

Saturday People, Sunday People

By Lela Gilbert



**“On Saturday
we kill the
Jews, on
Sunday we kill
the Christians.”**

March 11, 2011 was a Saturday. Thanks to the quiet observance of Shabbat, there was little going on in my neighborhood. Like the observant Jews around me, I enjoy the peace and quiet of the Seventh Day immensely, and miss it when I'm away. But, not being constrained by tradition, I do log on to my computer, check my emails and glance at the news. And when I did so that Saturday, I immediately saw—thanks to a less-than-Orthodox Israeli news site—that something horrifying had happened.

By sundown, when everyone was back at work and the news was updated, the story became all too clear. A family of five—parents and three little children, including an infant, had been brutally murdered in Itamar, a settlement in Samaria. Before long, an assortment of photos of the Fogel family appeared on the Internet, posted by friends who were enraged by their murders. Ehud—“Udi”—and Ruth were the parents; Yoav was 11, Elad was four, and Hadas was a three-month-old baby girl. All had died in pools of blood, their throats slit. The tiny infant Hadas was beheaded.

Three Fogel children survived—Tamar, age 12, Roi, age 6, and Yishai, age 2. Thankfully, for some reason Roi and Yishai were not noticed by the killers. Tamar, who had been attending a youth event nearby, had found

herself unexpectedly locked out—thanks to the murderers—and went to the next-door neighbor, Rabbi Yaacov Cohen, for help. He helped her get inside, and returned home. Tamar was alone when she discovered the grisly deaths. She screamed; Rabbi Cohen rushed back. They found Yishai sobbing, trying to wake up his father.

All of Israel was sickened and enraged. Tens of thousands of people showed up at the funeral. For days afterward, a heavy weight of sadness pressed against the whole country. Tamar promised, “I will be strong and succeed in overcoming this. I understand the task that stands before me, and I will be a mother to my siblings.”

The following week, a flurry of photos appeared on line, depicting the happy and attractive Fogel family in earlier times, doing ordinary things in their home. These, of course, made the brutality all the more stunning. The came the grisly images, with warnings attached, detailing the murder scene. Words fall short in describing the bloodstained walls, floors and toys that were left behind.

I have yet to remove the Fogel family's smiling faces from my computer. For me, they are emblematic of the millions of innocent Jews who have been slain over many centuries—an abomination that never seems to end.

Forgotten Refugees

When I arrived in Israel as a Christian visitor, I came with the conviction that an assault upon Jews is an implicit assault upon Christians, since it strikes at the root of the same ancient tree. In that light, I wanted to see for myself the predicament of Israeli Jewish communities under attack by Islamic militants. And, indeed, I have seen it again and again, and not only on the news. I've spent considerable time talking to survivors, and to loved ones, left behind in their grief.

Israelis know all about persecution—their history is bloodstained and they live in a nation of refugees. But since coming to Israel I've learned something new: not all of those refugees were from European families that fled the horrors of Hitler's “Final Solution” in the 1930s and 40s.

From 1948 to 1970, around 850,000 Jews either fled or were expelled from ten Muslim lands: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. Many of those Arab-speaking refugees were members of ancient Jewish communities that predated both Islam and Christianity. More than a few were wealthy, powerful and successful. Nearly all of them escaped with little more than the shirts on their backs, leaving behind houses, bank

accounts, investments, personal treasures, multigenerational family histories, and their means of livelihood. A good number of them resettled in Israel. From then until now, they have received no reparations, no inventory of their lost possessions, no resolutions by the United Nations, and virtually no consideration in negotiations for Middle East peace. Only a fraction of those Jewish populations remain.

The exit of Jews from those ten countries was far from the end of Islamist abuses. After the Jews' expulsion, subsequent attacks on Christians began in many of those same nations. Only as I began to discern this recurring pattern of violence did I hear about the jihadi slogan, "First the Saturday People, then the Sunday People."

Now that most of the Jews have been ousted from many Muslim lands, Christians face increasing threats, violence and bloodshed. Why? Because their common enemy's ultimate objective is a pan-Islamist empire, with no Jews or Christians "defiling" the populace. Here are but three examples of this phenomenon.



