

Virtual Thunderstorms of Blessings Rain Down as Asian Captives Set Free for Christ

National missionary Jesu Das was horrified when he first visited one village and found no believers there. The people were all worshipping hundreds of different deities, and four men controlled them through their witchcraft.

Stories were told of how these witch doctors could kill people's cattle and destroy their crops with black magic. People suddenly became ill and died without explanation. The destruction and bondage the villagers were living in are hard to imagine. Scars, decay and death marked their faces because they were totally controlled by the powers of darkness.

When Das told them about Christ, it was the first time they ever heard of a God who did not require sacrifices and offerings to appease His anger. As Das continued to preach in the marketplace, many people came to know the Lord.

But the leaders in the community were outraged. They warned Das that if he did not leave the village, they would call on evil spirits to kill him, his wife and their children.

Das did not leave. He continued to preach, and villagers continued to be saved.

A Higher Power

Finally, after a few weeks, the witch doctors came to Das and asked him the secret of his power.

"This is the first time our power did not work," they told him. "After doing our black magic, we asked the spirits to go and kill your family. But the spirits came back and told us they could not approach you or your family because you were

always surrounded by fire. Then we called more powerful spirits to come after you—but they too returned, saying not only were you surrounded by fire, but angels were also around you all the time.”

Das told them about Christ. The Holy Spirit convicted each of them of their sin of following evil spirits and of the judgment to come. With tears, they repented and received Jesus Christ as Lord. As a result, hundreds of other villagers were set free from sin and bondage.

A Perfect Storm

Through an indigenous organization in Thailand, where more than 200 national missionaries are doing pioneer village evangelism, members of one group personally shared their faith with 10,463 people in two months. Of these, 171 gave their lives to Christ, and six new fellowships were formed. More than 1,000 came to Christ in the same reporting period. Remember, this work of God is happening in a Buddhist nation that never has seen such results

Reports like these come to us daily from national outreach teams in almost every Asian nation. But I am convinced these are only the first few drops of revival rain.

In order to make the necessary impact, we must see hundreds of thousands more workers sent out. We are no longer praying for the proverbial “showers of blessings.”

Instead, I am believing God for virtual thunderstorms of blessings in the days ahead. {eoa}

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families.

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Spirit-Filled Pastor: Is It a Sin to Drink Alcohol?

The topic of drinking alcohol is controversial in the Christian community. Let's analyze Scriptures regarding wine to answer frequently asked questions.

Wine in the Old Testament

The Old Testament has a lot to say about wine's use, purpose and symbolism. The offerings (Num. 15:5) and tithes (Deut. 14:26) brought to God included wine. Wine symbolized blessing (Prov. 3:9-10). Therefore, a lack of wine was evidence of God's judgment for Israel's sin (Jer. 48:33).

It is important to note that drinking wine with meals was part of the Israelite diet and culture (Gen. 27:25, Judg. 19:19). But drunkenness was not encouraged, Solomon outlined the grave consequences of drunkenness in Proverbs 23:29-35.

Wine in the New Testament

Jesus' first miracle was creating wine from water, but Jesus warned against drunkenness in Luke 21:34. Creating a substance that can be abused does not make one responsible for its misuse by another. Jesus' wine miracle was actually prophetic

according to Jeremiah and Amos.

The apostles opposed walking in drunkenness and immorality in Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 1 Peter 4:3-4, to name a few verses.

My Reasoning for Abstinence From Alcohol

I believe Christians should practice total abstinence from alcohol, wine and beer because God liberates us from evil and sinful living.

Alcohol does not have any benefits; it intoxicates the body, attacks your brain, numbs your senses, destroys your self-control and leads to more sin. Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10). Lastly, those who struggle with alcohol may lead others to fall (Rom. 14:21).

Concluding Thoughts

The devil uses alcohol as a slippery slope to distance you from God. Instead of being drunk with wine, be drunk in the Spirit. Our new wine is the Holy Spirit to live holy, free and in God's will.

Vladimir Savchuk leads HungryGen movement and pastors a multicultural church with a clear-cut, focused vision to see the salvation of souls, healing, deliverance and the raising of young leaders. He leads the annual Raised to Deliver conference, which attracts thousands from all over the globe. He leads three different internships and is a sought-after speaker at conferences and camps.

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Messianic Rabbi: The Bible Demands Human Sacrifice

As a child, my parents insisted that we watch educational television programs and read *National Geographic* magazines so we could learn about history and culture. I was very interested in the articles about peoples like the Mayans, Incas, Aztecs and others who lived deep in the jungles and built temples to worship their gods.

