



# 40 *days of* PRAYER

FOR THE MIDDLE EAST



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PRAYER

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Names of viewers throughout have been changed for security reasons and images used for representation only.

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**THE MIDDLE EAST  
AND NORTH AFRICA**  
*Our journey of prayer*

# ABOUT SAT-7

ANOTHER STORY BEING TOLD

**Conflict. Poverty. Persecution. That's the story of the Middle East we've become accustomed to.**

But there is another story being told. A story of faith strengthened, love shown and joy brought – not just to the few, but to millions across the region.

For over 25 years, SAT-7 has dedicated itself to impacting the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) positively for Jesus. We are showing God's love across four television channels in the main languages of the region - Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish – reaching millions of viewers in 25 countries, 365 days a year.

Our teams are on the ground, creating powerful, faith-filled television and digital media programmes that bring life-changing moments of Christ's joy and take a stand against the negativity and despair that so often surrounds the region. What's more, we bring this where it's needed most – straight into the heart of the family home.

Our programmes encourage often-isolated believers in their faith and provide a fresh perspective of faith for those asking questions about Jesus.

SAT-7's vision is to see a growing Church in the Middle East and North Africa confident in Christian faith and witness, serving the community and contributing to the good of society and culture.

In this book, you'll take a journey of prayer through the 25 countries that SAT-7 works in, from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan in the east, meeting local believers and churches along the way. You'll hear how God is at work through SAT-7, and discover the ancient and often unknown Christian heritage of the region.

Discover the story of God's people in the MENA – a story of resilience, joy and faithfulness to Christ despite the odds.

*Let the story begin...*



# A JOURNEY OF PRAYER

It's easy to feel powerless as we hear of calamity on the other side of the world, in places of deep spiritual significance to our Christian faith. Perhaps you have picked up this book because you feel moved to pray for the region but don't know where to begin. Recent conflicts and disasters have shown us that the delicate balance in the Middle East can be thrown off in a matter of moments. But by looking back at how God has worked in the past, we may find hope for the present. God's purposes are a golden thread running through the rich tapestry of cultures and stories that make up the Middle East. If we take a step back to look at the bigger picture, we can see how God has worked out his plan of redemption in times past and continues to move today.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) comprise the lands that fill the pages of the Bible; they are the cradle of civilisations and the birthplace of the Church. These are the lands in which the Israelites wandered, with God's presence leading them from a cloud by day and

a pillar of fire by night. This is where God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, where prophets cried out in the wilderness, and where, in the fullness of time, the Messiah walked upon the earth.

Through Jesus' atoning death and triumphant resurrection, all nations would be blessed, just as God had promised. A flame passed from believer to believer with the preaching of the Gospel, a light which spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The disciples dispersed across the ancient world, planting churches wherever they went. Empires, kings and spiritual powers would rise against them, but the light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (Jn 1:5).

In the following period of prayerful reflection, we will tread in the footsteps of our forebears, understanding the spiritual significance of their homelands in the overarching narrative of God's plan for our salvation. Our journey through the MENA will take us from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan in the east, helping us to reconnect with the ancient roots of our

faith, as well as understand the challenges faced by the people living there today.

God is at work in the MENA to bring people to Himself, even in the most closed countries, through dreams, miracles and the bold witness of believers who share their faith at great personal risk. God is using SAT-7 to amplify the voices of believers in the region, beaming the Good News into places where they cannot speak freely of their faith. Our journey will take us alongside these local Christians as they live and worship in these often-troubled nations.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to pray. May the Spirit similarly prepare

us and guide us through these next 40 days and, as we experience the rich Christian heritage of the MENA region, equip us to pray for God's Kingdom to come in the lands where it all began.

## PRAY

- Pray that these next forty days will deepen your faith as you learn of the rich Christian history of the MENA.
- Pray that you would be inspired and equipped to pray for our brothers and sisters in the MENA.
- Pray that you will be challenged by the stories of Christians living in circumstances very different to our own.





## DAY TWO MOROCCO

# MOROCCO

### SOJOURNERS ON EARTH

We begin our journey in the westernmost reaches of the MENA, the Kingdom of Morocco, in the Maghreb region of North Africa. It is believed that Christianity took root here sometime in the 2nd Century, carried across the sea from Rome, with evidence of a close relationship with the Church in Rome in early centuries. At the time, the Maghreb was under the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire, which was still hostile to the Christian presence spreading across the ancient world. Despite persecution, the fledgling North African Church grew, particularly among the Berber peoples.

The Berbers were a nomadic group, those who braved the punishing winds and great expanse of the Sahara. In earlier centuries, Berber caravans made an inroad for the Gospel in North Africa, carrying the message of hope wherever they went. Many of the Church Fathers were of Berber origin, including Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. Today, the Berbers of Morocco go by the name 'Amazigh', which means 'free people'. Amazigh believers have appeared on the SAT-7 programme *Free Souls*, expressing how their faith has challenged them to overcome past prejudices towards

their Arab neighbours. The Church owes much to this people group, and we can continue to learn from them.

God's people are often described as a wandering people. The Israelites wandered in the desert, awaiting passage into the Promised Land. Likewise, in his letter to the Hebrews, Paul describes believers as "foreigners and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13), sojourners enroute to their true home. We are to have the attitude of those just passing through, not neglecting our duties on earth, but with eyes fixed on things above (Col 3:1-3). Our true citizenship is in Heaven (Phil 3:20); we are not meant to get too comfortable here.

Is it any wonder that the ephemeral quality of the Christian journey, living in the world but not of it (Jn 17:14-15), so appealed to the ancient nomadic Berbers, who new so well what it meant to be sojourners without an earthly home?

### PRAY

- Pray for the spread of the Gospel among the Berbers and in Morocco.
- Give thanks that SAT-7 is making programmes for Berber Amazigh viewers in their own dialect.



# MOROCCO

## LIFE OUT OF DEATH

The dramatic mountain ridges that line the Moroccan horizon contrast starkly with the sun-scorched flatlands of the Sahara. At night, the lanterns from the sprawling markets in the towns and cities light up the desert for miles around. But if you head into Marrakesh today, you'll see once-beautiful buildings in ruins and those who have lost their homes out in the streets. Since the devastating earthquake in September 2023, makeshift market stalls have reappeared along streets strewn with rubble, as Moroccans carry on eking out a living in a world that looks completely different.

Haytham is a young Moroccan whose life has been disrupted by the earthquake, but he had been known to SAT-7 before then. "I want to know if the Christian religion is real or not," he told the viewer support team. Haytham came from the majority faith but had concerns, and was seeking truth in other religions. He had read a little of the Bible but was pleased to receive a link to explore it further.

The team reached out to Haytham after the earthquake, and he was touched by their genuine concern for him. "We were in a place quite close to the earthquake, but thank God, everything is fine.

Unfortunately, many others have died. People are exhausted and afraid to leave their homes. We're currently sleeping outside the house." The team were overjoyed to hear that, since reading the Bible, Haytham had put his faith in Jesus. Even in his present circumstances, he was able to say, "I am happy, and I believe that my life is improving."

In this context, one Moroccan Christian leader said, "All of this has provided new opportunities to reach more people and respond to their questions about Christ, the Bible and the history of Christianity in this region. Believers are more open to speak about their faith and share their testimonies. This all shows how God works everywhere to show Himself to everyone, regardless of the obstacles and challenges. God brought life out of death and the disaster was transformed into an opportunity for prayer, unity and showing empathy."

## PRAY

- Pray for God's comfort for those who have lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones since the earthquake.
- Pray for Haytham and others seeking truth in the midst of disaster.



# MAURITANIA

## THE ONE WHO SETS US FREE

Partially isolated from surrounding countries in the Maghreb by the towering Atlas Mountains, the Berbers nevertheless began to make their way south to the land now known as Mauritania. In the 3rd Century they established trade routes, carrying precious metals, ivory, salt, their distinctive, brightly coloured linens, and the Gospel. Christianity grew in the region and was officially established under Byzantine rule. The history of Mauritania is a series of invasions and conquests, from the Vandals and Visigoths to the Byzantines under Justinian I, from the Islamic conquest in the 7th Century to colonisation by France, until achieving independence in 1960.

Mauritania was the last country in the world to outlaw slavery, and even now the practice persists. The Global Slavery Index estimates that, as of 2024, the number of people living in modern slavery in Mauritania is 149,000, mostly women and children, with slave status passed from mother to child.<sup>1</sup> The caste system

runs along ethnic lines, with most of those enslaved belonging to the minority Haratine or Afro-Mauritanian groups. The government has repeatedly denied that slavery still exists in the country.

Jesus identified Himself explicitly with those who were considered least in His society (Mt 25:40). Mother Theresa took His words to heart as she tended the poor and despised in Calcutta, saying she saw in them “Jesus in His most distressing disguise.” But it goes further than this: Jesus’ identification with the poor and oppressed was inherent to the incarnation itself, as Paul explains, “though He was in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:6-7 NRSVA).

Jesus suffers alongside us, but he does not leave us in our suffering. The passage continues, “And being found in human form, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (vs 7-8). It is through Jesus’ identification with humankind that

“TRULY I TELL YOU, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE  
OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.”

**MATTHEW 25:40**



His sacrifice on the cross achieves true freedom on our behalf. Those who are in Him join vicariously in His defeat of sin, death and suffering once and for all.

It was because of this reality that Paul was able to affirm, even in a society in which slavery was entrenched, that believers, whether slave or free, were all equal in Christ (Gal 3:28). The One who came to proclaim release to the captives (Lk 4:18) calls us to pray for those in captivity today, until the time when He will break every chain.

## PRAY

- Pray for an end to slavery and inequality in Mauritania.
- Pray that those who are oppressed in Mauritania will come to know their true worth in God’s eyes.
- Pray that those watching SAT-7’s programmes in Mauritania will come to understand the dignity of every human being, made in the image of God.



# ALGERIA

## RESTLESS HEARTS

We continue across the sands of the Maghreb into the arid desert landscapes and mountainous skylines of Algeria. The first mention of Christianity in the region is in the writings of Tertullian in 2 AD. The early Algerian Church was foundational for the worldwide spread of Christianity due to its influence on the theological controversies of the following centuries, not least as the birthplace of Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine, the most influential of the early Church Fathers, possessed a zeal and powerful intellect that had a profound impact on the theology of the Western Church. Today, despite the deep Christian roots from which the North African Church bloomed, less than 0.5 per cent of Algerians are Christian. However, the story of all that led up to Augustine's famous moment of conversion under the fig tree, related in his memoir, *Confessions*, provides a testament to the power of persistent prayer.

Though often overshadowed by the colossal contribution of Augustine's life and writings to development of Christian thought, the part his mother, Monica, played in his conversion cannot be understated. As Augustine searched

restlessly for meaning in gnostic religion, academia and worldly pleasures, Monica's prayers for her son "watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed."<sup>2</sup>

On entreating a bishop to help her wayward son, Monica was told, perhaps prophetically, "It is not possible that the son of these tears should perish," an answer she clung to "as if it had sounded from heaven." In his *Confessions*, Augustine frequently gives thanks that his mother's prayers were heard. His summary of his conversion is perhaps the most famous line in all his works, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Today, Algerian Christians suffer under authoritarian military rule, with church closures and the threat of extremism. SAT-7 frequently hears stories of isolated Algerian believers, for whom programmes like *My Church*, broadcasting the services of Algerian churches, provide a spiritual lifeline. It is hard enough for them to find spiritual direction and discipleship, let alone reach out to their families and neighbours. Yet, God has made every Algerian for Himself. Strengthened by the example of Monica's unceasing intercession, pray that this country would find rest in Him.

# ALGERIA

## A SPRING OF HOPE

Journeying deeper into the cities of modern Algeria, we find colourful, sprawling markets, steep, winding streets, and ruins which tell the story of the rise and fall of empires. The capital, Algiers, is home to magnificent Ottoman palaces, mosques and cathedrals. In Tébessa, an ancient outpost of the Roman military in the north, you will find the crumbling ruins of Byzantine basilicas, in which early North African believers once worshipped.

