

Is it taking shape – this highway of holiness?

Seeking to build a Biblical viewpoint, rather than one built just around cultural, social or political commentary, let me share some insights that may help you pray more effectively for North Africa.

These past 5 years, our National Prayer Networks international efforts have been focused primarily in North Africa. Why is this? In 2005 the Holy Spirit directed our attention on this region and its peoples, because – now was His time for this region to see change, *'to open the ancient doors and rebuild a highway of righteousness from Gibraltar to Jerusalem'*. This sovereign call came with the Biblical injunction of Isaiah 62:10, and Chapter 19:23-25. In my 20 years involvement with strategic intercession globally, God has confirmed to us in the natural what He is seeking to do in the spiritual; this is not unusual nor is it inconsistent with scriptures like Romans 1:20... *Where since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen. Being understood from what has been made...(NIV)*. God confirmed His word through the headline in a magazine that read, *'The World's Largest Highway Project...'* Guess where? It was being built across North Africa (commenced in 2007), with a feasibility study underway on a tunnel through the Straits of Gibraltar. This gave us the sign in the earth realm that things had definitely entered a new phase in the heavenlies across North Africa.



Since 2005 strategic prayer teams have entered into these nations, serving God's kingdom agenda in opening up the region to God's transforming power and saving grace. Even though

we have walked among some of the world's most ancient stones, we were more captivated by God's 'living stones' and their witness for Jesus in extreme and dangerous circumstances. From the research and prayer that our teams have carried out, I get a sense that the recent people's revolution in Tunisia has become a 'Tipping Point' in the Arab world, especially the region of North Africa.

The speed and scope of recent events in Tunisia, Egypt and now Libya have caught many by surprise. Some media commentators are drawing parallels with the fall of Communism and the 'Iron Curtain' in the 1980s, where one nation after another broke free of its grasp. One news report said, "All hell seems to have suddenly broken loose. Or heaven. Who knows? It's as though a big hand came from somewhere and is stirring things up with a cosmic spoon." Others note the role of modern communications and have dubbed it the 'Facebook Uprising'. As a

friend of mine recently said, "The current events in North Africa and the Middle East have the potential to bring us to one of the greatest mission opportunities in the history of the Church." An obvious prayer for the fledgling Church there is that the newfound freedoms will not open the door to Islamist governments. One of the leaders in the church in Tunisia urges us to pray, "That as the church, we will be bolder in what we do and continue to press for more religious freedom."

Different views, opinions and affiliations are being expressed from within Egypt, and other North African nations, even within the Christian community. Of course all are wary of the Islamic extremists, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, exploiting the chaos and rising to power through the support of 'moderates.' The common folk on the ground want stability, dialogue, and change without their nation falling into anarchy, but they won't any longer accept the repressive non-democratic regimes of the past, because of fearing the alternative may be worse. I agree with the sentiments of one Egyptian Church leader who said, "We need supernatural wisdom on how to handle this open door that God has given us. What we see happening is a reflection of what is happening in the heavenlies – all-out spiritual war for the souls of men and women."

As Christians make up between 10-15% of the population in Egypt, they need to be invited to participate in the talks between the current government and other opposition groups. I invite you to intercede for God's appointed leaders to emerge: men of goodwill, integrity and a commitment to human dignity, freedom and justice: that through it all, God's destiny for Egyptians would breakthrough. As one senior pastor in Egypt said, "The church and the saints in Egypt, for many generations now, have been praying for blessings for our nation. We are asking our living God who sees and hears all to come and save. We're asking for a new era of freedom and dignity. We are asking for a new system where leaders with integrity and fear of God would tend to the needs and the aspirations of Egyptians."

Now, for those of us who have been interceding for the people of North Africa and the Muslim World in general, we need to keep our focus on God and His love for the people who live in these nations; He loves them with a passion and wants only the best for them and their future. So, whichever way the affairs of men take in North Africa and the Middle East, it is certain that increasing spiritual hunger will be running neck and neck with the spreading rage and demands for political freedom and change. Therefore, however the 'ancient doors' swing open, the Church of Jesus Christ must to be ready to seize the day and walk through them.

Now all this is happening thousands of kilometers away from the safety of our shores, so where does it leave us as the Church in Australia and the West in general? Something monumental is happening: something historic. How do we as concerned Christians respond? Is God clearly answering the prayers of the saints

- unseating principalities, tearing down strongholds? Are we witnessing a shift that will usher in Isaiah's prophetic word in chapter 19:23-25 concerning a 'righteous highway' that God seeks to build between the family of Isaac and the family of Ishmael? Is His answer to bless, through this Isaiah companionship all the families of the earth beginning to take shape?

Isaiah 19:23-25 (NASB)

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

As we commenced to work in harmony with God's prophetic agenda for this region, this state of 'blessedness' – this end-time companionship of Isaiah 19, became a mind-blowing revelation to me. That God, in His infinite wisdom, had chosen as part of His divine purpose to bless all peoples...the entire earth, through the coming together of the family of Isaac and the family of Ishmael. That is His strategy for them to be joined together by a special highway: a highway of holiness (Isaiah 35:8). This tri-national (Egypt, Assyria and Israel) end-time prophecy spoken of by Isaiah is yet to be fulfilled. It may yet come as a result of more upheaval, internal division and conflict or through all-out war. Verses 16, 17 and 22 of the same chapter says, that the Lord's hand will be raised against Egypt, He will strike her, but for a time, and they will respond to Him and then He will heal her...knowledge and worship will flow freely into the heart of Egypt and beyond its borders. Now, whatever way this is ushered in, we can be assured, *'there will an altar set up in the heart of Egypt...'*(v19) and this will be a place where the 'Isaiah companionship' gathers together in worship.

