

**BARNABAS FUND** - AID AGENCY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH - BRINGING HOPE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

## **AFGHANISTAN**

*Providing support and shelter  
for Christians fleeing death*

## **BETHLEHEM**

*Christian schoolchildren nurtured  
and educated, thanks to your gifts*

## **PAKISTAN**

*Testimony of grace and strengthening  
in a time of Covid suffering*

# Afghan Christians

Deserted and alone



## The Barnabas Fund Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Fund distinctive from other Christian organisations that deal with persecution?



### 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)
- 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
- Acting on behalf of the persecuted Church, to be their voice - making their needs known to Christians around the world and the injustice of their persecution known to governments and international bodies

### 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

- tackle persecution at its root by making known the aspects of other religions and ideologies that result in injustice and oppression of Christians and others
- 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 comprehensive prayer material
- safeguard and protect our volunteers, staff, partners and beneficiaries
- keep our overheads low

### We believe:

- we are called to address both religious and secular ideologies that deny full religious liberty to Christian minorities - while continuing to show God's love to all people
- 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

*"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40)

### barnabasaid the magazine of Barnabas Fund

**Published by Barnabas Aid**  
1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350  
Vienna, VA 22182, USA

© Barnabas Aid 2021

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**Front Cover: An Afghan Christian woman who has managed to reach a neighbouring country. Barnabas Fund is assisting her and her family.**

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Barnabas Fund is a company registered in New Zealand number 9429 0429 68016. NZ Charities Services registration number CC37773.



# Deserted and alone

“All of them deserted him and fled.” (Mark 14:50 NRSV)

**A** crowd of armed men had just seized Jesus. It was clear that He had been betrayed and was in mortal danger. Wielding a sword, Peter leapt to His defence, only to have the wounded man healed on the spot by Jesus. What did the disciples do next?

They melted away. They fled into the night. They left Him alone in His hour of greatest need.

They themselves were not in grave danger, for it was Jesus, their leader, whose words had drawn such wrath from the authorities. But they deserted Him and Jesus was alone – alone and in peril of His life.

This year the same thing happened to some of Jesus’s bravest followers, the Christians of Afghanistan. Westerners, Koreans, Central Asians and other missionaries have discreetly brought the Gospel to this Muslim country, whose ancient Christian presence was eliminated by persecution many centuries ago. Through God’s grace, some Afghan Muslims found Jesus as their Saviour, Lord and God. By 2003 there were about 100 Afghan Christians, by 2021 about 5,000 men, women and children – or so it is believed, for only God knows the true number.

As converts from Islam, their lives were at great risk in a country where death for apostasy was part of the country’s laws (in line with Islamic sharia), albeit none have actually been executed yet. In those areas of the country where the Taliban ruled instead of the Afghan government, the risk was even higher.

Then came the announcement that the US would withdraw its troops, which had been in the country suppressing the Taliban and providing some security and order on behalf of the Afghan government. Fourteen months’ warning was given. It was predictable that the Taliban would advance further across the country as the Americans withdrew. The foreign missionaries and Christian NGO workers therefore made preparations to depart for safer places. Some wanted to stay with the Afghan Christians, but their sending organisations ordered them to leave.

An Afghan Christian leader told me how the Afghan Christians felt the missionaries had deserted them and fled, leaving them alone to face the Taliban.

Scripture gives us many laments of lonely and endangered believers, forgotten or betrayed. David wrote in agony of heart about his friends and companions avoiding him, while “those who seek my life set their traps” (Psalm 38:12). Another psalmist in great distress described himself as an owl among ruins in the desert, or a bird alone on a roof (Psalm 102:6-7).

But Scripture also assures us that there is a Friend who “sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24), revealed to us at the first Christmas as Jesus our Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). The Incarnation, which we are now preparing to celebrate, assures us that Jesus our God will never leave us nor forsake us.

## DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

*International Director*

*With the generous help of our supporters, Barnabas Fund has come to the aid of Afghan Christians, assisting with the practical needs of hundreds who have managed to cross the border to neighbouring countries, and hundreds more still in hiding in Afghanistan. We, and our supporters, are striving to persuade governments of safe countries to allow in our Afghan brothers and sisters and we will help transport and settle them. (See pages 6-7, 18.)*

*... their lives were at great risk in a country where death for apostasy was part of the country’s laws*

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# how barnabas is helping

## Christians hiding in Myanmar jungle praise God for Barnabas food aid

“I am so thankful to God ... to see them handling their fear and difficulties by their strong faith,” said Pastor Joel as he watched ethnic-Karen Christian families each receive a 45kg bag of rice provided by Barnabas to sustain them as they hid in the Myanmar jungle.

Thousands of Christians have fled there to escape attacks by the military. Many are starving, wounded or sick, and most have nothing but the clothes on their backs. Some have had to run from the soldiers more than once. Covid-19, rife in Myanmar, is an additional threat to their weakened bodies.

But their faith remains unshaken. “Even though they are facing unjust treatment and hardship in their lives, they thank God for providing them with rice in the proper time,” said the pastor. Many cried tears of happiness at the arrival of the latest shipment of Barnabas aid because “they have once again experienced the caring love of God”, he added.



Karen Christians wait patiently to receive one of the 45kg bags of rice

**\$45,630 for 1,204 families (approximately 8,245 individuals)**

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

## Food gifts show convert families in Albania God's love in action

Christian converts from Islam in Muslim-majority Albania were encouraged and strengthened in their faith by the gift of food from Barnabas supporters. Two hundred families (approximately 1,000 individuals) received a bag of food staples including flour, lentils, pasta, beans and oil to sustain them for two months.

“They have seen God's love in action,” said our project partner. “Through the food they realised that the Lord Jesus takes care of them by using brothers and sisters outside Albania.”

Even before Covid-19, times were tough for the converts, many of whom were shunned by their Muslim families for deciding to follow Jesus. Some are still struggling with the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in 2019, which rendered some of their Communist-era homes uninhabitable. Then came the pandemic and their jobs disappeared overnight. With little state aid available, many Christians could only afford one meal a day and desperately needed our help.



Albanian Christians receive food aid from Barnabas

**\$15,255**

*Project reference 1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)*

## Eye clinic treats poor in South Sudan

A church-led eye clinic supported by Barnabas is helping hundreds of patients in South Sudan, one of the world's poorest countries. Few in the area can afford the cost of travelling to the nearest clinic 100 miles away in the capital Juba and would otherwise be unable to access vital treatment.

The clinic treats about 200 patients a month, many suffering from serious eye conditions and also issues spectacles. A special surgical camp was arranged on site where almost 120 patients diagnosed with cataracts by the clinic were given surgery by a visiting team from Juba.

Carolina had no money to travel to Juba for a cataract operation and thanks God that she can see clearly again after surgery close to home. She said she had nothing to offer in return to the Barnabas supporters who enable the clinic to function, except her prayers for their blessing.



A patient receives follow up treatment after cataract surgery

**\$14,630 for one year's support**

*Project reference 48-758 (Medical Centres in South Sudan)*

## Compassion in action

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



### Building of church in Kazakhstan is answer to prayers after years of harassment

The construction of a church in a city in Muslim-majority Kazakhstan is an answer to prayer for the beleaguered congregation's 200 members, the majority of whom are converts from Islam.

In the 20-plus years since the church was founded, its leaders have been put on trial six times for gathering in a building unlicensed for worship and twice the church was ordered to cease activities for many months. Often members were forced to move out of premises they rented for worship because of pressure put on landlords by Muslim leaders.

Recently there has been an improvement in the authorities' attitude to the church and prosecutions and church raids have stopped. Christians have been further encouraged by progress on construction of their new multifunctional church building, part funded by Barnabas. The sight of the roof being raised became a sign that "even in conditions of quarantine, miracles happen", said a church leader.



The multifunctional church building takes shape

**\$39,080**

*Project ref 24-1338  
(Church buildings in Kazakhstan)*



### Women widowed by jihadists in Cameroon cry out with joy at gift of goats

Destitute and displaced Christian widows in Cameroon sang and wept with joy when each received a pair of goats from Barnabas. The animals will enable the 265 widows to become self-sufficient by providing milk for their children, manure for their crops and an income from the sale of baby goats.

Most of the women were widowed as a result of a terror campaign in the Far North by Boko Haram Islamist militants which forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes. The insurgency combined with the impact of Covid-19 means that famine threatens the region, as well as cholera because of a lack of clean water.