One of the things I found fascinating was that many of these religions required human sacrifices as a part of the worship of their gods. As a matter of fact, as a young Jewish boy, it was made clear to me by my rabbi and teachers that one of the primary differences between Judaism and other religions was that Judaism didn't practice human sacrifice.

However, as I grew and began to study the Scriptures for myself, I came to the conclusion that statement was simply untrue. Judaism and Torah *do* teach human sacrifice. Contrary to the teachings of my rabbi and other Hebrew School teachers, the difference between Judaism and other religions isn't that Judaism doesn't require human sacrifice; the difference between Judaism and other religions is in the *type* of human sacrifice required.

We only need to see the words of the prophet in Isaiah 53:10-11 (TLV) to know that the Bible teaches human sacrifice:

"Yet it pleased Adonai to bruise Him. He caused Him to suffer. If He makes His soul a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the will of Adonai will succeed by His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul He will see it and be satisfied by His knowledge. The

Righteous One, My Servant will make many righteous and He will bear their iniquities.”

Notice the words, “If He makes His soul a guilt offering.” This is an undeniable description of a human sacrifice. So, if Judaism includes human sacrifice, what is the difference between Judaism and other religions? The difference is that, in Judaism human sacrifice, our G-D only demands the death of our *will*, not the death of our bodies. Our G-D does demand human sacrifice, but His demand is for a *living* sacrifice, as we read in Romans 12:1: “I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice—holy, acceptable to God—which is your spiritual service.”

The human sacrifice our G-D demands results in new life here and eternal life once our time in this world is over, as we see in Romans 6:3-4: “Or do you not know that all of us who were immersed into Messiah Yeshua were immersed into His death? Therefore, we were buried together with Him through immersion into death—in order that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

The difference is that in those other religions I saw in documentaries and magazines, human sacrifice was required to satisfy the anger of their god. In Judaism, human sacrifice is a spiritual death that is required not to bring death, but to bring life. We die to self spiritually so we can have life more abundant, as we read in Romans 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Ruach you put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live.”

We also read this in Galatians 5:24-25: “Now those who belong to Messiah have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Ruach, let us also walk by the Ruach” and Ephesians 4:22-24: “With respect to your former lifestyle, you are to lay aside the old self corrupted by its

deceitful desires, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self—created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

So, while the G-D of the Bible doesn't demand the physical death of a person as a human sacrifice, He does demand the *spiritual* death as a human sacrifice. The human sacrifice G-D demands brings life and it is *more* abundant. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer is the author of *Overcoming Fearlessness, What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?*, *With Me in Paradise*, *Transient Singularity*, *OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry*, *#ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer*, *Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians* and *Galatians in Context*.

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All Things Work Together for God's Good as Canadian Pastor Brings Forth Gospel in Prison

Not many outside Canada may be aware, but Pastor Artur Pawlowski, who has been waging spiritual war against the demonic elements in the Canadian government and has been imprisoned for it, is once again behind bars and has been in solitary confinement for nearly six weeks, his son, Nathaniel,

told Flashpoint last week.

Nathaniel Pawlowski says his father's stay in solitary is "unprecedented" and this "has never before happened to a pastor in what is supposed to be a free and democratic society." But, he says, his father is in great spirits, is doing the work of the Lord in prison and is continuing to fight the good fight to which he has been assigned.

The younger Pawlowski said his father was arrested and jailed in early February for preaching to truckers in a 20-minute speech at the Alberta-Montana border of the United States. The truckers had formed a blockade similar to that of the Freedom Convoy in Quebec in February. Artur Pawlowski was charged with mischief—which carried a \$5,000 fine—as well as aiding and abetting the blockade of the critical infrastructure of Canada and breaching one of his bail conditions from a previous arrest for allegedly not keeping the peace.

"He went down there to do a sermon and to do the Lord's supper with the truckers. It was a peaceful protest," Nathaniel Pawlowski told Flashpoint. "He told the truckers to keep fighting for their rights and freedoms and to not give in to the tyrannical government. For that, he was arrested on Feb. 8 and he has been in solitary confinement ever since. He has been denied bail twice, and we don't know when he will be let out. The next bail hearing has not been set.

"It looks like we're at the mercy of the politicians and corrupt judicial system," Nathaniel said. "It's total lawlessness that we're seeing in our beautiful country of Canada. Our premier [Justin Trudeau] has jailed more pastors than communist China has in the last two years. Four pastors have been jailed in my province for keeping their church open during the whole mandate restriction process. And now, my dad has been jailed for speaking, for exercising his free speech. It is disgusting what is happening in our country."