However, if you walk through the towns and cities, you will see churches locked, with windows boarded up and courtyards empty. The state-enforced closure of Protestant churches in recent years has forced many Christians underground. Many church leaders have been thrown into prison and only a handful of churches remain open. This comes amid a sweeping campaign of suppression of freedoms nationwide. Some are able to meet in house churches, but for others, SAT-7 is an invaluable resource. SAT-7 Producer Samia Kessai reflects, “SAT-7 programmes are like a spring of hope for isolated Christians here in Algeria.”<sup>3</sup>

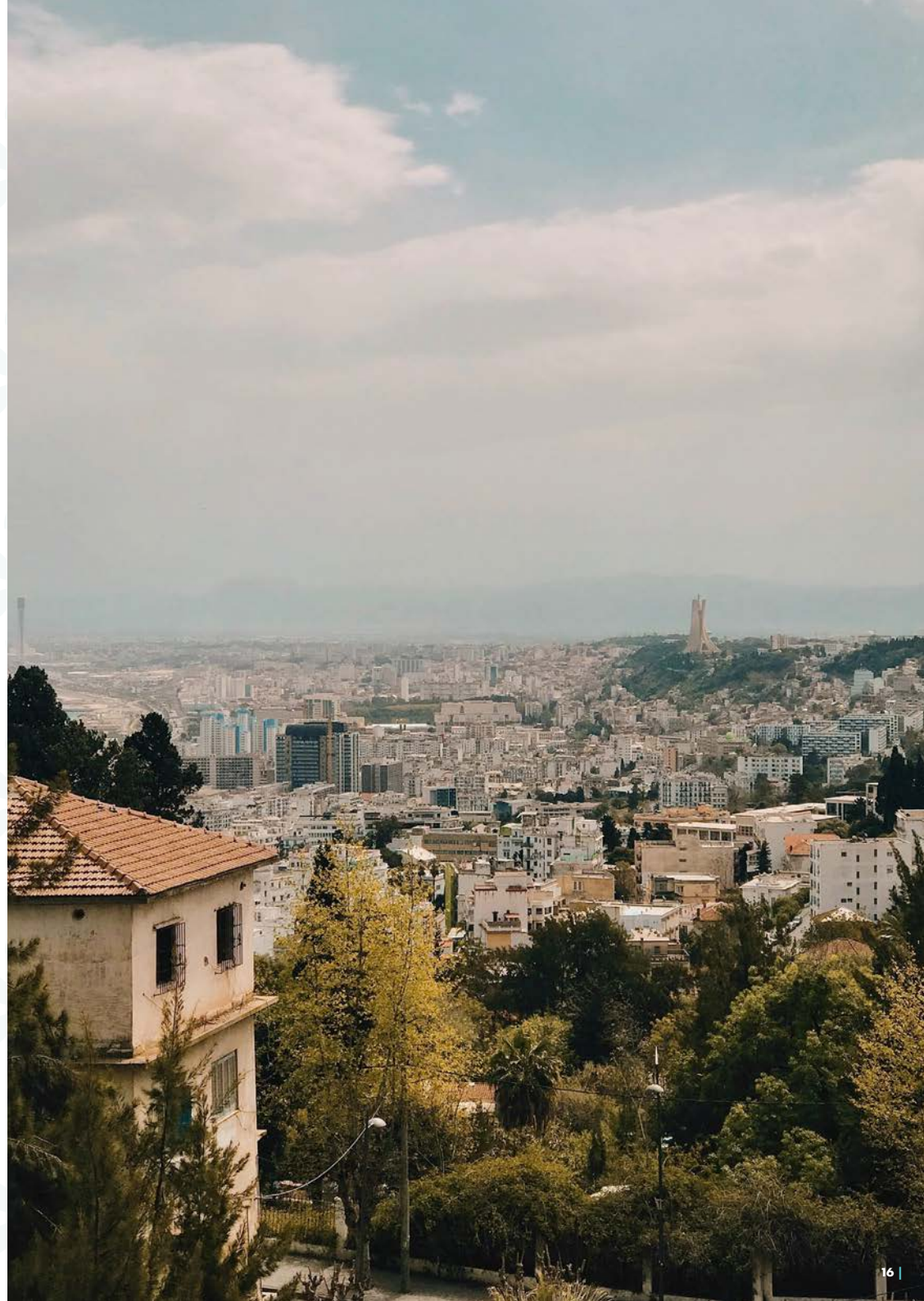
This situation has been particularly difficult for new converts, who long to be a part of a Christian community but

have no local church to nourish them. Kameel, an Algerian man in his thirties, told SAT-7, “I am from a non-Christian background. I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and I adore Him. However, it is so hard to strive to live out my faith without a church and a congregation.” He expressed the difficulties of living in what he called a “hardline society” that makes being a Christian dangerous. He told the SAT-7 viewer support team that he fears for his life and keeps his Bible hidden. Despite all this, he remains hopeful. The team prayed that he might be able to move to a safer part of the country, where he can attend a church and find Christian fellowship.

Despite government restrictions, God’s Spirit is moving in the hearts of many in Algeria. The hope these Christians have is a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14).

## PRAY

- Pray that Algerian Christians will be free to worship, that churches will be reopened and church leaders released.
- Pray that SAT-7’s programmes will be a spring of hope for isolated Christians in Algeria.



# TUNISIA

## STAND FAST IN THE FAITH

From the cities of Algeria, we follow the sparkling coastline of the Mediterranean sea into Tunisia. In the capital, Tunis, the architecture tells the story of all the cultures that have made up its history: remnants of ancient Phoenician temples; crumbling Roman ruins; and beautiful 1920s art-deco style blue and white buildings line the coast. Carthage, now just a small suburb of Tunis, was once the centre of the North African Church.

Despite the existence of a flourishing church from as early as the 2nd Century, Carthage was not always a safe place for Christians under the Roman Empire. Among the archeological remnants of

Carthaginian culture, the record of a fascinating early Christian figure has survived and continues to inspire the Church today. The prison diary of Perpetua is one of the earliest known Christian writings, and certainly the earliest text written by a Christian woman that has survived from antiquity.

Perpetua was a 22-year-old woman thrown into the dungeons of Carthage in approximately 202 AD, charged, along with her companions, with being a Christian. She writes of her prison, “I was very much afraid, because I had never felt such darkness.”<sup>4</sup> The early chapters of the diary describe her father’s visits to her cell to persuade her to recant her faith and save herself.

In the darkness of the dungeon, one of her companions asked her to pray for a vision as to whether their imprisonment would end in freedom or martyrdom. She was granted a vision of a golden ladder reaching up to heaven with a dragon prowling below, lying in wait for those who would ascend. Perpetua trod upon the head of the dragon and climbed up to heaven. On emerging from her vision, she and her companions “understood that it was to be a passion”. She faced martyrdom with the joyful anticipation of heaven and, with such surpassing hope in view, “ceased henceforth to have any hope in this world.”

The diary was completed by another Christian. Perpetua and her companions, including Felicitas, who had given birth just days before, were thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre of Carthage. Perpetua’s final words are a rallying cry to those who have faced persecution through the ages, “Stand fast in the faith, and love one another, all of you.”

Over 1,800 years later, Perpetua has lent her name to a Christian production studio in Tunis. SAT-7 has equipped and supported Perpetua in their mission to give the “small but active” Tunisian Church a voice.<sup>5</sup> Programmes like *Christmas from Tunisia* and *Standard Talk* share the Gospel message with Tunisians today.

The North African Church flourished in the centuries following the Carthaginian martyrs’ deaths. As another Carthaginian Christian, Tertullian, would one day say, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

## PRAY

- Pray that the example of Perpetua will inspire Christians in Tunisia to stand fast in the faith.
- Pray for the programmes produced by the new Perpetua studio in Tunis, and for the safety of the crew.



*“My father, for the sake of his affection for me, was persisting in seeking to turn me away, and to cast me down from the faith, - ‘Father,’ said I, ‘do you see, let us say, this vessel lying here to be a little pitcher, or something else?’ And he said, ‘I see it to be so.’ And I replied to him, ‘Can it be called by any other name than what it is?’ And he said, ‘No.’ Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.”*

From Perpetua’s diary

nec torquetur: ita ut astantes hor-  
rerent eius poenam: sed crudelissimus  
sarpentis insatiabatur. Sed cum theo-  
philus nihil ducebat poenam illas:  
ita ut nec suspiraret nec gemitu emi-  
teret: ut putarent eum in lecto iacere  
in stragulis dignis aut in cultris. Cum  
hec igitur uideret iniquitatis iudex:  
quod quasi exossatus & exearatus pro-

EXPLICIT PASSIO BIA-  
TAE DOROTHEAE. INCIPIT  
PASSIO SCARU PERPETUAE  
ET FELICITATIS. DIE NONA MARI-  
TINI IN CIVITATE TYBURTINA. ARUM  
minore. Adprehensum adole-  
scentem ex circumstantibus & fe-  
licitas conserua eius: Saturninus &  
secundulus inter eos: & uibia Per-

# LIBYA

## PEOPLE OF THE CROSS

Journeying with Jesus means responding to the call to pick up our cross and follow Him. One who experienced this in a very literal way was Simon of Cyrene, the man who was forced by the Romans to carry the cross as Jesus stumbled under its weight on the road to Calvary. Mark narrates, “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mk 15:21). We hear little of Simon after this, yet this action provides a vivid illustration of the weight of discipleship. For some Christians, picking up their cross and following Jesus may mean following Him to an unjust death.

Simon’s home, the city of Cyrene, was a Roman city near present-day Shahhat in north-east Libya, which is where our journey now takes us. We have left the Maghreb behind and enter into the region called the Mashreq, or “place of sunshine”. However, in a far cry from “sunshine”, Libya recently made headlines after a huge storm caused devastating flooding in September 2023. As we continue to pray for the people of Libya as they bear this particular cross, let’s remember the legacy of the Church in this country.

Because of its large Jewish population, Cyrene became an early centre of Christianity in North Africa. Acts 11:21 records that “The Lord’s hand was with them” as the believers of Cyrene took the Gospel to the Gentiles in other nations. Today, however, Christians are a tiny minority in Libya. Although officially free to worship, they face threats from extremist militia groups.

In February 2015, the so-called Islamic State (IS) released a video showing the beheading of 21 Christians – 20 Egyptian Copts and one Ghanaian Christian – on a beach in northern Libya. The martyrs, all clad in orange jumpsuits, knelt in the sand, each with a black-masked militant standing behind them. The narrator of the video mocks the “People of the Cross” before the captives are heard crying out to Jesus in the seconds before they are killed.

The attack was met with outrage across the world. Viewers of SAT-7 were moved when Beshir, the brother of two of the Coptic Christians who had been killed, called in to the worship and prayer programme *We Will Sing* soon after the tragedy. He expressed how proud he was of his brothers, Bishoy and Samuel, calling their unwavering faith “a badge of honour to Christianity.”<sup>7</sup>



Despite sharing the agonising fear and loss his family had suffered, he said, “Since the Roman era, Christians have been martyred and have learned to handle everything that comes our way. This only makes us stronger in our faith because the Bible told us to love our enemies and bless those who curse us.” He did just that, praying live on air for the salvation of those who had killed his brothers.

These martyrs exemplified what it means to “take up your cross” as they were given into the hands of unjust executioners, as Jesus was. They proclaimed Christ

right until the end. Though tragic, it is resonant that such an event took place in the birthplace of Simon of Cyrene.

## PRAY

- Pray for Libyan Christians facing discrimination and mistreatment for their faith.
- Pray for Libya as it recovers from the devastation of the 2023 floods.
- Praise God for the faithfulness of the 21 martyrs and the power of their witness.

# EGYPT



*Written by Archbishop  
Angaelos of the Coptic  
Orthodox Church, London;  
Chair of SAT-7 International  
Council*

## JOURNEY TO HOPE

Christianity came to Egypt in the first Century when Saint Mark, the Gospel-writer, was in Alexandria. His sandal broke, so he went to a cobbler. And while he was fixing his sandals, the cobbler pierced his hand and cried out, “The one God!” St Mark, being an evangelist, said, “Well, what do you know about the one God?” And he started speaking to him about our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three major pillars of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and all of them have been pivotal in my life and in the life of the Church in Egypt. The first is the theological side. Egypt was fertile ground for Christian thought and doctrine. Alexandria was a cultural centre of the world at the time, a hub of understanding, learning and faith. The Church of Alexandria was pivotal in the life of the Church in its formative stages, with Church Fathers like Saint Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria contributing to its doctrine.

The second is the monastic movement, established in the 4th Century with Saint Anthony the Great, the first monk. Monasticism grew out of the deserts of Egypt. Western Fathers like Benedict, John Cassian and others had gone to Egypt, seen the life of monks and nuns there and established monastic orders that are still lived throughout the world.

The third pillar is that of martyrdom. Ever since its first martyr, Saint Mark, was dragged through the streets of Alexandria, Egypt has experienced waves of persecution. The Church is proud of this heritage and honours the lives of martyrs, but doesn't live in a state of victimhood. We have rather used that experience to advocate for others.

There are about 10 million Christians in Egypt, representing about 10 per cent of the population. And they also represent about 80 per cent of all the Christians in the Middle East, because in most other countries the majority of Christians have left. Since the foundation of Christianity over 2,000 years ago, it has grown and flourished in places in which it is now diminishing in numbers. However, those who are still there are incredibly courageous and faithful in their witness.

There are massive challenges at the moment faced by everyone trying to be a person of faith, and especially young people. The Church must be alive and effective and responsive, so that it can deliver a living, breathing model of Christian life. With an online presence, with a satellite presence, various forms of communication and various platforms, there are many new opportunities for ministry. SAT-7 serves the Christian community in the Middle East, but there are also others who will be watching. Jesus Christ tells us to let our lights shine, that people may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven; this is one way to let light shine where people will see it and give glory to God and then follow Him (Mt 5:16).

We need to realise that the journey of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is not one that is supposed to keep us fixed and fixated upon suffering and death. It's a journey that takes us with hope to the empty tomb, to the resurrection and to the victory over death, over sin. We pray the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ for everyone living in hardship and persecution, that they can see beyond it to experience God's glory.

## PRAY

- Pray wisdom upon individuals and the Egyptian Church collectively.
- Pray for those who are suffering, but also for those who perpetrate and propagate hatred. Pray that their hearts will be opened to the goodness of God.



# EGYPT

## THE SECRET PLACE

If we follow the estuaries of the Nile that twist up past Cairo and then head west into the desert, we come to the desert dwellings of Scetis, Nitria and Cellia. These desolate dunes were the dwelling places of the early Desert Fathers, who withdrew from the world to pursue a life of solitude and self-denial. In this dry, barren landscape, the monks followed the pattern of Jesus in the Gospels, who “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Lk 5:16). There are still monasteries in the Egyptian desert today, as believers seek the wisdom that can be found in lonely places.

Saint Anthony of Egypt was one of the first ascetics and is called the Father of Monasticism. Athanasius of Alexandria’s biography, *The Life of Saint Anthony*, provides insight into the lives of the desert dwellers that formed a community around him. He gives extraordinary accounts of monks battling demons and walking on hot coals, but also of the intense discipline of body and mind that was their rule of

life. Reflecting on the years he spent in the desert while in exile from Alexandria, Athanasias said, “The desert was made a city by monks who left their own people and enrolled for citizenship in heaven.”<sup>8</sup>

Some visitors once asked a monk at Scetis, “What things do you who are living in the desert do more than we? You fast, and we also fast; you lead pure lives, and we also lead pure lives; whatsoever you do we also do; what do you who live in the desert do more than we?” The monk replied, “We keep watch over our minds.”<sup>9</sup>

The stilled minds of the Desert Fathers produced some of the most significant movements of the Early Church. We owe much of the development of theology in the classical and medieval eras to the rise of Monasticism, which produced theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The SAT-7 ARABIC documentary, *Christians of the East*, explores this heritage and empowers Egyptian Christians with the history of their homeland.<sup>10</sup>

“WHEN YOU PRAY, GO INTO YOUR ROOM, AND WHEN YOU HAVE SHUT YOUR DOOR, PRAY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN THE SECRET PLACE.”

