



### Week 2: Pray for Asia Bibi (Pakistan)

**Arrest and background** Asia Bibi (52) is a Christian farm labourer from Punjab province in northeast Pakistan. She has been in prison since 2009, the first woman to be sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, and is waiting for her appeal to be heard in the Supreme Court.

In June 2009, when picking berries in the fields with three Muslim women, Asia went to fetch water. The women refused to drink from the bowl she brought, saying the water had been brought by an "untouchable" and was "unclean". After an argument, one of the women told 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, local men beat Asia and the police took her into custody.



Asia said she had not made any blasphemous remarks and her lawyer claimed the allegation was made to target her because of her faith – she had been under pressure from Muslim farm workers to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam.

In November 2010, Asia was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. She lost her appeal at Lahore High Court in October 2014, but in July 2015 the death sentence was suspended pending an appeal hearing at the Supreme Court in Islamabad. This appeal was due to be heard in October 2016 but was adjourned when one of the three judges recused himself, and another date has not been set. If the Supreme Court hearing fails, Asia's only remaining hope will be a presidential pardon.

Islamists have persistently called for Asia's execution, and Muslim clerics put a bounty on her head. Two politicians who supported her and spoke out against Pakistan's blasphemy laws have been assassinated.

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

**Latest news** On 7 February 2018, Asia's husband, daughters and lawyer Saiful Malook visited the Supreme Court to ask for an early date for the appeal hearing. They met a court registrar to try to arrange a meeting with Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar so they could ask him to fix an early date, but they were not allowed to meet the Chief Justice. In late January, Saiful Malook reported that Asia was "healthy and in good spirits".

#### Prayer Diary

<b>Sunday</b>	Ask God to protect and sustain Asia in prison.
<b>Monday</b>	Pray for her Supreme Court appeal to be heard soon.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Pray for her acquittal and release to a safe place.
<b>Wednesday</b>	Ask God to protect Asia's lawyers and judges.
<b>Thursday</b>	Ask God to bless and protect Ashiq, Isha and Isham.
<b>Friday</b>	Pray that God would encourage Asia's faith.
<b>Saturday</b>	Pray for the blasphemy laws to be amended.

