

A WORLD IN MOTION



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Project Hero is helping to ensure the future of the Church in Syria through aid distribution.



THE NUMBERS:

BILLY GRAHAM



1939

The year he was ordained by a Southern Baptist church at the age of 21



215 million

The estimated number of people he preached the Gospel to at live events



185

The estimated number of nations and territories where he preached



61

The record number of times he finished in the top 10 of Gallup's annual poll of most admired men

BILLY GRAHAM—LEGACY OF A COMMITTED LIFE



By David Aikman

The Rev Billy Graham, counsellor to presidents and the most widely heard Christian evangelist in history, has died at age 99. He reached more than 200 million through his appearances and millions more through his pioneering use of television and radio. His message and service to US presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to George W. Bush earned him the nickname "America's Pastor." (*Time Magazine*)

His life and influence

Since his death, much has been written about the life and times of Billy Graham, from his addresses to huge crowds to accusations of neglecting his family at home. Dr David Aikman, former *Time Magazine* journalist and author of a Billy Graham biography, shared some of his insights on the man who has become synonymous with evangelism:

"I had the great privilege of meeting Billy Graham and interviewing him several times while a reporter for *Time Magazine*. I was especially fortunate to travel to many places all over the world where he had preached and to talk to people who had come to know him very well. With two colleagues, we put together a video profile for the TV series 'Great Souls', which was finally marketed through public television.

"I was privileged to be invited into his home in North Carolina, and to become acquainted, just a little bit, with him and his amazing wife Ruth, and then with his sons and daughters. All of this was very important when I was writing my book, 'Great

Souls' (one of whose chapters was an account of Graham and the moral quality of his life), and then my relatively recent biography, *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence*.

"The one moral quality which shone more brightly than any others with Graham was his personal humility. On one occasion when some clergy objected to his holding a meeting at a specific venue in some English city as an evangelist in the 1940s – they objected to his principle of a person making an individual decision to receive Christ – he privately met with each of the objecting clerics and apologised for upsetting them. They were all instantly won over by the example of his gracious humility.

"Back in the US, the CBS anchor Dan Rather had criticised him heavily for accepting an invitation to a Moscow peace conference in 1982. But in retrospect, the visit opened invitations for Graham to reach into all of the countries of Eastern Europe that later turned against communism in 1989. Graham had sensed that such a movement would come to pass. To the considerable credit of Dan Rather, he admitted later, "I was wrong and Graham was right big time."

"One of Graham's most remarkable moral successes throughout his life was to resist the temptation of financial success. When a prominent political fundraiser told him in the 1950s that if he were willing to run for president, there would be \$1 million in his bank account the following day, Graham turned him down flat. He joked about it later: 'Ruth told me that if I ran for the presidency I would have to do it as a divorced man.'

"Graham was personally revolted by the vulgar language that came out of the mouth of his good political friend President Richard Nixon during the time of the Watergate tapes. He had never seen that side of Nixon during his long friendship with the politician. But when Nixon was hospitalised with an illness after Watergate, Billy Graham and Ruth paid for a plane to fly over the hospital in a warm salute to Nixon. When Nixon resigned, his

NEWS HEADLINES



China's Communist Party has handed President Xi Jinping an open path to indefinite rule — a move analysts warn carries enormous risks by abandoning a succession model that brought stability after turbulent decades under Mao. Xi, who has concentrated power, accumulated titles and purged potential rivals since becoming head of state in 2013, could remain president for life after the party proposed abolishing a rule limiting the top leader to two five-year terms.



Rome's ancient Colosseum was lit in red on 24 February in solidarity with persecuted Christians, particularly Asia Bibi, a woman condemned to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Hundreds gathered on a rainy night outside the Roman amphitheatre that is a symbol of the martyrdom of early Christians to hear the husband and daughter of Asia Bibi. Human rights groups say the blasphemy law is increasingly exploited by religious extremists as well as ordinary Pakistanis to settle personal scores.



