

AFRICA

Aid for victims of violence
in Nigeria and Uganda

THE SHEPHERD'S ACADEMY

Ministry training for more
than 800 ministry leaders

PAKISTAN

Practical support following
anti-Christian riots

barnabasaid



**God hears
the cries of
His people**

WE WORK BY:

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

WE SEEK TO:

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

WE BELIEVE:

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

International office

The Old Rectory, River Street,
Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK
Telephone 01672 564938
Email info@barnabasaid.org
Fax 01672 565030

Australia

GPO Box 612, Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone (08) 8117 8079
or 1300 365 799
Email bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org

Barnabas Aid Australia is a charitable institution but gifts are not tax deductible. Barnabas Aid Australia is a registered business name of Barnabas Fund Australia. ABN 70 005 572 485.

New Zealand

PO Box 276018,
Manukau City, Auckland 2241
Telephone (09) 280 4385
or 0800 008 805
Email office@barnabasaid.org.nz

Published by Barnabas Aid
1934 Old Gallows Road Suite 350
Vienna, VA 22182, USA
Email info@barnabasaid.org

For permission to reproduce articles from this magazine, please contact the International Headquarters address above right.

To guard the safety of Christians in hostile environments, names may have been changed or omitted. Thank you for your understanding.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain permission for stories and images used in this publication. Barnabas Aid apologises for any errors or omissions and will be grateful for any further information regarding copyright.

The paper used in this publication comes from sustainable forests and can be 100% recycled.

The paper used is produced using wood fibre at a mill that has been awarded the ISO14001 certificate for environmental management.

The poly film plastic used to wrap this magazine for mailing is recyclable.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com
The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Front cover: A Christian widow in Plateau State, Nigeria, praying

The Bread of Bethlehem

As Christmas approaches, our thoughts begin to turn to Bethlehem, the “little town” where the almighty and eternal God chose to be born.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

The Lord in His wisdom and foreknowledge gave us this prophecy, which was fulfilled because Mary, who lived four days’ journey away in Nazareth, had to travel with Joseph to Bethlehem, the town of his ancestors, as required by a Roman census (Luke 2:1-6).

The Hebrew meaning of the word “Bethlehem” is usually given as “House of Bread”. So it was in the earthly House of Bread that the Living Bread came down from heaven (John 6:51).

Bethlehem was also called Ephrathah, which means “Fruitful”. Jesus described Himself as the true vine and we, His followers, as its fruit-bearing branches. As anyone who has grown a vine knows, regular pruning is necessary to get a good harvest. Jesus tells us that our heavenly Father, the gardener, prunes every fruitful branch “so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1-4).

Bethlehem is mentioned many other times in the Bible, as well as in connection with the birth of Jesus our Saviour. The book of Ruth begins by telling us there was a famine in the land around Bethlehem – no bread in the House of Bread. This caused Naomi and her family to flee to Moab as economic refugees (Ruth 1:1-2). Humanly speaking, it was because of this famine that a brave, loving and loyal Moabite woman, Ruth, became an ancestor of the Lord Jesus.

When all the women in the family had been widowed, Naomi “heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6, KJV), so she decided to return to Bethlehem. This is when Ruth, her daughter-in-law, clung to Naomi declaring, “Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Naomi’s original home, Bethlehem, became Ruth’s home.

Before long Ruth was married to Boaz, a respected citizen of Bethlehem. From them are descended not only King David but also the King of kings (Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:5, 16).

Many of us are now beginning to make preparations to celebrate the birthday of that infant King. Traditional delicacies to eat at Christmas often include special types of bread. In Germany there is stollen, filled with dried fruit and marzipan. In Italy it is fluffy panettone. In Greece the Christmas loaf, flavoured with special spices, is decorated with a cross, either the Greek letter X (chi) as the initial for Christ or to remind us of His atoning death.

For the bread of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, gave Himself to take away our sins. We feast on Him as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. If the baby in the manger had not grown up to die on the cross and rise again, Christmas would have no meaning. He tells us:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

Jesus spoke also of the manna from heaven with which God had fed His people in the desert (Exodus 16; John 6:30-33,48-58). He is our living manna on whom we feed, who alone can satisfy us and meet our every need. There is a lovely song which runs:

Hidden manna from above,
Sent to us with Father’s love.
I am hungry. Father, feed me
From the mouth of your dove.

This Christmas, as we come to Bethlehem, let us feed on the Living Bread who alone can satisfy.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO
International Director, Barnabas Aid

Contents

4 Compassion in Action
Barnabas-funded aid helps survivors of Morocco quake

6 Africa
Barnabas brings hope to victims of violence in Nigeria and Uganda

8 Petition
Sign our petition calling for action on the genocide of African Christians

10 The Shepherd’s Academy
More than 800 church leaders receiving training

11 Barnabas+
Finding encouragement in times of suffering

12 Christian martyrs
Testimonies from the Roman persecution of the Church

Pull-out
Part three of our series on living out the Sermon on the Mount

14 Pakistan
Barnabas gives practical aid to victims of anti-Christian riots

16 In Brief
Thousands flee “war crimes” in Nagorno-Karabakh

18 Giving
The Apostle Paul encourages Christians to give even amidst poverty

19 In Touch
Remember our brothers and sisters on Giving Tuesday

how barnabas is helping

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

\$40,000



Blankets, food and tents help survivors of Morocco quake

Barnabas responded quickly to help Christians and others left homeless by the earthquake that struck Morocco on 8 September and killed around 3,000 people. Within days we sent funding for blankets, food, medicine and tents, which were distributed to those most in need by a local ministry team.

Ahmed's wife and children were traumatised after their home was badly damaged by the quake. He says they are continuing to trust in Jesus. "We are putting everything in God's hands," he said. Ahmed thanks Barnabas supporters for their prayers and for sending practical help.



A Moroccan church leader coordinates the delivery of Barnabas-funded blankets to survivors

Project reference: 00-634
(Disaster Relief Fund)

\$180,000
to support 30 pastors and their families for a year



Financial support is answer to prayer for Algerian pastors

Barnabas is helping to meet the living costs of pastors left without incomes to support their families because of the closure by the authorities of many churches in Algeria. Our provision means pastors can focus on ministering to their church members, free from worrying about how to feed their families.

"The support we are receiving from Barnabas is a great answer to prayer, and our ministry is revived," said one pastor. He has started six home groups, and visits believers for pastoral care, training and discipleship.



Algerian Christians meeting in small groups after the forced closure of their churches

Project reference: 02-570

\$5,140



Clean water returns Christian refugees to good health

Four hundred Cameroonian Christians – mostly women and children – who fled Islamist violence to a refugee camp in Chad fell ill with stomach upsets because its nearest water supply was dirty.

Barnabas funded the drilling of two boreholes on church land close to the camp that produce clean water, so the families are no longer sick. The boreholes also mean the women no longer have to risk walking a long distance from the camp to draw water. They thanked God for "this testimony of love".



A young Christian refugee draws water from a Barnabas-funded borewell

Project reference: 00-635
(Water Projects Fund)



\$3,804



New windows keep out winter's cold at Uzbek church hall

Draughty and rotten wood-framed windows in a church hall in Uzbekistan have been replaced with plastic double-glazed windows, with funding from Barnabas. The hall is owned by a registered church and shared by four other unregistered church congregations, enabling them to meet legally.

The installation of the 32 windows was completed within two days to minimise disruption to services. Thanking Barnabas, the pastor said, "The hall has become much cosier, brighter, and more beautiful. Of course, it will be warmer in winter."



