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Musical Offering: Spirit of Prayer

The Ministry of Heaven: A Chapter from *Ravens and the Prophet*

www.ruachministries.org

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Don't step off your watchtower or lose heart in prayer

It would be easy to succumb to compassion fatigue when we think of contemplate the scale of suffering around the world: the terrible earthquake in New Zealand, the recovery for North-east Australia, and the vicious civil war in Libya and the mounting humanitarian crisis on the Tunisian border. Because we are called to identify with those who are suffering, however, we must be always prepared to look and pray wider, but equally be realistic about only giving ourselves to the objectives the Lord highlights.

I have made a few suggestions below, but I want to encourage you once again that God really does first inspire and then hear our intercession. remember years ago the Lord drawing close and saying, 'You haven't prayed for (a certain person) today. It touched me so much that He cared enough to have noticed when I hadn't prayed, and just how much He was using my (what felt to me) rather feeble prayers.

I had an amusing example this week. The Irish cricket team (who are far from renowned as a cricketing force) were playing against England in the World Cup. I felt quite clearly to pray that Ireland would win! (*Please* don't build any sort of theology about praying for sporting fixtures here – I can only relate what I felt on this occasion!) England batted first and made a hefty score: 328 off 50 overs, for those to whom such statistics mean anything. It would require the highest run chase in World Cup history for Ireland to pull it off – and by the time they were 111-5 at the half way stage, it all seemed dead and buried. What happened next is the stuff of sporting legends.

A certain batsman came in and just kept hitting six after six after six, scoring the fastest century in history in the process – and led his team to victory! Well, this is all just a bit of cricket fun – unless the Lord had other purposes in mind in allowing England to be so humbled. What is an encouragement is that if the Lord is calling you to pray, no matter how unusual your prompting, don't dilly dally or shilly shally – get stuck in – and find others to join with you in prayer.

A remarkable story from the Middle East

We are going to be sharing some major needs for prayer in Iran, so let's start with a really remarkable story from the region that has a happy outcome.

A Christian woman was recently arrested at six in the morning. When she came before a judge she found herself to her amazement (and deep concern) witnessing in an extremely bold and direct way, warning him of what would be his eternal fate if he continued along this path. She was considerably put out that the Lord wanted her to be so direct! However, she received a visit in her cell at 3 in the morning shortly afterwards, saying that the message was exactly what he needed to hear, that he wanted to repent and that she must not stop proclaiming what she knows to be true. He told her that he had to go on toe-ing the line in public, because, as a judge, his utterances are filmed and monitored – but he managed to secure her release from jail within a few days. She and her husband oversee a large number of churches in Iran.

What is being birthed in the Middle East? By Geoff Ashton

“When I was praying about this, my thoughts went back to Matthew 24, where Jesus talks about the ultimate historical seismic shift. In speaking about national strife and natural disasters He assures His disciples that ‘Such things must happen, but the end is still to come’ and ‘All these are the beginnings of birth pains’ (Matt 24:6-8). It was that last line that arrested me.

I have a sense that what we are seeing in the Middle East is like a multiple pregnancy as new national characters are coming to birth. As with every pregnancy there will be pain - which shouldn't be a surprise - and with every pregnancy we pray for that pain to be as minimal as possible. So in practical terms I'll be praying for strong, stable, and fair governments to emerge (even if it is too much to expect fully representative ones)!

I'm also praying about *what* comes to birth. More than half of the world's 350 million Arabs are under 30. What historical, cultural, and international influences are shaping these people? On the one hand their connection with the wider world has given them a strong desire for personal freedom and empowerment and greater government accountability. But strong traditional values still prevail.

A recent poll in Egypt revealed that 80% of the population still support the idea that adulterers should be stoned. Will some of these Arab nations start to look more like Turkey (which has a strong Islamist leadership, but also has

a booming economy) or more like Pakistan, which suffers from extreme and competing factions .

Or will they emerge in some entirely new way over the next five to ten years, making use of their as yet largely untapped natural and human resources, and also permitting women to take more leading roles?

