

Week 1: Pray for Asia Bibi (Pakistan)



Arrest and Sentence Asia Bibi (48) is a Christian farm labourer from the Punjab village of Ittanwali in northeast Pakistan, 75km from Lahore. On 14 June 2009, she was working in the fields with a group of Muslim women. One of the women asked Asia to fetch water and she did so, but the other women said that it should not be drunk as it had been brought by "an untouchable" and was therefore unclean. A heated argument arose, and one of the women reported to the local imam (mosque leader) that Asia had said: *"Jesus Christ died on the cross for me – what did Mohammed ever do for you?"*

The imam filed a case with the police under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. After Asia was beaten by some local men in front of her children, the police came and took Asia into custody for protection. A mob demonstrated outside the court during Asia's hearing on 8 Nov 2010 and the judge, bowing to extremist pressure, handed down the death sentence. Asia is the first woman to be sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws. She has appealed against the verdict.

Two politicians who expressed support for Asia Bibi, Governor Salman Taseer of Punjab and Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, were assassinated for expressing their support.

Family and church Asia is married to Ashiq Masih, with whom she has two daughters, Isha (15) and Isham (14), who has a mental disability. The family receives help from Christian groups in Pakistan including assistance with schooling.

Asia is a Roman Catholic and attended her local church. She is illiterate, like many labourers in Pakistan.



Latest news from prison In June 2013, Asia was moved from Sheikhpura Central Jail (a local prison where she had been held since her arrest) to Multan Central Jail, more than 290 km away. Asia was distressed by the move as it is too far away from the family home to make regular visits possible. On average, she receives just one family visit per month.

In February 2014, Asia's appeal was finally listed for hearing in court on 14 February but her lawyer was informed by text message that the hearing had been "cancelled by order". A judge was said to be unavailable but no further explanation was given and no new date set. It is thought that judges and lawyers might be unwilling to appear in the case because of the threat from extremist Muslims.

Prayer Points

1. Pray that the Lord will continue to protect and sustain Asia and her family during this long time of separation and uncertainty.
2. Pray for wisdom and protection for Asia's lawyers and all who seek to help her.
3. Pray that justice will be done and that Asia will be soon freed and that she and her family will be able to live their lives in safety.