



# ESTHER

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GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN AN EVIL DAY

# Reversal of Fortunes

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God Responds to Evil



# The Great Paradox

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God is omnipotently present  
even where God is most  
conspicuously absent.

# Important Lesson - Irony

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Regardless of what circumstances suggest “in the moment,” God is consistently ruling human (our) history with purposeful intent and unquestioned power.

# The Structure of Esther

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- A<sup>1</sup> Xerxes' banquet for the empire (1:2-4)
- B<sup>1</sup> Xerxes' banquet for the men of Susa (1:5-8)
- C<sup>1</sup> Esther's coronation banquet (2:18)
- D<sup>1</sup> Esther's first banquet for the king and Haman (5:1)
- E<sup>1</sup> Turning Point (6:1-2)
- D<sup>2</sup> Esther's second banquet for the king and Haman (7:1)
- C<sup>2</sup> Feasting for Mordecai's promotion (8:17)
- A<sup>2</sup> The first day of Purim feasting in the empire (9:17)
- B<sup>2</sup> The second day of Purim feasting in Susa (9:18)

# Lesson for the Marketplace

When a man or woman of God is willing, God acts through them to confront evil.

# Esther 8

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1. Change of Power (vs. 1-2)
  - Mordecai is given both presence and power
2. Plea of Esther (vs. 3-8)
  - Esther functions as the agent for protection of the Jews.
3. The Edict of Mordecai (vs. 9-14)
4. The Reversal of Fortunes (vs. 15-17)
  - First Edict: Sackcloth, ashes, mourning
  - Second Edict: Royal garments, crown, rejoicing

# The Edict's Content – Holy War?

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Was it right to allow the Jews to kill and plunder?

1. The language was identical to Haman's decree (3:13).
2. The decree was to defend.
3. Plunder was not taken (9:10, 14-16).
4. The final death count was 75,000 of "those that hated them" (9:16).
5. The edict aligns with, but moderates God's Word in 1 Sam 15:2-3 and Exodus 17:8, 14-16.



# God's Holy War Against Evil

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1. God fights for Israel.
2. God fights against Israel.
3. God gives hope for future reconciliation.
4. Jesus Christ is the divine warrior who ends holy war on the earth.
5. The second coming of Christ will destroy all evildoers.

# Realities of Holy War

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1. Evil men who hate God still exist today.
2. God still hates evil men.
3. God will ultimately destroy evil men.
4. Christians will rejoice in that day of destruction (Ps 58:10-11).

# AFGHANISTAN



Continues to **deteriorate**.

*The Taliban's opium-funded insurgency is advancing.*

**No liberty or security.**

## Pray for the nation:

- for God to graciously reveal himself to Afghanis (Isaiah 65:1) and to intervene to frustrate the ways of the Taliban (Psalm 146:9).
- for God to move powerfully amongst the *Afghan Diaspora*, so that Afghanis in exile may become the parents, Christians, leaders and nation builders of the future Afghanistan.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to bless Afghanistan's secret believers and keep them safe so the Afghan Church may live and grow to be an instrument of blessing, transformation, and truth-giving for the nation.



Photo: USAid

# ALGERIA



*Al-Qaeda terrorism escalating.  
Government appeasing Islamists and  
state persecution of Christians intensifying.*

## Pray for the nation:

- for God to give the government of President Bouteflika the foresight and courage to resist Islamist pressure to Islamise the state and repress the Church.
- May the repressive, anti-Christian law on religion be repealed.
- for the Holy Spirit to powerfully bless the gospel message of life, hope and salvation as it goes out into a nation traumatised and disillusioned by Islamic terrorism; may Christ bring new life to Algeria.

## Pray for the Church:

- for continued Church growth and perseverance despite repressive legislation against proselytising (mission) and unregistered house churches.

# BANGLADESH

***Worsened** since October 2001  
due to **Islamic radicalisation.***



**Pray for the nation (which once fought to be secular):**

- for an honest and just government, and for the people to resist the false promises of Islamists.