On receiving her Barnabas goats widow Bassi sang for joy, "Thank you very much, my children, my brothers, thank you and a thousand times thank you." Another widow, Amina, thanked God that she and her children would once again have animals to graze.



Christian widows thank God for their new goats

**\$44,290 for goats for 265 Christian widows**

*Project reference 07-1363*

### Barnabas-funded pastor opens new doors for Christ in Georgia

New doors and opportunities have opened for expanding the Kingdom of Christ in a Muslim-majority region of the Christian-majority country Georgia, thanks to Barnabas' support for a pastor and his ministry.

The pastor's full-time ministry focuses visiting remote villages, to meet Christian converts from Islam and local Muslim people. As a result, Muslims have begun to lose their distrust of Christians. New people have begun attending rural churches, new groups and youth ministries have been formed and believers have received encouragement as well as a wider knowledge of Scripture.

Camps for young people, where they enjoyed Bible stories, sang hymns and took part in sports, were especially successful and a good testimony for parents. "Now everything is in a stage of forming spiritual habits, priorities and values among local believers," said the pastor. The project has exceeded expectations, and helped people of all ages and from all walks of life, added our project partner in Georgia.



Metekhi bridge in Georgia's capital Tbilisi. Here in 1226 Muslim invaders massacred around 100,000 Christians who refused to convert to Islam. Barnabas has helped a Georgian pastor strengthen the Church in a Muslim-majority area

**\$7,816**

*Project reference 15-932*

# Rescuing Afghan Christians

*“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.”*

Proverbs 24:11 (ESV)

Afghanistan has become a land where each believer must choose between their faith and their life – unless they can escape to a place of safety. These Afghan Christians who recently escaped to a neighbouring country are being helped and supported by Barnabas Fund

## We

praise God that, at time of writing, we seem close to finding a safe and free country which will allow our persecuted Afghan brothers and sisters to settle and rebuild their shattered lives. Please pray for the success of our efforts.

Christians in Afghanistan – first-generation converts and their children – were forced to flee or compelled to hide as the Taliban swiftly overran the country in the weeks leading up to a planned withdrawal of US and other NATO forces. Taliban fighters took control of the capital city Kabul on Sunday 15 August.

As early as July the Taliban announced that under their Islamist rule Christians must re-convert to Islam, leave the country, or be killed. Afghanistan – already a very dangerous place to be a Christian – had become a country where each believer must immediately choose between their faith and their life.

As well as working tirelessly to find refuge across the world for Afghan Christians, Barnabas Fund has been able to support the living costs of those still in neighbouring countries, as well as those hiding within Afghanistan itself.

### **Christianity extinguished in a land of Islamist extremism**

It is believed that there was first a Christian presence in Afghanistan in the second century, but the Church there was extinguished by the rise of Islam. The only known church building of the

last several decades was demolished by Afghan soldiers in 1973; the congregation continued to meet elsewhere until 2010, but their fate is from that point unknown. A chapel exists at the Italian embassy in Kabul – but Italy now plans to move the embassy to Qatar.

The Taliban emerged out of the chaos that followed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. The mujahideen (jihadi fighters) were the heart of the anti-Soviet resistance, strengthened by arms and cash funnelled through Pakistan by Saudi Arabia and the United States. It was a mujahideen commander, Mullah Mohammad Omar, who formed the Taliban, which, with the capture of Kabul in 1996, sealed their control of Afghanistan itself.



Taliban fighters patrolling Kabul in the days after taking control of the city

The capture of Kabul in August 2021 presages a return to the strict enforcement of sharia (Islamic law) which characterised Taliban rule from 1996 until the US-led invasion of 2001. The Taliban confirmed that this was their intention in

the months before taking control again in 2021, and when a new government was announced on 7 September, Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada – as far as is known the Taliban's leader – declared that “in the future, all matters of governance and life in Afghanistan will be regulated by the laws of the holy sharia”.

### The promise of death for all converts from Islam

Sharia law demands death for apostates from Islam. In *Freedom to Believe: Challenging Islam's Apostasy Law* Barnabas Fund's International Director Dr Patrick Sookhdeo explains, “Islam stands alone among world religions in officially prescribing a range of severe punishments for any of its adherents who choose to leave their faith – punishments that include the death sentence.” \*

The four schools of law in Sunni Islam – the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali – and the main Shia school – Jafari – all prescribe death for apostasy.

Dr Sookhdeo explains, “Although the Hanafi school of sharia, which predominates in Afghanistan, specifies death only for adult sane male apostates from Islam (with imprisonment for adult sane female apostates), the Taliban's track record of an ultra-strict interpretation of sharia means it is very likely they will kill all apostates, both men and women, and probably their children too.”

Western forces in Afghanistan, including the US and the UK, recognised that the death penalty for apostasy is fully compliant with sharia. When NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) wanted in 2010 to prove the sharia credentials of the then Afghan government, they initiated the issuing of a fatwa calling for the killing of those who leave Islam.

### Christians struggling to find a place of safety

It was certain therefore that Christians who remained in Afghanistan would be killed for their faith in Christ unless they could escape. But escape was not easy.

As Taliban fighters closed in, Kabul airport remained under the control of US forces. In order to be considered for evacuation, Christians were required to submit their names, contact details and the reason for their vulnerability to the US authorities – a terrifying prospect when publicly identifying oneself as a Christian could lead to execution or extra-judicial murder and, ultimately, there was no guarantee that an application for evacuation would be accepted.

Thankfully, some Christian families were able to escape the country overland. Barnabas Fund has been channelling your generous donations to support the living costs of these believers who have been forced to leave everything behind.

Yet the Muslim-majority countries surrounding Afghanistan are not themselves very safe for

followers of Christ. This is why Barnabas Fund, through our Operation Safe Havens, has worked tirelessly to find a safe and permanent place for our persecuted brothers and sisters who have fled over the borders to wherever they could find.

We trust that by the time you are reading this, the government of a safe country will have agreed to allow the first few hundred Afghan Christians to settle in its territory.

Nevertheless, more Christians will be trying to escape from Afghanistan. The UK – despite its deplorable role in the 2010 apostasy fatwa which called, in effect, for the murder of Afghan Christians – has, at time of writing, given no indication that Christians fleeing certain death at the hands of the Taliban would be welcome there. Neither have any other Western countries.

### More work to do for our suffering family

As well as those who have fled into neighbouring countries, Barnabas Fund is in direct contact with several hundred Christians – men, women and children – who remain in Afghanistan. Working in much secrecy and danger, our Afghan Christian project partners have channelled your donations in order to support the living costs of believers who are internally displaced and trying to evade capture by the Taliban.



This Christian family is still displaced within Afghanistan, but Barnabas Fund has helped with their basic needs

Whether they remain in Afghanistan, settle in a neighbouring country or seek security elsewhere in the world, Afghan Christians still need your help.

You can join our letter-writing campaign asking the government to allow Afghan Christians to settle here in New Zealand (see p.18). Please consider donating to support Afghan Christians wherever they are – \$300 could provide one month's food and accommodation for an Afghan family on the move within the country, cut off from their normal means of support; \$100 provides food, rent and utilities for a week for a family newly arrived in a neighbouring country.

As always, please bring our brothers and sisters before the throne of grace, where all those who belong to Christ may find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

**Project reference: 01-901  
Needy and persecuted Afghan Christians**

\* To purchase, visit [www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books](http://www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books)

# Praise God for keeping Bethlehem school through Covid crisis

**Challenges overcome thanks to prayer and help of staff, students and Barnabas supporters**

## A prayer from St Aphrem's School

"Thank You, O Lord, for protecting us from serious dangers. Thank You, Lord, for Your love through Barnabas Fund who have cherished our school, our children, our staff and our church. Thank You, O Lord, for healthy children and healthy staff. Thank You, O Lord, for Your continuous support and for helping our school survive the pandemic. Thank You, Lord, for listening to our daily prayers."

"The challenges are great, but with God's grace and the loving care of Barnabas Fund we shall survive them all," said Miss Amal Behnam, the head teacher of a Christian school in Bethlehem supported by Barnabas Fund.