**MATTHEW 6:6**

We should not underestimate the value of a life wholly devoted to prayer. Though the monks lived in solitude, they were praying for the world outside the monastery walls. It may not be possible for us to run off to the desert today, but we can still find moments of peace and quiet to “pray to [our] Father who is in the secret place” (Mt 6:6). We should devote our prayers to the flourishing of faith in these ancient places.

## PRAY

- Pray that Egyptian Christians would be strengthened by the rich Christian history of their nation.
- Pray that the example of the Desert Fathers will continue to nourish and inspire the whole Church.
- Pray that those seeking God in Egypt will encounter Him in the “secret place” of prayer.





# SUDAN

## AN OPEN DOOR

We continue to follow the River Nile as it snakes down from Egypt into Sudan, a country ingrained with Christian history. Tradition has it that the Gospel was brought to Ancient Nubia by the Apostle Matthew in the first Century. With its proximity to Alexandria, the Nubian churches grew and developed under the influence of the Coptic Church. The Christian kingdoms of Nubia, Makuria and Alodia were established by the time of the Byzantine Empire, and resisted the Islamic conquests that began in the 7th Century, with Alodia, encompassing the area that is now the capital, Khartoum, holding out until the 16th Century.

In recent history, Sudan has been ravaged by ongoing conflicts and power struggles. 2023 saw escalating tensions between competing factions within the military government break into all-out war. Since then, thousands have been killed and millions displaced. Many of the stories of those fleeing Sudan have been featured in the SAT-7 ARABIC programme, *Sudan, Stories of Strength and Faith*. Here is one of those stories...<sup>11</sup>

On Easter Day, 2023, Bernadette George Banna was huddled in a hospital room with her two children. She had taken her three-month-old baby, Sophia, to Khartoum for routine vaccinations when she heard bullets whooshing behind her head. The security guard pulled them inside and bolted the door, saying, “Nobody shall go out or come in.” After six days, the sound of guns firing became unbearably loud. Bernadette’s son looked at her as if to ask what was going on. “I was trying to smile but the situation was bigger than me,” she recounts. In that desperate hour, she prayed, “Lord, my children and I are very tired. We can’t stay here anymore.”

That night they took their chance and miraculously made it home to where her husband, Ramy, was waiting so that they could all escape the country on a bus headed to Egypt. They boarded the bus with the assurance that Sophia’s birth certificate would suffice to allow her across the border. However, when they reached the border, they were told that she could not pass without a passport. “We stayed at the border for a day and half without any sign of hope.”



Then Bernadette prayed, “Lord, if you want to use Sophia to open the door for other children who don’t have passports to pass, please do this and give us the strength to handle the situation.” At last, they managed to secure an entry allowance document from Egypt. When the policeman at the Sudanese passport office saw the allowance document, he called out, “This is the first baby to cross the border without a passport after the war.” Bernadette then became sure that God had used the situation so that other

children fleeing the war without papers could have the same allowance made.

## PRAY

- Pray for families that have fled the war, as well as those who remain in Sudan.
- Pray for an end to the decades-long conflict that has devastated so many lives.
- Yet, thank God for stories like these, of hope in the midst of impossible situations.



# SOUTH SUDAN

## SONGS OF SUFFERING

We cross the border into South Sudan, the youngest sovereign state in the world, formed in 2011 after years of bitter civil war in Sudan. While any evidence of contact with Christians in the early centuries of the Church has been lost, the missionary work of both Catholics and Protestants in the region from the early 1800s is well documented. The Dinka are the largest ethnic group in South Sudan, a Nilotic tribal people of tall stature, among whom Christianity has flourished. Although it took a long time for trust to be established between the missionaries and the Dinka, an indigenous church began to take root in the mid-1900s.

The hymns the Dinka Christians have written give insight into their distinct Christian identity and how it is shaped by their relationship to the land. The following hymn was written between 1987-89 as a lament during the civil war, when the survivors found themselves displaced and without the land, property and cattle that are were so integral to their identity. The words bring to mind the lamentations and Psalms of David, acknowledging that God has created all and that all are in His hands, and crying out for His intervention in the created order.

*Look upon us, O Creator who made us,  
God of all peoples,  
We are yearning for our land,  
That we may pray to you in freedom.  
Hear the prayer of our souls in the wilderness  
Hear the prayer of our bones in the wilderness  
Hear our prayer as we call out to you  
Hear the cry of our hearts in the wilderness  
Watch over us, O our Creator.<sup>12</sup>*

The “wilderness” the hymnwriter writes from is a refugee camp in Ethiopia, as his whole being yearns to return to his native land. It could be the prayer of anyone who finds themselves displaced from the land that is such a cherished part of their identity. As of 2023, there are 2.4 million refugees from South Sudan, and nearly as many (2.3 million) internally displaced people.<sup>13</sup> More than half of these are children. Watch over them, O our Creator.

## PRAY

- Pray for the flourishing of the Church among the Dinka people.
- Pray for an end to the conflicts that have uprooted so many lives.
- Pray that displaced believers would find their true home and identity in the Lord.

# YEMEN

## ILLUMINATED BY HEAVEN

Our journey now takes us across the Red Sea from North Africa to the south of the Arabian Peninsula, first to the beautiful but war-torn nation of Yemen. The timeline of biblical and early Christian history weaves itself into a succession of mighty empires that once covered vast regions of the known world. As the people of Yemen suffer today in a long and protracted war, remembering how Christian communities took root and thrived in early centuries, even as war raged around them, may give us hope for the present.

In the land now known as Yemen, the Sabaeen Empire, superpower of the Kingdom of Sheba, overlapped with familiar Old Testament events, while the rule of the Himyarites corresponded with the rise of the Early Church. According to the 8th Century Arab historian Ibn Ishaq, Christianity first took root in the 4-5th Centuries in South Arabia in the city of Najran, which is located at the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The ancient text *Acta S. Arethae*, describes the community at Najran as “illuminated by heaven”, having received the faith from church fathers of great antiquity.<sup>14</sup>

In 520 AD, the Himyarite king Dhū Nuwās pushed back against the spread of Christianity and its accompanying Byzantine influence by attacking Najran. Lead by Saint Arethas, the Christians sent word to Dhū Nuwās: “If you subjugate us, our God will come and help us and your wickedness will turn upon you and your kingdom... we have no intention of worshipping or subscribing to your blasphemy but prefer death and life in Christ, who died for us and came back to life.” Enraged, the Himyarite king laid waste to Najran, burning the Christians alive along with their churches. The fires illuminated the sky above Najran, but, true to the Christians’ warning, the violence fell back upon the Himyarite kingdom, escalating into a series of wars that drew surrounding nations into a bitter conflict that lasted until the Islamic conquests of the 7th Century.

We are most familiar with the ongoing conflict between Shiite rebels and the Sunni government in Yemen, which has turned into one of the world’s most pressing humanitarian crises. The war makes it difficult to know numbers, but it is estimated that there are only a few thousand Christians living in Yemen

today. It remains extremely dangerous to be a follower of Jesus in Yemen, and Christians face great pressure from their communities. This discrimination also manifests itself through the humanitarian crisis, as aid distributed through religious organisations is often diverted away from Christians.

Despite this, Yemeni believers remain just as courageous as the martyrs of Najran. “If we sat at home and did nothing, we would be safe. But what kind of Christians would we be if weren’t risking our lives for others to know Life Himself?” said Saleh, a Yemeni Christian who has started a

house church network in the country.<sup>15</sup> As the darkness of war shrouds their country, may these brave Christians be illuminated by the light that comes from heaven.

## PRAY

- Pray for an end to the war in Yemen and that those suffering due to the humanitarian crisis will be relieved.
- Pray that through the witness of Yemeni Christians, who “prefer death and life in Christ,” others will come to know life.



# YEMEN

## HARD QUESTIONS

In Ma'rib, Yemen, which in Old Testament times was called the Kingdom of Sheba, the impressive ruins of Barran Temple stand as a testament to a familiar biblical character. It is known as the Throne of Bilqis, who is identified in Arabic sources as the famous Queen of Sheba described in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

The Queen of Sheba came to seek an audience with King Solomon “with a very great caravan – with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones” (1 Kgs 10:2). She brought these gifts in exchange for wisdom. Having “heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions” (v 1). This pagan queen knew there was something to the stories of the Israelites’ God, and that he might have the answers she was seeking.

The Queen of Sheba’s inquisitiveness is to be commended. Questioning and seeking answers for hard questions are companions in the journey of faith. There may still be mysteries this side of eternity, “for now we see through a glass, darkly,” (1 Cor 13:12 KJV), but God has decisively

revealed enough to give us confidence to trust Him in the mystery.

For this reason, SAT-7 ARABIC’s viewer support team rejoiced to receive the burning questions of one young seeker from Yemen. “My name is Nadi. I am a Yemeni 20-year-old man from a non-Christian background. I want to know more about God. Though I am busy with my studies as I am still a student, I need to know the real God – I’m seeking to know the truth.”

“

I NEED TO KNOW THE REAL  
GOD – I’M SEEKING TO  
KNOW THE TRUTH.”

**NADI, YEMEN**

The counsellor welcomed him and gave him the message of the Gospel. Nadi had many questions about Jesus. “Does it make sense that Jesus is God? If he is God, do you think it makes sense that God dies? How could he be fully human and fully divine at the same time?”



Just as Solomon patiently answered all of the Queen of Sheba’s questions (1 Kgs 10:3), the SAT-7 counsellor helped Nadi work through his doubts to the point where he had enough evidence to put his trust in Jesus.

Jesus once asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” (Mt 16:15). Nadi could now answer as Peter once did, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16). When the viewer support team asked him if he had accepted God’s

love for him, Nadi said “Yes” in tears, being “overflowed with God’s presence.” After praying together, Nadi excused himself, telling the team he could not hold back tears of joy.

The Queen of Sheba was similarly “overwhelmed” (1 Kgs 10:5) and left praising the God of Israel because of the wisdom she had heard from Solomon. Pray for God to plant a similar thirst for answers in the hearts of those who live in the Queen of Sheba’s homeland today.

# OMAN

## A FRAGRANT OFFERING

Our journey now takes us to the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, into Oman. It is likely that the gift of frankincense that the Magi brought to the infant Jesus came from this region. Much of the frankincense produced in the ancient world, and today, comes from the Boswellia Sacra trees native to the Dhofar desert. Gold and myrrh are also found in abundance here. It is possible that the Magi stopped by the markets and bazaars of ancient Oman on their way to Bethlehem.

Tradition holds that the disciple Thomas introduced Christianity to the region on his way to India during the first Century. Evidence of ancient maritime trade routes from the eastern shores of Oman across the Arabian Sea to India would seem to support this, as does the prominence of Marthoma (Saint Thomas) congregations among the Christian minority.

Despite this heritage, Christians number only around 180,000 in Oman, 3.6 per cent of the population, and most of these

are expatriate workers. While expatriate churches are tolerated, they are closely monitored for any native Omani people in attendance. Converts from the majority religion face intense pressure from family and the wider community to recant.<sup>16</sup> In these circumstances, the worship of Omani Christians, like the rich scent of the frankincense grown in Dhofar, is “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18).

The fire in the hearts of Omani believers is not dampened. A faithful viewer of SAT-7’s programmes for fifteen years, Adham reached out to express his joy that the Gospel is being proclaimed in his country. “Thank you for carrying the very important message of the Good News of Jesus Christ to millions – especially to those whose circumstances don’t allow them learn about it.”

A particular broadcast of thousands of Christians worshipping together at a large conference in Egypt, something almost unimaginable in Oman, had touched his heart.

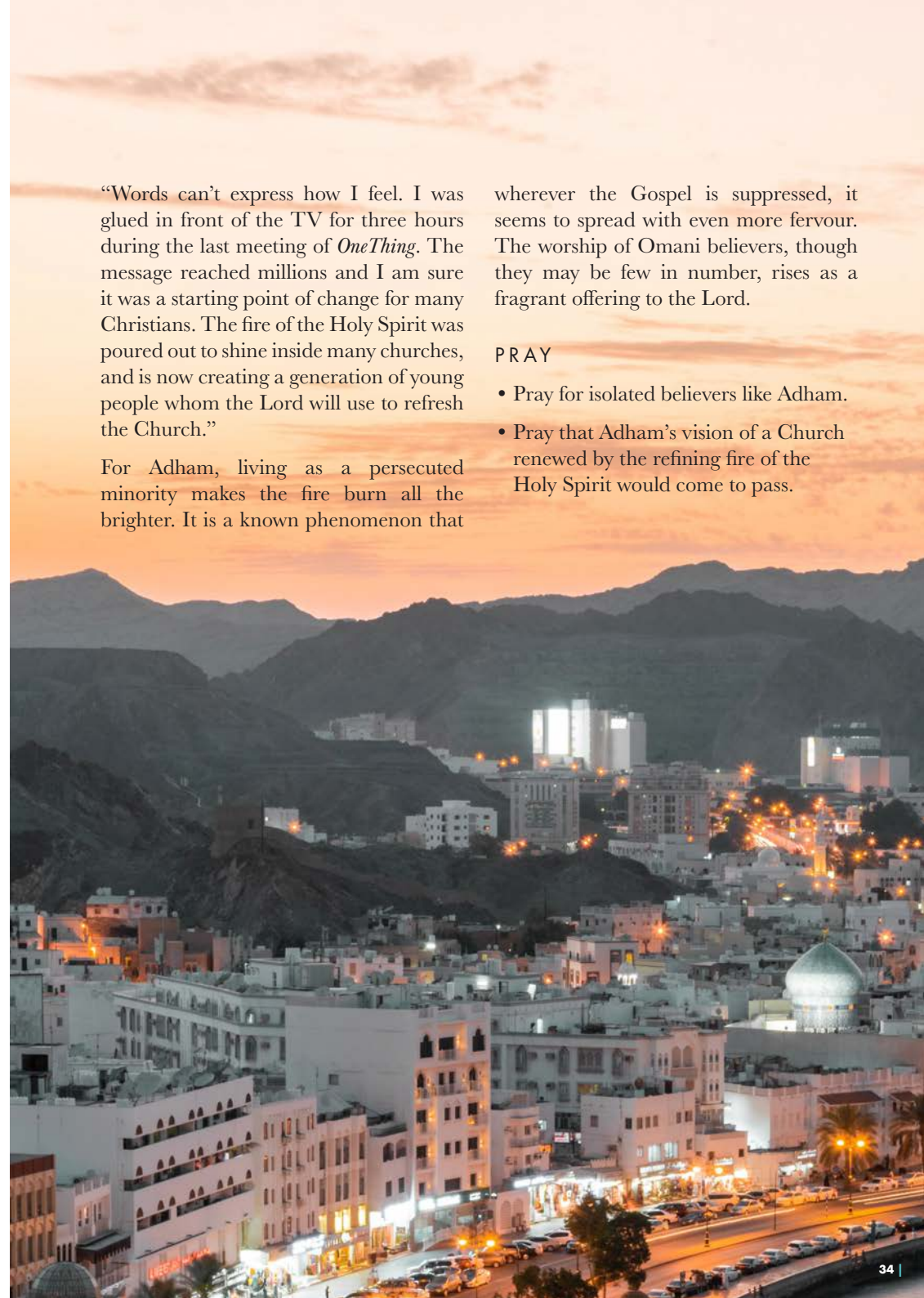
“Words can’t express how I feel. I was glued in front of the TV for three hours during the last meeting of *One Thing*. The message reached millions and I am sure it was a starting point of change for many Christians. The fire of the Holy Spirit was poured out to shine inside many churches, and is now creating a generation of young people whom the Lord will use to refresh the Church.”