The judge denied Artur Pawłowski bail, his son said, because the judge declared that he is a “danger to the public” and that he has the ability to raise funds to make bail, so it would be unjust if he were released on bail.

“I’ve heard of first-degree murderers being let out on cash bail, but this pastor? And he is the dangerous one?” Nathaniel told Flashpoint.

Nathaniel says he and members of his dad’s congregation, and others, have been holding protests every day outside the prison in Alberta.

“I’ve been there every single day with people from our church, people who love freedom and who love God,” Nathaniel says. “We’re expressing our support for this pastor and expressing our discontent with a government that arrests and jails pastors.

“Two days ago, they blocked off the parking lot as punishment because we defied their orders because we went up to the prison and blew our shofars and prayed on each side of the prison,” he says. “We have to park a kilometer away and we’ve had to walk, so it looks like a pilgrimage to the prison. But my dad says our stance outside the prison is making a difference. Our prayers, us anointing the place and blowing shofars, it’s changing the atmosphere in the prison.”

Nathaniel also says his dad is making a difference inside the prison. Despite being in solitary confinement, his father is allowed outside of his cell one hour a day to “shower and make phone calls.” He says Artur Pawłowski makes the most of it by talking to other inmates about Christ. And the impact has been astounding.

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” That is what is happening for Artur Pawłowski.

“My dad says the other night, inmates were crying all night long,” Nathaniel says. “The other day, they formed a group of about 15, and they all came and asked dad for prayer and for healing. They asked Jesus into their heart. As horrible as this situation is, my dad is making a difference and we’re making a difference. The prison he is in is one of the most corrupt institutes in Canada, we discovered. People are abused and all kinds of filth goes on in that prison. This was needed, and dad is making a difference.”

Stay tuned to Charisma News for more updates on Pastor Artur Pawlowski. {eoa}

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God Is Raising Up Apostles and Apostolic Believers for These End Times—Will You Join Them?

In every generation, God raises up reformers who are anointed to correct, rectify, reclaim, renovate, recover and deliver in the territories assigned to them. These reformers are apostles who are anointed by God to raise up apostolic believers.

We are currently witnessing the rise of more and more apostles

who are called for this generation. Reformers have assigned territories that are their sphere of influence, and they are commissioned to exercise kingdom rule in those territories. Reformers can be found throughout every strata of culture: government, marriage/family, arts/entertainment, media, religion/church, education and business. These reformers are influencers for the kingdom of God.

The mandate of kingdom rulership is not limited to those called to the fivefold ministry, however, but includes all believers. As God's reformers work and live in the places where they have been assigned, they manifest the authority and power they have been given. This results in changed lives!

The ministry of a reformer is linked with fulfillment of the Great Commission. Believers are commanded to "go" and make disciples of all nations. This does not mean that you must become a missionary who travels to other countries. There are believers who have been commissioned in this way, yet most believers are not. While you may not be called to preach and influence in other nations, you are commissioned to preach and influence individuals and families wherever you are.

Identifying Reformers

Who are these reformers and why is their ministry vital to fulfilling the Great Commission? From the beginning of time, God has expressed His desire for relationship with the people He has made. In spite of His love and care for mankind throughout time and generations, many people have consistently chosen their own way over God's way. His response to this has been to raise up reformers to whom He makes known His desires and plans. Then He sends these reformers to His people to influence them to return to Him with their whole heart. These reformers are the "sent ones."

This anointing can also be expressed in the terms "apostle" and "apostolic people." The term "apostle" refers to those

called to the fivefold ministry office of an apostle. The term "apostolic people" describes those who are aligned with an apostle, forming an apostolic company or apostolic community that operates strongly in this dimension through impartation.

It is important for the church to understand the concept of being sent. Luke 9:2 (NIV) states, "And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." We can see here that the disciples were sent.

When apostles are identified and released to operate in the anointing God has given them, those people connected to them operate in a greater measure of grace to preach the Gospel and demonstrate the power of the kingdom of God. This is the apostolic company of people.

Through the reformer's anointing, the Great Commission can be fulfilled. Without this anointing, the church becomes legalistic and rigid. Corporate gatherings can become formalized and resistant to the movement of the Holy Spirit. When apostolic grace is present in corporate gatherings, however, believers are activated in their ministry gift and call to disciple communities, cities, regions and nations. Individual believers are empowered to walk in power and authority, releasing the spirit of reformation. You must operate as a sent one.

