

Persecution and the Underground House Churches in Iran

by Edgar Reich

The Iranian underground church is a resilient and growing community that is sharing the gospel and spreading Christianity despite persecution and hardship.

Duration: 39:09

Scripture: Matthew 10:39, Matthew 24:9, Matthew 28:19, Acts 4:29

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

The video discusses the testimony of a family in Iran who watched the Gospel TV broadcast on an illegal satellite station and prayed together to confess their faith in Jesus Christ. It highlights the persecution and challenges faced by Christians in Iran, where the government is committed to Islam's quest for world dominion. Despite the risks, believers in the underground church boldly share their faith with others, even in public places like buses, taxis, and shops. The video also shares an example of a believer who obeyed the Holy Spirit's leading to give a New Testament to a man he met at a traffic light, leading to the man's conversion to Christianity.

Transcript

The talk tonight is about the Iranian underground church. Let us read from Matthew chapter 24 verse 9. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. Matthew 24 9 is a reality for many Christians in the world today.

This includes the nation of Iran. For Western Christians to understand the environment our sisters and brothers face in Iran, it is necessary to give you a brief overview of the Iranian and Islamic global agenda. Iran is committed to Islam's quest for world dominion.

The Iranian government leaders expect a savior to come and to bring the final victory for Islam. He's called the 12th Imam. Iran is a totalitarian government, a dictatorship which exercises suppression, persecution, and at times the death penalty for those of other faith.

The Islamic Republic and its leaders operate under great desire for Islamic world dominion and a religious fervor that does not permit faith other than Islam. They have a population of 75 million in 2012 and its capital is Tehran. Since 1989, the supreme leader of Iran is Sayyid Ali Khamenei.

His theocratic leadership is considered to be divine under the inspiration of Islam. He holds both the highest ranking political position and the highest ranking religious position in the Islamic Republic of Iran. We don't hear so much of him.

We hear more of the president of Iran who is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He is second in this country. He remains in office until the end of his second term, June 2013.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been reported as being called by divine decree to usher in the return of the 12th Imam, a pseudo-savior of the world. President Ahmadinejad gave his eighth address to the opening fall session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2012. Here are short excerpts from his speech.

He said, God Almighty has promised us a man of kindness, a man who loves people and loves absolute justice, a man who's perfect. He's perfect as a human being and is named Imam Almighty. This man will come in the company of Jesus Christ and the righteous.

The arrival of the ultimate savior will mark a new beginning, a rebirth and a resurrection. It will be the beginning of peace, lasting security and genuine life. His arrival will be the end of oppression, immorality, poverty, discrimination and the beginning of justice, love and empathy.

Now President Ahmadinejad told only part of the story of the 12th Imam to the United Nations. He did not share that the Islamic internal view requires conversion or eradication. Judo-Christian civilizations such as Israel and the United States of America must be converted or exterminated.

By creating the conditions of chaos and carnage, it will hasten the arrival of the 12th Imam. It is said that the Mahdi will turn the wars and killings to his advantage and establish justice and peace on earth. He will achieve world dominion for Islam thinks Islam.

Jesus Christ is considered a prophet under Islam. The Mahdi is the Islamic savior and Jesus Christ would come in a supportive role. Ayatollah Ruala Khomeini stated in January 1979, the governments of the world should know that Islam will be victorious in all the countries of the world and Islam and the teachings of the Quran will prevail all over the world.

Hashemi Rafsanjani, former president of Iran stated in December 2001, use a nuclear weapon against Israel. An atomic bomb will not leave anything. Muslims are prepared to wage Jihad, which is a holy war.

It is their duty and they're prepared to give their lives for Jihad. Some say that Muslims will have to create the conditions for the termination of Jews and Christians and that the Mahdi will finish the task himself. These are great deceptions to induce Iran and Muslims to engage in global war.

Islam and other religions have been created by men who were deceived by Satan. Allah cannot be the true God as he declares Muhammad to be his prophet. Muhammad is dead.

The one and only true and living God is the God Jehovah, who declares his son to be Jesus Christ and he told us in his word in 1st John 2 18. Little children, it is the last hour and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming. Even now many Antichrists have come by which we know that it is the last hour.