New windows help to keep out the bitter cold

Project reference: PR1424 (Church Buildings in Uzbekistan)

\$12,282
one year's funding for seven pre-schools



Christian pre-schools for poor children in Bangladesh

Barnabas funds seven Christian pre-schools in Bangladesh that provide free education for Christian children from impoverished communities. The majority of the children's parents are low-paid day labourers ostracised by their Muslim neighbours.

More than 225 children attend the schools where they are taught English, maths and Bangla as well as Bible stories, hymns and Christian values. "I try to attend every day in my class and I love it," says pupil Swapon Roy.



Pre-school children in Bangladesh hold up their Barnabas-funded schoolbooks

Project reference: 04-807

\$18,784
for one year's support of the training ministry



Nepalese ministry trains Christians in church leadership

A Barnabas-supported training ministry in Nepal strengthens new believers in their faith and prepares Christians to serve their local church in a country where believers often face hostility. Courses provide discipleship and leadership development through self-study and group discussion led by trained tutors.

In the year to July 2023, more than 1,100 students enrolled in courses and 219 Christians were trained as tutors. Rupilal, who now leads a village church, said the course taught him the importance of Bible study, prayer and service.



Nepalese Christians take part in a tutor-led group discussion

Project reference: 89-946



God hears the cries of His people

Barnabas-funded aid brings hope to victims of violence in Nigeria and Uganda

Aid delivered by Barnabas brought hope and light to suffering Christian communities in Nigeria

“God, You see and You hear the cries of Your people. You send help and You show Your love all the time. Thank You for Your servants Barnabas Aid for their care and perseverance in helping Your suffering community.”

These are the words of a Nigerian believer as he sang and danced in joy, praising God for the arrival of Barnabas-funded food and practical aid for six Christian-majority villages in Kaduna State that have endured incessant attacks by Islamist terrorists.

In one of the latest onslaughts, 33 people – including women and children – were killed. The terrorists struck at night, and many of the victims died in their beds when their homes were set on fire.

Kaduna State endures high levels of jihadi violence. No fewer than 23 pastors have been murdered and more than 200 churches forced to shut down across the state in the last four years, according to figures released by the Christian Association of Nigeria in September.

Families survive on barely a meal a day

Repeated attacks have destroyed farmland and food stocks at a time of rising food prices nationally. As a result, many Christian families barely have enough for one meal a day.

The latest distribution of Barnabas food aid in Nigeria was a lifeline for families in the six beleaguered villages, especially for widows who have little means of practical support.

Two hundred extended households (approximately 4,600 people) received a 100kg bag of beans and a 100kg bag of maize, sufficient to sustain them for three months. Each household was also given two sleeping mats and two blankets.

“This has brought hope and life to communities,” said a recipient of the aid. “Despite their grief,” he added, the aid distribution has helped believers to “continue to trust in God and also to know there are people who care”.

He continued, “Though the government here refused to assist the people, God has sent help from above through Barnabas Aid.”

“We have not been abandoned”

An elder of one of the villages thanked Barnabas for helping the community. “The excitement of our people when they knew that Barnabas Aid was coming again with another help is very encouraging to our faith,” he said. “It helps us to continue trusting in God to intervene in the killing in this area.”

“This is proof that we have not been abandoned,” the elder added. “More so, that Barnabas Aid sends prayer alert to people all over the world to pray for us is very encouraging. We really see the hand of God in this.

“We can only say thank you. May the Lord bless you abundantly.”

Aid comforts survivors of school massacre

“You are the first to give out relief to me and to us in general,” said Algyanyira, a survivor of a massacre at a Christian boarding school in Uganda in which 42 believers – mostly pupils – died. “Your support and prayers make us feel healed and our tears are wiped away,” he added.

“Though the government here refused to assist the people, God has sent help from above through Barnabas Aid.”



Christian women receive sleeping mats and blankets in the latest Barnabas-funded distribution of aid to Nigerian victims of violence

The 21-year-old senior student suffered burns to his back and arms escaping buildings set on fire by Islamists during the night-time attack on his secondary school in Kasese District, western Uganda, on 16 June 2023.

“Your support and prayers make us feel healed and our tears are wiped away”

Armed members of the Allied Democratic Forces, a group affiliated to Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh), stormed the school, shooting and hacking pupils to death. Other students were burned alive when the attackers threw petrol bombs into dormitories. The terrorists struck as pupils were singing hymns before bed.

Barnabas provided funding to support Christians injured in the massacre as well as for members of the local community, many of whom fled their homes after the attack, terrified that the terrorists would return.

Thanks to the donations of our supporters, we have paid the medical bills of the survivors, including Alganyira, and provided counselling for them and their families and for the bereaved to help them recover emotionally and spiritually.

We have also funded a series of radio talk shows in which church leaders shared messages of comfort and hope with the traumatised community, and local officials detailed measures taken to strengthen security. Each radio show offered members of the community the opportunity to phone in and ask questions.



Alganyira thanks the Lord that he escaped with his life from the slaughter

Food aid for 700 vulnerable households

We further supported the community by providing food for 700 vulnerable households (around 4,900 people).

Families who lost children or relatives in the attack as well as the elderly, disabled and people who fled their homes in terror were given flour, beans, groundnuts, rice, sugar,

soap and cooking oil to sustain them.

We also provided survivors with school materials – including pens, text books and maths sets – and funded text books and stationery for the schools where survivors have been transferred to in order to continue their education.

Recovering at home after hospital treatment, Alganyira is keen to resume his studies.

“Keep praying for me to get healed and go back to school,” he requested. “My ambition is to finish school and work for the community.”



Vulnerable members of the Ugandan Christian community around the school collect bundles of Barnabas-funded food aid

*Project references:
39-772 (Victims of Violence in Nigeria); PR1618 (Victims of Violence in Uganda)*



Petition: End the genocide of African Christians

A Christian child in Chibok, Borno State. Northern and Middle Belt Nigeria – where tens of thousands of Christians have been killed – is just one of the hotspots of anti-Christian violence across sub-Saharan Africa

Barnabas Aid is calling on supporters to sign our petition to end the anti-Christian violence that is sweeping across sub-Saharan Africa.

Many tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters have been slaughtered in the last two decades as terrorists wage a brutal and genocidal war against African Christian communities.¹

The worst-affected area is northern and Middle Belt Nigeria, where Boko Haram and other militant groups rampage freely. Countless Christian villages have been attacked, often at night, the buildings and crops burned, the people kidnapped, injured and killed – unless they manage to flee. Many pastors and worship services at church buildings are also targeted. The Nigerian security forces seem unable to protect vulnerable Christian citizens in these areas of the country, and the violence shows no sign of abating. Fresh attacks are occurring almost every week.

The violence afflicting Nigerian Christians for a generation has spread in recent years to other African countries. Thousands of Christians have been killed by affiliates of Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. Even Uganda has suffered some terrible anti-Christian violence. And more of our brothers and sisters have been killed in places such as Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania and the West African countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

Our African brothers and sisters show great resilience, courage and faith in the face of the unrelenting onslaught.² But can we, with God's help, give them the hope of better protection?

We recognise that other groups are targeted as well as Christians. We acknowledge the difficulties faced by African governments and the wider international community in combatting this form of violence. Yet, we believe that more can and must be done to protect these vulnerable communities.

Our petition urges the UK, Australian and New Zealand governments to request institutions such as the African Union and its legislature the Pan-African Parliament to consider this urgent situation. Given that Nigeria, Mozambique and Uganda are all Commonwealth countries, the petition requests that the matter be discussed at the October 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

¹ For more details see our report at barnabasaid.org/resources/africa-petition
² The anti-Christian nature of this violence is often omitted in media coverage.