**Pray for the Church:**

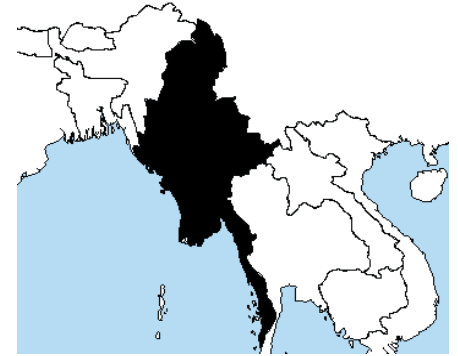
- for God to protect and sustain the small but growing persecuted Church from increasingly intolerant and often violent Islamic elements.



Photo: USAid

# BURMA (MYANMAR)

*Intensive isolation and severe ethnic and religious repression.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to give Burma an honest and just government that promotes religious liberty and equity.  
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## Pray for the Church:

- that God will protect and preserve the violently persecuted and hunted ethnic minority Christians.  
-that the Holy Spirit will take and wield the gospel message of Burmese Christians so it penetrates the hearts of the highly resistant Burmese Buddhist majority.

# CHINA

*Wrestling with transformation.  
Intense spiritual warfare  
guaranteed.*



## Pray for the nation:

- that God will continue to awaken and enlighten Chinese consciences. May China's pursuit of 'harmonious society' lead many to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- for God to give the government divine wisdom in dealing with the immensely complex issues of such a large and multi-cultural nation. May there be security with justice, and development with sensitivity.
- that China's appalling gulag, a vast network of some 1100 'loagai' (reform-through-labour prison camps, most used for forced labour) will be fully exposed, condemned and relegated to history.

## Pray for the Church:

- that God will be the refuge and strength of China's imprisoned believers, healing their physical and emotional wounds and that the ever-present Holy Spirit may comfort and counsel their hearts.
- for continued church growth in the midst of oppression and suffering. May Bibles be plentiful and may God raise up more Christian pastors and evangelists to meet the enormous demand created by nation-wide spiritual hunger. May he continue preparing the Church for the coming days of liberty.

# EGYPT

*Worsened through 2008.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to reveal himself to the Egyptians (Isaiah 19:19-25) as they struggle with issues of apostasy, religious liberty, and Islamic repression. Pray for an Arab Awakening.

## Pray for the Church:

- for Egypt's Christians to grow in prayerfulness, knowledge of the Lord, grace and faith in the midst of hardship and Islamic persecution. May God be building and sanctifying his Church in preparation for when revival comes to Egypt.  
- for Egypt's growing number of converts from Islam: pray for their safety and that they will live and grow in knowledge of the Lord and in grace, and as lights to their nation.



# ERITREA

*Worsened since May 2002 –  
severe persecution.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to intervene and bring peace, justice and liberty to Eritrea.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to redeem the Church's suffering so that good may come from evil. Pray for healing and comfort for those who have/are suffering. Pray especially for freedom and justice for more than 2000 Christians presently imprisoned for their faith.

- that the fire of persecution will eliminate religious competition, fix all eyes on Christ, and forge unity and brotherly love amongst Eritrea's Christian denominations and individual believers.

# INDIA



***Critical deterioration; grave risk.***

*Federal election due by May 2009 and Hindu nationalists are gaining ground.*

## **Pray for the nation:**

- for God to awaken Indians to the dangers of fascist Hindutva (militant Hindu nationalism); may he stir Indian consciences and awaken hearts and minds, so that Hindutva, violence and anti-Christian propaganda will be rejected in preference for truth, openness, harmony and liberty.

## **Pray for the Church:**

- for God to protect India's Christians, most of whom are vulnerable, poor and without 'voice'.
- for God to give great heavenly wisdom and courage to evangelists and bless their witness.
- for the Church to grow in prayerfulness, casteless solidarity, wisdom, grace and perseverance in the face of suffering -- that she might emerge from the fire of persecution refined, sanctified, united and glorious.