For Adham, living as a persecuted minority makes the fire burn all the brighter. It is a known phenomenon that

wherever the Gospel is suppressed, it seems to spread with even more fervour. The worship of Omani believers, though they may be few in number, rises as a fragrant offering to the Lord.

## PRAY

- Pray for isolated believers like Adham.
- Pray that Adham’s vision of a Church renewed by the refining fire of the Holy Spirit would come to pass.



# UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

## TRUE RICHES

The United Arab Emirates, made up of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm Al Quwain, is known as one of the richest nations in the world. It's no secret that this prosperity comes from an abundance of oil and natural gas. However, the spiritual richness of its Christian heritage is not as well known.

From around the 3rd Century BC to the rise of Islam in the 7th Century AD, Eastern Arabia was ruled by the Parthian and then the Sassanid Empire. In the early centuries of the Church, communities of Christianised Arabs and Assyrian Christians began to flourish in the region as the Gospel spread along trade routes. Today, the population of the UAE is made up of expatriates from all over the world, which makes for a religiously diverse population. Although Christians comprise 11 per cent of the population, believers from a majority background still face pressure from their communities.<sup>17</sup>

One family from the UAE experienced the true riches of fellowship with God during a time of financial hardship. Ronza, a

young wife and mother to a toddler, got in touch after watching the SAT-7 ARABIC programme *Share Your Heart*, a show that tackles difficult and controversial topics, and invites guests to tell their own stories.

She described how she and her husband had converted to Christianity and migrated to the UAE in hope of a better life. They were blessed with a child soon after, but their financial situation had become dire. Ronza's husband was struggling to make a stable income with freelance work, and Ronza felt unable to continue her work as a personal trainer after giving birth and struggling with her body image. On top of that, the family was isolated from other Christians and lived a long way from any churches.

The irony of having fallen on hard times in one of the richest places in the world was not lost on them. The healing journey began when Ronza reached out to SAT-7's viewer support team, sharing her struggles and asking for prayer. After a few weeks of counselling, Ronza began to feel strengthened as she remembered the wonderful things God had done in their lives. She realised that they had begun to

neglect times of prayer and reading the Word, and that this had left them without hope. She and her husband recommitted to reading the Bible together daily and joined an online discipleship group.

"I am grateful for your words. We should always thank the Lord for His grace, remembering His goodness and being grateful for all He's done. We're now trying to shut out the lies of the enemy, even when fear tries to creep into our minds in difficult moments. Honestly, before getting in touch with you... I was constantly depressed, living in fear of tomorrow. But your messages have filled me with hope and have increased my faith."

Ronza and her family only needed to be reminded that, whatever their circumstances, God has blessed them beyond measure. In a country known for its prosperity, they are sustained by a faith worth far more than riches.

## PRAY

- Pray for Ronza and her family's continued spiritual growth and that God will provide for their needs.
- Pray that Christians in the UAE would shine the light of Christ, glorifying God among their neighbours.
- Pray for Christians from a majority background, who face pressure to recant their faith.



# SAUDI ARABIA

## AS FOR ME

We continue past the Persian Gulf into the Arabian Peninsula, into the vast desert landscape of Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, after the conquests of the House of Saud brought the regions known as Arabia under the rule of an absolute monarchy. As the birthplace of Mohammed, it remains the heart of the Islamic world. The kingdom operates under Islamic Law and apostasy from Islam is punishable by death, therefore the few Christian believers must worship in complete secrecy. For these Christians, the SAT-7 ARABIC channel provides spiritual nourishment that they cannot find outside the safety of their own homes.

Yet Saudi Arabia is not without its own Christian heritage. Arab traders were present at Pentecost and heard the disciples preaching in their own language (Acts 2:11), and after his conversion, the Apostle Paul spent time in Arabia before meeting with the disciples in Jerusalem (Gal 1:17). Christianity was established in Arabia after Byzantium was conquered by Constantinople in 324 AD. By this time, the faith had been embraced by many of the Bedouin tribes and flourished over the next few centuries. The Bedouin peoples, from antiquity until today, have been

known for their vibrant and expressive poetry. We therefore have a precious trove of Bedouin Christian poetry relating the legacy of ancient Arabic faith.

One such poet was Adī ibn Zayd, a 6th Century Arab Christian of high social standing. Part of his story is told in one of the tales of Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*, called *Adī ibn Zayd and the Princess Hind*, in which he marries the daughter of an Arabian king. He was a prominent adviser in the royal court, until his rivals secured his downfall. Many of his poems are written from prison and consist of his meditations to God during his hardship.

In his third poem written from prison, he laments his situation: “What is my fated end? My worth besmirched, no cause for gladness anywhere I find.” Yet he is not without hope. “To the side of a striver and a griever and a man of song, my God be hailed will surely come.” Despite the lies of his enemies, he concludes victoriously in words that echo the Psalmist, “As for me, my trust is wholly in the Lord, the One who gives an answer to prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

There are thought to be around 2 million Christians living in Saudi Arabia, most of whom are expatriate workers. Pray that these and the secret Saudi believers would know that God is always by their side.



# SAUDI ARABIA

## MORE THAN WORDS

Arabic is considered a divine language across most of the Middle East, an integral part of the Islamic faith. Unlike the Bible, which was written by human beings through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Muslims believe that the Quran was dictated directly to Mohammed through the Angel Gabriel in Arabic. That is why Muslims across the world pray in Arabic, and no translation of the Quran is considered truly authoritative. Yet Arabic is the language that SAT-7 ARABIC is using to reach millions across the MENA with the Gospel of Christ.

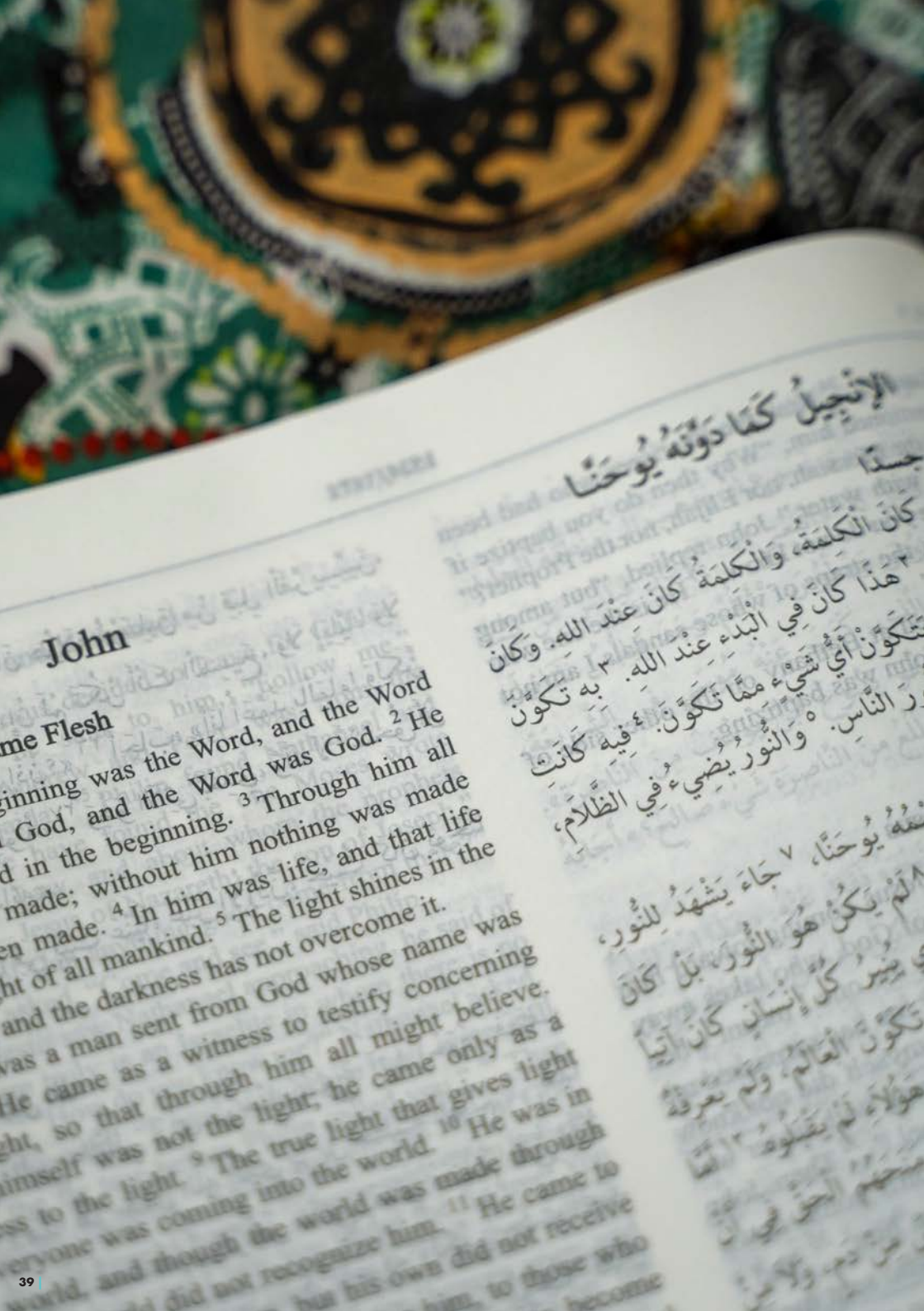
SAT-7 ARABIC broadcasts to 20 Arabic-speaking countries in the MENA, with 95 per cent of the population having access to our programmes via satellite television. For those living in countries with no access to Christian teaching or fellowship, finding answers to their questions about Christianity can be difficult. SAT-7's online page Daily Bread allows believers and seekers to find answers to questions sparked by SAT-7 programmes.

The experience of Moussa, an Arabic-speaking young man, illustrates how the comprehension of spiritual truths is something that transcends language.

“Even though I love reading the Bible, I don't always understand what it is saying. I want to learn everything I can.” The Daily Bread team started from the beginning and explained the whole story of God's plan of redemption with him.

A change took place in Moussa's heart when he heard the message of the Gospel. “Jesus' words are beautiful. I receive His salvation wholeheartedly. Now the words of the Bible flow to my heart with ease. The Lord will keep me and guide me. May His will be done in my life.” The Holy Spirit had spoken directly into his heart, indwelling him and bringing comprehension of the spiritual truths he read in the pages of the Bible. As Paul explains, this kind of understanding comes, “not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words” (1 Cor 2:13).

Just as the Arabs present at Pentecost heard the Good News being proclaimed in their own language (Acts 2:11), God is speaking into hearts across the MENA from every tribe and tongue. In countries like Saudi Arabia, where even the language spoken is thought to belong to the majority faith, praise God that His Gospel transcends language and culture.





# QATAR

## GATHER

As we continue along the coastline of the Persian Gulf, we come to the rolling dunes and impressive city skylines of Qatar. From remote rural villages to bustling cities, the Qataris practise a tradition that has endured for centuries. The “Majlis” is a decorated room in many Qatari homes reserved for special gatherings, where guests come to discuss current events and local issues while enjoying Arabic coffee. The term Majlis also refers to the gathering itself. Originating in pre-Islamic Arabia, the men of Bedouin tribes would congregate to discuss matters of common interest. This heritage is preserved in Majlis culture today, with the circle of large cushions that guests recline on resembling Bedouin living arrangements.

The act of coming together and sharing in fellowship should resonate with Christians of all backgrounds, bringing to mind the time when Jesus and His friends gathered in an upper room and broke bread together. Christians throughout history have recreated this moment over and over again in the sharing of communion, gathering to remember Jesus’ sacrifice.

In the 8th Century, Gabriel of Qatar wrote extensively of the significance of this sacred Christian tradition. He reminds us how the elements of the sacrament serve as “an image, each one of the things that were performed, for the confirmation of our faith, the growth of our hope, and the increase of our love towards Him.”<sup>19</sup> Drawing on the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:13, Gabriel reminds us that the Christian faith is one of community. As Christians gather in fellowship, sharing these symbols of Jesus’ body and blood, given for us, we grow together in faith, hope and love.