Reformers in Scripture

We are in an era when reformers are arising. God uses the voice of reformers, His sent ones, to remind people of His Word. These sent ones are unrelenting in their pursuit of righteousness and their desire to see the kingdom of God released in great measures so that the Great Commission can be fulfilled.

Territories and nations are in a time of choosing (see Matt. 25:32). We can either choose to align with God's order and come under the authority of the kingdom of God, or by default

we choose the kingdom of Satan. Neutrality is not an option. God has a plan! The church must embrace her identity as a ruling voice in the earth and forgo the pursuit of cultural and political acceptance at the expense of neutralizing her voice. The apostolic company resists the seduction to become secularized. You must embrace your identity as an influencer in the earth by continually committing to God's agenda.

When the apostolic anointing is the dominant anointing in the church, believers will walk in the anointing of sent ones, forming a powerful apostolic company. This powerful company overcomes the lure of darkness that would, in essence, silence their voices. As an example, eunuchs were common in the Old Testament and were often assigned to serve in the king's palace. Subjected to castration, they were unable to produce children. Another way to look at this is that they lacked the capacity to produce the future. There was no reproductive capacity within them. This is a form of silencing.

In the Old Testament, God sent some prophets like Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Isaiah and Daniel to prophesy to kings. When He wanted to convey His message to a particular king over Israel, He would send a prophet. Yet there were also false prophets who prophesied according to the will of the king. The king controlled their voices. Such false prophets, along with the eunuchs, were supported by the king. In other words, they ate from the king's table (see 1 Kings 18:19).

Apostolic reformers refuse to compromise. They will neither be silenced nor controlled by others. Not only do they build for the current time; they also build for the future. This is a picture of a legacy. Not every believer is called to the office of an apostle. Yet believers will carry the anointing of such a sent one and will manifest great Kingdom influence as a result of their alignment with apostles.

Distinctions of Reformers

Reformers have been present in God's affairs from the beginning and are present in every generation. Reformers are not only those who are called to function in fivefold ministry as apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. All believers are called as reformers, delivering people from bondage and bringing them into the kingdom of God. Reformers are fearless and committed individuals. Filled with vision and purpose, reformers are tenacious, unrelenting in fulfilling the purpose for which they have been sent.

Reformers are God's supernatural influencers who provoke fallen people to return to God. As apostolic reformer C. Peter Wagner wrote, "Every generation needs apostles to bring a fresh approach to ministry. They discover and restore truths and ministries that have been hidden or have been dormant within the Church." The church must return to her kingdom mandate. You have been given power and authority. When you are silent, Satan's kingdom exerts its influence and people are held captive in darkness.

Whenever God initiates something new, He identifies a person in a place and gives that person His plan. Such individuals are reformers. God has identified you to stand in the land as a powerful representative of the kingdom of God. You have everything you need to fulfill God's plan. Everyone in your sphere of authority is waiting for you to arise and shift to the next level. As you do so, you will impact their lives for change. {eoa}

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8 Urgent Prayer Targets to Avert Global Catastrophe

Going into 2022, some of us sensed that this would be another very challenging year. Of course, most of us hoped that we would go back to some normalcy with the pandemic mainly behind us.

However, the word I sensed the Lord gave me for 2022 was that the church needed “perseverance and faithfulness in the midst of hardship.” This, of course, implied that it was going to be another challenging year.

That is now an understatement with the world on the precipice of World War III. In addition, we are seeing record inflation, which is raising prices and devaluing our money. In many regards, we are already in World War III, with major superpowers pitted against one another along with all their subset allies. The only difference is we have not yet fired direct shots upon one another. That being said, I believe in the power of prayer that can alter the destiny of nations!

Historically we have also seen how the Lord can use one person to stem the tide of war and tilt it in favor of more righteous nations. (Intercessor Rees Howell was famous for praying until he broke through in the spirit for victory during World War II in England while his nation was under attack from Germany.)

First Timothy 2:1-4 teaches us to pray for political leaders to have peace for the sake of the gospel. This shows us that prayer can alter the course of a nation and avert wars. Indeed, the Lord searches for people to stand in the gap and make up the hedge before he allows destruction to come upon a nation (Ezek. 22:30). If there were ever a time that God was

looking for watchmen on the wall to pray until His will is fulfilled, it is now (Isa. 62:7).