Covid lockdown has severely affected Bethlehem, a city whose people (especially the Christian minority) are very dependent on tourism. The parents of the school's pupils have been finding it extremely difficult to earn a living and are "struggling for daily supply of food and most urgent needs, not to mention the urgent need for medication in case of illness", wrote Miss Amal to Barnabas Fund. Many parents have not been able to afford to pay the school fees for their children. When local benefactors occasionally provided aid for schools during lockdown, it never went to this school, which is unique in the area because nearly all its students are from Christian families.

But, praise God, with the help of donations from Barnabas Fund supporters, the school has survived. Everyone played their part. The teachers and other staff took a 50% cut in their salaries. Twelve-year-old Emily, from one of the better-off families, saved up her pocket money and then brought into school a package of coins, which she asked to be used to help pay the fees of needier children. Above all, they were fervent in prayer.

## Children given an excellent start in life

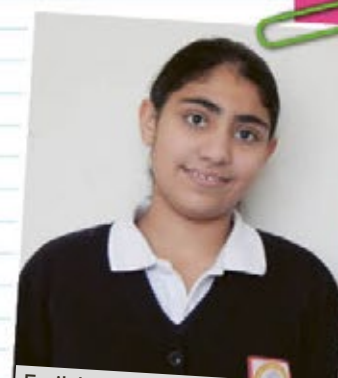
Christian children in Bethlehem face harassment and discrimination in their daily lives, and non-Christian schools can be hostile places for them.

St Aphrem's, which was built mainly with funds from Barnabas, has been providing Christian children with an outstanding education in a loving Christian environment for 18 years. With the support of Barnabas, it can offer minimal fees to needy families so that even the poorest Christian children can attend.

This excellent start in life will enable students to get better jobs and, in turn, support their families and strengthen the whole Christian community.



Children get an excellent start in life at St Aphrem's



Emily's teachers told her that a little support can make big things happen, so she saved up her pocket money to help pay the school fees of needier children at her beloved school



Sport is an important part of the curriculum





The school will soon be celebrating again the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in the very city where the children live and study, with a nativity play like these ones from previous years



Jerry wants to finish his schooling and support his family

St Aphrem's is currently ranked fourth among all schools in the District of Bethlehem with 88.8% of the school's graduates getting averages above 90 in government exams. Some of its students have won scholarships for further studies elsewhere.

There are 58 employees (full-time or part-time) including 46 teachers, four administrators, one accountant, one secretary, five cleaners and one security guard. These provide much-needed income for Christian families in Bethlehem.

#### Strict Covid hygiene rules remain in place

Following lockdown disruptions, the 2021/2022 academic year began in early August with 660 students. First back in class were the Grade 12 students, getting ready for their final year in school; other students from 1st Grade to 11th returned to their desks a fortnight later. The kindergarten children had their own start date two days after that.

Classes meet five days a week from 7.45 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. or 2 p.m. depending on grade level. Strict hygiene rules to guard against Covid remain in place. Students were happy to be back at school, but teachers noticed that their behaviour had deteriorated after 18 months of irregular attendance, and levels of aggression had risen. They were restive and needed a lot of attention from their teachers.

The head teacher met with a child behavioural specialist and arranged psycho-social and drama sessions and workshops to ease the levels of pupil stress. Morning devotions, prayers, Bible readings and spiritual talks for the children were also dedicated to the same purpose.

*Project reference 65-420*

#### Years of loving care and Bible teaching transform troubled child

"I am so happy and proud to be at St Aphrem's School," said 11-year-old Jerry whose father died seven years ago. "I feel they all love me. I now know why Mum was always crying. My teacher told me that only I can stop her tears and pain. I did not understand before these words. It was hard not finding Dad when we went back home. I thought he was coming back one day. But he never did. Miss Mary read us stories from the Bible and explained that Jesus is taking care of us, even my dad."

Miss Mary was the special needs teacher dedicated to caring for Jerry, a very disturbed child, with challenging behaviour, who often refused to go to school. Now, at last, her years of patient attention and loving care are bearing clear fruit in Jerry's life. He arrives early for school and runs eagerly into his classroom. He does all his homework, and wants to make sure his mother never cries again. Jerry says he has promised Jesus to help and protect his mother, finish his schooling and support his family when he grows up.



Children build up their knowledge through play



Untrained Indian pastors, elders and Bible women with their packages of carefully selected Christian literature

# Untrained pastors on the front line in India receive much-needed literature

“I found answers to many of my questions that I had for some years” - Pastor Raju

Pastor Raju’s joy at finding the answers to his questions reflects the impact on Christians ministering in northern India. Barnabas Fund has provided Christian literature to untrained pastors, church elders and “Bible women”. A distribution campaign has revitalised their work in many needy areas of the country.

## A life-changing gift to disadvantaged leaders

To describe the gifts of selected spiritual books as life changing is no exaggeration. Pastors in these rural areas are doubly disadvantaged. They have not received any formal training in ministry and they are too poor to buy study materials. Yet they are active in evangelism and church planting as well as building up their existing congregations. Selected spiritual books were distributed to leaders in the less evangelised regions of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, with several other states envisaged for later distribution. Pro-Hindutva parties rule most of these states and Christians face much opposition and persecution.

## A wealth of materials

In all, some 250 packages of 26 Christian books in the Hindi language were assembled carefully with each recipient in mind. The packages included a breadth of titles

including devotionals, apologetics, worship and preaching guides, children’s and small group ministry. They covered topics ranging from Christian leadership and the family to discipleship and practical Christianity and church growth. Our project partners organised one-day seminars in each location where books were distributed, at which they trained the Christian workers in making best use of the literature.

## Even attending the distribution session was a challenge

Attending the distribution day brought its challenges. Gathering groups of people for distribution and seminars was not without risk, and the weather is hardly inviting with abnormal temperatures dropping down to 5°C in places. In one of the organisers’ homes flooding almost drowned the stock of books just days before the distribution. The vast distances in India were also an issue. On one occasion the seminar organisers were delayed for ten hours because of vehicle repairs and the farmers’ strike.

## Bible treasures which will never fade

The response of the church leaders was overwhelming gratitude to God and excitement at how their new resources enable their ministries to grow. Many had been actively serving for years yet never had the opportunity to study the Bible in depth. As Bible woman



Pastor Raju, receiving his literature, has now found answers to many questions in the books and booklets in the parcel

Chancel declared, “Money will come and go, but these Bible treasures will always stay with us.” The leaders spoke of receiving fresh vision both for their own personal growth and to teach their church members effectively. Pastor Shankar affirmed, “By reading these books I and my church people will grow in spiritual life. And our people will also be able to avoid false teaching.” Pastor Vijay went even further. “With these books I have opened a library in my church and informed all my church members to read. I believe that through these books our church people will be educated and grow in their faith so that they can face any challenges. I believe everything in this world will be destroyed but not God’s Word.” The impetus given to the growth of God’s church will not only give huge encouragement to those serving on the front line but also multiply the effectiveness of their ministries for many years to come.

Project reference: PR1542

# UNDERSTANDING ISLAM FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Continuing our pull-out series from *Understanding Islam from a Christian Perspective*, a popular and informative book by Rosemary Sookhdeo, Barnabas Fund's International Director of Finance, this excerpt is the first part of a table showing the key theological differences between the two religions in tabular form.

## ISLAM

### THE QURAN

It has 114 chapters (*suras*) and is roughly the size of the New Testament. The *suras* are put together in order of length, the longest ones at the beginning and the shortest at the end, except the first *sura* The Opening (*al-Fatihah*). Muslims believe the Quran is uncreated, eternally preserved on a tablet in heaven, known as the "Mother of the Book" (*sura* 85:21-22). That was communicated word-for-word to Muhammad in Arabic over a period of 23 years (*sura* 12:2). Muslims believe the angel Gabriel, sent by Allah, visited Muhammad with the revelations (*sura* 26:193).

It is considered by Muslims to be the ultimate error-free authority on Islam.

The Quran is considered the final revelation of Allah to mankind, after the Torah (*Taurat*) of Moses, the Psalms (*Zabur*) of David and the Gospel (*Injil*) of Jesus. Muslims say that these Scriptures (except the Quran) have been corrupted over time by the Jews and Christians.

**Muslims believe that the Bible and all other holy books have been superseded by the Quran.**

Many of the verses in the Quran are contradictory. Some of these contradictions are overcome by the Doctrine of Abrogation. This means that many of the *suras* (chapters) that were revealed earlier in Muhammad's life are superseded by those that were revealed at a later date (*suras* 2:106, 13:39).