# INDONESIA



## ***Deterioration.***

***Government is appeasing  
violent Islamic fundamentalists.***

## **Pray for the nation:**

- for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Vice President Jusuf Kalla and all in authority in Indonesia, that they will have motivation, moral conviction and strength to implement justice and stand against Islamic radicalisation and violence. (1 Tim 2:1-4)

## **Pray for the Church:**

- for God to frustrate the ways of the wicked (Psalm 146:9) and protect the churches, pastors, evangelists, Christian leaders and all believers in these days of Islamic radicalisation and escalating violence.  
- for the Christians of Papua, that God may see their plight and hear their cries and deliver them from the potentially genocidal effects of Javanese Muslim domination and military (TNI) repression

# IRAN

*Critical deterioration and escalating belligerence in pursuit of regional hegemony.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to continue stirring up within the people a hunger for liberty, justice, human rights, scholarship, beauty and truth - things Persians historically have delighted in. May God also give them the courage to pursue liberation. May God intervene to bring down Iran's repressive, belligerent, apocalyptic regime controlled by Shi'ite clerics and enforced by Islamic Revolutionary Guards.
- for God to continue moving powerfully amongst the *Iranian Diaspora*, so that Iranian Christian and political leaders might be raised up and prepared to serve the nation.

## Pray for the Church:

- for safety, wisdom, provision and perseverance for Iran's violently oppressed and persecuted Christians, including a growing number of converts from Islam who face severe retribution and are at risk of public execution. May they shine as stars in the midst of darkness, displaying their joy and abundant life amidst repression, depression and a culture of death and revolution (Philippians 2:14,15).

# IRAQ

***Continued deterioration: no liberty and no security.***  
***Religious polarization.***  
***Looming genocide.***



## Pray for the nation:

- that God will still the turmoil of the nation (Psalm 65:5-7), frustrate the ways of the wicked (Psalm 146:9) and intervene against aggressors and all enemies of his Church.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to protect churches, pastors, evangelists and believers from terrorism and from lawless violence at this time of intensive insecurity when murder, torture, kidnap, forced conversions and rape of non-Muslims are endemic. May God be their refuge, strength and help (Psalm 46).
- that in the midst of violence and trauma, the faith and love of believers (including hundreds of thousands who are refugees) will be a witness to all around them: may all suffering be redeemed.
- for the furnace of persecution to produce a Christ-focused Church that is refined, sanctified, and united in love and truth across ethnic and denominational lines.

# KOSOVO

*Historically part of Serbia  
and the official 'church lands'  
of the Serbian Orthodox Church.  
Now a self-declared  
**independent Albanian Muslim republic**,  
recognised by 43 of the UN's 192 states.*



## **Please pray:**

- for comfort, grace and great wisdom for the vulnerable, Christian remnant in what is now the Albanian Muslim-majority self-declared Republic of Kosovo. Pray for God to be their shield (Psalm 33:20), their refuge and strength, their help in times of trouble, and their fortress (Psalm 46).
- for the Spirit of God to generate Christian love and solidarity across ethnic and denominational lines so that Kosovo's minority of Albanian Christians (mostly evangelicals) might bring glory to God through demonstrations of courageous, sacrificial brotherly love and Christian solidarity.