The following are eight urgent prayer targets for the church to engage in immediately to avert global catastrophe:

1. Pray that the Ukrainian people will not lose their democratic freedom. Our hearts are broken as we look at the news and see all the civilians, including women and children, being mercilessly attacked. Whether we agree with the political and policy leanings of Ukraine or not, the truth of the matter is Russia attacked a democratically led sovereign nation. We need to pray that the Lord's will be done in this matter. In the same way God gives humanity freedom of choice to live the way they choose; God doesn't want autocratic leaders imposing their will on other people through violence or through any other means.

2. Pray that the infrastructure of Ukraine will not be obliterated. Whatever happens, we need to pray that the infrastructure of Ukraine, which includes running water, electricity, the flow of gas, highways, hospitals, schools and everything else needed to sustain a civilized society, remain intact during this invasion. During a war, the usual international rules of engagement are that civilians and vital infrastructures should not be attacked. Pray that Vladimir Putin changes course and stops attacking nonmilitary targets. If he doesn't, he will not have a stable people or a nation to rule over if he destroys the infrastructure and if he wins the war.

3. Pray that the war will not escalate to include NATO nations. We need to pray that Russia does not cross over into NATO nations. If it does, it will cause a direct conflict with the United States. Also, many are pressuring the US to enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which would also mean NATO pilots will engage Russian aircraft in battle, leading to World War III.

4. Pray that Putin will not go nuclear to salvage the war. Russia has stated that it has changed the rules of engagement regarding nuclear war. This opens a door for them to utilize low-grade atomic weapons to decimate Ukraine if conventional warfare is ineffective.

“Russia continues to reserve the right to use nuclear weapons to end conventional military conflicts.”

The use of any nuclear weapons may trigger a nuclear response from the United States. Up until now, the policy of “mutually assured destruction” has stopped the world’s superpowers from engaging one another in battle. Please pray that Putin will not resort to utilizing nuclear weapons to save face because, thus far, they are losing the conventional war.

5. Pray that China will not directly aid Russia. If China gets involved militarily, it may cause an economic conflict with the USA. This will eventually lead to a physical conflagration that will pit NATO nations against Russia, China and their allies.

6. Pray that the orthodox church in Russia will not back the war. “Russian Orthodox bishop Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow, has endorsed Russian President Vladimir Putin’s narrative on Ukraine in a sermon Sunday.”

However, in Russia, nearly 300 Orthodox members of a group called Russian Priests for Peace signed a letter condemning the “murderous orders” carried out in Ukraine.

7. Pray that the pressure from within Russia to stop the war will prevail. Thousands of protesters in Russia are going into the streets with the demand to stop the war. This is unprecedented in a totalitarian state like Russia. Pray that this movement either topples Putin’s government or forces him to withdraw from Ukraine.

8. Pray that Putin will think rationally. Some report that

Putin is an egomaniac with a small inner circle who doesn't listen to other people. Other reports show that he may even be physically sick, which can explain why he is in a hurry to annex Ukraine. Whatever the case may be, we need to pray that he thinks rationally and is not driven by his ego at the expense of global peace. {eoa}

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Chuck Pierce Prophecies: 'The Church Will Overcome, No Matter What'

Based on what the Lord told me in 1986, what He has said in His Word and what he revealed to me for my 2020 Charisma House book *The Passover Prophecies*, I know that this is an era of war and tremendous conflict.

But I also know, no matter what Russia does, we will overcome. No matter how China dominates, we will overcome. And no matter what happens to the United States of America, we will overcome.

We are the church of the living and active God. We will overcome.

I wrote *The Passover Prophecies* describing the era we're living in right now. In the book, I explained that Russia and

China are rising and that by 2026, China would be the most dominant nation in the world. How do I know that? In 1986, before the Iron Curtain fell, God showed me.

In 2004 and 2008, I wrote articles and met with leaders in the Ukraine to explain to them that they were in a very small window of revival. I told them if they didn't understand the times, they also wouldn't understand the progression of events after 2020. After 2020, Russia would re-establish themselves at the right time by regaining Ukraine. They would continue to gain back their old territory and move toward establishing themselves in Syria and ultimately move to gain more control in Israel. When that happens, we'll see Ezekiel 38 come alive in a way that we've never seen before.

And remember, just before Russia invaded Ukraine, China tried to checkmate the world with a virus. It was planned, and it was designed to weaken our ability to resist poverty and infirmity. Now, after the invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia have aligned in a very peculiar way, and America now plays second fiddle in the whole scenario, which is unprecedented.

