

## BRINGING HOPE AND AID TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

### UKRAINE

*Food and practical aid at a time of unfolding humanitarian crisis*

### BURKINA FASO

*Joy and peace for Christians facing jihadi violence*

### CHINA

*Barnabas Academia provides training for Church leaders*



# Desperate, displaced Christians in Myanmar

## The Barnabas Aid Distinctive

What helps make Barnabas Aid 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 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
- 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 Aid

#### Published by Barnabas Aid

1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350

Vienna, VA 22182, USA

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**Front Cover: Our project partners have faced many obstacles in their mission to deliver aid to displaced Christians in Myanmar**

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



# Suffering as blessing

“O

the bliss of the man whose heart is broken for the world’s sufferings and for his own sin, for out of his sorrow he will find the joy of God.” So runs one translation of the second beatitude (Matthew 5:4).

“Suffering is the natural state of a Christian and so becomes an inescapable part of the joy of redemption.” The words of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) likewise link suffering and joy.

Christians have traditionally believed that at times of suffering they can experience the presence and power of God at a deep and profound level that is impossible to attain at other times. They believed that suffering would strengthen their faith, help them to grow more Christ-like and better prepare them for heaven and glory. Suffering was also a means to the closer fellowship with Christ for which they longed. He, the Man of Sorrows described in Isaiah 53, was their model of how to suffer – uncomplainingly, in service to others, and in obedience to God’s will.

Such an attitude to suffering has long gone out of fashion in wealthy countries. Yet it was the description of Jesus’ suffering for us in Isaiah 53 that drew me, as a Muslim, to commit my life to the Jesus whom I had despised.

We live in a world wracked by disease, hunger, war and natural disasters; a world in which millions of Christians encounter daily discrimination and hostility; a world in which secular humanism is tightening its grip, so that there are few if any countries where Christians, currently free, may not expect pressure and persecution in the foreseeable future.

It is time for us all to re-learn what our Christian forefathers knew so well and what many Christians living as minorities in places of persecution today also know – how to embrace suffering and use it to grow in faith and to glorify God.

Doctrines that brought and still bring comfort and strength to Christians in contexts where life is difficult and uncertain have tended to be neglected in contexts where safety and luxury are the norm. We must re-claim these teachings so that we do not give up the faith when hard times come.

The article on pages 11-13 looks at how to cope with suffering of many kinds. In a later magazine, we shall look at how to prepare to suffer for Christ – that is, how to prepare for persecution. This is a skill we need to learn if we do not yet have it. Allen Ross, commenting on Isaiah 53, has written:

*The Lord may call us to suffer and even perhaps to die. If that should be his will, then we must seek to suffer and to die well. It is far more important for us to do his will, to please him, than to have a comfortable, carefree life.*

*If we Christians have learned to see in sufferings the purpose of God, and in vicarious suffering God’s most holy service; if patience and self-sacrifice have come to be part of our spiritual life – the power to make this change in our faith has been Christ’s example. To submit to God’s will and to sacrifice self are the hardest things for us to do; to accept suffering and death without complaint or doubt demands a living faith that sees suffering and death as a prelude to glory. But if we submit to God’s will and sacrifice self for others, or for the building up of the faith of others, we shall then be living out the love of Christ in this world, and please our heavenly Father.<sup>1</sup>*

**DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO**

International Director

1 Allen Ross, “The Triumph of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12)”, 1 November 2004, no. 19 in the series *The Book of Isaiah*, Bible.org (viewed 10 December 2021).

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# how barnabas is helping

## Security tightened at Kyrgyzstan church after rise in attacks

Security measures have been increased around a church in a strongly Islamic region of Kyrgyzstan after anti-Christian attacks increased. Church leaders say hostility towards Christian converts from Islam has risen and spread to include violence towards ethnic Christians as a result of the increased radicalisation of Muslims.

The church suffered repeated attacks at night by Muslims throwing stones and breaking windows of the church or the pastor's parked car. In 2021 there were three incidents where children were targeted as they walked to school. Church leaders have become increasingly concerned for the safety of worshippers, and also for Christian converts sheltering in the church after they were thrown out by their Muslim families because of their new faith.

Barnabas funded the purchase of metal fencing, which Christian volunteers installed around the church, and also paid for CCTV cameras around the perimeter as requested by police. Since then, there has been no further stone-throwing (at the time of writing).



Barnabas provided a protective fence and a CCTV system at the church

**\$7,889**

Project reference 26-895

## Food for hungry Christians in India affected by Covid

"Prakash" lost his job in lockdown as Covid cases surged in India, and his family had only a little bread to eat. Nobody in his remote village community wanted to help because he is Christian. Barnabas heard of the family's suffering through their pastor and sent food. Prakash told us that during this difficult time he kept praying and did not lose faith in Christ.

Pastor "Sanjeev" lost his income from tithes when lockdown closed his church. The authorities refused him food aid for his wife and children because he is a pastor. Instead he was mocked and told to pray to Jesus. Sanjeev's prayers were answered when Barnabas sent the family food.

Just \$21 per family provided a month's supply of rice, flour and cooking oil for Prakash and Sanjeev. They were among many thousands of Indian Christians whom Barnabas Aid has assisted.



"Prakash" collects food for his family supplied by Barnabas

**\$133,490 to feed Covid-affected Christian families in India from August 2021 to March 2022 inclusive**

Project reference PR1530  
(Covid Emergency Fund)

## South Sudanese Christian refugees see God's love in practical ways

Barnabas is helping 200 South Sudanese Christian families living in a refugee camp in northern Uganda to become self-sufficient by enabling them to grow their own food. Each household (supporting an average of seven people) received six tins of seeds, farming tools and training on the cultivation crops including okra, cabbage, tomatoes and local green vegetables sukuma and dodo.

The refugees fled their homeland to escape conflict and violence. The crops will improve their nutrition and give them an income from the sale of surplus produce. Our church partner said the project is helping the church to demonstrate God's love in practical ways. It will especially strengthen the refugees' faith in God because the families know the support "has come from a Christian organisation and through the church", they added.

Our partners prayed with the families whose relatives were affected by recent attacks in South Sudan.



A Christian refugee receives Barnabas-funded tools and seeds

**\$8,528**

Project reference: PR1567

## Compassion in action

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 pressurised Christians.



### Poor Bangladeshi Christians given grants for study

“Because of God’s blessings and your mercy, I am fulfilling my dreams,” said Susan, a disabled Christian from a poor family in Bangladesh. When her father died in 2012, Susan, his eldest child, began tutoring other children to earn money to pay her younger brother’s school fees and help with her family’s daily needs. Sometimes she had nothing to eat.

Her hope has always been to continue her own studies at college; however, she worried that she would not have the means to do so. Thanks to support from Barnabas, Susan can pay her college fees, help her brother and give a tithe to her church.

Many Christian students have to drop out of higher education to earn money to support their impoverished families in times of crisis, such as bereavement, illness or job loss. Susan is one of 22 Christian Bangladeshi students supported in the last year by Barnabas.



Susan thanks God and Barnabas for enabling her to go to college

**\$10,202 to support 22 students for a year**

*Project reference: 00-1031 (Students’ Fund)*



### Hundreds of Christian families given food relief after rains fail in Malawi

Chrissy’s smile reflects her relief and joy at receiving emergency food provided by Barnabas. Like many Christians in southern Malawi, Chrissy experienced hunger after a lack of rain resulted in a poor harvest of beans and maize. Chrissy didn’t know how she would be able to feed herself or her visually impaired sister.

The crisis was compounded by a surge in Covid infections and strict lockdown restrictions that made it difficult for families to find work to pay for food. Chrissy and her sister were among 733 Christian households (approximately 2,932 people) given maize, beans and salt to last for at least a month. Face masks were distributed to 470 households.

Our church partners said Christians were strengthened in their faith because they saw God as a provider in times of need. “This is God!” exclaimed Ketrina, thanking Barnabas for the food. “Every day I think of what to eat but for this month I will sleep peacefully.”