As Qatari Christians gather, they do so either in secret, unauthorised house churches, or in one of the churches inside the Mesaymeer complex in Doha. There are no churches outside this complex and the government forbids Qatari citizens to enter, so these expatriate believers are cordoned off from the world. On a Sunday, the buildings overflow as congregations line up to attend their services one after the other.<sup>20</sup>

Despite this isolation, when believers in Qatar gather and share in communion,

their faith unites them in fellowship to the global Church. They are also united to Christians like Gabriel of Qatar who worshipped in their land centuries ago, when the region was called Beth Qatraye. May the tradition of the Majlis remind us of our fellowship with the whole Church, which transcends time and space, and will one day be gathered together in Jesus’ presence.

## PRAY

- Pray that the deep fellowship offered by the Christian faith will resonate with those for whom the Majlis forms an integral part of their culture and identity.
- Pray that the Qatari government will allow churches to operate outside of the isolated Mesaymeer complex.

“AND  
NOW THESE  
THREE REMAIN: FAITH, HOPE  
AND LOVE. BUT THE GREATEST OF  
THESE IS LOVE.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13



# BAHRAIN

## THE SILK ROAD

The ancient trade routes of the Silk Road run from Xi'an, China, in the east, to Rome in the west. Cities along the Silk Road became the meeting places of cultures, and more than silks and spices were exchanged as these merchants made their living. Christian communities began to spring up across the ancient world, sometimes in unexpected places, as the Good News travelled along the Silk Road. For example, an 8th Century Christian pagoda was recently found in China, evidence of a Christian community during the Tang Dynasty<sup>21</sup>, and various Christian relics have been found in the mountains of Inner Mongolia.<sup>22</sup>

Nestled in the crescent of the Persian Gulf, Bahrain was an important centre along the Maritime Silk Road, the vast web of ports that connected the east and west by sea. The country was known as “the Pearl of the Gulf” for its trade in pearls, the finest in the world. Perhaps the Gospel first reached Bahrain’s shores as Christian traders came to exchange their goods for pearls, and freely offered a message far more precious. Archaeological evidence shows that a native Christian community existed in Bahrain from as early as the 5th Century. A recently excavated monastery in Samahij corroborates records from the synods of the Church of the East of 410

and 576 AD, which mention the episcopal seat of Meshmahig.<sup>23</sup>

These encounters along the Silk Road show us how early Christians wove the Gospel into every aspect of life. Just as Paul made and sold tents with Aquila and Priscilla as a way to fund his Gospel expeditions (Acts 18:1-3), and Lydia, Paul’s first convert, was a seller of fine fabrics, early Christian merchants took the Good News with them wherever they went. It is a good reminder: “whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). There is no invisible boundary between the holy and the secular worlds, the Kingdom is with us wherever we go (Lk 17:21).

Today, despite Christians making up 12 per cent of the population, only 1,000 of these are native Bahrainis. Instead of ancient trade routes, SAT-7 is using satellite television to bring the Gospel to Bahrain and the nations. The means of passing on the message will change in each time and culture, but the Jesus we proclaim is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8).

## PRAY

- Pray for Christians in Bahrain and the MENA region to be ambassadors for Christ in every area of their lives.



# KUWAIT

## A FERTILE LAND

Following the coast of the Persian Gulf to the heart of the Fertile Crescent, we come to Kuwait. Several famous archaeologists and geologists suggest that Kuwait was likely the original location of the Pishon River, mentioned in Genesis 2:10-11, which watered the Garden of Eden.<sup>24</sup> Some even hypothesise that Eden itself was once located there.

This fertile land has been coveted by a succession of conquering empires: the Mesopotamians; the Babylonians; the Greeks; the Parthians; and the Portuguese. Archaeological remnants of Kuwait's Christian history are found across the bay of Kuwait, including settlements and churches dating from the 5th to 9th Centuries.<sup>25</sup>

The greatest discovery was of the ruins of a "hidden Christian community" on Failaka Island, once a well-watered plain with villages, churches and a monastic chapel.<sup>26</sup> Legend has it that this community grew up around a Christian hermit, but little can be known about these islanders. It appears that this isolated community were able to continue worshipping in peace as Islam swept through the region, at least until the 9th Century, when the Christian inhabitants seem to have left without a trace.

Despite Kuwait's very small Christian population, it is proving to be fertile ground for God's Word through SAT-7's broadcasting. Programmes that resonate with the everyday lives of viewers, such as *Heart to Heart*, which models healthy marriage from a Christian perspective, and faith-filled children's programmes like *Bible Heroes* and *Family of Jesus*, are opening hearts to God.

Safaa, a young wife and mother, contacted SAT-7's viewer support team in response to an episode of *Heart to Heart*, saying "Every word you say is so important, I learn a lot from you. Pray for me and my husband, for the Lord to grant us wisdom in raising our children. Thank you for sharing your life and challenges with us."

“

THANK YOU FOR  
SHARING YOUR LIFE AND  
CHALLENGES WITH US.”

**SAFAA, KUWAIT**

Children who grow up watching SAT-7 KIDS are being watered with God's truth. Shams, a mother, wrote in to say, "*Bible Heroes* is amazing. My daughter,



Soad, has been watching since she was born. She is nine now and she says it is her favourite programme." Another Kuwaiti mum, Passant, said, "I have a daughter who is three years old. It is difficult for me to send her to Sunday School, so we are watching *Family of Jesus* regularly and my daughter learns a lot from the programme. She memorised a lot of verses and songs through it. You are a good influence to kids and she loves you deeply."

We cannot know for sure whether Kuwait truly was the site of the Garden of Eden,

but it is certainly a fertile land, with hearts that are open to receive.

## PRAY

- Pray that Christian communities, like that of Failaka Island centuries ago, would spring up in Kuwait once more.
- Pray for young viewers of SAT-7 KIDS programmes, that their hearts will be watered by the message of God's love.
- Pray for Christian parents raising children in the faith in an area where churches are few and far between.



# IRAQ

## BY MY SPIRIT

“The King of Babylon is attacking us.” King Zedekiah’s messengers pleaded with Jeremiah to intercede for Judah as Nebuchadnezzar’s armies closed in on them from all sides. “Perhaps the Lord will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us” (Jer 21:2). But this was the fulfilment of the warnings that the young prophet had given when the people were still unwilling to listen. Now, when the enemies were at the gates, it was too late for them to turn from their ways. It was the Lord’s will that His people would be given into the hands of Babylon and go into exile.

The city of Babylon was the imperial capital of what was then the most formidable empire in the world, located within the region of modern-day Iraq. Wielding all the might of Mesopotamia, King Nebuchadnezzar brought the surrounding nations under his heel. The Book of Daniel recounts the oppression the Jewish diaspora suffered under the Babylonians. While Nebuchadnezzar II created wonders like the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, he also created fiery furnaces to incinerate those who would not bow down to his idols.

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty,”

(Zech 4:6) were the words spoken by Zechariah after Judah’s return from exile. Coming at the close of the Old Testament, they were the promise from the Lord that He would restore His people. The long-awaited Messiah broke the four-hundred-year silence, but He was not what the people expected. He did not conquer with might, like the King of Babylon. He did not wield earthly power, for His kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). But the Spirit of God was upon Him, and through Him God’s blessing spread to the ends of the earth.

Christianity came to Assyria in northern Iraq in the 1st Century and became the centre of the Eastern Church. During the 2013-2017 Iraq war, Christian Assyrians and Armenians, who made up a large part of Iraq’s Christian population, fled for their lives as IS swept through the country. Those who remain live under the might of the Islamic regime. But, as was the case under the might of Babylon and every empire that succeeded it, God’s Spirit prevails. Standing on the history of their nation, spirit-filled believers in Iraq can say, “I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Ps 56:4).

## PRAY

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen the Church in Iraq.

# IRAQ

## DREAMS OF JESUS

Throughout the Scriptures, we hear of God speaking to people through dreams and visions. The testimonies of believers from Muslim-majority countries, in which people often have no way of hearing the Gospel, seem to suggest that this phenomenon is how God is choosing to reveal Himself to seekers in the Middle East. Many who have come to the faith report that a dream or vision, often of Jesus speaking to them directly, played a significant part in their journey towards Him.<sup>27</sup> The step of faith is one that can come at great personal cost in countries like Iraq. It is not surprising that, for many people, nothing short of an extraordinary encounter, bringing deep conviction of the truth, would compel them to take that step.

SAT-7 has the privilege of hearing many stories of God speaking through dreams from those who reach out to our viewer support teams. One such story came from a young man named Fady in Serbil, Iraq. “I saw Christ in a dream,” he said, “and it made me realise that He has been with me all my life, even before I knew Him.” Despite his fears about what becoming a Christian would mean for him, coming from a poor and very conservative religious family, he couldn’t

ignore the newfound sense of peace and love that now filled his heart. Fady felt inexpressibly drawn to the person he’d encountered in his dream, so reached out to SAT-7 to find out more about Him. The viewer support team listened to his story with compassion, shared the Gospel and answered all his questions. As they began to study the Bible with Fady, he suddenly connected his own experience with the words he was reading on the page. “Am I now...a new person?” he asked.

“

AM I NOW...  
A NEW PERSON?”

FADY, IRAQ

A young woman called Nesteran encountered Jesus in a similarly miraculous way when she was close to death. “It was so wonderful. When I was ill, I saw Him coming towards me... He was shining and so magnificent. And then He healed me, even as I was grappling with death. I had that dream before I knew about Jesus, but I didn’t tell anyone about it, because I didn’t understand why it had happened or what it meant until after I became a Christian. Now, each

time I read the Bible and whenever I pray, I think about that dream.” She called into the SAT-7 programme *Question Mark* to share her remarkable testimony.

Stories like Fady and Nesteran’s show us how God, “who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), works in different ways in different times and places to draw people to Himself. Yet it is the same Jesus who stands at the door and knocks (Rev 3:20), whether in a dream, or in the preaching of the Word, through the witness of a friend, or a SAT-7 broadcast.

Praise God that he makes all those who respond to His call a new person in Christ.

## PRAY

- Pray that more Iraqis would be brought to the Lord through dreams and visions.
- Pray for courage for those who are being drawn by Jesus to take that step of faith.
- Pray for new believers who face pressure and ostracisation from their families and the wider community.



# JORDAN

## SELAH

As you read through the Book of Psalms, you will come across a mysterious word that falls between verses – *Selah*. Through the ages, this Hebrew word has puzzled readers and scholars alike, but most agree that it has a liturgical function as an instruction to musicians performing the Psalms. While it may simply indicate a pause, scholars examining the roots of the word have suggested it is an instruction ‘to praise’ or ‘to lift up’ in worship. Whatever its function, it’s a good reminder to pause, reflect on the words of the Psalm and lift up our hearts in praise.

The Kingdom of Jordan, which in biblical times was a part of the Holy Land, has a rich and distinct musical culture. Traditional Jordanian music uses a Levantine style known as Zajal, from the root verb *zajala*, which means ‘to raise the voice in singing’. Drawing on Bedouin traditions, it is a form of sung poetry accompanied by percussion and traditional wind instruments. It bears many similarities to the way the Psalms would have been performed in the courts of ancient Israel.

In Jordan, home to one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, dating back to the birth of the Church, Christians often intertwine their musical

heritage with their worship. From the cliff-carved city of Petra (which is coincidentally called *Sela* in Hebrew) to the ruins of Pella, where Christians fled to during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jordanians have lifted their voices in the words of the Psalms for nearly 2,000 years.

As the Christian population in Jordan has dwindled, however, many have become disconnected from this heritage. When the SAT-7 programme *Keep on Singing* broadcast a special episode from Jordan, many shared how the worship had reignited a sense of their unique Jordanian Christian identity. For many viewers, it was a needed pause, a *selah*, encouraging them to lift up their hearts in praise once more. “We have received so many calls and messages about what the Lord did through this episode,” Mawiyah, one of the musicians, shared. “And, large numbers of brothers and sisters who used to come to church called us to express their passion to return to the Lord.”<sup>28</sup>

Worshipping the Lord in the Jordanian dialect, the musicians were able to send a profound message about the possibility of an identity that is both Jordanian and Christian. Inspired by the Jordanian musicians, let us pause and lift our praises to the one whose song brought everything into existence.





# JORDAN

## CROSSING THE JORDAN

After many years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Miraculously, the waters parted before the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and God's presence went before the people as they entered the land (Josh 3:14-17). It was in these waters that John the Baptist would call the people to a baptism of repentance, and the Holy Spirit would descend and rest upon Jesus, God's beloved Son. The way to renewed life had been opened.

The phrase "crossing the Jordan" has come to signify deliverance and the fulfilment of promises after a long period of waiting and wandering. As the exodus from Egypt and wilderness wanderings of the Israelites foreshadow deliverance from slavery to sin and every believer's struggle against the flesh, the crossing of the Jordan gives us hope for the ultimate fulfilment of God's Kingdom.

As God went ahead of His people, Jesus also promised to show us the way. Before His crucifixion, he told His disciples, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later" (Jn 13:36). When he told them that he was going ahead to prepare a place for them in His Father's house, Thomas asked, "Lord,

we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (Jn 14: 1-5). Jesus replied with the famous words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v 6). They knew Jesus, so they knew the way.

The trials and persecutions that the disciples faced following Jesus' ascension were beyond imagining, as each of them were hunted down and executed, apart from the disciple John who lived out his days in exile, for proclaiming the Gospel. Their lives show that times in the wilderness are never wasted. As they crossed over into eternal life, they left behind the fledgling Church, which began as a spring and became a great tide that watered the whole earth.

## PRAY

- Pray that believers in Jordan would demonstrate the renewal of heart and mind that Jesus brings.
- Pray for both seekers and Christians who find themselves in a season of spiritual dryness, that they will find refreshment in the Lord.
- Pray that SAT-7's programmes will touch the hearts of Jordanian viewers, leading them closer to God.