In the prophetic realm, I've always seen America as a wild-card. I believe our nation could be strengthened or unravel based on the response of the church. Interestingly, and to my point, our previous administration tried to set up beachheads against China and Russia. Trump solidified our relationship with Israel, strengthened our port cities, and set up an economic relationship with Europe that blocked China's influence. Sadly, this current administration has destroyed those beachheads, and now, Europe's economy is beginning to rely more on China.

Although a dominant China allied with Russia sounds dark, I've never been a doom-and-gloom prophet. The church across the world still has a role to play. I'm calling the church in America, in Ukraine and all around the world to pray. But we

can't just have a prayer every now and then. We have to become an apostolic, prophetic, warring tribe who rises up in the midst of this.

In Scripture, the Lord says that if you don't bind the strong man, he gets seven times worse. We're in that scenario. There are strong men now who are making moves, and we the people of the kingdom of God have to rise up and say, "God, where are we in this? How do we stand? How do we move in prayer? How do we bind what the enemy is doing?"

Ultimately, we can't stop events predicted in Scripture from happening, but we can pray for them to happen in God's perfect timing.

In this Passover era, every year is important for us to cross over to a new dimension of the Spirit. This era is about the voice. It's about the wind. It's about the breath. It's about the Holy Spirit. It's about liberty breaking the curse that is moving illegally in the earth today. If we would rise up and have a Holy Spirit move of God through America and start saying what God was saying instead of arguing or trying to look "normal," we would see things change.

God will give us favor to say what needs to be said. And when He gives us those words, we need to say them. We need to decree them. We need to allow the love, power and glory of God to rest on us now more than ever. And we need to be advocates for the Holy Spirit, because if we hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, we will overcome. {eoa}



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regional and national gatherings to develop new kingdom paradigms. Chuck also serves as President of Glory of Zion International Ministries, a ministry that aligns Jew and Gentile. He is known for his accurate prophetic gifting which helps direct nations, cities, churches and individuals in understanding the times and seasons in which we live. Chuck has a degree in Business from Texas A&M, Master's work in Cognitive Systems from the University of North Texas, and a D. Min. from the Wagner Leadership Institute.

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How Purim and the Ukraine War Accentuate the Need for Modern-Day Esthers

This week Jews in Israel and around the world will begin celebrating Purim. Some Jews, who just fled the war in Ukraine, will be celebrating it in Israel for the very first time. It is perhaps the most festive holiday in the Jewish calendar, and though Christians do not usually celebrate it, many know the story behind it, just like Jewish children who grow up hearing it every year.

Purim recalls the deliverance of the Jewish people from their enemies nearly 2,400 years ago. The king of Persia chose a beautiful young woman named Esther to be his queen, unaware that she was Jewish. Esther heard from Mordecai, her uncle, that the king had entrusted the fate of Persian Jews to Haman,

the king's top adviser. Haman may have been one of history's earliest antisemites: He hated the Jews and issued an order to kill them all.

At great risk to her own life, Esther revealed to the king that she was Jewish and pleaded with him to save her people. He agreed to do so, and, in a fitting twist, handed down to Haman the death sentence Haman himself had planned to give the Jews.

Esther's story, though thousands of years old, teaches us several lessons that are relevant today.

The first is that, sadly, Haman is more than just a historical figure. In fact, it is not hard to find modern-day Hamans who are bent on causing harm to the Jewish people. Haman's presence lingers among Iranian leaders who frequently call for Israel's destruction. We feel it when we read about terrorists who carry out murderous attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions—as well as on Christians—around the world.

We sense it in the rising tide of antisemitic attacks. Not too long ago, we saw it at work when an armed man barged into a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and held four hostages—including the rabbi—at gunpoint.

As I watch the events unfolding in Ukraine, I am reminded that the Jewish community there too is suffering under the specter of Haman. Their plight has likely worsened during this precarious time of war and violence.

Yet the most important lesson from Esther's story is that God still calls brave men and women to protect others. Esther could have kept quiet and lived a comfortable life of luxury as a bride of the most powerful man in the world. But she was willing to put her life on the line to save her people.

In our world most people look out first for their own interests. Self-preservation is deeply ingrained in our human

psyche. At times this is beneficial as it helps us avoid danger, but it too can tempt us to survive at the expense of others.