Mary, a Christian, sits beside a bag of maize provided by Barnabas

**\$19,318**

*Project reference PR1530 (Covid Emergency Fund)*



### Barnabas frees another 474 Pakistani brick-kiln families from debt and bonded labour

Pakistani Christian brick-kiln worker Asif and his wife Akhter prayed to God to release them from the “curse” of the debt he inherited from his father. Like many impoverished brick-kiln workers, his father had taken a loan from his employer at a time of family crisis. Interest was deducted from his low weekly wage but he was unable to pay off the debt, keeping him bonded to the brick kiln. On his death, the loan and the bondage passed to Asif.

“God listened to our prayers and sent Barnabas team to our village,” said Asif. “They paid off my full loan.” Asif can now afford to give his two children the education he never had. “I am thankful to God and Barnabas from the depth of my heart,” he added. “May God bless Barnabas ... and may they keep doing their work to change lives of poor people.”

Asif is among 474 families whose debts have been cleared recently by Barnabas, making a total of families freed to 1,475 since the project began in 2017.



Asif and Akhter with their daughter Aliza and son Sharoon

**\$708,161 to free 474 families (Phases 14 to 17)**

*Project reference 41-1356 (Freeing bonded Pakistani brick-kiln workers)*

# Joy and peace in land of terror

Christian families in Burkina Faso tell of relief after rescue from villages under threat of jihadi attack



Mama Laya and one of her grandchildren recover from the trauma of months in hiding having reached a place of safety

**P**lease tell the people that are supporting us that we receive their support with great gratitude and, as you can see, it brings us joy and peace. When we go to bed we can sleep because we know that tomorrow we have something to eat, something for our children,” says David, a lay preacher in Burkina Faso, a land wracked with Islamist terrorist violence.

David, who is partially sighted, gives thanks to God that he and other vulnerable Christians were evacuated to a place of safety and given food, medicines and Bibles by Barnabas. This was after they had lived in hiding for more than six months from the jihadi gangs who have brought death, destruction and chaos to this beleaguered West African country.

## Situation growing desperate for Christians

His family were among 30 Christian households, comprising 152 people of all ages, who stayed behind in their villages in the Centre-North region long after other local Christians had fled the militants.

They stayed because family members were disabled like David, or elderly, sick, or very young, so the journey to the safety of the nearest city was too perilous and difficult for them to attempt.

Their situation was desperate. They had run out of food and were surviving by eating leaves from trees. They were isolated and aware that the militants were escalating their threats and violence, but they had neither the strength nor the means to escape.

Our Burkinabé church partners could not take the Barnabas-funded aid to these families because of the extreme hazards involved. Roads in the region are lined with home-made explosives and aid deliveries would be targeted by the terrorists who kill the drivers and steal the contents of their trucks.

*“Your intervention has strengthened us in our faith in the Lord”*

Instead, church volunteers drove, at considerable risk to themselves, through the bush to reach the Christians and discreetly took them to safety. Once at their new, safe destinations the rescued families were given Barnabas-funded food,



This pick-up truck was used first to rescue Christian families and then to bring them food in their new places of safety



Women spend time together reading one of the Bibles given to them by Barnabas



Displaced Christian Fulani families collect Barnabas-funded food aid

including maize, rice, spaghetti, tomatoes, cooking oil and salt.

Our church partners also used Barnabas funding to buy a stock of basic medicines, which they give to the rescued believers as required.

“Your intervention has strengthened us in our faith in the Lord,” said Mama Laya, who was evacuated along with one widowed daughter-in-law and 11 grandchildren.

Mama Laya’s three sons were killed by Islamist militants during an attack in 2019, but her trust in the Lord is unshaken.

Before being rescued by our church partners, the family were farming, but their crops did not thrive because there was so little rain. Since being rescued Mama Laya has been trying to earn some money by going out with the children to collect old plastic bags which they then sell.

The group of Christians shared some of their Barnabas food with Muslim relatives. Thirty of the Muslims, mainly women and children, were so impressed with what they saw of Christian love that they, too, decided to follow Christ. One of the new converts explained that Christianity “looks more interesting and real”, and continued, “when they [Christians] love you they really love you and show it. These people came into the bushes

to look for their fellow Christians and brought them here and they gave them food and we are all benefiting from their love. If I have a choice, I will only be a Christian.”

### Families treasure gift of Bibles

Others among the rescued families thanked Barnabas for sending Bibles in the local language, along with study guides, notebooks and pens.

“I have my Bible under my pillow day and night because I have not received any present such as this,” said one woman. Another added, “I read the Book the whole night. Even though I had no light, I set a fire with wood to be able to read.”

It was the first time our church partners had run a rescue mission and they say it has encouraged the Church in the region and pastors displaced by the violence to know the families are safe.

This is especially comforting in a country where violence is commonplace and where the simple fact of having a Christian-sounding name can result in a person being shot or kidnapped in rural areas. In cities, where internally displaced people (IDPs) have fled for shelter, anyone with a Christian-sounding name can be refused food (or registration for food) by some of the Muslim government workers.

The mission has also raised awareness that there are other vulnerable Christians “left behind in the hot zones”.

“We are trusting the Lord to help us to be able to contact them and encourage them and pray with them,” said our church partners. “We would like to launch further projects to assist them also.”

Our partners praise the Lord for His protection of the families taken to safety and the volunteers who risked their lives to help them.

### Fulani Christians helped by Barnabas

Since 1 February 2021, Barnabas has helped more than 720 Christian families in Burkina Faso. The majority are Fulani Christians who have converted from Islam. They are viewed as traitors by zealous Fulani Muslims and their villages are especially targeted by the militants for attack.

Some of those we helped had lost loved ones in jihadi raids; others barely escaped with their lives, forced to flee their homes and fields.

Our project partner said the food aid has encouraged Christians and the church locally to feel part of the bigger Christian family as “they were remembered in their struggle by family members from the UK”.

## Islamist attacks cause 1.5m people to flee their homes

At least 1.5 million people have been internally displaced in Burkina Faso because of the terror campaign waged by militants, many linked to al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

The impoverished country was, until a few years ago, viewed as a bastion of religious tolerance where the Muslim majority (estimated at 60%) lived in peace together with Christians (30%) and followers of traditional African religions (10%).

In 2015, jihadists from neighbouring Mali and Niger started attacking the north and north-east regions of Burkina Faso, and the violence has spread to affect most regions of this impoverished West African nation.

The armed groups target people’s livelihoods, destroying crops and food stores.

In the last three years almost 2,000 have died in the attacks, many of them aimed at Christians, Christian leaders and places of worship.

# Ukraine: keeping pace with an unfolding humanitarian crisis

**Your generous response reaches  
Christians within Ukraine and sustains  
refugees in neighbouring countries**

**A**mid wailing sirens warning of bomb attacks, Liuba decided to leave her home in Odesa, Ukraine and take her four children to safety.

She fled the conflict in her country along with her sister-in-law Natasha, who also has four children, the youngest just two weeks old when they left.

At the time of writing almost 5.9 million Ukrainians have left the country, mostly women, children and elderly, as men under the age of 60 are not allowed to leave. Liuba's husband stayed behind to continue to work and sustain the needs of the family as well as look after her ageing mother.

Barnabas supporters have been swift in sending money, food, clothing, blankets, nappies, sanitary and hygiene products for displaced Christians from Ukraine such as Liuba and her family, and many other Ukrainians remaining in their homeland.

## **"Hands open, hearts open"**

Our food.gives programme has gathered pace as a steady flow of lorries have left our warehouse in

Swindon, UK, with supplies to relieve suffering Christians affected by the Ukraine conflict – both refugees in neighbouring countries and those who remain in Ukraine.

Liuba's family were among those who received warm bedding, food and clothes at a refugee centre supported by Barnabas Aid in eastern Romania, not far from the Ukraine border. Over several weeks, hundreds of refugees stayed there. She is grateful for the Lord's provision that she has experienced through Barnabas supporters and our project partners and entrusts her family's future to Him. "I know that He will protect me and my children all the time through the people," she affirms.

Liuba, who worked as a Spanish translator in Odesa, has been offered translation work in Spain, but before she moves on she is happy to help serve her fellow Ukrainians at the centre, enjoying the security with her family, away from the turmoil in her country.

One of our project partners in Romania also expressed his joy at being able to serve. "I thank God that we were very close to Ukraine so we can help," he says, "and we still

give them as much help as we can. Hands open and hearts open to help them as much and as best we can."

## **More than 200 tonnes of aid for Ukraine Christians**

By the beginning of May nine lorries from the UK had arrived in eastern Romania. Each consignment carried up to 15 tonnes of essential aid items, all donated generously by supporters in the UK.