In 1st John 2 22 it says who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is Antichrist who denies the father and the son. Iran and Islam's quest for world leadership continues by establishing Islamic communities in many nations across this world using population growth and using the loss of the country.

They try and gain control. Countries in Europe are under attack now including Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, France and others. The second major strategy is that of military expansion and developing a nuclear bomb.

They are currently thought to be working on the enrichment of uranium at a level of 60 percent. To produce an atomic weapon the uranium enrichment must be at a level of 90 percent. Iran is denying nuclear inspections.

Iran refers to Israel as the little Satan and to America as the big Satan. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told a charring crowd in 2012 that Israel will soon disappear being wiped off the earth. The nuclear armed Iran is believed to be willing to destroy Israel and America.

Iran has stated that it will start World War III if attacked. Israel has indicated it is willing to attack Iran to deter its continuing development of nuclear weapons. So beloved we have much to pray about.

The religions in Iran are Islam 96 percent with Shia Islam being the state religion. Zoroastrians are 2.6 percent of the population. Christians are 0.58 percent but that may have gone up to around 1.3 percent.

Others are 0.082 percent. Christianity in Iran has a long history dating back to Jerusalem and Pentecost. According to Acts 2.9 in the Acts of the Apostles they were Parthians and Medes.

These were names for Persians and the Persians then have become Iranians. The Parthians and Medes were during Pentecost in Jerusalem. They were among the first new Christian converts.

Since then there has been a continuous presence of Christians in Iran, formerly Persia. Christians are severely persecuted in Iran, put into prison, are tortured and could face the death penalty. Yet Iranian Christians say they must continue to declare the truth of the gospel despite persecution.

God Jehovah declared by a voice from heaven that Jesus is his son, the true savior of the world, Jesus Christ. He rose from the dead and will return to earth in great power and glory and with the heavenly hosts and we must tell our neighbors. We must tell those we love.

Estimates of Christians in Iran vary. Christian News Today reports there are an estimated 1 million Christians in Iran. Another organization reports a wave of revival.

One home church movement is reported to have about 100 churches in 30 Iranian cities with more than 2,000 members. Christian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, who is currently incarcerated again, is part of one of the largest evangelical house church movements in the country. While not all reporting ministries say the same, overall wonderful growth is taking place despite great persecution.

In an interview Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, Iranian lawyer and 2003 Nobel Prize winner, commented on a new wave of people converting to Christianity in Iran. She said despite the pressures and threats from the government, the reports indicate that a large number of people, especially youth, choose to convert to Christianity even though they come from traditional and highly religious families. There is a great vacuum in the lives of the people of Iran.

Eighty percent of the younger generation are dissatisfied with emptiness and the fundamentalism of Islam which cannot meet their deepest needs. When they choose Jesus Christ they know they have chosen eternity in heaven, but they also realize that they must forsake all in this earthly life. The great gospel of

God given through his son Jesus is recognized as worthy to leave all behind and if necessary to give one's life for it.

There is no in-between. It is a total commitment. It is taking up your cross and following Jesus.

It is becoming a living sacrifice. Persecution continues while Christians are sharing their faith. The government took steps to oppose Christian conversions.

On September 11, 2008, the Iran parliament approved the death penalty for apostasy. Apostasy is the conversion from Islam to another faith. Evangelizing Muslims is banned and attracts the death penalty.

So if you share your faith, you are subject to the possibility of death. Likewise, Muslims who convert to Christianity face persecution and a possible death sentence. The United Nations have investigated Iran and they have reported more than 300 Christians have been arrested since the middle of 2010 in Iran where house churches operate, some in the climate of fear.

Over 60 Christians were arrested in December 2011 on Christmas Eve. Over 70 Christians were imprisoned during the holidays in 2010. Prisoners face torture, beatings, and deprivation.

Female prisoners and Christian women are raped. Two pastors' wives were recently released. They were raped continuously for three months.

Christian News Today reports, the day after Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad publicly congratulated Christians on the occasion of Christmas, an unprecedented roundup of followers of Christ began. Many Christians were rounded up and imprisoned in the days following Christmas. Their homes were vandalized, equipment destroyed, possessions seized, and the government is vowing more arrests.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom confirmed these reports of persecution. The government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused. We have heard the name of Christian pastor Youssef Nadarkhani.