Continuing the pregnancy theme I've also been reflecting on the Lord's words to Rebekah when she was approaching full term: "Two nations are in your womb, one will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). I'll be praying about the relationships **between** the new emerging political structures as well as their internal dynamic. When the power of Soviet communism broke in the 80's this not only resulted in new stable economies forming - Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland, Hungary etc. - but also provided an environment in which long-standing ethnic *tensions* were able to flare up (particularly in the former Yugoslavia). And as you pointed out, new alignments can have huge economic and political consequences. I hadn't appreciated the potential significance of Bahrain's relationship with Iran if Shia forces triumph there.

I also reflected that multiple pregnancies can be dangerous times. Not all children are safely born. I was struck by Robert's note of caution about the role of the army in Egypt. I read something similar in *The Times* last week, noting that promises by the military to oversee a speedy transition to democracy (in whatever form that expresses itself) are not always kept. Burma was cited as an example.

Neither does civil unrest always lead to immediate political and social change. Many hoped that the protesters focused in Tiananmen Square in 1989 would lead to significant change in China. In many ways, it precipitated further short-term repression, a phase it has by no means yet fully recovered from."

Libya

Inevitably, what is happening in Libya now will have a knock on effect on other countries in the region: in the short term Tunisia, which has a huge humanitarian crisis to resolve (the British are helping by sending Egyptian workers back home by air), but then also because Libya has an extensive (though by no means exclusive) presence in sub Saharan Africa. Gaddafi has cultivated this carefully in his bid to exercise a wider role – especially because major Middle East countries, such as Saudi Arabia, basically took a long look at him and rejected him as a peer many years ago.

Assad Al-Jihad 2 is calling to establish an Islamic state in Libya, (or even in part of it), using the analogy of the Christian state that has been established in southern Sudan. He threatens if there is any Western opposition to the establishment of an Islamic state. For more details, see www.memri.org

Egypt

The point we made in the last edition about not being too quick to assume that the Egyptian military is now the friends of the people is illustrated by the fact that Egyptian soldiers have recently and brutally attacked a Coptic

monastery with live ammunition. The following link may not be the most graphic account I have read of this horrendous incident, but it does put the attack in the wider context of what is happening to Christians in Egypt post Tahrir Square. www.catholic.org

There have been previous attacks against this monastery, leading to protests by Coptic Christians.

wikipedia.org/Monastery_of_Saint_Fana.



Pray for Iran

Reports reaching us about the state of various people in prison for their faith in Iran are disturbing. Pastor Vahik, an Armenian Christian, was arrested with his wife Sonia six months ago. Sonia's cellmate has just been found hung in the bathroom. Their situation is extremely dangerous. Vahik has not even been given his toothbrush or any soap. Arash and Arezou are also in desperate condition as well. They have been in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran now for six months. For details about these couples, please go to: fcnn.com



For details about the region from a Christian perspective please go to:

<http://www.222ministries.org/>

Please inform your friends, and prayer warriors and write letters to:

The Prison Warden, Hamadan Central Prison, Tehran/Hamadan road, 5th km to Hamadan, Voroudi Bahram Abad, Islamic Republic of Iran, calling for better treatment for Vahik and Sona and Arash and Arezou, and for their release.

Letters can also be written to The Chief Justice of Iran and Minister of Security Ayatollah Heydar Moslehim, and President Ahmadinejad. Can we also refer you again to the letter we mentioned last week on how to pray for Christians in prison: www.elam.com

Spirit of Prayer and Ravens and the Prophet

As we have spoken a lot about prayer this week, this week's offering is [*Spirit of Prayer*](#), because that was the focus of our recent CDs: to release and hone in us the gift and ministry of prayer. Linda once again wrote the music.

Considering the needs of the prisoners of faith in Iran, this would be a good time to point you back to the track '[Prayer for the persecuted church](#)' This is very brief, but will hopefully encourage you to pray on from where the music leaves off. Pray for Christians under pressure as the Lord leads and the Spirit directs. You can view the illustrated words for CD 1 [here](#), and CD2 [here](#)

This week's offering from *Ravens and the Prophet* is , appropriately, a chapter on prayer. Ruachministries/ravensandtheprophet

with our love as ever,

Robert and Rosalind