Two 40-foot containers also reached Romania from across the Atlantic Ocean, one from Canada containing dried potatoes and one from the United States containing soup mix. Their contents were being distributed in Ukraine in mid-May. Further shipments are being prepared in both countries.

Our partners have already distributed supplies to Christian communities across Ukraine itself. In total more than 200 tonnes of aid have been sent from Barnabas Aid to the region.

Supporters in New Zealand have brought dry foodstuffs and other practical aid – including first aid kits, hygiene products and nappies – to several food hubs around the







Liuba (right, holding child) and her sister-in-law Natasha, each with four children, fled Ukraine into Romania

country. By the time you read this, God willing, these donations will have been shipped to Ukraine.



Vital aid from Barnabas supporters in the UK about to be unloaded in Ukraine



food.gives boxes are reaching the most needy, such as this man in his home in Odesa

### Families receive much-needed care in Moldova

Across another of Ukraine's borders, several of our project partners

are active in caring for Christian refugees. One partner in Moldova provided accommodation for 30 mothers and 60 children. The refugees are accommodated in a Christian camp usually occupied by children. Rooms for about 3-6 persons have been allocated within three large blocks.

Thanks to Barnabas supporters' donations our partner was able to provide medicine and clothes, and cater for refugees' hygiene needs. In particular, they have been able to buy in much-needed supplies of underwear and nappies. In the house where the refugees stay, they have kitchens where they are brought food for lunch and dinner.

Many new arrivals have experienced considerable stress and exhaustion after making the arduous journey from Ukraine. One young mother, accompanied by her two children, the younger of whom was just two months old, had driven 28 hours to reach sanctuary in Moldova.

Your donations, and your prayers, are making a huge difference to our Ukrainian brothers and sisters, whether forced from their country, internally displaced, or remaining at home amid the ongoing crisis.

One of our partners in Ukraine, as well as expressing thanks for the funds and aid received, added, "I am also grateful for the huge moral and spiritual support given to the internally displaced people during these difficult times. ... May the Risen Lord bless you all and bring His peace to the world."

The conflict in Ukraine has had a devastating impact way beyond the region as the export of wheat, seeds, vegetable oils and fertilisers is being severely disrupted. As food becomes scarce, poor and persecuted Christians suffer more than most. But Barnabas Aid is responding through our food.gives programme that is providing food aid to impoverished Christians around the world.

For more information on how you too can help our hungry brothers and sisters, visit [www.food.gives](http://www.food.gives)

### Ukrainians in New Zealand thank Barnabas supporters for filling food boxes



Denys, Taryn and Daniel help out at the Barnabas food.gives collection hub at Gracecity Church in Auckland

Ukrainian Denys has been overwhelmed by the generosity of Barnabas Aid supporters in response to the crisis in his homeland.

He, his wife Taryn and son Daniel volunteer at Gracecity Church in Auckland, one of three Barnabas collection hubs in New Zealand for donations of dried foodstuff for Ukraine as part of the food.gives programme.

"People from Barnabas were amazing and the idea of the food box was really good," he said. "We were handing the empty boxes to the people after the church service and the week after we were collecting full boxes from them.

"The food collected would sustain hundreds if not thousands of people who are living in makeshift accommodations. It will provide hope for the future."

He added, "It was also amazing to see the smiles on people's faces who were bringing these boxes back."

"Often we feel helpless in situations like this, when we are far away and unable to do anything," said Denys. "Barnabas provided a way for people to help and I am grateful for what they do for Ukraine."

More on NZ donations: p19

# Praise God for wonderful Bethlehem school

Pupil gives thanks for the love, comfort and care provided at his Christian school

**“W**hat makes our school different from all other schools is the love we feel, the comfort and care we receive and, most important, we are all Christians in class.” So says Rafael who thanks God for St Aphrem’s School, Bethlehem, which he has attended for almost five years, starting at the age of four.

“I find my refuge in this wonderful school,” adds Rafael, who is in a special needs class with four other children of the same age. “I do not feel anywhere more happier.”



Rafael says he always thanks God for “this wonderful school where we pray to the Lord every morning”

### “We pray that Jesus keeps our school safe”

“I feel closer to Jesus every day,” he explains. “I feel He takes care of us and brings us happiness and blessings because we talk to Him every day ... and we pray that Jesus keeps our school safe and becomes bigger and bigger.”

Rafael’s father is unable to work because of poor health, and his mother supports the family, including Rafael’s two siblings, from what little she earns as a helper for the elderly.

They are among the poorest Christian families at St Aphrem’s who cannot afford even their daily needs, and the school strives its best to help them. Thanks to the donations of Barnabas supporters, it can offer minimal fees, or in some cases no fees at all, so that Christian children, like Rafael, can attend.

The school provides books and stationery for the poorest children. It also sources donations of food for their families from some of the better-off school parents as well as supporters in the wider community.

Poverty has grown during the Covid-19 pandemic, which badly affected the tourism sector in which many Bethlehem Christians worked. Parents lost their jobs and incomes and, with few signs of a revival in visitor numbers, they are continuing to struggle. At the same time prices for food and daily essentials are rising.

Head teacher Miss Amal Behnam explains that since St Aphrem’s opened in 2003 it has been committed to spreading the values and teachings of the Lord, despite the difficulties that Bethlehem Christians face living as a minority in a non-Christian society.

She says the school enables students to “realise the power and strength of being strong Christian believers,



Cynthia, Lea and Youstina enjoyed representing St Aphrem’s individually in the finals of a psalm singing competition in Jerusalem

fearless and yet cautious, and remarkably well-behaved citizens”.

### School is more important than ever

However, St Aphrem’s still faces great challenges, particularly because the number of Christians in the Muslim-majority city is dwindling as more believers emigrate. Miss Amal explains that, at this time, it is even more important to preserve St Aphrem’s because it provides a Christian education in a safe and secure environment to 650 students – 96% of whom are from Christian families.

She thanks the Lord for His blessings and gifts. “[The] challenges are great,” says Miss Amal, “but with God’s grace and the loving care of Barnabas we shall survive them all.”



Table tennis games and volleyball matches at break time kept students fit and promoted friendly competition when Covid restrictions meant other sports activities could not be held

# WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED IN...



Imperial Mosque, Lahore, Pakistan

PASHTUN

**T**he land that is now Afghanistan and Pakistan has been highly significant throughout history. This is the point at which China and the Far East, the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, and Central Asia converge.

Afghanistan has been at the centre of trading routes for many centuries, including the famous Silk Road. The land has often been fought over – by Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Mongols and Uzbeks. In the nineteenth century Afghanistan and what is now northern Pakistan were caught between the Russian and British empires. In the late twentieth century Afghanistan was a key Cold War battleground between the Soviet Union and the West.

Many of the international borders in this region are the artificial creations of the West – most notably the border that partitioned India from Pakistan in 1947, leading to the forced relocation of millions and between half a million and two million deaths.

The Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan is such a border. Established in 1893 as the border between a nominally independent Afghanistan and then-British India, it cut across family lands and tribal regions. Though it is recognised internationally, Afghanistan has never fully accepted it, while Pashtun and Baloch peoples in northern Pakistan also reject a line that divides them from their kin in Afghanistan.

The boundaries set by imperial administrators are just one way that foreign interference has damaged the region, and made life more difficult for its Christian population.

This is a highly Islamic region. The population of Afghanistan is almost entirely Muslim, and in Pakistan it is between 90% and 95% Muslim. Any religion other than Sunni Islam is



Barnabas Aid is providing practical support to Afghan Christians who remain in the country – including this Christian family – as well as those who have escaped. Visit [barnabasfund.org/countries/Afghanistan](http://barnabasfund.org/countries/Afghanistan) for more information

# ...AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN?

WEST

rejected fiercely and often violently. Christians and other religious minorities suffer systemic oppression and marginalisation in Pakistan. In Afghanistan, Christians face the death penalty as apostates from Islam.

### CHRISTIANITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Christianity has had a presence here since ancient times, despite the perception by Muslims that churches and Christian communities have been imposed by the West. Christianity was firmly established in the Indian sub-continent by the third century, and by the sixth century there were many believers aligned to the Church of the East.

