



Week 1: Pray for Asia Bibi (Pakistan)

Arrest and background Asia Bibi (51) is a Christian fruit picker from a Punjab village in northeast Pakistan. She has been in prison since June 2009, when she was arrested after a dispute with Muslim women who refused to drink water she had fetched. They said it had been brought by an "untouchable" and was "unclean", and reported the argument to the local imam. He filed a blasphemy case, local men beat Asia and the police took her into custody. In November 2010, she was sentenced to death.



In January 2011, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was shot dead because he had visited Asia in prison and had spoken out against the misuse of the blasphemy laws. The assassin was his bodyguard Mumtaz Qadri, who was hailed as a hero. He was executed in February 2016, and the judge who passed his sentence was forced to leave Pakistan because of extremist threats.

In March 2011, Minorities Minister Shab haz Bhatti, the only Christian in cabinet, was shot dead by the Taliban. He had supported Asia Bibi and had opposed the blasphemy laws.

In June 2013, Asia was moved to a prison more than 290km from her home. Because of fears that she will be attacked or poisoned, she is held in solitary confinement in a windowless cell and cooks her own food.

In October 2014, Lahore High Court rejected Asia's appeal and upheld the death sentence. In July 2015, the death sentence was suspended pending a full appeal hearing at the Supreme Court in Islamabad. The Supreme Court appeal was due to be heard on 13 October 2016, but was adjourned because one of the three judges recused himself, claiming a conflict of interest as he had been on the bench that heard Mumtaz Qadri's case. The Supreme Court did not set another date. If the death sentence is upheld, Asia's only hope will be a presidential pardon.

Family Asia is married to Ashiq Masih and has two daughters, Isha (18) and Isham (17), who has an intellectual disability and walking difficulties. They have had to move several times to avoid attack.

Latest news On 3 February 2017, Chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association Wilson Chowdhry met the First Minister at Pakistan's High Commission in London, who said Asia's appeal hearing would be before the end of March 2017.

Prayer Diary

Sunday	Pray that Asia's Supreme Court appeal would be heard soon.
Monday	Pray for her acquittal and release.
Tuesday	Ask God to bless and encourage Ashiq, Isha and Isham.
Wednesday	Pray that the family would be reunited in a safe location.
Thursday	Pray for protection for lawyers and judges involved in the appeal hearing.
Friday	Ask that other Christians convicted of blasphemy would be acquitted.
Saturday	Pray for the blasphemy laws to be amended.