# THE HOLY LAND



Written by Grace Al-Zoughbi, Head of Biblical Studies at Bethlehem Bible College

## EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

It is significant to me, beyond words, to be born and live in the land where the Lord Jesus Himself was born, lived, died and rose on the third day. The Easter season reminds me that Christ defeated the power of death more than two thousand years ago, but He lives today in me. His resurrection means I have a calling to serve our risen Lord with all that I have, all that I can, wherever I can. I feel strongly called to serve my people in the Middle East. Despite the ongoing injustices and hardships in the land where Christ lived, His love and peace will ultimately reign through us, His witnesses.

The apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” It is this hope that we cling to, that we preach and that we live for!

In my community, remembering the resurrection of Christ where it originally took place posits the Easter story in

its authentic context. How can we not believe in the death and resurrection of Christ when it happened in our very city, in our homeland, in the birthplace of Christianity? How can we not receive His love when we experience His provision in our lives day by day? To the Palestinian Christians, Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

A special tradition that is practiced in our culture during the Easter period is walking the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, sometimes more commonly known as “The Way of the Cross” (*Via Crucis*). While you can walk this road anytime of the year, it has particular significance around Easter time. Through “the way of suffering” or “the path of sorrows”, people have retraced the steps of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. Locals and pilgrims alike walk along the Via Dolorosa, which is believed to be the last walk Jesus took when He was carrying the very cross on which He would be crucified. About a half-mile along the Via Dolorosa

“

OUR RISEN SHEPHERD  
GUIDES AND LEADS US,  
EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.”

you would encounter the 14 Stations of the Cross, sites of deep significance to Christianity, leading to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where traditionally Jesus was buried. These sites witness to the amazing life of Jesus, His death and resurrection. However, wherever we are in the world, we can walk the narrow path Jesus walked so that we too can be living witnesses and living stones for the Lord. Retracing the footsteps of Jesus is a commandment for all of us as we learn from Him, seek to resemble Him, and faithfully and diligently follow the tender voice of our risen Shepherd who guides and leads us, every day and every step of the way. He reminds us in John 14:6 that He is “the way and the truth and the life.”

My prayer is that He will lead you to Jerusalem, to walk to the way of the cross so that you can also experience the joy of the resurrection, as we all victoriously chant the famous words of John of Damascus:

المسيح قام من بين الأموات ووطن الموت بالموت ووهب الحياة للذين في القبور

“The Lord has risen from the dead and trodden death with death and has given life to those within the tombs.”

## PRAY

- Pray that Christians in the Holy Land would demonstrate the way of Jesus to their neighbours.
- At a time of great suffering, give thanks that SAT-7 is broadcasting truth and life to viewers in the Holy Land.





# THE HOLY LAND

## THE SHEPHERD'S DISCOVERY

One day in 1946, a young Bedouin boy of the Ta'amireh tribe tracked a lost goat through the Judean desert until he stumbled across a cave. As he peered deeper into the limestone caverns of Qumran, he came across scrolls that been undisturbed for nearly 2,000 years.<sup>29</sup> When teams of archaeologists poured in, they uncovered some of the oldest biblical manuscripts ever to have been found. The significance of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to biblical scholarship cannot be understated.

Though only fragments remain of many of the scrolls, a handful of manuscripts are almost completely intact. Among them is the Great Isaiah Scroll, the oldest known complete copy of the book of Isaiah. The general consistency of this scroll with other manuscripts has bolstered Biblical scholars' confidence in the accurate preservation of the text we have today.<sup>30</sup> It is in Isaiah that we read the famous prophecy of Jesus' sacrifice, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6).

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP."

JOHN 10:11

The manner in which the scrolls were discovered has striking resonances with the story of another young shepherd, who followed a lost sheep into a cave where he came across a Burning Bush; God's revelation of Himself to Moses. God reveals Himself to us in many ways: sometimes in the world around us; sometimes in miracles and signs; most often through His Word; and ultimately in His Son.

As we linger a while on our journey near Qumran, we should remember that God's Word is an essential part of our journey. It's a map, a guide, a story, a mirror, a sword. Through it we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Above all, it shows us who Jesus really is, the shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

## PRAY

- Give thanks that Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the Church.
- Give thanks for God's revelation to us through His Word, and the wonderful truths we find within it.



# LEBANON

## COMING TO THE HARBOUR

Our journey now takes us along the shores of the Mediterranean to the tiny coastal nation of Lebanon. The ancient Phoenicians who dwelt here built temples along the shore, their tall fire-topped beacons doubling as lighthouses for night-time mariners.

Today, Lebanon has the second-largest Christian population in the Middle East, most of whom belong to the indigenous Maronite Church. The Maronites, founded in the 5th Century by Saint Maroun, retreated to Lebanon's mountains to escape persecution and were largely sealed off from the rest of Christianity until the time of the Crusades. They are affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, but retain their own Syriac traditions, including the use of Arabic and Aramaic in their liturgies.

Among these traditions is an ancient Holy Week rite called Naheero, or "Coming to the Harbour". Taking inspiration from their seafaring ancestors, the service tells the story of a ship, representing the Church, reaching the harbour of salvation in Jesus after its safe journey through Lent. The rite begins with a procession of the people to the church, bearing lamps,

candles and lanterns, and the first prayer is read at the door:

"Have mercy on us, O Lord, and assist us. O harbour of salvation and port of safety, you are the lighthouse that draws us to you with the radiance of your light, above the stormy seas of this world."

The people of Lebanon have certainly journeyed through some "stormy seas" in recent years. The country has been battered by economic and financial crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and Beirut's devastating port explosion in 2020. And the clouds of war loom ever-greater along its borders, as Syria's civil war rumbles on in the east and border skirmishes with Israel threaten to escalate in the south. In desperate and fearful times, where is the light for Lebanon?

“

MY PRAYER IS THAT THE LORD USES THIS TELEVISION SCREEN TO BE A LIGHTHOUSE TO ALL WHO ARE SEEKING TRUTH.”

**GHADA, LEBANON**



The answer can be found in the ancient hymn of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, chanted by the Maronite congregation at the opening of the Naheero service:

"Our King comes in majestic glory. Let us light our lamps and go forth to meet Him. Let us find our joy in Him, for He has found joy in us. He will indeed rejoice us with His marvellous light. Let us glorify the majesty of the Son and give thanks to the almighty Father Who, in an outpouring of love, sent Him to us, to fill us with hope and salvation."

It is this "marvellous light" that is beamed out through SAT-7, 24 hours a day, 365

days a year. Through SAT-7, the people of Lebanon are hearing the Good News of Jesus, and finding their hope and safe harbour in Him. Let's join with the prayer of Ghada, a SAT-7 viewer in Lebanon, who called us to say: "My prayer is that the Lord uses this television screen to be a lighthouse to all who are seeking truth."

## PRAY

- Pray that the people of Lebanon will come to know Jesus through SAT-7.
- Give thanks for the faithful witness of the Maronite Church through the centuries.

# LEBANON



*Written by Marianne  
Awaraji, Audience Relations  
Manager of SAT-7  
ARABIC and  
SAT-7 KIDS*

## BEAUTY FROM ASHES

My mother's voice trembled as she recounted the story. In 1982, Lebanon was engulfed in the flames of war, particularly in the mountainous region of Bhamdoun, where my mother and her family lived. Before the war, their old family home served as more than a dwelling; it was a vibrant community. But as the conflict escalated, my mother left her beloved home behind to pursue education in Beirut. A month later, a taxi arrived in Beirut, carrying her family. Their lives had been upended, and they had been moving from place to place.

When the war finally subsided, they returned to their village, only to find their house reduced to a charred, hollow shell. It had been stripped bare, with even the tiniest remnants stolen – doors, tiles, stones, everything. Little did they know that their war-ravaged house, reduced to ashes, would be transformed into a vessel for God's glory. In an extraordinary turn of events, the ruins were reborn as a free studio for SAT-7 KIDS, capturing

the heartwarming stories of children who had also experienced trauma. My grandmother graciously opened the doors of her restored home to the SAT-7 team. Within those walls, stories of resilience and hope unfolded. With nothing but an abundance of determination, they brought forth beauty from the ashes.

The efforts of SAT-7 in Lebanon are not without challenges: economic crises; political turmoil; social unrest; the 2020 Beirut explosion; COVID-19 lockdowns, rampant inflation, bank closures, and the looming spectre of regional conflict. Many Christians have fled the country in search of peace and security. In a world where violence and conflict dominate the headlines, SAT-7 KIDS offers a counter-narrative of peace, love, and compassion. Children are reminded of God's love for them and are equipped with valuable life lessons rooted in biblical principles.

I grew up serving God through SAT-7 and witnessing how believers from all over the Middle East supported one another during times of crisis. The testimonies shared through SAT-7 KIDS serve as a powerful reminder that, despite the difficulties Christians face in Lebanon, they are not alone. Pray that we will be united by our faith and shine God's light in a troubled world.



# SYRIA

## A CHANGE OF HEART

Some journeys change you for ever. Saul of Tarsus was on a journey to Damascus, today known as the capital of Syria. He was a hard-hearted man, set on pulling up the sapling of the Damascene Church and destroying it root and stem. But, in a flash of light, the persecutor of the Church fell to the ground. He heard Jesus' voice, and immediately realised that the one he had been persecuting was the Lord of all. When he reached his destination, Ananias and the other believers in Damascus welcomed their former enemy as a brother (Acts 9:1-18).

The story is so resonant that the phrase "road to Damascus experience" has entered common parlance as a metaphor for a sudden, radical change of heart. Saul's heart of stone is quickened and he is given a new heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). He doesn't waste any time, and before the end of the chapter he is preaching in the synagogues about Jesus, the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

This passage tells us that there was a church in Syria from the very beginning. The Church of Damascus rose as a centre of early Christianity, though it was fragmented by 5th Century controversies over understandings of the divine and

human natures of Christ. Syriac, the root of the Aramaic language spoken by Jesus, was one of the most important languages of early Christianity and predominated in many formative theological writings and liturgies. Believers in Syria today mainly belong to the Greek Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox churches.

In the pattern of Paul's ministry in the marketplace, Syrian Christians engage in all aspects of civic life: the economy; government; the arts; science; academia and entertainment. However, they have been increasingly subject to pressure from militant groups since the beginning of the war. Before the fighting began, Christians made up nearly 10 per cent of the population, a number which has more than halved.<sup>31</sup> But the story of Paul shows us that even the most zealous persecutors of the faith can experience a radical change of heart.

## PRAY

- Pray for hard hearts in Syria to be softened as they journey through war and suffering.
- Pray that Syria will one day be a safe place for Christians to return to.
- Pray that SAT-7 programmes will comfort Christian Syrian refugees.





# SYRIA

## REFUGE AND STRENGTH

Not all journeys are taken by choice. As we make our way across the Syrian Desert, we find a country unrecognisable from the Syria of a few years ago. The stone steps of the historic citadel of Aleppo are now blackened and strewn with rubble. The Roman ruins of Palmyra were completely decimated by IS. Department stores once decorated with Christmas lights are covered with a layer of white dust. Since the outbreak of the civil war, many Syrians have been forced to flee.

Even before the war, lines of tanks and armoured vehicles could often be seen stretching into the desert, as military rule kept a tenuous peace between the diverse mix of Sunnis, Kurds, Christian Arabs, Armenians and Jews. This fragile peace was shattered in 2011, when an uprising against the Syrian government escalated into a brutal civil war with many competing factions.<sup>32</sup> Countless innocent Syrians were caught in the crossfire. After the death toll of the civil war passed half a million, the UN stopped counting.<sup>33</sup>

Among the 14 million refugees who fled Syria<sup>34</sup> was a 13-year-old girl called Aline. Currently living in Iraq, Aline called into the SAT-7 KIDS programme *Behind the Door* with a message for children like her.

“I’ve personally experienced the hardships of war, and there were nights when fear kept me awake. To the kids facing difficult times, my prayer is to always hold on to your faith in Jesus. He will give you the strength to go on, and I encourage you to never stop praying, because it was my only refuge during war times.”

Aline lives out the words of Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” As each of us walks our own journey, may we extend God’s love to fellow travellers on the road, and especially to the strangers we may find in our midst, forced here through circumstances beyond their control.

## PRAY

- Pray for Syrian children who have been exposed to war and suffering.
- Pray that SAT-7 KIDS will encourage more children to look to Jesus.

“GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH,  
AN EVER-PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE.”

PSALM 46:1

# TÜRKİYE

*Written by Gülsüm I, SAT-7 TÜRK  
Programme Manager*

## THE POTTER'S WORKSHOP

Cappadocia, in central Türkiye, was home to early Christian communities and influential figures known as the Cappadocian Fathers, who shaped Christian theology. In the first few centuries AD, Christians in the Roman Empire faced sporadic periods of persecution, often rooted in the refusal to worship Roman gods or the emperor, which was considered an act of disloyalty. Cappadocia's unique geography, characterised by soft volcanic rock, allowed the inhabitants to carve elaborate underground cities. During times of persecution, Christians sought refuge in these underground complexes, where they could worship freely and escape persecution.

The region's underground cities bear witness to the challenges faced by early Christians and their resilience in the face of adversity. The ability to create hidden places of worship played a crucial role in preserving the Christian faith during periods of persecution in Cappadocia.

The Cappadocian Fathers, including Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of

Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzus, were influential Christian theologians from Cappadocia in the 4th Century. They not only contributed significantly to the development of Christian theology but also defended the faith against external threats, including doctrinal controversies and persecution. A testament to this legacy is the Goreme Open-Air Museum, which features rock-cut churches and chapels. The frescoes within them depict scenes from the Bible as well as the lives of these early Christians.

It was in Cappadocia that I sensed God speaking to me for the first time. I had read the Bible before, but my eyes were closed, and I remained sceptical. Years ago, I visited the preserved, centuries-old churches and chapels and watched the renowned local potters in their workshops. I suddenly had a vision of myself in a church, and I was praying and making the sign of the cross. I felt so relieved and peaceful in that moment. It was a feeling I had never felt before.