ISLAM



Faisal (above) and Nadeem were two Christian sanitation workers who died after being forced to enter a dangerous sewer to rescue a third Christian, Michael. None were given any protective equipment by their Muslim managers

These believers suffered persecution through successive waves of Muslim invasion into northern India from 1001 AD onwards. While Christian communities survived in southern India, the church in what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan appeared to have died out by the fourteenth century.

From the sixteenth century Christianity was revived, with the help of missionaries from Europe and occasionally with the official tolerance of the rulers of these lands. In the eighteenth century there was a Christian presence in Lahore, served by a minister who visited twice a year and also made visitations to Christian communities further north in Kabul and Kandahar.

Western missionary activity increased across India in the nineteenth century, including in the areas now part of Pakistan, eventually winning many converts. A large number of these converts were from the Chuhra, a marginalised group that initially practised a form of Hinduism influenced by Islam. The Chuhra conversions began in 1873 with an elderly man called Ditt, followed by some of his family and neighbours, then many others across the Punjab. "Chuhra" remains a pejorative term for Christians, implying low status individuals who perform dirty, menial jobs.

Today it is estimated that 3% of the population of Pakistan is Christian. The number of Christians in

Afghanistan is unknown, but was probably between 5,000 and 8,000 before the Taliban return to power in August 2021.

### GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES – AND CHRISTIANS

The psyche of Afghanistan – and especially the dominant Pashtun tribal group, including those in northern Pakistan – has been shaped by centuries of resistance towards imperial powers. In the nineteenth century, the "Great Game" – the geopolitical power struggle between Russia and the UK – led to constant meddling in the government of Afghanistan.

British fears that Afghanistan would side with Russia led to the first Anglo-Afghan War (1838-42). A second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-79) resulted in Afghanistan being treated as a British protectorate – nominally outside the British Empire, but with foreign policy controlled by the UK in order to maintain Afghanistan as a buffer zone between Russian Central Asia and British India.

The third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 was fought over the division of Pashtun lands caused by the Durand Line. The Treaty of Rawalpindi ended the war and acknowledged the independence of Afghanistan, but the line remained fixed.

This may seem like ancient history to those in the West, but it remains deeply significant for the people of Afghanistan, including their kin across the Durand Line. Until 1978 Afghanistan held an annual national commemoration for each of these three wars, and the US-led occupation of Afghanistan (2001-21) was regarded as a fourth Anglo-Afghan War.

Afghanistan has earned the title "Graveyard of Empires". Yet it is often Afghan – and Pakistani – Christians who bear the brunt of this legacy, being unfairly linked in the minds of the Muslim-majority population with the Western powers. When gunmen shot and killed 15 Christians at a church service in Bahawalpur, Punjab, on Sunday 28 October 2001, they shouted as they sprayed bullets, "Pakistan and Afghanistan – Graveyard of Christians."

### THE GROWTH OF ISLAMISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Islam first appeared in Afghanistan in the seventh century, and by the ninth century was the dominant religion. Yet its transformation into the world's strictest Islamic country and a breeding ground for Islamist terrorism is relatively recent.

In the mid-1960s Afghanistan was transforming into a democracy, with the establishment of a parliament (the Shura) that incorporated a fully elected lower house and partly elected upper house. The first free elections were held in 1965.

This did not last. In 1973 a Soviet-backed coup deposed the King Zahir Shah who had overseen the democratic reform. In 1978 the country became the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, aligned to and dependent on Moscow but not officially part of the USSR. The communist parties that gained power

implemented radical secularism and the redistribution of land.

Conservative Islamic groups in Afghanistan objected to this left-wing programme, leading to an anti-Soviet jihad and the rise of the mujahideen (meaning jihadists) – a loose coalition of Islamist groups fighting the Soviet-aligned government. In a bid to sustain communist rule, the Soviet Union launched its invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Afghanistan became a Cold War battleground, with the United States and other Western powers channelling financial and military aid through Pakistan to support the mujahideen. Support also came from China and Saudi Arabia. Secular anti-communist groups in Afghanistan were squeezed out, receiving no overseas support. The Soviets were forced to negotiate a withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

Once the Soviets withdrew and Western powers lost interest in Afghanistan, Islamists were able to establish themselves. Foreign interference and miscalculation from all sides had created a breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalism and Islamist terrorism.

### THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN

The Taliban emerged from the mujahideen during the civil wars that engulfed Afghanistan after the fall of the Soviet-backed government in 1992. Supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Taliban quickly established an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan that lasted from 1996 until the US-led invasion of 2001.

Despite support from Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban, a Pakistani movement – the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) – emerged in 2007, pledging to overthrow the Pakistani state. Both groups are dominated by Pashtun Islamists, some of whom support the idea of an independent Pashtunistan that would incorporate areas currently part of southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, and be ruled according to the Taliban's strict interpretation of sharia (Islamic law).

The original membership of the Taliban consisted mainly of students (the word Taliban literally means “students”) from Deobandi madrassas in eastern and southern Afghanistan. The Deobandi school of Islam emerged in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, northern India in 1867. Deobandis stressed strict adherence to sharia, opposition to any innovations (bid'a) in religion, and jihad as a sacred duty.

Islamist groups in Afghanistan have also been influenced by Wahhabism – a Saudi Arabian movement that calls for a return to a more “pure” form of Islam, unsullied by the modern world – via the Saudi financial support given to Islamist forces and Deobandi madrassas.

Life under the Taliban is therefore impossible for Afghan Christians, who being converts from Islam face the death penalty for apostasy. When Western forces withdrew from Afghanistan, Christians were faced with a choice: convert, flee, or be killed. Those who could fled to neighbouring countries, while others remain in hiding inside Afghanistan.



The Taxila Cross was discovered in 1935 at the site of ancient city of Sirkap, near Taxila, modern-day Pakistan. It probably dates from the second or third century, and symbolises Christianity's heritage in the region. In 1970 it was adopted as the symbol of the Church of Pakistan

It can be added to the list of Western strategic and moral failures that, when in 2010 NATO's International Security Assistance Force wanted to prove the sharia credentials of the then Afghan government, they helped disseminate a fatwa calling for the killing of those who leave Islam. The Western powers therefore reinforced fundamentalist Islamist dogma, and placed Christians in even greater peril.

### ISLAMISM IN PAKISTAN

The creation of Pakistan also helped in the development of Islamism, both in Pakistan and around the world. When Pakistan was formed in 1947 it was the first state in modern times to be created on the basis of religion. Conservative Muslims were greatly encouraged by a Muslim-majority nation that could be governed according to sharia – even though Muahammad Ali Jinnah, considered the founder of Pakistan, originally envisaged a society in which people of all religions would be treated as equal citizens.

**“You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. [...] We are starting with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state.”**

– speech by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, 11 August 1947

This perspective was perhaps strengthened by the name chosen for the new country. Derived from the names of the provinces that made up Pakistan<sup>1</sup> – the initial letters of Punjab, Afghania (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly North West Frontier Province), Kashmir and Sind, and the last three letters of Baluchistan – the name also means in Persian, “pure land” or “land of the pure”. This, it seemed, was a sign that Pakistan would operate according to a purified understanding of Islam – a theme dear to both Deobandi and Wahhabi Islam.

The idea that Pakistan is an exclusively Muslim land causes difficulties for Christians. The Islamic concept of *dhimmi* – People of the Book, that is, Christians and Jews, who must live in subjection to Islamic rule – is not formally part of Pakistan’s constitution, but shapes the way many Muslims view the Christian minority as second-class citizens and mistreat them if they are seen to step out of line.



Barnabas Aid continues to give practical support to Aasia Bibi and her family

An example of this is the persistent misuse of Pakistan’s “blasphemy” laws, which disproportionately affects Christians and other religious minorities.

“Blasphemy” laws have existed in the region since 1927 and were incorporated into Pakistan’s Penal Code at the country’s founding. The laws were strengthened under the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq (in office 1978-88), including the addition of mandatory life imprisonment for desecration of the Quran (1982) and the death sentence for defiling the name of Muhammad, the Islamic prophet (1986). A subsequent decision by Pakistan’s constitutional court making the death sentence for “blasphemy” against Muhammad mandatory came into effect in 1991.