“An answer to my prayers”

More than 800 Global South ministry leaders now training with The Shepherd’s Academy

A TSA tutor preparing to lead an online seminar for South Asian church leaders

“The Shepherd’s Academy is an answer to my prayers. I have always desired sound theological knowledge while doing my pastoral work and TSA afforded me the opportunity.”

These are the words of Pastor Godwill Nkese in Cameroon, one of more than 800 Christian leaders from the Global South receiving theological and pastoral training through Barnabas Aid’s The Shepherd’s Academy (TSA).

TSA has grown steadily to include students from more than 30 countries. Less than a year ago there were just over 400 students registered – now there are more than 800.

Practically equipped for ministry

TSA programmes combine self-study, online classes and in-person tutorials at these local study centres. Of the church leaders registered with TSA, around 600 are undertaking short courses while a further 200 are studying for an undergraduate degree. Each degree student is linked to one of our TSA study centres, of which there are now 20 in 12 countries.

“I might never have had this kind of opportunity to study without The Shepherd’s Academy,” says Pastor Godwill. “With the kind of tutorials and tutors we have at TSA compared to the small amount of money we pay as tuition fee, I can only say we have been favoured by God to have TSA.”

Although Cameroon is a Christian-majority country, Godwill says that believers there do experience opposition. He has been threatened by followers of

African Traditional Religion, who see Christianity as nothing more than “the white man’s tradition” and a form of Western colonialism. “They oppose,” he adds, “the planting of churches.”

Godwill describes the online system of study as a “game changer” that has enabled him to study while continuing his demanding pastoral ministry.

“The courses, especially Bible Interpretation, Christian Care and Counselling, and Church Management and Administration, have greatly equipped me practically in my pastoral engagements over the past two years,” he says.



Pastor Godwill Nkese in Cameroon sees The Shepherd’s Academy as an answer to his prayers

“I give all glory to God for this privilege”

“Anisha”, a missionary in a South Asian country, is also grateful for the opportunities afforded her by TSA’s programme.

“I praise God for TSA’s innovative idea of helping God’s servants like me who have not undergone any theological



The Shepherd’s Academy

TSA (a project of Barnabas Aid’s Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life) offers undergraduate-level learning opportunities to grassroots Church leaders in the Global South. The vision and goal of TSA is to empower these leaders with the necessary tools to lead their communities and churches faithfully and effectively, emulating the Good Shepherd in their contexts.

courses,” she enthused, adding, “I give all glory and honour to my God for this privilege of learning.”

Anisha, who has more than 20 years’ experience in the field, hopes to use her enhanced knowledge to tutor other women missionaries.

A TSA tutor in South Asia believes that this kind of training is already making a positive impact, saying that TSA courses have “equipped church leaders to be efficient counsellors, pastoral caregivers and a source of healing, in their churches”.

“We aim to train a new generation of leaders,” explains Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Aid and Executive Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life. “Our mission is to form in them the character and integrity that will give them the foundation to face their challenges, find hope in hopeless situations and counter untruth with truth.”

Jesus is our Rabbi, Teacher, Master, King and Saviour. He is the perfect pattern for our existence in terms of minds, actions, attitudes, motivations and the way we live our lives. The Beatitudes take us to the inner life of Jesus, showing us what true perfection is. They take us back to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve had perfect communion with God as well as a perfect relationship with each other. In the Beatitudes Jesus is describing Himself.

A Manual for Christian Living



③ Life in the Kingdom where negatives are positives

Matthew 5:3-5



ust 10 verses. Just 150 words.¹

If the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the heart of Jesus's radical teaching, then the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) are the heart of that heart. They describe the inner

attitudes of a follower of Christ, attitudes which bear fruit in the outward actions described in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

The word "beatitude" means a state of supreme bliss. Most English Bibles start these statements of Jesus with the word "blessed", but in many ways "happy" is a clearer translation.² The original word in the Greek New Testament was *makarios*, which meant a kind of Divine joy, a secure joy that cannot be shaken by circumstances. It is a joy that no one can take away from us, as Jesus promised His disciples some three years later, just before the crucifixion (John 16:22).

Of course, Jesus was not speaking Greek when he taught His disciples on that mountainside. He was

speaking Aramaic, so he probably used a common Aramaic expression, beginning each statement with *ashere*. This was an exclamation that we could translate as "O the blessedness of..." or "O the bliss of..." It shows that the joy we are promised is for now. It is not a glimpse of future glory, but something that has already started (and will become full and complete in heaven). The joys that Jesus describes are not a beautiful fairytale to sigh over; they are real life for Christ's followers.

This short passage (Matthew 5:3-12) has been analysed in many ways. Some see it as nine beatitudes, one for each statement beginning "Blessed are", but more often it is viewed as eight beatitudes, the last one being extra long (v.10-12). J. Oswald Sanders divides them into four passive personal qualities followed by four active social qualities.³

G. Campbell Morgan considers that Jesus is describing a sevenfold happiness related to character, a character which will result in persecution, for which reason Jesus adds the

eighth beatitude about enduring suffering.⁴ Some have pointed out a logical flow, each beatitude being a step towards the next one.

The analysis does not matter much. What is important is what Jesus said.

G.K. Chesterton wrote of the whole Sermon,

On the first reading of the Sermon on the Mount you feel it turns everything upside down, but the second time you read it, you discover that it turns everything right side up. The first time you read it you feel that it is impossible, but the second time, you feel that nothing else is possible.⁵

At the very beginning are three beatitudes which seem to the world to be paradoxical nonsense: they value what the world despises, and seek what the world strives to avoid. They appear to claim that happiness is to be found in poverty, sorrow and powerlessness.

Most people are on a quest for happiness, but generally find it elusive. Their thirst cannot be quenched, or not for long. Satisfaction soon fades, leaving an aching void. There is only emptiness and an all-pervading loneliness. Modern humankind's desire for pleasure has led to an abyss from which there seems no escape. For true and lasting happiness is not found in the places where people tend to seek it: money, pleasure, power and status. Augustine was right when he said that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. True joy can be found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many sections of the modern Church, sadly, are emulating secular society and unwittingly embracing its ideals, causing the loss of this spiritual reality, the loss of the inner life, the loss of the power of the Holy Spirit, and above all else the loss of Jesus Christ Himself. This has been a problem for the Christian faith throughout the ages. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians illustrates how quickly and how far Christians can fall away from the reality of Christ by embracing the values of the world.

Persecution has often been the sifter and purifier of faith that kept the believers clinging to their blessed Lord Jesus. These are the ones who "triumphed over [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11).



The Beatitudes are the heart of the heart of Jesus' teaching. His followers will enjoy blissful happiness as they model their lives on Him, even though it may seem nonsense to the world.



lessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

The first beatitude is the foundation on which all the others are built. It is about the poor in spirit, that is, those who recognise their spiritual need. They are the people who know they have nothing to offer God, that neither wealth, nor knowledge, nor family, nor nationality, nor natural temperament and personality are anything before the Lord. We might translate the first words as: "O the bliss of those who know themselves to be spiritually inadequate!"

The Greek word used here for "poor" means destitute, like a beggar. In a spiritual context, such poverty creates total dependence on God – and here is where total joy is found.