He was jailed on October 2009. He was sentenced to death for apostasy in November 2010 by a court in Gilan province in Iran. The court suspended the death sentence contingent upon his recanting his faith.

He refused to do so during the hearings. Immense international pressure was brought on Iran. The United States White House condemned his possible execution in 2011.

Many Christians prayed, and you, my dear brother, and all those on the call, you prayed fervently for our Christian brother. And by a miracle of God, Youssef Nadarkhani was released in September 2012. But then he was re-arrested and imprisoned on December 25, 2012 in Iran.

He was torn away again from his wife and two young boys on Christmas Day 2012. They suffer with him. Now here's what pastor Nadarkhani says.

The word of God tells us to expect to suffer hardship and dishonor for the sake of his name. Our Christian confession is not acceptable if we ignore the statement, if we do not manifest the patience of the Lord in our sufferings. Benham Arani, another house church pastor from Karaj, Iran, was convicted of crimes against national security, which were simply house church activities.

He pastored a group of converts in a house church and shared his faith with Muslims after voluntarily surrendering to authorities to begin his prison sentence. He learned that he would be forced to serve five additional years in connection with the previous conviction, which was also related to Christian faith. For the first few months of his sentence, Benham Arani was held in solitary confinement in a very small cell.

Afterward, he was moved to another small cell with other prisoners. The room was so full the prisoners were not able to lie down. They had to sit all day and night.

The room also got very hot. Authorities asked for him to be beaten regularly, and that includes to be beaten by fellow inmates. Frequent and brutal beatings by prison guards and other inmates have caused him great harm.

His hair has turned white, and his friends fear he may lose the use of his foot due to a severe foot injury. In 2012, Benham Arani became so sick that he lost consciousness. It appears that Benham also suffers from a bleeding ulcer.

Pastor Arani is married to Christine, an Armenian Christian, and has a daughter, Rebecca, and a son, Adriel. They all suffer with their death. Pastor Arani may also face the death penalty on separate court charges of apostasy or banning Islam.

Here's a letter from Pastor Arani at Christmas to his church in Iran, and he wrote, Despite the pressure and difficulties in prison, I am pleased to share what is like a fountain, my Christian joy with you on the new Christmas day to come, and I know that you who are the saints and spiritual children of God are acquainted with this joy. As a minister of God, I allow myself to announce you to be happy. Know that all the happiness that we have on earth is the first fruit of that great joy provided for us in heaven the Father provides.

I understand your worries at time of reported persecution, which forced some of you to flee abroad. However, please pay attention to what God says in Matthew 6 26 in the Bible. Look at the birds in the air.

They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? When there are times of pressure that come upon the church, this can result in great expansions of the gospel. Some estimate that over the last 30 years, more Iranians have given their lives to Jesus Christ than over the last 1,300 years put together.

Praise God. God has a remnant in Iran who are dependent, crying out to him day and night and trusting in his working. In such a place, God is doing the impossible to glorify his name, and great numbers are being added to the church.

A Christian who was jailed in Iran was told that if Christians would simply agree to stop evangelizing, all the prisoners would be freed. They said, how can we stop to give such great salvation? And they stayed in prison. And church leaders point to this as evidence that Christians in Iran follow the instructions of the Lord and share their faith.

Praise God. One imprisoned female Christian, though facing health challenges, says she had the opportunity to lead three people to the Lord, including a criminal on death row, making all of her trials worthwhile. Another Christian pastor, Farshid Fathi, has been detained in prison since December 2010.

He was charged with possession of religious propaganda, and the regime gave us evidence that Pastor Fathi had Bibles printed in Farsi, that he had unlawfully distributed Bibles, and that he possessed Christian literature. The regime argued that his Christian activities were equivalent to actions against national security. Pastor Fathi is presently serving a six-year sentence in Iran's notorious Evin prison.

His crime is being a Christian and freely exercising his faith. Pastor Fathi has a wife, Lila, and two children, Rosana and Bardia. They suffer with him.