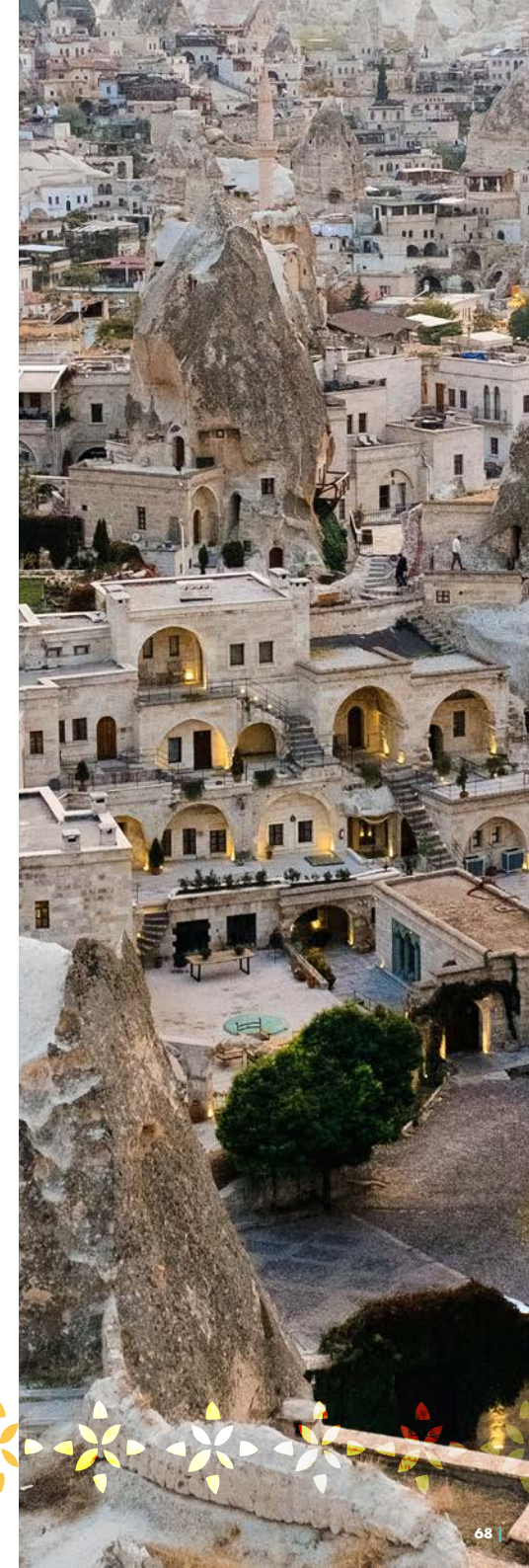
I asked a relative to take me to church with her, and she encouraged me to bring all my questions to God. I asked Him, "Why does nothing go well in my life? Don't you love me, God?" The next day at church, the pastor started his sermon with my question. I stopped in my tracks.

Was there really a God who could hear my questions and communicate with me? Then he talked about the potter's workshop in Jeremiah 18. I was reminded of the pottery workshop in Cappadocia. I was sure God was communicating with me.

After that, I read the Bible again, but this time with a changed heart. Looking back, I realise how much the Lord loves me. Not only have I become a believer, but I can also do what I love most, serving the Lord in media. I now work as a Programme Manager at SAT-7 TÜRK. In 2023, SAT-7 TÜRK shot a documentary in Cappadocia, showcasing the Christian history of this country to the people of Türkiye. The prayers of Christians who were persecuted in Cappadocia centuries ago were effective in my life. They testified to me, centuries after they left this earth. Let's pray that our lives, like pots moulded out of clay, will be a witness to others years and centuries later.

## PRAY

- Pray that more Turkish people will, like Gülsüm, hear God's call in these places of rich Christian history.
- Pray that the Church in Türkiye would have a strong presence, despite their small numbers.
- Pray for the work of Gülsüm and the SAT-7 TÜRK channel.



# TÜRKIYE

## WRITTEN IN STONE

In the city of Antakya, once known as Antioch, where the early believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26), stands the ancient Church of Saint Peter. Carved into the rock face of Mount Starius, the 4th Century church is one of the oldest surviving churches in the world. It has endured through wars, periods of persecution and even the February 2023 earthquake. Türkiye boasts some of the richest Christian history in the world, yet only remnants remain today. Despite being a very large country, it has one of the smallest percentages of Christians. Like the Church of Saint Peter, though, they refuse to be shaken.

Paul's missionary journeys took him through the ancient cities of Antioch, Ephesus, Colossae and Galatia, all of which are in modern-day Türkiye. His letters to the churches paint a picture of the young churches struggling to establish themselves in a culture that threatened to either destroy them or distort the Gospel. The seven churches of Revelation – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – were also located in southwest Türkiye.

Through the Golden Gate of Istanbul, we come to the ruins of the churches and basilicas of Constantinople. Following

the legalisation of Christian worship by Constantine the Great and the establishment of the city of Constantinople in 330 AD, the land entered a golden age of the faith. Constantinople became one of the great pillars of the Church and remains the ecumenical seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church today. However, the Christian presence in the land was largely wiped out by the late Ottoman genocides, and Christians in Türkiye number only 169,000 today.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the Christian history of the nation being written in stone, in towering ruins and ancient underground networks of cave churches, this history is largely unknown to the Turkish people. Among SAT-7 TURK's programmes are many which seek to uncover the nation's sacred past. As the Book of Revelation urges the church in Ephesus, we must pray for Türkiye to return to the love it had at first for the Gospel (Rev 2:4). Meanwhile, give thanks for the remnant of believers who have persevered, endured hardships for the name of Christ, and have not grown weary (v 3).



# AZERBAIJAN

## THE MYRRH-BEARERS

Encircled by imposing mountain ranges, the green plains of Azerbaijan offer a change of scenery as we continue our journey. A mixture of Middle Eastern arches, Russian architecture and modern flame-shaped skyscrapers make up the skyline of the capital, Baku. At the heart of the city, we'll find the Cathedral of the Myrrh-bearers, ecclesial centre of the Russian Orthodox Church in Azerbaijan, the largest denomination in the country.

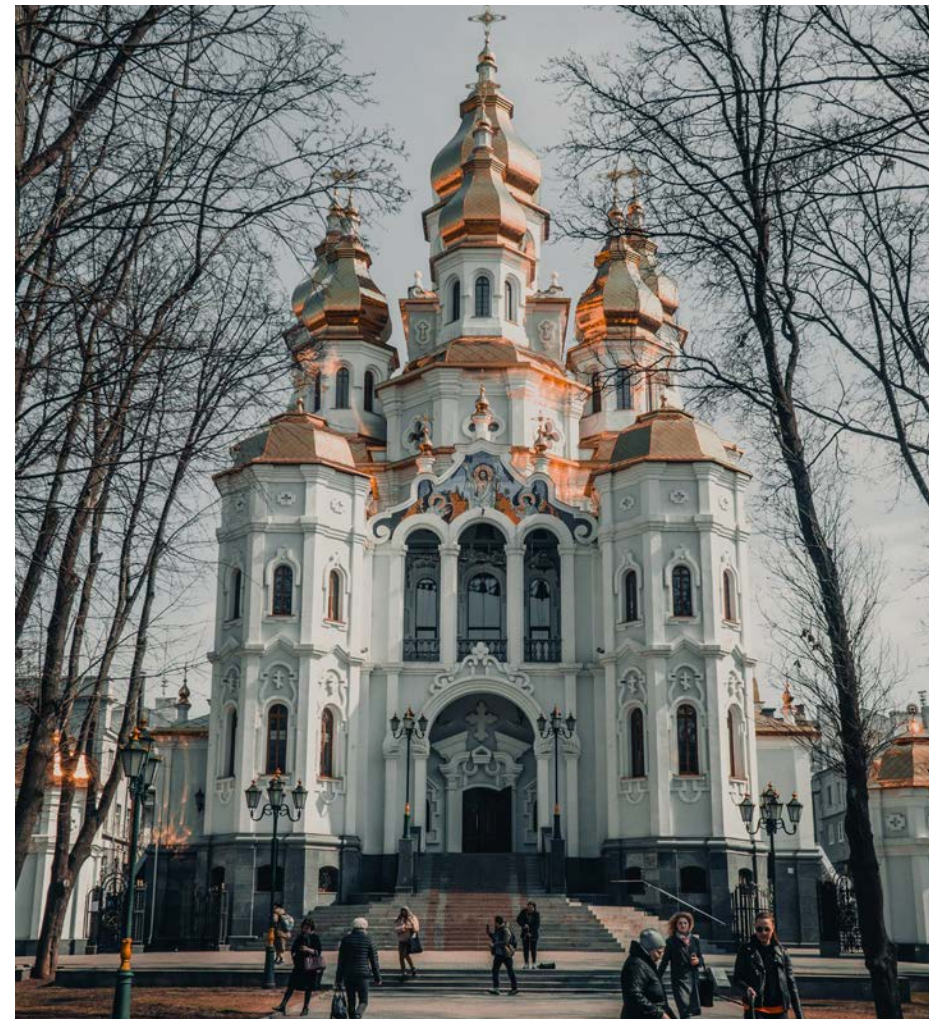
The first myrrh-bearer mentioned in the Gospels is the Magi, whose prophetic gift of myrrh foreshadowed the fate of the infant king. Mary of Bethany's anointing of Jesus for His burial, likewise, was a sign of what was to come (Jn 12:1-11). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus came to take Jesus's body away after His crucifixion, carrying "a mixture of myrrh and aloes" for His burial (Jn 19:38-42). And, most memorably, there were Mary Magdalene and the other women, who brought myrrh and spices to the tomb on Easter morning (Lk 24:1; Mk 16:1), only to find it empty.

The significance of the myrrh-bearers, followers of Jesus during His earthly ministry, is that they seemed to grasp,

before even the disciples, who Jesus was and what he would accomplish through His death. Jesus Himself indicated that they should be remembered in His response to His anointing at Bethany, "Truly I tell you, wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9). Their reverence for Jesus, even after His death, when many of His followers must have felt that their hopes had been in vain, is commemorated in the Eastern Orthodox churches.

But the women would exchange myrrh, a symbol of mourning, for the message of life as they became bearers of the news of Jesus's resurrection. The myrrh-bearers teach us how we ought to carry the Gospel to the world: both with sombre reverence for Jesus's sacrifice and joyful celebration of His defeat of death. They recognised the spiritual significance of what had taken place among them, as we should recognise what these events mean in our own lives.

SAT-7 is bringing this message to viewers in Azerbaijan through Azeri programmes such as *Taste and See*, which show how events that took place over 2,000 years



ago have a profound impact on our lives today. This strengthens Azeri Christians to live for Christ in a country that, despite having a Christian history that reaches back into the first Century, is dominated by secularism and nominal Islam. Let us pray that Azeri Christians, like the myrrh-bearers, will carry the message of Jesus's death and resurrection to a country in need of new life.

## PRAY

- Pray that the example of the myrrh-bearers will encourage Azeri Christians to bear the message of the Gospel with reverence and joy.
- Pray for God's peace in a country in conflict with neighbouring nations, and suffering from the cultural remnants of Soviet control.





# IRAN

## FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Our journey takes us south along the coast of the Caspian Sea into Iran, once the heart of the ancient Persian Empire. By the time of King Xerxes (c. 518-465 BC), Persia had superseded Babylon as the ruling power of the Ancient Near East. The Biblical narrative weaves into this period with the post-exilic Book of Esther, telling the story of a small group of Jews living in the Persian capital of Susa.

Famous in her time for her beauty, but remembered among God's people for her courage, Queen Esther stood her ground against those who were plotting to wipe out her people. She hesitated when asked to intervene on behalf of the Jews. To enter the king's presence without an invitation could be a death sentence. It was the realisation that God had brought her to her current position, "for such a time as this" (Est 4:14) that gave her the strength to enter Xerxes's courts. "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (v 16).

Despite pressure from the government, Christians in Iran are able to tune into SAT-7 PARS online and via satellite television. Korshed, an Iranian man, told SAT-7, "Having lived through the difficulties and challenges of these times, I have seen that wherever there is more

pressure and suffering, God's grace is given in greater measure. We are witnessing many being saved in Iran. Wherever I go, even among my immediate neighbours, people are talking about Christianity. We get to share in the promise of the kingdom of God, so I seek to share the Good News with others." Iranian Christians like Korshed are interceding for their people, even at great personal risk.

Xerxes had signed the edict for the elimination of the Jews without a moment's thought, but on learning that his wife was a Jew, he reconsidered. It may be the same for Christians patiently witnessing to their friends and families in Iran. Despite the cultural disdain for God's people, relationships have the power to overcome ingrained prejudices. May God strengthen the Iranian Church for such as time as this.

## PRAY

- Pray for Iranian Christians who face persecution for their faith from their community and the authorities.
- Pray for the work of SAT-7 PARS and for those who are watching, often in secret.
- Pray that Christians will draw others to Christ through their relationships.

# IRAN

ZAN. ZENDEGI. AZADI.

If you venture into streets of Iran today, you might hear the cry of “Zan! Zendegi! Azadi!” which translates as “Woman! Life! Freedom!” On 16 October 2022, after being arrested for allegedly wearing her headscarf incorrectly, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was killed in police custody. Her death sparked a wave of protests against Iran’s compulsory head-covering laws and the treatment of women in general. The Iranian government responded with force, in some cases firing live ammunition into crowds of protestors.

Sally Momtazi, presenter of Farsi-language programme *Insiders* on SAT-7 PARS, says, “Our hearts are heavy with the struggles faced by women in Iran, especially amidst the protests sparked by the tragic death of Mahsa Amini. We recognise the profound importance of honouring and uplifting women, a value echoed in the compassion and respect Jesus showed to women during His time on earth.”