Poverty, inadequacy and destitution all sound very unattractive in the world's eyes. This should not surprise us. It could be said that poverty of spirit marks the dividing line between those who follow Christ and those who do not. "There is no more perfect statement of the doctrine of justification by faith only" than the first beatitude, says Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, explaining that this beatitude must come at the beginning of the list because

there is no entry into the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, apart from it. There is no-one in the kingdom of God who is not poor in spirit. It is the fundamental characteristic of the Christian and of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and all the other characteristics are in a sense the result of this one.⁶

This beatitude is nothing to do with material wealth or lack of it. Elsewhere Jesus teaches that we should not be attached to material possessions.⁷ Yet a rich person can be poor in spirit – Abraham and Job are examples – and a poor person can have a proud and self-sufficient spirit, cutting them off from God.

Jesus's first hearers may have understood this distinction better than modern readers of the Sermon on the Mount. To be poor and without any resources, therefore powerless, therefore needing to trust completely in God are concepts all included in the Hebrew/Aramaic words for "poor". Poverty, humility and helplessness were all wrapped up together. Someone who had nothing could only look to God for help.

The promise made to those who are poor in spirit, that is, to all Christians, is the kingdom of heaven. The same promise is repeated in the last beatitude, with a range of other promises between.

The kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God as it is also called in the New Testament) is the reign of God in the hearts and lives of His people. The Kingdom of God is a Divine society where God's will is done perfectly, as it is in heaven (Matthew

6:10). Its citizens know that they are empty and have nothing; they can only trust and obey the King.



O the bliss of those who realise that, spiritually, they have nothing and are completely dependent on God.



lessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

This beatitude is probably even more perplexing to the world than the first one, as its basic meaning is “O the happiness of those who are unhappy!”

Just as the first beatitude used the strongest Greek word for “poor”, so the second one uses the strongest Greek word for “mourn”, describing a passionate outpouring of grief for a lost loved one. In this beatitude, however, the primary meaning is not sorrow because of a bereavement or other personal troubles, but sorrow for three other causes.

Firstly, there is a desperate sorrow for our own sin, unworthiness and spiritual failure, knowing that this grieves the Holy Spirit. This sorrow follows naturally from being poor in spirit. It is the attitude of Isaiah when he saw the Lord in the temple and cried out, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).

This is the godly sorrow which “brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10). It is the sorrow of the “broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17) which God does not despise. Rather, He takes away our mourning and gives us the oil of gladness (Isaiah 61:3, NRSV). We are comforted by the many promises of forgiveness that fill His Word and the joy of salvation is restored to us (Psalm 51:12).

Indeed, the joy of salvation is a happiness we cannot truly experience until we have felt the sorrow of conviction for our sins, a sorrow so deep and sincere that it leads us to repentance. This happens not only at the time when we commit our lives to Jesus, who died to take away our sins. It also happens repeatedly as we walk with Him for the rest of our earthly lives. If we are honest in examining ourselves, we will find sins of thought, word and deed every day, sins that cause us to mourn as we confess them in prayer and simultaneously to rejoice as we know ourselves forgiven.

Secondly, there is the sorrow that arises from having our hearts broken by the suffering we see in the world around us. To weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15) is to be like our Lord Jesus, who wept with the grieving friends and relatives of Lazarus, even though He knew He was going to raise Lazarus to life again (John 11:11, 33-35).

Sometimes there is an extra reason to mourn for others – not only their suffering but also the sin that caused it. In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah pours out his heart and we see that he is overwhelmed with a double sorrow: (1) the suffering of his people who have been taken in exile to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem and (2) the sins of his people which brought about their downfall at the hand of God. Six centuries later, Jesus wept over the same city and for the same two reasons: their stubborn sinfulness and the suffering it was to bring them (Luke 19:41-44).

Thirdly, Richard Chenevix Trench describes a mourning that arises “out of a sense of exile here, of our separation from the true home of our spirits, out of a longing for the eternal Sabbath”.⁸ This too is a sadness included in the promise of comfort and joy.

Jesus promises that those who mourn in these ways will find superlative happiness in God.

Such sorrow is an inward sorrow, between each of us and our Lord. There is no sense in this beatitude that Christians should be dour and moody with those around them. Although we never read of Jesus laughing, He surely made others laugh with His humorous images of planks of wood in our eyes or camels being threaded through needles. He went to wedding receptions and made sure there was plenty of good wine (John 2:1-10). In fact, He was criticised for enjoying the normal pleasures of life (Matthew 11:19).

The Christian life is a serious business but we should not be over-solemn as believers in earlier generations sometimes were. Just as there is no advantage in material poverty, so there is no advantage in general misery. Neither poverty nor misery are good in themselves. The promise of this beatitude is only for particular kinds of mourning. Nor should we force ourselves to seem always bright and bubbly, as some today feel is essential for Christians.

We should grieve over our own sins, over the suffering and sins of others, and as we yearn for our heavenly Home, but God’s comfort gives us inexpressible joy.



lessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)

In the third beatitude, we must again overcome the hindrance of the English language to understand what Jesus is really saying. Meekness is neither weakness nor grovelling. It is about voluntary powerlessness in our relationships



with other people. It is about controlled strength. At the same time it is about gentleness, teachability and deep humility. It is something like that greatly undervalued fruit of the Spirit, self-control (Galatians 5:23) but even better, for the meek person is not so much self-controlled as God-controlled.

The Greek word is *praus*, which is also used for domesticated animals or for breaking in a horse. A meek believer is like the young donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-7). Although the colt had never been ridden before and could have been expected to try to throw off anyone seated on it, it chose to submit to Jesus's control. A meek person wants to take Jesus's yoke, like an ox, and learn from Him (Matthew 11:29).

Meekness does not exclude righteous anger. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle defined *praotes* (meekness) as the happy medium between too much anger and too little anger. A meek person does not react with anger about insults or injuries done to himself or herself but may be rightly angry about what others are suffering or about an insult to the Lord.

Moses is described as the meekest person on earth (Numbers 12:3, sometimes translated as the most humble) but we know that he was on occasion very angry (Exodus 11:8; 32:19). Jesus drove the money-changers and merchants out of the Temple courts with a whip (John 2:13-16).

The promise for the meek is that they will inherit the earth. This is the very last thing to be expected, humanly speaking, for those who are not assertive on their own behalf, who do not claim their rights, who make themselves the servants of all. Such a person would be expected to succumb as prey to the power-play and plotting of others. Yet it is a promise that goes back to one of David's psalms:

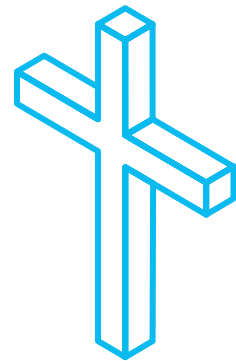
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider

- 1 In the New International Version translation
- 2 It is confusing that the English "happy" has its roots more than 500 years ago in the Middle English word "hap" meaning "good luck", which suggests a joy dependent on circumstances. That is the exact opposite of what Jesus is teaching here. The nuances and shades of meaning that the word lost half a millennium ago should not be applied to it now. It should be understood simply as happiness in its plain everyday 21st-century meaning.
- 3 J. Oswald Sanders, *The World's Greatest Sermon* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972), pp.24, 30.

his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:10-11 AV)

A person who is truly meek is always satisfied and content, as if they owned the whole world. Paul told the Corinthians he had nothing yet possessed everything (2 Corinthians 6:10). He also told them that "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22) and that one day they would judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2).

There is great joy for the meek and humble who lay their own rights to one side and seek to serve others.