In Iraq

In 1940 a shocking and bloody pogrom against Iraq's ancient Jewish population took place, precipitating waves of ruthless persecution. By the end of the 1960s, nearly 130,000 Iraqi Jews had fled their homeland, stripped of everything but the clothes they wore and a single suitcase. There are virtually no Jews left in Iraq.

As we wrote in *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, "Since Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in Iraq was destroyed, up to two-thirds of that country's Christians have fled in less than a decade." This was the result of myriad threats and warnings, followed by relentless bombings, assassinations, roadside IEDs, knifings, kidnappings, extortions and rapes. All this reduced a population of 1.5 million Christians to less than half a million.

The most notorious of literally countless attacks in Iraq took place on October 31, 2010, when 120 worshippers were attending mass at Baghdad's "Our Lady of Perpetual Help" church. Attackers broke into the church and shot two priests, who pleaded for the lives of their congregants as they died. More than 55 worshippers were massacred.

It is difficult to report precisely how many deaths and injuries have taken place in Iraq – there have been many thousands

of Christian casualties. Tragically, when a million believers fled, a considerable number went to neighboring Syria. At the time it seemed like a safe haven.



In Syria

Syria's ancient Jewish community was killed or driven out of the country after the founding of Israel in 1948. Of 4,500 Jews, less than 25 remain in the country today.

Meanwhile, in the last three years, a civil war has cost the country more than 70,000 lives. Until that war broke out, Syria's Christian population had lived in reasonable safety under dictatorial President Bashar al-Assad, who often protected minorities from radical factions for reasons of his own. Today, however, Syria's Christians are caught in the crossfire between Assad's henchmen and the increasingly Islamist Free Syrian Army. No one knows for sure how many believers have died, or how many have fled.

My colleague Nina Shea wrote in *National Review Online*, "The (Syrian) refugees were panic-stricken, pointing to some horrifying triggering event that forced them out — a kidnapping of a relative, a murder, or a robbery. They feel they are targeted for being Christian, which means that militants and criminals can assault them with impunity. Some point to a government that fails to protect them; others to Islamists rebels who want to drive them out."



In Egypt

Egypt's Copts have long suffered under Muslim rule. In the turbulence of the "Arab Spring," following the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak, however, violence against them has accelerated as the Muslim Brotherhood tightens its grip on Egypt.

A few examples – and there dozens more – of the Christians' ordeal:

In March 2011, a mob of several thousand Muslims attacked the Church of St. Mina and St. George and set it alight. Local authorities failed to respond to calls for help, despite the raging fire that devoured the building. It was later revealed that a forbidden Christian-Muslim romance had triggered the incident.

In October 2011, Coptic protesters gathered in Cairo's Maspero District to complain of ongoing attacks against their communities, including the destruction of several churches. These protesters were ferociously assaulted by the Egyptian military. Gruesome YouTube videos revealed military vehicles intentionally running over unarmed Copts. At least 27 protesters were killed.

A few days later, 17-year-old Coptic student Ayman Labib was beaten to death by his classmates for wearing a cross.

In early 2013, a Coptic mother, Nadia Mohamed Ali, and her seven children were sentenced to 15 years in jail at a criminal court in central Egypt for re-converting to Christianity after the death of Nadia's Muslim husband. This is, of course, a crime of apostasy under Sharia (Islamic) law.

At the time of this writing, Coptic Christians are organizing yet another demonstration in Cairo to protest their ongoing abuses. They are determined to seek equality under the law for their communities. Unfortunately, barring a miracle, there is no end in sight to their suffering.

Today, Christian populations are dwindling rapidly in every Middle Eastern country except for one – Israel. Radical Muslims have long attacked Jews wherever they could find them. Should Christians expect any better treatment? Reports from all across the Muslim world confirm the danger they face. And like Middle Eastern Jews, they know the slogan all too well—it's often written in Arabic, expressing jihadi intentions in the most precise terms: "On Saturday we kill the Jews, on Sunday we kill the Christians." ■



Lela Gilbert is the author of *Saturday People*, *Sunday People: Israel through the Eyes of a Christian Sojourner* (Encounter, 2012) and co-author of *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Thomas Nelson, 2013). She is an adjunct fellow at Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom and lives in Jerusalem and Southern California.

