

Open Doors ~ Iraq

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." - Psalm 121:1-2

Largest Christian town taken over by IS

Thousands of Iraqi Christians have **fled for their lives** as Qaraqosh, Iraq's largest Christian town, was taken over by IS (formerly ISIS) militants this week. The town was home to 50,000 people. "It's a catastrophe, a tragic situation: tens of thousands of terrified people are being displaced as we speak," said Joseph Thomas, the Chaldean archbishop of the northern city of Kirkuk. Other towns in the region around Mosul have also fallen to IS militants, including Tal Kayf, Bartella and Karamlesh.

People in the Kurdish cities of Erbil and Dohuk are increasingly concerned that they will face attacks from IS. The autonomous region of Kurdistan has been safe up to this point and many fleeing Christians have taken refuge there. "People have real fear of what is to happen in the next hours," one contact told us.

Around 40,000 Iraqis have also been stranded in the Sinjar mountains, reportedly including 50 Christian families. They have been without food or water, cut off by IS militants on all sides, and according to UNICEF at least 40 children have died of thirst. Praise God, reports are now coming in that the UN has been able to rescue some of these refugees in the last 48 hours.

Thank you for your prayers

Thank you for continuing to pray for Iraq and for taking the needs of our brothers and sisters to your churches. Your prayers are making a difference. Raja*, who is helping with **our relief programme**, said: "I hear that people around the world are praying for us and supporting us. To those people I want to say: thank you. You are far away, but you can reach us here with your support. Moreover, your thoughts and prayers are valuable and God listens."

Makruhi* trains Sunday school teachers and leads Bible studies for women in Iraq. Despite the risks, she continues to make the dangerous journey to visit women under her care. "The people in the villages are scared and I'm worried as well," she says. "Still, I go out to do trainings because people are growing in faith when we go out. God answers our prayers.

"These women know you are praying for them. They feel so encouraged by that! They asked me to pass on a special prayer request to you: 'Pray for everything that is going on here. Pray that we will be strong amidst these times of turmoil, we as adults, but also our children.'"

Christian leaders in Iraq have chosen this Sunday (10 August) as a day of prayer for Iraq. It can be easy to feel helpless in the face of such violence and tragedy, but we can hold hands with our Iraqi brothers and sisters by joining them in prayer and bringing their struggles to the One who reigns over all.

**names changed for security reasons*

Source: Open Doors; BBC; the Guardian

Please Pray:

- For God's protection and provision for all who have been forced to flee, especially the children
- For those who remain stranded in the Sinjar mountains to be rescued
- For God to continue to work through Raja and Makruhi
- For wisdom for international leaders as they consider how to respond to the crisis.

With many thanks for your prayers.

Open Doors Prayer Team