The most well-known case is that of Aasia Bibi, who was accused of “blasphemy” after an argument with co-workers in 2009, arrested, and subsequently sentenced to death. Aasia was not acquitted until a Supreme Court decision in 2018, after which she sought refuge in a Western country in fear for her life. In January 2022, Zafar Bhatti – another Christian convicted of “blasphemy” – was appealing against his conviction and life sentence at Rawalpindi District Court, when the judge chose instead to sentence him to death.

It is thought that six Christians are currently on death row having been convicted of “blasphemy”. Between 1990 and 2019, 15 Christians were murdered because of “blasphemy” allegations, even before a trial could be conducted. Entire Christian communities have been violently targeted by Muslims following allegations.

The strength of feeling among the Muslim population is such that the government fears to amend the laws – President Pervez Musharraf (2001-08) tried in vain to make them less susceptible to abuse – while judges are often afraid for their own safety if they acquit those who have done no wrong.

Politicians in Pakistan must pay lip service to fundamentalist Islam. Failing to do so risks creating opportunity for hard-line groups to move against the government. Anti-Western, Islamist rhetoric is also an easy way of gaining popularity. Furthermore, the government of Pakistan must always ensure a friendly government in Kabul as a means of strengthening its geopolitical position against India.

Hence Imran Khan – prime minister from 2018 until April 2022 – did much to support Christians and other minorities, but was also criticised for referring in 2020 to Osama bin Laden as a “martyr” and for praising in 2021 the resurgent Taliban for breaking the “shackles of slavery” to the West.

### ISLAMIST ATTITUDES AND WESTERN HUBRIS

On Sunday 30 January, William Siraj – a lay pastor near Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – was shot and killed as he returned home from church. It is believed that the gunmen had come over the border from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. William was the victim of deep-seated Islamist attitudes to Christians and a security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan worsened by the amoral hubris of the West and other global powers over several centuries.



William Siraj – the older brother of Barnabas Aid’s Regional Coordinator for Pakistan and South Asia, Wilson Saraj – was murdered by Islamists near the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan

**Patrick Sookhdeo’s *A People Betrayed: The Impact of Islamisation on the Christian Community in Pakistan* (2001) is available from [www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books/](http://www.barnabasfund.org/resources/books/)**

1 - That is, West Pakistan. East Pakistan – now Bangladesh – was not represented in the name.

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Barnabas Fund is a company registered in New Zealand number 9429 0429 68016.

NZ Charities Services registration number CC37773.

# Coping with suffering

**M**y 93-year-old mother died in hospital in excruciating pain. She had been rushed in, complaining of pain in her lungs. As the days passed, the intensity of the pain grew. She was diagnosed with cancer. Soon the ferocity of the cancer was such that she could hardly breathe. Sometimes she screamed in pain. Looking on at her bedside, I felt powerless, but holding her hand seemed to bring her some comfort. She died clutching a cross she had asked me to bring.

As I sat with my mother, I prayed for God to intervene, to heal if it be His will, to give her grace to bear the pain, or to take her so that she would be released from her suffering. But God was silent, or so it seemed.

## Growing through suffering

Academic studies have shown that traumatic events like illness, accidents or bereavement can bring positive changes such as a greater appreciation of life, changed priorities, warmer relationships and a greater sense of personal strength.<sup>1</sup>

These disasters may shatter not only our expectations of life but also our identities if, for example, a fitness fanatic is suddenly struck down by Covid and barely able to breathe or move. Christians ought to have a greater resilience to this than non-believers, for our confident expectation of heaven and our identity in Christ will never change.

According to the psychologist Emma Kavanagh, a large majority of those who suffer a single severe trauma eventually return to their pre-disaster level of functionality. A small percentage are permanently disabled by post-traumatic stress and another small percentage use the traumatic experience creatively and learn how to flourish after adversity. These latter can look back on their suffering as having produced something positive – but it takes time.

Some learn to flourish after many years of suffering. I know two “Eastenders” who grew up in the poverty of east London. Each suffered physical and sexual abuse in their childhood home. Each was surrounded by bullying, manipulation, deceit and greed. But somehow they survived with their own principles of honesty and compassion intact. In their late teens they happened to meet and eventually married. They created a stable, loving home for their children, and also cared sacrificially for all around them. Truly they found a way to be fruitful after adversity.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet dissident, spent a decade in Gulag labour camps and internal exile, after which he returned to the Christian faith of his childhood and wrote:

*Bless you, prison, for having been in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realise that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul.<sup>2</sup>*

We do not “move on” from suffering as if nothing had happened. After all, Jesus Himself still has His scars in heaven (Revelation 5:6). But with God-given resilience, and learning from the example of Jesus Himself, we His followers can grow through suffering. Our faith can be strengthened, our ability to endure and to help others can be increased, our fellowship with Christ can be closer, our joy and thankfulness can be greater, and we can be better prepared for our heavenly home.

## The Divine sympathy and the suffering of Jesus

As Christians we are aware of the comfort and support of the Triune God. He is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3) who says,

*I, even I, am he who comforts you.*  
(Isaiah 51:12)

This is a comfort that goes beyond sympathy, for the original meaning of “comfort” was to give strength

and courage. The Old Testament Hebrew word *nachamu* indicated a strong emotion, including consolation in grief and the relief found by viewing our circumstances from an eternal perspective.

The Son of God became like us, suffering the same temptations and trials (Hebrews 2:17-18), whether physical, psychological, emotional or spiritual pain. He is therefore able to sympathise with us (Hebrews 4:15).

He was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). He experienced poverty and homelessness (Luke 9:58). He was familiar with the pain of rejection, isolation and being misunderstood. He felt for the sufferings of others, whether the harassed and helpless crowds (Matthew 9:36); the sick; the outcasts of society such as leprosy patients, tax-collectors and women of ill repute; or His own desolate mother at the foot of the cross. He wept for the sorrow of His bereaved friends (John 11:33-35). He wept for the sinful stubbornness of the people of Jerusalem and the disaster which they were bringing on themselves (Luke 19:41-44).

We can be sure that His compassion and understanding extend to every variety of human suffering that we may endure, whether or not He experienced it during his earthly life. For example, He understands the torture of seeing a loved one slowly lost to dementia – an increasingly common experience in some societies today – and weeps with those who weep. He understands the bewilderment, frustration and fear of the dementia patient herself or himself, and is with them in their isolation when no one else can reach them. He understands the pain of our feelings of guilt and regret, even though He, the pure and sinless Holy One of God, never sinned and never made any decision that was not in line with His Father's will.

Jesus had enemies seeking to eliminate Him and was betrayed to those enemies by one of His friends. He who had so often gone to pray alone asked, in His extremity, for His three closest friends to stay with Him as He wrestled in prayer. Yet they could not keep awake, and within a few short hours had completely forsaken Him, as had the rest of the Twelve. When Jesus' friends failed him, an angel came to strengthen Him, but even so His sweat fell like drops of blood, so great was the horror he faced. Within hours He had been falsely accused and found guilty in a farcical series of legal hearings. His final physical ordeal began with a vicious scourging and ended with crucifixion.

His spiritual ordeal we can barely begin to imagine. What must it be like for God to empty Himself and become nothing, a mere human (Philippians 2:7)? What must it be like for One who was the radiance of God's glory (Hebrews 1:3) and "the darling of the Father's soul"<sup>3</sup> to suffer such debasement? What must

it be like for the One through whom all things were made to be rejected by His own creation, even His own people (John 1:3,10,11)? What must it be like for the pure and sinless Holy One to bear the sins of the world? What must it be like for God the Son to be cut off from God the Father? What agony of abandonment lay behind His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)? The first martyr, Stephen, was blessed with a vision of heaven, God and Jesus, which must have strengthened him for the ordeal of death by stoning (Acts 7:55-60). But Jesus had the very opposite experience: in His hour of greatest need, heaven closed to Him and He was cut off from His heavenly Father by our sins.

The third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, also sympathises with us and sustains us in our suffering. This is summed up in the New Testament by the word *parakletos*. A *parakletos* was an ally, an advisor, a defence advocate in court, but the basic meaning was someone who comes alongside someone else to encourage and support them. The Divine *parakletos* fills us with courage and strength, enabling us to stand firm. The word is translated in many Bible versions as "comforter" (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

#### **"He will crush your head" (Genesis 3:15)**

Recalling that God has already defeated Satan can help us cope. As we have already seen,<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:15 explains how Satan's perpetual struggle with the Church began, as well as foretelling his final defeat which began with Jesus' victory on the cross. By dying for our sins (described by theologians as substitutionary atonement) Christ triumphed over Satan.