Yet there is Holy Spirit boldness in this country. Many of the underground church share their faith publicly and daily with other Iranians. Believers share their faith with people in buses, taxis, in the shops, and even at traffic lights.

Here's such an example of boldness and obedience to the Holy Spirit. When the car of a Christian stopped at the red light in Tehran, the believer felt led of the Holy Spirit to get out of his car, knock on the window of another car, and give that man a New Testament. He also exchanged phone numbers, and shortly after that, the man who received the Testament believed on Christ.

Praise God! He met with the man that gave him the scriptures. The new convert testified that he had this overwhelming desire to follow the believer's car and for 20 minutes drove behind the Christian throughout the streets of Tehran, not knowing why. Such is the way of the Holy Spirit, working and drawing many to himself by what we would call miracles and impossibilities.

But this is the working, the normal working of God's Spirit to bring man to himself through Jesus Christ. Here's another example of this boldness. A taxi driver who's a Christian has a cross dangling from the front mirror of his taxi.

He has the Bible on the seat next to him. He realizes and knows that his livelihood, his freedom, and even his life are at stake. But he says, how can I not share this great salvation through Jesus Christ? Oh my, oh my.

Confession of the faith is also transported via technical means. A wonderful testimony is of a family in Iran that watched the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ on a gospel TV broadcast on an illegal satellite station. In response to hearing the good news of the Son of God and eternal life in Him, they prayed this prayer together as a family.

They prayed, Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner. I confess I cannot save myself through my own good words. I believe that you died on the cross for my sins.

And they put you in the tomb and you rose from the dead after three days. I believe that you are alive and have the authority to forgive my sins and to make me righteous in front of the everlasting God. I ask that you accept me and as you promised, please give me this new life.

I thank you for hearing my prayers. Amen. And with this prayer, they wrote into the gospel station and asked if the prayer was correct.

Praise God. All the Iranian believers go out in their daily lives to share the gospel with almost everyone they come in contact with. They blend right in with their country and culture and therefore are able to share their faith naturally in daily life like we should.

In Acts 1.8, we are reminded that this is the work of the Holy Spirit to Christians who are willing and obedient. It is a normal thing for Iranian believers to expect new converts in every meeting and to see new people coming in repentance to accept the gospel. This is very much like the account of the book of Acts where it says the church was and where it said, praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Iranians believe it is a sin, beloved, it is a sin not to share the good news of the gospel. Reverend Mehdi Diabash was nine years in prison for refusing to deny his faith in Christ and return to Islam. He abhorred of his court trial defense in a court of law.

He said, I am a Christian. As a sinner, I believe Jesus has died for my sins on the cross and by his resurrection and victory over death has made me righteous in the presence of the holy God. The true God speaks about this fact in his holy word, the gospel.

Jesus means savior because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus paid the penalty of our sins by his own blood and gave us a new life so that we can live for the glory of God by the help of the Holy Spirit and be like a dam against corruption, be a channel of blessing and healing and be protected by the love of God. Yet in response to this kindness, he has asked me to deny myself and be his fully surrendered follower and not to fear people even if they kill my body but rather rely on the creator of life who has crowned me with the crown of mercy and compassion.

He is the great protector of his beloved ones as well as their great reward. They object to my evangelizing but if one finds a blind person who's about to fall in a well and keep silent then one has sinned. It is our religious duty as long as the door of God's mercy is open to convince evildoers to turn from their sinful ways and to find refuge in him in order to be saved from the wrath of the righteous God and from the coming dreadful punishment.

Nevertheless he was incarcerated but he was not given the death penalty. At another time he wrote, I have always envied those Christians who were martyred for Christ Jesus our Lord. What a privilege to live for our Lord and to die for him as well.

I'm filled to overflowing with joy. I am not only satisfied to be in prison I am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus Christ. Brother Mehdi Dibej was released from prison and then he was murdered.

The Lord granted his wish to be martyred for Jesus. When he arrived in heaven all of heaven rejoiced. Then he saw his Savior's face to face and received the martyr's crown for eternity.