Esther reminds us that God does not work that way. Often, He calls us to put the needs of others before our own. As I write this the faces of several brave women in Ukraine come to mind. One friend, Malcki Bukiat—who had five children of her own to care for and protect from the horrors of war—took it upon herself to help lead 60 orphan children west, on a dangerous journey through an unpredictable war zone to find shelter and flee Ukraine. As food and fuel were lacking, and chaos consumed her world, she found an Esther-like courage to think of others' safety and put the vulnerable and helpless before herself.

As we celebrate Purim this year, my prayer is that in a world with no shortage of Hamans, more Esthers will rise to protect the vulnerable. As Esther reminds us, even one brave person could save an entire nation. {eoa}

Yael Eckstein is the president and CEO of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (The Fellowship). In this role, Eckstein oversees all ministry programs and serves as the organization's international spokesperson. She can be heard on The Fellowship's daily radio program airing on 1,300 stations worldwide, and on her podcasts, Nourish Your Biblical Roots and Conversations With Yael. Before her present duties, Yael served as global executive vice president, senior vice president, and director of program development and ministry outreach. Based in Jerusalem, Yael is a published writer, leading international advocate for persecuted religious minorities and a respected social services professional. As president and CEO of The Fellowship, she also holds the rare distinction of being a woman leading one of America's largest religious nonprofit organizations.

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Don't Be Surprised When Physical Christian Persecution Strikes the US

Hostility toward and ill treatment of Christians because of their religious beliefs and practices can be historically traced from the first century of the Christian or Common Era to the present. Even a brief review of the ill treatment of Christians by non-Christians, officials and even fellow Christians through the centuries clearly reveals the tenacious resistance and resilience of Jesus's followers and their dedication to the Son of God.

During His personal ministry on earth, Jesus taught His chosen apostles and other followers they should expect persecution and suffering. He acknowledged He was sending them out as sheep among wolves, but He also promised help in time of trouble (see Matt. 10:16-23).

Jesus's predictions of ill treatment quickly materialized. Chapter 12 of the book of Acts reveals King Herod Agrippa's murder by sword of the apostle James and the imprisonment of the apostle Peter.

The latter's escape from prison with the help of an angel can still stoke excitement and faith among believers.

Despite the ill-treatment of early Christians, the religion

grew rapidly. By the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity had penetrated most regions of the Roman Empire. An estimated 7 million individuals had become Christians by A.D. 324 despite the martyrdom of some 2 million believers.

The last or Great Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire took place under several emperors in the early fourth century. The emperors issued decrees repealing Christians' legal rights and ordering that they respect traditional religious practices, particularly sacrificing to the Roman gods. The Christian clergy became special targets, but the Edict of Milan and the rise of a new emperor in the eastern part of the Empire in A.D. 313 offered a relatively comprehensive acceptance of Christianity and much less persecution.

Despite periods of confusion, persecution and uncertainty, Christianity increased its influence in the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity and legalized the religion throughout the Empire in A.D. 313. Ten years later Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Since the Roman Empire, Christianity has continued to grow into the world's largest religion. In the *World Christian Encyclopedia* in 2001, Dr. David B. Barrett and George Thomas Kurian estimated some 2.7 billion individuals were converting to Christianity annually. Some billion, approximately one-third of the world's total population, currently profess to be Christian. In the United States, 75 percent of the residents identified as Christians in 2011, but in 2021, only 63 percent claimed to be Christian, a decrease of 12 percent. KQED reporter Becky Sullivan has suggested the shrinkage of white Christians in America ceased the same year.

The growth of Christianity throughout the globe has not prevented the persecution of Christians even in the 21st century. According to Wikipedia, current Christian persecution

includes maltreatment of Christians by other Christians, persecution by terrorist groups and maltreatment by countries which favor their state religions.

Some Christians seem to persecute other people of Christian faith linguistically and legally. The linguistic persecution downplays conversational technique and procedures while emphasizing controversial ideas and principles with disrespect and assumed spiritual supremacy. In an online article titled "Christians Persecuting Other Christians," pastor, author and publisher Jack Wellman proposes that Christians should not attack each other over ideas and beliefs non-essential to the faith. Attacks by believers disclose to unbelievers that Christians are willing to persecute each other verbally and psychologically over even minor points of doctrine.

Christian-to-Christian maltreatment very often reveals, in Wellman's educated opinion, "the two-faced nature of many believers" and a reluctance to show love for others. Sincerity, unity and understanding can greatly reduce Christian-to-Christian persecution and promote ways of living with differences.

One Christian denomination sometimes mistreats another denomination, and the treatment can involve censorship, coercion, sieges or acts of terrorism. In the 19th century, U.S. nativist protestants engaged in what is known as sectarian violence against recent non-English-speaking, multiracial European Catholic immigrants; the violence involved discrimination. The U.S. is today characterized by diversity, but the possibility of further sectarianism sometimes shows its ugly head.