# LAOS

*Serious persecution.*



## Pray for the nation:

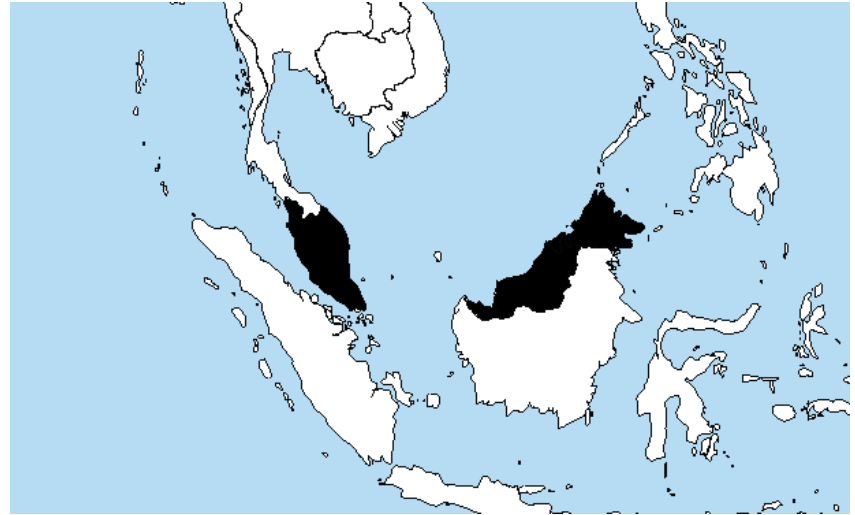
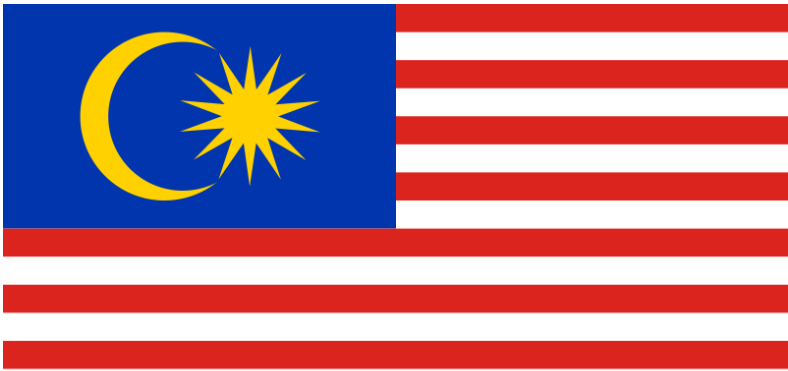
- for an end to the severe Communist oppression of Christianity, and the Lao government's genocidal campaign of terror against the Hmong, a pro-West, largely Christianised ethnic minority.
- that rights-affirming nations will use their influence to leverage human rights reform and religious liberty in impoverished Laos.
- for God to bring spiritual awakening and moral conviction to the dominant, majority ethnic Lao. so they might be instrumental in bringing change to Laos.

## Pray for the Church:

- that Christians (mostly ethnic minority Khmu and Hmong) will be sustained, kept safe and blessed with faith, peace, assurance of God's love and presence.
- for healing for all those who have been tortured, beaten or attacked by the military, especially the Hmong who have been attacked with chemical weapons ('yellow rain'), butchered, starved and driven into exile where there is still no refuge. May God uphold and preserve them, raise up voices on their behalf and deliver them from evil.

# MALAYSIA

*Opposition to 'creeping Islamisation' is growing!*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to continue working in the hearts of Malaysians, drawing them towards openness, progress and liberty, so that decades of 'creeping Islamisation' might be reversed.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to raise up Christians of great courage and conviction to speak with wisdom and grace in these days of searching and questioning.



# MOROCCO

*Persecution - but reform gives grounds for hope.*



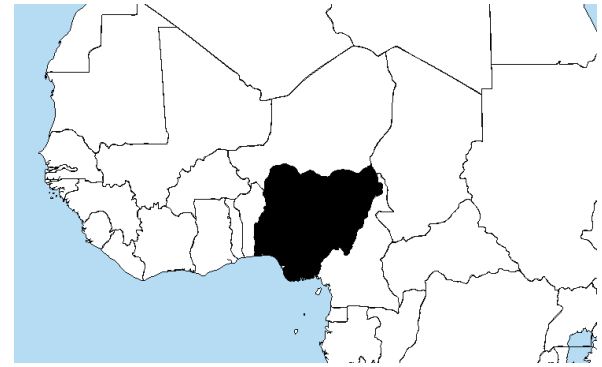
Photo: USAid

## **Please pray:**

- for King Mohammed VI and the elected government in Morocco to persevere with reforms: may they be instruments in the hand of God for his good purpose so that religious freedom may become a reality.