In the topsy-turvy kingdom of heaven those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted (Luke 1:52; 14:11), the first will be last and the last will be first (Matthew 20:16), the sad will be happy and the meek will inherit the earth.

DR PATRICK SOOKHDEO

International Director, Barnabas Aid

- 4 G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible, Chapter by Chapter in One Volume* (Grand Rapids MI, Fleming H. Revell, 1959) p.410.
- 5 Quoted in Sanders, *The World's Greatest Sermon*, p.22.
- 6 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol.1.* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1959) p.42.
- 7 For example, Matthew 6:19-21, 24-33; 19:16-30.
- 8 Richard Chenevix Trench, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine with Observations (London: John W. Parker, 1844), p.8.

International Headquarters

The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 5DB, UK
Telephone 01672 564938 **Email** info@barnabasaid.org
Fax 01672 565030

New Zealand

PO Box 276018, Manukau City, Auckland 2241
Telephone (09) 280 4385 or 0800 008 805
Email office@barnabasaid.org.nz

Australia

GPO Box 612, Adelaide SA 5001 **Telephone** (08) 8117 8079
 or 1300 365 799 **Email** bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org

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

Barnabas Aid Australia is a charitable institution but gifts are not tax deductible. Barnabas Aid Australia is a registered business name of Barnabas Fund Australia. ABN 70 005 572 485.



Finding encouragement through barnabas+



The experience of Mariam and her daughter Manuela is a powerful testimony of the strength and faith of persecuted Christians

Mother and daughter Mariam and Manuela were among the many Christians forced to leave Iraq because of the persecution and violence that believers faced under Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh).

IS had captured parts of Iraq and Syria and imposed sharia (Islamic law) in those areas. Christians were targeted for their faith, and many were killed or forced to flee their homes.

Mariam heard about IS members killing pastors and churchgoers, as well as reports of women being raped. When her family started receiving threats because of their Christian faith, they knew they had to leave Iraq. They fled to Jordan, where they found refuge among fellow believers who welcomed and supported them.

During this time, they received food through Barnabas Aid's food.gives project, which helped to sustain them during a trying and difficult period in their lives.

The story of Manuela and Mariam is just one of the incredible testimonies of God's goodness and grace through times of suffering, persecution and

affliction available for you to watch on Barnabas+.

Demonstrating the faithfulness of God

Barnabas+ – the free streaming service produced by Barnabas Aid, available on smartphones, the web or TV – offers a variety of quality Christian films, animations, documentaries, and more.

As well as Barnabas Originals – short features and films produced by Barnabas, such as the account of Mariam and Manuela – there are hours of Christian content available.

This includes Bible teaching, short devotionals designed to uplift and inspire, Gospel-based children's TV shows, and Christian apologetics that re-affirm the truth of our faith.

The aim of sharing accounts of suffering and persecution is never to burden or discourage – but rather to encourage and inspire. Such accounts remind us that the Lord remains faithful through our trials and tribulations. They also remind us that we are not alone but part of a worldwide family of believers, from whom we can learn how to endure suffering with a thankful heart full of praises to our Lord Jesus.

watch it now on
barnabasplus.tv



Manuela: A Story of an Iraqi Refugee is available now on Barnabas+

Barnabas+ can be accessed at **www.barnabasplus.tv** and is available on multiple devices. New programmes are added every month.

Subscribing to Barnabas+ is free, so you can learn more about the inspiring accounts of Christian brothers and sisters worldwide. It is also an excellent way to introduce other Christians to the needs of the suffering and persecuted believers.

So, if you want to watch inspiring content and be encouraged in your faith while also making a positive impact in the lives of our brothers and sisters, subscribe to **Barnabas+** today.

Christmas martyrs in the Great Persecution

Nobody knows the year for sure, but the day was Christmas Day and the place was Izmit in Turkey.

Nobody knows the exact number of believers who perished in the blazing churches, but it was many thousands.

For a few decades (286-330 AD) Izmit, then called Nicomedia, was the most important city in the Roman Empire. During that time it also became, for a while, the scene of intense anti-Christian persecution. Tradition records that 20,000 Nicomedian Christians were martyred.

Soon after Diocletian became emperor in 284, he divided the vast and unwieldy empire into two halves: east and west. He himself ruled the eastern half, with Nicomedia as his capital and Galerius as a junior emperor (to assist him and later take the senior emperor position). The western half was ruled from Rome by another pair of senior and junior emperors.

The Christian faith was flourishing in Nicomedia and, by the beginning of the fourth century, it was said that half the city's population were Christians. Many in the emperor's household were believers, which to begin with was not an issue. Diocletian, although a worshipper of the Roman gods, was quite favourably inclined towards Christians. Later, however, he was persuaded, especially by Galerius, to start persecuting Christians.

The edicts of Emperor Diocletian

Apparently Diocletian at first hoped that he could repress Christianity without bloodshed, for example, by purging the imperial household and army of Christians.

But soon things grew much worse. Over a period of about a year, beginning 24 February 303, Diocletian issued four edicts for the suppression of Christianity. The first forbade Christians to gather for worship and decreed that Christian Scriptures were to be burned and church buildings

destroyed. Christians in public service were demoted and deprived of their civil rights. Christian freedmen were made slaves again, which meant they could legally be tortured. The day before issuing this edict, Diocletian had ordered that a church building in Nicomedia, near to the imperial palace, be razed to the ground and its Scriptures burned.



Emperor Diocletian [Image credit: Dennis Jarvis, flickr]

No penalties were mentioned in the first edict, so local magistrates could be as harsh or lenient as they chose in punishing transgressors. The later edicts became gradually more specific and severe. The second edict ordered church leaders to be imprisoned. Soon the prisons were so full of Christian clergy that there was no room for ordinary criminals. Towards the end of the year, a third edict offered the prisoners their freedom if they would sacrifice to the Roman gods, but torture and mutilation if they refused. The fourth edict (early 304) ruled that everyone must sacrifice to the Roman gods. The punishment for those who refused was death and the confiscation of their property. It was in this context, known as “the

Great Persecution”, that countless Nicomedians died for Christ.

“Should we not lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?”

As the Great Persecution proceeded, Christians were daily being arrested, tortured and executed in various cruel ways. At the request of his flock, Anthimos, Bishop of Nicomedia, went into hiding in a nearby village. From here he continued to encourage the Christians who remained in the city, sending them written messages urging them to stand firm in the faith.

One Christmas many thousands of Nicomedian Christians were burned to death in the churches where they had gathered in large numbers to celebrate Christ's birth. On imperial orders, the army piled wood and kindling around the church walls and set up an altar to the Roman gods outside the door. The Christians were commanded to sacrifice to the Roman gods as they left the building, or remain inside and be burned to death. Soldiers with swords drawn were ready to deal with any who tried to escape. Thousands perished, singing, in the flames.

A courageous leader in one church urged the congregation to remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the young men who were thrown into a blazing furnace in Babylon for exactly the same issue as faced the Nicomedians, that is, refusing to worship an idol (Daniel 3:1-27). He continued:

Now a new Nebuchadnezzar, not a whit less cruel or ungodly than the old, prepares a furnace for us, so let us emulate them. They were mere children, only three in number, lacking examples of bravery to imitate in contending for the Lord. But there is an enormous crowd of us, and many of our number have reached old age. Furthermore, we have numerous models of courageous suffering for Christ to inspire us. May love for this fleeting existence

not turn us into snivelling cowards! May we never prefer the present life to God, Who created us and underwent death in the flesh for our sake! Truly, it would be a pity if we failed to understand that the approaching contest is a wondrous opportunity for us to prove our faith unshakeable.

