

A Cry from Syria's Christians: 'No One Is Protecting Us'

Last week, hundreds of Christians were caught in the political crossfire that has raged in Syria for 14 years. Among those killed were women and even babies.

"I feel there is no safety," said one witness of the massacres that occurred on the coastal region of Syria, in the city of Latakia. "There is nowhere to escape to, and no one to defend us."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 830 civilians were killed last week in the attacks, along with 231 Syrian security forces and 250 militants that were loyal to deposed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The new government, which is loyal to the Islamic militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is viewed as hostile to the minority Christian population.

An anonymous Christian who spoke to Fox News said Islamists "want to kill all of us. They don't want us in Syria. We have to flee Syria. They are seeking revenge from the former regime. I am asking for protection and to live in dignity, because we can be killed at any moment."

Ruwayda, a 36-year-old Christian woman, told Agence France-Presse: "There's a feeling that no one is protecting us."

Syria is home to a sizeable population of Syrian Christians, most of them part of an Orthodox community that has lived in this country for centuries. Father Bahjat Karakach, who leads the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in the city of Aleppo, told the media: "I ask you to pray for us, we need it so much, let us raise our prayers to the good Lord who knows how to

work miracles.”

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Syria is no stranger to New Testament-style miracles. The apostle Paul—who persecuted Christians when he was a zealous Pharisee—had a dramatic conversion in Syria, on the road to Damascus. The book of Acts tells us that Paul later made disciples while preaching in Syria, at the beginning of his ministry (see Acts 9:19-25).

God is still in the business of revealing Himself to people who are hostile to Christianity. I observed this up-close a few weeks ago when I interviewed a man named Isa in eastern Uganda. Isa was raised in a strict Muslim family, but he began to explore the Christian faith when he faced a health crisis at age 18.

“I developed a tumor on my arm, and I was very scared that it was cancer,” Isa told me. He went to witchdoctors as well as to Islamic clerics to find a cure, but the lump was still there. Yet after he met some Christians, he started listening to a radio broadcast that featured a Pentecostal preacher.

“I heard this man preaching about Jesus, and then he began talking about healing,” Isa said. “He then invited listeners to lay their hands on the radio, and he said Jesus can heal.” So Isa put his hands on the radio, and he prayed from his heart for a miracle.

When Isa woke up the next morning, the tumor was gone.

“Immediately I went to a Christian church, and I told the people that I was now a believer,” Isa said. But later, when he informed his parents that he had become a Christian, his father got so angry that he disowned his son.

Yet today, this man who was rejected by his parents is the pastor of a growing church in his city—and he is reaching many

Muslims for Christ.

Isa's story gives me great hope for the Syrian people, because I know that the Holy Spirit is moving in supernatural ways to reveal Jesus to those who are trapped in old religious traditions.

Here are some key ways to pray for Syria:

> Pray that Syria's new interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, will not promote the wholesale killing of civilians in his country, and that all genocide plots will be exposed and stopped.

> Syria has one of the highest percentages of displaced people in the world—7.2 million. Many of them have fled to Turkey, Lebanon or Europe. Two million Syrian children are unable to attend school, and 90 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line. Pray that the international community will offer aid.

> A huge percentage of Syria's Christians have been driven from the country. Pray for the tiny minority of believers who remain there to be a bright light in the darkness. ** Pray that the Muslims in Syria will be open to the gospel as the message spreads through online sermons, films, videos and local believers. Pray that those who are full of hate will experience dramatic conversions just as Paul did 2,000 years ago on a dusty Syrian road.