

Celebrating a Modern Persian Heroine

Marzi Amirizadeh is not a Persian queen. Unlike Esther, an orphan in Persia expelled from Judea following the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and exile of the Jewish people, Marzi is a native of Persia. Today, that's Iran.

She lives in the United States, her adopted country where, like Esther, she has risen to the occasion "for such a time as this." Like Esther who put her life on the line to approach the king, her husband and to save her people, Marzi also put her life on the line.

She did not go before the modern "king," the ayatollahs, to save her people from imminent death, but rather worked stealthily behind the scene, against the ayatollahs, to affirm her faith and for the well-being of Iran.

Marzi is an Iranian born Christian who fled the land of her birth, the land in which she came to faith. Just doing so put her life at risk. In Islam, Jews and Christians are granted the status of dhimmi, a protected second-class citizen. But in Iran, the reality is somewhat less "favorable."

Jews and Christians are persecuted, as is pretty much anyone who does not fit into the narrowly defined version of extremist Shia Islam that's hijacked Iran since 1979. Sunnis, Kurds, Bahais and other religious and ethnic minorities are all in the regime's crosshairs.

Coming to faith as a Christian in Iran is not something to be taken for granted. As much as there are morality police guarding how people dress and behave in public, simply being a Christian and affirming that in any way publicly can be dangerous if not life threatening. Marzi knows all too well. She was arrested and interrogated, brought to trial and

received a death sentence due to what the Iranians called “apostasy.”

But Marzi is not just brave like Esther, she’s smart too. In her interrogations and even at trial, when accused of apostasy, converting from Islam to Christianity, Marzi simply said, “No.” She was never a Muslim, despite the Islamic practice that a child born of a Muslim man is a Muslim, and that children born as such in Iran are registered as Muslims.

She was forced to study Islam, but never avowed it, never embraced it, so she could never disavow it. Her Iranian accusers were left without much to challenge her back, despite that she and everything about her upset the Iranian system.

But she didn’t stop there. Marzi shared her faith with her accusers, her captors, her interrogators. If Allah was really God, why could she not have a personal relationship with him? Why could Allah not speak to her directly? There were many “whys” in her search for faith, and then her affirmation of it.

Marzi related that their God is a God who is distant, with whom you cannot have a close relationship, is always ready to punish you, even which will inflict torture for the most minor infractions. She never accepted Allah, revered in Islam, as the true God. She was always searching for a personal relationship with God, to find the truth. Even something as mundane as only praying to God in Arabic, not in Persian or any other language, challenged her and caused her to challenge their theology. If their god were God, he would surely be multi-lingual and receive prayers in all languages.

She understood they were lying, and was thirsty to get to know God. Eventually, God spoke to Marzi in a dream, revealing the true face of Islam, and God’s love for her and all people. A God of love was comforting, made sense and upended their God of fear. After this, God made Himself present in her life, and

became her rock.

In coming to faith in the land whose Islamic leaders brand Israel “the Zionist entity” and “the little Satan,” Marzi also had a spiritual awakening about Israel and the Jewish people, how important they were to her faith and very existence as a Christian. This alone could have earned her another death sentence. Even in our conversation for the Inspiration from Zion podcast, she notes dispassionately, would be used by Iranian extremists to demonstrate her “spying” for Israel. Off the cuff, she notes that should the Iranians arrest her in the future, she will be accused as a spy.

Marzi enraged the judge, in whose hands her life was at stake, by recounting how God spoke to her against the judge’s (and Islam’s) belief that God only speaks to prophets and holy people. Some of her captors admired the strength of her faith for standing up to the many forms of intimidation and threats of consequences of not renouncing her Christianity, even while challenging the underpinning of Islam.

But Marzi does not do anything in half measures. Though Iran is the land of her birth, and the United States is where she’s now a citizen and where she has even run for elected office, Israel is a dream, on her radar. Next month she’ll get to fulfill her dream and visit the land of the Bible, the land in which her faith was born, where Jesus lived.

✖ She wants to see all of biblical and modern Israel, and be inspired in her own faith. But she also wants to bring a message of love to Israel that while the Iranian regime hates Israel, average Iranians do not. She knows that just as she was arrested and sentenced to death, and only a miracle saved her, the Iranian threat to Israel is very real, but that God will also protect Israel.

More than 2500 years ago, Esther beseeched the Jewish people to pray and fast for her, that she should be able to use her

position to save the Jewish people from the death decree forced by Haman. Today, Marzi represents Esther's bravery and boldness, and is very much a bridge between Jews and Christians.

We should join her in prayers for Iran, that somehow miraculously the Iranian people can be saved from its evil rulers.

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Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation, which builds bridges between Jews and Christians. Hear and understand more about this subject, including the backstory on the *Inspiration from Zion* podcast.