House churches if found out continue to be under great persecution to this day. Two members of the church of Iran who belong to a house church that was raided on Friday October the 12th 2012 by security forces were arrested in the city of Shiraz in Forest Province. They were summoned to the intelligence ministry's detention center Pilak where seven other members of the house church were being held.

From another house church 15 Christians were put into jail. They were put under severe pressure which includes beatings and torture to recant their faith to deny their Lord but they refused to do so. Iranians Abbas Amiri and his wife Sakineh Ranama who hosted an underground house church service died from injuries sustained when secret police raided the house church service and severely beat them to death.

Abbas died right away. Before becoming a Christian Abbas had been a devout Muslim even making a pilgrimage to Mecca. His wife died in less than a week later at the house church service where seven

other men six women and two children.

Martyr Mohammed Ali Yafar Zadeh was executed by hanging in Evin prison in Iran. Martyr Mohammed Jabari was executed by hanging in Evin prison in Iran. Martyr Pastor Gorban Dori Turani an Iranian house church leader was murdered near his house.

Martyr Pastor Mohammed Bajir Youssefi affectionately known by his flock as Ravanbash or soul giver was murdered. He had left his house to spend time in prayer but he never returned. The Iranian authorities notified the family later that evening that his body had been found hanging from a tree in a nearby forest.

Pastor Youssefi was survived by his wife Akhtar who also is from a Muslim background. His seven-year-old son Stephen and his nine-year-old daughter Ramsina. Pastor Saeed Abedini wrote at Christmas 2012.

Here's what he wrote. I always wanted God to make me a godly man. I did not realize that in order to become a godly man we need to become like steel under pressure.

It is a hard process of warm and cold to make steel. The process in my life today is one day I was told I will be freed on bail to see my family and kids at Christmas. They were all lies and the next day I'm told I will hang for my faith in Jesus.

One day there are intense pains after beatings and interrogations. The next day they are nice to you and offer you candy. These hard and colds only make you a man of steel for moving forward and expanding his kingdom.

When for 120 days you are asleep in a room with one big light that is constantly lit and does not separate day or night and when you can only see true sunlight for a few minutes a week that's when you are becoming his workmanship and you can be a vessel in bringing his kingdom in a dark place and you are able to share the gospel of peace and life to the dying world and this is where you learn you can love your enemies with all your heart. Christian Haig disappeared from the streets of Tehran in 1994. The authorities reported his death to his family much later.

He was stabbed 26 times in his chest. Indeed Haig gave his heart to Christ twice. Once when he invited Christ into his life as a savior and second when his heart was torn apart for his faith in Christ.

Beloved we have to recapture a faith that is worth living for and worth dying for in our day. Christ demands our all in his call for discipleship. If we seek to save our life we will lose it.

Jesus said then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. If we do not suffer a little persecution in some way now we must ask the question do we live a godly life? What is it that you and I need to do today to get ready for persecution? Beloved it starts with repentance and asking the Lord for his Holy Spirit to help us share the good news. It starts with repentance that our love has grown cold for our neighbors.

It starts with asking the Lord to give us tears for our neighbors and the love we have never known before. When is the last time you have wept for your neighbors who do not know the Lord? Would you be willing to weep for your country to return to the Lord? Would we be willing to set aside our pride in ourselves and lay down our lives before our fellow men as our sisters and brothers are doing in Iran? Yes the underground church in Iran needs our prayers for they are hurting. Likewise we the church in North America needs

prayer as only five percent witness.

Most of the North American part of the body of Christ is not functioning and dead. May the fire of God fall on us anew. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father my heart is burdened for myself Lord over this message over the example of my dear sisters and brothers in the nation of Iran Lord and you asked us to be a living sacrifice Lord and yet we don't stay on the altar whenever something goes wrong, whenever someone opposes us, whenever someone says something our pride acts up and we get off the altar. Oh Lord I pray that you would help me that you would help everyone on this call Lord to become a living sacrifice and to share the faith that you have given us so freely and which has such an incredible incredible value for our sisters and brothers, for every neighbor, for every member of our family, for every person in our city, for every person in our state and every person in our country. Oh Lord give us a new passion this day.

Give me a new passion. I ask for this in Christ's name. Amen.

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