

The Promised Presence

-- Saeed Abedini and the promise of Isaiah 8
By Elizabeth Kendal (May 2013)

On 8 May 2013, after more than a week in the "small dark hole" of solitary confinement, Pastor Saeed Abedini (33) -- an Iranian-born US citizen imprisoned in Iran¹ -- was returned to the main prison population in Ward 350 of Evin Prison.²

Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, told Voice of the Martyrs (VOM)³: "*He said he felt many praying, and the time in solitary was a time of intimacy with God. He said when he came out, the other prisoners said he was glowing! He was filled with more joy and peace after solitary than going in!!! All of the prisoners were shocked at the change! This is because of your prayers! Thank you! I will provide more updates as I get them. Please continue to pray for his health and his internal bleeding. He has not been treated yet.*"

To understand what Saeed experienced in that "small dark hole", we need to turn to Isaiah 8. As explained in chapter 3 of my book, *Turn Back the Battle: Isaiah Speaks to Christians Today* (Deror Books, Dec 2012)⁴, a crisis loomed over Judah during Isaiah's day, for the day was coming when the imperialistic regional superpower -- Assyria (the object of Judah's hope) -- would flood Immanuel's land (Judah) right up to its neck (the gates of Jerusalem) (Isaiah 8:5-8). While the enemies of God would not be victorious (v9-10), challenging days lay ahead. And so God gave Isaiah some instruction to help him navigate the crisis. Isaiah shared God's paradigm for threatened believers with his disciples, for God was not going to deliver his faithful *from* the crisis; rather, he was going to be with them *in* the midst of it.

During testing times, God's faithful are to trust and honour God by walking, thinking and fearing differently to the world: that is, we are to walk by faith not by sight; think spiritually, not just politically and materially; and fear only the Lord, not all the things people fear (8:11-13). And the promise of God is, that for those who do this, he will be a "*sanctuary*" (8:14b). And the Hebrew word used here is *miqdas*, which is not a place of refuge, although some modern translations have chosen to translate it that way. A *miqdas* is a holy place, a place where God dwells.

What Saeed experienced is that promised presence. This is the same promised presence that has sustained martyrs and suffering saints throughout the ages.



Naturally we all want to be spared from testing times. However, when trials do come then we may be assured that when we exercise faith, God will exercise grace: i.e. when we trust and honour God in the midst of the trial -- by walking, thinking and fearing differently to the world -- then God *will* dwell with us in an amazing and sustaining way. This is one of the most encouraging and beautiful promises in all of scripture.

(Photo of Naghmeh and Saeed Abedini, courtesy of The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ))

¹ Pastor Saeed Sentenced to Eight Years in Prison (VOM)

<http://www.persecution.net/ir-2013-01-31.htm>

² American Pastor Saeed Released from Solitary Confinement, Returned to General Prison Population, By Jordan Sekulow for the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), 9 May 2013.

<http://aclj.org/iran/american-pastor-saeed-released-solitary-confinement-returned-general-prison-population>

³ God's Presence Evident in Evin Prison (Pastor Saeed's case) (VOM)

<http://www.persecution.net/ir-2013-05-16.htm>

⁴ <http://www.turnbackthebattle.com/thebook.html>