

Will Jesus' Reign Begin Where Moammar Gadhafi's Reign Ended?

Tripoli, Libya, woke up Monday to the imminent end of 42 years of rule by Moammar Gadhafi—the longest-ruling Arab leader ever.

In Syria, meanwhile, violent clashes continue in the streets between President Bashar al-Assad's forces and his opponents.

NATO-backed rebel forces in Libya seized control of much of Tripoli on Aug. 21 after months of brutal war tactics by Gaddafi. The rebels continue to fight for the rest of the capital city.

In one part of Tripoli, a local imam sang not the call to prayer but the national anthem of the pre-Gaddafi monarchy, according to BBC News.

President Barack Obama called it a “tipping point,” asserting in a statement that Tripoli is “slipping from the grasp of a tyrant.” He and other world leaders are calling for Gaddafi to end his claim to power.

Christian leaders like Nik Ripken, meanwhile, are praying for stability of a different kind in Libya.

“Often we ask people to pray that governments provide the safety and security necessary for the gospel to spread, such as the early church had under the Roman Empire,” said Ripken, who has served 25 years with the International Mission Board and is an expert on the persecuted church in Muslim contexts. “But when stability is the stability of governments that deny their people even access to Jesus, then that is the worst form of persecution.”

Ripken asks believers worldwide to pray for the kind of stability in Libya where access to Jesus is a basic human right.

And Christian leaders across the region join him in that request, praying for similar freedoms in other nations affected by the "Arab Spring," the wave of political protests and change sweeping North Africa and the Middle East since December 2010.

Violent clashes still happen in countries like Syria, where al-Assad released a statement Aug. 22 saying that his government would not fall. About 2,500 have died in Syria's crisis, according to the BBC.

Natalie Shepherd*, who formerly lived and worked alongside her husband in Syria, said she believes God will work through the unrest there to bring people to salvation in Jesus Christ.

"Years ago during Ramadan, we joined a small group of Christ-followers inside Syria to pray all night. I remember we cried out to God to do whatever it takes to bring millions inside Syria to salvation in Jesus," Shepherd said.

Today she is praying that God will use what is happening in Syria now as a catalyst for that very thing.

"I want to see thousands encounter Christ just like Saul did on his way to Damascus, so we begin to see bold, passionate disciples like Paul spreading the Good News," Shepherd said.

Ripken said Christians in the West can help not only by praying for the spread of the gospel in war-torn nations, but also by learning not to be persecutors themselves.

"Pray today that we will not join the persecutors by denying our family, neighbors and friends access to Jesus," Ripken said.