

Persecution in Iraq

“Christians [in Iraq] are the victims terrorists.” – Monsignor Rabban

On a trip I made to Kurdistan recently at the invitation of President Masoud Barzani, I was alerted to the plight of Iraqi Christians. While in the city of Irbil, I met with a high-level government official, a very humble man, who is a Christian. As we sipped tea, he told me about two attempts by terrorists to kill him and an attempt by Saddam Hussein to poison him. Hussein almost succeeded.

This gentleman told me that Christian women had acid thrown in their faces for not wearing the Muslim burqa, pastors were beheaded for preaching the gospel and more than 12,000 Iraqi Christians had moved to Kurdistan. The Kurds are providing food and shelter for them.

The invitation to return to Kurdistan came as a result of a trip I had made into that region during the first Persian Gulf War. I traveled into the mountains of Iraq to take medicine, blankets and food to the Kurds who had fled their homes to escape gas attacks by Hussein's army. Some 200,000 Kurdish men, women and children died in that war.

I also had the opportunity to share the gospel with the Kurds. While standing in a muddy field in the rain, I told the story of Jonah and described how the king and people of Nineveh had repented after Jonah delivered God's word to them.

An old man in the crowd stood, and with tears streaming down his face, accepted Christ. He pleaded with me, “Come to my city; we will repent.” To my astonishment, he was a Kurdish

sheik with authority over 16 provinces in northern Iraq, and his capital city was Nineveh.

During my recent trip, I was told that tens of thousands of Christians had fled Sunni and Shiite strongholds near the valley of Nineveh, a few miles from Irbil. Reportedly, some 5,000 Christian families have sought sanctuary in Kurdistan to escape the terrorist bombings, kidnappings and persecution from Islamic radicals. Christian villages are rising from the ashes of those razed by Hussein's army.

The bishop of Irbil in Kurdistan, Monsignor Rabban, says, "Christians are the victims of ... fanatic terrorists who are proceeding to a real religious cleansing. ... It is disaster for all Iraq."

Although Kurdistan had been free from terrorist attacks for nearly two years, terrorists proved this spring that they will stop at nothing to create chaos and upheaval. On May 8 a powerful truck bomb exploded in front of the offices of the Ministry of the Interior and Irbil Asaish (security police). More than 15 people were killed and scores wounded.

The building targeted was the same building where my son, Michael, and I had stood just days before, prior to going inside to interview the minister of the interior. This was certainly a reminder of how close we and the people there are to evil daily.

For now, Iraqi Christians have found a haven in Kurdistan. However, a group in the area close to the Iranian border has distributed a statement threatening what they call the "apostates of the Islamic religion" and calling for the names

of young people who have recently converted to Christianity.

Romeo Hakkari, an Iraqi member of parliament in Kurdistan, says, "Thousands of Christian families are being told to leave the country or convert to Islam, or pay the jizyah [a tax traditionally imposed on non-Muslim men in Islamic states]." Hakkari reported that pamphlets, allegedly distributed by a group with ties to al-Qaida, threaten to kill all Christians in Mosul and Baghdad if they remain in those cities.

"Hundreds of Christians have been abducted and murdered and their churches have been destroyed as part of a detailed plan implemented by Muslim extremists," Hakkari says.

While in Irbil, I asked the president and prime minister if they would welcome Christians' help for the suffering church, and they agreed to provide a building and land for this. If you would like to learn what you can do to help Christians in Iraq, contact Mike Evans at jpteam@.

Mike Evans is a New York Times best-selling author. His newest book, *The Final Move Beyond Iraq*, was released by FrontLine in May and has been made into a major television special.