

Echoes from the East

Comfort in Nigeria

TRUE STORY



The terrorists finally broke through the gate. They entered and began killing people.

Hadiza* was a young girl in a Nigerian community when Boko Haram (a violent Islamic terrorist group) attacked in 2009. During the night, Hadiza woke up to use the bathroom. She heard voices outside, and as she peeped through the window to see what was going on, she heard a bomb explode.

Hadiza and her family started running. She was holding hands with her mom but they somehow got separated. Everyone in the community hurried to their church, like they normally do in crises. However, on this night, the terrorists followed them to the church and started banging on the gate.

As the terrorists were trying to take down the gate, Hadiza's father saw a man he recognized hiding in a tree. He told her to climb the tree as well and instructed her to stay there – no matter what happened.

The terrorists finally broke through the gate. They entered and began killing people. Hadiza could see as the terrorists hacked her father and others to death with machetes. The pastor's house was burned down with a young boy in it, too.

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Islamic terrorists oppose Christians in Nigeria. Shariah, or Islamic law, is in place in some Nigerian states, giving people the right to kill those who convert from Islam. Some call the conflict a clash between herders and farmers, but in Nigeria, Fulani herders are known to be Muslim, and farmers are known to be Christians. Not all Fulani are radicalized by Islam, but some are.



Fact 1

Over 50,000 Christians have been killed in Nigeria in the last 15 years.



Fact 2

Nigeria has everything! It has deserts, plains, swamps, mountains, jungles, and rivers. There are more than 250 languages spoken in Nigeria.



Fact 3

At least 60% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, existing on less than a dollar a day.

After the terrorists left, she and the man climbed down from the tree. The man helped cover her father's body with leaves. He told Hadiza to follow him, but she was in shock and wandered aimlessly.

The Boko Haram terrorists were still in the area, and some of them grabbed her and kidnapped her along with other girls. The terrorists marched the girls along, prodding them with their guns. As they walked, the men chanted "Allahu Akbar!" (God is greater) and told the girls to do the same.

After some time, they stopped to pray. They told the girls not to try anything stupid. But while the men bent in prayer, no one was watching them. Some of the girls saw an opportunity to make a run for it. Hadiza and some others escaped.

As she hid in the bush, she found a woman who recognized her. The woman took her to her mother, Ngozi. Ngozi asked her what happened, but Hadiza could not respond. All she could say was "death." She remained in shock for a long time.

Hadiza was angry with God. She did not understand why he allowed something like this to happen to her family.

When she was at church one day, a change took place in Hadiza. Something the speaker said made her realize she was holding on to a lot of anger, and that she had never given her life to Christ. She made a decision that day.

The next week, her schoolmates were surprised to see her in church for two consecutive Sundays. They witnessed a real change in her.

Since then, Hadiza has held on to God for comfort.

An ICR Project

NIGERIA

ICR supports education for the children of Christian martyrs in northern Nigeria. Part of the education includes trauma counseling, which is especially necessary for children who have seen or heard about their parents' brutal murders by Muslim extremists. Along with regular school subjects, the education teaches students about Jesus and having hope in Him. By investing in these children and strengthening their faith and knowledge, the church of Nigeria will also be strengthened.

Sponsor the monthly education of a child of a martyr: \$100



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Although she still grieves, she also has a new hope and growing trust in Jesus.

Hadiza and her family moved to a safer city. She is now in college and is grateful for the opportunities she had through the help of an ICR partner. She has a safe home, medical help for her mother, her school bills are paid, she has food to eat, and she has the support of other Christians.

Questions for discussion

Read: 1 John 3:11-24

- How does 1 John 3:11-15 relate to the story of Hadiza?
- How do we know what love is?
- What is evidence of God's love in us?
- How can we show love to other Christians throughout the world?

Truth: We can love others out of God's great love for us.



Pray for comfort, protection, and peace for widows, widowers, and orphans.

Pray for strength and wisdom for those serving attack victims.

Pray that churches in the whole country will work together against violence and support one another.

Echoes from the East

Shepherd in Iran TRUE STORY



"Hello, I'm Heidar," the voice on the phone said. "I'm a 19-year-old shepherd in Iran. I've been listening to your channel. 'Can you tell me more about this Jesus of yours?'"

The call center Heidar reached is the call center for a Christian TV channel that broadcasts the gospel into the Islamic Republic of Iran. Heidar wanted to know about Jesus. He was born a Muslim in a small Kurdish village, but at some point, he had a dream about a man in white who he later realized was Jesus.

The Christian on the other end of the line offered to send Heidar a Bible, but Heidar told her he could not read. Instead, they decided the counselor would call every week and read the Bible to Heidar. Heidar recorded what she read from the gospel of John so he could relisten to it during the week.

After about a month, Heidar said to the counselor, "This message is so good! Why doesn't everyone in my country know this? I want to go to the streets and shout from the rooftops about Jesus!"

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I want to go to the streets and shout from the rooftops about Jesus!

Christians in Iran often face persecution for their faith from both the government and family members. Conversion from Islam is illegal and punishable with long prison sentences. Most Christians practice Christianity in secret and depend on an underground network to learn and fellowship with other Christians.



Fact 1

In Bible times, Iran was called Persia. After Pentecost, Persians brought the Good News of Jesus back to what is now Iran.



Fact 2

All broadcasting from Iranian soil is controlled by the state and reflects Islamic ideology. Iranians watch satellite TV or look online to find differing opinions.



Fact 3

The government in Iran is Islamic, and most Iranians are Muslim.

The counselor cautioned Heidar to be careful because evangelism is illegal in Iran.

But Heidar was so enthusiastic about the message of Jesus, he did not keep quiet. He told neighbors and friends and even strangers in cafes.

During one of their weekly phone calls, the Christians on the other end of the line could hear intelligence agents raiding Heidar's house while he was on the phone with someone from the TV ministry. The believers listened in horror as agents stormed in and began beating Heidar. "You could hear the screams in the background," an ICR partner said.

Eventually, one of the agents noticed the phone and saw a call was in progress. He picked up the phone and delivered a message: "You are dangerous for the future of Iran. As long as you're around, you're going to be talking about this gospel of yours. People in Iran are going to get hurt. They're going to get killed."

Several months after the last communication with Heidar, the call center received a call from his phone number. It was Heidar's cousin, calling from his phone. He told the Christian call center that authorities had falsely accused Heidar of being a drug dealer and he was put to death earlier that day.

"He was not a drug dealer. He just loved Jesus," his cousin said. "We are in his house, and about 40 or 50 village elders are here. They all want to hear about Jesus. Can you tell us who Jesus is?"

An ICR Project

IRAN

Despite the risk, the underground church in Iran is growing! Hundreds of people requested Bibles in the last year. They depend on secret distributions of Bibles because Bibles are illegal, and owning or distributing them can lead to severe consequences.

ICR provides access to the Word of God either by bringing Bibles to people who have requested it or giving them to house churches who can distribute them.

\$13 provides a Bible to an Iranian



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Questions for discussion

Read: Psalm 119:105-125

- What are some phrases in these verses that show us God's Word is valuable?
- Why would these verses be important to someone in Iran?
- What do you learn about God's character in this passage?
- How do these verses impact your life?

Truth: The Word of God is alive and active. It equips us to grow in the Lord.



Pray for God's Word to give the Iranian people a firm foundation.

Pray for church leaders to stay in Iran and disciple new Christians.

Pray for Muslims to hear the good news of Jesus.