This is so, even if there were no reward at all for sufferings endured for Christ. But how paltry is the pain inflicted by tormentors compared with the recompense awaiting martyrs beyond the grave! Is it any wonder that the saints are eager to exchange a few days or years here for eternal felicity; the transitory esteem of men for everlasting glory, riches that cannot be taken away, and joy unending? What holds us to the earth? Why do we not hasten to die for Christ and gain the celestial realm, while we have the chance?

He also reminded them that Holy Communion, as celebrated in the Church, commemorated the Lord's sacrifice for them, so "should we not lay down our lives for Him in this holy place?"

The congregation responded with a shout: "We are Christians! We are Christians, and refuse to worship your false gods, O Emperor!"

They were filled with great zeal to die for Christ. And die they did, for they were not delivered from the flames as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been. Perhaps they spoke to the Roman soldiers the same words of faith and courage that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego used to King Nebuchadnezzar: "The God we serve is able to save us ... and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3:17-18)

God, in His sovereign wisdom, chose not to save the Nicomedians from the flames but to grant them the gift they now yearned for – to die for Christ.

Anthimos, Theophilus and Christian prisoners

Meanwhile Bishop Anthimos was sending letters to Christians in Nicomedia, especially those in prison. Once a deacon called Theophilus was caught bringing in such a letter. The enraged emperor ordered some of the jailed Christians to be brought into his presence where he berated them severely and then gave them the letter. The Christians noticed Theophilus standing some distance away and smiled affectionately at him. This caused the emperor to turn his wrath on Theophilus, demanding to know the author of the letter. Theophilus answered boldly who it was but said he would never betray the bishop by revealing his location. The bishop was pastoring his flock by letter-writing, said Theophilus, and was encouraging them with words spoken by the pre-eminent Shepherd: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28, NKJV).

"But how paltry is the pain inflicted by tormentors compared with the recompense awaiting martyrs beyond the grave!"

For this speech, Theophilus had his tongue cut out. Then he and the others were killed.

Troops set off to search for Anthimos. They found him but did not recognise him. Promising to show them the bishop they sought, Anthimos fed them as his guests and then revealed his identity. The astonished soldiers offered to report back that they had failed to find Anthimos, but the bishop insisted on returning with them to Nicomedia. On the way he shared the Gospel and the soldiers were converted and baptised. Anthimos was beheaded.

After Diocletian

In the western half of the empire, where the edicts were never very rigorously enforced, persecution ceased altogether when Diocletian abdicated in 305 owing to ill health. Galerian took his place as senior emperor in the east and continued harshly enforcing Diocletian's four edicts, adding a fifth of his own in 308. This included the command that everything sold in the markets must

be sprinkled with offerings made to the gods, thus polluting it in the eyes of Christians. The aim was doubtless to starve the Christians, although Galerian generally seemed to prefer burning them alive.

It appears that at times there were too many Christians to kill, so they were maimed instead. In about 309 a group of 97 Egyptian Christians – men, women and children – were sent to the copper mines in Palestine, which was then under the rule of an exceptionally ruthless governor called Firmillianus. Each of the 97 had their right eye blinded by sword and fire and their left leg disabled by hot irons. The same punishment was inflicted on other Christians, including a group "in the city of Gaza, being in the habit of assembling themselves for prayer and being constant in reading the Holy Scriptures".¹

On his painful, stinking and revolting deathbed, Galerius issued one more edict. This time it was an edict of toleration (30 April 311), reversing the earlier edicts. A few days later he died.

Yet the Great Persecution did not stop. Galerius was succeeded by Maximin, who refused to sign Galerius's edict of toleration. It seems, however, that Maximin must have indicated that the degree of pressure put on Christians could be decided locally. Thousands of Christians were released from mines and from exile and in some places new church buildings were constructed and ruined ones restored. But in Tyre the town council put up a plaque forbidding Christianity within the city and in Nicomedia the citizens begged Maximin for permission to banish Christians. The martyrdoms continued.

The Great Persecution finally came to an end in 313 when Emperor Maximin was defeated in battle.

The story of the Nicomedian martyrs appears in Patrick Sookhdeo's book of 366 daily devotional readings on Christian martyrs, *Heroes of Our Faith Vol. 2*. (Isaac Publishing, 2021, ISBN 978-1-952450-15-0) See entry for December 25. To purchase a copy please go to barnabasaid.org/resources/books or contact your nearest Barnabas Aid office (addresses on inside front cover) or write to sales@barnabasbooks.org

¹ Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, lived from c.260 to c.339. This description and quotation come from his book *History of the Martyrs in Palestine*, edited and translated by William Cureton (published in London and Edinburgh by Williams and Norgate, 1861). See pp.26-28.



Children help their parents to gather Barnabas-funded supplies

Hope and strength amid the terror

Barnabas relief aid provides comfort to victims of Pakistan riots



have never been exposed to such an extreme fear and mass life threatening situation,” Pakistani Sunday school teacher Mrs Shazia told Barnabas.

The widowed mother-of-three was describing the terrifying events of 16 August 2023 when a mob of extremist Muslims rampaged through the Christian area of Jaranwala, a city in Punjab, burning and looting.

By the time the violence subsided the extremists had ransacked 27 churches as well as pastors’ houses, burned to ashes hundreds of Bibles, set fire to church furniture and carried away anything of value.

Families run for their lives

The homes of more than 100 Christian families were attacked. Around half of these were burned to the ground, while others were looted and vandalised, with household items smashed to pieces.

“We had to run away to the fields to save our lives. Nobody was willing to provide us shelter,” recalled Mrs Shazia.

“All the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels about the troubles of the Church in the last days flashed through my mind repeatedly.”

Returning to her community, Mrs Shazia discovered her home in ruins. All the books and materials she used to teach Sunday school were destroyed. The mob – whom she describes as acting with savagery – took everything of value, including items belonging to her newly married son. “Nothing was spared,” she said.

Working closely with our project partners on the ground, Barnabas funded emergency aid for 172 families (around 1,032 individuals) worst affected by the violence.

We provided each family with a package of food, including staples like wheat flour, rice, pulses, cooking oil and tea; a hygiene kit made up of soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, towels, washing



Christian victims of the violence pick up Barnabas-funded food, hygiene supplies and household equipment

powder and women's sanitary pads; as well as two plastic buckets and two mugs.

We also replaced kitchen items lost in the destruction. Families received a set of three pans plus one for making the Pakistani flatbread roti, plates, bowls, cups, cutlery, kitchen knives, a jug with six plastic beakers plus a plastic bucket with a lid for flour storage.

“God provides for all our needs”

In phase two of the aid delivery we are providing each of the 172 families with a second food package, clothing and winter bedding.

Mrs Shazia was deeply touched by these gifts funded by your donations.

“It's not merely relief supplies,” she told us. “For me it is sharing of love which strengthened me and made me realise that God cares for us and provides for all our needs beyond our expectations.”

The rioting broke out after torn pages of the Quran were found in the street and Muslims, incited by mosque leaders, blamed local Christians.

“Barnabas Aid stood side by side with us ... and gave us hope”

“It appeared as if we'd all be killed like animals,” said Martha, a Christian whose home was plundered and burned. “But thanks to our God who protected us.”

“We felt hopeless,” she added as she reflected on the damage inflicted on churches and the Christian community.

She thanked Barnabas for providing families with “desperately needed” practical help.

