

11 Christian Missionaries Crucified and Beheaded

At several steps on their path to death by beheading and crucifixion last month, 11 indigenous Christian workers near Aleppo, Syria, had the option to leave the area and live. The 12-year-old son of a ministry team leader also could have spared his life by denying Christ.

The indigenous missionaries were not required to stay at their ministry base in a village near Aleppo, Syria; rather, the ministry director who trained them had entreated them to leave. As the Islamic State (ISIS), other rebel groups and Syrian government forces turned Aleppo into a war zone of carnage and destruction, ISIS took over several outlying villages. The Syrian ministry workers in those villages chose to stay in order to provide aid in the name of Christ to survivors.

"I asked them to leave, but I gave them the freedom to choose," said the ministry director, his voice tremulous as he recalled their horrific deaths. "As their leader, I should have insisted that they leave."

They stayed because they believed they were called to share Christ with those caught in the crossfire, he said.

"Every time we talked to them," the director said, "they were always saying, 'We want to stay here—this is what God has told us to do. This is what we want to do.' They just wanted to stay and share the gospel."

Those who chose to stay could have scattered and hid in other areas, as their surviving family members did. On a visit to the surviving relatives in hiding, the ministry director learned of the cruel executions.

The relatives said ISIS militants on Aug. 7 captured the Christian workers in a village whose name is withheld for security reasons. On Aug. 28, the militants asked if they had renounced Islam for Christianity. When the Christians said that they had, the rebels asked if they wanted to return to Islam. The Christians said they would never renounce Christ.

The 41-year-old team leader, his young son and two ministry members in their 20s were questioned at one village site where ISIS militants had summoned a crowd. The team leader presided over nine house churches he had helped to establish. His son was two months away from his 13th birthday.

"All were badly brutalized and then crucified," the ministry leader said. "They were left on their crosses for two days. No one was allowed to remove them."

The martyrs died beside signs the ISIS militants had put up identifying them as "infidels."

Eight other ministry team members, including two women, were taken to another site in the village that day (Aug. 28) and were asked the same questions before a crowd. The women, ages 29 and 33, tried to tell the ISIS militants they were only sharing the peace and love of Christ and asked what they had done wrong to deserve the abuse. The Islamic extremists then publicly raped the women, who continued to pray during the ordeal, leading the ISIS militants to beat them all the more furiously.

As the two women and the six men knelt before they were beheaded, they were all praying.

"Villagers said some were praying in the name of Jesus, others said some were praying the Lord's prayer, and others said some of them lifted their heads to commend their spirits to Jesus," the ministry director said. "One of the women looked up and seemed to be almost smiling as she said, 'Jesus!'"

After they were beheaded, their bodies were hung on crosses, the ministry director said, his voice breaking. He had trained all of the workers for their evangelistic ministry, and he had baptized the team leader and some of the others.

Hundreds of former Muslims in Syrian villages are in danger of being captured and killed by ISIS, which is fighting to establish a caliphate in which apostasy is punishable by death. The underground church in the region has mushroomed since June 2014, when ISIS began terrorizing those who do not swear allegiance to its caliphate, both non-Muslims and Muslims. Consequently, the potential for large-scale executions has grown along with the gains in ISIS-controlled territory.

The ministry assisted by Christian Aid Mission is providing resources and trying to find ways to evacuate these families by other routes.

Many of the ministry's teams also remain in Syria. Christian Aid Mission assists those who do not or cannot leave with the means to survive.

Even those who leave, however, may encounter ISIS militants and other criminals in refugee camps, said the leader of another ministry that Christian Aid Mission assists. He spoke of a Muslim from northern Syria who, like all men in areas that ISIS takes over, was coerced into joining the caliphate or being killed.

Recruited into ISIS, he fled the country after his brother was killed in the fighting. Disillusioned with ISIS but still adhering to Islam and its teaching that Christians and Jews are unclean "pigs," he went to Amman, Jordan, as he had learned that relatives there were receiving aid from Christians.

The Muslim, whose name is withheld for security reasons, went to a Christian meeting with the intention of killing the aid

workers gathered there. Something kept him from following through on his plan, though, and that night he saw Jesus in a dream, the ministry director said.

“The next day he came back and said, ‘I came to kill you, but last night I saw Jesus, and I want to know what are you teaching—who is this One who held me up from killing you?’” the director said. “He received Christ with tears, and today he’s actually helping in the church, helping out other people. We’re praying for lots of such Sauls to change to Pauls.”

The sorrow of the ministry team leader who lost 11 workers and one of their children last month has been deep, but he takes heart that their faithfulness could help change the hearts of persecutors.

“They kept on praying loudly and sharing Jesus until their last breath,” he said. “They did this in front of the villagers as a testimony for others.”

He asked for prayer for surviving family members and for himself.

“These things have been very hard on me,” he said. “What wrong did those people do to deserve to die? What is happening is more and more people are being saved. The ministry is growing and growing—in the past we used to pray to have one person from a Muslim background come to the Lord. Now there are so many we can barely handle all the work among them.”

For more information, [click here](#).