Ruthless and brazenly cruel terrorist groups have been and continue to be persecutors of Christians around the world. These groups include paramilitary organizations, cults and loosely organized crowds of people who justify their actions according to their own objectives and worldviews. In July

2019, Lindy Lowry shared an online piece titled "11 of the Top Persecutors Around the World Today" under the auspices of the organization Open Doors USA.

Ms. Lowry began with the declaration that the persecution of Christians is increasing each year and then provided a list of the top persecutors, including the following 10 groups: ISIS or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; Al-Qaeda in the Middle East; Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea; Hindu Nationalists; Al-Shabaab, the Eastern African version of Al-Qaeda according to Ms. Lowry; Boko Haram and the militant Fulani Herdsmen of Nigeria; Radical Islam; Drug Cartels; and, The Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Satan himself was listed as the "Ultimate Enemy: Persecutor of Persecutors." To this list, Iran's Quds Force, a branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard, and other groups could be added.

Christian persecutors have employed a variety of vicious techniques in the quest to reduce the influence and even presence of Christians. The persecutors have forced many believers from their homes and treated many as social outcasts.

One or two groups have burned Bibles and have sought to destroy any religious expression not compliant with their faith. They have kidnapped many Christians and have claimed thousands of Christian lives. These persecutors may raid private homes and target Christian leaders. Often, they do not permit Christian parents to teach their children about the Christian faith.

Numerous governments around the world permit the persecution of Christians. In its 2020 annual report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom identified 12 countries where Christians are regularly persecuted; the U.S Department of State labelled the nations "countries of particular concern." The Department placed another 13 countries on a "special watch list" in relation to the

persecution of Christians.

The Christian faith remains of central importance to many people throughout the world. It has endured longer than most empires and continues to wield more influence than the greatest cultural achievements. Future persecution will not eliminate Christianity or its social and spiritual impact.
{eoa}

Franklin T. Burroughs was awarded a Nishan-e-Homayoun by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi for his work in the Iranian Ministry of Court and has received certificates of recognition from the California Senate and State Assembly. He is a member of the adjunct faculty of John F. Kennedy University and has served as president of Armstrong University and interim dean of the School of Business at Notre Dame de Namur University. He has taught at the University of California at Berkeley. He has been the managing director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Iran and has served as consultant to the Ford Foundation, UNESCO, the U.S. Department of Commerce and the government of Iran. He has also been visiting scientist at the U.S. Department of Energy. He serves as an English language officer (contractor) with the U.S. Department of State. Dr. Burroughs serves as an international consultant in education, Middle East affairs and cultural diplomacy.

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Marilyn Hickey Explains How You Can Live a Victorious, Healthy Life

Do you need to win? God has different names, or revelations, that have to do with His provision. *Jehovah* means “the ever-revealing one,” and the name *Jehovah Nissi* means “Jehovah, my banner of victory.”

Without Him, you can do nothing; but with Him, all things are possible. God’s Word always causes you to triumph in Him. As long as you say, “God is the victorious one in my life,” you will be on top of your circumstances because you will not win in your own strength. You can win only through God’s strength and with His plans.

In the Bible, God gives us an awareness of who the devil is, and we should know how to pray spiritual warfare prayers. You *can* confront the enemy with the power of the Holy Spirit with specific prayers to dismantle the works of the enemy. Learn how to fight—through your prayers. Check out our programs with special guest John Ramirez.

Do you need a blueprint for health and balance? Check out our special program with Dr. Janet Maccaro. Dr. Maccaro’s system helps you begin to live free of anxiety, depression, worry and illness. {eoa}

Marilyn Hickey *founded Marilyn Hickey Ministries more than 45 years ago with God’s vision to cover the earth with the Word. Marilyn co-hosts a daily television program, Today with Marilyn & Sarah, reaching a potential viewing audience of over 2 billion households worldwide. Marilyn communicates deep biblical truths in a way that is understandable and practical for everyday life.*

Sarah Bowling is on a mission to connect every one with the heart of God while loving those who are overlooked, excluded, and ignored. Led by Holy Spirit and anchored in the Word, Sarah seeks to inspire all to know the unconditional and transformational love of God in our daily lives. A Bible teacher, author, international speaker and global humanitarian, Sarah also co-hosts a daily television program, Today with Marilyn & Sarah.

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