“We highly appreciate that Barnabas Aid stood side by side with us in our hard times and gave us hope and feelings that our big global family in Christ always cares for us.”



Debris litters the street outside one of the churches attacked in Jaranwala [Image credit: M. Arif/White Star]

Nisar, a Christian who runs a scrap metal business, recalled being alarmed by an early morning announcement from the local mosque that he said incited Muslims against Christians.

Police took him and his family from their home before it was plundered and burned down.

Thankful for relief supplies

“I am an old man,” said Nisar. “All that I have gathered over a lifetime has been looted and destroyed in just one day. All my business and livelihood are lost.”

It was the first time that he felt that Pakistan was not safe for Christians. “Churches and Holy Bibles were burned and we could do nothing,” he said.

Nisar added, “But we are thankful to Barnabas Aid team who visited us, comforted us with new hopes and provided us with emergency relief supplies. They were desperately required as we have lost all we had.

“May God bless Barnabas Aid always in all ways.”



Sunday school teacher Mrs Shazia with her 11-year-old son Saloush

Thousands flee “war crimes” after Azerbaijan invades Christian enclave

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Thousands of Armenian Christians fled Nagorno-Karabakh after Azerbaijan seized the enclave in a military operation on 19 September. At the time of writing, more than 100,000 refugees had crossed into Armenia.

The military action follows Azerbaijan’s blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only land route between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia itself, which began on 12 December 2022.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said he expected thousands more people to follow because they fear “the danger of ethnic cleansing”.

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Primate of the Armenian Church of the UK and Ireland, said, “There are reports of mass killings, raping and torturing of people. A scene of war crimes is unfolding.”



Armenian Christian children among the thousands displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh [Image credit: Arman Tatoyan/UNCRC]

Converts told to undergo Islamic classes amid clampdown

IRAN

At least 69 Christian converts were arrested by security forces in five cities across north-western Iran in the period 11-18 July.

The believers were arrested at their homes or venues for “house churches” in Tehran, Karaj, Rasht, Orumiyyeh and Aligoudarz. At the time of writing, the charges against them are unknown and at least 10 remain in detention.

Worship in Iran’s majority language Farsi (Persian) is forbidden and Farsi-speaking Christians are typically charged with “acting against national security”.

Those released were forced to sign commitments not to undertake any Christian activities, or ordered to undergo Islamic re-education classes.

Riots devastate Christian community in Jaranwala, Punjab

PAKISTAN

Homes and church buildings were destroyed in anti-Christian riots that swept across the Pakistani city of Jaranwala, Punjab, on 16 August.

Armed mobs, reportedly incited by local mosque leaders, attacked the Christian community after torn pages of the Quran were allegedly discovered nearby.

Twenty-seven church buildings were attacked, with five of them set ablaze, in riots lasting several hours. More than 100 houses of Christians were ransacked and some were set on fire. Bibles and hymnbooks were also burned, while a Christian cemetery was desecrated.

Hundreds of Christian families fled for safety to nearby fields or to the city of Faisalabad about 40 kilometres away.

Two brothers, both Christians, were accused of desecrating the pages of the Quran. They were charged under sections 295C and 295B of the Pakistan Penal Code for allegedly committing “blasphemy”. At the time of writing, police have also arrested 160 people for involvement in the violence.

Tensions and anti-Christian feeling have increased in Pakistan in recent months, fuelled in part by a Quran-burning incident by an Iraqi atheist in Sweden for which Islamist extremists held Christians responsible.

The Lahore-based Islamist terrorist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi threatened to “make Pakistan a hell for Christianity” and vowed to begin “waging suicide attacks on Christians of Pakistan”.

Church leaders, however, had already condemned the Quran burning. “We always have [raised] and will continue to raise our voices against such recurring religiously provocative actions,” said Dr Azad Marshall, President of the Church of Pakistan.

Barnabas helps Jaranwala victims, p.14

Abducted Christian charity worker and daughter freed after two weeks

HAITI

Christian charity worker Alix Dorsainvil and her daughter were released two weeks after being abducted in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on 27 July.

The charity confirmed their safe release in a statement on 9 August, adding, "Today we are praising God for answered prayer!"

Alix – a nurse from New Hampshire, United States – is a staff member at a Haitian Christian humanitarian organisation and married to the charity's director and founder Sandro.

As of August 2023, there were nearly 300 cases of abductions in Haiti since the beginning of the year. "The growing trend in kidnappings and abductions is extremely worrisome," said UNICEF Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Gary Conille, "threatening both the people of Haiti and those who have come to help."



Alix Dorsainvil – pictured with her husband Sandro, the founder of a Haitian Christian charity – was released along with their young daughter [Image credit: El Roi Haiti]

Islamic State announces beheading of Christian fisherman

MOZAMBIQUE

A Christian fisherman in Cabo Delgado Province, northern Mozambique, was beheaded by jihadists on 9 July.

According to a report in the official Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh) newspaper the terrorists abducted two men, both fishermen, near Litamanda. The other man was allowed to go free because he was a Muslim.

The militant Islamic State-affiliated organisation Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama, also known as IS Mozambique, has killed around 6,500 people in northern Mozambique since 2017.

More than 40 killed in Islamist attacks on Christian villages in Plateau State

NIGERIA

Twenty-one people were killed in two Christian villages in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State on 9 August.

Fulani Islamist extremists attacked Batin village at around 1.30am, killing 17. The gunmen also murdered four people in nearby Rayogot.

Twelve of the dead were internally displaced people who had fled to the area to escape previous extremist violence. Local Christians said their warnings to security services of these planned attacks had gone unheeded.

These attacks follow the killing of at least 26 people in separate attacks on communities in Mangu LGA, Plateau State, in June and July.

Anti-Christian violence is leading to the deaths of dozens of Christians every month in northern and Middle Belt states such as Plateau.

Three church leaders feared dead after abduction by military in Chin State

MYANMAR

Three deacons from a church in Mindat Township, Chin State, are feared dead after being arrested by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military).

Chai Kay, Hon Chway and Hon Kay were arrested on 16 July, and are believed to have been tortured to death. The pastor of the church, Htang Kay On, was also arrested and tortured. After being left for dead in a nearby ditch, he was able to escape and receive treatment.

Family members and church officials were initially informed on a visit to the local military base that the four men were being interrogated. On a second visit on 26 July, however, the military denied any knowledge about the situation or the men's whereabouts.

Violence against civilians by the Buddhist-extremist Tatmadaw in Christian-majority areas such as Chin, as well as other parts of the country, is continuing.



Three Christian deacons Chai Kay (left), Hon Chway (centre) and Hon Kay, are presumed dead following their arrest in Mindat, Chin State [Image credit: Radio Free Asia]

Giving in abundance and giving in poverty



The Apostle Paul was clear in his teaching that it is a Christian duty for believers to provide for their impoverished brothers and sisters.

Paul's specific priority was the relief of suffering Christians in Jerusalem who were enduring a severe famine. He did not demand donations, but urged that generous giving to the most needy believers was a sign of the sincerity of our love for Christ (2 Corinthians 8:8).

Paul argued that it was a matter of fairness for those Christians who have plenty – as many of us in the West have plenty compared to those around the world – to give generously to support their Christian family (2 Corinthians 8:13-14).

Yet he also praised those who gave in spite of their own struggles. The church in Macedonia gave in “rich generosity” despite their own “extreme poverty”, and even “urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people” (2 Corinthians 8:2,4).

Many of us are also struggling with the cost of living or our personal circumstances. The Macedonian Christians were enduring “extreme poverty”, yet they gave generously.