Even in his death throes, however, Satan's efforts to bring depravity, destruction and death are sometimes very successful.

#### **"God intended it for good"**

But God can thwart Satan's plans. "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good," said Joseph to the callous brothers who had planned to murder (Genesis 37:18-28; 50:20). In God's providence, however, they sold him and Joseph later saved countless lives when famine came.

The knowledge of God's ability to bring good out of evil can give hope in suffering. It is part of the eternal perspective with which we should try to view our current difficulties. It can help us to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Suffering can enable us to mature spiritually and become more Christ-like. Although we should not seek suffering, we can welcome it when it comes because it is part of God's development of our faith to prepare us, eventually, for glory.



The poet William Cowper (1731-1800), who had repeated bouts of severe depression, wrote many hymns. One particularly focuses on how affliction can be a blessing that a Christian would not seek to avoid. Cowper probably had in mind the verse telling us that “the LORD disciplines those he loves” (Proverbs 3:12).

*’Tis my happiness below  
To encounter many a cross,  
But the Saviour’s power to know,  
Sanctifying every loss:  
Trials must and will befall;  
But with humble faith to see  
Love inscribed upon them all –  
This is happiness to me.*

*God in Zion sows the seeds  
Of affliction, pain and toil;  
These spring up, and choke the weeds  
Which would overspread the soil:  
Trials make the promise sweet;  
Trials give new life to prayer;  
Trials bring me to His feet,  
Lay me low and keep me there.*

Job is an example of this spiritual growth. He gets no answers as to the reason for his suffering. Yet he never loses hope in God and eventually learns to stop asking why. He knows God is there and he finds “joy in unrelenting pain” by being faithful to Him (Job 6:10).

### Giving others comfort

Our own suffering equips us to console others in their suffering, and this, too, gives our suffering meaning and purpose. We have the privilege of comforting others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:4). Many in the depths of suffering have been encouraged by a hymn written by George Matheson (1842-1906), at a time of great loss in his life, about the Divine love that never abandons us.

*O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee.  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.*

Another hymn written out of appalling personal tragedy has the refrain:

*It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Horatio Spafford had suffered financial ruin and the

deaths of his five children. The theme of his hymn is that, whatever our outward circumstances, the fact remains that Christ has died to take away our sins and therefore all is well with our souls. Furthermore, we look forward to heaven and to Christ’s Second Coming. Such eternal hopes are rightly a source of consolation to suffering believers, even if they are going through the inner collapse and desolation that some call the “dark night of the soul”.

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall  
be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall  
descend,  
A song in the night, oh my soul.<sup>5</sup>*

If suffering is not accepted, it embitters us and can destroy our faith. Research has shown that personal suffering (of oneself or others) is a major cause of young people leaving churches in the West. As they wrestle with the problem of why an omnipotent God of love allows suffering, their faith fails.

I knew a committed Christian woman, married to a wealthy city businessman. They had no children and she often travelled with him. She confided to me once that she had never known suffering. Eventually he retired and she looked forward to years of enjoying the good things of life with her husband “all to herself”. Shortly afterwards, she found him dead in their bathroom, where he had slipped and hit his head. This first experience of suffering destroyed her. She was consumed with self-pity and with anger at the God she had always worshipped faithfully. She became bitter and miserable and never recovered.

### Embracing suffering

Christians have traditionally believed that during times of suffering they can experience the presence and power of God at a deep and profound level, which is impossible to attain at other times. Christianity, which has the pain of the cross at its very heart, teaches believers to embrace suffering – not only to accept it and submit to it – but to welcome it, even with joy, as a means of fellowship with Christ. Ultimately, we have the example of Jesus the Suffering Servant to show us how to suffer (1 Peter 2:20-21) and to demonstrate that, in the words of Allen Ross, “Suffering is in God’s plan the way to glory”.<sup>6</sup>

## DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

*International Director, Barnabas Aid*

<sup>1</sup> Emma Kavanagh, *How to be Broken: The Advantages of Falling Apart*, quoted in Marianne Power “Losing Toby was a big wake-up call for me to live my life”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 May 2022, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, Vols 3 and 4, translated from Russian by Thomas P Whitney and Harry Willetts, London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1975, p.617.

<sup>3</sup> John Flavel, *Preparation for Suffering*, revised by Jennifer Adams, Forest VA, Corner Pillar Press, 2011. p.147.

<sup>4</sup> *Barnabas Aid*, November-December 2021, pp.12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Horatio Spafford, “When peace like a river”, 1873.

<sup>6</sup> Allen Ross, “The Triumph of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12)”, 1 November 2004, no. 19 in the series *The Book of Isaiah*, Bible.org (viewed 10 December 2021).

# PROVIDING FOR DESPERATE, DISPLACED CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR



Our project partners have faced many obstacles in their mission to deliver aid to displaced Christians in Myanmar



Young children are helping dig shelters to hide from airstrikes

**T**he Lord listens and has answered their prayers by touching many people’s hearts, including Barnabas Aid, to save their lives,” relates one of our project partners in Myanmar (Burma). “When the people have got the rice, they are so happy, with tears.”

Barnabas has been providing aid and other help to Myanmar’s persecuted Christians since 2005. Working discreetly through Christian organisations in Myanmar – as well as Thailand, India and Bangladesh, where Christian refugees have been forced to flee for safety – Barnabas has funded practical aid to suffering ethnic-minority believers.

These believers have for at least three generations suffered persecution at

the hands of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military). It is estimated that 6.2% of the population of Myanmar are Christian. Most belong to the Christian-majority Kachin, Chin and Karen ethnic groups. There are also significant Christian minorities among other groups, including the Kayah (Karenni) people and the Muslim-majority Rohingya.

Barnabas has provided for the needs of Christians from all these groups. Such needs intensified in the wake of the 2021 military coup (*Barnabas Aid*, May/June 2021, pp.6-9).

### **Desperate needs met as the Lord touches hearts**

Thousands of Christians have been driven from their homes. Some have had to run more than once, as the

Tatmadaw have launched airstrikes and artillery bombardments against IDP (internally displaced persons) camps.

Barnabas Aid has been hard at work giving practical support to our suffering brothers and sisters. In the 12 months to the end of March 2022, Barnabas helped 5,204 Christian families in Myanmar (about 26,000 people).

*Your gifts helped around 26,000 Christians in Myanmar in the year to March 2022*

Through our project partners – and thanks to your generous donations – essential supplies of rice, cooking oil, tinned fish, medicines, clothes, baby milk powder, blankets, mats and tarpaulins have reached Christians,

both those in Myanmar and the many who have been able to cross over into Thailand and India.

### **Essential supplies provided in the jungle and across borders**

Barnabas project partners have helped fleeing Karen Christians by supplying aid in various locations. Over several months in 2021 the relief network extended to several IDP camps and an estimated 8,500 displaced Karen people who are living along the Thai border. In one camp accommodating about 2,000 Karen Christians, our partners have brought rice, noodles, oil, and other supplies several times.



A Barnabas project partner shares the Word of God with displaced believers after a two-week search to locate them in the jungle

Aid has also been delivered to refugees from Karen State who had crossed into Thailand. The Karen believers were provided with not just food but also Bibles in the Karen language.

Further north, Barnabas has distributed aid to a Kachin IDP camp in northern Shan State. Currently there are estimated to be more than 100,000 Kachin IDPs.

Meanwhile, on Myanmar's western border, Barnabas is supporting at least 5,540 Christians who have crossed over from mainly Christian Chin State into the Indian state of Mizoram. At least 22 churches and 350 homes in Chin State were burned or destroyed by the military between August and November 2021.

Local project partners have faced many challenges in distributing the aid. Sometimes drones must be used to find needy Christians deep in the jungle. It took one determined aid distributor more than two weeks to locate certain displaced families in order to deliver much-needed supplies funded through your generous donations.

The annual rainy season (June-October) brings further challenges,

but our project partners travel by motorbike or on foot to distribute rice to IDPs in remote, flood-prone areas.