It is too dangerous for SAT-7 PARS to operate inside Iran, so the channel has studios in the UK and Cyprus. However, satellite television is beyond the reach of government censorship and the team are able to reach Iranians and other Farsi-speakers with a message of hope and

freedom, even from a distance. Presenters like Sally and the rest of the production team cannot return to Iran due to the nature of their work, but it is a price they are willing to pay.

Sally describes the Church in Iran as “a beacon of hope and refuge for many, uplifting and giving a voice to women within their communities.” However, she also says that the oppression Iranians have suffered means many young people want nothing to do with any religion. She hopes that SAT-7 programmes may be used by God to soften their hearts to the truth.

“

JUST AS JESUS CHERISHED  
AND UPLIFTED WOMEN,  
WE PRAY FOR THE  
EMPOWERMENT OF  
WOMEN IN IRAN, THAT  
THEIR VOICES MAY BE  
HEARD AND THEIR RIGHTS  
ACKNOWLEDGED.”

**SALLY MOMTAZI, SAT-7 PARS**

SAT-7 programmes like *Insiders* aim to support women in Iran and show



them their value in God’s eyes. They interview both Christians and experts from a secular background, shedding light on many of the challenges women face. Let’s join Sally in her prayer: “We ask for divine wisdom and insight as we craft our content. May Your will be done through this programme, touching hearts, fostering empathy, and advocating for justice and equality for women in Iran. Lord, grant Christians in Iran wisdom and discernment as they navigate these troubled times, allowing Your love to guide their actions and decisions.”

## PRAY

- Pray that God’s love and grace will surround the women of Iran, the Church, and SAT-7 PARS, guiding their steps and bringing hope in times of struggle.
- Pray for protection and guidance over programmes like *Insiders*, that God will shield these initiatives from any potential harm or obstacles, allowing them to continue their work of uplifting and empowering women.

# AFGHANISTAN

## ERASED

At the crossroads of the Middle East and South Asia, we come to the forbidding, mountainous landscape of Afghanistan. The ancient trade routes that threaded through the country brought together diverse cultures and belief systems, evidence of which could, until recently, be seen in a myriad of fascinating historical artefacts and archaeological sites.

When the Taliban regained power in 2021, the National Museum of Afghanistan braced itself, remembering the destruction of the past. Throughout periods of Soviet occupation and Taliban insurgency, Afghanistan’s many historical artefacts and works of art were targeted and destroyed, including classical Greek artefacts from the time of Alexander the Great, ancient texts from the Puli Khumri Public Library, and any trace of the Christian history of the country, which reached back to as early as the second century.

It is not the first time that extremist groups have sought to erase the Christian history of the Middle East. Extremist groups have

destroyed churches across the Middle East and desecrated holy sites. “There are no Christians in Afghanistan,” said Inamullah Samangani, a spokesman for the Taliban, in 2022. “[A] Christian minority has never been known or registered here.”<sup>36</sup> SAT-7 knows this to be untrue, as we continue to receive messages from Christians in Afghanistan, telling of the struggles of living under the oppressive rule of the Taliban.

The Gospel is thought to have been brought to Afghanistan by the Apostle Thomas, and despite the Islamic and Mongol conquests in the centuries since, a small Christian presence has always endured. Herat was a significant outpost of the Afghan Church from the 5th to 15th Centuries. Evidence of this, despite attempts of erasure, can still be found: a town close to Herat is named Injil, which is the word for Gospel in Arabic, Pashto and Dari.

Hope and memory endure, and Christians in Afghanistan remain steadfast in the knowledge that their faith is stronger than buildings and artefacts. Baset contacted SAT-7 to say, “My wife, children, and I

are always thinking beyond these crises and adhering to the true and Living God. We are always praying and until now our Heavenly Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have protected us, and we have peace in our hearts.” Though the physical evidence of Afghanistan’s rich Christian heritage has been destroyed, this true, saving faith is beyond reach. Give thanks that God has promised those who remember Him, “Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isa 49:15).

## PRAY

- Pray for Afghan Christians living in constant threat of danger under Taliban rule.
- Give thanks for SAT-7’s broadcasts in Dari, the Persian dialect of Afghanistan.
- Pray that isolated Afghan believers will discover SAT-7 and realise that they are not alone.

“SURELY THEY MAY FORGET,  
YET I WILL NOT FORGET YOU.”

ISAIAH 49:15



# AFGHANISTAN

## PSALMS OF LAMENT

This landlocked country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia is covered by a vast expanse of desert sand, indifferent to the turmoil that has gripped the Afghan people in recent years. Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, life has been extremely hard for Afghan citizens, who have been stripped of many fundamental freedoms. For Christians, this has not only meant the freedom to worship without the threat of death, but also the freedom to follow their conscience.

The beginning of Arman's message to SAT-7 began with a despair that echoed the biblical psalms of lament. "I am truly tired of life and have no hope or trust in my future or that of my children." He describes being trapped in a society that seeks to conform its citizens to a morality that is contrary to his Christian faith. "I don't want my children to live under the rule of the Taliban. I don't want my poor children to study in a school that is controlled by the Taliban, forced to read books that are full of commands to kill and engage in evil."

He described his difficulty in finding a job in these circumstances. "I want a job that does not involve lies, hatred or inflicting injustice on people. I cannot perform duties that lead to stoning, cutting off of

limbs or the execution of a person. I am asking God for a job which allows kindness and respect and protects the freedom to act according to my conscience; a job that will help my relationship with God to grow and be strengthened."

But, in the style of biblical lament, Arman's words build with a rising sense of hope and trust in God. "According to the powerful statements in God's Word, I believe strongly that God hears my voice and He will come to my aid. The way God came to me in a completely restrictive society and touched my heart is miraculous and extraordinary. This is proof that the power of God is far above the laws of nature: so I believe that God will also perform other miracles in my life."

“

THE WAY GOD CAME TO  
ME IN A COMPLETELY  
RESTRICTIVE SOCIETY  
AND TOUCHED MY HEART  
IS MIRACULOUS AND  
EXTRAORDINARY. ”

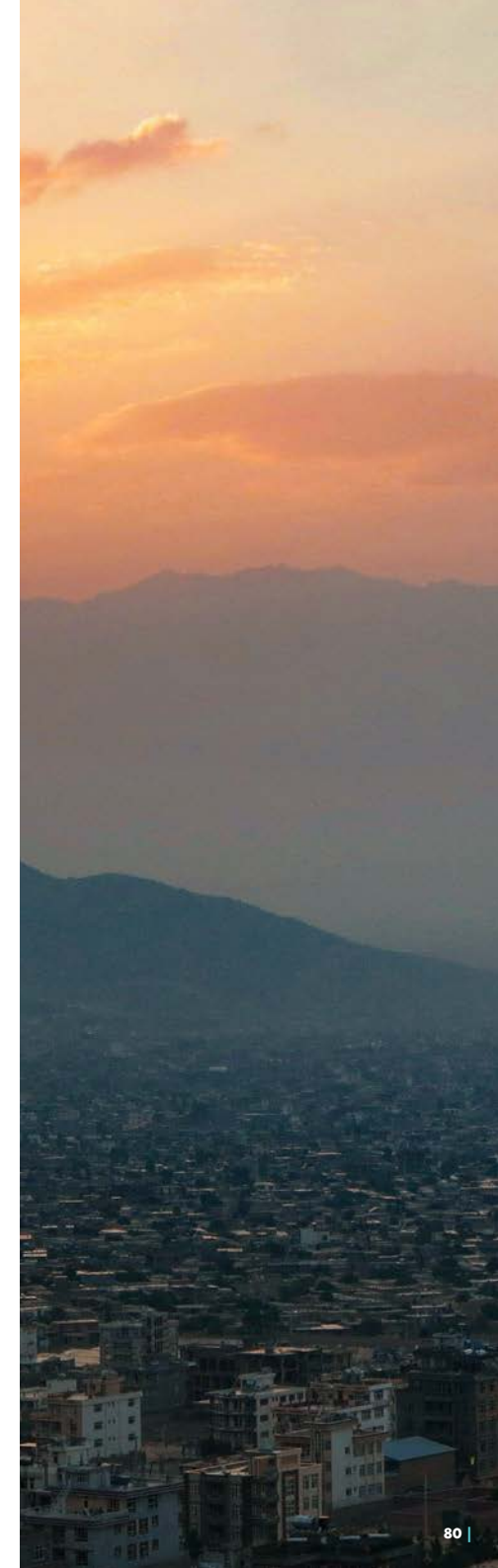
**ARMAN, AFGANISTAN**

Under the pre-Christian Roman Empire, Christians faced a choice. They could worship Christ freely, so long as they acknowledged the deity of Ceasar by simply putting a pinch of incense in the brazier before his statue, or they could face execution. They were not willing to compromise, as doing so would be a denial of the unique lordship of Christ. Saint Polycarp (c. 69-155 AD) was an elderly Christian who faced this fate, with the words, "Eighty six years have I served Him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"<sup>37</sup> He was martyred because he would not compromise, even with just a pinch of incense.

Like the early Christians, believers like Arman in Afghanistan are unwilling to compromise their faith. At SAT-7 we hear stories of Christians burying their Bibles for safe-keeping, of wives living with husbands who threaten to turn them over to the Taliban for their faith, and of faithful believers fearlessly sharing the Gospel, despite the threat of death. Their messages read like psalms of lament, but always end with a rising hope in their Saviour.

## PRAY

- Pray for Afghan Christians like Arman, who face pressure to violate their conscience at every turn.
- Pray for the safety of all who suffer under the rule of the Taliban, and for their oppression to come to an end.



# TAJIKISTAN

## RADICAL FORGIVENESS

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). The Gospel narratives end with the triumph of forgiveness. Even as His persecutors drove nails into His hands and hurled insults at Him from the foot of the cross, Jesus prayed that His Father would forgive them. Paradoxically, the most unforgiveable thing that ever happened, the unjust death of God the Son at the hands of His creation, wonderfully secured forgiveness for all those who would place their faith in Him.

For those who have been transformed by God’s forgiveness, forgiving others is a natural part of their sanctification process. Though not always easy, the Holy Spirit is there to gently pull and tug at our hearts, leading us to a place where we can relinquish hurt and blame. Forgiveness is the heart and culmination of the Gospel, so it is fitting that our penultimate reflection tells the story of a man who discovered this freeing truth for himself.

Alborz, a young man from Tajikistan, reached out to SAT-7’s viewer response team. “I am grateful for you and for your wonderful programmes. I would like to share a testimony of perhaps the most overwhelming event in my life. My 25-year-old brother, a civil engineer

living in Afghanistan, was a follower of Jesus. When the extremists found out that he was a Christian, they hanged him upside down, broke his hands and fingers and burnt his face with cigarettes. They put that child of God through the most dreadful torment and killed him.

“I was unable to forgive them. I was permanently distressed and angry. I had a strong desire to take revenge. The hate that I had for them became my constant companion. Soon I found myself with no friends and at home I did not speak with kindness to those around me. One day my father told me, ‘You must forgive those who killed my son.’

“Three years later, I was reading the Sermon on the Mount in the Bible, and it deeply impacted me. My tears flowed, my heart softened, and I forgave the extremists. That moment, the burden I had been carrying was lifted from me. Today I have a great joy in my heart that God has placed there, and I am able to overcome all difficulties.”

## PRAY

- Praise God that, because we have experienced God’s forgiveness, such extraordinary forgiveness is possible.
- Give thanks for SAT-7 programmes in the Tajik dialect of Persian.



# THE GREAT HIGHWAY

The book of Isaiah speaks of a promised highway through the desert, “called the Way of Holiness” (Isa 35:8), where the redeemed will walk and those the Lord has rescued will return (vs 9-10). Wherever and whenever each believer throughout history has found themselves, they are all walking the same journey on the highway prepared for us by our God through Jesus Christ. Because of what He has done, “The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom” (v 1).

Although the spiritual landscape of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) may often seem like a wilderness, God has caused streams to spring up in the desert before (v 6), and continues to do so today. It is our prayer that these past forty days have instilled you with a new hope. The golden thread running through the tapestry of rich cultures and stories in the Middle East is the faithfulness of the Lord to uphold His Church and bring joy out of suffering.

As we come to the end of our journey through the MENA, we find ourselves changed. The more we’ve learned about the ancient Middle Eastern heritage of Christianity, the more tangible it has become to us; a faith rooted in real historical events and places. We’ve been

inspired by the resilience of believers, past and present, living in circumstances every bit as harsh as the desert landscapes that surround them. We’ve been challenged by the voices of Middle Eastern believers – in their liturgies, poems, hymns, songs, writings and testimonies – proclaiming their steadfast hope in the one who journeys with us.

But this is not the end of our journey. As we continue to walk alongside believers in the MENA, may God continue to change us. Please continue to lift up the MENA in your prayers. As we turn to see our fellow travellers on the highway of the Lord, may we see those we have been praying for walking beside us.

## PRAY

- Pray for persecuted and isolated believers living in the MENA, that they will be refreshed by the Lord.
- Pray for the work of SAT-7, as we continue to make God’s love visible in the Middle East via satellite television and digital media, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Pray for all those who encounter the good news of the Gospel through SAT-7’s programmes, that God would lead them on their own journey.



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Look out for more *40 Days of Prayer* content at  
**[sat7uk.org/40days](https://sat7uk.org/40days)**

“THE DESERT AND THE PARCHED  
LAND WILL BE GLAD;  
THE WILDERNESS WILL REJOICE  
AND BLOSSOM.”

**ISAIAH 35:1**





## **Join us on a journey of prayer through the Middle East and North Africa.**

When we look at the Middle East and North Africa today, it can be hard to know how to pray. Yet these are the lands that fill the pages of our Bibles, where Jesus walked among us and the Church itself was born.

Over the next 40 days, we'll travel from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan in the east, meeting local believers and churches along the way. We'll hear how God is at work through SAT-7's television programmes, and discover the ancient and often unknown Christian heritage of the region.

So let's pray for God's Kingdom to come in the land where it all began...



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