihad with impunity across sub-Saharan Africa. Yet Christian communities are not recognised as vulnerable when these facts are downplayed, ignored, or even denied.

Governments and international institutions must begin by recognising that African Christians are at particular risk of attack from Islamists. They must then take steps to protect Christian communities from jihadi violence. Our part is to continue to supply aid and practical support to beleaguered Christian communities wherever and whenever we can, and above all to pray for our brothers and sisters who are in the midst of such dreadful persecution.

Barnabas Aid continues to monitor the situation in Africa. In future magazines we will share how you can take action on behalf of our African brothers and sisters.



One of the dormitories at the Kasese school where many young Christians were burned to death by Islamists. Officials from the Ugandan Ministry of Education survey the scene of the slaughter [Image credit: Janet K Museveni]

Christian children massacred by Islamist terrorists at boarding school

UGANDA

More than 40 people, almost all school pupils, were killed in an Islamist attack on a boarding school in Christian-majority Uganda.

Residents near Lhubiriha Secondary School heard pupils singing hymns as part of their evening worship before the attackers from jihadi group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), based in north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), launched their assault after 10pm local time on 16 June.

The school in Mpondwe, Kasese District, on the DRC border, has just over 60 pupils, most of whom live there.

Victims were either shot, hacked to death with machetes, or burned to death in their dormitories. Eight people were critically injured. Six pupils were abducted and forced to carry food that the Islamists stole from the school.



Mourners grieve the loss of Christian children at Lhubiriha Secondary School, Mpondwe

Pakistan tightens “blasphemy” laws as cases mount in Punjab

PAKISTAN

Pakistan’s coalition government has reached an agreement with an Islamist opposition party that includes the strengthening of the country’s controversial “blasphemy” laws.

The agreement, signed on 17 June, states that anybody charged under Section 295-C of Pakistan’s Penal Code with defaming Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, will also be charged with terrorism offences. The penalty for “blasphemy” against Muhammad is already death.

The government has additionally promised to speed up trials of “blasphemy” cases and to create a new Counter Blasphemy Department.

The agreement follows the filing of several “blasphemy” cases against Christians in Punjab province. A Christian wedding photographer and the Muslim couple who hired him were accused of “blasphemy” in the Pakpattan District. Khurram Yousaf, 40, was asked to take photos of the newlywed couple at the Shrine of Baba Fariduddin, a Muslim site, on 30

April, but was accused of desecrating the site by a member of the shrine’s management who reported the incident to the police. Khurram is now in hiding.

Two Christian boys from the Lahore area have also been charged with “blasphemy”. On 18 May one of the boys, Adil, was chewing some gum that has the brand name “Muhammad Ali”. His friend Saiman, 12, made a joke about the gum, which was overheard by a Muslim man who accused the boys of ridiculing Muhammad. The Muslim man beat Saiman and threatened to kill the boys, before calling the police.

Noman Masih, a 23-year-old Christian, was sentenced to death by a court in Bahawalpur, on 30 May for alleged “blasphemy” against Muhammad. He was arrested in July 2019 and charged under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code over images allegedly found on his mobile phone.

A Christian woman and a Muslim man accused of “blasphemy” were both released

on bail on 13 May. Musarrat Bibi and her colleague, Mohammad Sarmad, were employed at a school in Arif Wala City. They were accused of desecrating the Quran and charged with “blasphemy” on 19 April after burning waste paper that apparently contained Quranic verses in Arabic, despite both employees being illiterate (see “In Brief”, *Barnabas Aid*, July/August 2023).



Noman Masih was handed a death sentence for “blasphemy” for images allegedly found on his mobile phone [Image credit: AsiaNews]

Five Christians arrested after raid on underground church

NORTH KOREA

Five North Korean Christians were arrested as they attended a secret church service in a farmhouse at 5am on Sunday 30 April.

The Christians had been meeting each week at the farmhouse in the village of Tongam, South Pyongan province.

“At the site of the worship service, the police retrieved dozens of Bible booklets and arrested all in attendance,” said a Tongam resident.

In North Korea’s *songbun* system citizens are classified according to their perceived loyalty to the state. Religious believers are placed in the “hostile” class and are considered enemies of the state.

Believers in prison or labour camps in North Korea are often singled out for especially harsh treatment that often results in death. Christians

Religious believers are placed in the “hostile” class and are considered enemies of the state

have been executed for the “crime” of owning a Bible.

Underground churches in Tongam had been raided twice before, in 2005

and 1997, and the believers were sent to labour camps.

The resident added that the five captured Christians have refused to renounce their faith despite pressure from the authorities.

She said, “A staff member of the judicial agency told us that the [Christians] refused to tell where they got their Bibles and said, ‘All for Jesus, even in death.’”

Tongam’s history with Christianity goes even further back. Another resident confirmed the site of a large church building that stood even after the Japanese had occupied the Korean peninsula in 1905 and made Shinto the state religion.

Two “Chibok girls” rescued nine years after kidnapping

NIGERIA

Two of the “Chibok girls” abducted by Boko Haram Islamist terrorists in April 2014 have been rescued by the Nigerian military, nine years after they were taken.

