



SAT-7 NEWS

September 2021



LOOKING TO IRAN FOR GOD'S HOPE FOR AFGHANISTAN

Christians in Afghanistan face an existential threat from the Taliban. Rev. Tat Stewart, one of the founders of SAT-7 PARS, recalls when Iranian Christians also feared they would be wiped out, 40 years ago – and how the years since have proven “the gates of hell cannot prevail”. He shares how the story of the Iranian Church can give us hope, in God, for our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan.

As the world witnesses the tragic events in Afghanistan, one thing is clear: they will have repercussions for years to come. Amid this unfolding humanitarian crisis, many questions are raised. We face a conundrum as the Church of Jesus Christ: to take in these events in their full severity and also to understand them in light of God's Word and our understanding of who He is and what He is doing.

As I watched the news break, I was reminded of the similar events that took place 40 years ago in Iran. My wife Pat, our two children, and I were living in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. I was pastor of the Community Church of Tehran, and working with the youth of the Evangelical Church of Iran. Looking back through the lens of history, what lessons learned might comfort and guide us as we face what is happening in Afghanistan?

As I sat with church leaders back then, there was a permeating fear that with the advent of the Islamic Republic would come the end of Christianity in Iran.

But that is not what happened.

Today, Christianity is growing faster in Iran than in any other country on earth and has been identified as the most mature Church of its kind in the world. How can this be?

The first and most important reason is that **we serve a sovereign God**. “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). God has given all authority to His Son, Jesus: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

Since the Islamic Revolution, the numbers of Christians in Iran are thought to have grown to almost one million, or 1.5 percent of the population. What has happened there proved to the world that the gates of Hell could not prevail against God's Church. Yes, the people of Iran suffered greatly after the Revolution. Christians suffered, too – pastors were martyred, the Church went underground, and many fled the country. But if we are students of the Bible, we are not unaware that Jesus taught us to expect suffering for His sake.

We, of all people, must understand

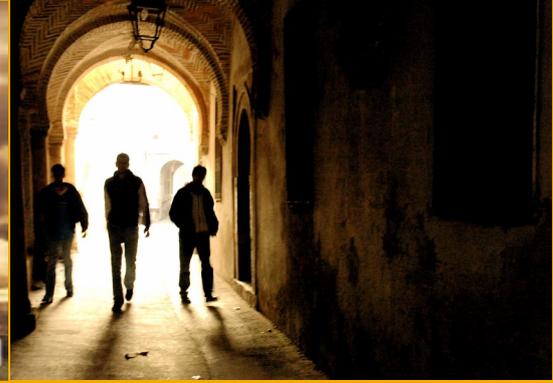
that **God has chosen to use trouble as a means to advance His Kingdom**. In Acts 8, where God allowed persecution to come to the Church, for the disciples to scatter and fulfill the Great Commission.

The believers in Afghanistan are now facing unbelievably hard times. Some of them had already become martyrs for the sake of our Lord Jesus, and others are facing persecution. But we must set our faces toward Jesus and trust His faithfulness. We must embrace the biblical truth that God will be advancing His Kingdom in Afghanistan in ways we can't even imagine right now.

Suffering purifies the Church.

It emboldens true believers, as they find themselves on their knees day and night. It brings unity among those who are living in the fire. In Iran, we saw for the first time Christians put aside their differences and begin to gather for times of prayer. It also brings unity with the global Church, as we are currently witnessing as special prayer meetings for Afghanistan crop up all over the world.

PTO



این حقیقت بر اساس امید به حیات جاوید

LOOKING TO IRAN FOR GOD'S HOPE FOR AFGHANISTAN

(continued)

As we pray for protection, peace, and freedom in Afghanistan, we must also keep our eyes open for the ways God's glory will shine through for all the world to see. For you see, **God reveals His glory in the midst of suffering.**

His character and power shine through. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you walk through the fire you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze, for I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour" (Isaiah 43:2-3). God is with us and He faithfully shows up in miraculous ways in times of persecution. Go back and read the book of Daniel. Listen to believers from Iran tell you about the dreams they have had of Jesus and the protections He has provided. One of my friends spent several weeks in prison in Iran because he was witnessing to non-Christians and got caught. He wrote that those days in prison were the best days of his life. I knew it was not because the food was so great. No, he told me that he had never had such a sweet sense of the presence of Jesus.

Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan that they, too, will experience the sweet presence of Jesus and His protection. God's glory also shines through the transformation that suffering brings. In Iran, drug addicts are coming to Christ, former regime hardliners are coming to Christ, and God is radically changing people as He takes them through the fire.

I see it. I see what God is doing. I urge you to pray earnestly, give financially to ministries that will glorify God, and open your heart to Afghan refugees when they come to your town. I want to be a part of God's work. I hope you do, too. ■

GUIDING VIEWERS ON THEIR JOURNEY

As part of the digital transformation of SAT-7's Arabic media, both our social media and our Audience Relations departments are making a vital shift. Once, both acted only as support functions for SAT-7's satellite broadcasts. While they will continue to do this, they are now also becoming platforms for God's love in their own right – platforms that interact seamlessly to support viewers on their journey.

"My aim is for SAT-7 to become the largest online distributor of Arabic Christian media," says Shady Francis, SAT-7's Arabic Digital Director.

Shady's first step toward this goal has been to completely revamp SAT-7's social media presence, distilling its many Facebook pages to eight brands. SAT-7 ARABIC, SAT-7 KIDS, and SAT-7 ACADEMY remained – and five new brands were launched: SAT-7 Family, SAT-7 Youth, SAT-7 Woman, SAT-7 Worship, and SAT-7 Daily Bread, which shares discipleship content.

The benefit of this, Shady explains, is that by following the most relevant brand, audience members are reached by content that speaks to them. "We are building what our viewers need," he says. "Instead of being satellite program-driven on social media, we are driven by the needs of this audience, who are younger than our television viewers."

Driven by what viewers need

Each brand guides its Facebook and Instagram audience through a series of themes, which work the same as SAT-7's satellite programming.

Each week, the topic is introduced through eye-catching graphics and text, and these posts prompt conversations in the comments box and in private messages from viewers. In between these posts, the teams share relevant video clips from SAT-7's programs. SAT-7 Worship, the only brand not based on themes, makes Arabic worship music and church services available 24/7.

Shady's team have also launched two closed groups for special demographics: one for audience members learning

online with SAT-7 ACADEMY, and another for SAT-7 KIDS viewers.

Both parents and children interact on these platforms. Last month a child from Egypt and a child from Algeria made friends in the comments section. We are building a safe online community for children through SAT-7."

Shady's team is responsible for the content SAT-7 shares on social media. But the minute a viewer begins to interact, the Audience Relations team, headed by Marianne Awaraji Daou, takes over.

"Follow-up is a journey; it is not merely answering our viewers' questions," says Marianne. "Our viewers have certain spiritual needs; that is why they watch our shows or follow us on social media. We want to accompany them on a journey that leads them through, and out of, the tunnel they are in."

The viewer's journey might progress through messaging, calls, prayer, counselling, and eventually connection to local Christian fellowship. "Our goal is hearing testimonies from viewers whose lives were changed."

"They need to be loved"

"We are reaching a whole new audience," says Marianne. "Everyone is so isolated today, and it has become the norm to reach out to others online. This is a strategic moment to develop our work, one not to be missed. We took this opportunity to build a dynamic online community, based on empathy, availability, authenticity, friendship, and – after we have demonstrated these principles – sound theology. This is what people need today. More than ever, they need to feel accepted and loved." ■