

Barnabas Prayer Focus

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hope and aid for the persecuted church

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Nigeria – Over 300 Nigerian Christians slain in merciless killing spree by Fulani militants since February; while God’s intervention saves 72 captive Nigerian Christians from Boko Haram firing squad

Barnabas Fund contacts have reported two similar stories from Nigeria, with very contrasting outcomes. In one report nearly 300 people were killed in at least seven predominantly Christian villages by Fulani militants across Kaduna State, Nigeria, in February and March 2019. In another report, the Lord’s intervention saved the lives of 72 captive Nigerian Christians, most of them young children, moments from certain death at the hands of a Boko Haram firing squad.

In a dawn attack on Karamai on 14 February, 41 people died when some 300 gunmen engulfed the village, chanting “Allahu Akbar!” as they fired their guns and ransacked homes. Almost all the dead were women and children.

Up to 71 people were killed and 28 injured in an attack on 11 March in Dogon Noma village. An eyewitness said the gunmen were “torching houses, shooting and hacking down anything that moved”. Some 100 houses were destroyed.

Nine were reportedly killed in Nandu Gbok on 16 March and 30 houses destroyed.

In Kajuru district in February and March, the bodies of about 73 women, some pregnant, and 101 children,

ranging from babies on their mothers’ backs up to 10-year-olds, were interred in a mass burial.

Elsewhere in Nigeria, a group of 76 Muslim-background Christians were taken to a Boko Haram camp where the four male leaders were shot in front of their families for refusing to renounce their faith in Christ. The wives of the four martyrs were ordered to renounce their faith or their children would be executed the next day. That night the Lord Jesus appeared to the group assuring them that He would protect them and they should not renounce Him but stay strong knowing that “He is the way, the truth and the life”.

When the mothers refused to renounce Jesus Christ and return to Islam, the Boko Haram militants prepared to take aim at the children, but then started to scream and shout “Snakes!” Some ran away and others dropped dead where they stood. One of the children said, “Can’t you see the men in white fighting for us?”

Cry out to the Lord, weeping with those who weep (Romans 12:15), asking for the Lord to comfort those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Pray that Nigerian Christians facing callous and relentless attacks by militant Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram fighters will find a safe refuge and a strong fortress in God, in whom they trust (Psalm 91:2). Rejoice and give thanks to God who intervened and gave the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57) to the survivors of the Boko Haram firing

squad. Pray that their remarkable testimony of deliverance, as well as the unflinching courage of the four martyrs, will be a shining light that leads others, including Muslim militants, to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indonesia – Christians in Indonesia ask for prayer in run up to presidential elections

General elections will be held in Indonesia on Wednesday 17 April, along with elections for the president and vice-president. Indonesian Christians have asked for prayer for peace and security during this time, as it is thought likely that Islamist radicals will be planning violent attacks.

The current president, Joko Widodo, has been very good to Christians, and attacks on churches have significantly decreased during his five years in office. He is standing again for another five-year term.

Lift up in prayer the forthcoming elections in Indonesia, asking that the Lord’s hand and guidance will be over every aspect of the elections, including the results. Pray that peace and security will be maintained in the country as the election approaches. Pray that any violent attacks planned by Islamist radicals will be thwarted, and the LORD’s plans for that nation will come to pass (Job 42:2). Thank God for the favourable treatment given to Christians by President Joko Widodo and pray for a continuation of this policy into the new government.

Pakistan – Mentally disabled Christian man charged with “blasphemy” in Pakistan

Stephen Masih, a mentally disabled Christian man, was charged with “blasphemy” in Punjab, Pakistan on 11 March following a complaint by two Muslim men who claimed he made derogatory remarks against Muhammad in their presence and ignored their requests to stop.

The complaint was lodged at Badiana police station in Sialkot District by local Islamic cleric Hafiz Muhammad Mudassar under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carries a mandatory death sentence. Stephen is being held in police custody while investigations continue.

