

Advancing through Persecution in North India

From the time of the New Testament up to today, bold witnesses continue to see the gospel advance, even in the face of serious persecution.

Once when Jesus sent His disciples out on mission, he told them, *“I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves”* (Matt. 10:16, NLT). The rest of that chapter records a fascinating list of possible results from following Jesus’ pattern for mission. Some who follow His pattern will get hauled before the courts. Some will be betrayed by their own families. Some will be threatened. Others will receive a gracious welcome. And all are so important to God that the very hairs on their heads are numbered.

All these things are still happening today. The movement with which we’re connected has matured through the persecution believers are experiencing. A person may simply put their faith in Christ from listening to Bible stories, but the ensuing persecution that person faces causes their faith to mature. Here are two recent examples.

The Fire Spreads

In one village in Northern India, 26 believers’ homes (huts) were burned this year. High caste people in the village had ordered these low caste believers to stop meeting together as followers of Jesus. But in spite of threats, they kept meeting. Then one night during the hot season while they were sleeping mostly outside of their huts, someone set a fire in one hut. It quickly spread from home to home until all 26 were consumed. The believers went to the police to file a report but the police would not do anything. The high caste Hindus who lived in the high caste part of that village then threatened them even more.

Many of those who lost their home left the village to stay with relatives elsewhere. Then, seven days after the fire, the 26 families got back together and decided: “We are not afraid. We will rebuild our homes!” This runs contrary

to the usual cultural pattern of low caste people simply acquiescing to the orders of high caste people. As these believers made plans to rebuild, house churches in other areas supported the families with their own funds. Even in their poverty, the house churches generously helped others in the movement.

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In addition to the help from believers, many other village people are also helping meet the needs of those who lost their homes. This event has exposed the reality of radical Hinduism. It has caused some people to ask more questions about Jesus, like “Why would they do that to you?” and “Why are you now a Christian and not a Hindu?”

When news of this tragedy gets out, Christians in other areas tell what happened. That leads to discussions about who Jesus is. Also, the families currently staying with their Hindu relatives are sharing with them about Jesus. So as a result of the fires, the gospel message is being shared more than before. The dispersion of these people from their burned houses has spread gospel messengers to 17 villages.

A Beautiful Martyr

Ravit was 39 years old. He worked hard as a carpenter to provide for his wife, three daughters and young son. He also farmed their personal small plot of land. Three years ago, he attended one of our trainings where he heard that Jesus’ final command to His followers was to go make disciples. Soon Ravit was putting into practice what he had learned. He worked in the mornings, both in the fields and the shop, and then dedicated his afternoons to ministry.

Ravit never asked for money. When other house church leaders inquired to see if he needed “help,” he’d reply,

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The “Walker” family began cross-cultural work in 2001. In 2006, they joined Beyond (www.beyond.org) and in 2011 started applying CPM principles. The Walkers moved countries in 2016, and have been supporting the movements from a distance. *Pseudonym

“No, I don’t need it. I have my own business and don’t need more money.” The movement leader describes Ravit as “very wise and bold.” He was also focused on reaching more places, new villages. Every one or two months he would go to a new, unreached place. He was not afraid to talk with people. He was energetic about the gospel and wanted to spread the Word. In the course of three years, he saw 378 house churches birthed and nine generations of leaders mentored. He was not jealous of others’ successes, but freely shared all that he learned in trainings so that others could also be fruitful.

A few months ago, a radical Hindu group became jealous of the impact Ravit was making in his area. A group of them attacked him one day, beating him mercilessly. He became ill from his injuries, but since he wasn’t fully incapacitated, he continued working. His mentor asked him if he wanted to report the attack to the police. Ravit said that his attackers were all local and had strong political ties, so reporting the incident to the police would only make things worse.

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Two months later, Ravit was still weak, but mobile. One day, the group returned and beat him again. His chest hurt, but there was work to do so he went to the fields. The pain grew worse and worse so he finally stumbled home to rest. Later that day, Ravit died. The next day, Ravit’s mentor and friend buried him in his own field. Ravit is the first known martyr from this disciple-making movement. The story of the believing community’s response can be seen in the video “The Gospel in Action.”

I asked the leader of the movement, “How many other leaders like Ravit are there?”

He answered, “There are about 20 others (men and women) like Ravit in his area alone. Each one has seen between 300-350 house churches birthed.”

He went on to estimate that 20-30% of the churches across the whole movement have experienced beatings or arrest for being followers of Jesus. The other 70% have experienced some form of persecution such as harassment, social pressure or bullying. Over the last few weeks, in his hometown alone:

- Three house church leaders were arrested while worshipping in their home.
- A family’s power lines were cut by one neighbor and their water-supply pipe was broken by a different neighbor. The family had no electricity or water for 17 days until a friend of a friend reconnected them.
- A man named Mohan was beaten in his own home one night by his neighbors. They were upset about the Bible studies he’d been hosting in his home. The police have yet to file an official report of the incident.

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In Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, he said, “*If one part [of Christ’s body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it*” (1 Cor. 12:26-27, NLT).

Please pray for the part of Christ’s body in this nation. Pray, as the first disciples prayed when they faced persecution:

“*O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—You spoke long ago...saying, ‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord...’*

And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus”

—(Acts 4:24b-26, 29-30, NLT). MF