With the current turmoil and tensions occurring across North Africa and the Middle East, including the longtime tensions between Jews, Arabs and Christians, it is vitally important that as believers in Christ, we keep our focus on heaven's agenda, and God's prophetic purpose – to bless all of Abraham's seed. My friend James Goll (author of *The Prophetic Intercessor* and *Praying for Israel's Destiny*) comments on the Isaiah 19 prophecy in a recent article, "God is the supreme multi-tasker. He can accomplish more than one thing at a time! Biblical prophecy indicates that alongside God's gathering of the outcasts of Israel to their homeland, He is setting the stage to do a great work among all the descendants of Abraham."

A key to seeing this 'Isaiah companionship' become a reality is the nation of Egypt. It is crucial that we understand the strategic role of Egypt, including the role of the Coptic (Orthodox) Church, the Evangelical church and other Christian

organizations. Into this mix we need to add the changing face of Islam that is emerging across the region, where now we are seeing a large number of Muslims turning to Christ. Late last year whilst visiting one of these nations, I was informed by those who are working within this grassroots network, that the current estimate was somewhere between 1.5 to 2 million. Leaders in and beyond Egypt agreed, “that Egypt is a very important country in the whole of the Middle East, for whatever happens in Egypt affects the rest of the Muslim World.” The events in Egypt cannot be discussed in any other context. From a Kingdom of God perspective, Egypt is one of the most strategic nations in the world. Unless we understand the spiritual connotations of what is happening, and the strategic implications, we will completely miss the point.

Consider the following: approximately 47% of all Christians in the Arab World live in Egypt. Now unlike Western believers, Egyptians have a free reign to visit any Islamic nation. God has kept alive through centuries of hardship, trial and persecution, the seed of the Gospel in the heart of this nation for ‘such a time as this’. It is not beyond reason to believe that an Esther anointing is now falling on the Church of Egypt (Esther 4:14). History shows us that the Church seems to come alive in the midst of crisis – may we witness this even more so now. Indeed, North Africa and the Middle East have the potential to usher in one of greatest mission opportunities the Church has ever witnessed. Over recent times there have been unprecedented conversions to Christ in the Arab world. As I travel and meet local believers in these regions, I increasingly hear testimonies of local Muslims who are coming to Christ through personal contact with loving followers of Jesus, answers to prayer, supernatural healings and encounters with Christ. Do we dare to imagine our Father God inspiring an indigenous missions movement amongst His Church in Egypt and North Africa? Let’s pray for such a wave of saving grace and power.

Is the recent turmoil in North Africa and in other Arab nations in response to the decades of focused intercession? One cannot be definitive, but we do know that our Australian prayer teams received clear prophetic words for this region to sharpen and inform our intercession. For example, in the lead up to our 2009 Tunisia prayer journey, we received a word that this tiny nation of Tunisia was the “thin end of the wedge” in North Africa. This English idiom is used for something small and seemingly insignificant that will lead to something much bigger. Remember that God does nothing that He does not first reveal to His prophets (Amos 3:7). During our 2008 Egyptian prayer assignment God revealed that He was about to visit Egypt in the context of a storm; this storm would be the beginning of a new season and that He was in the storm. In 2010 while on the ground in Libya, God reminded us again that it was important to separate the people from the system. That God’s heart of mercy was towards the people, but His judgment was against the system. That in this nation there was a wind coming to expose and renew what He was doing. Another interesting aspect to

this word concerned the kind of church that would finally emerge, a new form of Christianity away from the excesses of Western Christianity. Therefore we can be certain that God is in the midst of things that are unfolding right now. That He is sovereign and that all history, including what is happening in Egypt and across North Africa is under the direct control of a sovereign, omnipotent and Holy God.

As the Church we need to pray for those who are angry, frustrated and fed-up with such things as: abuse, unemployment, corruption, autocracy, the absence of human rights and basic human freedoms, that they would encounter Christ through an emboldened Spirit-led church. Pray for political and religious freedom to be enshrined in the Tunisian and Egyptian constitutions. For real reforms to come to Libya's system of government and true freedom for it's people. It's time! Time for genuine spiritual and societal transformation to take place: now is our time to stand with our brothers and sisters. On the ground this is an incredibly unstable situation yet our confidence and hope is not in the politics of the moment nor worldly systems. We have the certainty of God's word that, *...through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to His eternal purpose* (Ephesians 3:10 NIV).

I agree with my friend, Mike Burnard when he said, "We cannot deny that we are called into a spiritual battle. We cannot deny that the battle is intensifying and that North Africa and the Muslim World are on the frontline of this battlefield. We cannot deny that the situation in Egypt is directly related to the battle for the hearts and minds of people. However we can try to deny, like in the days of Noah, that this will have no effect on us who live in the West." To do that would be foolhardy and unconscionable. Let us not forget that the church was born in the midst of a national struggle. It was designed to be a light in the darkness to lead the way to mercy, justice and eternal freedom.

Let us join our hearts and prayers with our brothers and sisters in Egypt and North Africa. Together with the assistance of the angelic hosts of heaven, let us see His church stand like Esther did, for 'such a time as this'.

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