### ALLAH (GOD)

God is known as Allah. He is absolute oneness (*tawheed*). *Sura* 112 states "He is Allah, the One and Only".

To put anyone or anything equal to Allah is the sin of *shirk* (polytheism). Therefore he has no equal partner, children or son and therefore there is no Trinity (*tathlith*) (*sura* 4:171).

**Muslims are often confused about the Christian Trinity and some believe it is God the father, Mary the mother and Jesus the son (*sura* 5:116).**

## CHRISTIANITY

### THE BIBLE

It consists of 66 books written over a period of 1,400 years by over 40 authors in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

They wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "... *no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

**The Bible is the infallible word of God and is the ultimate authority for Christians.**

### GOD

God is one in an eternal Trinity, made up of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not three gods, rather a unity of the Godhead: "*In the beginning God...*", "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Genesis 1:1; Matthew 28:19).

# ISLAM

## ALLAH IS NOT A GOD OF LOVE

Allah is not a god of love. He does not love sinners (*suras* 2:276, 3:57, 4:107).

## ALLAH IS NOT FATHER

Allah is unknowable and is not referred to as "father". He is transcendent (*tanzih*) and powerful.

## ALLAH IS CREATOR

Allah is the creator of the world (*suras* 23:14, 6:102, 13:16).

## ALLAH HAS NOT REVEALED HIMSELF TO MANKIND

Allah is self-sufficient (*sura* 31:26).

Allah predetermines everything; the destiny of creation is fixed (*suras* 25:2, 65:3). He determines all according to his mercy and wisdom (*suras* 2:216, 42:27). All things are decreed by Allah (*sura* 85:16). He can decree both good and evil.

## ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS

Allah is best understood from his traditional 99 most beautiful names (*sura* 7:180) although there are more than 99 found in the Quran. They reveal his attributes, for example: holy, eternal, compassionate, the one, the hidden, the manifest, the light, the most high, the omniscient, the living, the omnipotent, the seeing, the hearing, the wise, the dominator, the strong and the crafty one (*suras* 3:54, 8:30). And they reveal his actions: the guide, the provider, the gentle, the just, the merciful, the harmer, the withholder, the avenger, the abaser and the one who leads astray (*sura* 6:39).

**Some of Allah's actions and attributes are not consistent with the Biblical God.**

## JESUS (*Isa*)

In the Quran, Jesus' name is "*Isa*", and is often called "*Isa* son of Mary". In most places he is called "apostle of Allah" (*sura* 3:49), but also "servant of Allah" (*sura* 19:30), "al-Masih" (the "Messiah", but not in the specific Biblical meaning) (*sura* 3:45), "a sign for mankind" (*sura* 19:21), a "word of Allah" (*sura* 4:171) and "a spirit from him" (*sura* 21:91).

## VIRGIN BIRTH

*Isa* was born of the virgin Mary, and was fully human (*sura* 3:42-47).

## JESUS IS NOT THE SON OF GOD

*Isa* is a created being and is only a man (*suras* 3:59, 5:75). *Isa* is not the son of God or divine (*suras* 9:30, 19:34-35).

# CHRISTIANITY

## GOD IS LOVE

It was out of His love for mankind that God sent His Son: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*". "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us*". "*God is love*" (John 3:16; Roman 5:8; 1 John 4:8).

## GOD IS FATHER

God has adopted those who believe in His Son as His heavenly children: "*Dear friends, now we are children of God*" (1 John 3:2). God is a knowable, heavenly Father. He is transcendent and immanent, full of grace and glory: "*Am I only a God nearby' declares the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?' declares the Lord. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the Lord*" (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

## GOD IS CREATOR

God is almighty, the Creator and sustainer of the world (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 148:5).

## GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN JESUS

He has revealed Himself to mankind in the person of Jesus: "*Jesus answered: '... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'*" (John 14:9).

## ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS

God is described in the Bible as eternal, glorious, almighty, merciful, holy, righteous, forgiving, omnipotent, incomparable and omniscient. His actions are loving, just and wise.

## JESUS

The Bible has many names for Jesus. Some are: Creator, Saviour, the Word, Holy One, Image of the Invisible God, Lord, Prince of Peace, Mediator and Messiah (Christ).

## VIRGIN BIRTH

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and was fully human: "*the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us*" (John 1:14).

## JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

Jesus is fully human and fully divine. He is the Son of God: "*And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'*" (Matthew 3:17. See also John 1:14, 18).

# ISLAM

## JESUS IS A PROPHET

*Isa* is a great prophet sent by Allah who is held in honour in this world and in the hereafter (*sura* 3:45). He announces Muhammad as the next and last prophet (*sura* 61:6).

## JESUS PERFORMED MIRACLES

*Isa* was a miracle-worker. "With the permission of God" he made a clay bird come to life (the Arabic word *khalaqa* is used only for God's creating work). He healed, raised the dead and knew the unknown (*sura* 3:49).

## JESUS DID NOT DIE ON THE CROSS OR RISE FROM THE DEAD

*Isa* did not die on a cross and he did not rise from the dead. Another man died in the place of *Isa* on the cross. Muslims believe that Allah would not allow one of his prophets to die a death of disgrace (*sura* 4:157).

## JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

Muslims believe that *Isa* ascended to heaven, where he still lives and will one day return (*suras* 3:55, 4:157-8).

## JESUS WILL COME AGAIN BUT AS A MUSLIM

*Isa* will return to earth as a Muslim at the Second Coming, he will get married, have children, convert all Christians to Islam, some traditions say destroy the Jews, break all crosses, rule as king of the Muslims, kill all swine, die and be buried alongside Muhammad in Medina (*Sahih Muslim*\* 1:287,289; *Al-Tirmidhi*\* 1522).

## HOLY SPIRIT

The Quran speaks only very vaguely about a spirit, sometimes called "holy spirit" (*ruh al-qudus*) (*sura* 16:102). Muslims identify him with angel Gabriel.

## CREATION

Allah created the heavens and the earth in six days (*suras* 29:44, 50:38).

## CREATION OF MANKIND

Allah created man from either clay or a blood-clot to worship and obey him (*suras* 32:7, 96:2, 51:56).

## ADAM AND EVE CREATED WEAK

Adam was created "weak", i.e. not perfect (*sura* 4:28).

# CHRISTIANITY

## JESUS IS THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHETS

Jesus is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets: "Do not think that I [*Jesus*] have come to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5:17).

## JESUS PERFORMED MIRACLES

Jesus performed miracles during His earthly ministry to reveal His glory: "This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him" (John 2:11). This included bringing the dead to life: "... Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face" (John 11:43-44).

## JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS AND ROSE AGAIN

Jesus died on a cross because of the sin of mankind: "It was the third hour when they crucified Him". "But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs" (Mark 15:25; John 19:33). He defeated death and was raised from the dead on the third day: "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared to Mary Magdalene ..." (Mark 16:9. See also 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Romans 4:25).

## JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN

He ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God the Father until the Second Coming: "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

## JESUS WILL COME AGAIN AS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

## HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is part of the triune Godhead: "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be upon you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'. And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22).

## CREATION

God created the universe in six days. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

## CREATION OF MANKIND

God created man in his own image: "So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

## ADAM AND EVE CREATED SINLESS

God created Adam and Eve innocent and sinless.

# ISLAM

## THE FALL OF MAN

The story of mankind's fall was actually an equal challenge between Allah and Satan (*sura* 7:11-17, 24). Satan was disobedient to God because he did not prostrate before Adam. Adam and Eve got caught up in this challenge and were tempted by Satan in Paradise (heaven).

## THE RESULT OF THE FALL

Adam and Eve repented and God accepted their repentance (*suras* 2:37, 7:23). Adam and Eve were then cast down to earth without sin (*sura* 2:36). Because their sin was a personal lapse it did not bring innate sin on the whole of mankind. **Therefore there is no need for a Saviour to pay the ransom for sin.**

## AFTER DEATH

At death the angel Izra'il separates the soul from the body (*sura* 32:11). In the grave there is an examination by the angels Munkar and Nakir, which sometimes involves torture. Prayer for the dead is beneficial (*sura* 59:10). Between death and the Judgement Day the soul rests in purgatory (*barzakh*).