# NIGERIA

*Religious fault-line nation.*



## Pray for the nation:

- that state, community and religious leaders will have hearts committed to peace, liberty and justice; may they have the wisdom and strength to prevent sectarian tensions and clashes.

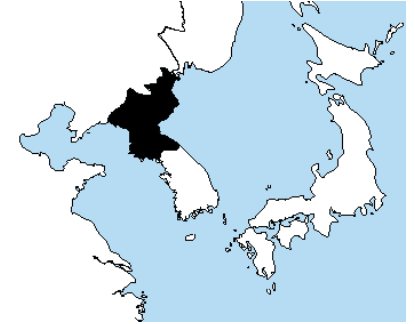


## Pray for the Church:

- for God to protect and sustain the Christian minority in northern Nigeria where Islamic Sharia law heightens Islamic zeal and leads to crippling discrimination, repression and violent persecution.

- may God give the free and often prosperous Christians of southern Nigeria a deep burden for their persecuted and usually impoverished brothers and sisters in the north; may this be evident in fervent, unceasing prayer and sacrificial generosity. (Isaiah 58:5-7)

# NORTH KOREA



## ***Severe persecution.***

*However, belligerent North Korea seems to be losing some of the support of its patron, China.*

## **Pray for the nation:**

- for the Spirit of Christ to infiltrate the nation, bringing in his gospel through cracks that God will make and doors that God will open. May Christ bring justice, righteousness, healing, comfort, abundant life and salvation to the people, freedom to the prisoners, and healing to the land. (Luke 4:18,19)
- for God to move North Korea away from isolation (traditionally sustained by China) towards openness, global engagement and liberty.
- for the Spirit of God to direct Chinese and South Korean authorities as they formulate policy initiatives aimed at improving conditions and hastening reforms in North Korea.

## **Pray for the Church:**

- which exists mainly in horrendous prison labour camps as well as in underground, secret house-churches and in exile, that these most cruelly abused believers will be preserved and strengthened in their faith and hope by the ever-present Holy Spirit.

# PAKISTAN



***Critical deterioration; grave risk.***

*North-western tribal areas are largely under al-Qaeda-Taliban control.*

*The Taliban is advancing and terrorism is escalating.*

## **Pray for the nation:**

- for the government and the Army to have the will and courage to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the north-west, and confront intolerant, regressive Islamic fundamentalism.
- for the present troubles to cause Pakistani disillusionment with Islam to increase and be the catalyst which would enable decades of Islamisation to be reversed.

## **Pray for the Church:**

- for God to protect Pakistan's Churches and individual believers from Islamic terrorism. Pray especially for the small, vulnerable Christian communities living under Taliban rule and Sharia law in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of North West Frontier Province (NWFP).
- for God to bless all Christian witness in increasingly hostile and insecure Pakistan. May Christian grace and hope be instrumental in leading many to Christ.

# SAUDI ARABIA

*Principal worldwide disseminator of intolerant, jihadist, Sunni Islam.*



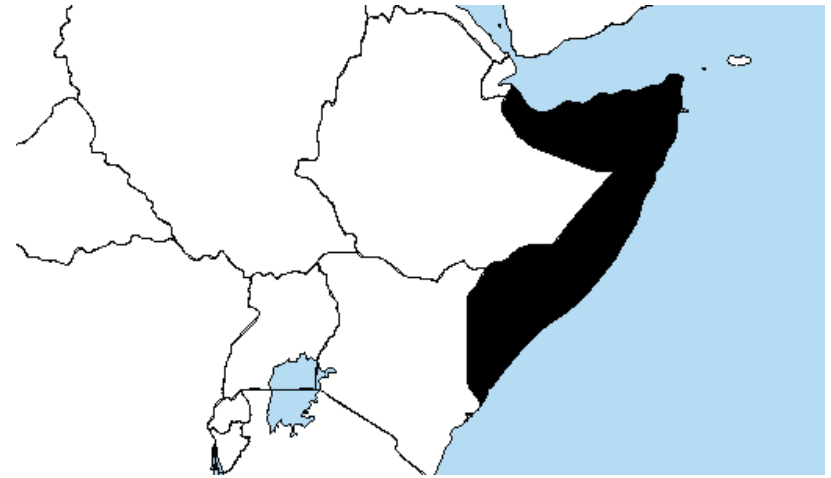
## Please pray:

