

Israel a Christian Haven Amid Islamic Persecution

The so-called Arab Spring has given a big boost to radical Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood. For Christians, it's been a much different story.

Believers in Jesus are suffering major persecution throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

But there is one place left in the region where they don't have to fear: Israel.

Growing Islamic Threat

Before Islam's prophet Muhammad died in 632 AD, he declared that no two religions could co-exist on the Arabian Peninsula, meaning Islam must reign supreme in the region.

Muslim leaders there today take Muhammad's words seriously. Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti recently issued a fatwa, or religious ruling, that all churches on the peninsula must be destroyed.

The decree was a stunning statement by Saudi Arabia's top religious authority. Yet it received little attention in the mainstream press and the Obama administration has yet to comment.

"This is giving license to the destruction of churches, by the way, at a time when churches are being burnt in Egypt, in Nigeria, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia, country after country—sometimes with the worshipers inside them," Cliff May, president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said.

May told CBN News the Saudi mufti's statements are part of a troubling pattern.

"What we have right now—and this is, I think, one of the

biggest stories taking place in the world that most of the media are refusing to cover—is increasing and widespread persecution and cleansing of Christians throughout the so-called Muslim world,” May said.

Middle East expert Raymond Ibrahim recently wrote that in the month of February alone, churches and Christian monasteries were attacked or destroyed in nine different Muslim countries.

During that same time frame, Ibrahim noted, dozens of Christians were murdered, beaten, or harassed across the Muslim world. Those were just the incidents that were reported.

Last Middle East Safe Haven

The so-called Arab Spring, which has seen radical Islamic groups like the Brotherhood rise to power, has only made things more difficult for the region’s Christians.

In Israel, however, it’s a different story.

While Christians are fleeing the Muslim Middle East in droves, their numbers have increased by a thousand percent in Israel since the nation’s re-founding in 1948.

“Christians are in every aspect, every realm of Israeli society. They’re in the Knesset. They’re on the Supreme Court; they’re in academia,” Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren said.

“The Israeli Defense Forces was at one point printing out Hebrew versions of the New Testament because there’s so many Christians swearing in for duty,” he noted.

Oren told CBN News that Arab Christians living in the Jewish state are among the most educated and prosperous in the Middle East. And all Christians, citizens and tourists alike, have free access to their holy sites.

“And we protect them,” Oren said. “Several years ago there was

an attempt to build a mosque in Nazareth right over the Church of the Annunciation, and Israel intervened and stopped that from happening.”

Things aren’t always perfect. Jewish believers in Jesus have experienced difficulties over the years.

Yet Israel’s overall acceptance of Christians is like night and day when compared with the Palestinian-controlled areas of Gaza and the West Bank, where Christians are frequently persecuted and even killed.