## JUDGEMENT DAY (*Yaum ad-din* or *Yaum al-hisab*)

The angel Israfil will blow the trumpet (*sur*) to announce the last day. The dead will be raised (*sura* 39:67-75). The balance of the good and bad deeds will be weighed (*suras* 21:47, 23:102-3). There will be a sharp bridge for all humanity to cross (the bridge of *sirat*) over hell fire. Those whose good deeds exceed their bad deeds will pass over it. **Heaven in Islam is through works, but there is no assurance and nothing can be guaranteed.**

## SIGNS OF THE END TIMES

Only Allah and Jesus know when the Judgement Day will be. Jesus has knowledge of the hour (*sura* 43:61). The signs of the last days include lesser signs and greater signs, The lesser signs are an increase of injustice, sin, faithlessness, shamelessness and tribulation. The greater signs will be the Antichrist (*Dajjal*), the Beast of the earth, the rising of the sun in the west, the return of Jesus, Gog and Magog and also the appearance of the Mahdi. On Judgement Day all creatures will die and the universe will be destroyed. **There are many signs of the end times that are similar in both religions.**

# CHRISTIANITY

## THE FALL OF MAN

Satan tempted Eve to sin. Eve then tempted Adam. They both disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit: *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food ... she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it"* (Genesis 3:6). In Christianity Adam and Eve were tempted on earth.

## THE RESULT OF THE FALL

This sin against God resulted in their expulsion from the earthly Garden of Eden and separation from God: *"So the Lord God banished him [Adam] from the Garden of Eden ..."* (Genesis 3:23). Their actions had the consequence of bringing sin into the world, which brought death. Humans are sinners and completely lost (Romans 6:23).

**Therefore to save mankind, there needed to be a second Adam (Jesus) who would be a blood sacrifice, breaking the power of sin and healing the divide between God and mankind.**

## AFTER DEATH

Christ will come again to judge the world. Only God the Father knows this appointed time. Christ will come as the King of kings in power and splendour, heralded in by angels. The dead will be raised: *"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And He will send His angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens"* (Mark 13:26-27).

## JUDGEMENT DAY

All must appear before the judgement seat of Christ. Those who did not put their faith in Christ will be judged with eternal punishment. For the Christian, it is only their works that will be judged: *"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10). See also John 3:18; Matthew 25:31-46).

## SIGNS OF THE END TIMES

The signs of the end times include: wars, natural disasters, false prophets and an increase of sin in the world: *"... many will come in my [Jesus] name, claiming 'I am the Christ', and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation ... There will be famines and earthquakes ..."* (Matthew 24:5-7). There will be a new heaven and a new earth for the believers to dwell in: *"... for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ..."* (Revelation 21:1).

To be continued in the next issue of *Barnabas Aid*

\* A hadith collection

This table also appears in Rosemary Sookhdeo, *Why Christian Women Convert to Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> US ed. McLean: Isaac Publishing, 2016, pp. 105-125.

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**Published by Barnabas Aid** 1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350 Vienna, VA 22182, USA

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# My Testimony

## The presence of God in the pandemic Covid-19

BY MRS AZRA IMRAN  
(Islamabad, Pakistan)

I am Mrs Azra Imran, 50 years old and mother of four boys. I have been working with the Shine Society (Sharing Hope in Needs/Emergencies), a Christian relief and development organisation, since January 2012 as Programme Manager of its Community Development Programme. The months of March and April 2021 were very busy for me as we were simultaneously working on three community development and relief projects. During this period I had to interact with many people in the community of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. I observed all the required Covid-19 procedures, but on 14 April 2021 I became the victim of Covid-19 virus as my test result was positive.

I quarantined myself at home and that period was very tough for me. In my 50 years' life this was the first time I suffered from a disease for such a long period. I surrendered my situation into Almighty God's hands and started reflecting upon the book of Jeremiah that proved so encouraging for me. I learned that a number of times God let the people of Israel become the captives of pagan regimes due to their sins, but in the end He restored



them by His everlasting love and exalted them among the nations. Along with that I was singing all the time the worship song written by Dr Patrick Sookhdeo *Walk with me, Jesus*<sup>1</sup> (Urdu translation "Yessu chal mere saath, andhairy hey raat, Yessu chal mere saath") particularly when at night I woke up and then started singing that worship song.

I am thankful to God from the depths of my heart that He blessed me with the rich experience of His Grace and love in my sufferings that strengthened my faith more. I am also thankful to my husband and children who provided all necessary support and never let me feel any isolation or despair. I am also thankful to my fellow team members and friends for their intercessory prayers and love. By the Grace of God my Covid-19 test is now negative and I have started taking part in the daily chores of life.

In the sufferings of a believer the Word of God, praise and prayer cause the miraculous power of God to move and our sufferings turn into opportunities to strengthen our faith and be His witnesses that draw us closer to God and bless us with the lovely feelings and experience of the amazing fellowship of our fellow believers.

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo, *With the Eye of Faith: Meditations and Prayers*, p.51 (Isaac Publishing, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The Urdu version of the song (with English subtitles) was sung at the Barnabas Fund Supporters' Event broadcast on 27 March 2021. [www.barnabasfund.org/supporters-event-march-2021/](http://www.barnabasfund.org/supporters-event-march-2021/)

# God's answer to suffering

Suffering of every kind, including physical and spiritual death, came into the world when Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan, sinfully rebelled against the LORD. As Basil Atkinson has said, "Sorrow would not exist apart from the Fall."<sup>1</sup> The Fall damaged our relationships with God, ourselves, other people and the rest of creation. It also made Satan our implacable and insatiable enemy. He seeks always to hurt and destroy, and with God's people his main lines of attack are temptation and persecution.

Sometimes we ask why "good people" suffer, but this merely shows how little we grasp God's standards of holiness. If it is a matter of deserving or not deserving to suffer, we are all sinners deserving punishment. Jesus, who later died to take away our sins, was asked about some Galileans who had suffered greatly. He answered:

*Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. (Luke 13:2-5)*

## Rebellion

Adam and Eve brought their problems on themselves – and on us – when they chose to rebel. We cannot blame God. Rebellion in a country brings

mayhem and destruction. Similarly, Adam and Eve's rebellion bred conflict and death. God's Word records Samuel's rebuke to King Saul, in which he stated that "rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). The king had blatantly disobeyed the LORD's clear and specific instructions, just as Eve and then Adam had done. Rebellion and arrogance (or "pride" in some Bible translations) are on a par with the terrible sins of divination (witchcraft) and idol-worship. Both rebellion and witchcraft are about seizing power and control, while both pride and idolatry are about putting something in the place of God, whether that is self or idols.

Many know the agony and tears of a parent who watches their child go astray, ignoring wise parental advice, and make decisions that will lead to suffering, perhaps even to death. Is it presumptuous to imagine that the LORD God felt the same when Adam and Eve decided to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? While we may assume His curse against the serpent was uttered in a voice of judgment, what was His tone of voice when He told Adam and Eve what the future now had in store for them? Perhaps it was laden with sorrowful love.

## Hope of a Saviour

God affirmed His love for Adam and Eve even before He turned from addressing the serpent to addressing them. He had already set in place a way to redeem humankind from the sin that had just come into the world. It is there in His final words to the serpent, announcing the serpent's future defeat and punishment:



*And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.  
(Genesis 3:15)*

The LORD did not curse Adam and Eve, but He told them what the consequences of their action were going to be. And before doing even that, He gave them hope in the Genesis 3:15 prophecy of the Good News of Christ's ultimate victory over Satan. Amongst Eve's descendants was to be Jesus, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15).

To strike the head of the enemy would cause fatal and final destruction; to strike the heel would cause harm but not fatal damage. Thus the verse tells us that Satan will cause some temporary harm to Jesus but Jesus will utterly destroy Satan. This all happened on the cross at Calvary. Satan caused Jesus some damage and suffering but Jesus rose victorious, never to suffer or die again, and Satan's final defeat began. As Matthew Henry explains, these words at the end of Genesis 3:15 are a gracious promise of Christ who will be the Deliverer of fallen humankind from the power of Satan.

*... Here was the dawning of the gospel-day:  
no sooner was the wound given, than the  
remedy was provided and revealed.<sup>2</sup>*

Because the victory of Christ is imputed to us, God will also beat down Satan under our feet, while at the same time we are exposed (as God permits) to his malice. Thus Christ's people share in both His sufferings (though never in a propitiatory sense) and His victory. As the Apostle Paul assured the Roman Christians: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20).

