

Nations in Turmoil

Biblical Prayers in Troubling Times

The long-beloved Christmas carol describing an idyllic and peaceful place of welcome for the newborn Jesus isn't quite accurate anymore. "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie" does not describe today's city of Bethlehem, just a few miles down the road from Jerusalem.

This was one of my biggest surprises during a trip to Israel. Our visit to Bethlehem did not match any images I conjured up based on the biblical history. I knew I wasn't going to see a preserved manger from Jesus' birth, but I had no idea how different Bethlehem was from the culture of Jerusalem, Galilee, and other key sites in Israel.

Bethlehem is now a walled city. But the walls and checkpoints are not designed to protect the people within the city. Instead, they are designed to protect Jerusalem and other outlying areas from the hatred that seethes from some of the people who reside within Bethlehem. Cars leaving Bethlehem are stopped at guarded entrances and inspected for bombs or other terror-oriented weapons that might be on their way to Jerusalem.

We were warned as our tour bus entered the winding streets of Bethlehem that it was possible residents would throw rocks at us. Our tour guide said they might sound like gun shots, but not to worry because the windows were designed to hold strong. Our Israeli bus driver clearly was not happy to be there—and we all felt some relief when we drove out of the city gates.

Strife has always been present in the land of Israel—including ancient days when the Romans ruled and current days when surrounding nations threaten to destroy this small and

strategic nation.

Turmoil among nations of the world has always existed. And in more recent days, we see the tensions rising. Wars and rumors of even more wars are in the headlines every day. Calls for peace can seem unheard or ineffective.

In This Issue

So how do we pray when nations are in such turmoil?

Kie Bowman cites the prevalence of war and strife throughout Scripture. What is happening in our day is not new; believers throughout the centuries have faced conflict. He uses biblical examples of godly response to turmoil as a reminder that the Church is called to pray for peace.

Although Dave Butts is now eternally with Jesus, his writing still impacts our readership. We selected an excerpt from one of his books on praying for Israel. Dave and his wife Kim traveled extensively throughout that nation on prayer journeys—and his insights in praying for Israel are just as relevant today.

Kay Horner closes out our theme with instructions from Jesus in how to pray when it seems the end of the world is upon us. Rather than give in to fear, we should be encouraged and excited that our prayers might be the prelude to His return.

Oh, Little Town

Bethlehem was once a town of promised peace through Jesus Christ. There is still hope as reflected in the closing line of the first verse of this Christmas carol: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

There's *always* hope in Jesus.

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