### **Return home is not an option**

To return home is very risky as the Tatmadaw regularly plant landmines around abandoned villages. During a two-week ceasefire, some young men went back to their villages to see what was left of their houses. At least five of them were injured when landmines were detonated. There have also been instances of men returning to their villages in search of food only to be shot dead by Tatmadaw soldiers.

Widowed "Naw" and her family are among thousands of Christians for whom returning home is not an option. "We are a family of four. My youngest daughter is four years old now," she explains. When the soldiers came, "the entire village needed to flee; it was nowhere safe for us anymore; in our village". The evacuation of whole communities is typical of Christians uprooted from their homes in Myanmar.



"Naw" and her family were forced to flee their village and take refuge in an IDP camp

"Naw" and her children are now in an IDP camp – but even the IDP camps are not completely safe from continuing Tatmadaw airstrikes. Several camps accommodating Christians supported by Barnabas have been struck, causing those within to run for cover in the jungle.

"Now young children are digging holes," Naw adds. "We are teaching the little ones to hide in there when the war planes are flying and bombing us. Please, keep us in your prayers. Thank you and God bless you."

### **Timely intervention from pastor**

Churches whenever possible have kept in contact with Barnabas Aid's project partners. Pastor "Y" was one who made an urgent appeal for help. He reported Tatmadaw attacks as close

as 30 minutes' walk from his church, and many displaced Karen people desperately needed help. He sent out his church members to look for the Karen families hiding in the jungle.

When the church members found them and brought them to his church, as the pastor had no money to buy relief aid, he asked the Barnabas partners to help. The families, he said, were severely traumatised and he was so grateful to be able to help them and minister to them. The pastor and church members started preparing meals funded by Barnabas for the Karen IDPs and resolved to continue for as long as it is needed.



Timely Barnabas donations enabled Pastor Y and his church to provide for these displaced Christian families

### **PAH'S STORY**

When Tatmadaw soldiers surrounded her village, they ordered Pah, 33, and her four children aged between 12 and 4, to walk away but kept hold of her husband and brother, not allowing her to look back. Then followed the sound of gunshots.

A week after Pah moved into an IDP camp with her children she visited the village, now burned down, only to recognise her husband's burned body by the remains of his clothes.

The family moved into another village in a more isolated area. Her disabled mother, who had also been in the camp, came with them, but died shortly afterwards.

Barnabas currently provides Pah and her children with food and other essentials. "I hope and believe that God will continue to bless you and may you receive a blessing from God abundantly," said Pah who constantly remembers those who have helped her.

Despite her distress, Pah continues to hope in the Lord: "I just comfort myself with the words of God and I'm strongly believing that God will continue to protect me and my children."

## Haryana passes anti-conversion bill but India's Supreme Court rejects state supervision of Christian missionaries

INDIA

The state assembly of Haryana, northern India, has passed a bill criminalising religious conversions solicited through force, fraud, allurement or marriage.

The adoption of the Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill (2022) – commonly referred to as an anti-conversion law – means that the state becomes the tenth in India to pass such a law.

The bill prohibits “religious conversions which are effected through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage by making it an offence”.

Conversions secured through such means now carry a term of imprisonment of one to five years. The

punishment can extend to ten years when the intention is to convert a minor, a woman, or a person belonging to the Scheduled Castes (those viewed as having the lowest status according to the Hindu caste system).

Such laws can be misused by extremists to make false accusations against those simply sharing the Gospel.

In the same week, however, Indian Christians were encouraged as the country's Supreme Court rejected an extremist group's petition to create a committee to monitor the activities and income of Indian Christian missionaries and local evangelists.

The petition was based on the allegation that Christian missionaries and evangelists are seeking converts through force, fraud or allurement.

In a declaration published



Indian Christians praying. In several Indian states Christians have been subjected to unfounded allegations of carrying out conversions by force, fraud or allurement

on 25 March, the bench of two Supreme Court Justices are actually disturbing the harmony with these kinds of petitions.”

## Islamists “mercilessly killing Christians” in north-eastern DRC

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

At least a dozen people were killed in an attack by Islamists on the village of Masambo in the north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).



Musa Baluku renews ADF's allegiance to IS [Image credit: Long War Journal]

The attack, on Sunday 3 April, was carried out by the Islamist group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

A church leader in neighbouring Uganda confirmed that that the ADF were “mercilessly killing Christians”. Many people fled north-eastern DRC to seek refuge in western Uganda.

In a video released on 1 April, ADF leader Musa Baluku renewed the group's pledge of allegiance (*baya*) to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

## Egypt legalises record batch of 239 churches

EGYPT

Egypt registered its largest single batch of churches and church-affiliated buildings on 20 April.

A total of 239 licences were granted by the committee overseeing the process, its highest number since the licensing process began.

The 23rd batch brings the number of churches granted licences to 2,401 out of the 3,730 that applied for registration after a new Law for Building and Restoring Churches removed Ottoman-era restrictions on church buildings in 2016.

Prime Minister Mustafa

Madbouli, who presides over the committee, previously instructed members to speed up their work to clear the backlog of unlicensed church buildings as swiftly as possible. At its previous meeting in January, members approved 141 churches.

Before the committee started work in late 2017 many congregations had no option but to meet illegally in unlicensed buildings. Christians are now permitted to worship in unregistered buildings pending the completion of the licensing process.

## Turkey deports 78 foreign Protestant pastors in three years

### TURKEY

Turkey has deported 78 foreign Protestant pastors and their families since the beginning of 2019, according to a report by the Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey.

Some of the pastors were expelled on grounds of national security, with attendance at a Christian conference or missionary activities being deemed sufficient to threaten the security of Turkey.

A number of congregations were left in difficult straits, the

report stated, given that many churches depend on foreign pastors. Tight government restrictions on church leadership training have severely limited opportunities for gaining suitable qualifications within the country.

The report denounced the deportation orders that were issued “without any evidence to members of the Protestant community who are focused on living their faith, who are opposed to violence and who do not have criminal records”.



In February 2021 Michael Feulner, a German pastor who has worked in Turkey for more than 20 years, was arrested and threatened with deportation on the grounds of national security [Image credit: ME Concern]

## Scores of Christians killed in Nigeria's Middle Belt

### NIGERIA



His Royal Highness Ronku Aka (centre), ruler of the Irgwe nation and a retired pastor, visited the injured following the attacks at the Zrreci festival [Image credit: Rigwe Deze]

More than 170 Christians were killed in multiple jihadi attacks across Kaduna and Plateau states in Nigeria's Middle Belt over a three-week period in March and April.

In Kaura Local Government Area (LGA), southern Kaduna State, an attack by suspected Fulani militants on a Christian community on Sunday 20 March left 34 people dead – 32 residents and two military personnel. Gunmen attacked four locations in the LGA. More than 200 houses and 32 shops were burned in the raid and twenty vehicles vandalised.

In Giwa LGA, northern

Kaduna State, at least 50 people were killed and more than 100 abducted, including a church minister, when nine villages were attacked on 24 March. A church and homes were razed, around 30 vehicles set on fire, and cattle stolen during the assaults.

In Plateau State, 12 people were killed as gunmen attacked the Zrreci festival ground in Bassa LGA on 2 and 3 April. On Sunday 10 April at least 80 people were killed and more than 60 abducted when gunmen attacked ten predominantly Christian villages in Kanam LGA, during which more than 115 homes were razed.

## Three young siblings killed and church damaged in Myanmar

### MYANMAR

Three siblings, brothers aged 7 and 10 and their 12-year-old sister, were killed by an artillery shell in the village of Le Htwel, Kayah State, Myanmar on 8 March.

The children died instantly in the attack on the village close to the state capital Loikaw. The siblings' father and 15-year-old sister

sustained injuries from the shelling.

Residents believe that the shell was fired from a military unit stationed in their area, which is completely under control of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military).

Earlier the same day a church in the nearby village of Saun Du La, Demoso

township was heavily damaged in an airstrike. The bombing caused severe damage to the ceiling and windows. A local Christian leader decried the “deliberate and planned attack” on the church.

Several churches have been hit by Tatmadaw airstrikes and artillery shelling in the

Loikaw area since May 2021.

According to the 2022 report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, released on 25 April, the Tatmadaw's persecution of ethnic-minority Christians is comparable to the military's genocide against the Muslim-majority Rohingya.