### **Christ's victory**

Christ's crushing of Satan was achieved when He died on the cross and rose again. Satan is now in his death throes. He knows his time is short and that knowledge fills him with fury (Revelation 12:12). One day Christ will return glory and establish the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1). But, until that Day, Satan continues to prey on us, causing us as much misery, pain and suffering as he can, including both temptation and persecution for Christ's sake. In the words of Matthew Henry,

*Christ's heel was bruised, when his feet were  
pierced and nailed to the cross, and Christ's  
sufferings are continued in the sufferings*

*of the saints for his name. The devil tempts  
them, casts them into prison, persecutes and  
slays them; and so bruises the heel of Christ,  
who is afflicted in their afflictions. But while  
the heel is bruised on earth, it is well that the  
Head is safe in heaven.<sup>3</sup>*

There is permanent enmity between Eve's offspring, that is, redeemed humanity, and the devil and his offspring, that is, demons and other evil spiritual powers as well as unredeemed humans who persist in sin and Satanic desires.

Humans who reject God and His divine eternal laws to pursue their own desires, are, though they may not know it, furthering the aims of the evil one because they are opposed to God (John 8:44). Their shared objective enables them to come together in their struggle against Eve's offspring so that even amongst the children of darkness there is an intimate solidarity, bound as they are by a shared hatred.

An unceasing struggle continues between the Kingdom of God on earth – that is, the Church of Christ – and the kingdom of Satan. The devil is trying to exterminate the Church by persecution or allurements into sin, but the Church overcomes by faith. Matthew Henry calls this the "continual conflict between grace and corruption".<sup>4</sup>

### **The spiritual war**

Jesus has promised us that ultimately the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18, AV). We also know that the "man of lawlessness" (Satan) will be overthrown and destroyed when Jesus returns, bringing to a final end his deceit and rebellion (2 Thessalonians 2:3-10) and all the suffering that they produce. But until then the two armies are locked in perpetual combat. Just as Eve chose between two trees, every day we face a choice between which army to fight with: God's or the devil's. It is a war without neutral nations, without non-combatants or bystanders, without a no-man's land. We have to engage.

*... don't you know that friendship with  
the world means enmity against God?  
Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a  
friend of the world becomes an enemy of  
God. (James 4:4)*

Suffering will come, yes – but there will also come a Saviour to take the weight of our sin-caused suffering on the cross including dealing with the curse.

*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")*  
(Galatians 3:13 NKJV)

The cross of death for Jesus is a tree of life for us.

### God's suffering

God's heart is broken by our suffering, even though its ultimate cause is our sinful rebellion against Him and it was He Himself who came in the flesh to bear that sin and suffering. In the words of Campbell Morgan,

*If I want to see God I go to Calvary, and when I see God there, I find out that He is not indifferent, in spite of all the stupid things that stupid men are saying. I find that He is sharing in humanity's agony. He is bearing the results of its rebellion. I find He is bearing the sin of the world. "A body hast Thou prepared Me." He is bearing the sin of the world in that body. If I want to see God I see Him there, and I find that God is revealed there as sharing, bearing, suffering with suffering humanity in spite of all its sin.<sup>5</sup>*

The Fall not only caused humanity to suffer but also caused God Himself to suffer.

May we picture grief in heaven, as Eve bit into that fruit, while flames leapt in hell and weeds sprang on earth, to be followed by disease, hunger and death? Yet worst of all – and beyond human imagination – it led to the Fall, which brought tears to the eyes of God.

If there were no death in the world, Jesus would not have wept with the other mourners at Lazarus' grave (John 11:33-36). Jesus also wept over the city

of Jerusalem, grieving for the violence and suffering that He knew would come to its people, which they could have avoided if they had recognised the Prince of Peace (Luke 19:41-44). Think, too, of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood in His anguish at the horrifying prospect of bearing the sins of the whole world as He dies an agonising death (Luke 22:44).

Yet, God's suffering did not begin with the incarnation. He loves us and, since the Fall, has suffered whenever we suffer. He also suffers whenever we sin. We read of how God's people "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" in Isaiah (63:10). Likewise, the Apostle Paul warns us not to grieve the Holy Spirit by unwholesome talk, bitterness, anger, fighting, slander or malice (Ephesians 4:29-31).

### A new Jerusalem

Turning back to Adam and Eve, we can be sure that God still loved them after they had sinned. Did not the God who is love (1 John 4:8), miss them when they hid themselves amongst the trees and cut themselves off from their accustomed fellowship with Him? Dare we imagine His grief when He had to expel them for ever from Eden, literally the Garden of Delight (Genesis 3:23-24) which He had made for them? He longs to forgive our sins.<sup>6</sup> He even put a protective mark on Cain the murderer (Genesis 4:15).

Along with the tsunami of sorrow and suffering which humanity experiences, there is hope in Jesus our Redeemer and our Healer (Titus 2:14; Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:17). There is the eschatological hope of the tree of life, whose leaves will be for the healing of the nations, in the new Jerusalem, where this life-giving tree has taken the place of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and there will no longer be any curse (Revelation 22:2-3).

## DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

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1 Basil F.C. Atkinson, *The Pocket Commentary of the Bible: The Book of Genesis*, Worthing, Henry E. Walter Ltd, 1954, p.50.

2 Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1706, London, Ward, Lock & Co., new edition, 1857, Vol. 1, p.18.

3 Henry p.18.

4 Henry p.18.

5 G. Campbell Morgan, *The Triumphs of Faith*, London, Pickering and Inglis, 1944, pp.127-128. The Bible verse quoted is Hebrews 10:5.

6 God does not forgive the sins of the devil because no one influenced the devil to sin; he is the very epitome of sin and the source of all evil.

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## New Barnabas Food Boxes initiative helping hungry, poor and persecuted Christians gathers momentum

**T**hank you to everyone who has signed up to offer their help and support to **food.gives**, the new Barnabas Fund initiative to help hungry, poor and persecuted Christians around the world. The work of **food.gives** is growing and gathering momentum – we have already delivered vital food supplies from South Africa to believers in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. God willing by the time you are reading this the first shipping containers will have left our UK warehouse laden with dry food for our needy brothers and sisters in South Asia; by the end of the year containers will hopefully have left Australia for Sri Lanka; and the **food.gives** programme in NZ will be back up and running after weeks of lockdown and getting ready to start loading our first container!

### The vision ... and the response

Jesus instructs His disciples, “You give them something to eat” in Mark 6:37. Prior to the lockdown in August, generous donations of non-perishable food were arriving at our warehouse in Manukau City, Auckland that indicated how many Barnabas supporters had caught hold of this vision. In just the first three months of **food.gives**:

- generous donations came in for us to purchase our first container to store and ship food;
- 300 boxes were sent to our supporters, and are being filled across NZ;
- many churches signed up to give food together as congregations.

As well as those filling and sending food parcels, we had our first volunteer come into our temporary storehouse and help us prepare boxes to send to our supporters. One church in Hamilton has volunteered their facility to be a local warehouse for those in the Waikato area. We are immensely grateful for the many donations received towards transport, bulk food purchases and general logistics.

Even despite lockdown so many Barnabas supporters have got involved in **food.gives**, with more joining every week.

As soon as lockdown levels have lifted (hopefully by the time you are reading this!) we will be back and running in full force and picking up where we left off. For those of you who still have boxes that are ready to be sent back to the Auckland office, once we are in level 2 we will contact you to set up a time and delivery date. Thanks for being patient!!

### Needs being met

Thanks to **food.gives** more than 60 tonnes of a special nutritious porridge called ePap were transported by truck from South Africa to Matabeleland, an impoverished region of Zimbabwe wracked by drought and Covid-19. Churches in the region, where 98% of the population is Christian, distributed ePap to the most in need, including many thousands of children suffering malnutrition, stunting and pellagra, a disease caused by vitamin B3 deficiency.

In the same way **food.gives** trucks shipped 25 tonnes of ePap to Christians in Mozambique displaced by horrific Islamist violence in the northern province of Cabo Delgado (read more about the Islamist terrorism which has turned northern Mozambique into a land of fear in *Barnabas Aid*, July/August 2021 or at <https://barnabasfund.org/magazine/land-of-fear/>).

### The challenge

Will you join others who are filling up their food boxes in their homes and churches across NZ? Please visit **www.food.gives** to see how you can help.