Saudi Arabia replaced its military chief of staff and other defence officials in a shake-up apparently aimed at overhauling its Defence Ministry during the stalemated and ruinous war in Yemen. The kingdom also announced a new female deputy minister of labour and social development.

successor President Ford was bitterly criticised for granting him a pardon. It might have cost Ford the election against Jimmy Carter. But one of the voices recommending a pardon for the sake of bringing peace back to politics in the US was that of Billy Graham.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

A description of David Aikman's biography of Billy Graham reads as follows: "Billy Graham wasn't born with a mandate to become the face of modern evangelism. Growing up, he wasn't much different from other boys in his town. Billy was more interested in going to the movies than the moving of the Holy Spirit, and he spent more time chasing girls than God. But at a revival meeting the day before his sixteenth birthday, Graham committed himself to Christ and never looked

back. That day, he started on the path that would make him the most influential Christian leader in American history."

David Aikman closed his tribute to Billy Graham with the following: "In today's toxic political and cultural atmosphere in the United States, extending the grace of forgiveness to others is one of the most prominent missing public virtues. How much all of us Americans will miss the example of Billy Graham over the next few years."

PRAY > For the ongoing work of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association > For Billy Graham's legacy to continue bearing much fruit as his sermons and books go on to bless and inspire millions

NEW SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT INSPIRES OPTIMISM



By Mike Burnard

New South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has spoken of a "new dawn" in his first State of the Nation address. Mr Ramaphosa, who was sworn in on Thursday 15 February, promised to "turn the tide of corruption". He also spoke of accelerating land redistribution and outlined plans to boost the economy and create jobs. Mr Ramaphosa, a 65-year-old former businessman, highlighted youth unemployment and said he planned to create a million paid internships in the coming years. "This is the year in which we will turn the tide of corruption in our public institutions," he said. "We are determined to build a society defined by decency and integrity, that does not tolerate the plunder of public resources, nor the theft by corporate criminals of the hard-earned savings of ordinary people." (*BBC News*)

A defining year for Africa

2018 will be a defining year for the African continent, and the recent political events in South Africa could provide a beacon of hope for those who seek peaceful transitions. During the next twelve months, 20 countries in Africa will hold presidential and parliamentary elections, and with the African worldview primarily based on fear and power, African elections often run the risk of being marred by violence and protests. The Africa Centre for Strategic Studies estimates that one in every five elections in Africa experience violence resulting in fatalities.

Analysts have warned that countries in the grip of civil war and political turmoil, (like South Sudan, Libya, the DRC, Egypt, Mali, Cameroon and Togo)

could see an escalation of violence and further marginalisation in political communities leading to violence and death. Even a country like Zimbabwe, which saw the peaceful leadership transition of Mr Mugabe to Mr Mnangagwa, will face the challenge of restoring credibility in the economy, judiciary and security sectors. Mr Mnangagwa has promised that the 2018 elections will be free, fair and credible, but Zimbabwe is notorious for some of the continent's most violent elections.

Peaceful leadership transition

From an African perspective, the peaceful leadership transition of Mr Zuma to Mr Ramaphosa was nothing short of a miracle. The fact that not a single gunshot was fired and there were no significant protests bears testimony to the prayers of many and a maturing democracy.

When one looks at Mr Ramaphosa's history, one sees a man prepared for a season such as this. He walked alongside Mr Mandela upon his release in 1994 and was mentored by a leader who pursued reconciliation above power, which shaped Mr Ramaphosa into becoming a negotiator known for excellence. Mr Ramaphosa's Christian upbringing and work among the poor in his community were instrumental in shaping his moral foundations and will play a role in guiding his decisions towards decency and integrity, as mentioned in his speech in Parliament.

South Africans can often be highly critical of their leaders, and the 'prophets of doom' were quick to highlight what they saw as Mr Ramaphosa's shortcomings: his apparent hesitancy to criticise Mr Zuma and his promises of land distribution without compensation (reminiscent of Mr Mugabe's strategy in Zimbabwe), which they believe will drive the agricultural community into bankruptcy. But they overlook the fact that Mr Ramaphosa is a shrewd businessman (with a net worth in excess of six billion rand) and a successful farmer himself – facts that should instil sufficient confidence that all decisions will be made in the best interest of all South Africans. In an interview on eNCA, Mr Ramaphosa assured South Africans that they should not be nervous about the ANC's decision to seek land expropriation without



India and **Pakistan** began exchanging heavy gunfire on 22 February, in what is being reported as an "escalation" of hostilities between the two countries. Both India and Pakistan claim Kashmir in its entirety but only control parts of it - the dispute has sparked two wars and a limited conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours. There has been a steep rise in ceasefire violations since 2013.