# Building a Biblical foundation in China

“Bingwen” compares different Chinese and English translations of the Bible

For four years “Bingwen” has served the Chinese Church as an itinerant preacher, ministering to congregations across nine provinces. He is just one of the Chinese church leaders studying with the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL), the academic branch of Barnabas Aid.

In China, as in many other lands, there are few opportunities to undertake pastoral and theological study. Those opportunities that do exist can be prohibitively expensive, sometimes amounting to thousands of pounds per year. Even theological books and Bible commentaries are hard to find.

The need is great. Many Chinese churches lack trained pastors, ministers or lay leaders who can serve and disciple the Lord’s people.

OCRPL provides formal training at low cost, thanks to the generous donations of our supporters and the use of online teaching. There are currently ten church leaders from China amongst OCRPL’s student body – three undertaking a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree and seven a Master of Ministry (MMin) degree. God willing, 30 undergraduate students will be added in October 2022.

Bingwen is one of the DMin students. His research focuses on comparing different Bible translations, both English and Chinese, and exploring the benefits of using multiple Bible versions to gain a fuller and deeper understanding of God’s Word.

Bingwen experienced the love of God following some dark and difficult times. Growing up in a non-Christian family, he suffered first the death of his grandparents, then his father. The grief was compounded by the financial difficulties faced by Bingwen

and his mother, who struggled with irregular employment and chronic illness.

It was when things looked most dark that God reached out. Bingwen’s mother was admitted to hospital and came close to death. At this time some Christians shared with Bingwen the eternal hope found in the Gospel of Christ. Both he and his mother accepted Christ, and she experienced an almost miraculous recovery from illness. On their first day attending church after she was discharged, the sermon was based on Psalm 68:5 – “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”

Now with a wife and young son, as well as responsibility for his mother’s medical bills, Bingwen felt God call him to leave his employment and take up his full-time ministry, despite the financial risks. He and his wife now support themselves by doing laundry for other families.

The training of leaders such as Bingwen is intended to strengthen the Church in China in several ways. Lay church leaders will be equipped to serve the flock and build a strong Biblical foundation for the Church.

Their training will assist them to correct the false doctrines and heresies that can so easily take root, especially via the internet and social media, in a context where Christians often find solid, Bible-based teaching difficult to come by.

In turn, Church leaders will train others, equipping more believers for ministry and service as the Church continues to grow. ■

*At this time some Christians shared with Bingwen the eternal hope found in the Gospel of Christ. Both he and his mother accepted Christ, and she experienced an almost miraculous recovery from illness.*

## Barnabas launches streaming channel with the Gospels at its heart

**Barnabas+** is our new streaming service as we seek to connect with Christians “for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3).

The platform seeks to do so through spiritual materials such as devotionals, traditional praise and worship, and Biblical teaching. Additionally it offers informative Christian film and documentary content as well as Christian children’s animation. All this through your smartphone, tablet, computer or TV.

The channel features the personal accounts of Christians who have suffered for their faith, and shows how Barnabas is helping our brothers and sisters in need. Viewers can also hear the four Gospels narrated in their entirety and re-enacted in film.

Launched on 11 June, **Barnabas+** is free to access and does not carry advertising.

It is available anytime through any device with an internet connection, including iOS and Android apps, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, Xbox and smart TVs.

Simply go to **barnabasplus.tv** to set up an account and start watching.

## In Touch

### Thank you for helping Ukrainian Christians

“God is love. Praying for you,” read the simple message in capital letters on the front of the filled food.give box destined for Christians fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

It was written by one of the many Barnabas supporters in New Zealand who responded to our appeals for food and nappies to help our brothers and sisters who remain in Ukraine or have crossed into neighbouring countries.

In total you filled around 600 food.gives boxes and donated heaps of nappies – that together was enough to fill a 40-foot container!

Thanks go to our collection hubs at Gracecity Church, Auckland, the Church on Vogel at Palmerston North and Rangiora Baptist Church on South Island.



Volunteers hard at work sorting and packing donations for Ukraine

We are also hugely grateful to the Bible Society of New Zealand for allowing us to use its warehouse at Auckland, where our teams of hard-working volunteers sorted and packed donations ready for shipping.

Thank you, too, to Amberlene Accessories, Auckland, for donating a 40-foot container of hand sanitiser and to Oceania Medical, Auckland, for its gift of a palette of bandages.

Barnabas Aid’s New Zealand CEO Stephanie Johnston said it was inspiring to see how many people donated food and volunteered their time. “They were so excited to be a part of helping in a tangible and practical way,” she said.

“It was a perfect example the verse in Corinthians that says when one part of the body suffers, we suffer with them” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

**Ukrainians in New Zealand thank Barnabas supporters: p9**



Volunteer Jedidiah Natanielu delights in the message on the food.gives box “God is Love. Praying for You”

## Save the date for SCAAW 2022



Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week this year runs from **Sunday 30 October to Sunday 6 November**. The theme will be “*Understanding the Times*” (see 1 Chronicles 12:32).

Be part of SCAAW as we stand with our suffering Church family in thought, prayer and practical action.

Remember to put SCAAW into your church’s diary. You can make a difference to the lives of our poor and persecuted brothers and sisters by praying, raising funds and informing others about the persecution of Christians by holding an event at your local church or group.

Contact your local Barnabas office today to register for your *Understanding the Times* inspirational resource pack with everything you need including an A3 poster to advertise your event, eight-day devotional booklet, SCAAW 2022 bookmark, Barnabas’ Praying for the Persecuted Church booklet. Further resources will be in the next issue of *Barnabas Aid* magazine.

Keep up to date with the latest news on Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week 2022 at our website **barnabasfund.org/scaaw**

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Watch on **Barnabas+** as Christian schoolgirl Dudu explains how Barnabas Aid’s deliveries of the nutritious ePap porridge have restored her and her friends to health in drought-hit Zimbabwe

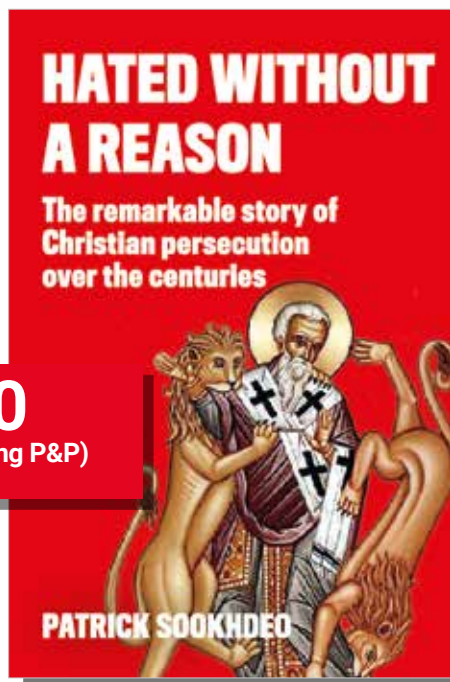
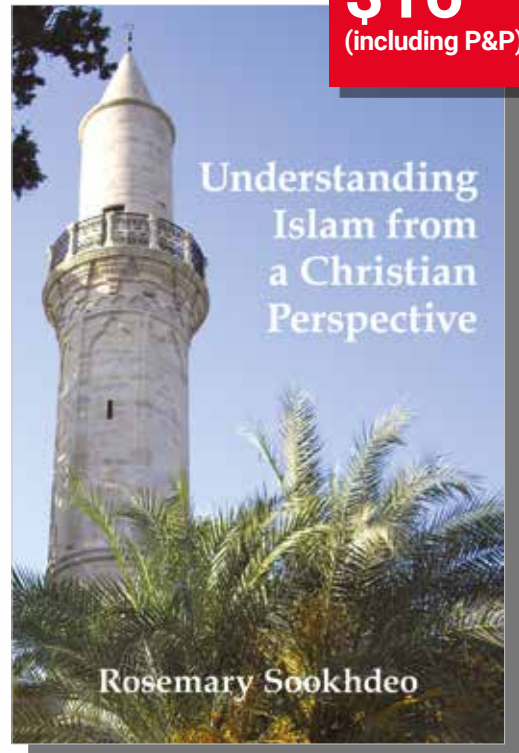
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**\$16**  
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ISBN: 978-1-7321952-2-6



## Hated Without a Reason

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To order, please contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (addresses on inside front cover).

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