Why not buy a food box on behalf of a friend or family member as their Christmas present for \$30 to support persecuted Christians? You can simply do this by heading to the **food.gives** website and signing up for a pack to get you started.

## Christian villages in Syria and Iraq bombed by Turkish air force

SYRIA



Homes were destroyed in the Assyrian Christian village of Tel Tawil. The displacement of Christian communities in Syria by Turkish bombing has drawn comparisons with the Ottoman Empire and Islamic State [Image credit: AsiaNews.it]

An Assyrian Christian village in northern Syria was bombed on 30 August by the Turkish air force as part of a military campaign against Kurdish militants.

Many homes were destroyed or damaged in the Tel Tawil community in al-Hasakah governorate. There were no casualties.

Turkey has been active in northern Syria since 2018, claiming to be combatting militants with links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

However, Elias Antar Elias, the head of the Assyrian People's Assembly in the Jazira region of north-east Syria, said the Turkish offensive is displacing Christian communities in a manner similar to the genocide of Christians under the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and again under Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) in 2015.

In May 2021 Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan were forced to abandon homes and farmland in Chalke village due to a Turkish bombardment supposedly targeting the PKK.

An analyst writing for *The Jerusalem Post* argued, "This looks like ethnic cleansing ... Turkey has systematically targeted areas of Christian, Yazidi and Kurdish minorities."

## Christian books labelled "extremist" in Luhansk

LUHANSK

The government of the self-declared Luhansk People's Republic, which declared itself independent from Ukraine in 2014, has added four Christian books to an official list of Extremist Materials.

A court in Luhansk ruled in May 2021 that the books seized from the Council of Baptist Churches in the city of Sverdlovsk were "extremist" and in July they were added to the list by the Luhansk Justice Ministry and therefore banned.

The latest addition means that there are 18 Christian works on the list of Extremist Materials, including a Russian version of the Gospel of John, a book by C.H. Spurgeon and a book by US evangelist Billy Graham.

The Prosecutor's Office claimed the books "incite religious discord" and should be banned to secure the safety of the Republic.

## Indian pastor, 16, severely burned with acid for refusing to stop praying

INDIA

A 16-year-old Christian pastor suffered burns over at least 60 per cent of his body after an acid attack in eastern India.

It happened shortly after he left his house at the end of August to sell vegetables in the village market. The pastor had previously been warned by radical Hindutva nationalists to stop holding prayer meetings at his family home.

In India, it is not unusual for a pastor to be serving at such a young age because there are so few Christian workers, a situation aggravated by the death of at least 2,000 Christian leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Armenian cemetery in Turkey bulldozed, bones scattered

TURKEY



Gravestones were destroyed and bones scattered in the bulldozing of the Armenian cemetery in Van, eastern Turkey [Image credit: Stockholm Center for Freedom]

An Armenian Christian cemetery in eastern Turkey was destroyed and bones scattered across a field after it was bulldozed by people claiming to own the land.

The destruction occurred in mid-August in the district of Tuşba, in the mainly Kurdish province of Van. The area was home to many Armenians until 1915, when its residents were forced out during the genocide.

Turkish opposition MP Murat Sarısaç called for a parliamentary inquiry into the matter.

Gayane Gevorgyan, an Armenian living in Van, underlined the importance of such cemeteries to the Armenian diaspora. "Many descendants of Armenians who were victims of the atrocities and forced deportations carried out in 1915 search for the remains of their families in these cemeteries," she said.

"They commemorate their lost ones in these cemeteries, but they have been robbed of that."

## Suspected Fulani militants slaughter residents of Christian community in Plateau State, Nigeria

NIGERIA

More than 35 residents of Yelwan Zangam, a Christian community in the Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, were killed in an attack by suspected Fulani militants.

The assault is just one of many recent incidents of anti-Christian violence in the North and Middle Belt of Nigeria.

***“It’s a coordinated attack on the Christians”***

Gunmen invaded the community on 24 August after destroying a bridge to prevent the villagers escaping. Survivors said that the raid lasted for hours, with numerous houses and vehicles set on fire. One resident said, “It’s a coordinated attack on the Christians.”

Yakubu Bagudu elaborated. “Some of the victims were burnt in a house where they were taking cover in the home of the community leader,” he said. “The community leader is alive but my brother was killed.”

In Kaduna State, ten more students kidnapped from Bethel Baptist High School were released and reunited

with their parents on 18 September, the fourth batch to be freed.

They were among around 120 abducted by gunmen from the Christian boarding school on 5 July. The kidnappers had previously released a total of 75 students. A group of 32 pupils, described as being “sick and weak”, were freed on 27 August; another 15 had been released on 22 August; 28 had been released on 25 July. Others had managed to escape. At the time of writing, 21 students are still being held.

Meanwhile, a girl abducted by Boko Haram from the Nigerian town of Chibok seven years ago was reunited with her parents at the end of July, raising hopes that others still being held will be found.

The girl, called Ruth Ngladar Pogu, made contact with the authorities along with someone she said she married during her captivity.

On 14 April 2014 Islamist extremists abducted 276 girls, mostly Christian, from a secondary school in Chibok. Around 160 of the girls have subsequently escaped, been rescued or released.

## Several injured as Muslims open fire on Christians in Lahore, Pakistan

PAKISTAN

Several Christians were injured in a shooting incident on 6 September in the Shera Kot district of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, a Barnabas Fund contact reports.

A group of six or seven Muslims opened fire on the houses of Christian residents in the district at about 2.30 p.m.

Five Christian women, one of them pregnant, and one man were injured in the shooting. Three of the six are in a critical condition. The man, Asif Nawab, was returning home from work when an attacker opened fire, injuring him in both legs.

Meanwhile, Lahore police have filed charges against two Muslim cousins who abducted two sisters, both Christians, forcing them to convert. Arooj, 18 years old, and Kinza, 14, both of whom are now free, said that they were threatened with death if they did not convert to Islam and marry the two men.

In a separate incident, also in Punjab, two Christian parents have pleaded for the release of their 16-year-old daughter Muqadas Nadeem Masih, who was also forcefully married and converted to Islam.

## Bangladeshi Christians flee attacks by Buddhist extremists

BANGLADESH

Residents of Suandrapara, a Christian village in Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts, were forced to flee after suffering threats and attacks from Buddhist radicals.

The villagers, who converted from Buddhism 16 years ago, were assaulted after they refused to re-convert and demolish their church building.

The Buddhists attacked members of the church and the building, breaking a cross and tearing down part of a wall.

***“The radicals told us to destroy the church, but we will not. If we have to sacrifice our lives, we will”***

The assistant pastor, Tubel Chakma Poran Adetion, said, “The radicals told us to destroy the church, but we will not. If we have to sacrifice our lives, we will. They threaten us to return to our old religion, but we will not return. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. We will die for Him.”

The Christian community of Bangladesh is estimated at just 1% of the population, which is 89% Muslim. Believers have typically enjoyed greater religious freedom in Bangladesh than in many other Muslim-majority countries, but have suffered violence, particularly in rural areas. The Buddhist population of Bangladesh is less than 1% nationally, yet Buddhist tribes represent a majority of the population in the Chittagong Hill region.



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# Barnabas Fund campaigns

## Genocide petition to reach governments

Our petition calling for recognition of the Armenian Genocide – which was signed by 14,572 of you – has been delivered to the governments of New Zealand, Australia and the UK.



New Zealand MP Golriz Ghahraman is a Kurdish-Iranian Kiwi who made history as the first ever refugee to be sworn in as an MP, having arrived in Aotearoa as a child asylum seeker with her family from Iran. Throughout her career she has called on our government to recognise the Armenian Genocide

In New Zealand the petition will be presented to Parliament by Golriz Ghahraman MP. In Australia it was presented to MPs Trent Zimmerman and Joel Fitzgibbon as representatives of the Parliamentary Friends of Armenia, who passed it on to the relevant government department. In the UK the petition has been delivered to Prime Minister Boris Johnson at 10 Downing Street.

Between 1893 and 1923 a total of 3.75 million Armenian, Assyrian, Greek and Syriac Christians were killed within Ottoman territories. The autumn 2020 invasion of ethnic-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, shows that Christians in the region remain under threat.

Please pray that the governments of New Zealand, Australia and the UK will add their nations to the list of those who have recognised as genocide the atrocities committed against our brothers and sisters.