Stephen, 38, lives with his elder sister Alia and their mother, who is bedridden because of serious illness. At the age of about ten he had typhoid fever which caused damage to his brain, leaving him mentally disabled. Stephen’s family is too poor to pay for the medicine he needs to control the fits and vocal outbursts of bad language caused by his mental disability.

On 11 March Stephen became involved in a quarrel with the wife of Hafiz Muhammad Mudassar. She and a woman friend threatened to report Stephen to the police because “he often used filthy language against the local women”. A crowd of Muslim men, including Muslim clerics, later gathered and brutally beat Stephen while Alia begged for his life. The beating only stopped when the police arrived and took Stephen into custody.

Alia conceded that Stephen used bad language to local women but said he did not utter any derogatory remarks against Muhammad. She said the family had lived happily among the Muslim community for up to 35 years, but now, for the first time, they are scared for their lives because of the false “blasphemy” accusation.

Intercede for Stephen Masih, asking that the Lord will provide someone to speak up for this vulnerable man and that his case will be judged fairly (Proverbs 31:8-9). Pray that the Spirit of the Lord

will bring him peace and calm as he waits alone in custody and that the LORD will keep watch over the door of his mouth (Psalm 141:3). Pray for his mother and sister Alia that the Lord will protect them in their day-to-day lives amongst the Muslim community.

China – Children among 44 new arrests, journalist detained and pastor’s mother beaten by police as persecution intensifies in China

A further 44 arrests of Early Rain Covenant Church members were made on 24 February, including ten children and a two-month-old baby, and a Chinese Christian journalist has been arrested after writing about how the elderly mother of detained Pastor Wang Yi was savagely beaten by a police officer.

Journalist and church deacon Zhang Guoqing was missing for several days before it was discovered he was being held in police custody for “provoking trouble”, according to a statement issued by the church in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on 2 March.

Mr Zhang had published a story of how the pastor’s mother, Chen Yaxue, was beaten up by a policeman on 24 February. He described in the article how one officer grabbed her hair and kicked her, while another held her down, after she refused to reveal her PIN number to him at an ATM.

According to a recent statement by the church posted on Facebook, eight Christian families from Early Rain Covenant Church were evicted from their homes and two fired from their jobs after police pressured landlords and employers. Twelve Christians are currently being held in criminal detention and one is missing.

Pray for the members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in China still held in detention, asking the LORD to be a shield of protection around them (Psalm 3:3). Pray for the Lord’s provision for those who have lost their homes and jobs. Ask for healing both physically and mentally for Chen Yaxue, the elderly mother of Pastor Wang Yi, who suffered a

cruel assault by the police. May the grace and peace of Him who is, and who was, and who is to come (Revelation 1:4) fall upon the Early Rain Covenant Church and protect them against further attacks from the Chinese authorities.

India – Christian father of five beheaded in Odisha, India by Maoist Naxalites

A Christian father of five was beheaded on 11 February in Odisha (formerly Orissa) state, eastern India, because of his Christian faith.

Anant Ram Gand, 40, had become a Christian nine months earlier. His more recent baptism, in December 2018, had angered locals in Raigarh Tehsil village, Nabarangapur district, according to local Christian leader Shibu Thomas. Reportedly, the execution-style murder was carried out by Maoist Naxalites, a communist guerrilla group, at the behest of local extremists.

Anant’s six-year-old son Purno witnessed his father being dragged out of their home by three men on the day he was killed. The terrified boy ran after his father crying and was told by the three assailants not to follow. Anant’s wife and four young daughters, aged 13, 11, 3 and 2, were not at home at the time of the abduction. Anant’s body and severed head were later found on a nearby road.

“I ask the prime minister and the governors to speak clearly against persecution of Christians,” said Thomas. “The Christians of the villages live in fear.”

Ask that the LORD will comfort the wife and five young children of Anant Ram Gand, shielding them from further persecution in the local community and sustaining them in their time of trouble (Psalm 3:3,5). Give thanks for the courageous life of Anant Ram Gand who through his recent baptism testified to his village his wholehearted commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember in prayer all Christians who live in fear of persecution as minority people in villages throughout India, asking that the Lord’s strength will be made perfect in their weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

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