The **US** Embassy in Jerusalem will open in May to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Israel declaring its independence, the Trump administration announced on 23 February. The embassy will initially be located in the neighbourhood of Arnona on a compound that currently houses the consular operations of the US Consulate General Jerusalem.



Though three Muslims have been arrested in connection to the 18 February terror attack on the Orthodox church in Dagestan, **South Russia**, the terror threat remains elevated. On 22 February, Site Intelligence Group published a letter purportedly by the Islamic State (IS), entitled 'Strike their necks and strike each one of their sons', the letter glorifies the killer as an 'extraordinary mujtahid' and urges IS supporters in 'Russian-occupied Muslim areas' to kidnap and kill Christians.

compensation: "Land is a very broad, as well as a complex issue and it has to be handled very delicately because around land there is quite a lot of emotion." He went on to say: "We will have a workshop or a conference on land and look at all its various aspects and beyond that we will come up with a clear policy, or direction on how this will be handled."

In one of his first acts as president, Mr Ramaphosa axed ten ministers in a Cabinet reshuffle. Some of those axed featured in allegations of state capture, while others were staunch allies of Mr Zuma. The new Cabinet has been met with mixed reactions, but Business Leadership South Africa has said it is an important step in boosting confidence in the economy.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

As Christians, we should take this Scripture seriously: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God ... Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:6,8)

This offers clear guidance about how to deal with the political uncertainties ahead, regardless of whether one is a white farmer, a black businessman, a coloured teacher, a Chinese shop owner, an Indian doctor, a young student or an old pensioner. Firstly, it addresses anxieties and highlights the duty of gratitude. Matthew Henry describes it as follows: "We must join thanksgiving with our prayers and supplications. We must not only seek supplies of good, but own receipts of mercy. Grateful acknowledgments of what we have argue a right disposition of mind, and are prevailing motives for further blessings." This is the time to thank the Lord for a peaceful leader and a peaceful transition.

But secondly, we are also to add to our prayers the sanctification of our thoughts. Before speaking, we need to think, and before thinking, we need to give thanks. This is the correct order for Biblical peace and victory over anxieties. We need to guard our hearts and watch our words. As Christians, we need to be messengers of hope and not vessels of suspicion.

PRAY > For Godly wisdom for Mr Ramaphosa and his Cabinet as they tackle South Africa's many challenges > For believers to be messengers of hope and encouragement

ROLE-PLAYER'S IN 'TUG-OF-WAR' OVER SYRIA



By **Andrew Richards**

Hours after the United Nations Security Council called for a 30-day halt to the fighting in Syria, government forces attacked a rebel-held eastern suburb of Damascus from the air and the ground on Sunday [25 February], and rebels lobbed shells at the capital, residents and activists said. The continued bombing of eastern Ghouta came as a bitter, although not unexpected, disappointment to residents who have endured one of the bloodiest assaults in seven years of civil war. More than 500 civilians were killed in eight days of airstrikes and artillery fire, according to opposition activists. Nearly a quarter of the dead are children. (*LA Times*)

War without end

There has been plenty written about the Syrian civil war – descriptions of the situation, pleas for help, and guidance for those in diplomatic positions – to better understand the seven-year war that has claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people and uprooted more than 11 million (five million of them now refugees struggling for survival in foreign countries). Countless reports have been written and

hundreds of research findings presented, yet they provide very little of the much-needed hope that Syria desperately needs.

Initiatives to bring the major players to the same table have repeatedly failed to foster peace, suggesting that the outside players involved in the Syrian war might be directly responsible for prolonging the war. These outside players include Iran and Israel, who have fought numerous proxy wars before the 'Arab Spring' brought revolution to Syria. Other major players include Russia and the United States who have both sought dominance in the region before.

Key role-players and their ambitions

In trying to understand these key players, *INcontext* asked one of its sources in the region for a breakdown of each player's reasons for fighting in Syria and their ambitions once the war ends.

Iran: Shia-majority Iran has one objective, and that is to attack Israel. Iran's military foothold in Syria is a means to an end. Influence in Syria is critical in securing a land passage to Hezbollah-controlled parts of Lebanon. Iran's main objective is not defending the Shia-aligned Assad regime in a Sunni vs Shia battle in Syria; its main objective is to inflict harm on Israel. Post-war Iran hopes to remain in Syria from where it can launch operations against Israel.