## Nigeria campaign: Australia PM's response

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has responded to Barnabas Fund's open letter calling for Commonwealth heads of government to take action on behalf of Nigerian Christians suffering perpetual extremist violence. It is estimated that nearly 10,000 Nigerians have been killed since 2015, and the violent persecution has increased over the last two years.



Prime Minister Scott Morrison says that Australia is "committed to advocating for the protection of human rights" in Nigeria

In a letter dated 10 September 2021 Mr Morrison stated that "Australia is committed to advocating for the protection of human rights", including in her role as Vice Chair of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.

The Australian High Commission in Abuja, Nigeria, also "continues to monitor the situation and engages a range of organisations working to promote peace and development in West Africa".

"Australia," continued Mr Morrison, "is closely engaged in monitoring members' compliance with Commonwealth values, including the strengthening of human rights and the rule of law."

Thank you to all Barnabas Fund supporters who added their name to the open letter to Mr Morrison. Letters were also sent to New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson asking that they consider diplomatic pressure and policy responses to the increasing anti-Christian violence in Nigeria.

## Urge the New Zealand government to **RESCUE AFGHAN CHRISTIANS**

On Sunday 15 August 2021 the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, sealing their takeover of the country. Less than a month later the Islamists had announced the formation of a new government, reiterating their intention to rule according to sharia (Islamic law).



This Christian family got out of Afghanistan overland in August. Barnabas Fund is helping to support them. Persecuted Christians such as these now need a safe place to rebuild their shattered lives

The Christians of Afghanistan are first-generation converts who will be liable to the death penalty as apostates from Islam. All have been told that they must convert back to Islam, leave the country, or be killed. No Christian left in Afghanistan is safe.

Barnabas Fund has helped hundreds of Afghan Christians who have fled the immediate danger – but now they need somewhere to settle permanently and rebuild their lives. At the time of writing the New Zealand government has remained silent on the need to help these persecuted believers.

Could you write to your MP asking the New Zealand government to allow persecuted Afghan Christians to settle here? You can use the sample letter at [barnabasfund.org/nz/resources](https://www.barnabasfund.org/nz/resources) but it will be more effective if you write in your own words.

While you can email your MP, a letter on paper will often carry more weight. Your letter does not need to be long. Ask that your MP put pressure on the government by raising questions in Parliament or writing Kris Faafoi MP, the minister responsible for immigration. Please remember to be polite to your MP, and ask him or her to reply and tell you what they have been able to do in response to your letter. See how many other people you can get to write to their MPs too.

# In Touch

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## Spiritual inspiration every day of year

Available in the New Year, our newly-published *Heroes of our Faith Vol 2* introduces readers to the lives of Christians from many parts of the world who died for Christ.

Author Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, the International Director of Barnabas Fund, gives an account of the martyrdom of individuals or communities for each day of the year, adding Bible verses, hymns, prayers and quotes by Christian writers from around the globe to give 366 uplifting and moving daily readings.

Most stories in this new volume are of ordinary Christians who lived in contexts very hostile to the Christian faith and to Christian people. They were faithful to Christ in the midst of daily and often violent hatred while continuing to love their persecutors in His Name.

This book will make an excellent day-by-day companion and a resource for personal and family devotions.

## Volunteer for Festival One 2022

We are looking for volunteers to join us in helping to raise awareness of the persecuted church at our mission stall at Festival One this year. The popular Christian music, art and community event takes place from 28 to 31 January 2022 in Waikato (location to be announced soon).

Are you passionate about the persecuted church and want to be a voice for our persecuted whānau at the festival? We are looking for young adults or parents with children at the festival who can spare some time and make a difference while you are there.

We will help cover the cost of the festival ticket if you are willing to volunteer for a couple hours a day during the festival. Email Heather at [office@barnabasfund.org.nz](mailto:office@barnabasfund.org.nz) to let us know if you are keen or would like more information.

If you can't come to Festival One but still want to help perhaps you could consider giving a financial donation, which would help us cover the cost of having a stand at the festival.

## Remember food.gives on Giving Tuesday

After the consumerism of #BlackFriday, #GivingTuesday on 30 November is a great way of giving back to Christians less fortunate than ourselves. As we enter Advent and prepare for the coming of the Saviour into the world, why not donate a portion of your Christmas budget to those who need it most?

Following the successful launch of our new food.gives initiative earlier this year, Barnabas Fund is encouraging supporters to send a special Giving Tuesday Food Box to poor and persecuted Christians in South Asia. Find out more about how you can help on [www.food.gives](http://www.food.gives)

## Bless suffering Christians with a special Christmas offering



Soon we will be joining together with Christians all over the world to celebrate the birth of Christ.

This year so many of our already marginalised brothers and sisters suffered additional hardship because of conflict and the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Could your church or group take up a special Christmas offering to make a difference to the lives of our persecuted Christian family who need our help?

## Get involved with SCAAW (31 Oct – 7 Nov)

Please remember our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) from Sunday 31 October to Sunday 7 November. Barnabas has a range of inspirational materials for you, your prayer group and your church to get involved in SCAAW through prayer and practical action.

These resources are available free of charge to download at [Barnabasfund.org.nz/scaaw](http://Barnabasfund.org.nz/scaaw) or can be ordered from [office@barnabasfund.org.nz](mailto:office@barnabasfund.org.nz) or on (09) 280 4385. The resources will still be available if you, your church or your church group choose to participate in SCAAW at a later date.

### Heroes of Our Faith



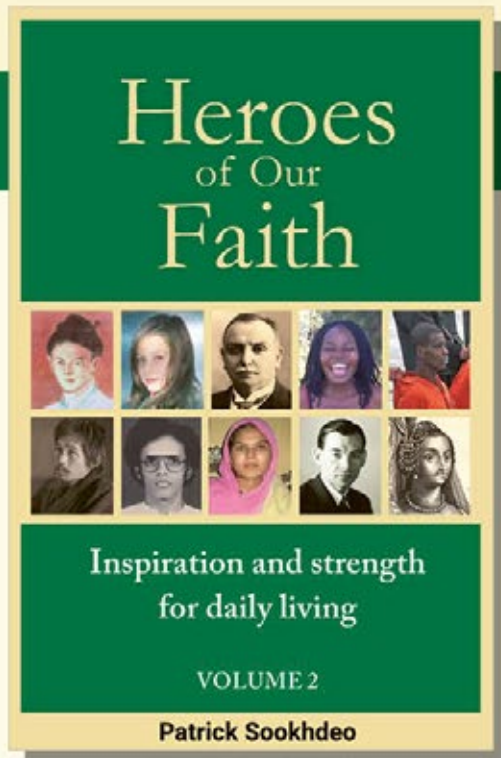
Inspiration and strength for daily living

VOLUME 2

Patrick Sookhdeo

Spend a year in the company of faithful Christian martyrs with *Heroes of Faith: Vol 2*

# Inspiring stories of Christian faith and courage



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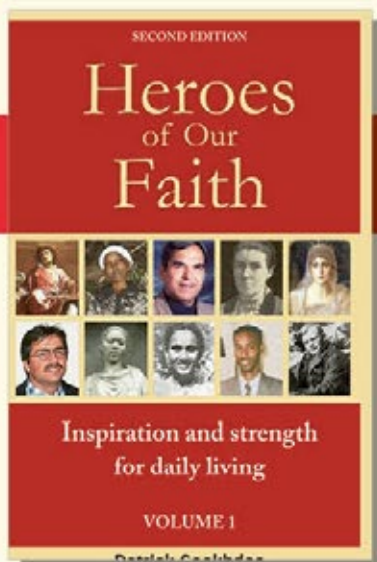
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Inspiration and strength for daily living

by Patrick Sookhdeo

Newly published, volume 2 of *Heroes of Our Faith* gives another 366 devotional readings about Christians who gave their lives for the Lord. These believers, from the first century until 2021, witnessed to the truth and power of the Gospel by their faithfulness to Christ. The inspirational stories of the martyrs are interwoven with Bible verses, hymns, prayers and words of wisdom to inspire us to live wholeheartedly for Him. Spend a year with these great heroes of our faith and allow God to touch your life in a new way.

**\$25**  
(Plus P&P)



## ALSO AVAILABLE

### Heroes of Our Faith – volume 1

Second edition

by Patrick Sookhdeo

**\$25**  
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To order, please contact your nearest Barnabas Fund office (addresses on inside front cover).

[barnabasfund.org/nz](http://barnabasfund.org/nz)

  
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