Hauwa Maltha and Esther Marcus, both 26, were found at Lagara, a Boko Haram enclave in Sambisa Forest in north-eastern Borno State.

Each girl was forced to marry Boko Haram fighters three times during their captivity. Hauwa has four children – she was eight months pregnant with the fourth at the time she was found, and he was safely delivered several days later. Esther had a one-year-old baby with her when she was rescued.

Boko Haram abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014. An estimated 169 girls have subsequently escaped, been rescued or released.

Girls reported being whipped by their captors to force them into marriage, while a group of Christian girls experienced a mock execution for refusing to convert to Islam. Other girls said they were starved or beaten by the terrorists if they refused to pray.

Government licenses 590 more churches

EGYPT

The government of Egypt licensed a further 590 churches and church-affiliated buildings in two batches, in May and June.

These were the 26th and 27th batches of approvals made since the government committee overseeing the process began work in 2017. The 27th batch, comprising 374 approvals, was the largest issued since the licensing process began in December 2017.

Licences have now been granted to 3,189 of the 3,730 churches that applied

for registration under a 2016 law that abolished Ottoman-era restrictions on church building.

While Christians still face hostility from extremists within society, the stance of the Egyptian government has become much more supportive. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as been swift to give verbal and practical backing to the Christian community while condemning anti-Christian violence.



Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly, right, presides over the licensing committee [Image credit: Watani]

Barnabas founder honoured to receive international awards

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, founder and International Director of Barnabas Aid, has received awards from three organisations in the Majority (that is, non-Western) world.

“I am greatly honoured and greatly humbled to receive this recognition from organisations representing some of the marginalised communities of the non-Western world,” said Dr Sookhdeo.

“I do not undertake my work on behalf of persecuted and suffering Christians in order to receive praise or awards,” he added, “but I am grateful that the achievements of Barnabas Aid, for which we give thanks to God, have been recognised in this way.”

On 31 January 2023, in a ceremony at the Armenian Diocesan Centre in London, UK, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, awarded Dr Sookhdeo the Order of St Gregory the Illuminator in recognition of his work to help the Armenian Church. This is the highest award given by the Armenian Orthodox Church.

The patriarch also presented Dr Sookhdeo’s wife Rosemary, who co-founded Barnabas and serves as International Director of Finance, with a commemorative pin.

On 18 May, Dr Sookhdeo also received a Gratitude Medal from Arayik Harutyunyan, President of Nagorno-Karabakh, for his “contribution to the realization of charitable and humanitarian aid

programs” in Nagorno-Karabakh. The medal was presented by Mrs Azatoohi Simonian, advisor to the president.

Most recently, on 23 June, Dr Sookhdeo was presented with the World Tamil Organisation’s Lifetime Achievement in Economics Award in a ceremony at the UK House of Commons in the Palace of Westminster in which several figures were honoured. This was in recognition of Dr Sookhdeo’s life’s work, including contributing to the economic development of Tamil people globally, especially in India and Sri Lanka.

In 2021 Dr Sookhdeo was awarded an honorary Doctorate in Divinity from Serampore University, India (a 200-year-old institution established by the British missionary William Carey), for meritorious services to Church and society, and in 2010 the St Ignatius Theophorus Decoration as Commander, the highest award of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Alongside his work as

International Director of Barnabas Aid, he is also the Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life, Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam, President of the Westminster Institute in Washington D.C., and an Honorary Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, indicating his influence in both the Western and Majority worlds.

Dr and Mrs Sookhdeo founded Barnabas Aid in 1993, since which time we have funded approximately 5,000 projects in 109 countries, giving aid and practical support to persecuted and suffering Christians across the Global South.

Join with Dr Sookhdeo in giving thanks to God for all He has done through Barnabas Aid and Dr Sookhdeo’s ministry, and pray that He will continue to bless this work in the years ahead.

Dr Sookhdeo was presented with the World Tamil Organisation’s Lifetime Achievement in Economics Award on 23 June



Canon John completes 21st sponsored cycle for Barnabas on his 91st birthday

Our grateful thanks to Canon John Bowers who completed his 21st sponsored cycle ride for Barnabas Aid on his 91st birthday.

The retired clergyman set off from his home in West Kirby, UK, and pedalled 30 miles around the Wirral Peninsula to raise money for Barnabas-funded apprenticeships that give hope and a future to marginalised young Christians in Pakistan.

The ride took place on 17 June, just a few months short of the 60th anniversary of Canon John's ordination, and took in some of the landmarks of his life and work.

Accompanied by members of his family, Canon John rode first to Christ Church, Higher Bebington, where he and his beloved late wife Margaret were members of the congregation.

Their daughters Angela and Ruth were baptised at the church, and it was from there that Canon John went to St Aidan's Theological College in Birkenhead.

Total raised tops £283,000

The riders moved on to St Barnabas, Bromborough, where the Bowers' son Chris was baptised during Canon John's first curacy there, before heading home along the Wirral Way.

At the time of writing, the sponsored cycle had raised £4,875 with more donations expected. This brings the total sum Canon John has raised for Barnabas over 21 years to at least £283,000.