Syria: After rapidly losing ground during the early years of the war, the Syrian government accepted support from Iran and Hezbollah, and later Russia, that helped turn the tide. The Assad regime knows that Iran's long-term objective is inflicting harm on

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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Israel and would likely not allow Iranian military groups to remain in the country post-war, fearing that an Iranian military presence could lead to a possible war with Israel. Should the Assad regime claim victory in the end, it will need international support to help rebuild its cities, but an Iranian military presence in the country would make it harder to acquire the needed funds as Western powers do not trust Iran.

Russia: As the war drags on, Russia will have to decide between Iran and Israel. Russia's only warm-water naval port is on the Syrian coast, which allows Russia direct access to the Mediterranean, and this would sway Russia towards Israel. Throughout the duration of the war, Russia has tried to be diplomatic, with the intention of creating a stable environment from which to exercise its military presence throughout the region. Continued Iranian military presence in Syria could threaten this objective.

Israel: Israel is surrounded by hostile Muslim nations, aside from Egypt and Jordan who have signed peace agreements. Israel will do nearly anything to ensure its survival, but not at the cost of a possible proxy war between the US and Russia over Israel (if Iran attacks Israel and Russia chooses to back Iran, one would assume that the US would support Israel). Israel will therefore continue to avoid Iranian interests in Syria while avoiding targets near Russian positions, despite not agreeing with Russia's support of Assad. Israel will also continue to punish Syria for allowing an Iranian military presence on their doorstep, stirring the tension between Assad's regime and Iran.

US: The US has promised unequivocal support for Israel, even committing to move its embassy to Jerusalem (happening in May 2018) – a move that acknowledges the city as the rightful capital of Israel. Although denying direct involvement in the Syrian war, the US has supported groups aligned against the Assad regime and flown hundreds of bombing sorties over Syria (against Syrian and Islamic State forces). However, even though the US trains and supports opposition groups, it chooses not to engage with Russia in fear of being dragged further into the war.

Turkey: For the most part, Turkey has tried to stay out of the war in Syria, but as the Kurdish Peshmerga claimed successive victories against the Islamic State (both in northern Iraq and Syria), Turkey felt threatened. 'Kurdistan' stretches over a wide region that includes parts of south-eastern Turkey, and with the Kurds already having passed a symbolic vote of independence in Iraq, Turkey fears secession of their Kurdish population (and associated land). Although Turkey has other reasons for entering the war, the threat of a unified Kurdistan outweighs them all, and is something Turkey will not allow to happen.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The war in Syria is a good example of how one country can influence an entire region, and even the world. What started as a revolution for democracy in the Arab world (the Arab Spring) found its end in Syria when peaceful protests quickly turned violent after government forces cracked down. A civil war ensued, and before long, various other powers got involved.

With so many role-players, all with different agendas and their own pursuits of power and control, it will be hard to find lasting peace that will bring healing to the nation of Syria, especially in a region marred by continuous wars. The Church, however, being called to the position of servanthood, is not only the bearer of peace but perhaps the only key to bringing about reconciliation.

There is hope that post-war Syria will see the outside players (especially Christian nations) investing in the rebuilding of the country, which would allow the Church to grow in a season of more and more Muslims questioning Islam every day.

PRAY > For miraculous breakthrough in the Syrian conflict > For those working in Syria, providing relief and comfort > For the Church in Syria to endure and thrive despite the severe conditions

See below how you can get involved in supporting the Church in Syria in a tangible way!

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT HERO

Helping to ensure the future of the Church in Syria

Project Hero focuses on those who choose to remain in Syria, who deal with the daily bombings (which have again intensified in districts of Damascus) from which others have fled, and who encounter death as part of daily life. Those who have stayed have done so for two reasons: either they have been unable to get out (for reasons such as old age or a lack of finances), or they have refused to leave Syria because it is home and they still believe they have a role to play in the reconstruction of the nation.

"You stand beside us with your big support, we thank you for all your giving for the church and its people." - Pastor in Damascus

To support this project, please make use of the INcontext bank details and use HERO together with your email address (as much as possible of it) as reference.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact our project department (gustav@incontextministries.org) or [CLICK HERE](#) to visit the website