- that God will give wisdom to Christians in Saudi Arabia – virtually all expatriate workers – to know how to share the gospel and worship without unnecessarily endangering lives; may they be protected from Islamic terror and may the gospel spread in spite of all the obstacles.
- for God to continue to empower and bless those gospel radio and satellite ministries that are reaching right into Saudi homes and hearts and doing the unthinkable: leading Saudi Arabs to Christ.
- for God to intervene and bring the cleric-administered, state-funded (by oil) national industry of global dissemination of anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, pro-jihad and pro-Sharia Wahhabist Islamic ideology to a decisive end.

# SOMALIA

Continued **deterioration** due to jihad.

**No security.**



## Please pray:

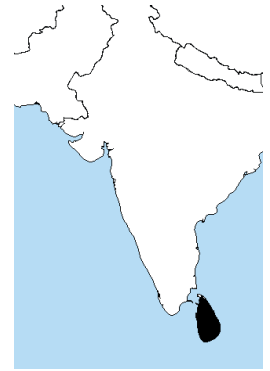
- for God to protect and sustain Somali Christians: those living in lawless war-ravaged Somalia; those in Ogaden (Ethiopia); and those who are refugees in Yemen and Kenya and elsewhere. May they live and grow in grace and faith.

- for many in the *Somali Diaspora* to receive Christ and the education they need to return to Somalia one day as community and church leaders.



# SRI LANKA

*Serious deterioration as civil war resumes and fuels Buddhist nationalism.*



## Pray for the nation:

- that God will protect Sri Lanka from the schemes of Buddhist nationalists, so that Christians may serve the poor and needy, and so Sri Lankan Christians may witness and worship with liberty and security.
- that the authorities will reject hostile anti-Christian militant Buddhist nationalism. May they uphold the law, defend the weak and respect the constitutional guarantee of religious liberty.

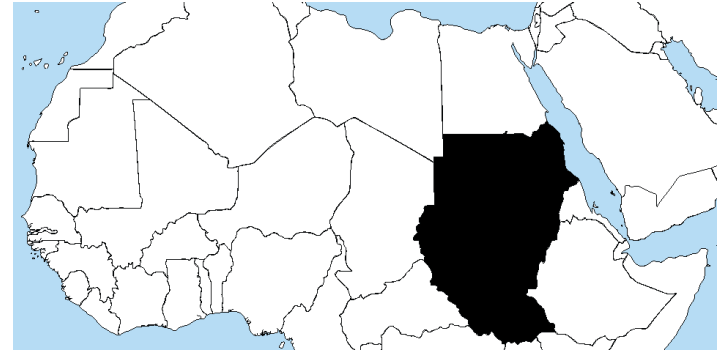
## Pray for the Church:

- that God will protect and bless his servants as they minister, teach and evangelise in an increasingly dangerous and hostile environment. May the Church continue to grow and provide blessing.
- for God to empower the Church as a peace-maker and light of truth, in the midst of dark civil conflict.



# SUDAN

*Religious fault-line nation at **grave risk** of disintegration and war.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for God to effectually call Christian humanitarian workers across the world – engineers, entrepreneurs, teachers, health-care workers and more – that they may provide all the humanitarian assistance needed for rebuilding the south after decades of destructive jihad.
- for the Spirit of Christ to infiltrate and transform the Muslim Arabs of Sudan, softening and enlightening their hearts and turning them towards peace and progress.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to raise up leaders amongst the South Sudanese, in churches, local communities and government. May the church be an instrument of unity, strength, vision and blessing.
- for spiritual wisdom for all Sudan's pastors and Christian leaders who serve and minister daily to a traumatised people who have no desire to return to war.