Canon John has no intention of hanging up his bicycle clips, however. He is already planning his 22nd Barnabas cycle ride next year.

He said, "When I retired from ministry, I wasn't able to be face-to-face on a day-to-day basis, so I decided I would help those I would never see face-to-face. That's when and why I chose Barnabas."



Canon John Bowers is already planning his 22nd Barnabas sponsored cycle next year

Project reference: PR1531 (Apprenticeships in Pakistan)

Barnabas celebrates 30 years of ministry



Barnabas Aid supporters and staff gathered at the food.gives warehouse in Swindon, UK, to celebrate 30 years of our global ministry to suffering and persecuted Christians.

"Thank you, to you, our faithful and wonderful supporters and friends," said Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Aid, who co-founded Barnabas with his wife Rosemary in 1993. "Without you, we would not be here today. It is essentially not just our ministry, but your ministry also."

More than 170 were present at the celebration event, with several hundred more watching online.

5,000 aid projects in 109 countries

Dr Sookhdeo reflected that the work of Barnabas remained vital, as Christian suffering around the world has become "so utterly overwhelming" since the ministry began.

Supporters were also given an overview from Caroline Kerslake, Barnabas Aid's International Director of Projects, of just some of the estimated 5,000 aid projects in 109 countries that Barnabas has undertaken over the past 30 years.

This includes physical aid (such as food, water and other basic needs) emotional aid (for example, trauma counselling for those who have suffered anti-Christian violence) and spiritual aid (such as the provision of Bibles and other Christian books for believers who need spiritual nourishment).



Caroline Kerslake, International Director of Projects, outlines to supporters just some of the estimated 5,000 projects in 109 countries that Barnabas has undertaken in 30 years

Heroes of our Faith

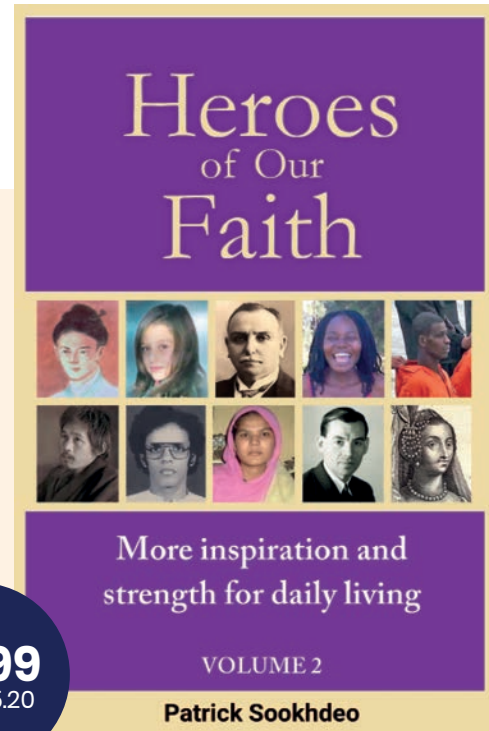
Volume 2

Patrick Sookhdeo

Volume 2 of *Heroes of Our Faith* aims to show the vast scale of Christian martyrdom, and highlights mass killings and genocide. Find out about Christians from the first century until the present day who gave their lives for the Lord. These believers witnessed to the truth and power of the Gospel by their faithfulness to Christ. Spend a year with these great heroes of our faith through 366 devotional readings and allow God to touch your life in a new way. These inspirational stories of the martyrs are interwoven with bible verses, hymns, prayers and words of wisdom to inspire us to live wholeheartedly for Him.

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Hated Without a Reason

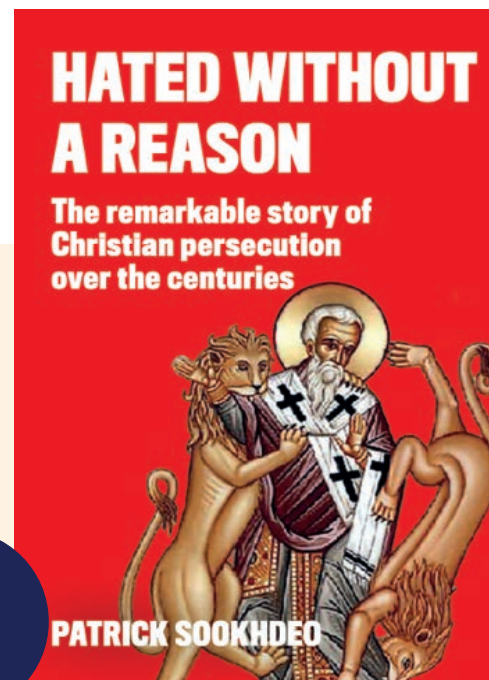
The remarkable story of Christian persecution over the centuries

Patrick Sookhdeo

Hated Without a Reason explores Christian persecution throughout the ages and shows it is not restricted to a certain region or era. It has inspiring stories of courageous individuals. Dr Sookhdeo shows the different ways Christians respond to persecution and its causes. He also gives lessons from the past that are relevant and applicable today.

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