

## News Story Summary

ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) have been on a rampage in their effort to create an Islamic state in the Middle East. This year there have been reports of ISIS executing crimes against ethnic groups such as the Yazidi people, who practice some aspects of Christianity, and against Iraqi and Syrian Christians. ISIS forced families from their homes, many of whom were forced into sexual slavery, imprisoned, or beheaded. At one point, some 40,000 Yazidis were forced to flee and trapped on top of Mount Sinjar. They faced two options: if they returned to their homes, they would be slaughtered; if they remained on the mountain, they would die of starvation.

Though these events are far from home, there is a reality that brings them close to us; Christians are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. However, these Christians demonstrated a resolve to face execution rather than embrace a faith that bullied others and waged violence.

(For more on this story, search the Internet using the term “Who is ISIS?” and “groups persecuted by ISIS.”)

## Focus Attention

On a markerboard, write Yazidi, Syrian, and Iraqi Christians. As group members arrive, call attention to the list, allowing them to share what they know about each group. Explain that the groups listed face persecution from ISIS. Lead the group to list ways a person might respond if facing persecution for their faith.

Share briefly the reports about ISIS attacks against the Yazidi people other Middle Eastern Christians. Share your report on how the Yazidi responded by fleeing to a mountain. Ask: *Were they justified in their response to the ISIS attacks? Why or Why not? Given the circumstances how would you have responded differently?*

Say: *In the Book of Esther, Mordecai choose to remain faithful to God and the religious practices of his faith in spite of possible adverse repercussions for not only him but for the entire Jewish people.*

Ask: *What kinds of persecution do believers face in this country? What would help you to endure severe persecution?*

Challenge the group to look for disciplines during today's study that will strengthen their faith when facing adversity.

## Challenge

Say: The Yazidi, Syrian, and Iraqi believers are our brothers and sisters in the Lord. *What can we do to support or even help them as they face such dire persecution?*

Challenge members to investigate ways they can show their support for the Christians in the Middle East. Ask them to place themselves in the shoes of these suffering believers and consider how they should pray for them. Direct them to set aside one day this week to spend time in prayer for the Middle Eastern believers and to reflect on their own resolve to respond as God directs in the face of persecution.

Lead in prayer and ask God to give each group member the strength and resolve to face persecution. Pray also for the Yazidi, Syrian, and Iraqi Christians as well as other ethnic groups who are currently facing religious persecution.