# TURKEY

***Worsening** due to escalating Islamic radicalism and Turkish nationalism.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for Turks and Kurds to resist the pull towards intolerant Islam and ethnic nationalism.
- for anti-Christian, anti-'missionary', anti-'foreign' and anti-Western propaganda to be exposed as false and destructive. May it be profoundly rejected in preference for equity, liberty, peace and progress.

## Pray for the Church:

- for strength to endure and great wisdom to know how to handle persistent discrimination, harassment, media disinformation, incitement, and increasingly violent persecution.
- for increased freedom and security for churches, gospel distribution and prayer ministries.

# UZBEKISTAN

*Threatened by revolutionary and militant Islam.  
Protestants persecuted primarily for geopolitical reasons.*



## Pray for the nation:

- for Uzbekistan's relationship with the West to be repaired and developed for the advancement of religious liberty. Pray especially for Uzbekistan – European Union ties to promote confidence and liberty.



## Pray for the Church:

- for God to grant the small, young Uzbek Church comfort, grace, strength and wisdom from the Holy Spirit to stand firm and move forward in faith as persecution mounts against it from both the radicalising Muslim community and the embattled, embittered government.

# VIETNAM

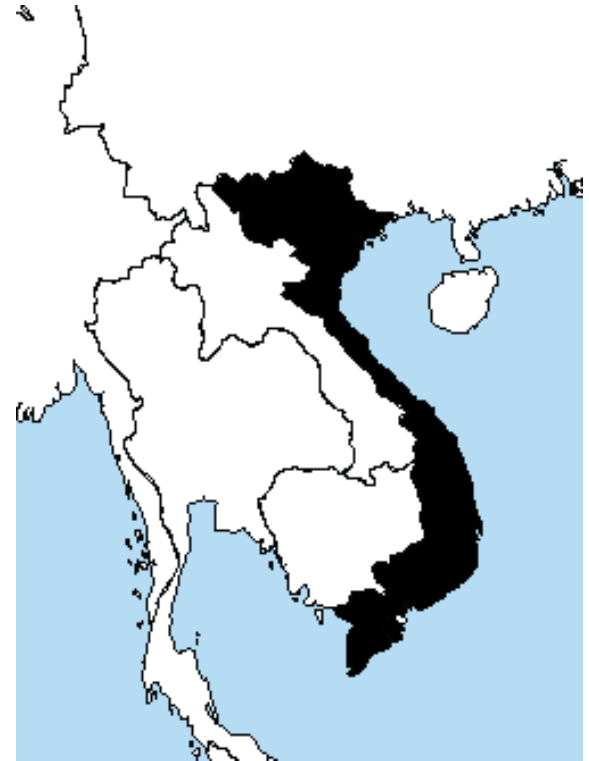
*Serious persecution.*

## Pray for the nation:

- for God to bring religious freedom to Vietnam so the Church can minister, serve and witness in freedom and security.

## Pray for the Church:

- for God to heal, comfort and sustain Vietnam's oppressed, persecuted and imprisoned believers and their families. May the Church displaying the refreshing righteousness of Christ in the midst of a nation struggling with corruption, dictatorship and injustice (Philippians 2:12-14).



# YEMEN

*Critical deterioration in 2008.  
Government moving against 'missionaries' and  
'apostates' for political gain.*



## **Please pray:**

- for God to protect, sustain and encourage the growing church as it emerges into a state riddled with Islamic fundamentalism and destabilised.



# Lessons for the Marketplace

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1. God's sovereign will is accomplished through human vessels (evil, growing, and mature).
2. Satan's attack against God has been an ongoing full-scale war since Eden.
3. God will ultimately win the war for worship.



# ESTHER

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GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN AN EVIL DAY