

## Week 4: Pray for Asia Bibi (Pakistan)

**Arrest and background** Asia Bibi (50) is a Christian farm labourer from Ittanwali village in Punjab, northeast Pakistan, 75km from Lahore. In June 2009, she was working in the fields with a group of Muslim women and went to fetch water. The other women said it was unclean, as it had been brought by an "untouchable". After an argument, one of the women reported to the local imam that Asia had said: *"Jesus Christ died on the cross for me – what did Mohammed ever do for you?"* The imam filed a blasphemy case with the police and publicly denounced Asia. Local men beat her in front of her children and the police took her into custody for protection.



A mob demonstrated outside the court during Asia's hearing in November 2010 and the judge, under pressure from extremists, handed down the death sentence. A cleric promised 500,000 rupees (€4370) to anyone who would kill Asia in jail. She was the first Pakistani woman to be sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws. Two politicians who supported her, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Minorities Minister Shabaz Bhatti, were assassinated for expressing their support.



**Family** Asia is married to Ashiq Masih and they have two daughters, Isha (17) and Isham (16), who has an intellectual disability and walking difficulties. They miss their mother very much. Ashiq also has three children from a previous marriage. The family receives help from Christian groups, including education at a private Christian school. Over the past six years, Ashiq and the girls have had to move several times to avoid attack.

The family have received death threats and live in constant fear. The family must travel for several hours to the southern Punjab city of Multan to visit Asia in prison, over 290 km from home.

**Latest news from prison** In early March 2016, Asia's security was increased following intelligence reports that Islamist groups are conspiring to get her killed inside prison to avenge the execution of Mumtaz Qadri (who assassinated Salman Taseer). Up to 150,000 people attended his funeral, many chanting for Asia Bibi to be hanged. A government source said, *"Only her husband is allowed to meet her in jail, and she has been told to cook her own food to prevent any attempt at poisoning her meals. All guards deployed for her security have been carefully vetted by intelligence agencies and other security outfits to ensure that they are not extremists in their belief."*

Asia continues to wait for a Supreme Court appeal against her conviction for blasphemy to be heard. In July 2015, Asia's death sentence was suspended pending a full hearing of the appeal but no date was set for the hearing.

### Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would protect and sustain Asia in prison.
2. Pray for God's protection for her family, living with sadness and fear.
3. Pray that the Supreme Court would hear Asia's appeal soon, and acquit her.