The trustworthiness of Paul

Along with Paul's encouragement to give generously, the churches will have been persuaded to donate by the character of the man who was collecting the

donations. Put simply, Paul was trusted.

The Apostle Paul was known for his faithfulness, continually serving Christ and His Church despite the difficulties he faced (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). He was reliable, open and transparent. He dedicated his life to service, even continuing his ministry of teaching, evangelism and prayer from prison (Philippians 1:7-12).

Paul also showed himself a good steward of the churches' resources. In Corinth Paul worked as a tentmaker, and avoided burdening the church financially (Acts 18:3; 2 Corinthians 11:9). Similarly, in Ephesus, “I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions” (Acts 20:33-34).

Paul's collection for Jerusalem was well ordered and purposeful. He gave clear instructions as to how to raise the money and how to ensure it reached those who needed it (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

Emulating Paul

At Barnabas Aid, we aim to emulate these characteristics of Paul, following his example (1 Corinthians 11:1). We too prioritise continual faithful service, having worked for 30 years to provide aid and practical support to persecuted and suffering Christians. In that time we have used our supporters' generous donations to fund around

5,000 projects in 109 countries.

We too are open and transparent, providing regular updates on how we use the money so graciously given to us.

Through these updates – published in our free bimonthly magazine, emails and project newsletters – donors to Barnabas Aid know the difference that their donations have made. They can pray for the projects they have supported with up-to-date knowledge. Above all, they will know that they are part of the Barnabas Aid community. For we are all one family of believers, one partnership and one fellowship. Everyone in the Barnabas community, whether donors, intercessors, volunteers, staff, project partners on the ground or the suffering Christians whom the projects support, seek to encourage one another in the Lord and to give Him all the glory.

Regular giving, regular blessing

Many in the Barnabas Aid community give regularly, for example by monthly Direct Debit. This is quick for our staff to process and keeps our overheads low. If you can commit to regular giving, you will know that every month your gift is blessing suffering Christians who, like you, are part of the Barnabas community.

Barnabas Aid stalwart retires

Barnabas Aid stalwart Trevor Sobey is officially retiring in November after serving as our Victorian State Coordinator for 16 years.

He served in a voluntary capacity for more than a decade before becoming a part-time staff member in 2017.

Although Trevor has served as the Victorian State Coordinator, he has also organised and led speaking tours in other States.

Australian Head of Operations Ashley Saunders recalls, "I had only started with Barnabas Aid for one week when I first met Trevor, the two of us travelling extensively through Southern and Western Queensland over more than a week, visiting eight regional/remote towns and traversing as far removed as Goondiwindi in the south and Longreach in the far central west."

Although retiring from his State Coordinator's role, Trevor will continue to represent Barnabas Aid as a volunteer speaker.

Trevor says, "Volunteering brings its own rewards from the responses received from the people you speak with and the friendships you make on the visits."

If you'd like to join Trevor in the ranks of our volunteer speakers, please make contact with the Australian office: bfaustralia@barnabasaid.org or 1300 365 799.



In spite of his official retirement, Barnabas stalwart Trevor Sobey will continue to represent us as a voluntary speaker

Remember our Egyptian brothers and sisters on Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday on 28 November 2023 is a perfect opportunity to remember Christians less fortunate than ourselves.

As we enter Advent and prepare for Christmas, Barnabas Aid is encouraging supporters to send a special Giving Tuesday gift to members of our Egyptian church family.

Many poor and marginalised Christian women and young Christian men in rural areas of this Muslim-majority country struggle to find work. Christian women are especially vulnerable, particularly if they are widowed, left without the provision and protection of a husband.

Barnabas is helping our brothers and sisters to become self-sufficient and independent financially by helping them to set up their own income-generating small businesses.

"I am now capable to pay the school fees for my daughters. I feel that I saved my children and provided them a secure future," said "Mary".

She is one of 51 Christian women (mainly widows) whom we have trained

in sewing. We have given each of them a sewing machine as well as a starter kit of cloth, needles and thread to enable them to open a business.

In phase one of the programme we have helped other young people, women and widows to set up grocery shops, shops selling herbs, and hairdressing salons.

Your gifts can help us to help even more believers.

- \$402 could buy a sewing machine
- \$180 could buy a starter kit of cloth, needles and thread
- \$76 could buy two 25kg rice sacks to sell at a grocery shop
- \$238 could buy a hairdresser's chair
- \$60 could buy a set of hairdresser's combs, scissors and towels

Please give a gift to our Egyptian church family on Giving Tuesday via our website barnabasaid.org, by post (address on inside front cover) or by phone on 1300 365 799 quoting the project reference 11-226 (Small business start-ups in Egypt).

Get involved with SCAAW 5-12 November



Please remember our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (SCAAW) from Sunday 5 November to Sunday 12 November.

Barnabas has a range of inspirational materials for you, your prayer group and your church to enable you to get involved in SCAAW through prayer and practical action.

These resources are available free of charge to download at barnabasaid.org/scaaw or can be ordered from your local Barnabas office (details on the inside front cover).

Bless our suffering Church family with a Christmas offering



Soon we will be joining Christians all over the world to remember and celebrate the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

This year so many of our already marginalised brothers and sisters have endured additional hardships because of

conflict as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and floods.

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



Egyptian Christian women receive Barnabas-funded training in sewing

**Can your church take up
a special offering for the
suffering Christians of
Nagorno-Karabakh?**

Help the broken people of Nagorno- Karabakh



30,000 hungry and traumatised Christian children fled with their parents to Armenia in the last week of September.

They were the children of Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenians have lived for more than 2,000 years. In their young lives, most had experienced bombardment, hiding in cellars, and nine months of desperate food scarcity that was followed with a full-scale military invasion by Azerbaijan on 19 September.

Within a few days it was clear that their beloved homeland was lost, a land filled with ancient churches and vibrant Christian faith.

Almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh – that is 120,000 people – are now in Armenia. Their bodies are weakened by months of near-starvation. Their minds are frantic with worry about relatives

who disappeared in September, probably captured by Azerbaijan. Their spirits are broken as they grieve for the land they will never see again. They feel a terrible sense of failure to protect this Christian enclave, which for 1,700 years stood as a witness to Jesus Christ. They are afraid of the future – how will they live?

Give them help. Give them healing. Give them hope.

Barnabas Aid helped the Christians of Nagorno-Karabakh after it was attacked in 2020 and much of the territory seized by Azerbaijan.

Barnabas Aid helped the Christians of Nagorno-Karabakh during the blockade (December 2022 to September 2023), getting food into them by channels which God gave us.

Barnabas Aid is still helping the Christians of Nagorno-Karabakh, now that they are refugees in Armenia.

The world may not care about them, but we do.

Share with us in this task as we help Christian refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh to re-establish their lives in Armenia. It is a God-given privilege. It is a joy.

Could your church help a Christian family set up home again with beds, mattresses, a table and chairs, a fridge and cooking things?

Could your home-group make a gift of chickens, sheep or a beehive so Christians can earn a livelihood and feel a renewed sense of self-worth?

Could your Sunday School provide pens, pencils and notebooks for a Christian child to enable them to go to school again?

**Could you give a gift yourself?
Any amount will help.**

Will you ask your church leaders to take up a special offering for Armenian Christian refugees during Suffering Church Action and Awareness Week (5–12 November 2023)?

Or send your own personal donation by filling in the donation form enclosed with this magazine, writing project reference code PR1539 where indicated.

You can also make a donation online at www.barnabasaid.org/help-armenia

