

Road to Damascus: Arab Believers Risk Death for Faith

What happens when a Muslim comes to Christ in the Middle East? Many fear persecution so they keep their Christian faith a secret.

Others, like evangelist "Rasim," boldly profess their faith and suffer dire consequences as a result.

There are dangers but also blessings of embracing and sharing the gospel in a very distressed region of the world.

Signs and Wonders

Many Muslims throughout the Middle East are coming to Christ through **signs and wonders** like those performed by Paul and Barnabas in the Book of Acts.

The road to Damascus is where the apostle Paul walked and stopped at the home of Ananias where he was baptized. And that was the start of an incredible ministry that has changed the world. Today in Syria, other evangelists are following in his footsteps.

One evangelist named Rasim shares his faith in a mosque with the imam. He gave the Islamic priest a copy of the Bible and the Jesus film.

"I told him if you read the Bible, you'll believe and your mind will be changed—the Lord is God and he died for you," Rasim said. "He took the Bible and he said, 'maybe.'"

Several Christians joined Rasim in the mosque and prayed for an elderly Muslim man named Bakram. He could barely walk because he had broken his knee and it had not healed properly.

“Bakram was healed and he started dancing and was very happy,” Rasim said. “Hallelujah! There’s a miracle in the mosque!”

Safety Is a Concern

Like the secret Muslim converts and other Christians, Rasim’s safety is at risk. While he is often afraid when he approaches a mosque, he said he feels the peace of God once he steps through the door in faith.

And because he courageously pushes forward, the knees of a Bedouin woman were also healed recently when Rasim paid a visit to her home.

“We have fear, but Jesus is with us—Emmanuel is with us,” Rasim said. “Jesus said, ‘I am with you forever’ and we need to go to the mosques and everywhere to tell people the truth about Him and His love.”

Christians Killed in Egypt

Believers like Rasim have good cause to fear. It is hard to be a Christian in a Muslim-dominated society, especially in Egypt where Christians were murdered in the streets earlier this year near the city of Luxor.

“In November 2008 there was actually an attack of 3,000 people on a church in Cairo where they had attempted to burn it,” said Caroline Doss of the American Coptic Federation. “And the attack can actually be viewed online on YouTube. You haven’t heard anything about an arrest or a prosecution ... That’s sending a clear message to the Egyptian population that this is acceptable behavior.”

It is life-threatening behavior that mainly targets converts from Islam.

Egyptian Mohammed Hegazy his family are in hiding—running for their lives. That is because he has several fatwas—official Islamic pronouncements of death against him because he became a Christian and then fought a legal battle to gain the right

to change his religion on his national ID card.

“If you don’t have the right or freedom to choose your own belief, what rights do you have,” Hegazy asked. “What freedom do you have? I am not afraid because I believe in Christ.

Hegazy said he was jailed and tortured by Egyptian state security agents who wanted him to return to Islam.

“They hanged me upside down by my feet and beat me repeatedly,” he said. “They used to torture us with electricity on many parts of our bodies and especially on the genitals.”

Conversion Kept Secret

Hegazy suffered because he publicly professed his faith. Converts from Islam often try to keep their Christianity a secret in Muslim countries. But many are eventually found out by family members and others.

“I was very worried a rock would hit one of my children or my wife,” said Asif, a former Palestinian Muslim who was attacked by militant Muslims. “Thank God the rock hit me instead.”

Asif’s leg was broken and surgery was required. A steel rod was placed in his shattered leg. He endures ongoing threats and pain, still Asif said he will never return to Islam.

“I can’t play back and is not a game,” he said. “Honestly my life has changed. I am a happier person, a better person. I have a new life now.”

Compelled to Share Their Faith

Despite the risks, some bold Middle Eastern Christians feel compelled to share their faith with Muslims and other people.

Several years ago, an Iraqi Christian under the alias of Hassan, started a church in Mosul. The body of believers grew from several people to 60 in about five months.

One day a gunman in a passing vehicle shot Hassan. Doctors said he suffered a spinal cord injury and would never walk again.

Hassan continues to share Christ with others, but today he does it from a wheelchair in Lebanon. His paralysis has caused many difficulties, but also opportunities.

“When I witness to people about Christ, they know that I really mean what I say unto death,” Hassan said. “Of course living for Christ in Iraq is not easy for this difficult situation the salvation of souls is taking place in big numbers among masses in Iraq.”